

The essences of multicultural: A sensory exploration of an inner-city street market

keywords: smell, multicultural, race, taste, street markets, urban

Abstract:

This paper applies methods and concepts derived from a 'sensory turn' within the social sciences to a street market, popular with migrants to east London, to explore the socio-sensory processes through which convivial metropolitan multiculturalism is produced. Arguing against critiques of "eating the other" (hooks 1992, p.21) and reductive accounts of cross-cultural interaction (assimilation, acculturation, boutique cosmopolitanism etc.) this paper hones a sensory attention on the market place and reveals the ways urbanites come to live with difference and, between them, develop metropolitan multiculturalities.

Ali is a quiet man, a forty-five-year-old trader born in Pakistan, living in east London. He has worked in his open-fronted shop behind the green and white tarpaulins of a local street market for the last fifteen years. In many respects, Ali is an exemplary "assimilationist hero" (Keith 2005, p.82): the entrepreneur that embodies the local cultural practices and sensibilities of his new home. In the context of an east London street market, local culture looks, smells and tastes very different to that which appears in many accounts of interaction between migrant and host communities. While I interview him, Ali arranges transparent polythene bags of dried salt fish, sorrel, dried black eyed beans and yellow plastic tubs of salted ox tongue he had picked up in the early hours from a nearby wholesaler of Afro-Caribbean food. He takes a break from arranging his stall to barter over some powdered yam with a curt Nigerian woman before returning to preparations for the day. Having arranged his products, Ali lights incense sticks to ward off the smell of the neighbouring fishmonger and the seagulls it attracts. The heavy wooden smell of sandalwood mixes with a faint hint of cloves that fills the open fronted shop. As he swings

gently for one of the seagulls, a female voice emerges from the market crowd. It seems to be laughing at him. The owner of the cockney-cum-Caribbean chuckle reveals herself as Angela, a thirty-five-year-old British woman, born to parents from the island of Saint Vincent. The shopping list she carries in her head is for the ingredients she acquired a taste for in early adulthood when she moved to London from the suburbs: beans, salted fish, scotch-bonnet peppers and a small bag of what she affectionately calls “my spices.” She enters the shop, and greets Ali before being introduced to the ethnographer hanging around the market interviewing its patrons and traders.

How to understand the everyday multiculturalism that emerges when diverse individuals, sensibilities and practices converge in spaces such as an inner-city street market? What is specific about the circumstances in which cross-cultural exchanges take place, or do not take place, in a twenty-first century city? In this paper, I will argue that the answers to these questions lie in honing sociological attention on to the mundane, everyday sensory experience of urban space, the experience of smell and taste in particular. Engaging an olfactory and gustatory analogue of what Les Back refers to as the sociologist’s “art of listening,” the sensuous descriptions of urban spaces that the article develops illustrate banal aspects of everyday life that are overlooked by conventional modes of sociology, while providing a novel medium for theoretical critique (Back 2007, p.21-25). Through these descriptions the paper sketches the sensuous processes through which “convivial metropolitan cultures” (Gilroy 2005, p.119) are made. The end product is an account that moves our understanding of urban culture beyond simplistic accounts of assimilation, acculturation and mosaic multiculturalism, towards an understanding of the processes of “transculturation” (Ortiz 1995, p.97-103) that characterise the everyday life of inner city London.

Coming to our senses

In recent years, a sensory turn within the social sciences (Classen, Synnott and Howes 1994, Seremetakis 1996, Stoller 1997, Bull and Back 2003, Howes 2005, Chau 2008, Vannini et al. 2012) has significantly deepened our sociological understanding of previously under-theorised aspects of experience. The authors detailed above have each contributed towards scholarship that operates within a greater “democracy of the senses” (Berendt 1992, Back and Ware 2002, p.10). However, while moving us closer to a mode of thinking that engages all the senses, each author has also revealed the distinct nuances that each sense imparts to social processes. Sound, touch and vision each add something slightly different to social processes, and the conjoined senses of smell and taste are no different. Notably, a number of studies have argued that these two senses play an important role in the transmission of culture across generations and through space (Seremetakis 1996, Sutton 2001, Stoller 2002, Vannini et al. 2012, p.83-103). In the context of globally connected cities, this means that noses and tastebuds have been integral to the articulation of diasporic identities and the reproduction of ethnicised social spaces amidst the experience of dislocation (Manalansan 2006, p.41-57). As well as providing migrants with a sense of stability and comfort, smells and flavours of home also provide markers through which migrant groups’ cultural differences are identified by more established groups, often with negative consequences. As Constance Classen (1992, p.134) writes, “the odour of the other [...] often serves as a scapegoat for certain antipathies toward the other for whom [...] an animosity [is felt] for unrelated reasons.” Consequently, the smells and flavours that migrants carry with them are both sources of anxiety and comfort (Manalansan 2006, p.41-57). As much as they produce ambivalent feelings within the lives of new migrants, the flavours and smells of home have also presented economic and social opportunities for new arrivals to the city. The flavours

migrants carry with them have proven ideal for profiting from fellow homesick travellers (Kloosterman and Rath 2001, Panayi 2008), but also through vending an experience of elsewhere to more established residents of the city (Cook and Harrison 2003, Panayi 2008). The olfactory and gustatory exchange between migrants to cities and the local culture has, of course, already been subjected to sociological attention. While cross-cultural consumption is championed by the cultural industries and liberals alike as a social good, abstracted sociological theory has tended to present the consumption of another's cultural milieu as resulting, at best, in a shallow "boutique cosmopolitanism" (Fish 1999, p.56). Therein contact between discrete cultures extends no further than the surfaces of one another's ethnicity. At its worst, "eating the other" (hooks 1992, p.21) has been characterised as a form of violence and oppression in which the flavours of the marginal other are reduced to an exotic morsel for spicing up mainstream culture (hooks 1992, Buettner 2008). Yet when it comes to theorising the everyday exchanges that characterise locales such as the one in which Ali and Angela meet, blunt criticisms of food hall cosmopolitanism – and the mosaic model of multiculturalism upon which they rest – simply do not fit. Unfortunately, as Amanda Wise (2010) notes, the social sciences seem to offer little else for understanding the role of taste and smell in processes of social formation where differences of all degrees are "part of the wallpaper," (Wise 2010 p.90). This paper argues that a closer attention to the sensuous aspects of sociality across sites of apparent multiculturalism might go some way to addressing that deficit. Drawing on methods developed as part of the aforementioned sensory turn, this paper moves beyond reductive discussions of assimilation, mosaic models of multiculturalism (Fish 1999) and critiques of "eating the other" (hooks 1992, p.21) to reveal the role of the senses in the transcultural production (Ortiz 1995) of metropolitan multiculturalism.

An olfactory inventory of multiculturalism

To approach an understanding of the role of the senses within any social context, there is a methodological requirement that the researcher be present amidst the materials out of which that sociality arises (Stoller 1997). Accordingly, as part of a project exploring the role of smell and taste within the social life of contemporary London, I visited a series of locations twice a week over the course of two years and subjected them to close sensorial attention. I routinely produced inventories of their sensoria – their sounds, smells, flavours and textures –and followed up with sustained ethnographic enquiry into the place that those sensoria have within the lives of those that pass through them. Of course, unlike with vision and sound, there are very limited tools for recording non-visual aspects of sensory experience, and for representing these experiences to a wider audience. Language remains one of the few ways, and a poor one at that, of translating one person's embodied experiences into the understanding of another. Nonetheless, below I will offer a linguistic translation of the sensuous experience of multicultural space in east London, in the form of an olfactory inventory of Ridley Road Market, a ramshackle market popular with London's various migrant groups located about a mile to the north east of the City of London. The inventory appears as it did through my nose on a warm afternoon in May 2007. It should be noted, however, that the inventory was not compiled by an especially experienced 'nose'. Rather, it was compiled by a nose that, like those that move through the market each week, comes with a very specific range of sensitivities and sensibilities (honed through a childhood in my parents' delicatessen, seven years in the restaurant trade and a decade sniffing around east London). As such there are inevitably aspects of the "sensescape" (Degen 2008, p.43) that are absent from the aromatic portrait. Far from being a shortcoming, however, a sensory ethnography's dependence on the researcher's own (in)sensitivities serves as a timely reminder of the extent to which all ethnographic accounts are, to some extent, partial (Clifford 1986, p.7). This partiality should not be taken

as a weakness but rather as a position from which criticisms of more totalising claims about the contemporary city, and urban culture, can be developed.

With that in mind, I want to take you to mid-morning in May 2007 as I step off a busy road running northward out of east London, into Ridley Road Market. The tarmac underfoot is wet and a little slippery from a recent rain shower, but the renewed sunshine and evaporating moisture combine to amplify the aroma of the market. The first smell I encounter as I move eastward through the half mile of stalls is that of pungent fruit commingling with the sweetish petrol smell from the nearby road. As I approach the fruit stall it is possible to start separating the fragrances of different fruits: the delicate turpentine inflections of mango, melons that smell not entirely unlike overfull bins, and the alcohol-tinged scent of ripe bananas. These smells seem to gain strength as I pass more fruit stalls on both my left and right and the exhaust of the nearby road fades. As I move past the initial fruit and grocery vendors, a warm yeasty smell enters my nose, followed swiftly by a blend of South Asian spices: coriander, cumin and cardamom, the near floral scent of cardamom being particularly strong. The sources are not immediately discernible but as my eyes follow my nose it becomes clear that the baking smell is coming from the local bagel bakery, a residue of the market's early twentieth century Jewish users, while the spice is coming from a delicatessen next door where tandooried meats are being sold over a glass display cabinet. Moving on, the smell of fresh fish, or rather the smell of the sea (as fresh fish rarely smells of fish), makes its presence fully sensible. The source of the smell is clear: a cluster of fishmongers, the visual recognition of which notifies me of the aroma's pre-existing presence in my nose. This cluster is interspersed with relatively odourless, yet visually and aurally aggressive, toy stalls. Next, my momentum moves me into a clearing lined with three sizzling hot food stalls. From these arises the nutty pastry smell of dumplings and patties, mixing with the unmistakable smell of bacon being fried

on one side, and the sugary burnt smell of caramelised onions that accompany the steaming halal hot dogs on the other. I move on still, past a handful more fruit and vegetable stalls, these ones with less fruit and more vegetables – the damp, muddy scent of potatoes laced with spiky coriander. Notably there is also a very strong smell of fresh peppermint coming from the large green bouquets vended by one of the stalls on the right.

A turn of the head to the left leaves the smell of mint behind and confronts me with a distinctive fusion of smells — polythene bags, dusty factory storage and mass transit — all emanating from a luggage stall, most likely from the filling that is stuffed into the luggage to demonstrate just how much it can hold. At this point, a mash-up of the staccato guitars of Lagos funk and the unmistakable double snare of Michael Jackson's 'Billy Jean' emerges between competing DVD and CD vendors, the beats not quite synchronising. The musical melange competes with the calls of a nearby fruit vendor: "Bunches of banana, cheaper than in Ghana!" A mix of vegetable and polythene smells washes past until I arrive at another fruit stall where mango slices are offered for the delectation of potential customers. The smell emanating from these slices is arresting enough to partially obscure the source from visibility, convening a crowd of bustling elbows and handbags around it.

The walk continues, and here, about halfway up the market, is an entirely new set of fragrances: 'Egyptian Musk,' 'Sandalwood,' 'Laxmi Pooja' – variations on the type of otherworldly woody musk familiar everywhere from Greek Orthodox churches and Buddhist temples to sultry candlelit bathtubs. Although some of this incense is coming from a stall selling incense sticks, the majority of the aroma derives from Ali's ongoing efforts to ward off the seagulls flocking around a neighbouring fishmonger. This scent of incense is complicated by an array of oils, extracts and spice – nutmeg, cinnamon, clove – combined in large handmade blocks of soap sold opposite Ali's stall.

Onward still. Before I had been passing aromas, now an aroma passes me. A refuse collector barges past with his bin on wheels. The aroma is a noxious conglomeration of smells characteristic of a kitchen bin un-emptied for days in hot weather. It smells a little like ripe melon. It passes in the same direction as I am moving, leaving a trail all along behind it. Attention to this smell is, however, diverted by the smell of marijuana; not unlike a mix of cut grass, hops and oregano. My eyes follow my nose away from the passing bin and towards the crevices behind the stalls where the aroma seems to get stronger. The source of the odour is, as with most things that are illicit, invisible. The essence of transgression quickly disappears behind the odour rising out of a large blue bin labelled “Strictly Not For Human Consumption” – a label that I don’t see until it is too late. I move my head over the bin only to be slapped in the face by the powerful but highly localised smell of fish guts and decomposing cardboard. I quickly move on towards the top of the market past many recurring smells previously described. At the top of the market a large smelly truck is parked ready to descend and collect the piles of cardboard and overripe produce discarded by traders. Upon reaching the truck at the top of the market, I turn to descend back, taking a different route between the stalls and the permanent units to their side.

What is immediately apparent is an entirely different combination of smells, most of which were sequestered from the initial stretch of the walk by the polythene tarpaulins of the market’s main stalls. The first encounter on the descent is with that of fresh butchered meat — a generic metallic bloody smell coupled with mustier overtones emanating from the drying calves’ legs piled neatly to the side of the stall. This smell quickly becomes infused with the peculiar smell of dried and smoked fish, a pile of which sits at the front of one stall, their tails curled around and fed back through their mouths to form a small ring.

Rather than smelling of the sea, as with fresh fish, they smell like a subtle mix of tinned sardines with smoked almonds, sawdust and sunflower seeds. This is infused with a host of peppery spices that intermingle with the dried fish. Having passed another butcher, there is a conspicuous gap in the aroma of the market as I make my way past the automatic doors of the adjacent shopping mall, the air from which smells of new trainers and the sweet popcorn scent of a cinema foyer. Then onward again, nearly at the bottom where I started, past more fresh fish and a return to the smells of mixed fruit – first gala melons, then mangoes followed by bananas, then the sweet smell of petrol.

The essence of multicultural

Following my nose as it moves through the market space reveals, if nothing else, the multiplicity of cultural influences that suffuse this inner-city locale. Within the inventory it is possible to find sensoria transplanted from South Asia, northern Europe, rural England, the Caribbean and West Africa, amongst many other locations. As well as bringing into relief the different culinary cultures currently active in this part of London, the aromatic inventory provides a portrait of the area's demographic history, containing within it the sensuous sediments deposited by a number of twentieth-century migratory movements. Of course, for critics, this translation of an aroma-scape provides an example of the weaknesses inherent in hybridity discourse and multicultural talk (Caglar 1998, Papastergiadis 2000, p.3, Hutnyk 2005, p.81). That is, through identifying the individual components out of which the market's poly-aromatic air is comprised, one ultimately ends up with a collection of indivisible wholes associated with discrete cultures. Certainly a simple reading of this olfactory inventory might lend itself as evidence of a shallow "boutique cosmopolitanism" (Fish 1999, p.56) or a mosaic form of multiculturalism within which discrete cultures meet at the edges but never mix. Such a reading is certainly understandable given the need to list

'essences' one by one in a textual representation of the market place. Yet in singling out separate smells as isolable units, the inventory of 'essences' fails to capture important aspects of the sensory experience of the market place. For instance, the open air market, in contrast with the strict olfactory zoning and manipulative mediation of a neighbouring supermarket, is regularly brushed with breezes that move unpredictably through it. As a consequence, in a crowded space in which stalls already lack the neat ordering of a supermarket's separate ethnic isles, the aromas and flavours of the market mingle incessantly. Accordingly, if one user visits the market to purchase an element of her culture, a whole mix of fragrances and flavours inevitably pass through her nostrils in the process. At the very least, a habituated and embodied familiarity with aggregate sensoria of the market emerges as part of this process. Beyond familiarity, as I will argue later, the integration of the market's diverse smells and flavours into the everyday life of its users can also be seen to smudge the boundaries of the culture embodied by regular visitors.

It should also be noted that, in contrast to accounts of assimilation or acculturation, this mixing of sensoria and sensibilities in the nostrils and shopping baskets of the market's users, is not a unilateral or bilateral exchange between a local host culture and the marginal culture of migrants. Rather, as suggested by the olfactory inventory, habituation to the sensorium of Ridley Road involves habituation to a vast panoply of sensoria and sensibilities. Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz coined the term "transculturation" to discuss contexts in which numerous cultural traditions have passed through, danced with each other or collided (Ortiz 1995, p.97-103, Berg 2010, p.437). As I will discuss further below, the olfactory inventory of the market and its patrons' relationship with it provide empirical evidence of such a process of "transculturation". That is, it testifies to a collision of, and osmosis between cultures – at the level of the sensuous – that underpins the production of convivial forms of metropolitan multiculturalism (Gilroy 2005, p.119).

Of course there are plenty of moments in the recent history of London where the olfactory or gustatory contact between different cultural traditions has not resulted in conviviality. Quite the opposite. They have produced anxiety, disgust and shored up parochial forms of identification. The history of the contemporary metropolis, as Les Back notes, is one in which the production of metropolitan multiculturalism has occurred alongside the paradoxical fortification of highly racialised senses of cultural difference (1996, p.7). Ridley Road is no exception to this history. While, over the last century, migrant communities have choreographed an elaborate local multiculturalism around the wares sold at the market, across the same time span and in the same space, fascist, nationalist and racist thugs have also attempted to instantiate their own exclusive culture. In the 1940s for instance, “Yiddley Road” and the streets around it were a favoured destination for Jeffery Hamm and Oswald Mosely’s fascist rallies (Macklin 2007, p.42). Decades later the market remained a popular destination for the muscle of the National Front who, along with local police, showed particular disdain for the Caribbean inflections the market adopted in the late ’70s and early ’80s (Keith 1993, p.41). Considering the fraught, and occasionally violent histories of cross-cultural contact in the modern city, we might ask what the intervening conditions are that help actualise “convivial metropolitan multiculturalism” (Gilroy 2005, p.119). In the following section I will outline the economic, political and cultural landscapes of this particular street market and their role in facilitating the production of a local strain of multiculturalism through the senses.

The somatic labour of an ethnic entrepreneur

Once the first place of settlement for the Irish, Eastern European and Italian migrants that arrived at the docks a couple of miles south of the market in the early twentieth century [is

this correct?], the area around Ridley Road remained, until very recent hikes in property prices, popular with newcomers to the city. Populated today by visitors from Turkey, Ghana, Nigeria, Iraq, Vietnam, Pakistan, Brazil, Lithuania and beyond, life in Hackney, the borough in which Ridley Road market nestles, remains characterised by a multiplicity of cultural differences (as also discussed in Wessendorf's article in this volume). Yet, although the borough abuts the Square Mile, London's financial centre, and has major global banks and many new prestigious housing developments within its postcodes, it is also characterised by a patchwork of extreme poverty (Nomis 2012). The relative poverty of the area, combined with the preponderance of migrant groups constitute the two most important factors shaping the everyday activity of the market. For many traders, the local demography presents a "captive market" (Kloosterman and Rath 2001, p.197) of dislocated, impoverished and homesick "co-ethnics" (Cook and Harrison 2003) to sell the taste or scent of home to. However, while many traders might have started their businesses serving co-ethnics, the diversity of the area's demography means that traders often have to develop a familiarity with the cuisines and sensibilities of the market's evolving roster of cultures if they are to make a profit. Spending just a day watching Ali, the aforementioned Pakistani-born stall holder, negotiating the sale of salt cod to Nigerians, sourcing star anise for middle-class white Britons, handing small bags of turmeric over to a Pakistani uncle and offering pouches of a locally blended spice mix to a British-Caribbean woman, reveals the extent to which the socio-economic context demands that the market's traders develop varying degrees of literacy in the life-worlds of a diverse customer base. Of course, this competence involves varying degrees of linguistic fluency, as well as familiarity with the customs that regulate trading: ways of bartering, for instance (Wessendorf 2010, p.20). Equally important to traders at Ridley Road Market however, and as Ali exemplifies, is a degree of literacy with the sensuous worlds that his customers inhabit. A literacy in the smells and tastes that suffuse the life-worlds of his customers does

not, however, come easy. Rather it is only achievable through a degree of what Dennis Waskul and Phillip Vannini refer to as “somatic work” (2008). By “somatic work” the authors refer to the oft-overlooked – and often non-conscious – effort one’s body exerts to make sense of the “sensory order” of a given culture or location (2012, p.59). “Somatic work” is a part of the socialisation process through which one makes sense of the smells, flavours, sounds and textures of one’s own cultural milieu. It is also, however, essential for any profitable understanding of the myriad of cultures that move through London’s street markets. Ali, like many of the other traders at the market, has quietly undertaken extensive amounts of “somatic work” in his fifteen years at the market, in order to make sense of the gustatory, olfactory and tactile sensations that suffuse his customers’ lives, and in the process embodying certain aspects of culture that, in the first instance, were not his. Sometimes this somatic work, or sensory understanding, starts with sharing food with neighbouring stall holders of different ethnicities. Other times it involves tactile lessons from customers about the coarseness of a bag of powdered yam, their dislike of the market’s fishy pong, or their preference for palm oil over vegetable oil (a change that came as African customers at the market started to outnumber those from Caribbean backgrounds). While supermarkets are able to adapt to their customers’ sensibilities through the collation of large data sets, Ali does so through quite literally smelling, tasting and feeling his way through their everyday lives, taking this knowledge with him on weekly trips to wholesalers and larger markets where he selects his stock. Importantly, while there might not be one distinct “sensory order” (Vannini *et al.* 2012, p.59) peculiar to the locale of the market for Ali to assimilate, the sensory literacy that Ali and other traders develop through their “somatic work” might be understood as approaching a “transcultural” (Ortiz 1995) understanding of the “sensory order” of local multiculturalism.

While businesses such as Ali's contribute little to the formal economy of the local area, there is, as with most exchanges (Davis 1996, p,215), a great deal more going on at his stall than rationally calculated financial exchange. Rather, there are incredibly important social and cultural consequences to the sensuous labour undertaken by traders and their customers that are left out in economic evaluations of increasingly underfunded inner-city street markets. As Sophie Watson and David Studdert argue in their account of 'street markets as a space of social interaction,' markets such as Ridley Road are incredibly social spaces in which interactions range from

“a very minimal connection, such as a greeting between acquaintances or between shoppers and traders, to extended conversations between those who have met up in the market, or extended interactions between stallholders and the customers they serve.” (Watson and Studdert, 2006, p.14).

Importantly, at Ridley Road, as at other urban markets, these are interactions that often take place across “different... demographic and ethnic/racial groups” (Watson and Studdert, 2006, p.14). Through acquiring, or sharing fragmentary embodied knowledge of their customers' sensuous life-worlds, many of the stall-holders and shopkeepers along the market become important facilitators in the transcultural connections that characterise the social fabric of the locale. As demonstrated in the opening exchange between Ali and Angela, this results in transcultural (Ortiz 1995) friendships between stall-holders and customers but also interactions between diverse customers. Such cross-cultural exchanges are an important by-product of the “somatic work” (Waskul and Vannini 2008) that Ali and other traders at Ridley Road do. Far from merely grounding an economic exchange, it is integral to the multilateral processes at the core of the market's everyday culture.

More than tastes of necessity

In contrast to a neighbouring farmers' market (where a loaf of bread costs £4.50), most of Ridley Road's stalls are involved in meeting the basic everyday needs of the market's users at a low cost. For a political economist, the market is, at best, important for the reproduction of an urban workforce – and a reserve army of labour – in the cheapest way possible. Yet there is a great deal more of social significance to the flavours and textures that fill the baskets and bellies of the market's users than a political economist's evaluation of the market place might suggest. To see, or rather to taste and smell what I mean, it serves to recall the warm doughy smell that drew the nose towards the shop sat beneath the sign reading “Mr Bagel, Rice and Spice, We Do Indian & Caribbean Food – حلال (Halal).”

The market's bagel bakery, which has endured in one form or another since the market was established in the early twentieth century, remains a popular destination for many of its contemporary shoppers. Although the glossy rings of dough continue to be served with Yiddish favourites of chopped herring, salmon and salt beef, bagels across London today come stuffed with an array of fillings, from egg mayonnaise through halal coronation chicken to the distinctly non-kosher (or halal) Cumberland sausage or streaky bacon. In some respects such evolution of the bagel in London is typical of Jewish food in twentieth-century Britain, as historicised by Panikos Panayi (2012). According to Panayi, the twentieth century has seen Jewish food heavily “Anglicised” while British food has quietly drawn on various Jewish influences. However, just how straightforwardly ‘British’ these Anglicising influences on the old Yiddish classic are looks uncertain when considering that by far the most popular item sold at Ridley Road's Mr Bagel today, is the jerk chicken

bagel. Let us ruminate for a moment on this chewy, slightly sweet parcel of carbohydrate, softened with the juices from lightly spiced meat. From the point of view of the utilitarian economist, the doughy residues of the old Jewish market (the bagel), is exemplary of what Pierre Bourdieu would call a “taste of necessity” (Bourdieu 1984, p.177). So too is the soft and slightly lardy spiced chicken, a cheap analogue of the slow-smoked dish that made its way from the Maroons of Jamaica’s Portland Parish (Magnus 2008 p.591-592), through the rest of the island and tentatively (Cook and Harrison 2003) into Caribbean neighbourhoods of late twentieth- century British cities. Both components of the sandwich represent that which is “simultaneously most ‘filling’ and most economical, reproducing labour power at the lowest cost” (Bourdieu 1984, p.177). What is particularly interesting about the bagel, however, is the apparent interchangeability of these “tastes of necessity” (Bourdieu 1984, p.177). The doughy bagel mimes the starchy ‘hard food’ of Caribbean cuisines, and the chicken substitutes the bagel’s generic protein and fat-laden fillings. The inter-changeability of these tastes of necessity offers a metaphor for the inter-changeability of migrant labour within the recent history of the city. However, whipping off the “blanket” of “socio-economic rationality” (de Certeau 1988, p.59), the bagel also exemplifies the steady evolution of a “transcultural” (Ortiz 1995) “sensory order” (Vannini *et al.* 2012, p.59) of local culture that took place between multiple cohabiting migrant groups. It has been hard to pin down who first combined elements from these discrete diasporic cuisines. Perhaps more important to recognise, however, is less one baker’s substitution of analogous calories, flavours and textures, than the extent to which the conspicuously transcultural recipe was written, first and foremost, by what Luce Girard (de Certeau *et al.* 1998, p.3) refers to as “invisible non-histories” of modernity; histories that sedimented an assortment of influences within the embodied practices and habits of contemporary city dwellers. While such histories might seem “invisible”, they remain detectable, if unacknowledged, within

the olfactory and gustatory experiences of contemporary city dwellers and the “sensory orders” they inhabit. As Pierre Mayol argues:

“Every alimentary custom makes up a minuscule cross roads of histories [...] under the silent and repetitive system of everyday servitudes that one carries out by habit [...] there piles up a montage of gestures, rites and codes of rhythms and choices (Mayol 1998, p.172).

To be sure, the jerk chicken bagel is a combination of calories structured by the needs of cheap migrant labour in the city. It is also a recipe seasoned with histories of British colonialism and European anti-Semitism; histories that both led migrants to east London and violently affected their lives on arrival. Importantly, it is also a recipe that demonstrates that the cultural practices xenophobia preyed upon have not only endured, but have combined to transform the “sensory order” of culture in the city’s margins.

Of course, to the majoritarian consumer, the bagel might present an opportunity for the consumption of an exotic hybrid culture; a tangle of spicy essences to be subsumed into the superior culture of their lives. In their chicken juice covered hands, the histories wrapped in the bagel might be quickly forgotten. The bagel might even be eventually claimed as a national dish. Such a fate certainly met the nineteenth-century Franco-Sephardic fusion food of fish and chips (Walton 2000, p.26), which is today often cited in the most historically inaccurate and ethnically exclusive definitions of British identity. For now, however, the bagel remains part of a local culture in which cultural heterogeneity is ubiquitous, conspicuous, but also banal and, pragmatically speaking, unimportant. As such it remains a quiet emblem of a local multicultural subject to continual mutation.

Conclusion

There is little denying the history of racist violence and xenophobic sentiment in twentieth-century London. Nor should we ignore the ways in which such sentiments enduringly inflect meanings on to the smell and flavour of 'the Other,' be it disgust or exoticisation. On my way back from Ridley Road I often passed rowdy hen and stag parties barging into Banglatown's identikit curry houses for a "bit of the other" (hooks 1992, p.21). In the same area it is not uncommon to see parties of businessmen from the neighbouring city, ties removed, top collar button undone, sidling into strip joints that boast "New Girls, Just Arrived." The problems of what bell hooks (1992, p.21) refers to as "eating the other" are all too apparent in the everyday life of east London, an increasingly popular destination for cultural tourism, in which gaps in wealth and opportunity are easily mapped onto ethnicity. However, not all cross-cultural interactions in the locale are inherently problematic or reproductive of asymmetrical power relations. Some interactions may even include the potential for the "transcultural" (Ortiz 1995, p.97-103) production of forms of multiculturalism in which the dangers of cultural difference fade. Amanda Wise identifies such transactions in the food halls of suburban Australian malls where "lightly fragranced" forms of cultural difference slip "beneath the Otherness radar" (Wise 2010, p.88). Ridley Road, of course, is far less lightly fragranced than a suburban food hall. In fact olfactory signs of difference are conspicuous in the market place. However, far from inhibiting the development of transcultural exchanges, I hope to have demonstrated that odour and taste play an important role in the development of "convivial metropolitan multiculturalism" (Gilroy 2005, p.119). Through these two senses, regular users of the market develop an embodied familiarity with a melange of sensoria and sensibilities, and are provided with artefacts around which important forms of dialogue and exchange can occur.

In her remarkable ethnography of multiculturalism in Hackney, Susan Wessendorf refers to cross-cultural competencies, such as those displayed by Ridley Road market's traders, as

evidence of what she refers to as “corner-shop cosmopolitanism” (2010). Yet, Wessendorf argues, while mixing takes place at public sites like Ridley Road, the surrounding borough's composite cultures remain notably parochial in private. For Wessendorf, when people go home at the end of the day the mosaic model of the multicultural city remains intact. Yet what I hope that this paper has suggested is that, if we pay closer attention to the “sensory orders” (Vannini *et al.* 2012, p.59) inhabited by those that use the market, evidence of deeper processes of transcultural exchange appear. If we consider culture to comprise not merely of association with outwardly similar individuals, language or forms of self-identification, and take seriously the “sensory orders” (Vannini, Waskul and Gottschalk 2012, p.59) of the cultures urbanites inhabit, then the drift towards local forms of multiculturalism across today's cities becomes more apparent, even in private. Whenever a new ingredient is integrated into the culinary rhythms of the market's users, or even when a new scent osmoses into the nostrils of a regular visitor, the “sensory order” (Vannini *et al.* 2012, p.59) of the culture that they embody is potentially altered. Importantly, these are not simply exchanges between a host culture and those of migrants, and as such, are unsuited to talk of assimilation or acculturation. Rather, the changes that take place in the “sensory order” inhabited by Ridley Road's locals emerge from any number of different directions and are best characterised as the product of “transculturation” (Ortiz 1995). The gradual blurring at the edges of the “sensory order” embodied by a given individual might seem insignificant in the wider schema of urban life. However the importance of understanding how and why such interactions take place is equal to understanding the dangers of “eating the other” (hooks 1992, p.21).

An ethnographic attention honed in on unremarkable embodied experience of urban life reveals aspects of culture that are not necessarily visible through other forms of sociological attention. What people say about their own lives, the stories that they tell

themselves and others, and who they associate with, will always be important to understanding multiculturalism. However it is at the level of the non-discursive, or the sensuous, that we get a taste of the processes that are shaping the culture of contemporary cities. This paper has argued that, given its relationship to the political economy of the city and the historical contingencies of local culture, smell and tastes afforded by a street market subtly effect the “transcultural” (Ortiz 1995) production of urban multiculturalism. The everyday multiculturalism that emerges through the senses has outpaced both cultural theory and many city dwellers’ own accounts of their lives. This paper offers a mode of attention, concepts and methods with which social theory theory might, at the least, catch up with the dynamism of metropolitan multiculturalism.

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