

Ethnicity and Consumption: south Asian food shopping patterns in Britain, 1947-1975.¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literature that explores the relationship between ethnic identities and food consumption, with particular reference to business management studies. It focuses on the food shopping practices of south Asians in Britain in the period 1947 to 1975, to illustrate the need for more historically contextualised studies that can provide a more nuanced exploration of any interconnections between ethnic identity and shopping behaviour. The paper draws on a reasonably long standing interest in ethnicity and consumption in marketing studies, and explores the conceptual use of acculturation within this literature. The arguments put forward are framed by recent interdisciplinary studies of the broader relationship between consumption and identity, which stress the importance of contextualizing any influence of ethnic identifications through a wider consideration of other factors including societal status, gender and age, rather than give it singular treatment. The paper uses a body of empirical research drawn from recent oral histories, to explore how these factors informed everyday shopping practices among south Asians in Britain. It examines some of the shopping and wider food provisioning strategies adopted by early immigrants on arrival in Britain. It considers the interaction between the south Asian population and the changing retail structure, in the context of the development of self service and the supermarket. Finally, it demonstrates how age, gender and socio economic status interacted with ethnic identities to

produce variations in shopping patterns.

INTRODUCTION

Some social scientists and marketing researchers have come to view ethnicity as a category of identity, which has a strong influence on consumption decisions (Costa and Bamossy, 1995; Cui, 1997; Gren, 1999). However, immigrant consumer behaviour is a relatively under researched phenomenon and there is little work that explores the reactions of immigrants to developing forms of retailing in the UK (Wang and Lo, 2007). This paper explores the extent of any interconnectedness between ethnic identity and consumption, through a consideration of the food shopping experiences of south Asian immigrants to Britain in the period 1947 to 1975. In referring to the category 'south Asian', we refer to the geographical origin of these immigrants and wish to remind the reader that 'ethnic identity' is a quite different phenomenon. The dialectical interplay between immigrant identities and what they perceive to be the 'host' culture is complex and has been explored through theories of acculturation in disciplines across the social sciences (Laroche et al, 1998; Lindridge et al, 2004). There is also research that concludes that acculturation and ethnic identification are positively related to food consumption (Bojanic and Xu, 2006; Satia-Abouta et al, 2002). Neglected in this research, however, are historically contextualised studies of everyday provisioning and the interconnected practices of ethnic identification, shopping and domestic reproduction. This paper attempts to demonstrate how the cultural preferences of immigrants are differentially maintained, negated and in some cases adapted to the perceived 'host' culture in the context of changing immigrant constituencies and shopping infrastructures. By focusing on immigrant consumption strategies, the various responses of immigrants to retail modernisation and the diversity of immigrant consumer cultures, the paper is designed to stimulate inquiry into the neglected contribution of ethnic identification to evolving retail landscapes.

The relationship between shopping and identity has been the subject of several recent interdisciplinary research projects (Jackson et al, 2006; Miller et al, 1998). Taking a broad approach, these studies suggest that it is not sufficient to focus on a single aspect of identity, arguing that ‘the relationship between consumption and identity should not be reduced to the level of individual “lifestyle choice” but related to wider structures of social interaction, especially concerned with gender relations and the family, with generational differences and competing constructions of race, place and nation’ (Jackson, 1999:36). In addition, anthropologists and cultural geographers have analysed the relationship between contemporary ethnic identities and shopping (Crang, 1996), most notably in *Shopping, Place and Identity* by Miller et al (1998). Drawing on these approaches our paper demonstrates the limits of the analysis of consumption practices based on a single category of identity. It is argued that ethnicity, as a socially constructed category of identification, must be viewed in terms of its emergent interconnections with other constructions of societal status, gender and place.

Our understanding of the complexities of consumers' approaches to food shopping have become somewhat more complete as a result of recent research. Writing from a marketing perspective, Goldman's study of the transfer of retail formats to developing economies introduced the idea that some cultural groups may share distinctive shopping patterns that influence their engagement with the retail sector (Goldman et al, 2002; 1982; Goldman and Hino, 2005). The idea of selective product adoption within consumer practice introduced by Goldman has recently been taken up by Alexander, Phillips and Shaw in their study of female food shoppers' reactions to self-service in mid-twentieth-century Britain (Alexander et al, 2007). They reveal the importance of selective adoption practices resulting from perceived risk among women shoppers, with early self-service stores and supermarkets reported to be frequently bypassed in favour of more traditional formats when it came to shopping for certain products. Recent analyses from the geography literature also point us towards the role of the household in shaping food shopping choices (Jackson et al,

2006:58). This paper draws on these recent interpretations of food shopping as a social practice, to consider a number of important issues. First, the strategies employed by those south Asian shoppers seeking to fulfill cultural needs, in the face of a retail system potentially ill-equipped to meet these. Second, the responses of south Asian shoppers to the changing retail system in Britain at this time, specifically to the arrival of supermarket. Finally, the importance of the organisation of the household, gender, work roles and socio-economic status in determining south Asian food consumption patterns alongside the impact of cultural preferences linked to ethnic identity. Following Jackson et al's (2006) cultural approach, our intention is not to offer a comprehensive picture of south Asian shopping practices, but rather to provide an insight into the subjective dimensions of everyday shopping and the various ways in which consumers negotiated aspects of their own identity alongside changing supply chains and retail developments and shopping opportunities.

The empirical material for this analysis has been drawn from a new survey of the available qualitative data for the experiences of south Asian consumers in Britain in this period, including contemporary anthropological studies and a number of oral histories of both immigrant groups and the wider population. This material has been collected together and analysed by the Universities of Exeter and Surrey as a part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council project 'Reconstructing Consumer Landscapes 1945-1975: Shopper Reactions to the Supermarket in Early Post-war England'. This project is designed to respond to observations on the dearth of detailed studies of the development of self-service retailing and shopping (Usherwood, 2000).

THE BRITISH ASIAN COMMUNITY BEFORE 1975: CONTEXT AND SOURCES

The British south Asian population has been chosen for assessment principally because its large scale establishment of an infrastructure of specialist shops was unique in Britain at this time

(Anwar, 1979; Holmes, 1988), and is perhaps suggestive of an alternative view of British shopping habits. The term 'south Asian' is frequently used in contemporary sociology (Ahmad et al, 2003), and is used as a catch all term for a diverse set of national and religious identities. During the 1950s, immigrants from the Indian subcontinent were mainly Sikhs from Eastern Punjab in the north of India, Hindus from Gujarat in the west of India, and Muslims and Parsees from various locations. The majority of Muslims from the subcontinent came from Pakistan, from Mirpur and Sylhet (now Bangladesh) (Holmes, 1988: 273). Many Pakistani migrants were from rural backgrounds with low levels of literacy (Holmes, 1988:273). According to the 1951 census, which recorded place of birth, there were 110,767 people in Britain who had been born in India and 11,117 who had been born in Pakistan (Holmes, 1988: 225). The population was further increased in the 1960s by the arrival of Indians from Kenya. The total population of Britain in 1971 was 55,347,000 of whom 750,000 had been born in India or Pakistan (Tinker, 1977:164-165). These figures, however, do not include the children of migrants who were born in the UK. It is also estimated that 35% of the total so-classified 'black' population (including south Asians) in 1971 were born in the UK (The Runnymede Trust and Radical Statistics Race Group, 1980:4). Where immigrants settled often depended on the availability of jobs and accommodation. Outside the south east and London, ethnic minority populations were concentrated in the West Midlands region (particularly Wolverhampton, Birmingham and Coventry), West Yorkshire (especially Bradford) and the East Midlands (Leicester) (The Runnymede Trust and Radical Statistics Race Group, 1980:5). London boroughs with larger Asian populations were Kensington, Chelsea, Ealing, Camden, Westminster and Tower Hamlets (Tinker, 1977: 274).

The earliest anthropological studies were conducted in the 1960s and include Desai's *Indian Immigrants to Britain* (1963). This work was followed by more detailed anthropological studies produced in the late 1970s. Thus, Tinker's *The Banyan Tree: overseas emigrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (1977), offers some interesting material from the East African

perspective. In contrast, Anwar's, *The Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain* (1979), offers a nuanced and detailed study of the Pakistani community in Rochdale, whilst Rex and Tomlinson's *Colonial Immigrants in a British City: A Class Analysis* (1979) explores the relationship between ethnicity and class through a case study of Handsworth in Birmingham. More specifically, Wilson's *Finding a Voice* was published by Virago press in 1978, and assessed the position of Asian women in Britain. From the point of view of shopping, it is a useful text, but has been heavily criticised for overemphasising the misery and isolation of the position of many Asian women (Parmar, 1982). Finally, Shaw's sensitive and nuanced study of the Pakistani community in Oxford was published in 1988; the fruit of four years' anthropological research, this text is neutral in tone and rich in direct quotations from her subjects.

Experiences of migration have emerged as one of the most important themes in oral history. Thomson (1999) has summarised the contribution of oral histories to migration studies, which form part of a wider oral historical tradition that has sought to give voice to oppressed groups. He commends oral history as an apposite methodology, because migrants' stories are likely to be unrecorded or badly documented (Thomson, 1999:26). Thompson and Bauer, for example, have recently explored the family mythologies of Jamaican migrants in Britain and America (Thompson and Bauer, 2002). Marino (2007) explores the work of Sheffield's Bengali Women's Support Group. Indeed, narratives and extracts from some of these histories have been published as anthologies, which this paper draws material from.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, there have been a number of large scale oral histories published as a result of community initiatives, the most useful for our purposes being the surveys of south Asians in Bradford, undertaken by the Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, published in 1987 and 1994. This programme operated over ten years, ending in 1993, and included over one hundred life story interviews. Our paper draws on the findings of this extensive study, which includes the narratives of south Asians who settled in the Bradford area during the 1950s and 1960s. The paper also uses the findings of large oral history projects that were

not undertaken specifically to record immigration experiences. In particular, we use thirty oral history interviews given by South Asian immigrants and their children, most of which are from the National Sound Archive, held at the British Library, from the 'Millennium Memory Bank' and 'Food: From Source to Salespoint' projects. The Millennium Memory Bank Project was a joint undertaking between the British Library Sound Archive and BBC Local Radio to create an 'archive snapshot' of the opinions and experiences of 'ordinary Britons' at the turn of the century (Perks and Robinson, 2005). Two additional interviews made as part of the 'Woking Living Words Project' at the Lightbox Museum and Gallery at Woking have also been used.

EXPLORATIONS OF ETHNICITY AND CONSUMPTION

Social scientists have sought to articulate the experiences of migrant groups and the impacts of the migration process on patterns of consumption including food (for example Kershen, 2002). Some marketing academics, particularly those working in the USA, have employed the concept of 'acculturation' to define the relationship between ethnic groups and the so-called 'host' culture (see Bojanic and Xu 2006). Initial studies used the term assimilation to describe an immigrant group that had absorbed the values and characteristics of the 'host' culture (Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983). This perspective is represented in linear bi-polar models in which the acquisition of traits from the 'host' culture is concomitantly related to the loss of traits from one's culture of origin (for example Faber et al, 1987). Such models rely upon measures of ethnicity including language, religion and food preferences, in which the individual is theorised as the participant in a one way process (Laroche et al, 1998). However, such linear bi-polar models have been rejected, since they do not take account of the bi-level multicultural processes as suggested in acculturation (Laroche et al, 1998), the potential agency within immigrant groups (Rex and Tomlinson, 1999), the dialogical nature of ethnicity and acculturation (Bhatia, 2002), and the heterogeneous composition and hybridity of

‘host’ cultures.

Understandings of acculturation have been refined over decades of research. For example, Peñaloza and Reardon have found that acculturation and the assertion of ethnic identity are not mutually exclusive, and that acculturation should be viewed as a transitional process without a definite end point (Peñaloza, 1994; Reardon et al, 1997). Likewise, Berry (1980; cf Lindridge, 2004) argues that acculturation is a bi-directional process in which an individual constantly moves back and forth, between positions of assimilation, integration, marginality and separation. Summing up Berry’s argument, Lindridge et al (2004, 214) conclude that ‘the ethnic minority individual creates multiple presentations of their self identity in different contexts, i.e. “situational ethnicity” (Stayman and Deshpande, 1989)’. Different members of the same ethnic group can experience acculturation in different ways, as some individuals may be more inclined to adapt their behaviour towards the host culture than others (Cuellar et al, 1997).

Early studies of immigration to Britain highlighted the importance of food consumption in immigrants’ relationships with ‘host’ cultures (Desai, 1963). Across the Atlantic, Gans’s study of Boston concluded that food cultures are often the most resilient to change amongst successive generations of immigrants (Gans, 1962: 33). Thus, food consumption has been seen as a key factor in the phenomenon of ‘consumer acculturation.’ (Rosenthal and Feldman, 1992 (cf. Laroche et al., 1998); Omar et al., 2004; Peñaloza, 1994). Indeed, food consumption has been the central subject of analysis in many recent studies of ethnicity and consumer behaviour (Bojanic and Xu, 2006; Brunso and Grunert, 1998; Laroche, 1998; Stayman and Deshpande, 1989; Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983). In a study of Italian ethnic identity in Montreal and the consumption of traditional and convenience foods, Laroche et al argue that ‘it is quite apparent that acculturation and ethnic identification are related to consumption. In other words, consumption is ethnically bound’ (1998: 145). However, they also found that this process was complex. The relationship between acculturation and food

varied according to food type, and the operation of ethnic identities was more salient under certain conditions such as religious holidays (Laroche et al., 1998).

Whilst the majority of research on ethnicity and consumption has focused on North America, recent studies have begun to explore the impact of ethnicity on consumption within Britain; the geographic focus of this paper. Omar et al. (2004), have explored the relationship between ethnic identity and brand preference by surveying the choices of ethnic and non-ethnic shoppers in London, taking a broad definition of ethnicity that encompassed more than 40 nationalities. They used the term 'acculturation' to refer to a process of social change caused by the interaction of ethnic minority groups with what they term 'British culture'. The survey measured the level of acculturation, examining the use of English at home, food brand preference and length of time in Britain. The study found that 'no significant differences were found in the preferences of food brands because of cultural differences' (Omar et al, 2004: 39). Jamal and Chapman (2000) have recently added a new dimension to the debate on acculturation with a study of ethnic minority consumers in Bradford in the UK. Rather than searching for 'ethnic' behaviour across a different range of groups, they sought to understand the operation of ethnic identity through the study of a single community. In doing so they emphasised that acculturation should be seen as a process that is always in transition, arguing that 'there is no single, everlasting outcome of acculturation' (Jamal and Chapman, 2000: 384). This demonstrates a nuanced view of how different individuals within the Bradford Pakistani community expressed ethnic identity through shopping choices.

Despite the more nuanced dialogical versions of acculturation being developed by marketing researchers, many studies construct 'ethnicity' through simplistic categories that struggle to break free of the binaries that define ethnicity as same/other. All too often, ethnicity enters the calculations of statistical models without remainder and without acknowledging the excluded middle ground in which ethnic identities are negotiated. Progress in management and organizational

studies is likely to occur, perhaps, as insights from postcolonial literature enter its corpus (Frenkel and Shenhav, 2006: 855) and we begin to see a fuller expression of the latter's theoretical contribution (for instance Bhaba, 1994; Werbner, 1997) in studies of marketing, consumption and ethnicity as has been the case in organizational analysis (Prasad, 2003; Frenkel and Shenhav, 2006). It is beyond the scope of this paper to further this agenda, but we acknowledge its potential.

The approach to ethnicity as a single category of identity has been challenged by an interdisciplinary research project on shopping in north London. Miller et al. (1998) question approaches to the study of shopping that employ ethnicity as a single approach and blanket category. They suggest that it is fruitless to search for a single meaning of 'ethnicity' that 'exists as a wide range of identifications which may be generated by those within a community or projected onto that community by others' (Miller et al., 1998:183). It is argued that the identification of a group as ethnic only makes sense in the context of a large group of "unmarked" persons, e.g. the British. By exploring the relationship between shopping and identity from the point of view of place rather than targeting "ethnic" users, they reveal the complex relationship between place and ethnic identities. As they argue, 'while not wishing to presume or impose ethnicity as a perspective...ethnicity emerged as part of the overall relationship which we would have to highlight' (Miller et al.,1998: 159). The challenge to ethnicity as an effective category of social analyses has also been posed, from a social history perspective, by Tabili (2003:125), who argues that the theoretical perspective developed by historians in relation to class analysis is also of value when studying racial processes: ethnic identity, like class, needs to be seen in the context of other identities and power structures such as gender. Therefore, rather than viewing south Asian experiences in Britain as one kind of "ethnic" identity, the underlying emphasis in this paper is on differences among south Asian migrants, and similarities with others, exploring gender, and socio economic status alongside "ethnicity".

FOOD SHOPPING: CONSUMPTION STRATEGIES

The forms through which imported south Asian practices were dialectically related to practices dominant in the 'host' society were strongly influenced by structural factors. These structural factors varied for different groups of immigrants, which are reflected in the varying strategies employed by immigrants. Before the early 1960s, the majority of immigrants were male, and were often employed for long hours in manual labour. Hard working life left little time for food preparation. A Bradford interviewee remembered: 'the last thing you want to do after a twelve hour shift is to go home and cook yourself some dinner' (Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, 1987:44). Often living in shared houses with little access to cooking facilities they were initially dependent to a certain extent on what was locally available, and on convenience foods. This is revealed in Shaw's study of the small Pakistani community in Oxford. One of her interviewees, 'Amjad,' recalls his experience of living in Jericho in West Oxford in 1953: 'It was a terrible thing living there. ... During the week, for three months, we ate nothing but baked beans [in response to the lack of availability of Halal meat]' (Shaw, 1988:35).

Before a retail infrastructure developed in some locations to cater for any particular shopping demands, South Asian consumers could engage with the existing retail system or seek provision outside of it. Religious observance was difficult for some. Shah Abdul Majid Qureshi, interviewed by Adams, arrived in London in 1936. He remembers:

'In those early days we never thought of having halal meat or anything like that – we used to buy meat from the English shop – just avoid the pork... pork usually no Muslim will take, though they might take drink, which is equally forbidden to them'(Adams, 1987:160).

Specialist items might be ordered long distance. Naffese Chohan came to Middlesborough, Teeside for an arranged marriage in the 1940s. At this time there were few Asians living in the area. She found obtaining 'Asian food' difficult locally and sent off to London for spices and long rice, whilst

mixing her own chappati flour (Millennium Memory Bank (MMB), C900/10580). South Asian immigrants might also turn to shops run by other ethnic groups who shared similar tastes. A Bradford interviewee recalled ‘there weren’t any Asian shops in those days there were the Jewish shops, the Polish, the Latvians – they had similar sorts of foodstuffs to what we would eat, in terms of some of the spices’ (Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, 1994:50). An alternative strategy was to circumvent the shops and go back to the source to obtain culturally appropriate foodstuffs. Again turning to religion as a facet of ethnicity, this practice was widespread amongst Muslims who wished to obtain halal meat. A Bradford interviewee recalled:

‘Initially for meat there wasn’t any. Then one individual discovered a process whereby he could go and buy a sheep, have it killed at the farm, and bring it over to the house and we would share it – and this sheep was obviously slaughtered in the halal fashion so everybody was eligible’ (Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, 1994:50).

Other Bradford interviewees recalled local farms where chickens could be obtained, and the early Pakistani migrants interviewed by Shaw in Oxford adopted similar practices to obtain chicken that had been slaughtered in the appropriate fashion (Shaw, 1988:35).

Such elaborate and potentially inconvenient consumer strategies became less necessary as the south Asian immigrant population grew from the 1950s, creating an infrastructure of culturally specific goods and services for those seeking such items. The first Indian grocery business was established in 1928 in London, supplying students, businessmen and professional men, whilst the first was started in Birmingham in 1949 (Desai, 1963:57). According to Adams (1987:40), the first halal butcher’s shop in Britain was opened by Haji Taslim Ali, in East London in the 1940s. The growth of a retail infrastructure targeting south Asians varied across Britain, depending on the size of the local community. In certain areas, a strong internal economy developed. Faisal Ali, whose father established the Gifto cash and carry in Southall in the 1960s, notes that during this period ‘Southall

became a hub for Asian shopping.’ (Faisal Ali, n.d., British Library National Sound Archive, C821/72). The historian Colin Holmes (1988:232) cites the growth of saree shops in Bradford, Huddersfield and Southall. Similarly, Anwar’s (1979:34) study of the Pakistani community in Rochdale found that by 1974 there were over twenty Pakistani owned grocery/butcher and drapery shops and ten travel and shipping agents in the town.

By the mid 1960s it was becoming easier to obtain perceived culturally specific foodstuffs in certain areas of Britain, which had developed as ‘hubs’ for South Asian shops. South Asians situated in these locations would have had considerably more choice in where they shopped and what they purchased. For example, Dr A. Mahood lived as a student in Whitechapel from 1966 to 1968. He noted:

‘There used to be a lot of Pakistani shops springing up to sell meat and vegetable because that area at that time was almost being demolished so the houses were going very cheap, so lot of Pakistanis bought those and were running, you know, really very well and there were small restaurants where you could go and have a cup of tea in the evenings and so forth. Brick Lane was not very far away from there...’ (Woking Living Words Project).ⁱⁱⁱ

But when he moved to Woking in 1974, he found that such food stuffs were only available in one corner shop in the town. This experience is typical of others living outside the major metropolitan areas at this time:

‘We went to the same shop because they used to do halal meat in those days but when we moved to Woking, because we had an association with the East End of London for the first six months, literally almost every weekend because we had a car, we used to sit and go and I can tell you that the Upton Park High Street there was not a single Asian shop. In 1974 there was not a single Asian shop, now if you go, there are all Asian shops and nothing else.’ (Woking Living Words Project).

Other oral histories suggest that for those who did not live in an area where the Asian population was highly concentrated a dual shopping pattern could be adopted. Basic provisions obtained from local outlets could be supplemented by more specialist goods obtained from further afield, either via retailer delivery or a co-operative system amongst the local community. Harkesh Khabra came with her family to Gravesend in Kent in May 1959 and ingredients for traditional meals were bought from Rochester market. The four or five Indian families living in Rochester went collectively to London every month for supplies, but as more south Asians arrived street vans came down from London and a local shop eventually opened (MMB, C900/07620). An interviewee from the Millennium Memory Bank Project arrived in Hampshire with his family from Nairobi in Kenya on March 21 1962. Initially, any culturally specific goods came from Southall, and were delivered from there, but later goods were delivered from shops at Smethwick and Handsworth in the West Midlands (MMB, C900/000--). Other Indian immigrants reported the same experiences: whilst certain goods could be obtained closer to home others would by and large have to be ordered from further away.

Any changes to the food consumption habits of early immigrants may have depended in part on local availability of resources. But there were also variations in the approaches of different South Asian groups. An interviewee of the Bradford Heritage project commented that Muslims in Bradford were extremely conscious of the need to maintain their cultural identity through the consumption of the appropriate foodstuffs:

‘The pattern in those days (early 1960s) was that there were very few people who were devoted to the religious side, mostly people were basically concerned with their own survival. They were very conscious of not eating meat from English shops or poultry – they relied very heavily on vegetables – cauliflower, peas.’ (Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, 1994:48).

This contrasts with the account of Gurnam Singh Khera, a Sikh who came to London in 1953 and settled in Northfleet, and was interviewed in the 1990s as part of a Hammersmith and Fulham community project. His comments also show how food consumption could be positioned within a wider re-fashioning of the interviewee's identity as a Sikh living in England:

'Things were rationed in those days, we could not get enough butter which we Indians used to think was the most healthy part of our diet, and we were working very, very hard in those days so in order to stay fit and healthy we adapted to the English diet, started eating meat. Meat does not go alone so beers and drinks followed, and we became proper Anglo-Indian gentlemen.'

(Ethnic Communities Oral History Project, 1993: 4).

THE GROWTH OF SUPERMARKETS AND SOUTH ASIAN FOOD SHOPPING

As with all other consumers, South Asian's food shopping patterns were also influenced by wider changes in the British retail structure in this period. The 1950s and 1960s saw the growth of self-service retailing across Britain and the emergence of the first supermarkets. There is little evidence to suggest that the co-operative societies, leading innovators of self-service, nor the large chain supermarkets met the specific cultural needs of Indian and Pakistani shoppers in this period. The supermarket chain Sainsbury's made some attempt to cater for particular tastes on a local basis: the Swiss Cottage store, which was open in 1959, was reported to cater for the needs of the local Jewish community, stocking a wide range of continental foods rarely seen outside the specialist delicatessen. While Sainsbury's introduced so-called "Indian style" goods from 1920, including mango chutney and "currie powder", specialist ingredients such as fine spices were not available until the launch of Sainsbury's Special Selection in 1993.^{iv} For all consumers, including recent migrants, the rapidly developing supermarkets could represent a potential source of excitement and interest or frustration. Chenab Mangat came to Essex from Africa as a small child in the early 1970s. She remembers welcoming the wide range of goods on offer, but being surprised by the lack

of familiar foodstuffs:

‘I remember walking round supermarkets with my Mum being a little kid and obviously stuff we didn’t get in Africa... so it was quite a different experience... no wine... no garlic bread.’

(MMB, C900/07603).

However, shops not owned or frequented by South Asians might be viewed as a source of threat, with fears of encountering racism. Parminder Dillon, who was born in Kenya in 1958, came with her Sikh family to live in Northolt in 1968. The shops in Northolt at that time were not attractive: ‘the area was very white and unfriendly. All white shops.’ (MMB, C900/05009). But not many oral histories referred to racism in the shops. Neighbours identified by immigrants as “white” could be staunch allies when negotiating the unfamiliar terrain of the local shop. One interviewee had a “white” neighbour in Wellingborough who was very friendly and used to go shopping with her: ‘because I was in the house so much she used to ask if I wanted to help her, or to go shopping with her.’ (MMB, C900/000--). Shirin Abdul Hussein, came to Nuneaton with her family in the 1960s, fleeing what has been termed Africanisation in Uganda. She remembered that her mother ‘found shopping a big step, she’d never done it before in Uganda.’ The Muslim association put them in touch with a special shop, and their “white” neighbours were also friendly and helpful if they needed anything (MMB, C900/00048). Shops could represent intimidating spaces but in cases we have researched help was sometimes at hand in their negotiation.

Clearly, south Asian owned shops, like other independent shops, often performed a social function beyond the basic supply of goods. For Rochdale, Anwar (1979:48) notes that such shops ‘acted as dissemination points for various types of information relating to the community... [they were] also used as meeting points and for spreading information about different activities in the community.’ Parminder Dillon, was delighted by the ‘Asian shops’ of Southall, remembering that on her first visit she ‘couldn’t believe there was such a place. Very Asian.’ (MMB, C900/05009). When her

family moved to the borders of Southall in 1970, they gained not just convenient shopping but a much improved social life: ‘ [it was] wonderful, you could see relatives, go shopping, the social scene improved.’ (MMB, C900/05009).

Similar to others, South Asian communities could co-opt the supermarket to play an important social role and fulfill cultural needs. An interviewee from the Millennium Memory Bank project and her family came to Wellingborough in 1974, which at that time was a small town with only a small shopping centre. Culturally specific goods were not available: ‘If you wanted anything Indian you had to come to Leicester.’ (MMB, C900/000--). For day to day shopping, the family used ‘Rileys’, a small supermarket in Wellingborough. This supermarket was used by the local Asian community. She remembered that her family were different from the other small group of Asian households in Wellingborough at that time, as they intended to make a home in Britain and were not sending money back to India. Because of this difference, they did not have a great deal of contact with the local community – in fact contact took place when shopping at the local supermarket:

‘You met when you went to the market or the most important, for example, the supermarket everybody went to was a store called Rileys at that time and you used to meet, you’d see, different people there, Asian people.’ (MMB, C900/00011).

Several of the interviews mentioned a dramatic change in supermarkets since the 1970s. Shezad Hussein commented: ‘supermarkets, the way they looked then and the way they look now, it’s one hell of a change really.’ (Food: From Source to Sales Point, C821/36/01-09). There was a shared perception that supermarkets had only recently started to stock the specialist goods that were essential for south Asian cooking. Salim Kholwadia, who was interviewed in 1999, remarked: ‘even say, ten, fifteen years ago, you couldn’t get chillies from Asda, or garlic.’ (MMB, C900/04625). However, he did not believe that these goods had been provided with the south Asian consumer in

mind, stating that these goods were now stocked because of the demand among “English people.” ‘Fifteen years ago they wouldn’t have touched this stuff. You know. It’s foreign. Full stop. They hadn’t got the demand.’ (MMB, C900/04625). Some even suggested that the supermarket was now the best place to go for ingredients for Asian cuisine:

‘In the food market there’s lots of Asian people working there so they tell these people to bring these things. Like ginger and other things you can’t usually get in... But I think you can get everything in Sainsbury’s in small amounts but they got lots of varieties and I found that most of the varieties in Waitrose, the Waitrose shop...’ (Deran Shah, Woking Living Words Project).

However, despite the fact that supermarkets now offer specialist goods, shops located within the south Asian community can retain the loyalty of some of their former customers. Gurdip Gill was born in Handsworth in Birmingham in 1969, where his parents had migrated from Punjab in India. He comments that although the necessary products for Asian cooking are now available in the supermarkets, the local community retains its hold. The landscape of Handsworth, imbued with memories, continues to draw him back:

‘Supermarkets have ginger etc. But I still like to go to Soho Road, Handsworth. I’ve not lived in Handsworth for eight years, but I feel more comfortable walking in Handsworth. I remember who used to own the shops.’ (MMB, C900/1859).

SIMILARITIES AND DIVERGENCES IN SHOPPING PATTERNS

Variations in the domestic division of labour and the reproduction of the family household affect consumption patterns. Whilst the south Asian population could be portrayed as having a ‘distinctive’ and ‘different’ culture, it is important to assert that experience within these communities themselves varied as ethnicity was configured in multiple ways that articulated socio-economic, religious and gendered identities within specific distributions of economic resources. The final section of this paper argues that any understanding of the construction of ethnic

identities through consumption must take account of these multiple figurations and the temporal (in)stability of these relations.

Shopping practices were and continue to be strongly influenced by women's working roles outside the home. Women frequently adopt responsibility for food preparation within the home, and there is a clear relationship between specific practices of cooking and food consumption and the time available to engage in other activities. The working experiences of women in south Asian groups varied greatly. Within some communities, there was an expectation that women would not undertake paid work, but this was subject to substantial variance between communities. Parmar's survey of the 1971 census shows that 40.8% of women from India were engaged in wage labour and 20.7% of women from Pakistan (Parmar, 1982:247). The arrival of the Ugandan Asians in 1972 also made a significant difference: the economic participation of women aged over 15 and born in East Africa was 52%. This was also determined by differing regional employment opportunities: within the Muslim community over a quarter of women between 15 and 45 were at work in the south east and the south west of Britain, whereas in Yorkshire and the West Midlands there was only a low rate of going out of the house to work (Parmar, 1982:247). For married women shouldering the double burden of waged work and domestic reproduction, the convenience of the supermarkets and ready made foods would have had more appeal. Bhanumati Kotecha, who came from Uganda in the late 1960s, and married and moved to Leicester in the early seventies, commented 'I like chips. (I like everything) for easy life. Samosa takes ages to make... I don't know how I would have survived in Uganda or India.' (MMB, C900/09083 C1).

Like others, how south Asians households engaged with the retail sector was also determined by patterns of household work and technologies. The arrival of the supermarket and self service in Britain are associated with changing patterns of work for British women. The supermarket promised speed, convenience and hygiene (Usherwood, 2000:125). Self service and convenience

food were suggested to have made life easier for the working housewife or mother. The range of products available in the supermarket is also linked to changing household technology: the arrival of the fridge being the most obvious (Bowlby, 1997:104-5). However many of the Pakistani housewives who were the subjects of Shaw's (1988:68) study rejected new household technologies. She found kitchens that were simply equipped: 'women point out that since they are not expected to take paid employment outside the home, it is only proper that they should manage the household as cheaply as possible and not waste money on household gadgets.' She noted that most women prepared a fresh curry for every meal, crushing their own fresh spices and not making more than enough for one day (1988:68). For such housewives, labour saving convenience foods would have little appeal. These practices, however, contrast with evidence from other south Asian groups. The autobiographical epic poem of Wolverhampton factory worker Madho Ram, which describes his immigration experiences, celebrated household technology, and on arrival in Britain his wife was pleasantly surprised to find a gas cooker and other conveniences (Tatla, 2002:68). Another Sikh man expressed pride in embracing household technologies and the lifestyle he perceived to be associated with them. Gurdip Singh settled in Gravesend in 1954 and was interviewed as part of the Asian Voices project. He remembered: 'I loved experimenting and exploring. I was the first one to have a fridge and a telephone in the house... Life was very English.' (Ethnic Communities Oral History Project, 1993:10).

Within the south Asian communities there was a variation in the gendering of shopping responsibility. Parminder Bhachu, in her study of Sikh women's relationships with work and home, argues that the emphasis on equality within the Sikh religion, coupled with the initial absence of elders contributed an increase in shared decision making in the households of Sikh migrants (Bhachu, 1988). In some instances, however, men were more likely to be responsible for food shopping. A female interviewee from the Bradford heritage project recalled:

'My husband always came to Bradford to get the full week's meat and chicken and everything.

Whenever we ran out of anything, he would always come to Bradford to get it. But we didn't have a car and I was in Purdah in those days... it isn't nice to travel, wearing that black thing, we call it a burkha, so we always had a taxi. And we used to pay about £2 or something, or £3 return, and it was a lot of money in those days. I usually came every two or three months.' (Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, 1994:76).

'I wasn't allowed to go in the shops in those days. It was only men who usually go in the shop, they don't like their women going in front of everybody else, so it is his job. He used to bring everything that I needed. I just had to tell him if I was short of anything.' (Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, 1994:77).

We do not suggest that the influence of community was necessarily obvious or indeed positive. A Bradford interviewee recalled: 'I remember we went to an Asian restaurant and the man said that the women had to sit separately, and they were shocked that my Dad had taken his wife and daughters out, so we didn't try again.' (Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, 1994: 122). At the same time, removal or distance from the community could also result in lack of access to shops providing specialist foodstuffs. A woman interviewed by the Hammersmith and Fulham community project had initially enjoyed living and shopping in Aldgate East when she came to Britain. However, she moved to Fulham when her husband got a job in the area: 'I miss the homely atmosphere of Aldgate. I cannot go shopping to buy Bangladeshi vegetables and fish unless someone takes me there. My husband buys those things every week from a shop near his place of work, but it is not like buying it yourself.' (Ethnic Communities Oral History Project, 1993:12). Werbner has shown how female friendship networks within the Manchester Muslim community were essential in the process of consumption and distribution of gifts for ritual exchange (Werbner, 1988). Anwar's study of the Pakistani community in Rochdale notes that women arranged shopping trips together (Anwar, 1979). It is likely that these female networks in Muslim communities also played a role in

everyday food consumption, but more research is needed on the nature of this interaction.

The difficulties women could experience when shopping were also shaped by socioeconomic background and (linked) educational opportunities. The process of shopping itself was new to many Ugandan women who had previously had servants to do their shopping for them (Naffesse Chohan, MMB C900/10580; Bhanumati Kotecha, C900/09083; Shirin Abdul Hussein, MMB, C900/00048). Education made an important difference. Harkesh Khabra remembered that the language barrier was a problem (MMB, C900/07620). Such cultural and linguistic dislocation continued to be a problem for new arrivals later in the twentieth century. Kamal Miah, a Bangladeshi Muslim from Newcastle, describing his family's arrival in the UK in the early 1990s, noted: 'it helps to have a lot of Bangladeshis together. Mother finds shopping difficult.' (MMB, C900/11135). One interviewee, who joined her family in Wellingborough in the early 1970s after having been a student in India, was frustrated and surprised that her mother, who worried over the consequences of the language barrier, would not let her buy necessities from the corner shop:

'No because you won't understand what these people say and I don't understand what they say it would be very difficult what if somebody gets at you. So for about a month she would not let me out on my own which I found really strange.' (MMB, C900/000--).

This experience varied greatly between women of different ages and backgrounds. The interviewee referred to above, a seemingly confident, university-educated young woman, was puzzled by her mother's fears. Ruksana Gul, who arrived in Scunthorpe in her teens, stated in her narrative that she believed herself to be the first young Asian woman to get a job outside the home in the town at that time. She relished the freedom of shopping, associating it with her new-found independence:

'Shopping and everything ... [I] started to enjoy the freedom. I should call it freedom... it was difficult... back home I never went shopping, never knew the prices of things.' (MMB, C900/07111b C1).

Gardner's (1999) contemporary study of age and death amongst Bengali elders in East London shows how class/caste and education still make a huge difference to women's use of space and attitudes to shopping, even within a small social and religious group. She compares the experiences of two women. One woman had been in London for only 18 months and lived in a high rise block near Mile End. She commented: 'The centre (St Hilda's) is the only place I go, otherwise I stay in one place. Who's going to take me?' (Gardner, 1999:71). Gardner contrasts this statement with a second woman who had been in Britain since the 1970s and was from a high status and well educated family in Sylhet: 'London is a free place. In Bangladesh I couldn't do my own shopping: going to the bazaar is *sharom* (shameful), but in London we can all do the shopping.'

CONCLUSION

Our review of the literature reveals contemporary studies of ethnicity and consumption within marketing research and business management have frequently adopted acculturation as a useful concept for understanding the process of 'cross-cultural consumption'. We feel that this is an area for further debate and enquiry, with a more detailed reading of alternative conceptualizations of notions of culture and change, which is beyond the means of the literature review in this paper, potentially valuable. From our study of the oral history data, we consider that ethnic identifications can have an impact on everyday consumption, but this impact is complicated. Ethnicity should not be singled out as a variable to explain the shopping habits of consumers. South Asian immigrants to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, like all other consumers, both adapted and maintained cultural traditions through food consumption and shopping. Through an analysis of the experiences of consumption expressed in oral histories it is clear that the extant retail infrastructure placed constraints on the opportunities for cultural expressions through food shopping and consumption.

Households could organise to provide the necessary labour to carry out south Asian cooking practices, whilst ingredients were sought in shops of other ethnic groups. But religion plays a role here too; in the case of Muslim consumers, butcher's shops were often circumvented in the search for halal meat.

During the 1960s 'hubs' of south Asian shops emerged across Britain, which made it far easier for south Asian groups to obtain culturally appropriate foodstuffs. However, south Asians living outside these areas could formulate alternative strategies to obtain any culturally specific goods they required. Dual shopping - purchasing basic goods at local stores while travelling further afield for south Asian spices and specialist ingredients – was a common practice. In some areas associations were formed within the community for the supply of goods. The gradual arrival of self service and the supermarket, changed the British retail landscape. Early British supermarkets were seen as having little to offer south Asian consumers in terms of specialist foods, although in some areas they were used since there were few alternatives. However, in those areas some distance from shopping 'hubs', the supermarket could even be co-opted by the local south Asian community, performing a similar social function in the community. Although many interviewees commented on the massive change that had taken place in the provision of south Asian foodstuffs in supermarkets, these changes were perceived as for the benefit of the 'English population' as much as the south Asians. When large supermarkets finally began to offer a range of suitable goods, some south Asian consumers remained reluctant to use them, remaining loyal to the longer established retail landscapes of Southall and Handsworth.

Any evaluation of the influence of ethnic identity over consumption must be framed within a wider understanding of the operation of other categories of social identity. Class, age, gender and economic status were all important in shaping the food practices of the south Asian population in Britain at this time as of course for other groups. The organisation of the household had an

important impact on shopping practices: if women worked outside the home, they were more likely to invest in convenience foods, increasingly available in supermarkets and self service stores. The likelihood of women undertaking work outside the home was among other things linked to religious affiliation, but this also varied according to regional employment opportunities. In households that prized labour and frugality above convenience, such as the Pakistani households in Oxford surveyed by Shaw, convenience foods and freezable products reportedly had little appeal. In some households, religious and cultural preference, coupled with the practical difficulties of accessing the shops, meant that men, rather than women were responsible for household shopping. Education, age and socio-economic background also influenced how south Asian women engaged with the shops: older women or those with language difficulties might find shopping a daunting experience, and prefer to rely on other members of their family to obtain foodstuffs.

Unfortunately the existing qualitative data provides only partial detail on how South Asian shoppers responded to the major changes in British retail system denoted by the rise of self-service and particularly the supermarket. Food shopping is usually an aspect, rather than the focus of the interviews used here. There is little commentary in these sources on the significance of change from counter service to self service or the coming of the supermarket, so we only have a small amount of information on how these innovations were experienced across different immigrant communities. Further oral histories focused on the topic of changing patterns of retailing and shopping would provide a potentially valuable further source of evidence.

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 - ii An additional source that offers useful evidence is the creative writing penned by South Asian writers when they first came to Britain. For a useful summary of some of this material and approaches to it see Tatla, D.S. (2002) 'A Passage to England: Oral Tradition and Popular Culture Among Early Punjabi Settlers in Britain,' *Oral History* 30(2):61-72.
 - iii Quoted with the permission of the Woking Living Words Project, Light Box Museum and Gallery, Woking.
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