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### An explorative ethnography in the super-diverse Wilmslow Road

Urban sociality and the  
recontextualization  
of shisha and food

Elena Damiano



Migration Research Unit



# An explorative ethnography in the super-diverse Wilmslow Road

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of shisha and food

Elena Damiano

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# Abstract

Several academics criticised the commodification of cultural diversity for reproducing exoticism and neo-colonial relations (e.g. Hooks 2015; Buettner 2008; May 1996). This explorative ethnography on the commodification of food and shisha will show that this theoretical position is irrelevant for describing the reality of the super-diverse Wilmslow Road. In this urban area, located in Manchester (UK), diversity reaches beyond the multiple ethnicities and looks of its inhabitants, workers and visitors, by articulating through different interpretations of religion, health, gender roles and generational needs. These differences are some of the key aspects shaping a divisive debate around the commodification of shisha - a marketized ancient artefact for a new subculture of young British Muslims. Shisha smokers do not consider shisha as exotic, hybrid or authentic, but rather as an object that satisfies their social needs. Subsequently, shisha bars acquire a paradoxical urban duality, they promote urban sociality and cohesion as well as cause disruption and social divisions in the road. Food, on the contrary, is a substance bringing the community together and creating urban sociality for everyone due to its association with family and kinship making. A case study on an apparent hybrid British Asian Lasagne will reveal the inappropriateness of the concepts of hybridity and authenticity. This work argues that food and shisha on Wilmslow Road must be described through the lens of 'recontextualization' (Thomas 1991: 28).

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# Introduction

A child was carrying a bag while trying to protect his head from the rain, a man, who looked like his father, was quickly following him and carrying a large tray, they had bought food from the nearby restaurant. The usual flavours of barbequed meat and spices were in the air. I entered the restaurant and sat on the second floor; this was the most popular area. After eating my first bite of *nan* bread, I started to look around. Noisy children and women wearing colourful outfits were standing out. On my way home, I passed next to the shisha bars, men were chatting while exhaling puffs of steam mixed with smoke. I was in Wilmslow Road, also known as the 'Curry Mile', in Rusholme, Manchester (UK). This area is famous for a large number of shops and restaurants selling South Asian, Middle Eastern and North African products attracting people with diverse ethnic backgrounds.

As Wilmslow Road shows, migration patterns are becoming increasingly complex and cities are becoming increasingly culturally diverse; '(...) more people are now moving from more places, through more places, to more places.' (Vertovec 2010: 86). Manchester, for instance, is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the UK. In 2011, 59% of residents were White British, while 41% were members of other ethnic groups (Office for National Statistics et al. 2017). Rusholme is one of the most multicultural areas of the city, in 2011, the percentage of British White in this ward was 36% (Office for National Statistics et al. 2017). This implies that cities like Manchester are becoming spaces of complex ethnic encounters which are also related to the commodification of cultural diversity (Keith 2005). For that reason, many academics invite social scientists to produce more work on how cultural diversity articulates and how different people live together (Turner 1993, Keith 2005, Vertovec 2007a). The goal is to understand how we deal with diversity and what are the consequences and meanings around its commodification.

This project addresses these issues, but also more importantly, focuses on shisha and Wilmslow Road, a commodity and an urban area that have been neglected by academia – only a few published socio-cultural studies about this road and substance exist (e.g. Barrett and McEvoy 2006; Chaouachi 2007). Whereas, large academic attention has already been given to ethnic neighbourhoods as well as the

topics of multiculturalism, commodification and food.

This work will engage with some key debates in these fields by aiming to understand how the commodification of cultural diversity is conceptualised and experienced through everyday discourses and practices in the multicultural urban area of Wilmslow Road. The vast majority of academics criticised the commodification of cultural diversity because of its tendency to reproduce exoticism and power inequalities (e.g. May 1996; Buettner 2008; Hooks 2015). Some studies showed that the commodification of diversity is not only related to products but extends to the marketization of entire gentrified neighbourhoods (e.g. Shaw et al. 2004; Wells 2007).

However, cultural commodification has also been theorised through a more positive lens: some authors highlighted the capacity of such urban spaces to create inter-ethnic encounters, urban sociality and conviviality (e.g. Latham 2003; Bell 2007). These two academic trends also reflect two different understandings around commodities, by defining them critically as false authentic or positively as hybrid (Keith 2005). This work will engage with these theoretical positions by aspiring to understand and describe the social and cultural dimensions of shisha and food commodification<sup>1</sup> on Wilmslow Road:

Which everyday discourses, practices, experiences and meanings shape shisha and food commodification on Wilmslow Road? How are shisha and food produced, consumed and marketized?

Do the commodification of food and shisha promote urban sociality and cohesion or create social division and power inequalities? Are shisha and food conceptualised as exotic, authentic or hybrid?

These are the research questions underpinning this dissertation. Nevertheless, to achieve a clear understanding of the micro-context in which empirical multiculturalism manifests other dimensions of this concept, as well as other macro-

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<sup>1</sup> I consider commodification as a multi-dimensional process. As Claire Dwyer stated: '(...) commodity culture has (...) multi-dimensionality at its heart in so far as a commodity is inherently many things: the product and embodiment of social relations of production; a form of aesthetics; a means of realizing an exchange value; the product of particular businesses and organizational geographies; and a resource allowing the objectification of social relations for customers.' (Dwyer 2004: 75). In this work, particular attention is given to the phases of production, consumption and marketization.

aspects, must be taken into consideration. For that reason, this project also sets out to understand the history and policies that shaped the character of Wilmslow Road:

What form does multiculturalism take on Wilmslow Road? How is multiculturalism imagined by the local state?

Did Wilmslow Road undergo processes of regeneration and marketization? Which projects concerning urban space, cultural diversity and tourism have been implemented on Wilmslow Road?

This ethnography is characterised by the use of an explorative approach, including the collection of secondary sources, observations and interviews. These were conducted with 20 individuals having different ethnic backgrounds and, following the methodological approach of Dwyer and Jackson (2003), having diverse roles (e.g. local government representatives, residents, businesses' staff and shisha customers).

The methodology will be presented in the second chapter, after a literature review illustrating key theoretical and empirical studies related to the commodification of diversity. The results will be presented in the last three chapters. I will first show how Wilmslow Road transformed over time. Then I will consider the socio-cultural dimensions of shisha and food. I will argue that postcolonial critical positions on the commodification of diversity and the concepts of hybridity and authenticity are not appropriate for describing life on Wilmslow Road. This urban area must be seen as a super-diverse environment hosting processes of material 'recontextualization' (Thomas 1991: 28).

# 1. The commodification of cultural diversity

## 1.1 Cultural diversity in policy and theory: between empirical and ethical multiculturalism

One of the consequences of migration is the encounter and incorporation of different individuals in the same social system. 'Integration', or the achievement of a functioning and harmonious society, is the final aim of this process. Assimilation and multiculturalism are two polarised interpretations of 'integration': the former implies repression of cultural differences in favour of cultural homogenisation, whereas the latter supports cultural pluralism and the expression of cultural diversity (Castles *et al.* 2014).<sup>2</sup>

Multiculturalism is an ambiguous concept (Goldberg 1994). As a starting point, it is fundamental to differentiate between the ethical and empirical dimensions of multiculturalism, which also reflect the philosophical and descriptive dimensions of the term (Calhoun 2002). On the one hand, at an ethical level of analysis, multiculturalism is a normative endeavour. The Canadian philosopher Will Kymlicka (1995) was the first to propose a liberal theory of multiculturalism based on rights for ethnic minorities and immigrants (Kymlicka 1995).

On the other hand, multiculturalism is an empirical social demographic fact indicating the presence of culturally different people in the same population and territory (Calhoun 2002). This is a neutral and non-normative way of using the term. By following this definition, multiculturalism can be measured through the deductive gathering of quantitative statistical data.

Alternatively, multiculturalism can also be conceptualised as empirical lived experience. This research project follows this inductive approach by focusing on the analysis of people's everyday practices and discourses in a multicultural micro-context represented by Wilmslow Road. This approach follows the works of Terence Turner (1993) and Steven Vertovec (2007a) who invite social anthropologists to study and research multiculturalism. In fact, the study of the manifestation of multiculturalism

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<sup>2</sup> See also (Damiano 2018) for an overview of the concept of integration.

empirically can enrich the understanding of the phenomenon, and similarly to a normative approach, inform theory and policy (Vertovec 2007a).

Many liberal states around the world decided to manage their cultural diversity through multicultural policies. In the case of the United Kingdom, as Richard T. Ashcroft and Mark Bevir (2018) note, the multicultural nature of modern Britain is mainly due to its colonial past. The post-war decolonisation period saw an increase in immigration from the Commonwealth countries, especially Jamaica, Caribbean, Pakistan and India due to the implementation of the British Nationality Act (1948) that gave citizenship status and the right to move to the UK to members of former colonies (Ashcroft and Bevir 2018). Some policies were characterised by a multicultural approach, including tolerance of cultural diversity, equality, and anti-racism (e.g. Race Relations Acts 1965, 1968) (Ashcroft and Bevir 2018).

Nevertheless, from 2000 onwards, multiculturalism lost its popularity in Britain and other states around the world. A series of events, including the 9/11 terrorist attack, changed the attitudes of the public and politicians (Modood 2007). The British New Labour government (1997-2010) and later the Cameron's Conservative government (2010-2016) declared multiculturalism a failure and shifted towards the idea of community cohesion (Ashcroft and Bevir 2018; Bennett 2018). This meant a shift towards an assimilationist approach, emphasising national identity and values (Bennett 2018). Furthermore, multiculturalism started to be considered a failure also by academics. Kymlicka's multicultural theory was criticised for several reasons including a lack of attention to illiberal practices (Kukathas 2003), a promotion of inequality (Barry 2001), the legitimisation of sexism (Moller Okin 2002) and essentialism (Phillips 2007). In addition, discrimination, inequality and isolation continued to exist despite multiculturalist policies (Vertovec 2010).

Although the term multiculturalism is still used (Modood 2007), it tends to be deployed in new ways. An example is Steven Vertovec's conceptualisation of a post-multicultural era characterised by 'super-diversity' (2007b: 1024). Vertovec argues that social scientists and policy-makers should take into consideration the new diversified and complex patterns of migration (Vertovec 2010). Migrants' culture and social patterns cannot only be related to the variables of the country of origin and ethnicity, but also, for instance, to gender, language and religion (Vertovec 2007b, 2010).

## 1.2 Material culture and migration: theoretical debates around commodification, authenticity and hybridity

Wilmslow Road's multiculturalism will be explored and described through the analysis of the commodification of urban space, shisha and food. For that reason, in this section, the focus is on the relationship between migration, material culture and debates around the commodification of objects in globalised settings.

In the last decades, a *material turn* in the social sciences invoked an increase in studies focusing on the material world and its relation to humans' lives (Hicks and Beaudry 2018). The account *Rematerializing social and cultural geography* (2000) by Peter Jackson is an example of this academic willingness. The key idea around the *material turn* is that materiality and social life mutually influence each other, therefore, for understanding social life, it is key to consider the inter-relationship between material and lived experience (Pinney 2005, Ingold 2000 and 2007 in Stahl 2018). This stimulated the development of studies researching classical social research fields through a material lens.

An obvious example is the study of globalisation, as Stahl (2018) argues, histories of material objects reveal the global connections existing between humans around the world, which are forged by historical phenomena as the movement and circulation of people due to trade, imperialism and colonialism. The book, *Europe and the People without History* (2010) [1982] by Eric Wolf, was one of the first to challenge historical eurocentrism by revealing such connections. Later, Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power* (1985) on the history of sugar and its trade from the European colonies to the West became a classical example of a study on global connections, material culture, social life and power relations. Another classical work is Arjun Appadurai's study on the relationship between objects, their circulation and commodification (1986). He stressed that commodities are 'things-in-motion' with a social life entangling with meanings and values (1986: 5).

Other scholars went a step further by considering the circulation of objects in combination with migration. This tendency can be recognised as the 'material turn' in migration studies, as Wang argues: '(...) the divide between people and things is perhaps the biggest "blind spot" that prevents us from seeing the full picture and complexity of migration trajectories and pursuit.' (Wang 2016: 2). This means, that

migrants' experience should be studied by considering the materials moving with migrants and the material context in which the migration experience takes place (Basu and Coleman 2008: 313, Wang 2016).

One of the most prominent debates in this field is the theorisation of authenticity and hybridity in relation to different conceptualisations on the commodification of cultural diversity. On the one hand, some academics argued that commodities produced by migrants are constructed through a false authenticity, this means that the material is associated with an essentialist, traditional and stereotypical idea of a fixed and original culture (Zukin 2009, Korpela 2010, Karaosmanoğlu 2014, Pottie Sherman and Hiebert 2015, Cavanaugh and Shankar 2014). This construction or invention of authenticity, in cases of the commodification of cultural diversity, is also associated with forms of Western's colonial orientalism, in other words, an imagined exoticism or romanticisation towards the Other (Said 1978, May 1996). Therefore, this academic position also argues that the commodification of culturally different authentic artefacts glosses over unequal power relations between consumers and producers (Keith 2005, Korpela 2010). This theoretical position achieved resounding success, and this is exemplified by the existence of a high number of phrases representing this critique, such as 'Eating the Other' (hooks 2015: 21), 'boutique multiculturalism' (Fish 1997: 378), or 'commercial multiculturalism' (Hall 2001 in Vertovec 2010: 85).<sup>3</sup>

The interview-based research conducted by Jon May in London is a concrete example of a case study supporting this view. The author tries to understand if the consumption of exotic food by young professionals means a real interest for the Other or hides 'racist imaginative geographies' (May 1996: 59). The results show that this consumption is a selfish mean of class affirmation and reproduce racist stereotypes:

*'it's not about being foreign in terms of where it comes from – it's more if it's got the bits in it then it's foreign ... (...) If it hasn't been cleaned up for you, sanitised like modern food has, because it comes from poor countries (...)' (May 1996: 61).*

With this sentence, Amanda, one of the interlocutors interviewed by May, is socially and culturally distinguishing herself from the Other through dichotomies of modern vs.

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<sup>3</sup> See also Damiano (2019a) for an overview on some of these authors.

poor, clean vs. dirty (May 1996).

On the other hand, some academics described migrants' commodities as hybrid, instead of inauthentic. Hybridity is a concept indicating the mixing or fusion of two things together forming something new, ambivalent and in-between. It originally comes from the biological and linguistic worlds and was brought into postcolonial cultural theory by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) (Young 1995). For Bhabha, hybridity is linked to colonial discourses and their representation, it reveals their ambivalence and dialogical nature based on the former coloniser (the authority) and colonised (Other) subjects (1994). Hybridity is a form of power resistance; it neutralises the authority and counter-acts its authenticity (Bhabha 1994). For that reason, this position is linked to a positive vision on the commodification of cultural diversity, as a mean of cultural mixing and intercultural dialogue (Keith 2005).

Although the concept of hybridity was influential (e.g. Nurse 1999), it has also been heavily criticised for several reasons. Two critiques are the assumption of the existence of two pure and essentialist categories that are fused (Thomas 1996) and the potential of the concept to become itself a site of capital accumulation and hegemonic power (Mitchell 1997). Therefore, some academics tried to theorise apparent hybridity through a new lens. The analysis of a Jerk chicken bagel by Alex Rhys-Taylor is an example of this trend (2013). The Jerk chicken bagel is surely, for a consumer, an apparent hybrid product resulting from entangled and unknown Caribbean and Jewish migrants' histories, 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.' (Rhys-Taylor 2013: 403).

With this analysis Rhys-Taylor stresses the inadequacy of the fixed concepts of hybrid and authentic to a specific object since objects and their meanings are in constant change (2013).

### 1.3 Urban space, shisha and food

This work considers the theoretical debates described in the previous section by investigating three types of material commodities: urban space, food and shisha. In this section, relevant theoretical and empirical works related to these commodities will be presented.

Urban space is the context in which multiculturalism takes its everyday form, or in other words, where cultural diversity is perceived, constructed, managed and experienced (Keith 2005; Foner 2007). The focus of this dissertation will be on an urban area where commodification of diversity takes place, or what Micheal Keat would define as a 'cultural quarter' (2005: 112). This means urban areas with a high number of ethnic businesses dedicated to the commodification of ethnic products (Keith 2005). Chinatown in London's West End is an example (Sales *et al.* 2009). The Wilmslow Road can be also described as a cultural quarter. For instance, Giles A. Barrett and David McEvoy define Wilmslow Road as an 'ethnic destination' (2006: 193) after conducting field observations aiming at discovering the development of ethnic businesses over the period of 1960s-2000s. This dissertation will also investigate the history of Wilmslow Road, however, it will especially focus on recent developments, from the period 2000s onwards.<sup>4</sup>

In any case, many studies about cultural quarters exist. For instance, Stephen Shaw, Susan Bagwell and Joanna Karmowska (2004) analysed the local authority's policy rationale behind the transformation and marketization of Banglatown in East London and highlighted the negative consequences around its commodification (e.g. commercial gentrification, displacement of residents, creation of exotic identities) (see also Dines 2009; Hulme 2018). In fact, local authorities are economically powerless but have the influence to steer urban planning regeneration projects intended to brand urban space through the invention of exotic ethnic identities (Keith 2005; Mitchell 1993; Wells 2007). This is done for achieving neo-liberal business imperatives aiming at increasing international tourism and economic growth (*ibid.*; Damiano 2019a).

This critique is challenged by work of other academics, who instead of describing cultural quarters as a result of a neoliberal, calculative and instrumental

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<sup>4</sup> See also Damiano (2019a) for a similar overview.

commodification of diversity, see them as spaces of hospitality and cohesion. For instance, David Bell argues that '(...) the ways of relating that are practised in bars, cafés, restaurants, clubs and pubs should be seen as potentially productive of an ethics of conviviality that revitalizes urban living.' (Bell 2007: 12). This account follows the position of Alan Latham (2003) who argued that a methodological approach focusing on everyday practices reveals how urban change can allow the creation of new public cultures and trends (ibid.). For instance, the insurgence of cafés and bars in a gentrified neighbourhood in Auckland, allowed women to access public space since female residents found these bars more attractive than pubs (ibid.). This urban change favoured social and gender mixing as well as the creation of a 'sexually polymorphous culture' (Latham 2003: 1710). It transformed a neighbourhood into a space of celebration of diversity, tolerance and freedom (Latham 2003).

The second commodity considered is shisha, also known as waterpipe, narguilé or hoak. Majority of academic studies on shisha comes from medical disciplines and focus on the health risks related to smoking. The literature research conducted by Waziry et al. (2017) shows that shisha smoking is associated with various diseases, such as respiratory diseases, different forms of cancer and mental health problems. Research in the public health sector focuses on shisha smoker's perspectives, knowledge and attitudes and considers how to implement policies to reduce shisha consumption (Dar-Odeh and Abu-Hammad 2011, Nakkash et al. 2011, Jawad et al. 2013, Arshad et al. 2019; Aveyard and Jackson 2008).

Socio-cultural research on intoxicants is a new field expanding across various disciplines, including history and geography (McShane and Kneale 2011). Nevertheless, socio-cultural research on shisha is almost inexistent. The publications of the French anthropologist Kamal Chaouachi (1997, 2006, 2007) on shisha are part of this trend. His analysis of shisha differs from medical studies as it focuses on the historical and socio-cultural dimension of the artefact. In the book *Le Narguilé: Anthropologie d'un mode d'usage de drogues douces* (1997), the author touches various topics, such as the history and technicalities of the object, its representation in the arts, its relation to sociality and cohesion, geographical spread and health risks (ibid.). This dissertation follows the approach of Chaouachi by considering shisha smoking as a social practice, however, this work will also focus on shisha in a specific urban area. In fact, Chaouachi's work is relevant but lack contextualization as it is geographically broad (1997, 2006, 2007).

The third and last commodity considered is food. Food is a resource influencing the life of humans not only at the biological level but also at the social and cultural level (Belasco 2008; Counihan and Van Esterik 2008). This has been recognised already by a vast amount of research in the social sciences. One of the first pioneering works in this field is the book *The raw and the cooked* (1964) by Claude Lévi-Strauss presenting an analysis of the South American indigenous mythology based on binary and sensory notions, such as cooked and raw, fresh and rotten.

The study of food has been linked to many research fields, from kinship (e.g. Carsten 2003) to class (e.g. Bourdieu 1979), however, what is of most interest to this study is the relationship between food, globalisation, migration and multiculturalism (e.g. Cook and Crang 1996). One of the pioneering works in this field is the study of Manuel Calvo (1982) on migrant dual identities and food in Paris.

The commodification of food is often studied in relation to processes of consumption or production. The former is a fundamental part of commodification since it allows the consumers to create and communicate identities and relationships by giving meanings to the commodity (Kneale and Dwyer 2004). Our cultures and our identities are defined by what it is eatable and uneatable and our consumption taboos (Fischler 1988). The case study of May (1996) presented above (section 1.2) is an example of a study around the consumption of food produced by immigrants. However, case studies around migrants' food consumption also exist (e.g. Mannan and Boucher 2002; Donkin and Dowler 2002).

A focus on processes of migrant's food production and marketization is also fundamental (Narayan 1995). For instance, Claire Dwyer and Peter Jackson used a qualitative approach for investigating migrants' production and marketization of artefacts (2003). Their focus was on Asian clothes, but their case-study approach can be inspirational for the investigation of other artefacts including food.

## 2. Methodology

The research followed an explorative ethnographic approach and was characterised by a mix of methods: a collection of secondary sources, interviews with 20 interlocutors and observations. The type of data collected, and the selection of interlocutors depended on the different objectives of the research (see Table 1).

### 2.1. Secondary sources

This research relied on the collection of specific secondary sources, i.e. policies, statistical data, local history sources and newspapers articles. This allowed me to have background information about Manchester and to understand how the local authorities conceptualised and still conceptualise Wilmslow Road and its diversity.

Relevant policies, at the local, national and international level, were gathered through websites or staff members of relevant bodies (e.g. Manchester City Council, Home Office, World Health Organisation)<sup>5</sup>. Collecting and reading policies was essential for understanding the position of authorities towards topics such as community cohesion, urban regeneration and health.

Local history sources were used for understanding the past representation of Wilmslow Road in Manchester. I spent a considerable amount of time in the local history section, newspaper archives and the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre located in Manchester Central Library. The access to local micro-film newspapers was limited by time constraints, instead I used the online archive of *The Guardian*.<sup>6</sup>

All the statistical data come from the 2011 UK Census and were obtained through the Infuse database (Office for National Statistics et al. 2017). These data are relatively old but were the most recent Census data available. Besides, data on mobile subjects such as workers and customers are not available. The *CDRC 2011 Census Data Packs for Local Authority District: Manchester (E08000003)* was used for creating

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<sup>5</sup> Manchester City Council (<https://www.manchester.gov.uk>), Home Office (<https://www.gov.uk/>), World Health Organisation (<https://www.gov.uk/>).

<sup>6</sup> The Guardian archive (<https://theguardian.newspapers.com/>; and <https://search.proquest.com/>).

a map of Manchester (Office for National Statistics and Ordnance Survey 2015). The dataset *Counties and Unitary Authorities (December 2017) Full Extent Boundaries in UK* was used for creating a map of the UK (Office for National Statistics and Ordnance Survey 2017). The geographical data were analysed and visualised with the software RStudio.

**Table 1.** Methodology in relation to the research objectives

Objectives	Data collection
<p>To understand the history and policies that shaped the present character of the Wilmslow Road (focus on multiculturalism and urban space)</p>	<p><b>Interviews</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1 semi-structured interview with a business staff/owner</li> <li>- 1 semi-structured interview with business staff/owner</li> <li>- 4 informal interviews with business staff/owners</li> <li>- 1 walking along interview with customer/resident</li> <li>- 1 walking along interview with customer/resident</li> <li>- 1 semi-structured interview with a representative from Council</li> <li>- 1 semi-structured interview with Council’s frontline staff</li> </ul> <p><b>Collection of secondary sources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- newspapers archives and local history books</li> <li>- statistical data</li> <li>- policies</li> </ul> <p><b>Observations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wilmslow Road</li> <li>- Manchester city centre (<i>Manchester Day</i>)</li> </ul>
<p>To understand the social and cultural dimensions of shisha and food commodification (production, consumption and marketization) in Wilmslow Road</p>	<p><b>Interviews</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 4 semi-structured interviews with 3 restaurant managers and 1 chef</li> <li>- 1 informal interview with a restaurant manager</li> <li>- 1 informal interview with a shisha smoker</li> <li>- 1 group informal discussion with three shisha smokers.</li> <li>- 1 informal interview with shisha bar waiter</li> <li>- Interviews in the above section also contain some data related to shisha and food</li> </ul> <p><b>Collection of secondary sources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- policies</li> <li>- legislations</li> </ul> <p><b>Observations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wilmslow Road</li> </ul>

## 2.2. Entrance into the field

Starting the fieldwork and finding interlocutors has been a challenging phase of this research. I had familiarity with the Wilmslow Road, however, I did not personally know anyone working or living on this road. I planned to approach people working in shops and restaurants or residents on the street and asking them if they would like to participate in my research. Considering that asking strangers trust and help is socially awkward, I thought that asking during a face-to-face encounter was more transparent than sending an email or making a telephone call. However, this approach required a reflection on my positionality, i.e. 'the fields of power that connect the field researcher and participants (...)' (Katz 1994: 69).

The first problem was the formality and temporality of my approach. Arranging meetings for interviews is a way of organising time for any student conducting research, but it was not a good way of organising the time of my interlocutors. Often individuals were willing to help me, however, they were not keen to arrange a meeting, or having an interview, it was too formal or unusual, people would have rather just had a discussion. I was able to arrange 8 formal interviews and obtain other 2 through the classical method of snowballing (see Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). But with time I understood that Wilmslow Road is an unpredictable environment where people are busy but also live day-by-day. This is one of the reasons why I started to conduct informal and spontaneous interviews, that allowed me to gather what I believe are some of the key results of this project.

Throughout the fieldwork, I tried to keep an explorative and participatory approach. This implied that interlocutors were '(...) cast as subjects rather than objects, and the research process is informed by the idea of "not on but with"' (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Sinha and Back 2013, in Berg and Nowicka 2019: 5). As I adapted my methodology to the context and the interlocutors, I also tried to conduct interviews, especially at the beginning, where interlocutors were taking control of the conversation and deciding the direction of the topics (see Wengraf 2001). This allowed me to penetrate an emic level i.e. 'life as experienced and described by the members of a society themselves' (Eriksen 2010: 40) and discover information that I was not expecting, such as the debate around shisha. Initially, the research focus was on food,

as an outsider and non-smoker, I did not know anything about shisha and its impact on Wilmslow Road.

The new topic of shisha and some information gathered around gender roles introduced a new methodological challenge related to positionality. At the beginning of the research, as a female ethnographer, I was aware that I could have had some problems of access due to my gender and sex, but I was not fully aware of the Wilmslow Road's gender conceptualisations. After some initial interviews, however, I started to understand that public space, especially around shisha bars, was male-dominated and this made some women feel uncomfortable. At the personal level, I was not feeling unsafe, I observed Muslim and non-Muslim women walking on the road alone. However, I understood that for some individuals and in certain spaces the presence of a woman alone could have been odd. For that reason, in dubious situations, my male partner became my occasional field and foodie companion. In a similar fashion, Lila Abu-Lughod was helped by the presence of her father when accessing among Bedouins in Egypt (2016: 12-13).

Shisha also pushed me to move from the topic of production to consumption, because I had access to shisha consumers rather than producers. New interviews also pushed me to consider the theoretical topics of urban sociality in relation to community cohesion and youth. For that reason, I decided to contact another person working with young people in the area, who could be considered a 'para-ethnographers' (Holmes and Marcus 2008: 236–7, in Berg and Nowicka 2019: 5). In a very explorative manner, I was following an intentional 'theoretical sampling' (Glaser and Strauss 1999: 45) and acknowledging 'the dialogical nature of research' (England 1994: 84).

### 2.3. Interviews and ethics

As Table 1 shows, the research was conducted by using three types of interview techniques. Firstly, semi-structured interviews were based on a list of questions. However, these questions changed depending on the person interviewed. For instance, I asked to all restaurant managers questions related to their restaurant's story, the food offered, the road and the community, but in each case, I had to understand different aspects related to their cuisines, e.g. I asked questions about hummus to a Middle Eastern manager and questions about Lahore's food to a

Pakistani one.

Secondly, walking interviews were conducted with two customers/residents. I thought to use this method as the natural environment of the customers is the road itself. During these interviews I let the persons speak freely, the discussion was stimulated by the environment and their memories rather than my questions (see O'Neil et al. 2019). This method allowed the interlocutors to easily talk about the history of the road and the businesses.

Thirdly, the informal interviews were not recorded, but I took notes while the interlocutors were talking, then I expanded the notes as soon as possible after the encounter. I followed specific topics and questions that I had in mind or briefly noted in my notebook. However, the majority of the conversations were unstructured. I felt that people were much more at ease with this type of method.

The recorded interviews were transcribed with the F5 programme, and then analysed and coded with NVivo Pro 12. The informal interviews were also coded with NVivo, whereas notes and photographs, resulting from observations on Wilmslow Road and during the event *Manchester Day* were analysed by hand.

All the interviews were conducted with informed consent. I was aware that I had to avoid asking sensitive questions, for example, on ethnicity and race, illegality and sensitive details about personal stories. I was also reminding the participants to stop the discussion if they felt uncomfortable. During some interviews, interlocutors touched topics that could be considered sensitive, but it was their choice to do that, I was giving them control and also the freedom to express themselves as they preferred and within their own ethical boundaries. As the results will show, shisha, similarly to alcohol, is 'a central symbol of conviviality' as well as 'the focus of moral panics' (Bell 2007: 17; see also Latham and McCormack 2004). For that reason, I tried to represent opposing opinions around shisha by maintaining a neutral position and giving equal voices to different perspectives.

## 3. Manchester's 'Curry Mile'

### 3.1. The city's past and present

The imposing locomotives located in the Science and Industry Museum of Manchester reminds visitors of the city's past industrial development (Science and Industry Museum, Hylton 2016, ix). Manchester, a city in the Northwest of England (Figure 1), has been famous for the production of textile since the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century became the global and imperial capital of cotton trade (Mellor 1984: 1-20 in Werbner 1990a, Science and Industry Museum, Hylton 2016: ix-x and 27). During this historical phase of industrial and economic development, the city became attractive for many workers from Europe and former colonies (Werbner 1990a). One of them was the German philosopher Friedrich Engels who worked in his family mills but also studied how industrialisation was changing society (Werbner 1990a, Hylton 2016).<sup>7</sup>

Members of the former colonies were recruited especially after the post-war period due to labour shortages (Werbner 1990a). From the 1920s until the 1950s the textile industry underwent a phase of decline due to increasing international competition (Hylton 2016). However, Pakistani immigrants, similar to other Asian immigrants, were able to prosper by shifting their working sector from the textile industry to food and garment (Werbner 1990b). The initial Pakistani retail businesses and restaurants, which opened in Wilmslow Road, were a symbol of this change.

Manchester, today, is one of the most diverse cities in England. In 2011, only 59% of the population was British White (Office for National Statistics et al. 2017). This diversity is mainly concentrated in the North and Centre of the city, including Wilmslow Road (Figure 2). In 2017, the city's diversity was challenged by the Manchester Arena bombing. However, after this tragic event, the city is recovering, and the community is coming together. The report *A Shared Future* demonstrates that local authorities are committed to tackling the problems behind what happened (Greater Manchester Combined Authorities 2018). In terms of community cohesion, Council follows the

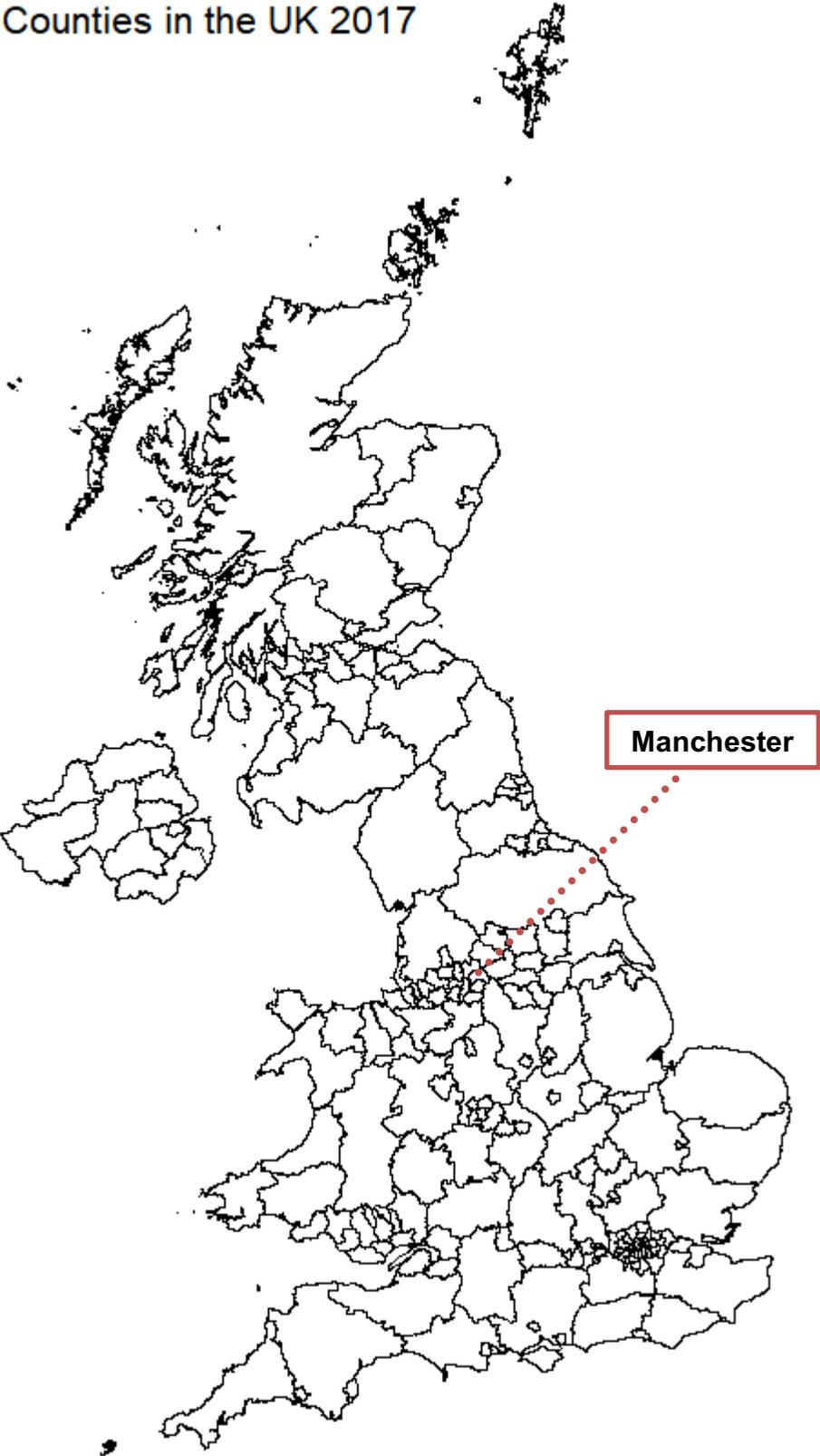
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<sup>7</sup> See also Damiano (2019a) for a short overview of Manchester's history and diversity.

Home Office's *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper* (Manchester City Council 2018; HM Government 2018).

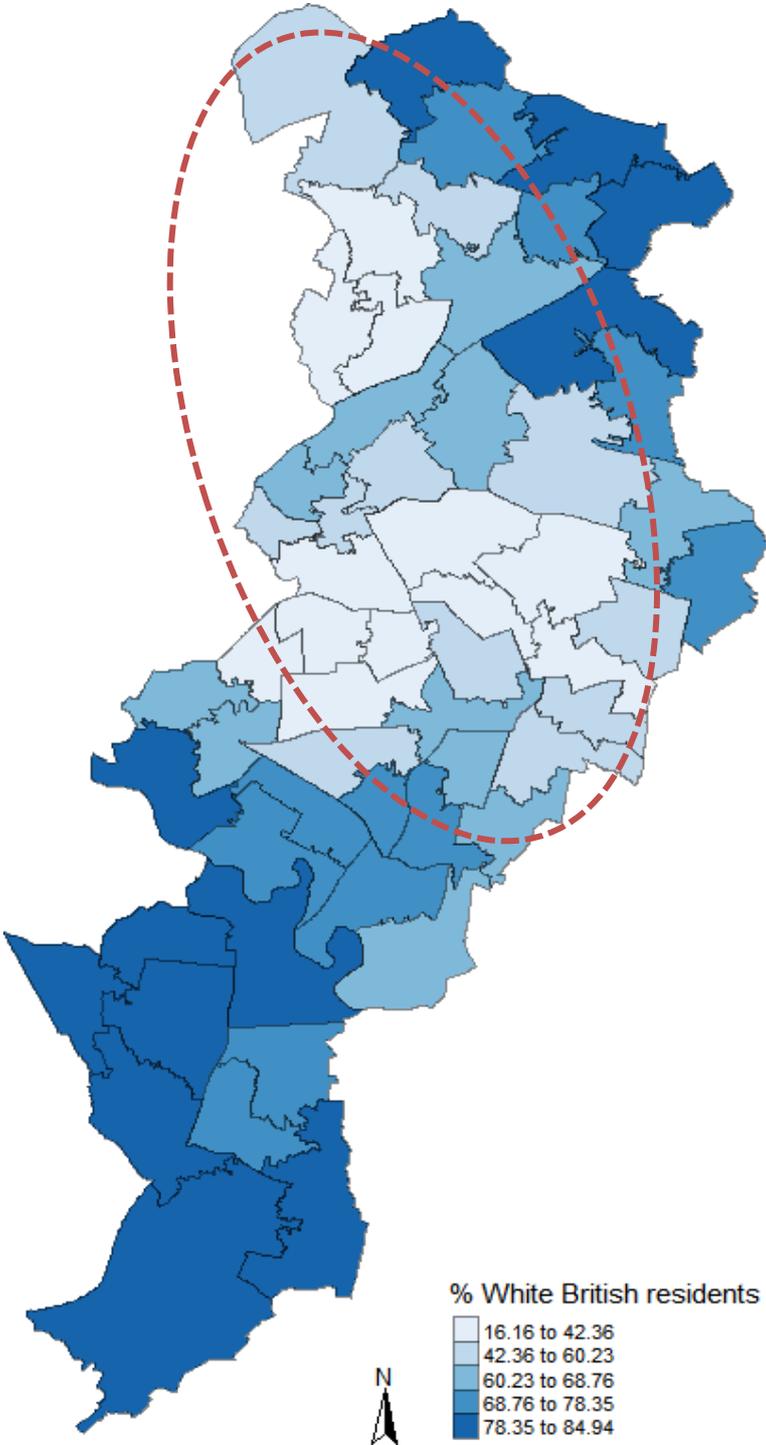
This approach reflects 'post-multiculturalist models that somehow fuse agendas of the left (...) and the right (...)’ (Vertovec 2010: 91). On the one hand, there is an emphasis on Mancunian and British values, shared rights, responsibilities and language; aspects that represent a more assimilatory understanding of integration (Manchester City Council 2018). On the other hand, there is an emphasis on promoting tolerance, fighting extremism and hate crime, and celebrating cultural diversity (Manchester City Council 2018). The *Manchester Day*, a parade and performances of organisations and cultural groups exemplify these principles. The aim of the Council is to bring people together and break barriers. People need to talk and connect with each other and develop pride towards the city. The majority of interlocutors whom I met were proud of the diversity of Wilmslow Road and believed that there are cohesion and harmony between people. As the results of this research will show, divisions in Wilmslow Road are not related to race or ethnicity.

**Figure 1.** Manchester in the United Kingdom (2017)



Contains OS data and National Statistics data © Crown copyright and database right [2017], see Office for National Statistics and Ordnance Survey (2017), see also (Damiano 2019b).

**Figure 2.** % of White British residents in Manchester (MSOAs, 2011)



Contains 2011 UK Census data, National Statistics data and Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right [2011], see Office for National Statistics and Ordnance Survey (2015) and Office for National Statistics et al. (2017), see also (Damiano 2019b).

### 3.2. The 'Indian' exotic Other

South Asian immigrants, mainly from Pakistan, started to populate and open businesses in Wilmslow Road during the 1950s-60s (Barrett and McEvoy 2006). Many of the interlocutors believed that South Asian businesses opened for the needs of the community and the immigrant population. In the 80-90s, however, the road transformed from a road for the Pakistani community to a road that caters to people with multiple backgrounds coming from different parts of the UK and world. 'It is started up as a cater for a minority and it ended up cater for a majority (...)' (10.06.19), this is how, Azra<sup>8</sup>, a woman who lived and worked all her life on Wilmslow Road, described the development.

The name 'Curry Mile' started to be used as the area became more popular. A fashion shop owner told me that the phrase exists: 'because the British people started to call it like that. They liked to come here to eat curry.' (Aron, 17.06.19). The name 'Curry Mile' officialises the existence of a cultural quarter characterised by the commodification of diversity.

Wilmslow Road started to be advertised as the 'Curry Mile'. An example of this is an article written by British Indian Chef celebrity Malhi Manju (2002) published in *The Guardian* and entitled *How to eat curry: eating out*. A large part of the article is about alcohol, and this makes clear that her instructions are directed to non-Muslim British readers:

'For religious reasons, Indians generally tend to abstain from drinking alcohol with their food. So if you want to really eat like the Indians do, have water or a yoghurt or fruit drink during the meal and drink tea afterwards. (...) if you do want to drink make sure you are drinking a wine that can compete with the spices and their flavours.' (Manju 2002).

The article includes a list of recommended places for eating curry. One of them is the '(...) famous Curry Mile, with endless Indian restaurants to choose from' (Manju 2002). The word 'Indian' is used in an unprecise manner: the majority of curry

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<sup>8</sup> Throughout this work, the names of the interlocutors are pseudonymous. Details regarding their background remain vague as this would render them easily identifiable.

restaurants on Wilmslow Road are run by Pakistani, whom do not drink alcohol if they follow Islam. The word 'Indian' like 'Curry' is part of an exotic branding strategy representing a false authenticity. This type of orientalist representation of Wilmslow Road is reminiscent of the colonial era. For instance, Elizabeth Buettner (2008) argued that the consumption of 'Indian' food reproduces, rather than erases, racial and former colonial unequal power relationships. Despite this, 'Indian' restaurants were still successful, and to this day some of the first 'Indian' restaurants of 'Curry Mile' still exist and symbolise the hype of 'Indian' food in Britain.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.3. A new era, new migration flows, new businesses

Although a sign at the entrance of Wilmslow Road states 'Welcome to the Curry Mile', 'Indian' restaurants are now a minority among the businesses on the road. According to my interlocutors, some of the restaurants closed down for different reasons, including: the unwillingness of young British Pakistani to continue the family business, the inability of the restaurants to renew their offer, the increasing ability of customers to cook at home, a cycling lane constructed by the Council that reduced the parking space, lack of a business association that could unite the road, and increased competition and costs especially due to rent increase, a phenomenon that has already been noticed by Barrett and McEvoy (2006).

However, today, Wilmslow Road is still vibrant and populated by many different businesses. Well established Asian jewellery, fashion and sweet shops show shining items in their garnished windows and also attract customers from around the world. A young woman proudly told me that Pakistani customers from Europe and the USA come to her shop for buying clothes. Moreover, many new businesses (restaurants, barbers and shisha bars) opened and this corresponded to the arrival of new migrant's groups. Seddon described this phenomenon as a recent 'Arabization' of the 'Curry Mile' (2012: 16). Nevertheless, I find this term reductive, since some of the new businesses are managed by Arabs, but many individuals working or living in Rusholme, come from Afghanistan, Iraqi Kurdistan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, Malaysia, Turkey, Eastern Europe, Greece and other countries. These are migrants

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<sup>9</sup> See also Damiano (2019a) for a short overview of these theoretical positions.

arrived in the UK more recently and are part of recent migration flows.

The road today is a heterogeneous place. For that reason, people working on Wilmslow Road have contrasting opinions regarding the phrase 'Curry Mile'. A manager of an 'Indian' restaurant proudly said that he is happy to use the word 'Curry Mile'. Some people specified that Wilmslow Road is not anymore 'Curry Mile', a manager of a Middle Eastern restaurant pointed out that new alternative names 'Arab street' or 'shisha street' are also used. Two British Pakistani men reacted negatively after I used the term 'Curry Mile'. They found the phrase racist and offensive. Their reaction to the name embedded what it could be considered a postcolonial critique of the commodification of the Other (hooks 2015; Buettner 2008; May 1996). Other stakeholders, such as the local newspaper and generally outsiders continue to use the word 'Curry Mile' (Scheerhout 2019).

This mix of opinions on how to define and describe the road shows that Wilmslow Road lacks a precise identity, which is essential for branding. Even though 'Curry Mile' still attracts visitors, it is not considered central to the economic development of the city by the Council, in contrast to Chinatown and The Gay Village (Law 2000; Manchester City Council n/da and n/db). Local authorities are powerless in dictating changes because they do not own the land, lack funding for regeneration projects and collaboration with the road's businesses is difficult. The only power of the Council is the implementation of law and regulations regarding restaurants' hygiene, waste management and indoor smoking. Points that need to be addressed before a potential economic re-launch of the road.

## 4. Shisha

### 4.1 'We don't like shisha': media and everyday discourses on shisha

Shisha bars are one of the most controversial changes of Wilmslow Road. An intense discussion with Michael, who grew up on this road, and now he is struggling to keep alive his family business, made me understand that I could not ignore the topic. He was eating an apple behind his counter while expressing his discontent with the status of the road. He pointed to a copy of the Manchester Evening News. I looked at the title, it was about shisha. He said: 'That is something that I do not like of this road: the shisha bars.' Later on, I asked him if there is a sense of community and he answered '(...) There are many fights, anti-social behaviour (...) did you see this?' (16.06.19) and he pointed to the article again as if he wanted to wake me up. I re-looked at the newspaper and started to read it properly. The article described the closure of a specific shisha bar due to the breach of the smoking ban, anti-social behaviour and crime (Scheerhout 2019). Negative comments about shisha became common during the entire fieldwork. For instance, after eating a tasty meal, I asked the restaurant manager to discuss about the road, food and the restaurant. His answer was: 'We do not like shisha' (08.07.19), he went straight to the point.

Shisha smoking is an activity that became popular over the last years on Wilmslow Road, as in the rest of Europe. A shisha smoker told me that recent immigration from the Middle East played a role in increasing the popularity of the object. Everything started from family businesses, but now Wilmslow Road is known as 'shisha street' and attracts shisha smokers living in Manchester and other parts of England. The consumption of shisha took over the consumption of curry. Therefore, shisha bars are a new type of strong competitor that advanced on a road where some businesses underwent increasing economic challenges (see Ch.3.3 and Barrett and McEvoy 2006). This process, using Michael's words, is part of a 'life cycle' (16.06.19) that prices the economically successful.

In the following sections, I will illustrate the socio-cultural nature of the

commodification of shisha and shisha bars on Wilmslow Road. Shisha is dividing the community and my aim is not to take a side in this debate, but rather to understand how it articulates.

## 4.2. Consumption taboo: between legal, scientific and religious understandings

As a shisha smoker explained to me, shisha is a decorated reflux condensation chamber. The head of the shisha is rolled up with a perforated aluminium foil containing a mixture of tobacco and flavours. Coal is positioned on the head for heating up the tobacco, subsequently, the hot smoke and flavours move through the vertical body of the shisha until ending in the base, a vase full of water. Here the smoke cools down, but the heat transforms the water into steam containing the smoke and flavours, that then are inhaled through a long hose.

Smoking shisha per se is not illegal but smoking or allowing its consumption in indoor premises open to the public in the UK is illegal (Health Act 2006). In fact, the Manchester City Council also states: 'The law classes shisha smoking the same as cigarette smoking. It is illegal to smoke shisha in an enclosed public space, or a space that's mostly enclosed. To smoke in any public premises with a roof, at least half the wall space must be open.' (Manchester City Council 2019). For that reason, the Council is trying to regulate, fine or even close the shisha bars on Wilmslow Road, that do not have adequate infrastructure.

The reason why indoor smoking is illegal in the UK as well as in many other countries around the world is obviously due to the health harm of passive smoke. The increase in popularity of shisha also pushed the World Health Organisation to publish an advisory note entitled *Waterpipe tobacco smoking: Health effects, research need and recommended actions by regulators* (World Health Organisation 2015). Health was also discussed by some of the interlocutors. Many referred to the shisha as an unhealthy intoxicant, '(...) it is good that government is closing down the shisha café and making sure that people do not smoke because there is a lot of indoor smoking (...) and I do not think it is very good, it is passive smoke I would say.' (Lina 12.06.19).

The shisha smokers, whom I encountered, are aware that shisha is an unhealthy

substance, but tend to point out that shisha is not the only unhealthy substance in our society. Ravi told me:

‘Yeah, I think it is unhealthy, but it depends on how one defines unhealthy. You could eat too much cinnamon and die. Anyone needs activities to chill out, this is helping me to ground myself, I am here alone, and I can have some thoughts about the day, have some time for reflecting. I am not taking alcohol, drugs, it is a kind of regular part of a routine. It helps digestion, I do not think it is actually true, but it is like some people take a glass of wine, have a nice chat, it is also a way for being very relaxed.’ (22.06.19).

Another female smoker, Awaisha, told me: ‘Everyone knows, we are aware of our actions. But it is not the only unhealthy thing that we can get. It is like fast food, sweets and pastries.’ (29.06.19). Her friend Neeru added: ‘Yeah definitely, you can ruin your health in many different ways, also by just walking outside and breathing pollution (...)’ (29.06.19). Other studies already showed that smokers are aware that shisha is unhealthy (e.g. Lipkus et. al. 2011; Sidani et al. 2014). What I found interesting is how they justify their practices, by critically comparing shisha to other unhealthy substances.

Science tells us that consuming shisha, cigarettes, sugar, fat, alcohol, drugs, and many other things is unhealthy, however, the questions of what we can or what we cannot insert into our body remains ethical, everything ends up to specific cultural values and interpretation of health and consumption taboos (see also Fischler 1988). In fact, on Wilmslow Road, when people talk about smoking shisha, also talk about Islam, a religion but also a way of living that is performed in the everyday practices of a believer (Ruel 1992, 22). As my interlocutors explained, these practices include some consumption taboos, for instance eating pork and drinking alcohol are considered *haram*, which means ‘not permissible’. The food cooked and sold on Wilmslow Road, except the alcohol offered in licensed ‘Indian’ restaurants, is *halal*.

Whereas, it is not very clear what is the religious interpretation of shisha smoking. Kabir, a non-smoker, told me:

‘I do not know why people like shisha so much, I mean I get it, but at the same time, I hear conflicting things about it. Some people say it is *halal* and

some people say that you can't do it (...) (18.06.19).

Jack helped me to clarify this point further:

'(...) initially the idea of like smoking, when the scholars first discussed this, long time ago, they did not understand the implication of smoking, the reason it was *makruh*, that it is 'disliked', it is because of the smell. There is a pray, on a Friday, when we go to congregational pray, that we should not eat like strong food, like onion and garlic because the smell could put people off. (...) So they put it into this category, but now because of all the research about, between smoking, lung diseases and cancers, most scholars of the world say that it is *haram*.' (18.07.19).

In any case, *makruh*, which represents a grey area between *halal* and *haram*, is still used by the Muslim shisha smokers whom I encountered.

### 4.3. The marketization of shisha

Shisha smokers explained that with time shisha smoking became very commercialised and this implied a material transformation of shisha and shisha bars. Instagram played an important role in this process (see also Taleb et al. 2018), for instance, Awaisha told me:

'(...) when I started to smoke in London, it was not like that, there were some simple places, like semi-outdoor with plastic tents. Then, it started to develop and become something more', and later she added 'you can see that these places are really pretty, they make them "instagrammable" (...) (29.06.19).

Shisha bars are designed for appealing to customers, for instance: some have luxurious large and shiny sofas and armchairs, and some serve drinks in alternative hipster mason jars. Moreover, shishas have different looks and are done with different

materials, but most importantly tobacco can have different intensities and fruity flavours. Ravi explained 'you can have everything, raspberry, apple, cocktail mix' (22.06.19), and later showed me a whole fresh pineapple on the head of a shisha, 'it is all about marketing, and it is a way of intriguing people' (22.06.19). This is a process of marketization and transformation that has also been documented by Nakkash et al. (2011) in Lebanon.

However, shisha acquires different forms in different places. Ravi also added:

'I think there is a big question mark for Muslims. Shisha is still a form of intoxication and contains nicotine. So, I can believe that some practitioners would not like it. That is the reason why in the Middle East there are less flavours, and it is less commercialised, they do not want that young people get intoxicated and get off. It became commercialised and the flavours expanded in other parts of the world. I was once in Dubai and it is not possible to find fruits on the shisha.' (22.06.19).

This sentence shows how shisha on Wilmslow Road is a transformed material commodity, a very ancient object but reinvented (see Chaouachi 2007: 138-153). Ravi and Awaisha are aware of this process, and for that reason do not construct the shisha and shisha bars as authentic or hybrid.

#### 4.4. A new sub-culture

Through movement, shisha did not only undergo material modifications but also acquired a specific social function. Neeru told me: 'There is a culture in Manchester' (29.06.19). In fact, shisha bars, which are attended mainly by young men, but also groups of women, and mixed groups with different ethnic backgrounds, are spaces of sociality, like pubs, bars, cafés and nightclubs. Shisha was part of the past university experience of some of the smokers whom I met. 'After exams shisha', 'after work shisha' and 'studying sessions with shisha' are popular activities. Zain, a waiter working in one of the most popular shisha bars on the road, told me:

'I think English people go clubbing, and the shisha bar is the same for the

Asians. It is like clubbing but you can also come here and relax, listen to music, make friends, find a girlfriend, and get married. It is over 18 of course, minors cannot enter here.' (03.07.19).

Awaisha, Neeru and Zakia confirmed this social aspect, while giggling they told me that shisha facilitates marriage, Neeru dates her fiancée in shisha bars. Chaouchi already described how the shisha, contrary to a cigarette, but similarly to a meal or a drink, generates conviviality and sociality, e.g. friends and couples can share the hose and have the right atmosphere for long discussions (2007: 104-107). This also means that Asian shisha consumers do not smoke shisha as a form of exotism, as in the case of food consumers interviewed by May (1996), but rather as a form of sociality.

The sociality of shisha and its similarity to alcohol is key; it is what makes shisha smokers feel part of society. Jack explained to me: 'it is a challenge for them to socialise and to feel that they are part of this society because they can't go to pubs and clubs.' (08.07.19). In fact, shisha is an alternative to alcohol, an unhealthy but consumed substance. After I started to talk about the health problems around shisha, Zakia, a young woman wearing the veil, looked at me intensively, opened her eyes, raised her eyebrows and exclaimed: 'It is like alcohol!' (29.06.19). As a non-Muslim woman who drinks alcohol, I felt a hypocrite. At that moment, she was a Muslim woman disliking alcohol and I was a non-Muslim woman questioning the health risks of shisha, but at the same time, we were both women consuming questionable substances (depending on the point of view). This is very powerful, because shisha smoking is a way for young Muslims to perform their multiple identities, being Muslim, but also being consumers of an unhealthy substance. This is a way of 'assimilating' or finding a place in society.

Shisha acquired a specific social meaning and function on Wilmslow Road. This function is related to alcohol as well as the sociality, conviviality and integration of young Muslims on Wilmslow Road. Using Nicholas Thomas terminology, shisha underwent a process of social change and 'recontextualization' (1991: 28). Thomas studied how European colonisers and Pacific Islanders exchanged and started to use each other's objects (1991). These objects underwent mutations and acquired new meanings when recontextualized (ibid.). Thomas's work was pioneering in showing how objects can mutate, be used in different ways, change identities, and acquire new meanings.

## 4.5. Shisha, gender and generational divisions

Shisha smoking surely increases sociability, but critics of shisha smoking would argue that shisha does not increase the sociability of everyone. In fact, shisha is smoked mainly by young men and for that reason, shisha bars and the road became men-dominated spaces. For instance, Azra, stressed the inability of females and families to access the road with confidence: ‘because of the shisha bars it becomes kind of a *taboo* to be here at certain times, that should not be’ (10.06.19).

Women are also portrayed as victims of potential shisha smokers’ inappropriate behaviours. Kabir, a young university student, explained that sometimes men follow women and he believes that the source of inappropriate courtship practices is that:

‘basically in the Asian culture, and this happens in lots of cultures though, like men and women are told to, like not sort of stay together, so what happens is, when each one gets older, the men are like, the men are told by their family: “go and find a girl” and they do not know how to do that, because for all their life they were told not to go after girls.’ (18.06.19).

The shisha bars, in fact, are not considered spaces for women by some of the critics and also by some of the men smoking. Social mixing between opposite genders is not encouraged by ultra-orthodox forms of Islam.

Nevertheless, while I was conducting fieldwork, I was observing groups of women, couples and mixed groups of people coming on the road for smoking shisha. Women on Wilmslow Road were following different and contrasting roles. Women are either portrayed and feel vulnerable or, as in the case of Awaisha, Neeru and Zakia, are part of what it can be considered a change in women’s role and courtship approach (see also Dar-Odeh and Abu-Hammad 2011). The shisha smokers whom I encountered believe that shisha is becoming always more accessible to women.

This is also visible in some marketing strategies employed by shisha bars, an example is the introduction of food, something that Neeru finds attractive (see also Nakkash et al. 2011). Similarly, Latham showed how the appearance of bars in a gentrified road in Auckland created a new public culture allowing ‘both women and men

to experiment with and forge identities outside the confines of established gender norms. And, in so doing, it is generating something that is genuinely radical' (Latham 2003: 1712). Some shisha bars on Wilmslow Road are in a way radical, they are undergoing a similar change, however, women smoking shisha on Wilmslow Road is still a new practice and shisha bars are heterogenous.

If shisha offers a space for the sociality of young shisha smokers, it reduces the space for the sociality of families and minors, who are usually customers of restaurants. In fact, some critics of shisha promote a family culture and would like to have a 'family-oriented' road. There is not enough space for different generational needs.

## 5. Food

### 5.1. A 'family-oriented' road

If shisha divides the community of Wilmslow Road, food unites it. Of course, there is competition between all the businesses, including the old established 'Indian' restaurants, however, none speaks negatively about restaurants and food. In fact, eating food on Wilmslow Road is legal, is *halal* and is accessible to people of all ages, all sexes, genders, ethnicities, shisha smokers and non-smokers. For that reason, restaurants are spaces where a more vibrant and especially unquestioned and free mixing of multiple diverse people take place.

The reason why new restaurants opened on the Wilmslow Road is an initial desire of catering members of the migrants' community: an Arab restaurant manager, explained that the reason why Middle Eastern restaurants opened is the arrival of Syrians to Manchester and the existence of a large Arab community in the region. Nevertheless, with time, restaurants became spaces for people with different backgrounds, and this does not only include consumers but also members of staff. For instance, a Kurdish chef had the occasion to work with Sudanese, Europeans, Arabs, and this is a very common practice in many restaurants on the road.

In terms of ethnicity and race, the restaurants do not differ greatly from the shisha bars, but contrary to shisha bars, restaurants are considered spaces for families and women by everyone. Many of the interlocutors associated food to family. For instance, when I asked what they like eating, they answered with a plural subject 'we eat...', 'we like...', moreover, Pakistani adults tend to talk about the food cooked by their moms rather than the food cooked by themselves. As many have already noticed sharing food as *substance* is a mean of kinship making (e.g. Carsten 2003 and Schneider 1980). And this can also go beyond blood relationships. For instance, Gohar, an elderly restaurant manager, working in an 'Indian' restaurant, argued that it is very important to serve the customers properly, with politeness, sweetness, and to treat them as a relative, like an uncle, a sister. This act of mundane hospitality is related to an economic interest but cannot be reduced only as such (see Bell 2007).

Shisha also creates friendship and romantic partnership, but the mechanisms

around this process are much more questionable and divisive. Whereas, as Bilal told me, food

‘(...) is something that makes people happy (...) when people want to come out for a restaurant, and enjoy themselves with their friends, is something that (...) they look forward to it as well as eating as well as meeting other people, as well as meeting with their friends, and yeah, you know it is absolutely, it brings people together, that is what it is.’ (03.07.19).

In any case, the commodification of food on Wilmslow Road takes place in different forms due to the huge diversity of the restaurants. In the following section, I will present only one specific example, the British Asian Lasagne.

## 5.2. British Asian Lasagne

I was observing a wall covered with colourful posters when the waiter arrived and positioned a dish in front of me, a yellow platter that matched with the vibrant decor of the restaurant. I was in front of a slice of Lasagne, salad and chips. After the first bite, the rich and hot flavour of the minced mutton, vegetable and tomato sauce invaded my mouth. The sauce tasted curry. While biting, the sauce mixed with the layers of pasta and cream and an intense flavour of cheddar started to dominate.

This was the dish of a self-defined British Asian restaurant. Different ingredients symbolised different culinary histories, cuisines and identities. I interpreted the cheddar and the chips as a symbol of Britishness, while the spicy mutton sauce as a symbol of Asianness. Hybridity was behind the restaurant’s idea.

The menu includes:

‘(...) Indian food, Pakistani food but also have, you know, Italian food, English food and then obviously (...) some of the Chinese food (...). It is like a mix of everything (...)’ (Bilal, 03.07.19).

I struggled to understand the idea behind this mix, but after remembering the answers of some British Asian interlocutors everything became clearer. For instance,

a few weeks before, Kabir explained to me:

‘While growing up, if we had spaghetti bolognese it wasn’t just pasta sauce, herbs, or whatever was it. My mom would put chilli, green chilli, turmeric, red chilli powder, curry powder, to make it really Asiany (...). And if I made it, I would’ve made it (...) like regular way, and my mom would be like: “Kabir! It is very bland, no flavour!”’ (18.06.19).

The words of Kabir, also reminded me of a previous meeting with Azra, during which she told me about her delicious ‘Curry Lasagne’. The general diet of the British Asians whom I met is various, mixed and hybrid, similar to the restaurant’s offer.

The restaurant had one of the most diverse clientele on the road, but it was generally popular among British Asians, while the licensed ‘Indian’ restaurants that opened in the 80s-2000s are more popular among British White customers. If the ‘Indian’ restaurants adapted Pakistani and Indian food for a British palate, now the British Asian restaurant transforms international and British food into Asian. If Tikka Masala is the exotic for the British, Lasagne is the exotic for the Asian. It presents the real home food of the third generation of British Asians living in Manchester, the grandchildren of the first Pakistani arrived in the city. For that reason, the commodification of Lasagne does not hide a form of exploitation of the Other related to former colonial relationships. This is rather a good example of how hybridity can counter-act power inequalities (Bhabha 1994).

However, even if the British Asian is a self-declaration of hybridity regarding British and Asian identities and food, the material history of the British Asian Lasagne shows the limitations around these essentialist labels. Lasagne is a food cooked everywhere, but it could be considered an Italian dish. An Italian migrant in front of a dish of British Asian Lasagne would compare it with the ‘authentic’ Italian Lasagne of their mom, made with pasta layers, ragu, béchamel sauce and Parmesan. However, ingredients of the Lasagne arrived in Italy through global past histories of connections that inevitably destroy the essentialist idea of an ‘authentic’ Lasagne.

This shows, that also in the case of food, commodification and migration implies a social mutation of ingredients, the pasta sheet went through a ‘succession of uses and recontextualizations’ (Thomas 1991: 29). Every consumer and producer can attach different labels and meanings to the Lasagne as a commodity, depending on its

personal experience, background and identity. As an external observer, I could define the British Asian Lasagne as authentic British Asian home food, even if it is not explicitly defined as such. But can we define what a Lasagne in absolute material and social terms is? The answer is no. This interpretation follows the Jerk bagel's argument already advanced by Alex Rhys-Taylor (2013). The Lasagne can be defined as hybrid or authentic but more importantly are in an endless social mutation (Rhys-Taylor 2013; Thomas 1991). They break spatial and temporal boundaries of our personal and limited visions on social reality and its diversity.

# Conclusion

Wilmslow Road underwent several changes over the last years. In the 1990s and 2000s, this road was known as the 'Curry Mile' because it offered exotic 'Indian' curries to English customers. But in an increasingly competitive environment, the number of 'Indian' restaurants declined. This road is becoming famous for its shisha bars. These changes correspond to the arrival of new migrants coming from the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Europe that now live together with members of a long-established Pakistani community. The Manchester City Council is proud of its diversity and aims to celebrate it whenever possible. The people working and living on Wilmslow Road embody this attitude.

In fact, this road is not socially divided by issues related to ethnicity and race but rather by the commodification of shisha. The socio-cultural analysis of the everyday discourses and practices around this artefact revealed how cultural diversity on Wilmslow Road takes form. Shisha divides the community because of different reasons that can also be considered the social dimensions of the debate: economic and legal factors, as well as interpretations of consumption taboos, gender roles and generational needs. The positioning along these points is not related to the ethnic background of a person. For that reason, I find it more appropriate to describe Wilmslow Road, following Steven Vertovec (2007b), as a super-diverse road where different cultures do not necessarily correspond to specific migrant groups. This new form of diversity also renders the postcolonial criticisms, which conceptualise the commodification of cultural diversity as a form of exoticism reproducing neo-colonial relations, irrelevant (e.g. hooks 2015; Buettner 2008; May 1996).

The introduction of shisha saw the creation of a new subculture of young Muslim shisha smokers who attend shisha bars for socialising, finding a partner, relaxing and consuming a substitute to alcohol. Shisha creates a space of sociality and conviviality where shisha smokers can be 'integrated' in society as non-drinkers consuming a questionable substance. Moreover, shisha smokers are aware of the movements, transformations and the marketization of shisha, in fact, they do not construct the object as hybrid, authentic or even exotic, but rather as a commodity that can satisfy their social needs. The case of shisha, therefore, shows that the concept of

'recontextualization' (Thomas 1991: 28) describing the change of an object's use, identity and meaning, is more suitable than fixed labels, such as hybrid or authentic. In addition, following the account of Latham (2003), shisha bars can be seen as spaces of urban sociality and invention of a new urban culture, even if health-wise questionable. However, if one considers the entire road and the whole community, shisha bars are also a source of social division, thus encompass a paradoxical urban duality.

The commodification of food is what brings the community together, indeed, food is a type of commodity that is accessible to everyone, no matter their age, gender, ethnicity, race, religion or opinions. Interlocutors often associated food to family and hospitality, food creates kin relationships as well as community cohesion and urban sociability for everyone (Carsten 2003; Bell 2007). And here, critics of shisha insist on stating that they would like to have a family-oriented area.

The commodification of food on Wilmslow Road has many different forms. In this work, I considered the case-study of the British Asian Lasagne, that is an Italian dish with a mix of Asian and British flavours. This dish and its restaurant are a self-proclamation of hybridity disrupting former colonial power inequalities and forms of exoticism (Bhabha 1994), but more interestingly, the British Asian Lasagne represents the authentic diet of a young British Asian living in Manchester. It becomes even more complicated if an Italian migrant orders the British Asian Lasagne. This is the moment when the Lasagne is compared with the Italian authentic Lasagne. A dish that, however, cannot be defined as authentic since it is the result of global and material histories. This example again shows the social and material mutability of artefacts in movement (Rhys-Taylor 2013) and therefore the limits of the concepts of authenticity and hybridity. For that reason, it invites to use the concept of 'recontextualization' (Thomas 1991: 28).

The research was conducted through an explorative and qualitative approach that facilitated the discovery of the issues around shisha. However, a long-term in-depth research would be needed for producing a larger number of interviews and observations. Different topics (e.g. gender and religion) or specific types of food (e.g. Middle Eastern) should be considered more in-depth. In addition, the collaboration of a female and male ethnographers and the use of a survey for creating generalisation and relationships between different variables (e.g. gender, generation, ethnicity) would enrich the results.

Nevertheless, I believe, that this work can contribute to a broader discussion related to policy and community cohesion. For instance, the community cohesion policy of the Home Office and Manchester City Council argues that:

‘We want to see vibrant communities in which everyone plays a part and for people from all backgrounds to have access to, and make use of, community hubs such as libraries, community centres, cultural venues, parks and pubs where they can come together with people from different backgrounds around shared activities.’ (HM Government 2018, 43 and Manchester City Council 2018, 5).

I believe that this is the right direction. Nevertheless, attention to the different social and cultural dimensions of such spaces and the substances and artefacts that they contain is necessary. For instance, pubs and alcohol are taboo for young Muslims. Addressing shisha as health and community problem requires also addressing issues around the access of young Muslims to spaces of urban sociality.

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