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## Picturing difference: juxtaposition, collage and layering of a multiethnic street

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## **Picturing difference: Juxtaposition, collage and layering of a multi-ethnic street<sup>1</sup>**

By Suzanne M. Hall (London School of Economics and Political Science)

My research is an ethnographic exploration of how cultural and ethnic diversity manifests through regular, face-to-face social contact on the Walworth Road in South London. My focus is the small independent shops along the mile length of this multi-ethnic street and the social and spatial interactions between proprietors and customers within them. While absorbed in an ethnography of everyday life, I searched for ways of understanding the layers of place, time and experience that make this street. As an architect, I had a fascination for how urban space is designed and appropriated, and a predilection for a visual reading of the city. As an inexperienced ethnographer, I had to learn about a much slower process of looking; making time to sit, listen and talk. My research methodology has been influenced by a combination of architectural and ethnographic approaches to how individuals appropriate and re-constitute urban space in the habitual rhythm of their day-to-day lives. In this paper I expand on my ethnographic process of exploring difference through pictures made during fieldwork. I use juxtaposition, collage and layering as both illustrative forms and analytic methods for observing and representing difference.

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A key quality of an urban high street is that it is central to the local life of an area, but it also travels past the area, linking it to other places and people. An urban high street situates and connects, both focusing and extending the possibilities for contact between different people. The object of my research, and my initial fascination with the Walworth Road, is the intersections of culturally and ethnically diverse individuals and groups within a local street in South London. The subject or questions that have charged my research is how difference manifests in the everyday world of this multi-ethnic street, and how people adopt and refine social and spatial repertoires to engage in urban change. I came to this exploration as a newcomer on many fronts: as a South African who had grown up in the unjustly privileged, white suburbs of Johannesburg; and as an architect, a stranger to ethnographic research. Researching the Walworth Road through the everyday lives and livelihoods on the street also provided me with an opportunity to learn about a slower process of looking, 'spending time' being essential to ethnographic understanding. I spent one year of intensive fieldwork on the Walworth Road, but as a local resident I have made regular use of the street, and my fieldwork has informally expanded to include the four years of my PhD research period.

The purpose of my paper is to ask what we might learn about difference from a differentiated view of everyday life; how to see, analyse and represent the city from the perspective of individuals, their voices and their practices in local spaces. My paper does not address in any ethnographic detail how difference, explored in this paper as cultural and ethnic diversity, is experienced and voiced on the Walworth Road. Therefore the forms of ordinary spaces and modes of everyday sociability developed by individuals on the street are only briefly touched on. While the ethnographic process is key to my research findings, it features less prominently in my account of difference in this paper, as I focus on the core methodological question of how to picture difference. I explore the process of picturing as one way of

interpreting survey and ethnographic data, where the picture serves as both an analytic and illustrative composition. A question I explore through picturing, one that is very much at the centre of contemporary anthropological and ethnographic enquiry (Marcus, 1995; Hannerz, 1997; Burawoy *et al.*, 2000), is how to relate composite objects of study, such as the aggregation of individuals and spaces on a local street, to the city and the global reach of a rapidly changing world.

The contemporary city concentrates difference, and local life on the Walworth Road is connected to broader forces that redefine contemporary urban heterogeneity. Today the greater proportion of London's population was either born elsewhere, or has parents who were born elsewhere (National Statistics, 1991; 2001). While this numeric description fails to capture the lived meanings of difference, it reflects the current diversity of London's population, quantified by the introduction of an 'ethnic' category into National Statistics in 1991. This diversification in London's demographic profile since the 1990s can be traced to structural forces shaping the city. Here I touch briefly on the restructuring of capital that has directed investment in and through global cities (Sassen, 2001), on the flows of transnational migrants into global cities in the pursuit of work opportunities (Koser and Al-Ali, 2002) and on the production of increased wealth in London coupled with increased disparity (Hamnett, 2003). This heightened process of 'flows' between people and places across the globe with compounded effect in cities such as London, generates the question of how to research composite and contingent ways of life. For ethnographic research the question extends to how to relate the varied individual experiences of the local world to the wider connections that mixed urban societies sustain across many places.

My exploration of difference through the use of picturing is developed in this paper in three sections, focusing on *juxtaposition*, *collage* and *layering*:

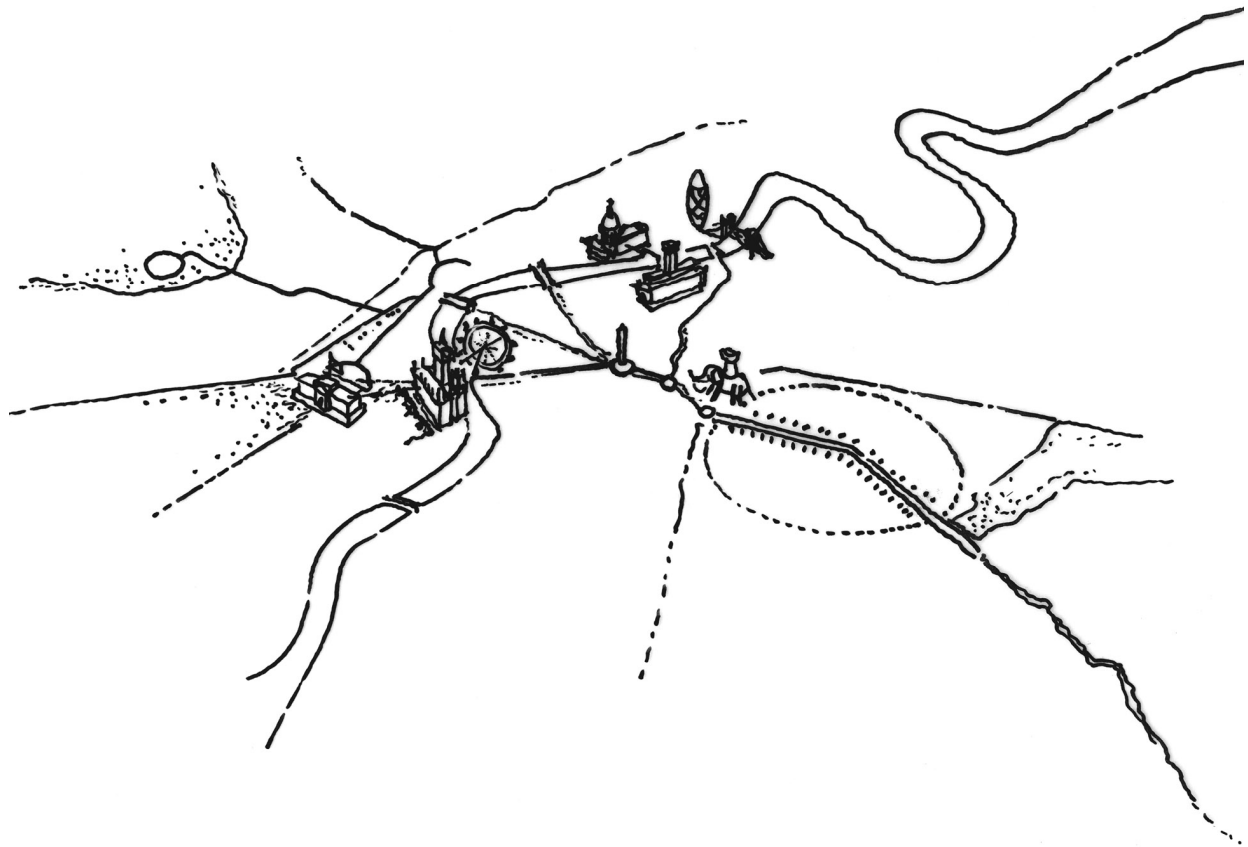
- *Juxtaposition*, as the relationship between apparently unlike conditions, to understand how the Walworth Road 'fits' between the global and local, and the urban centre and margin;
- *Collage*, as the overlap of cultures, viewed through the combinations of activities and spaces within the organisation of the small shops; and
- *Layering*, encapsulates how space is differentiated by patterns of use, including fluctuations across the times of day, and public and private layering of space.

## Juxtaposition

*Juxtapose*: 'to place two or more things together, especially in order to suggest a link between them or to emphasise the contrast between them.' (Encarta Dictionary, 2008)

How do we conceptualise difference in the context of a dynamic and disparate global world? In Sassen's (2001) analysis of 'a new geography of centres and margins', she argues for an understanding of place as the localisation of global processes, or the local relationships between place, practice and production in the organisation of the global economy. She identifies both the centrality of the global city, as well as a juxtaposition of prestigious and marginal spaces within the city, evidenced in the stratification of people, urban economies and places. While global cities concentrate these contrasts, Sassen's emphasis on localisation shifts the framing of 'otherness' (as immigration or ethnicity, for example) to 'newness'. Here the urban margins and its work environments, including places like the Walworth Road, represent spaces where a diverse collection of entrepreneurial and social skills intersect, and where new urban cultures potentially emerge.

The methodological importance of juxtaposition lies in exploring the relationship between unlike conditions, such as global and local, centre and margin or insider and outsider, to understand the connections between them. The Walworth Road occupies a peculiar urban geography – a place from which one can hear the chimes of Big Ben, but which remains distinct from the perceived centre of London, signified by the symbolic prominence of spiritual, cultural and economic landmarks like St. Paul’s Cathedral, Tate Modern or the ‘Gherkin’ (30 St. Mary’s Axe) respectively. Not unlike Patrick Wright’s (1991) description of the ordinariness of Dalston Lane, or Doreen Massey’s (1994) account of the assorted intersections of cultures on Kilburn High Road, these everyday streets broadly share a particular symbolic relationship to London: both a physical proximity to it and a cultural separation from it. Although the Walworth Road provides a direct physical connection to the centre and its prestigious landscape represented by the symbolic prominence of its landmarks (figure 1), its cultural resonance remains more local. Such landmarks are rendered less visible to the passerby, as they generally acquire local value through habitual use, and include the East Street Market, pubs, various eating establishments, and a scattering of formal public spaces like the Newington Library, and the Clubland Methodist Church.



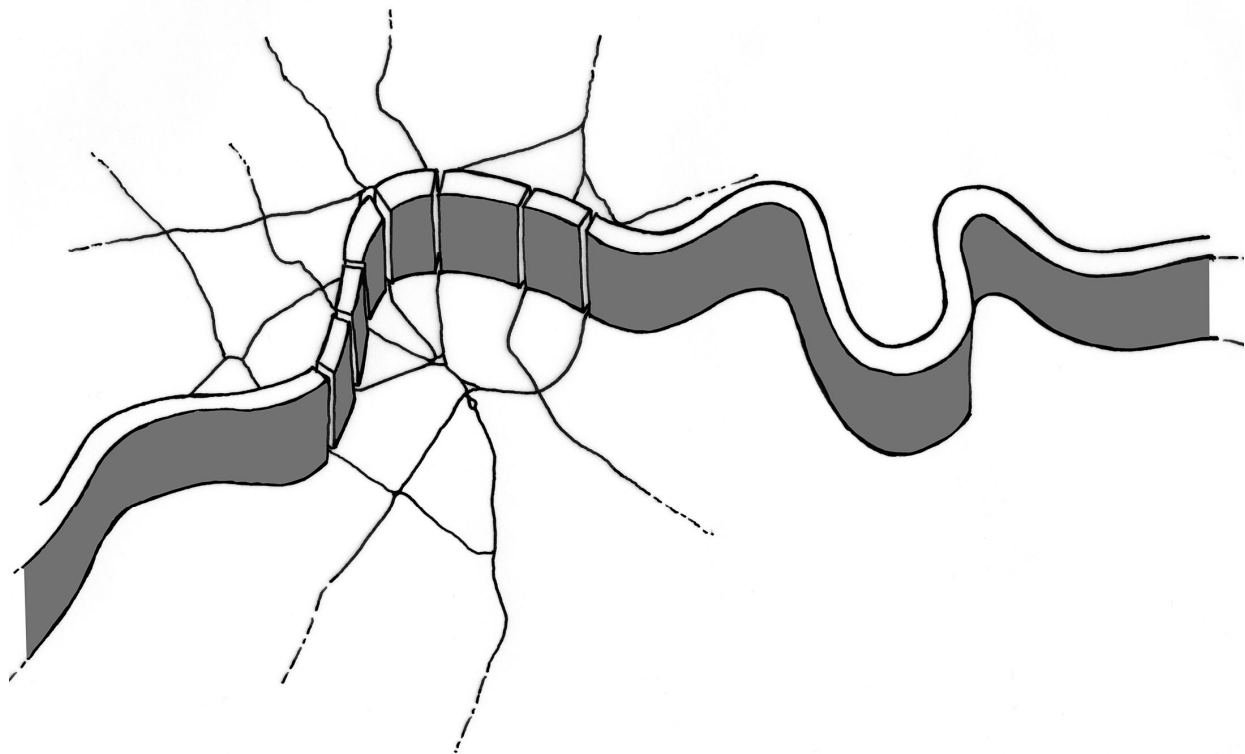
*Figure 1. The juxtaposition of centres and margins: Walworth Road in relation to the symbolic landscape of central London (Fieldwork drawing, 2006)*

My ethnographic data from the Walworth Road revealed the reoccurrence of symbolic boundaries as a way of distinguishing between places, in particular the London to the north and south of the River Thames. Many of the local residents I talked with described themselves as, ‘South Londoners’, and used descriptions such as, ‘I’m a South London person’ or, ‘My grandfather was a Peckham person’. These narratives incorporated not only ways of life associated with particular places, but also a sense of separation from other places. John<sup>2</sup>, who is between forty and fifty, grew up in Peckham and now lives in

Camberwell, to the south of the Walworth Road. He describes himself as, ‘a local council tenant and historian’, and writes on topics including the Black history of Southwark and Black British film. He describes the day when he joined the National Film Theatre at the age of sixteen:

So when I joined the National Film Theatre, it was this middle-class place on South Bank – Festival Hall, National Theatre and all that. And to me it was, like, not so much for my father, but for my mother, it’s like she’s going to lose me. And metaphorically she did. Because once I had joined that place, but...and I never forgot she stood at the window and watched me walk to the bus stop. I think she was still probably standing there waiting for me to come home. But I was only going up the road to the National Film Theatre...she had the strange feeling that her son...But it was a big thing for a kid from a working-class family, from a council estate, to make that leap and it was a leap, a big leap. (Interview, 05.02.2007)

During the course of my fieldwork on the street, I ventured into the archives at the Southwark Local History Library, and by juxtaposing archival data and street data, I could relate both the impact and the traces of how economic, political, social and spatial boundaries had been authorised over periods of time (figure 2). Historic maps of the growth of Walworth in relation to London (see for example Roque, 1769; Greenwood, 1824) marked the distinctions in the political and economic investment in London to the north, with the comparatively underdeveloped south. Parish Council records showed the historic prevalence of poverty in Walworth and included surveys of the poor and administration of welfare, such as the operation of a number of Workhouses in and around Walworth up until the 1900s. This data together with the limited number of available oral histories (Parker, 1983; Carter, 1985; Dallimore, 1995), all pointed to the construction and experience of a symbolic spatial landscape in which differences in income, class and ultimately culture were inscribed in space and re-inscribed in memories, perceptions and practices.



*Figure 2. The symbolic boundary between north and south London: Walworth Road leading to the Elephant and Castle, and the Westminster, Waterloo, Blackfairs and London bridges (Fieldwork drawing, 2008)*

During the course of my fieldwork, most particularly during the intense periods of observation, I came to think of the Walworth Road as a social and spatial labyrinth, the complexity of which was initially obscured by my first impressions of its visual appearance. The density of networks and connections, legitimate and illicit ways of being, entrepreneurial pursuits and the ongoing maintenance of a plethora of daily routines all happened behind the layer of what was apparent at first glance. While these vital invisibilities are often obscured in any social space, they seemed increasingly significant for reaching an understanding of the Walworth Road, since its visual legibility was without the dominant repertoire of flagship stores, high street brand-names, or recognisable public spaces. On the basis of visual recognition or lack thereof, it is probably easy to overlook or stereotype streets like the Walworth Road without understanding its local, urban and global roles. In spite of my ethnographic focus on individuals and small spaces, I found it necessary to juxtapose the Walworth Road with the city and with its relationship between north and south London. I also aligned a map of the street with a map of the world, to trace the origins and journeys between the shop along the street and the proprietors' links to other local worlds across global space.



*Figure 3. The juxtaposition of global and local: A map of Walworth Road aligned with a map of the world, showing the origins and journeys of the independent shop owners (Fieldwork drawing, 2006)*

Figure 3 is a picture of that connects the origins of the independent shop owners to their respective shop units along the mile length of the Walworth Road. This image emerged after a face-to-face survey that a colleague and I undertook a few months into my fieldwork in 2006. We spent two weeks walking the Walworth Road, and we recorded every unit along the street. We stepped into each independent shop to explain our task, and to ask three short questions of the respective proprietors: ‘How long has this shop been on the Walworth Road?’; ‘Is the shop owned or rented?’; and ‘What is the country that you were born in?’. Of the three questions, the one least readily answered related to ownership. To my surprise, a reluctance to answer any of the questions occurred in only a few cases, where either the proprietor was away or too busy, and declined to answer. In most instances, the proprietor, a family member or an associate was available, and we generally had a five-minute period of grace in which to interrupt the entrepreneurial rhythm.

From this initial survey we learnt that there were a total of 227 units along the mile length of the street. While these units were predominantly retail, they included a scattering of public buildings and services, such as the Newington Public Library, the Cumings Museum and the Walworth Clinic. Most shop fronts ranged from approximately 4.5 metres wide for a single unit, to approximately 9 meters for a double unit, indicating the comparatively small scale and density of the units that make up this retail strip. Over 60 per cent of the retail units were independent shops: they neither belonged to a chain nor franchise, and in most cases during our survey the proprietor was directly engaged in the shop activities. We also learnt that of the 133 independent shops, there were over 20 different countries of origin amongst the proprietors, with no single place of origin predominating.

The image of our survey intentionally juxtaposed the map of the Walworth Road with the map of the World, in order to emphasise the connections between people and places. Each of the proprietors' shop units on the Walworth Road was linked to her or his place of birth. Looking back on the image after the fieldwork period, a number of different relationships seem more evident within this representation. I now see an image of classification, driven perhaps by too much of a concern for where people have come from. The more crucial research question ties to how proprietors' origins or understandings of space, social etiquette and entrepreneurial skill merge with their lives within their respective places of work. A map of the former British Empire is also evident, reflected in the high proportion of the proprietors' countries of origin being former colonies of Britain.

Because this image has flattened out different time periods to equate to the present, it represents a singular moment, and questions around the speed and scale of change, and what impetus these have on experiences of change are not directly prompted. The combined maps relate the 'third world' or 'developing world' to the Walworth Road, and ties places in Africa, the Middle East and the east to microcosms on this London street. While South America would have featured prominently on this map should I have stretched the survey to include the Elephant and Castle proprietors, North America and Western Europe are largely absent from the pin-point origins marked on this world map. This provokes questions of not only why certain individuals and groups end up in or go to certain places in the city, but why they might remain there over long periods of time.

The confluence of origins, colonial pasts and disparate global development are some of the historic and contemporary themes of migration and diaspora that I began to see when I focused on the places identified on the two maps. However, pin-pointing fulfils only one convention of map-reading, and involves locating and orienting oneself by finding markers or places on a map. If we were to read the map like a traveller, then our attention would shift to the distance between places, and the journey needed to undertake a particular route. By shifting focus to the plethora of orthogonal lines that criss-cross between the map of the Walworth Road and the world, questions emerge as to how these multiple crossings and connections of people are experienced. How do people manage their journeys between familiar and unfamiliar worlds, and develop their lives and aspirations across these global and local 'scapes'? To focus on what kind of place and what kind of sociability emerges from these dense intersections of difference on the Walworth Road is to explore the in-between: the process of crossing; the convergence at the shared spaces of intersection; and the effort and imagination required to travel across geographic and temporal distance and personal familiarity.



Although figures 1, 2 and 3 emerged out of ethnographic and survey work, they are ultimately the hand of the author. The associated risk is that the drawings remain as emblematic or positivistic representations of space: where images symbolise rather than actualise how individuals connect their local world to the city and the world. However, in my discussion of figure 3, I have tried to reveal how picturing – both the process of making the picture and the process of looking at it subsequently – raises research questions and reveals research limitations. Pictures or more precisely picturing, is therefore an analytic tool more than a final form of representation. In the following section on ‘Collage’, I work with photographs of the street to explore how this different visual process and format informs the research process.

## Collage

*Collage: ‘the art of making pictures by sticking cloth, pieces of paper, photographs, and other objects onto a surface; a combination of different things.’* (Encarta Dictionary, 2008)

Bhabha (2004[1994]) focuses on the city as a place of intensive gathering and an accumulation of difference, but his emphasis is the post-colonial processes of migration and diaspora. He, like Sassen, stresses the significance of the margin or border and the role of migrants and minorities in developing different ways of belonging in civil society, but where Sassen highlights the role of place, Bhabha points to the value of voice. The cultural role of narration or individual stories is revealed both through the expression of ‘personhood’ as well as the exchange of ideas. My methodological challenge was to find ways of looking at and showing these different voices and expressions of cultural overlap. One expression of voice is display, and in this section I explore the role of spatial display in how proprietors express both cultural difference and convergence. Sandhu’s (2004) analysis of how Black and Asian writers have imagined London makes valuable connections between city space, experience and forms of expression. He describes the mixed terrains in which these authors were working as the ‘less-exalted’ parts of the city, and emphasises how much of the social life within these worlds was ‘tucked away’. From this urban context he links mixed ways of life to composite representations of life, through modes of collecting, combining, mixing and layering, ‘juxtaposition and collage are the ideal aesthetic modes for incarnating this higgledy-piggledy commotion of a metropolis.’ (2004, p. 259).

I explore the idea of hybrid space, both through how shop spaces along the Walworth Road are collaged through the applied skill of their respective proprietors, as well as the collage as a method of representing these mixed spaces. It would be misleading to isolate the space of the small, independent shops along the Walworth Road from the street, just as it would be simplistic to separate out the shops from other adjacent uses. Here street life is an amalgamation of formal public life within institutional buildings like the library and churches, informal public life on the pavement and related shop interiors. What serves to distinguish the spatial aspect of the shop from these other formal and informal spaces, and hence its distinctive forms of social life, is that it sits between a public and private realm, a space in-between the life on the street and the life in the domestic interiors above the line of shops. The vitality of the small independent shop although privately owned or rented space, depends on engagement with a passing public for its survival. The proprietor uses visual and spatial displays to articulate their shop spaces: imagination and acumen are employed in attracting a customer base; and personal identity is asserted in the place of work.

The visual arrangement of shop signage and shop front and the flow into the spatial arrangement of public and personal items within the shop, distinguishes each shop. In few cases, the merchandise or brand was the most prominent expression of the space, where the arrangement of items was contrived primarily to effect purchase; an organisation of retail space by item-to-shelf sequence and a product-oriented shop identity. In many other cases, shop identity took on a combination of explicitly cultural and personal identities. In one Halal butchery and convenience shop for example, the space was divided into two areas, the first, closest to the street, included general food products and the meat counter, while the second space, further from the street, stocked food goods more oriented to North African and Muslim customers. In this second space were pictures of Mecca and a small prayer area.

The proprietor who had recently come from Sudan, promoted his primary public display, or his street frontage, through signage in both Arabic and English, using a selection of words aimed at including a wide customer base, '*Absar Food Store. Halal butchers and Grocery. Afro Caribbean and Mediterranean Fresh Fruit and Veg*'. Other shop signage along the Walworth Road also represented a similar desire to reach a diverse customer base, sometimes expressed with humour such as, '*Mixed Blessings Bakery. West Indian and English Bread*'. Cultural amalgamation was not the only mode of hybridity that these signs represented, and signage such as, '*Roze and Lawanson Nigerian Market. Money Transfer. Wedding Garments*', and, '*Afroworld Food Store. Cosmetics, wigs and fruit and veg*' alluded to the combinations of merchandise and services offered within these independent shops (figure 4).

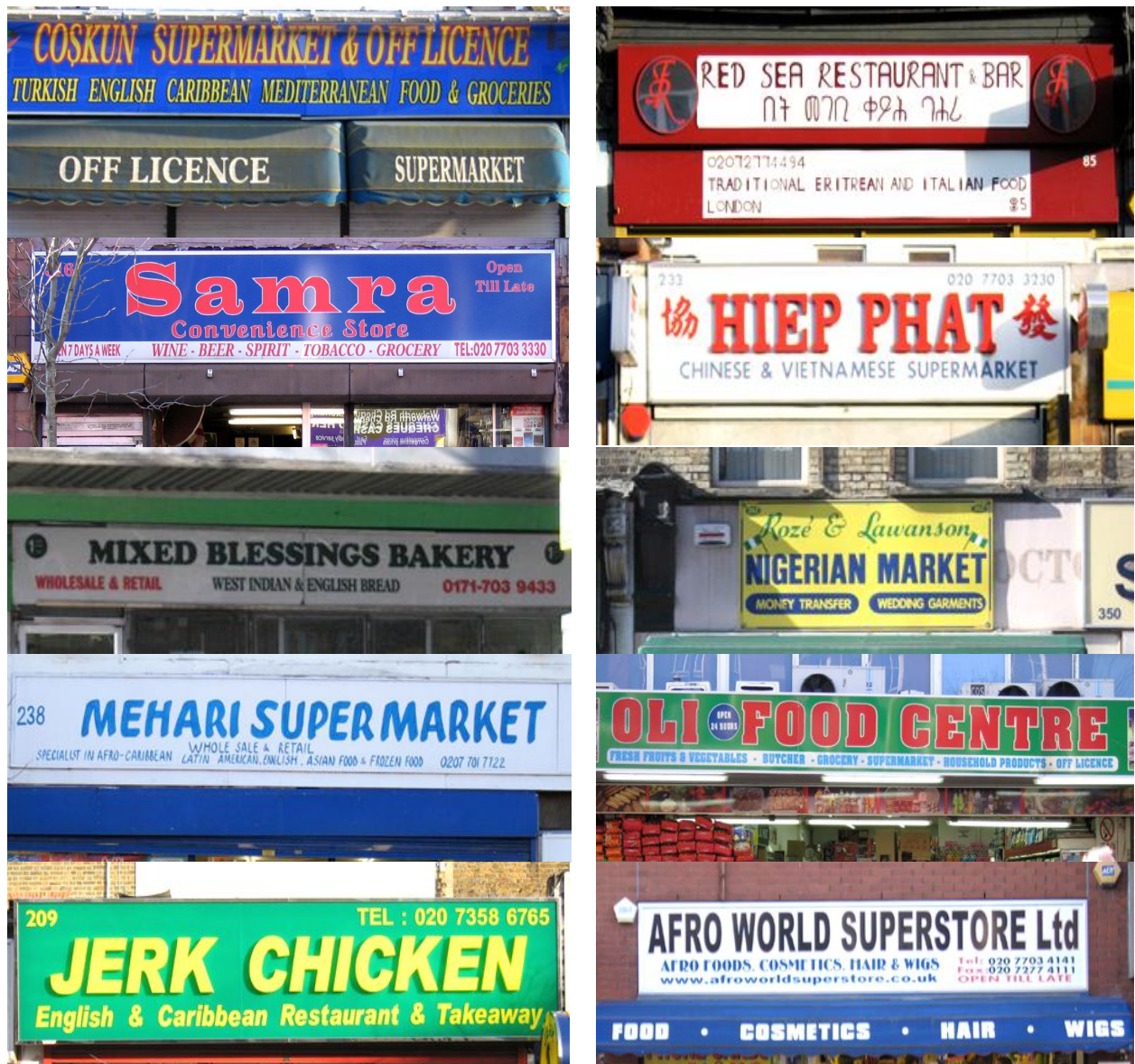


Figure 4. A collage of the hybrid shops signs on the Walworth Road (Fieldwork images, 2008)

Research pictures that were made from a collage of street images (figure 5) became an important tool for showing the range of shops along the Walworth Road. From a use and activity perspective, there was a predominance of food shops along the Walworth Road, both of the retail and restaurant type. Cheap merchandise, most evidently clothing was the second most prominent form of retail, followed by assortments of inexpensive household goods including charity shops. There were also a number of jewellery and pawnshops. Since the period of my survey in 2006, there was a distinctive increase in shops dealing in beauty products, particularly in hair and nail products and services.

Food retail



Food services



Clothing



Beauty



Bargains



Figure 5. A collage of a range of retail groupings on the Walworth Road (Fieldwork images, 2008)

What remained consistently apparent during my research period was the spatial pattern of a retail street lined with small-scale increments of retail space, generally of narrow frontage, always limited to the ground floor, and with a spatial arrangement of identity revealed in the items and sequence of display. Significantly, this spatial pattern could be understood as a basic framework for subjectivity, a pattern in which proprietors along this street were spatially confined by the dimensions of the shop and the interface to the street, but where there was also the opportunity for visual expression and spatial engagement in the street society in which they are active citizens.

From a methodological standpoint, the visual photographic surveys that I conducted and subsequently arranged through collage, only broadly outlined the range of social relationships

between proprietors and customers across the spectrum of the street. In the process of walking the Walworth Road, with a camera in hand, I became more aware of the use of visual and spatial display as key avenues through which the proprietor could both engage and attract a customer base, as well as express individual and collective identity. However the depth and substance of social interactions between customers and proprietors within the shop spaces escaped the format of the visual survey. Similarly, the intricacies of social contact were only partially suggested in the informal interviews that I held with eight of the proprietors of the independent shops. These interviews were structured through a limited number of opening questions such as 'When did you first come to the Walworth Road?', and served to highlight the significance of personal service in sustaining a customer base, stressed by these proprietors. However, researching social interaction through its dimensions of regularity, repetition and face-to-face encounters, called for more in-depth ethnographic exploration that depended on sustained observation over long time-periods.

## Layering

*Layer*: 'to apply or arrange things in overlapping sections.' (Encarta Dictionary, 2008)

While involved in a visual and verbal survey of the independent shops along the Walworth Road, I undertook an ethnographic exploration of two of the small independent shops along the street: Nick's Caff and Reyd's Bespoke Tailor shop. I explored how to picture these spaces to reveal how interactions occurred within the layers of time and space. In this paper, I focus only on Nick's Caff. The Caff was a small meeting place off the Walworth Road, where I could watch how individuals and groups appropriated space through their different patterns of use across the times of day.

The emergence of the London Caff<sup>3</sup> required the symbiosis of at least two cultures to forge its qualities for a particular kind of meeting and eating in the city: the initiation of a casual and affordable eating establishment brought largely by Italian immigrants to London in the 1950s; and the take-up of a local, sociable place by the working-class to eat home-cooked food away from home (Heathcoate, 2004). The London Caff has emerged across cultural imaginations, and across the Formica tables and accompaniments of malt vinegar and brown sauce, it has come to include other immigrant and minority groups, including Greek, Turkish and Cypriot proprietors, and customers from a changing working-class, and from changing local areas. While the loss of public space as places for different people to engage beyond a visual encounter features prominently in writings about the contemporary western city (Sennett, 1992[1977]; 1996), others have pointed to the meeting between cultures away from overt public spaces, to the smaller spaces of regular engagement, including schools, workplaces and youth clubs (Amin, 2002). It is in these interstitial spaces, neither overtly public nor private, Bhabha argues, that inter-cultural social life can be experienced.

To relegate Nick's Caff solely to the status of an eating establishment would be to overlook its significant role as a local meeting place, situated between the public street and his family's home above the shop. The Caff provides a base to consider the complexities of how different people belong by coming together in the city; it is a local place that born-and-bred locals and a range of newcomers use on a regular basis and its sociability extends from the solidarity of an extended family of relatives and friends, to the singular practices of diverse individuals. The Caff is a fairly old fashioned interior, and feels almost as if one is stepping into the 1960s, when Nick's Dad first bought the Caff and named it '*The Istanbul*'. There are 16 tables comprised of four unequal rows and a clear designation, through routine and

preference, of who uses which table. Family and regulars sit up front furthest from the street, while people who come to the Caff for a meal or company, but prefer less engagement, tend to sit at the sides. This is generally where I sit, with my back to the street so that I have a full view of the Caff but from where, behind my book or cup of coffee, I feel less conspicuous.

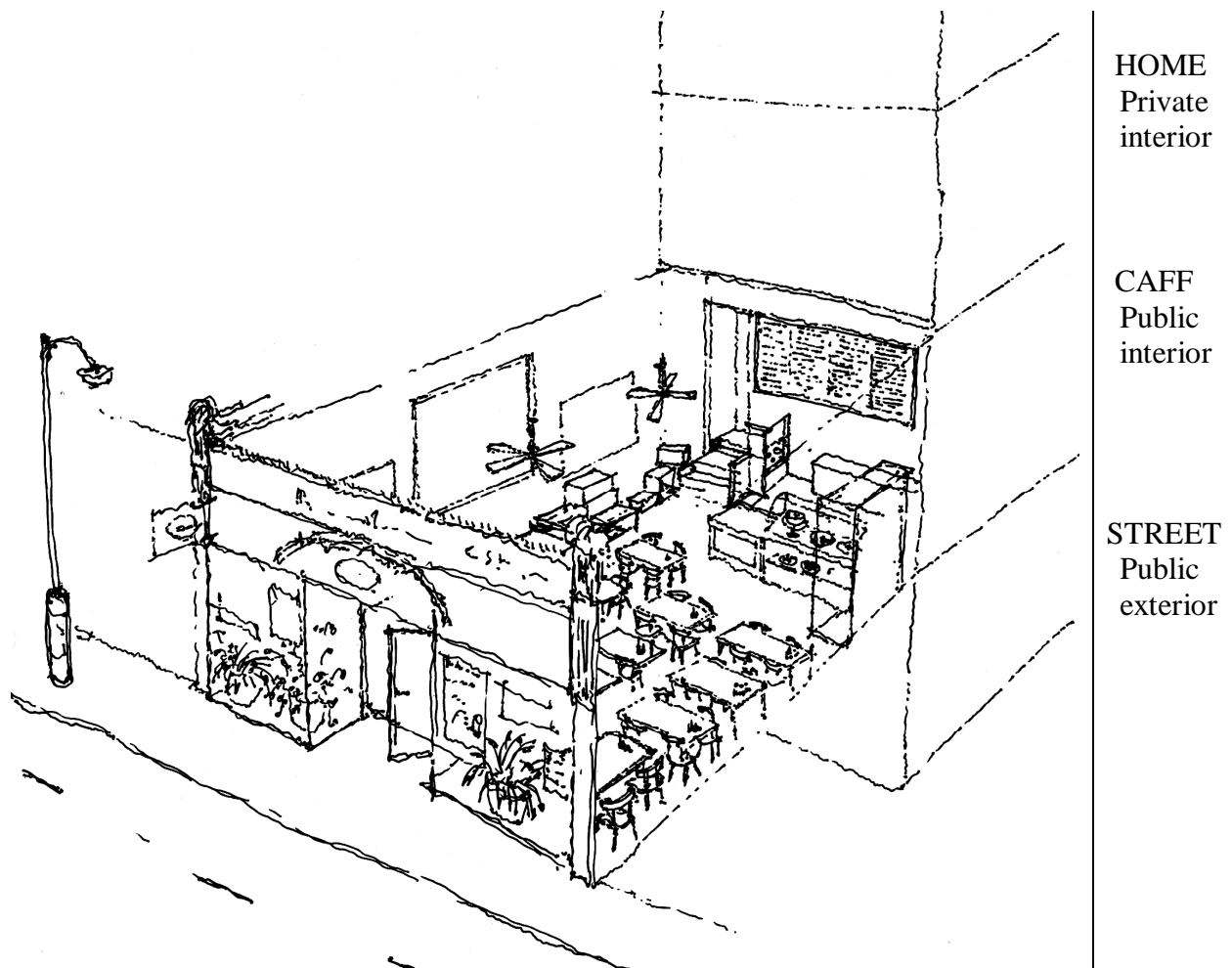
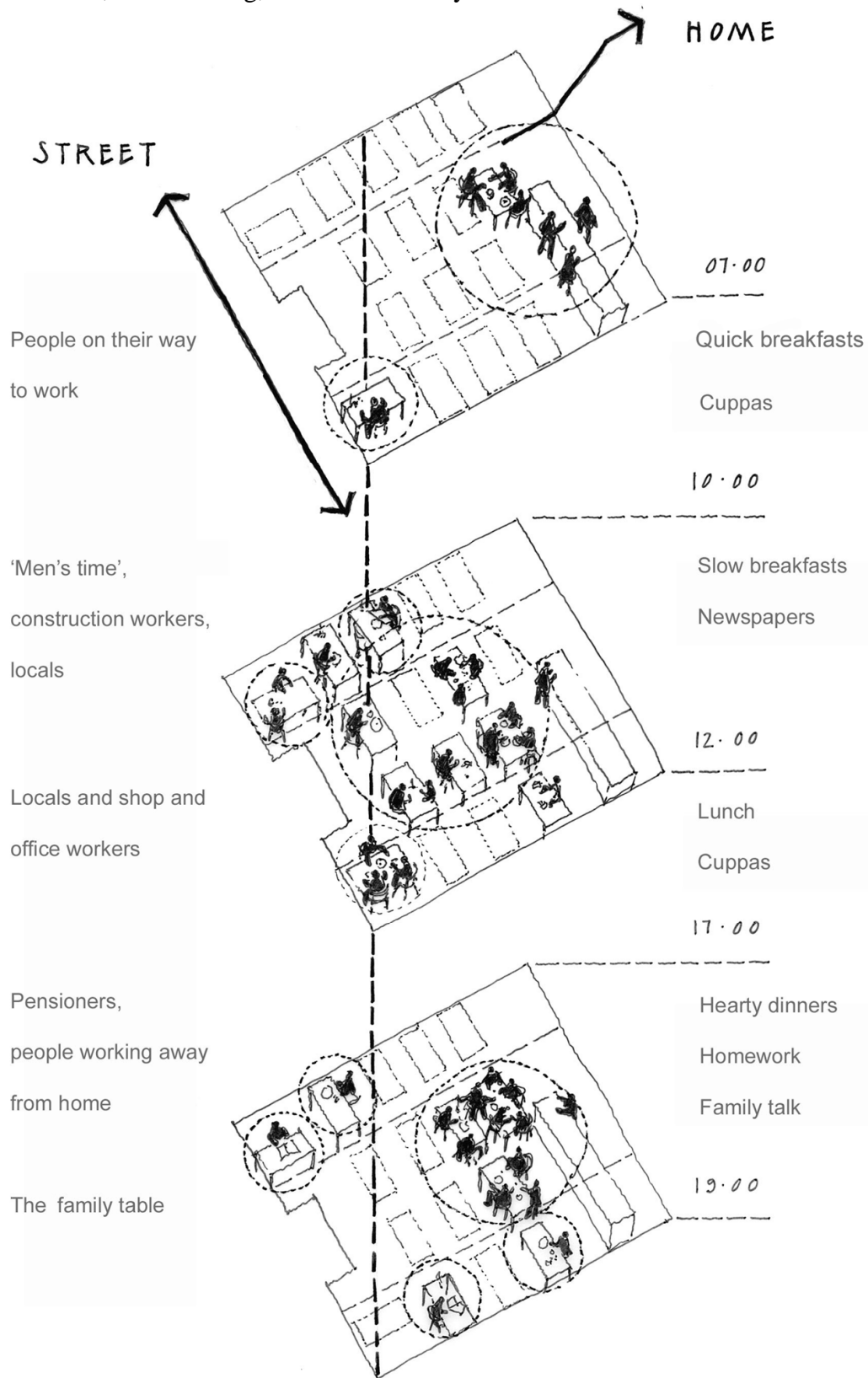


Figure 6. 'Nick's Caff', a space between the street and the home above the shop (Fieldwork drawing, 2007)

The Caff opened by 7:00 in the morning and closed approximately twelve hours later. It was open seven days a week, closing earlier on Sundays before lunch. The combination of regular opening and extended open hours provided a local place that was consistently available to its customers. The rhythm of the Caff across the day brought moments of intensity and relative quiet, a fluctuation in the space in its peak periods compared with its quieter moments (figure 7). The first customers of the weekday were generally those on their way to work, either stopping in briefly for a takeaway or a quick breakfast at a table. Around 10:00 the Caff begins to fill, mostly with construction workers off sites in the area as well people from local workshops and small industries. Lunchtime introduced the third set of regulars, workers from local offices, shops and institutions. The frenzy subsided after lunch, and the odd person popped in for tea and late lunch or early dinner. Local shop workers came in and out during the day. Around 5:00 in the evening, the daily evening regulars settled in around the two family tables upfront. They sat there until Nick and Dorah closed up around 7:30. Aside from Nick and Dorah's family, this group also included Sonja, who was born and grew up in

Walworth, and Sonja's daughter and grandson who sometimes hauled his homework out onto the table, as if an extension of his home. Mike often strolled across from his flat in the sheltered housing for the elderly, accommodation that Nick helped him to secure. He regularly joined this extended 'family', dismissing the people at the sheltered housing with an irritated flick, and asserting, 'This is where my friends are.'



*Figure 7. The layers of time and activity in Nick's Caff. Difference is accommodated in rhythms of time across the day as well as patterns of use. (Fieldwork drawing, 2008)*

Aside from the regular groups who used the Caff, there were individuals who frequented the Caff as part of their weekly routine. People on piece work away from home, like Dave, used the Caff periodically when they worked in London, where they could be assured of a home-cooked meal and the familiar comforts of a traditional Caff. Pensioners also had their regular slots, many would come in the morning for a cup of tea, others in for a hot meal at lunch or dinner time. Mark, who was self-employed and a confessed late riser, generally came in around 11:00, read a paper, did a bit of business, and ordered his regular cooked breakfast. He mostly sat on his own at a side table facing the street. He told me that the Caff was the place, 'where I do my thinking.' Hinga, who left Sierra Leone 12 years ago, started coming to the Caff during my fieldwork. He quietly slipped into the Caff at the same time most mornings and sat upfront, close to Nick. He ordered the same items on the menu, tea and toast, never really making eye contact, but glancing up to watch the telly and occasionally talked to Nick. Hinga did not partake in any of the general conversations, and he did not conform to any particular groups in the Caff. But Nick's was one of Hinga's local places and he reserved his place through the regular act of sitting.

The positions of the tables, the defined area of the table as a personal space, and the fluctuating use of the space throughout the rhythm of the day, defined personal territories within the larger space of the Caff. Through these smaller terrains it was possible to belong differently: either without explicit interaction, or with talk limited across the table, or by joining in with larger conversations across tables. In Nick's Caff sitting was a social process tied to a local place, where regularity was an important dimension of a basic mode of belonging. Many customers claimed this belonging through regular time and place; sitting in the Caff more or less at the same time and mostly in the same place. A further critical dimension of 'caff time' was the possibility of taking your time. Mustafa, a local pensioner, described this underlying informality at Nick's Caff, 'Caffs are better than restaurants. Restaurants are very formal. You can take time, eat, have a cigarette. Restaurants you got to eat your food and get out.' Key to its appropriation by its customers, the Caff was a place to go to regularly, either spontaneously or as part of a routine. It was a place where you could do nothing much without any sense of being moved on; there was no required purpose for being there. One may go through the formality of ordering a cup of tea for 50p, but more importantly the Caff was a space where you can spend time and take your time.

## Conclusions

What do we learn about difference from a differentiated view of people and place? Does the process of picturing - of seeing and forming a picture - assist in understanding and representing differentiated views? Fine-grained approaches like anthropology or ethnography potentially serve to re-examine the category or stereotype. But to know how difference occurs, where it emerges, and how it is celebrated or suppressed, the researcher of local worlds and everyday microcosms must traverse across time and place, making connections between individuals and their immediate lives, to the places and processes that constitute the urban margin, or streets such as the Walworth Road. My method for exploring difference and the differentiated view in this paper is to picture both the essence and complexity of local relationships. Juxtaposition, collage and layering when combined with ethnography, calls for following individual routines, rhythms and modes across the increment of tables space, to shop spaces, the street, the neighbourhood and the city. Because of the analytic techniques of



alignment, mixing and overlapping, the pictures that emerge tend to be composite – they tend towards differentiated views of life on the Walworth Road.

Undoubtedly, my ways of seeing that I had developed as an architect, accompanied me on what has largely been a journey into a new way of looking – the ethnographic view. Throughout my research process I have both consciously and inadvertently combined these different ways of exploring and understanding difference, focusing on how difference manifests in its joint social and spatial dimensions. This paper has set about reviewing composite pictures made as one way of exploring how to find out about and communicate difference. The pictures presented in this paper have emerged out of different research processes – the verbal and visual survey, the semi-structured interview and regular and sustained observation. While I argue for the analytic value of combining different methods to understand the varying expressions of difference, ethnography remains a powerful method for reaching the subtlety and intricacy of social contact within small shop interiors off the street. In working with a process of picturing, I hope to have avoided a representation of norms, classifications and stereotypes, since the multi-ethnic street I have come to know is layered with multiple and complex spaces and interactions. I am mindful that images can serve to limit or direct interpretation, by overtly presenting a chosen or mediated view. Where I think pictures or drawings made during research may be most useful, is when they reveal a process of thinking or analysis, rather than presenting a singular conclusion. Pictures have the capacity to create interpretive space between the writer and the reader, by raising questions and by revealing varied and contingent forms of social expression.

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## About the Author

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> This paper has developed out of two student-led initiatives. The first is a citiesLAB workshop on *Researching the social and spatial life of the city* from which a working paper 'Visualising difference: picturing a multi-ethnic street' was developed. The second is the SOAS conference on *Exploring and Expanding the Boundaries of Research Methods*, which allowed a critical distance for me to develop and expand on my earlier working paper.

<sup>2</sup> In line with the ethnographic practice of anonymity, names of individuals as well as individual shop names have been changed.

<sup>3</sup> 'Caff' is a word that emerged from slang or colloquial language for the working-class eating establishments that came to the fore in the 1950s. It is an establishment similar but different to the European café and the American cafeteria.