

**What is food without love? The micro-politics of food practices in South Asians in Britain, India and Pakistan**

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***What is food without love? The micro-politics of food practices in South  
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This paper draws on Morgan's theory of family life consisting of the political, moral and emotional economies (Morgan 2001) to examine the interplay of women's control over resources, gender norms and intimacy expectations in the context of household food consumption. This research focuses on the findings from 84 interviews with two South Asian groups: Pakistani Muslim and Gujarati Hindu women with at least one dependent child and representing a variety of occupations and household compositions. Examining everyday food consumption, the research demonstrates how gender hierarchies are reproduced by parallel, reinforcing political, moral and emotional economies. Gender inequalities in these three economies may produce a struggle for women to subvert oppression and negotiate more powerful positions within the household through food management, by employing manipulative and deceptive tactics. The paper argues that women's access to economic resources alone is not sufficient for achieving desirable food and nutritional outcomes: the interplay of resources, gender norms and conjugal relations are central to household food consumption.

Key words: Food, power, gender, resources, intimacy, migration, ethnicity, Pakistan, India, Britain,

## **Man Killed Wife for Making Vegetarian Dinner: Prosecutors New York Times**

'A Pakistani immigrant beat his wife to death in their Brooklyn home after she made the mistake of cooking him lentils for dinner instead of the hearty meal of goat meat that he craved, according to court papers. Noor Hussain, 75, was so outraged over the vegetarian fare that he pummeled his wife, Nazar Hussain, 66, with a stick until she was a "bloody mess" ....' (New York Times, 2014).

Noor Hussein, dubbed 'the Lentil killer' in the media, was sentenced to 18 years for killing his wife (New York Daily News, 2014). The horrific murder of Nazar Hussein reveals the intimate relationship between food, gender and power, as highlighted by feminist and food scholars (Adams 1990, 2010; Appadurai 1981; Counihan 1999; Douglas 1972). Adams's influential work on the sexual politics of meat demonstrated the links between meat eating and patriarchal values (1990; 2010). She argued, 'men who batter women have often used the absence of meat as a pretext for violence against women' (2010, p. 62). What killed Nazar Hussein then was not her husband's dislike of lentils, but the position of power and control over his wife that he enjoyed, arising from systematic gender inequalities implicit in the structure of marriage. However, women are not just passive players in the area of food consumption: they can be tactical in how they negotiate their power through food, by resisting traditional gender role expectations, rejecting food chores or embracing domestic femininity on their own terms (Counihan 1999; Gilbertson 2014; Mills 2010).

Though some work has examined food consumption in families from the perspective of access to resources (Brannen and Wilson 1987; Ramchandran 2006; Quisumbing 2003), a comparative work examining household food consumption across different classes and ethnicities in an international context is conspicuous by its absence. Such comparisons can

illuminate the role of context and culture and inform understandings of household food consumption in a global context. Pakistani Muslim and Gujarati Hindu groups have some significant cultural and experiential similarities, such as gender and intergenerational norms and the practice of transnational marriages. However, there are differences in socio-economic trajectories, especially in the arenas of women's employment and religion, which make a case for comparative work. Further, there is wider literature in the realm of South Asian household food consumption exploring the link between gender and household resources (for example see Ramachandran 2006; Rao 2006); the gendered nature of household food practices (for example see Charsely 2005; Harriss 2008; Ludwig et al. 2011); as well as some research examining gender, food and intimacy (for example Davashayam 2008; Snell-Rood 2015). Although recent research has started to explore the link between conjugal relations and food consumption (for example see Gilbertson 2014); there appear to be few studies that have considered the role of broader inequalities in power relations, as reflected through all three structural sources of differentiation: resource allocations, gender norms and marital roles. This paper engages with these structural inequalities in shaping household power dynamics, and considers the use of food as one of the most potent expressions of these. The data for this paper is drawn from in-depth interviews conducted with two groups of South Asian women: Pakistani and Hindu Gujarati women in Britain, India and Pakistan. Drawing on Morgan's theory of family life consisting of the political, moral and emotional economies (Morgan 2001) this paper aims to examine the interplay of women's control over resources, gender norms and intimacy expectations in the context of household food consumption.

### **'Three economies': political, moral and emotional economies in Gujarati and Pakistani families**

Morgan's (2001: pp. 232–3) theory posits three economies of family life: the political economy (the allocation of resources), the moral economy (day-to-day family living) and the emotional economy (feelings and emotions). Although helpful in exploring connections between resources, domestic labour and emotional intimacy in the context of food consumption, a more nuanced exploration is needed. This need is highlighted by Morgan's (2011) later reservations about collapsing the economic and the political into one category 'the political economy' (Morgan 2011). Here, Pahl's (2007) interpretation of Morgan's analysis of family life is helpful. She has extended Morgan's three economies distinction in planning an empirical research on sleep, showing how it can be applied to other areas of family life. Like sleep, where 'love and sharing are dominant practices', food practices are demonstrations of both love and conflict (Appadurai 1981; Burridge & Barker 2009; Charles and Kerr 1988; Pahl 2007). Thus in this paper, Morgan's three economies, with Pahl's interpretation and extension, provide a valuable approach for investigating household food practices. Morgan's theory, as it applies to South Asian food practices in South Asia and Britain, is detailed below.

### The political economy

'The political economy' deals with the allocation of resources (including time and effort) within the household and within the wider society. Consistent with the global picture, gender inequalities in control over household resources among South Asians remain significant in Britain, India and Pakistan. In Britain, minority ethnic women are not only poorer than white British women, but they also have lower individual incomes than men in the same ethnic groups, although significant between-group variations exist, particularly with regard to women's independent income through employment (Moosa and Woodroffe 2009; Nandi and Platt 2010; Nazroo and Kapadia 2013). Similarly, India, women's poorer economic status

than men at a micro as well as macro level is reflected across a range of indicators such as women's say in how their own earnings are used as well as the percentage of women having a bank account as compared to men (Kishor and Gupta 2009). In Pakistan, a significantly lower percentage of women (29% as compared to 98% of men) are employed, and only half of those employed made independent spending decisions (Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2012-13). Although the wider welfare contexts differ across all three country contexts, household resource allocation is commonly shaped by the global gender order (Connell 2002). For example, Jejeebhoy's and Sathar's (2001) research comparing women's autonomy across India and Pakistan suggests that women's access to and control over resources, as well as ability to make decisions are highly constrained in both countries despite the diverse socioeconomic and legal contexts. They conclude that the 'centrality of social institutions of gender within each community' is the main factor determining women's autonomy rather than there being a 'primacy of religion and nationality' (2001, p.708).

Evidence from both developing and developed countries suggests that men and women have different spending patterns and that expenditure on food is enhanced when mothers control resources (Blumberg 1988; Doss 2006; Kenney 2008; Pahl undated; Quisumbing 2003; Rao 2006). However, unlike studies done with largely white British families (e.g. Pahl 1989; Brannen and Wilson 1987; Bisdee et al. 2013; Burgoyne et al. 2007) there are few studies in the context of South Asians in Britain, that can uncover the mechanisms through which gendered spending patterns develop. Although a small number of studies have included South Asians, their samples are too small to provide meaningful conclusions (for example see Bisdee and colleagues 2013). Perhaps the first and one of the few studies to exclusively focus on the domestic finance among British South Asian households was that conducted by Bhopal (1999) in East London. Bhopal's study, although she does not consider expenditure on

food specifically, showed significant difference in organisation of household finances between white British and South Asian households. Similarly, research conducted in India by Singh and Bhandari (2012) shows two-way flows of money in multigenerational families which are specific to Indian culture and context. Existing limited research considering food budgets with a focus on South Asian households suggests that most women go to a considerable length to meet their food requirements. For example, Harriss (2008) in her research found that British Pakistani women prioritise food shopping, even in financial hardship, and employed a range of strategies such as cooking from raw ingredients for the optimal utilisation of food budgets. Research from India and Pakistan suggest a positive impact of access to resources through micro-credit, independent income and land rights on food related practices (Gaiha et al. 2009; Idrees et al. 2012; Ramchandran 2006; Rao 2006). Nonetheless, rich qualitative insights into the processes involved in such decision-making are missing.

### The moral economy

'The moral economy' describes the ways in which family members reflect upon and account for decisions that they have made in the course of day-to-day family living (Morgan 2001: pp. 232–3). Pahl (2007) has argued that the moral economy of family living could well be used to examine the norms which surround broader gender ideologies within households that are concerned with the roles and responsibilities of individuals.

As Pahl (2007, para 6.3) has argued 'different moralities can and do conflict'. More women from Pakistani and Gujarati backgrounds are working than ever before, and some are earning a higher income than their husbands (Kishor and Gupta 2009; PDHS, 2012-13). However, the majority of South Asian families in India, Pakistan and Britain hold traditional gender

role expectations where men are the primary wage earners and women are responsible for running the household (Ali 2012; Harriss 2008; Kishor and Gupta 2009; Salway et al. 2009). Therefore, despite women's economic contributions, preparing and serving food remains primarily women's responsibility which, if unfulfilled, can cause conflicts. For example, Ali (2011) found in Pakistan that if a woman failed to look after their house and prepare food it led to domestic disputes, regardless of their employment responsibilities. Similarly, Grover's (2006) work on marriage in a low-income neighbourhood in Delhi, India, revealed that men who approached a local NGO to resolve marital grievances complained about their wives' not performing their gender roles such as preparing food on time. In Britain, however, a slow change in gender ideologies with regard to food practices particularly is evident in recent research findings. For example, Salway et al. (2009) reported that several South Asian fathers took on the responsibilities of being the main carer and cooking for children and sometimes for the family, though some hid their involvement in these tasks from friends and family for the fear of ridicule. Similarly, Rawlins et al.'s (2012) study indicated a generational change among Indian families in Britain, where participants reported a more sharply gendered nature of cooking practices 'back home' than in Britain. They also reported fathers' involvement in the cooking, though it remained occasional, often as a 'treat' or due to children's demands.

However, alongside these shifting gender roles in domestic food preparation practices; gender ideologies are continually reworked and maintained through transnational marriages (Balzani 2010). Charsely (2005) in her work with migrant Pakistani husbands show that a wife not adjusting her cooking to her migrant husband's preferences may lead to anger and violence within the marriage due to the restructuring of the gender power relations.

## The emotional economy



'The emotional economy' is to do with the part played by feelings and emotions within family living. Pahl argues that if the emotional economy were to provide the framework for research on sleep, 'the bedroom would be a prime site for the emotional life of a couple, both in terms of positive and negative emotions' (2007, para 5.2). Following Pahl, if the emotional economy is relevant for examining household food practices, then the kitchen is the site for the display of intimacy and distance. Intimacy will be understood as quality of close connection between people and the process of building this quality (Jamieson 2012:11).

The research on food in South Asia, suggests that food can signal both 'intimacy and distance' and can be used to challenge existing hierarchies (Appadurai 1981; Nitcher 1981). Appadurai (1981) in his work with Tamil Brahmins in India demonstrates how food can be both the medium and message of conflicts between husband and wife. He postulates that those who control the cooking and serving can communicate their authority or resistance through food; for example, by reducing the number or quantity of food items or altering the serving or seating orders. This is also evidence in Nichter's (1981) work in South India, who argues that food is an 'idiom of distress' and contends that one may punish or withdraw love by not giving food when it is expected, as well as not accepting food when it is offered (1981, Note, p.403s, and see more latterly Snell-Rood 2015). Similarly, Donner's (2008) research based on work with married Bengali women in India shows that, by taking on vegetarianism, women who felt controlled by their husbands' families were able to carve out a niche for themselves. Scholarship on the South Asian diaspora has suggested similar relationship between food, kinship and intimacy (Davashayam 2008). For example, following Appadurai (1981 p.497), Davashayam argues that the Indian community in Malaysia continues to be the bastion of culinary orthodoxy (Davashayam 2008 p. 167). She argues that cooking and feeding husbands expresses the continuity of a wife's kinship with her husband. Creation of the

'affinal ties' between man and woman is achieved through gestures such as sharing food from the same plate, waiting on husbands and serving him (Davashayam 2008, p.165). She argues that cooking and feeding are ways to connect emotionally, and similarly, that not cooking or sharing meal is a sign of problems in the relationships (Davashayam 2008).

Further, recent research with Pakistani and Gujarati families in Britain, India and Pakistan suggests that intimacy expectations are changing in marriage (Qureshi et al. 2014; Ali 2012, Twamley 2012, 2013; Sandhya 2009; Palit 2013; Qadir et al. 2004). For example, Qureshi et al. (2014), in her work with British Pakistani families, found a lack of romantic love to be an important factor in marital instability. Twamley's work with Gujarati men and women in Britain and in Gujarat showed their desire for marriage to build on intimacy. However in Britain, Gujarati young people viewed marriage as building on existing sexual and emotional intimacy whereas in Gujarat, men and women felt that marriage leads to emotional intimacy and sex can follow on from marriage in a genuine loving relationship (Twamley 2013). Ali's (2012) work with Pakistani men and women demonstrated that people felt communication and understanding of each other's moods and preferences to be central to a successful marital relationship.

The above literature on resources, gender ideologies and intimacy in Gujarati and Pakistani families illuminates the complexity of household and the relationships they contain in the current globalised context.

## **METHODS**

This paper draws from a multi-site study examining the relationship between women's access to resources and household food consumption among two South Asian groups in India, Pakistan and Britain. As part of this study issues related to social and economic processes

underpinning household resource allocation, gender ideologies and marital relations were explored. The project focused on women with dependent children from Pakistani Muslim and Gujarati Hindu backgrounds in Britain; Pakistani Muslims in Pakistan (Karachi) and Gujarati Hindus in India (Ahmedabad). The study used the constructivist grounded theory approach which, 'consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in data themselves' (Charmaz 2006; p.2). This began with general research questions used to explore and build a theoretical analysis from what was discovered through research.

Women were recruited on the basis of self-identification of their race/ethnic categories while acknowledging multiplicity of experiences and a range of identities within the common definitions of ethnic 'groups' (Gunaratnam 2003; Modood 1988). They were recruited for in-depth interviews through community networks involving women's groups, community leaders and snowballing in Britain and India by the author. The major part of the recruitment in Pakistan took place with the help of a trained research assistant, using similar recruitment strategies as the author was denied permission to visit Pakistan due to the university policy at the time. The remaining respondents were identified through other contacts (accessed through word of mouth) of the author in Pakistan. The author and the research assistant communicated on an almost daily basis to ensure quality and comparability in data collection. Nine interviews in Sindhi were conducted by the research assistant and the remaining fourteen were conducted by the author, using video conferencing, except two interviews which were conducted face- to-face with women who were visiting UK from Pakistan. The overall quality and length of the Pakistani interviews were comparable with the British and Indian interviews.

A theoretical sampling approach which aims to refine the categories by sampling, to develop the properties of the categor(ies) (Charmaz 2006, p.96), guided the sampling. The overall sampling strategy was to achieve maximum sampling heterogeneity/variation (Charmaz 2006) with an aim to capture the full range of South Asian women's experiences and 'the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it' (Phoenix and Pattynama 2006:187). Women represented a range of socioeconomic status, defined broadly and encompassing education, income, occupation (type of employment including authority at work place and terms and conditions) and housing (ownership, type of property and neighbourhood). The women also represented a variety of household compositions (joint and nuclear), and migration histories. The final sample included: British Pakistani Muslims, both first and second generation (BPM, n= 23) and British Gujarati Hindus, both first and second generation (BGH, n=12) in Britain and Gujarati Hindus (GH, n=26) in Ahmedabad (India) and Pakistani Muslims (PM, n=23) in Karachi (Pakistan). As with Gujaratis, the initial plan was to focus on Sindhis as opposed to the broader category of Pakistani women, and although the vast majority of the Pakistani respondents are of Sindhi origin, some women from Punjabi and Kashmiri backgrounds have been included in Britain sample because the Sindhi diaspora in Britain is relatively small compared to that from Punjab and Kashmir, hence the use of broad category 'Pakistani'.

Table1. Demographic profile of the respondents

Categories*	<b>BPM</b>	<b>BGH</b>	<b>GH</b>	<b>PM</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Age</i>					
20-29	3	0	5	1	9
30-39	17	5	10	12	44
40-49	3	7	11	10	31

<b><i>Migrant status</i></b>					
UK/Karachi/Ahmedabad- born/migrated age <10 years	11	4	7	18	40
Migrated age >10 years	12	8	19	5	44
<b><i>Education</i></b>					
≤ GCSE/ O'level	8	1	6	15	30
A' level or equivalent	4	2	5	1	12
Degree or equivalent	11	9	15	7	42
<b><i>Occupation</i></b>					
Professional/managerial	6	6	6	4	22
Skilled/Clerical/Assistant	6	2	5	4	17
Manual	(2)**	1	5	6	12
Home makers	11	3	10	9	33
<b><i>Income categories</i></b>					
Low income	5	0	7	11	23
Lower middle income	8	2	6	4	20
Middle income	10	10	13	8	41
<b>Total respondents</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>84</b>

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*Note:*

\* For details on categorization, see the methods section.

\*\* These two women are doubly counted under homemakers, as per their current occupational status.

The fieldwork was conducted between 2013 and 2014 in Britain (Sheffield, Rotherham, Bradford and London), India (Ahmadabad, Gujarat) and Pakistan (Karachi), with interviews conducted in English, Urdu, Sindhi and Hindi. The interview guide was modified on an on-going basis to accommodate emerging issues in accordance with the ground theory approach (Charmaz 2006). All interviews were transcribed, and where applicable, translated verbatim. Original recording of the translated interviews and back translation techniques were used to ensure the accuracy in translation. The data analysis was informed by the constant comparison method (Charmaz 2006; Boeje 2002). Initial coding which focus on 'fragments of data -words, lines, segments, and incidents-closely for their analytic import' (Charmaz 2006, p. 42) and focused coding which involves testing most useful initial codes against extensive data were followed by the theoretical coding process to specify possible relationships between focused coding categories (Charmaz 2006; p. 63). Data analysis was an ongoing process. The author is a first-generation Indian married mother with a dependent child. She has extensive experiences of working with South Asian groups in India and Britain and cultural and linguistic skills (Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and understanding of Gujarati). This gave her the necessary insights but also required her to be aware of her own tacit assumptions in *what* is defined as data and *how* it is being looked at (Charmaz 2006 p. 132). Constant engagement in reflexivity about similarities and differences in ethnicity, religion, migration background, education and other experiences between the author and the respondents contributed to the rigour in data collection and analysis (Charmaz 2006; Wray and Bartholomew 2010).

The project was granted ethics approval by the author's institution's ethics committee.

## **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

The findings have been presented in three sections: shopping for food, cooking, and eating/feeding. Though there is some overlap, these categories link to Morgan's three economies: the political economy which includes the resources that are necessary for food shopping; the moral economy which concerns the norms surrounding broader gender ideologies including around cooking; and the emotional economy, which covers the feelings and emotions within family relations that would encompass eating/feeding.

### Food and resources: shopping for food

Household power relations and resource-access shaped shopping practices. There were different arrangements with regard to shopping for food, which depended upon many factors including the desire to control food items, time available, individual interests and expertise and logistics, such as driving skills and proximity to food shops. In many Gujarati and Pakistani households, men did the bulk shopping for dry and long-life items such as rice and pulses, whilst women did the day-to-day shopping for perishable items. In Britain, some couples shopped together, especially from superstores. Men were often said to be better at shopping for meat.

Many women talked about shopping for things their children liked, alternating between children's and their husband's food choice. Like women, in some households, men reportedly also remembered their wives' and children's food preferences. A couple of women from Pakistan and India talked about their husbands bringing treat food, especially on the payment day, to show affection. One Gujarati professional woman's narratives revealed how she felt cared for by husband through his shopping:

'He brings whatever I like to eat... I don't have to tell him...two days back I had fever and for this I was not getting the taste of anything... I like *panipuri* (Indian snack) of a shop in Satellite...so he bought it for me.'

However, in some households marital conflict was reflected in the way shopping was done and items purchased. Some women across the sample wanted to do the food shopping themselves, to ensure that money was not wasted on non-essential items, drugs or alcohol. Many women reported that they liked to do the shopping so that they could control the quality, quantity and variety of the food purchased. One first-generation British Pakistani woman managed to get control of the shopping after many years of negotiation with her husband, though she made sure that he was happy with the shopping:

Because he has given me control of shopping, I drive, but I try to take my husband and kids with me, so everyone can buy as they like... If, I give him a list he will just bring more Coke.

Several women complained about their husbands' buying the wrong food items despite a shopping list, often in the form of unhealthy food, food that was too expensive and sometimes in the wrong quantities. Some women felt frustrated that men could not differentiate between different ingredients and brands. Despite their desire for control, some women gave up control of the shopping due to unresolvable arguments and preferred to top-up the food supplies using their own money. A Pakistani woman talks about why she gave up shopping:



He used to give me 5000 rupees and used to expect good food every day. I used to try hard, buy it from cheaper places but would still run out of money with 5 to 6 days to go in the month. He would get angry...so I told him 'take your money and do your shopping'.

Women often employed a range of strategies to deal with their discontent with regard to shopping. A first-generation British Gujarati woman who was frustrated with her husband for shopping in large quantities, tried to take control by shopping on her own. Her husband, who did not drive, was not able to go to shops without her so he started ordering online, which caused even more arguments due to him ordering food in the wrong quantities and brands. In contrast, a couple of women who shared the household expenses with their husbands let their husbands shop alone to make sure they paid for things; as illustrated by one British Pakistani woman in skilled employment, said: 'I will be at a financial loss if I go shopping for food and other stuff with children...instead if they went with him he would spend.' Conflict around food was the main reasons behind several women starting employment.

### Food and gender ideologies: Cooking

Irrespective of occupation and earnings, women were responsible for most of the cooking in the family. Women often narrated satisfaction in nourishing their family. Thus a first-generation professional British Gujarati woman commented: 'I want to make sure that food is always prepared...even if the sink is full and the clothes are scattered.' Some women considered the kitchen their territory and discouraged their husbands from cooking by exaggerating the skills and knowledge required in preparing food, especially traditional food. One second-generation British Professional Gujarati woman argued: 'When he starts cooking, it's a mess, that's when I put my foot down and say "I don't want my kitchen to be trashed".'

Though women were responsible for cooking in the majority of the households, in some British households, men shared cooking, especially when women were physically away due to work reasons. In contrast, the majority of professional women in India and Pakistan did the cooking by themselves or with the help of servants or relatives. Some British women resented having to relinquish their cooking role to their husband. They felt inadequate and scrutinised by friends and family, especially those who were not working or were in part-time employment and appeared to hold a higher moral ground for being able to prioritise cooking and feeding their family. To avoid criticisms, some of these women paid frequently for takeaways as no-one cooking was better than their husband doing it; and some others cooked in the presence of friends and family but were happy for their husband to cook in private. Some women, who were not able to find time to cook, made alternative arrangements either by sourcing the food from relatives or ordering takeaways, as seen in the following Pakistani woman's account:

In case I have to go out...I will give the money and ask him to bring something ... I have not cooked ... and because it is my fault I pay for it.. I say we can both pay for the curry ...but the roti is on me.

Women often associated cooking with love for family members, and took pride in cooking according to their husband's and children's preferences. Some Pakistani second-generation women married to first-generation migrants struggled to reproduce the very different food practices of their family members. Some used creative strategies, for example, one second-generation British Pakistani woman reported making *haandi roti* (chapatti and curry) for her husband, while making a wrap with *roti* cheese and salad for herself and children. As another second-generation British Pakistani woman said: 'He likes his curry and chapatti a lot, so

probably I'll be cooking that but for me and my son I will also put potatoes in the oven.... so I'm like preparing two meals.' This kind of preparation of various meals was not common in Indian and Pakistani households. Some women also reported men cooking for them to show their love, though regular cooking by men only happened in a minority of British households. A first-generation Pakistani migrant talked about how her husband who had never cooked in Pakistan had learned to cook to help her achieve her educational goals:

In Pakistan we both never cooked. Initially after moving we had this problem, because when I cooked I took hours. Then he said if I spent so much time cooking when I will study. So he also started to learn cooking with me and now he does all the cooking as well cleaning up.

However, as much as cooking was the most common and obvious way to express love, it was also a common way to express discontent. Several British women reported the drudgery involved in cooking and felt unappreciated and unsupported by their husbands. Several women reported cooking things their husbands did not like as a way of registering their dissatisfaction with regard to household finance, domestic labour or marital relationships. Some women refused to cook meat, and others deliberately cooked food their husbands did not like. However, such actions were often followed by negative consequences. Here is a Pakistani woman talking about what happens if her husband does not like her food:

He says it looks as bad as my face and throws it on my face. He says if you cannot cook well ...don't cook at all ...that's' why no matter what I eat ...I try to make food that he likes.

Sometimes those who were scared of the negative consequences of their actions often sought legitimate reasons such as illness or children for cooking in ways that did not suit their husbands' preferences. Some women used the discourse of healthy eating to assert their greater knowledge and express disagreements rooted in marital dissatisfaction: As a second-generation British skilled Pakistani woman said: 'I always [use] less oil, less salt ...my husband says salt ....and I say ...you add some more if you like, it's not good for children.' Conflicts around cooking often resulted in irregular meal timings, separate cooking and unhealthy meals.

### Food and intimacy: eating/feeding

Feeding the family was central to women's narratives, as a second-generation British Pakistani woman said: 'Food has to do with your family, kids, people come over. ...it's all about food and it's all about family.' A common pattern in Britain was for women to feed their children if their husband was going to be late for dinner. In contrast, in India and Pakistan, many children stayed up late to wait for their father before eating. The majority of women reported both eating with their children and waiting for their husband depending upon what time their husband was scheduled to return. Some families where men and women had regular day jobs made sure that they always ate together, though many women preferred to join after they had served hot *roti* to their husband and children. As a first-generation British Gujarati woman said: 'By the time he is at the door, my food is ready on the table and I will give him and my child hot *roti*...when I have enough *rotis* made, I will join them.' Many women felt that they were not only responsible for putting food on the table, but also for the portion size and variety. A first-generation British Pakistani woman used her skills and knowledge to provide adequate food for her family and by doing so assumed authority:

I give them a limit,...this is your portion and you should eat milk, fruit not only *roti salun* (vegetables). So I am strict on that and I am strict with my husband as well for that matter... They are happy with anything that I make for them.

Some women's love and desire to demonstrate their duty towards their family was also expressed as feeding children and husbands and eating whatever was leftover. As a Gujarati housewife stated: 'I think of him first, so then he understands that I take care of everyone... If I have made food for everyone, and there is nothing left for me, it's ok, but you all eat... and he likes that.' Several women from Gujarat reported eating from the same plate with their husbands and narrated it as a sign of their strong bond. This practice did not feature in narratives of respondents from Britain and Pakistan. Some women said their husbands insisted they sit next to them whilst they were eating. One Gujarati woman said: 'When like I make a snack he says, come sit with me, how can I sit with him like that in the morning when there is so much work.'

As with love, equally, marital conflict could be shown through eating practices in the family. Conflicts were often expressed through refusing to eat food or refusing to eat together. In some families, men expressed their anger by eating separately and by not eating food cooked by their wife; instead, they would choose either to eat outside the household or to cook their own food. Some women who were subjected to this behaviour felt hurt, inadequate and ashamed. For this reason, a low-income Gujarati woman, despite her extreme conflictual marriage, took care of her husband's dietary needs. She made sure that her husband's privileged position as the head of the house is not threatened:

He cannot tolerate wheat...so I make something wheat-free like *dhokla*, then I cook separately for children... If I angered him, he would beat me, my family says... what is the problem...you have everything to eat...there is milk, buttermilk...but you tell me what is food without love?

Some women appeared to express their unhappiness through the rejection of meat or fish. Their narrative suggested a form of protest and rejection which no one could question and indeed, in some cases, was upheld by friends and relatives in Gujarati families (see Donner 2008; Snell-Rood 2015). Several women talked at length about how meat and fish made them nauseated and they refused to cook and eat them. This is seen in a first-generation British Pakistani woman's account here:

'I go with whatever my husband wants ...but I don't like fish and don't cook it...the look of it makes me nauseous. My husband likes fish a lot ...when we eat out...he orders fish because it is essential for children.'

As a health professional, she believed fish was essential for children, yet at the same time maintained her distance in her marital relationship through refusal of eating fish. The conflicts around finances and relationships also reflected in the way that sex and food were equated in respondents' stories. A Pakistani woman who had an acrimonious relationship with her husband compared the control of sexual desire with control of food. She did not let her husband touch her but also did not find it easy:

I have focused on trying to control my desires, some *jismani* [bodily] desire, once you learn to control these desires....other desires, mean nothing. Whatever I get to eat ...I eat, I don't eat chicken and he likes it every day.

Some women also talked about cooking for their family but refusing to eat themselves as a way to seek their husband's attention, though it often caused further conflict and violence, as narrated by a Pakistani housewife from low-income background: 'He would bring things in front of me and I would still not eat... because of this he hit me.'

The above discussion reveals 'intimacy and distance' as both cause and consequence of food consumption in the households in all four groups. However, to understand how resources, gender ideologies and intimacy were linked and shaped household food practices in the households, there is a need to examine the women's narratives in a holistic manner. The following section uses case-studies to evidence how women displayed love and conflicts through food and negotiated power.

### Displaying love and conflict and negotiating power through food: three case studies

As seen above, the interplay of resource-access, gender ideologies and intimacy expectations often shaped the household dynamics, where food became a medium through which gendered status and power was claimed, lost and displayed. These case studies have been purposively selected to show the entangled landscape of resource-access, gender roles and intimacy, and its implications for household food consumption.

#### **Negotiating power through food: displaying love**

***'I eat whatever, their food or his food': Nasreen, professional, second-generation British Pakistani***

Nasreen is highly educated and runs a successful business. Despite running a successful business, she does not have access to a bank account, and she is happy to ask her husband for money for shopping and do all the household chores. She says, 'I don't get a salary because I pay the kids' fees on a monthly basis. So I try not to use that account at all for my own personal use. So when I need money I just ask my husband for money and it's fine, he doesn't question me. Generally when I do the household shopping I'll ask him, I'll take £100 off him.' She does all the cooking and housework and does not see a problem with it:

'I basically do whatever's needed to be done with the kids and house, as in I've always done it. Drop-offs, school drop-offs, what they need, cooking in the house, shopping, that's all down to me. He wouldn't look after them in the sense that I knew it would be too much for him.'

She derives pleasure from feeding her children and her husband healthy food and on time:

He's fussy in himself... so I cook his food separately. I'm trying to keep my husband off the curry, because he needs not to eat all the calories...so if I make *daal* (lentils) for him I make them something else for children. I eat whatever, their food or his food. The time they need to eat is too early for him...So when he's ready for his dinner I'll prepare mine as well, and then we eat together.

It would appear from Nasreen's account that the ultimate control over all their incomes is with her husband and though he does not mind her spending, she needs to ask him each time



she goes for shopping. She is also responsible for all the domestic work including shopping and cooking. However, she does not feel any discontent on these grounds, and is focussed on her children and her husband's needs including those for nourishment. Her love and commitment to her family and a desire to nourish them was so central to her that it did not make any difference who controlled their finances or who did the work; she was part of all that by committing herself to her family who she loved unconditionally.

### **Negotiating power through food: displaying conflict**

#### ***'My husband likes meat and fish but I don't cook these things.'* Zarina: low-income employment (domestic help), Pakistani**

Zarina, a mother of three boys, works as a domestic help and provides for her family. At first she started working secretly to support her children's needs. But her husband, an occasional driver and an alcoholic, soon discovered her work and stopped contributing to the household expenses. She hides her income from him and lives with him because marriage, as she put it, gives her the shield behind which she can carve out a life of *izzat* (*honour*). She struggles to pay for all the food and resents that her husband does not contribute: 'If I ask for money my husband starts beating me. I earn and feed my children, cook *roti* for them but I get curry from where I work or I buy yogurt. I save money, sugar, tea and other things in a locked cupboard and keep the keys with me.' She gets exasperated at her husband's demands on her and resorts to tricking him. Here she talks about how she circumvented her husband's demand of ironing his clothes on top of all the housework: 'I can't do everything, so I broke the iron. But got it mended and hid it in the cupboard. He says iron my clothes and I say give me money for repairing the iron... he gets silent on that.' Fear of violence stops her from confronting him directly so she uses food to express her hostility:

My husband likes meat and fish but I don't cook these things. His sister makes him these foods. I get food for children from my employers. I don't like meat, because if I eat fish or chicken, I feel nauseous and I vomit... There are always arguments about why there is less food, why food is not cooked on time.

Zarina's narrative shows her resignation to an abusive marriage but also the tactics that she employs to fight back, such as lying about her income, and breaking the iron so that she can conserve her energy for feeding her children. Many a time she manages to get enough food for her children and herself, leaving her husband to eat with his sister. By refusing to cook and eat meat, she is able to defy her husbands' demands to cook for him without inviting his wrath. She feels trapped but constantly negotiates control over her resources.

### **Negotiating power through food**

***'When I am angry, I make things like daal (lentils)': Noorjahan: housewife, Britain resident, first-generation British Pakistani***

Noorjahan is a housewife and a mother of two daughters. She has battled depression for many years. Her husband is employed in a small business. She and her husband have frequent disagreements over housework and finances. In order to share some of the responsibility with her husband, she tried to get him to do the food shopping because it was the easiest thing for her husband to do. But she regrets her decision: 'It took eight years for him to take on shopping responsibility. Sometimes I give him a list but he buys unnecessary items like chocolates and biscuits and then I have to shop again for essentials.' Financial constraints make her cautious about how money is spent on food. She feels they spend a lot more money when her husband does the shopping. So, she wants take back control of the shopping, but to no avail: 'I will wait days and days for him to give me money to do the shopping and he says

what do you need, then he will do little bit of shopping.' Unable to get money for shopping now, Noorjahan gives him the list and hopes he will get most of the items. She then uses her child benefits to top-up on fruit and vegetables. Her husband refuses to help her with any responsibilities at home with regard to children or cooking:' we have had many fights because of this because I say that I do everything and take all the stress and he doesn't take any responsibility.' Tired from the arguments around money and household work; her choice of food is guided by cost, the labour involved and the potential consequences in terms of her husband's reaction:

He calls me from the gym and asks about food. If he likes it, he comes, otherwise eats outside. I mostly cook his choice [meat] but sometimes when I am angry, I make things like *daal* (*lentils*). He doesn't like *daal* but we argue about why I have to make his choice all the time. Last week, he did not like the food so ate out and paid with my money (child benefits) because I had not made food of his choice.

Noorjahan's subversion leads to undesirable consequences, for example, losing control of the shopping which means that she now has to top-up on fruit and vegetables mid-week using her child benefits money. Furthermore, if she protests against her husband's lack of support and his financial control by cooking things that he does not like, she is faced with negative consequences such as her husband spending her child benefits on eating out, thus causing further financial damage and arguments.

The findings presented above examine the interplay of women's control over resources, gender norms and intimacy expectations and their impact on household food consumption in Pakistani Muslim and Gujarati Hindu families in Britain, India and Pakistan. The findings

show a great deal of similarities in women's access to resources, in gender ideologies and in changing ideals of intimacy across Pakistani Muslim and Gujarati Hindu women in Britain, India and Pakistan. At the same time, significant differences existed both within and between these groups, based on households' gender ideologies, marital relationships, as well as women's occupation and household financial situation. There were more similarities across all three economies and food consumption between women in low-income employments in India and Pakistan than between Pakistanis in Britain and in Pakistan, and Gujaratis in Britain and in India. For example, among low-income households, there were more marital discord and conflictual uses of food in Pakistan and India and similarly, in many Pakistani and Gujarati dual earner households in Britain, women's expectations to share household labour caused conflicts. However, both in India and Pakistan, the majority of the women in professional roles did not expect men to do much cooking, usually doing it by themselves with the help of servants or female relatives. There were more conflicts around food in Pakistani families than in Gujarati families in all three countries examined. Similarly, Pakistani low-income families reported most punitive uses of food. For all four groups of participants, women were responsible for the majority of the cooking and strived to acquire, reject or display their power through food. For all groups, individual income through employment did not necessarily translate into being able to exercise choice over food.

The intra-household resource allocation literature suggests that in many unequal households, women may not see any basis for conflicts, as their welfare is so intimately connected with the welfare of the family, and they are at risk of being worse off outside their household (Kabeer 1997; Agarwal 1997; Sen 1987). This research supports this argument, but also shows the role of conjugal relations, shaped by expectations of intimacy, as a major factor. Many women shared a strong bond with their husband and often expressed their love for their

family through food. As seen in previous research (Counihan 1999), they negotiated power through giving and making themselves central to the household's wellbeing. They perceived their lives as so intertwined with their loved ones there was no desire to risk the love and peace in relationship for equality in resources or domestic labour. This is in line with recent intimacy research which suggests that women may find it difficult to negotiate more egalitarian relationships because of a desire to safeguard love and intimacy in the marriage and this desire for intimacy may, in fact, contribute to continued reproduction of caring roles for women (Twamley 2012). However, in many households control over resources and food was a major reason for argument. It was more prominent, in low-income families where women's work was vital to the survival of the households, a finding supported by existing research (for e.g. see Ramchandran 2006).

Though the traditional division of labour, where men worked outside the home and women undertook household responsibilities, worked well in most of the single earner households, several particularly British dual earner households were plagued by arguments over housework. However, many households functioned well in spite of the lack of flexibility in gender ideologies if couples shared a strong bond and women, rather than perceiving such division of labour to be unjust, derived fulfilment from it, as shown in Nasreen's case study above. By contrast, in many households, rigid and traditional gender ideologies often led to conflict. This coheres with Palit's (2013) research, which showed that flexibility in gender role expectations contributed to successful marital relationships in many dual earner households.

For the many women in this research who found themselves trapped in love-less and conflictual marriages, food was the most potent medium to express their anger, to manipulate

as well as to bargain and negotiate. In line with previous research; women appeared to be using food for the creation of both 'intimacy and distance' and in challenging existing hierarchies (Appadurai 1981; Nitcher 1981; Donner 2008). Women resorted to food to express their anger about a lack of financial control, domestic abuse and sexual violence and an unequal division of labour. They subverted their husband's authority by employing a range of manipulative tactics, such as hiding their income or deliberately cooking food that their husband did not like. Some women took control of their time and resources by refusing to cook and eat meat and fish, something they reported their husband's liked. However, women's resistance often led to undesirable consequences which made them reconsider their resistance, as seen with Noorjahan, who lost money because her husband ate out using her account when she cooked things he disliked. Noorjahan's case is an example of how conflict between couples often impacted a household's capacity for optimal utilization of food resources as seen in recent research (Gilbertson 2014).

## **CONCLUSION**

Previous research internationally has linked women's resource-access to food consumption patterns in the household, suggesting that women's access to resources can lead to positive health and nutrition outcomes (Quismbing 2003). However, little is known about the role that gender ideologies and intimacy play in conjunction with resource-access in shaping household food consumption. Using Morgan's framework of political, moral and emotional economies, (Morgan 2001) this paper aimed to examine the interplay of women's control over resources, gender norms and intimacy expectations in the context of household food consumption. The findings show that power relations shaped by the interplay of above factors permeate food practices. Gains in one area (e.g. income earning) do not necessarily translate into gains in other areas (e.g. being able to exercise choice over food) and in fact may

actually lead to losses in other areas for women, since gender hierarchies are reproduced by these three parallel, mutually reinforcing economies. For example, some women may experience not only loss of their husband's financial contribution to the household when they start earning but also be expected to do more housework due to threat to husband's position as the head of the house. Gender inequalities in these three parallel, mutually reinforcing economies may produce a struggle on the part of women to subvert oppression and negotiate power through food by employing manipulative and deceptive tactics. Sadly, the outcome of such struggles is frequently reflected in lesser expenditure on food, consumption of unhealthy meals, poor management of a food budget and an inequitable household food distribution. Thus, women's access to resources alone is not sufficient for achieving desirable food and nutritional outcomes: the interplay of resources, gender norms and conjugal relations are central to household food consumption.

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