

**(Im)migrants' appropriation of culture: reciprocal influence of personal and work contexts**

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# (Im)migrants' appropriation of culture: Reciprocal influence of personal and work contexts

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## ABSTRACT

Increasing internationalisation in organisations demands further research on acculturation within international business (IB). Based on triangulated qualitative data on South Asian diasporas' food consumption in the UK and Bahraini contexts, we introduce two acculturative orientations: essentialism and boundary spanning. We contribute to literature by linking acculturative orientations with relevant drivers and resulting adoption and adaptation of cultures to offer a new perspective towards analysing (im)migrants' appropriation of culture in personal and work settings. We push the boundary of IB research by highlighting and enriching the understanding of, and reciprocity between, social and occupational contexts that shape (im)migrants' acculturation.

## 1. Introduction

Globalisation has accelerated, facilitated, and encouraged the migration of people, interaction between communities, and exchange and spread of cultures (Neal et al., 2013). Simultaneously, globalisation has increased cultural and ethnic diversity in many countries. This is particularly applicable to countries with stronger and more sustained economic development, where economic migrants seek better education, safety, and standards of living (Cerdin et al., 2014). As such, globalisation creates paradoxes of homogeneity and diversity amongst communities, and challenges businesses to understand their employees and customers in the contexts of their cultural identities and dispositions (Andrews et al., 2022; Gielens & Steenkamp, 2019; Lazarova et al., 2023; Ponomareva et al., 2022). As a result, global consumer culture (Demangeot et al., 2015), diaspora marketing (Kumar & Steenkamp, 2013), and diversity management within organisations (Fainshmidt et al., 2021; Hajro et al., 2017) have gained traction recently in international business and marketing research.

(Im)migrants, living and working in multicultural settings are exposed to a multitude of cultures. Their knowledge of and interaction with these different cultures may influence changes in their lifestyle and

cultural dispositions leading to acculturation. The scholarly works on acculturation underpin the academic debates on the nature and implications of global consumer culture (Cleveland et al., 2011, 2016) and the research into (im)migrants' interaction with host and heritage cultures (Askegaard et al., 2005; Dey et al., 2017). In international business, acculturation has been studied to analyse ethnic entrepreneurs' management philosophies and practices (Dheer & Lenartowicz, 2020) and expatriate employees' adoption of, and integration within organisational cultures (Jun et al., 1997) and multicultural workforces (Gillespie et al., 2010; Selmer & De Leon, 1996).

Existing acculturation literature sheds light on culture swapping (Schwartz et al., 2010), identity formation (Fernando & Patriotta, 2020), and acculturation strategies (Dey et al., 2019) to explain (im)migrants' acculturative behaviours. Individuals' acculturative behaviour can be more complex, as it involves tension and stress (Lee et al., 2019), which may lead to an appropriated version of cultural expression (Weinberger, 2015). Appropriation is defined as the simultaneous adoption and adaptation of a phenomenon. Cultural appropriation is often attributed as the hegemonic and distortive representation of cultures (Gertner, 2019). However, it is also identified as a means of individuals' adoption (Suh et al., 2016) and interpretation of cultural

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attributes (Thompson & Haytko, 1997).

Notwithstanding the wealth of research on acculturative behaviours and strategies, the existing literature revolves around how and to what extent (im)migrants adopt other culture(s) and adapt towards their acculturated lives. The underlying assumption remains that (im)migrants retain and adopt the purest versions of the heritage and host cultures respectively, and when necessary, adapt their own lifestyle as a part of the process (Douceirain, 2019). However, the existing literature does not clearly spell out whether or not (im)migrants' acculturation involves the adoption of the purest or the fusion version of cultures. Accordingly, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the theorisation of the appropriation of culture. Our paper aims to address this research opportunity by achieving the following objective:

**Research Objective-1:** to gain a deeper understanding of how (im)migrants adopt and/or adapt the purest and appropriated elements of the host, heritage and other cultures.

As already mentioned, acculturation studies have been approached from different disciplinary perspectives. Broadly, they can be classified on the basis of the contexts of the study: acculturation in an individual context and acculturation within an organisational context. The former has been of interest mostly within marketing, and the latter has received attention from international business (IB) and general management scholars. However, individuals' behaviours within organisations are a subset of their overall cultural interaction and expression (Vaara et al., 2019).

We value the importance of these contexts which define and differentiate the way individuals acculturate, as it is necessary to have a nuanced understanding of how and to what extent personal and occupational contexts shape acculturative behaviour. We choose to challenge the orthodoxy of the existing IB literature on acculturation by merging contextual acculturative behaviours in personal and work settings. As such, we assess acculturation in both occupational and personal contexts and analyse the reciprocities and idiosyncrasies that characterise the similarities and/or peculiarities in two different contexts. That leads us to the second research objective:

**Research Objective-2:** to assess (im)migrants' acculturative behaviours in personal and occupational contexts and analyse the peculiarities, similarities, and reciprocities between the two contextual settings.

To achieve these objectives, we report on a study conducted on the food consumption behaviour of South Asian diasporas in the UK and Bahrain. The South Asian diaspora's acculturation within the UK has received significant research attention (Dey et al., 2017; Jamal, 2003) due to its notable presence within the British society. South Asians offer a unique case to study an ethnic population due to their linguistic, religious, and income diversity. However, there is a lack of research on South Asian (im)migrants residing in the Middle East, despite this sociocultural context offering unique characteristics due to the numerical strength of migrants compared to the relatively smaller size of the indigenous Arab population. Unlike in Europe and North America, where most acculturation studies have been conducted, (im)migrants in the Middle East do not constitute a minority population. By bringing evidence from Bahrain, we not only address this understudied context but also offer a more robust theoretical understanding based on a dataset from two different contextual settings.

Acculturation and culture swapping can be studied through different aspects of ethnic consumption behaviours. Following the extant literature (Romo & Gil, 2012), we have selected food consumption for this study, as it involves culturally sensitive behaviour and is influenced by its socio-cultural settings (Halkier & Jensen, 2011). Food consumption demonstrates a complex overlapping of social and communal identities and culture swapping (Dey et al., 2019), and demonstrates cultural boundary-crossing and boundary-maintenance behaviour (Bardhi et al., 2012). To analyse these behavioural intentions, we explain two dialectic acculturative orientations: essentialism and boundary spanning by drawing upon social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1986).

Our findings report on the food consumption behaviour of white-

collar and blue-collar (im)migrants based in a Middle Eastern country. The acculturative behaviour of blue-collar migrant workers has received limited research attention. Furthermore, a comparative study between European and Asian contexts also constitutes the novelty of our findings. The theoretical contribution of this paper is evidenced through the introduction of two acculturative orientations, namely, essentialism and boundary spanning, which determine whether or not (im)migrants choose to adopt or adapt the host, heritage, or any other culture they come across. By linking acculturation drivers, acculturative orientations, and the resulting adoption and adaptation of cultures in two separate contexts, we offer a new perspective towards analysing (im)migrants' appropriation of culture as an outcome of adoption and/or adaptation in personal and occupational settings.

We have structured the paper in the following way: first, we explore the relevant literature that informs the theoretical underpinning of this research. Subsequently, we rationalise and describe the selection of research contexts along with research methodology. We present the findings and analyse them in light of the existing literature to articulate the theoretical and practical contributions.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Social identity theory

The social identity approach is commonly used as an overarching term for the numerous theoretical developments based on social identity theory (SIT) and self-categorisation theory (SCT). The fundamental principle of SIT is an understanding of social identity as a relational concept of the self, meaning that one's group identity exists in relation to other groups, and that social identities are constituted by individuals' past and present experiences of social reality (Hornsey, 2008). As social identities can be viewed as a by-product of wider social processes, there is a lack of consensus on whether the essence of an identity exists whether or not it can be reified, identified, or altered.

Based on the social identity theory, we identify the two dialectically inter-connected concepts – essentialism and boundary spanning – which broadly characterise an individual's orientation toward their interaction with their in-group and out-group members. Accordingly, essentialism and boundary spanning can constitute individuals' orientation toward acculturative behaviours. Drawing on this notion, we explore acculturation processes and dynamics in both personal and organisational contexts.

The concept of essentialism, as discussed in the sociology and psychology literature, can explain this identity tension. The concept has been used to describe a wide range of meanings, including 'immutable', 'stable', 'discrete', 'bounded', 'exclusive', and 'homogeneous' (Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2017). In general, psychological essentialism refers to the degree to which individual attributes (e.g., capacity and culture) are viewed as fixed or alterable characteristics (Chao et al., 2017). The definition of social essentialism presented by Phillips (2010) provides a suitable framework in which to consider the essentialising of cultural groups. The framework presents essentialism in holistic terms with constituent parts which are familiar and potentially observable. By synchronising the various definitions and perspectives towards essentialism, we adopt this concept in this paper as the perceived core characteristics of the members of a certain cultural entity.

People who identify an essential connection with a group are more likely to trust their group members due to social ties (Perry-Smith, 2006). On the other hand, boundary-spanning can be particularly useful for creative outcomes, since they offer diverse knowledge and frequent interactions (Sosa, 2011; Tortoriello et al., 2012). In addition, boundary-spanning social ties can also be enhanced by an individual's interaction with a superordinate organisational group which encompasses multiple teams (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). The concept of boundary spanning has been identified as an attribute for dynamic and creative employees in the IB and international management (IM)

literature.

It is important for a global manager to overcome the intra- and inter-organisational boundaries created by operational and contextual complexities (Schotter et al., 2017). As boundary spanners tend to exercise personal power rather than functional power (Pedersen et al., 2019; Schotter & Beamish, 2011), they are more likely to be flexible and enterprising. Hence, it is argued that firms and employees ought to go beyond organisational and operational boundaries to interact with people and businesses in order to build and leverage from a wider network (Goerzen, 2018). Schotter and Abdelzaher (2013) argued that boundary spanners can link themselves with wider communities through multiple identities and can often overcome the difference between in-group and out-group dichotomies.

## 2.2. Acculturation studies: the importance of context

The interaction between individuals from different cultural backgrounds leads to acculturation, which enables them to adopt and/or reject the attributes of the cultures of their own and/or other groups (Berry, 2009). The conceptualisation of acculturation has multiple disciplinary perspectives, such as PSA (psychology, sociology, and anthropology) and international business (Gonzalez-Loureiro et al., 2015; Lu et al., 2012). Acculturation from the field of PSA mostly relates to consumer studies (Peñaloza, 1994; Weinberger, 2015) and international marketing (Cleveland & Bartsch, 2019), while the IB scholarship focuses mostly on ethnic minority employees' engagement and interaction within organisational contexts (Okpara & Kabongo, 2011).

Increasing consensus in the recent acculturation literature within the IB discipline (Hajro et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021; Valenzuela & Rogers, 2021) alludes to the contextual importance of acculturation. Selmer and De Leon (1996) used the example of Singaporean middle managers in Swedish subsidiaries to explain how local employees could learn new work values from the parent organisational culture through the process of organisational acculturation, while Gillespie et al. (2010) adopted this perspective to explain how acculturation can enhance the ability of employees to progress higher within their organisation. The consideration of an organisational context as a unique and detached unit of study may not provide richer and deeper understanding. Organisational context is a subset of and may often be inextricably connected with the broader socio-cultural context (Vora et al., 2019). As many (im)migrants become part of the workforce in host countries, they are influenced by and can also influence their organisation and the host society in general (Hajro et al., 2021). Their integration within an organisation is influenced by their motivation to migrate and how they interact within the wider society (Cerdin et al., 2014).

However, organisations may lack the clear and deep understanding of the complex and dichotomous socio-cultural stress that (im)migrants encounter in a host country (Jun et al., 2001). Although (im)migrants can foster the internationalisation of businesses by supporting access to diverse markets, customers, resources, and knowledge, organisations often develop policies and strategies focusing on employee assimilation, thus failing to leverage the unique capabilities of these individuals (Hajro et al., 2021, 2017). Employees may not wish to assimilate into the purest form of an organisational culture and/or choose to make adjustment while integrating with other employees. Failure to offer the freedom for employees to adopt and adapt can reduce their engagement and performance and increase staff attrition (Okpara & Kabongo, 2011).

Employees' cultural adaptability is argued to have positive influence on organisational performance (Sorndee et al., 2017). Accordingly, cultural adoption and adaptation by (im)migrants within the organisational context have equal importance (Sinkovics & Reuber, 2021). The current and future development of acculturation studies within IB needs to focus on the fluid and dynamic roles of the context and how (im)migrants adopt and adapt cultural attributes in both personal and occupational spheres. We delve into the acculturation research within consumer studies and international marketing, driven by PSA concepts

and theories, to explore the potential links that can guide and support the development of future IB research.

The PSA research takes a transformative view of cultural adoption by (im)migrants, whose relocation to the host country is generally deemed to have a longer duration compared to their engagement with an organisation. The research in this field is mostly guided by the categorisation of distinct acculturative strategies (e.g., assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalisation). (Im)migrants' interactions in a multicultural market are not only confined to host and ancestral values but are also influenced by other ethnic cultures, the global consumer culture, and multinational cultures (Askegaard et al., 2005; Weinberger, 2015), thereby exhibiting multiple and co-existing identities (Jamal, 2003; Oswald, 1999; Schwartz et al., 2010). Consumer acculturation within a multicultural society can involve multi-dimensional and transient natures (Dey et al., 2019), which are key attributes for organisational acculturation. Hence, the recent developments of acculturation scholarship within PSA make it easier to combine IB and consumer research.

Current acculturation literature does not shed much light on (im)migrants' adaptation. Furthermore, it is not clear how individuals demonstrate their acculturative behaviour. The question remains: Is it the purest version of the host/heritage culture and/or an appropriated form? A partial understanding can be found in Weinberger's (2015) study, which found that non-celebrants of Christmas holidays use a set of ritual strategies that are grounded in their conflicting goals of protecting their own culture and rooted identities but that also exhibit a relational work with out-groups from different cultural backgrounds and beliefs. Weinberger (2015) identified this process as cultural appropriation, which, again, is fraught with a multiplicity of interpretations. We aim to address the inconsistency and opacity around individuals' acculturation and the appropriation of culture to develop a deeper understanding of the nature and outcome of acculturative orientations. The following section discusses cultural appropriation.

## 2.3. Cultural appropriation revisited

Cultural appropriation – defined broadly as the use of a culture's symbols, artefacts, genres, rituals, or technologies by members of another culture – is inescapable when cultures come into contact with one another (Rogers, 2006). Cultural appropriation in the arts is a diverse and ubiquitous phenomenon, thought to include occurrences such as the representation of cultural practices by cultural “outsiders” and the procurement of cultural objects by culturally distant institutions (Matthes, 2016). The multiple definitions of cultural appropriation often deem the phenomenon to be an unauthorised or objectionable use of cultural elements where outsiders repurpose their context without any comprehensive understanding of, and/or respect for, the culture in question (Gertner, 2019).

Cultural appropriation comprises three characteristics: a change of cultural context, a power imbalance between the taker and the holder, and the absence of the holder's involvement. Scholars such as Arewa (2017) claimed that borrowing and cultural mixing are parts of the human experience which are evident in language, religion, agriculture, food, and other cultural elements. Nevertheless, the boundaries between cultural borrowing and cultural appropriation can be subtle and subjective, and the correct way of utilising cultural elements by outsiders has been increasingly debated in myriad settings.

Cultural practices, including appropriation, are constituted by, and constitutive of, culture as a realm of relations. The challenge for cultural and media critics, and for critical, rhetorical, and intercultural communication studies, is to reconceptualise culture not as a bounded entity and essence but as radically relational or dialogic (Rogers, 2006). Scholars also recognise that cultural appropriation is an inevitable action due to the increased interaction and exchange among various cultures facilitated by global connectivity (Heyd, 2003; Jenkins et al., 2009; Rogers, 2006).

Weinberger's (2015) work alludes to possible links between cultural



appropriation and acculturation. Whilst it is plausible that (im)migrants' behaviour is a potential outcome of their appropriated use/adoption of the attributes of other cultures in a multicultural society or workplace, the complexity surrounding the concept of cultural appropriation impedes clearer conceptualisation. Nevertheless, the concept of cultural appropriation has not been comprehensively discussed from an organisational/IB point of view. As such, our research endeavours to explore and establish the link to explain how and why South Asian (im)migrants in the UK and Bahrain adopt and adapt the cultural attributes within work and personal settings.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Contextual backgrounds

##### ■ South Asians in the UK

The term 'South Asian' was coined in the early 20th century to categorise the countries within the Indian subcontinent (Jain & Oommen, 2016) and to identify the diasporic communities originating from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal (Mohammad-Arif, 2014). During the colonial period, affluent British colonialists enjoyed lavish lifestyles in India. The widespread practice of having South Asian servants, nursemaids, and nannies complemented their opulent lifestyles and estates. Until World War One, only a tiny number of sojourners from the Indian subcontinent could be found in Britain (Ballard, 2002). However, after World War Two, Europe experienced an economic expansion, which led to a higher demand for low-skilled workers (Ballard, 2002), skilled workers, and professionals (Jain & Oommen, 2016). Since then, South Asian migration to the United Kingdom has become commonplace. The South Asian diaspora constitutes almost 5% of the UK population and enjoys a strong presence within the spheres of politics, economics, culture, and sports, contributing significantly to the British society (Dey et al., 2017).

##### ■ South Asians in the Gulf and Bahrain

The relationship between the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Indian subcontinent predates the discovery of oil, which first occurred in 1932 (Jain & Oommen, 2016; King, 2017) and eventually transformed the economy of the region (Zahlan, 2016). The influence of the British Empire across various countries within the Middle Eastern region and the colonisation of the Indian subcontinent created and strengthened historical relationships between the Gulf countries and the Indian subcontinent. South Asian migrants established numerous communities across the Gulf region and fulfilled a wide range of professions, including pearl traders, bankers, merchants, government officials, and other professions (Jain & Oommen, 2016).

The British Empire employed numerous South Asian employees in administrative positions to ensure a smooth operation of British governance within the Gulf region. As a result, the migration of South Asians to the Gulf countries, including Bahrain, continued to increase at an exponential rate as they searched for opportunities, especially with the discovery of oil in the 1970s (Jain, 2005). There was a great demand for semi-skilled and low-skilled workers to support modernisation projects, which significantly increased following the oil boom of the 1970s (Jain & Oommen, 2016). As a result, white-collar and blue-collar workers from many developing countries – including those of South Asia – migrated to the Gulf region.

As mentioned, the socio-cultural dynamics within the Gulf region, and Bahrain in particular, have special characteristics which can contribute to the current understanding of (im)migrants' interactions with their host cultures and other cultures. Unlike Qatar and UAE, where the South Asian population is significantly larger than the numbers of Qataris and Emiratis respectively, in Bahrain, the populations of South Asian (im)migrants and Bahrainis are almost similar. Currently, 47% of

the population are Bahraini nationals, whereas 42% are of South Asian origin.<sup>1</sup> This numerical distribution is a contrast with the UK and other Western countries, where immigrants in general, and South Asian immigrants in particular, constitute substantially smaller proportions of the populations compared to indigenous white Caucasians.

#### 3.2. Research philosophy and strategy

An interpretivist approach was adopted to understand the food consumption behaviour of South Asian migrants in the UK and Bahrain. This approach facilitated an in-depth understanding of the food purchase and consumption behaviour that developed as a result of participants' interactions with mainstream and other ethnic cultures.

Participants were identified and recruited using maximum variation purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) to include various linguistic (i.e., Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, Panjabi, Malayalam), religious (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Christian), and sociodemographic groups (in terms of gender, income, and occupation) from South Asian diaspora members based in the UK and Bahrain. Both first-generation immigrants and UK-born South Asians in the UK were included in the samples, as education, upbringing, and lifestyles were likely to differ between the two groups.

The sample group in Bahrain, however, comprised only first-generation (im)migrants. To recruit participants for the British sample, places of worship (mosques and temples), community organisations, and universities were contacted. However, for the Bahrain sample, participants were approached via the occupational and personal networks of one of the authors, who is based in Bahrain. Appendix A<sup>2</sup> provides demographic information on the interview respondents from the UK and Bahrain. The focus group discussions (FGDs) included ten skilled/semi-skilled participants in Bahrain.

#### 3.3. Data collection tools

In-depth interviews were chosen as the primary method: these were supported by two FGDs in Bahrain and supplemented by observation and photographs in both the UK and Bahrain. The research work commenced in late 2019 and continued into the early phase of the COVID-19 outbreak (BBC, 2020), which limited personal observation and face-to-face contact later in the data collection process.

During the initial phases of data collection, before the COVID outbreak, face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted at participants' homes or locations of their choice and convenience. The interviewers visited participants' homes and observed their food behaviour and took photographs. From March 2020 onward, interviews could be conducted only via online methods, and no observation or photography could be conducted.

The data include 23 in-depth interviews with the UK-based sample and seven in-depth interviews and two FGDs with the Bahrain sample. We had fewer interviews from Bahrain due to its relatively smaller population.

Two FGDs, each with five participants, were used to explore the experiences and practices of the unskilled/semi-skilled participants to help overcome language barriers, put participants at ease, and encourage fluency of discussion. One of the co-authors, based in Bahrain, is of Arab origin and does not have sufficient proficiency in the language spoken by the unskilled/semi-skilled participants, who speak a rudimentary form of English. Furthermore, it was understood that the unskilled/semi-skilled participants might feel less comfortable in one-to-one interviews due to the perceived hierarchical barriers (between a highly educated Arab and a South Asian manual worker), which could impede the free flow of communication.

<sup>1</sup> GLMM\_ExpNote\_06\_2015.pdf (eui.eu).

<sup>2</sup> All appendices are available as online supplements.

The interviews included questions on respondents' daily routines, their perceptions of life in the UK/Bahrain, their daily food habits, their lifestyles, their food and shopping habits, their interest in an overall lifestyle, their food consumption behaviour (both in the host country and when they travel), and their motivation and intention to integrate with the UK/Bahraini population and with other ethnic communities in the society where they lived. On average, the interviews lasted between 60 and 90 min each. The interview protocol is presented in Appendix B.

During the initial phase of data collection, the researchers visited the homes of ten UK respondents and seven respondents from Bahrain and dined with them. The observation involved inquiring about respondents' food purchases, the ingredients available in their kitchens, and their cooking practices, eating habits, and culinary experiences; we attempted to explore these issues within broader socio-cultural and institutional settings. By observing the participants dining, we were able to triangulate the interview responses.

Photographs and researchers' diary notes were used to record observations. In the interviews held in participants' homes, permission was granted to take photos of their kitchens, foods, spices, and ingredients. Respondents were given no reward for taking part in the study.

Table 1 below summarises and displays the various sample sizes, the sample locations, the methodological tools and their purposes implemented in this research.

### 3.4. Data analysis

All the interviews with the UK participants and with the seven participants from Bahrain were conducted in English. However, the two focus groups in Bahrain were conducted in Malayalam and English with the help of an interpreter. All interviews and FGDs were transcribed into English. The transcripts were coded using the NVivo software package.

Our data analysis is underpinned by the seminal work of Gioia et al. (2013), which provides a robust framework for the coding method in qualitative research. We started with three *a priori* themes, namely, adoption, adaptation, and appropriation, and kept an open mind in searching for emerging codes from the interview and FGD data. Following the extant literature (Lorenz et al., 2018; Srivastva & Chandra, 2018), two researchers independently went through the transcripts and coded the data. Eventually, the two sets of codes were collated, and consensus codes were derived. Appendix C provides a summary of the coding process.

The initial first-order codes were screened and categorised to achieve second-order codes. The constant comparison method was followed to

**Table 1**  
Methodological Tools and Sample Size.

Methodological Tools and Location	Sample Size	Purpose
Interviews in the UK	23	To gain deeper insights into participants' food consumption behaviours in both work and social environments.
Interviews in Bahrain	7	
Observations in the UK	10	To understand and explore participants' perspectives and how meanings are derived from their environments and influence their behaviours in the UK and Bahrain. In addition, observations allowed the exploration of unanticipated phenomena.
Observations in Bahrain	7	
Focus Group Discussions in Bahrain	Two groups (five participants in each group)	To understand and gain rich insights into the experiences and practices of the unskilled/semi-skilled participants in Bahrain. Also, to explore their perspectives and food consumption behaviours by placing them at ease by using FGDs.

link the second-order codes with the relevant literature. While some of the third-order codes (e.g., accommodation, association, aspiration, and affordance) were identified through the summative themes and meanings of the second-order codes, we also resorted to the relevant literature to obtain theoretically grounded terminologies (e.g., essentialism and boundary spanning).

Following Srivastava and Chandra (2018), two researchers independently conducted axial coding to develop theoretical models, which are presented in the Discussion section. Appendix C provides the list of the first-, second-, and third-order codes, and Appendix D provides a summary of how the validity was ensured in the three steps: method selection, research design, and data analysis.

Methodological triangulation helped us to compare and contrast the data collected from multiple sources (i.e., in-depth interviews, researcher observations documented by photographs, and diary notes) to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings and resulting claims. We meticulously analysed the scripts of the seventeen (17) in-depth interviews which had supporting materials (i.e., photographs/diary notes) and corroborated the excerpts with those supporting materials.

Thus, the supporting materials were categorised under the relevant themes and codes, and these are used in support of our arguments in the following sections of this paper.

## 4. Findings

The interviews, observations, and photographs offer rich and deep insights into the food consumption behaviours of the South Asian diaspora living in the UK and Bahrain. In addition, we derived a detailed understanding of the broader socio-cultural, familial, and occupational contexts within which food consumption is embedded, providing an opportunity to explore respondents' experiences of residing and working within a society and interacting with its institutions, which host the co-existence of various cultural groups. This was an important step in ascertaining the nature and extent of the interactions amongst different cultural groups, which are pivotal to shaping and defining an individual's preferences. The findings of this paper can be contrasted with some of the existing literature on similar contexts (Dey et al., 2017; Jamal, 2003, 2019). In contrast to the existing literature, this paper considers food consumption both at work and in personal/social settings and offers novelty in terms of a comparative presentation between two different countries, which have not been explored in the extant literature.

### 4.1. Drivers of cultural interaction at personal and work settings: accommodation, association, aspiration, and affordance

The UK and Bahrain – the two research contexts – enjoy rich cultural diversity. Both countries have significant numbers of foreign nationals, are prominent in international trade and commerce, and have a prolonged history of interaction with other countries. As a result, a wide variety of cultural and ethnic groups have settled in these two countries, which offer rich platforms for cultural interaction and exchange.

The interviewees in this research experienced the co-existence of different ethnic and cultural groups in their respective countries of abode. Dipika,<sup>3</sup> an Indian participant from Northern England, articulated her experience of living and working in a multicultural environment, which also exhibits her aspiration to be a global citizen:

I came to this country as a student, did an MBA, and decided to stay permanently. ... I have colleagues from Germany, Spain, and Italy. My neighbours are British, South Asian, and other European nationals.... I feel like being a part of a global village.

Hence, personal and occupational goals, which appeared to be

<sup>3</sup> All respondents' names have been changed to protect their identities.

interlinked, had a bearing on participants' decision to migrate. A similar response was also offered by Mushtak, one of the Indian interviewees from Bahrain. Mushtak's decision to reside in a multi-cultural place in Bahrain reflects his intent to be a global person through both his social and occupational interactions.

I lived all over Bahrain. I lived in Manama, Riffa, Adliya – three places. I am flexible and not rigid with my community. See, I live in a neighbourhood that is not fully Indian. ... I work in a multinational company, and my intention is to build an international career. When I look for accommodation or a flat, I prefer a mixed community... because it gives us a chance to learn their culture also.

The FGD on South Asian migrant workers in Bahrain also evidenced similar experiences. Although these individuals were significantly different from the other respondents in terms of income, accommodation, social status, and lifestyle, they met and interacted with people and cultures from other parts of the world:

Six of us live together in the same apartment. We come from the same village in South India. It is cheaper for us to share the accommodation. We seek to support and help others. There are workers from other countries, who work with us in the same company. Some of them live in the neighbouring flats.

The presence of global culture was also felt by the respondents, although they often found it difficult to differentiate between global and British cultures. As Rohit, from Birmingham commented:

I had a somewhat different opinion about bars back in India. To be honest, in our time, which is 15 years ago, it wasn't very common for middle-class people to go to bars with their partners... So, I wasn't very comfortable about the pub culture here in the UK... English and European football leagues have become popular in India; it is very global. But it has a different flavour in the UK... I was always into cricket, but I have to update my football knowledge to keep up with colleagues and friends. Now, I enjoy going to pubs with my colleagues, and this is a way for me to catch up on gossip, interact, and integrate.

Hence, Rohit had to change his knowledge and ideas. He discovered a different way to assess his external world and interact with people and institutions. His knowledge of football and perception of pubs had to be changed in order to acculturate with colleagues. Hence, acculturation is not always compartmentalised between private and public lives, as argued in the existing literature (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2007). Transformation of personal values and perceptions is shown to have an impact on how one behaves in public spheres. We term this category 'affordance', which denotes the implicit understanding and capability of how to interact. It is, however, not just one-way traffic. The values and dynamics within an organisation also enable individuals to develop in-group and out-group experiences. Arjun, an Indian IT professional, mentioned during his interview:

*One of my previous employers really helped me to settle in through their social events. During our Christmas dinner, the members of the top management used to serve the food to show appreciation and gratitude.*

The association within occupational settings not only enables (im)migrants to feel comfortable and valued in a new country but also provides them with an opportunity to learn and explore new cultures. Therefore, our findings suggest that accommodation, affordance, association, and aspiration are the major drivers for their acculturative orientation.

#### 4.2. Food consumption behaviour

Food consumption behaviour in general has multiple facets. Ingredients remain at the core. Subsequently, food consumption involves preparation, which uses specific recipes, processes, and utensils. Finally,

it involves how an individual prefers to eat, which, in turn, involves using various tools (using a knife and fork, chopsticks, fingers etc.), timing (e.g. late or early dinner), and manner (e.g. individual, familial, or social dining).

Furthermore, food consumption also involves individuals' acts of eating out, and is therefore defined by their attitudes toward various restaurants. Based on the findings, we can divide food consumption behaviour into three broad facets:

- Preference for, and purchase of, food products and ingredients.
- Food preparation, style, aroma, and eating patterns.
- Preferences for, and experience of, eating out.

The classification is driven by how the respondents defined and reflected upon various aspects of food consumption behaviour. Again, within each classification, we extracted two broader orientations, which determine the nature of their acculturation. We term these 'acculturative orientations':

- Preference for authenticity.
- Preference for fusion and hybridity.

In this section, we present the findings in relation to the three aspects of food consumption behaviour and the corresponding perspectives that define the respondents' behavioural patterns within each facet.

##### 4.2.1. Preference for, and purchase of, food products and ingredients

All major UK supermarkets have sections of ethnic food items, and these are more due to the special type of cooking and preparation; however, the South Asian diaspora's grocery needs, as evidenced in our interviews, are not fully met by the selection of South Asian items available in large supermarkets. Their interactions with wider society, often underpinned by their work settings, also determine how they assess and devise their food consumption. UK respondents living in and around bigger cities, such as London, Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds, and Manchester, have the luxury of finding a selection of culture-specific products in mainstream supermarkets (e.g., Tesco, Asda etc.). This is particularly easy for the respondents who live in big cities with large immigrant communities. Amit, an Indian participant from Leeds, mentioned:

*Our local Asda has a fairly large South Asian section. We can get spices, pulses, and Indian snacks which are to our liking. We normally buy chicken once a week and occasionally diced lamb and pork chops, which we can also get from Asda and Tesco. We go to our local Asian store for rice and flour.*

Shabnam, a Pakistani participant from Bristol, offered a different opinion. According to her, the local mainstream supermarkets do not offer a full range of Asian food ingredients and grocery items. She is particularly keen to have meat with bones and authentic Pakistani branded spices. Shabnam's preferred brands of spices relate to her sense of authenticity for the taste, smell, and colour of the food. She wants to have the food prepared and served the way her mother does back home. Hence, authenticity is defined by practice and tradition and deeply influenced by one's familial upbringing.

Anupam, an Indian participant, particularly prefers South Asian fish, which is distinct from the fish found in the British waters. The popularity of 'ghee'<sup>4</sup> as a cooking ingredient amongst Asian communities is also highlighted in his interview response:

*See, I am a Bengali. We love to eat fish. I like local UK fish, such as salmon and trout. But I miss the likes of ruhi and hilsa. ... Another thing I*

<sup>4</sup> Type of butter, used in South Asian cooking.

*miss very much here is edible 'ghee'. ... I also miss Amul butter. Here, the butter we get is a bit too salty for my taste.*

Rima, an Indian housewife based in Bahrain, expressed a desire for authentic foods. She considers the quality and freshness of vegetables to differ, even if they are found in her local shops. Again, the desire for authenticity is echoed in her response.

*One thing which is good in India is the flavour of the vegetables. Because even if you just stir fry them, you really have a different flavour .... I just try to make the most of having vegetables with what I can find here because I feel they have a very different flavour. Even though I put the same spices on the vegetables here in Bahrain, it does not come out the same.*

The desire for authenticity and perceived true tastes is shown not just for South Asian food products and ingredients. Omar, a Bangladeshi respondent based in London, expressed his keenness for authenticity within other food products which are not strictly South Asian:

*I am particular about certain types of brands and products. For instance, it has to be Heinz ketchup or single malt Scotch whisky. I do not like bourbon or Irish whisky.*

However, the sense of authenticity is often learnt through interaction with people from other communities. It was evident that the work environment provides a platform for the exchange of ideas and knowledge about authenticity. As Arjun explained during his interview:

*Food is an ice-breaker. To talk about food during work or when we go out with colleagues helps to start the conversation ... After meeting a Nigerian colleague, I came to know that the preparation of their rice is different from ours, but some of the spices they use are similar to what we use in Indian cuisines.*

Work settings can also promote fusion recipes. Haroun, a British Indian respondent, explained his experience of learning food ingredients from his Malaysian colleague:

*Once, my Malaysian colleague brought her own cooked food for lunch. I was extremely impressed by the aroma. I could sense it was spicy and not too different from my palate. I asked her about the recipe: it seemed mostly the same as we do in India aside from the use of lemongrass. I tried it myself, although it was not exactly Malaysian, as I don't like coconut milk, so it was a blended version.*

In the above responses, there is a strong hint of how the interviewees assess and adopt food ingredients from what they perceive as the 'in-group' and 'out-group'. Their adherence to in-group identity and the exploration of the cultural attributes of out-groups in these cases shape their cultural adoption and adaptation.

#### 4.2.2. Food preparation and eating patterns

(Im)migrants' food preparation and eating patterns have received little attention in the existing research. Despite some generic research on food consumption (Cleveland et al., 2013; Dey et al., 2019), preparation and eating patterns remain understudied. We obtained deeper insights into how and why our participants preferred certain recipes and preparation methods, and how and when they liked to eat. Extant research on (im)migrants often documents the pursuit of unique cultural experiences to help narrate their own individualised identities (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Oswald, 1999; Peñaloza, 1994; Snee, 2014) and to achieve self-development goals and soft skills (Bardhi et al., 2012; Olsen, 2002; Weinberger, 2015). We divide the relevant findings into two broader categories: food preparation and eating patterns at personal settings and food preparation and eating patterns at work settings.

Food preparation and eating patterns in personal contexts

Rubaiyat, from Coventry, reflected upon their preference for food preparation:

*It depends on what we want and when we want it. Weekends are meant to be for desi<sup>5</sup> style of foods. We normally have a typical Bangladeshi lunch on Saturdays and Sundays... On odd occasions, we do a lamb curry prepared in a North Indian or Pakistani style, or continental roast chicken .... However, on weekdays, we do not have time. We get cereals in the morning, sandwiches for lunch at work, and frozen foods in the evenings.*

However, the preferences are complex for multi-generational families. Atif from Sheffield, a British-born 40-year-old professional, had experienced a change in food consumption patterns in his household:

*When my mother was alive, we followed stricter Pakistani recipes. Even for breakfast, we used to have chapati and curry. However, since her death, we have moved to a more flexible food habit. Our children do not like hot and spicy stuff.*

Individuals' preferences when dining out demonstrate their adoption and acculturation (Cleveland et al., 2016; Jamal, 2003). Therefore, we studied participants' preferences and actual behaviours when eating out and getting takeaways. Anupam, from Greater London, demonstrated his liking for authentic traditional British foods:

*I like fish and chips. Normally, if I go to a pub for lunch, fish and chips would be one of my most preferred options. I also try the Sunday roast, provided I can get roast lamb. I do not eat beef, so it is not always possible for me to try the Sunday roast if there is no lamb option on it.*

There is a strong tradition of South Asian style Chinese foods in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. Respondents, in general, appreciated Chinese and Oriental foods in what they call 'desi' style. Nahid, a Bangladeshi from Liverpool stated:

*Here in Liverpool, we have a fairly big Chinatown where you can get both anglicised and authentic oriental cuisines. ... I do not like the anglicised version. I always have a craving for the Bangladeshi style of Chinese cuisine, which is spicier. That is the taste for oriental food I have had from my childhood.*

Pradip, from London, further described the popularity of Chinese food in India. The traditional 'Chindian' cuisine is very popular in South Asian countries. However, the names and recipes of these dishes are different from in the original Chinese cuisines.

*Chinese communities based in India brought the taste of oriental cuisine. They developed recipes that are palatable to Indian tastes. Items such as Chilli Chicken or Gobi Manchurian, for instance, have constituted our taste for Chinese cuisine. In effect, when I grew up in Kolkata, India, the only easily accessible and affordable foreign cuisine was what we got in Indo-Chinese restaurants.*

Hence, the concept of authenticity is variable and fluid. What many South Asians perceive as the authentic taste of oriental foods is actually based on locally appropriated fusion recipes. Nevertheless, the concept of authenticity is paradoxical. Niaz, a Keralite respondent based in Bahrain, sought authenticity in his own cuisine, although he remained open about other cultural foods:

*We do not get the traditional Kerala dish where you would eat food on a banana leaf ..... The banana leaf that is used as a plate would also infuse flavours into the food since hot food is served directly on it and that would cook it and infuse flavours into the food as well. This dish is not usually available in Bahrain except during the festivals, but still, it is not as authentic as Kerala, ... Even the wooden and clay pots or vessels are more used in Kerala, and this gives the food a different flavour.*

#### Food preparation and eating patterns in work contexts

<sup>5</sup> The word 'desi' (originally meaning 'from country') is used by the South Asian population to refer to any object or individual that comes from the Indian Sub-Continent.



The previous section demonstrates the convenience and contextual constraints in personal settings, and similar sentiments were echoed for work-related settings, as Sohini articulated in her response:

Occasionally, I take home-made stuff for lunch at work. Normally, it is the leftovers from the night before. However, I am conscious of the smell of the food, which can cause discomfort to other colleagues, who are not used to such food... then I decided to stick to sandwiches, albeit the ones which have flavour, such as coronation chicken.

The above response exhibits deeper insights into the paradoxical sentiments that the South Asian diaspora may have about their food. The existing literature suggests that there is a strong emotional attachment to home-made food amongst South Asians (Goyal & Singh, 2007). However, they are also conscious of the smell, which they find uncomfortable for themselves and others. While the aroma of food is an essential component and a strong indicator of its identity, it can also create ambivalence when individuals endeavour to deal with in-group and out-group members. Nahid, a British Bangladeshi, explained how she deals with it in the workplace:

*Back home, the houses are airy, unlike in the UK, where we keep our windows closed due to the cold weather. ... At my work, if I take a Bangladeshi curry, my colleagues highly appreciate my food, they say, "Wow, it smells so nice". But I realised once, even after hours, the smell gets trapped inside the office room. I have now stopped taking lunch from home.*

Hence, in work settings, the respondents in the UK prefer not to adhere to their authentic cuisines and tend to make the necessary adjustments. Mixed opinions and food habits could also be noticed amongst some respondents from Bahrain. Shankar, a 50-year-old professional based in Bahrain, mentioned during the interview:

*During our lunch break at work, I usually have lunch with one of my colleagues there, and we (South Asian colleagues) often carry red pepper powder or chilli with us to add to the food we have from the restaurants we go to.*

As the interview with Shankar took place before the outbreak of COVID-19, we had an opportunity to visit his residence. We noticed that his kitchen utensils were all Indian, including the pressure cooker, serving dishes, and *thali*. Shankar and his family tended to follow a very authentic and traditional style.

In our research, we noticed the way people ate, the time they ate, and the way they liked their dinner to be arranged. The timing of food intake in particular has cultural relevance. As Tarek from Bangladesh explained:

*In Bangladesh, we have the habit of having a fairly illustrious lunch even at work. We also snack in the late afternoon and then take dinner at late evening.*

The above scenario demonstrates how individuals learn about the local lifestyle, which is often linked with the timing of meals. Interaction within the work environment facilitates this learning and affects individuals' adoption and adaptation of culture.

All participants in the UK and Bahrain were comfortable using their hands to eat, which constitutes the core style of eating in South Asia. Even British-born participants enjoyed using their hands to eat foods. However, for most interviewees, the preference was driven by what they ate and when. Pradip, from London, explained:

*I like to eat with my hands. I do not enjoy eating chaul (rice) and daal (lentils) with cutlery. ... I use a knife and fork when necessary. However, I do not know how to use chopsticks.*

The collective social and cultural ethos in South Asia is also reflected in the eating patterns. While it is normal for families to have food together in many parts of the world, we found that migrant workers in

Bahrain who share accommodation always make sure they have their dinner together. As the migrant workers share accommodation with their co-workers, their personal and occupational lives are inextricably connected. Their fellow colleagues are amongst the small social circle they have beyond the work boundary. During the FGD, one respondent mentioned:

*We always have our dinner together. We rotate the cooking responsibility so that there is a fair contribution by all. The person who cooks does not have to pay for the cost of the groceries. We always have our dinner together. We spend the whole day working, but a dinner in the evening relaxes us and gives us a sense of family and togetherness.*

#### 4.3. Summary of findings

Table 2 provides the evidence of the dichotomous nature of acculturative orientations characterised by authenticity seeking and fusion/improvised food consumption:

The following table (Table 3) provides a brief summary of the key findings. It identifies the drivers, orientation, and actual behavioural manifestation of cultural adoption and adaptation in personal and work contexts. The findings are constructed in relation to the base theory of this research – social identity theory – which explains the nature and outcome of individuals' interaction with in-group and out-group members.

#### 5. Discussion

Our findings reveal how members of the South Asian diaspora adopt and adapt food products and practices while in their personal and work contexts in the UK and Bahrain. Despite the spatial and cultural distance between diaspora members and their heritage cultures – which encourages them to maintain their forebearers' customs and traditions – our findings support previous observations (Jamal et al., 2019; Kizgin et al., 2021) that members may embellish or reinterpret aspects of their inherited cultural legacies. Whilst we acknowledge that food is just one of numerous cultural elements, its consumption in this manner demonstrates individuals' propensity to interact with 'other' cultures in national, regional, or even global contexts.

##### 5.1. Acculturation and the appropriation of culture

Food consumption behaviour incorporates a range of activities,

**Table 2**  
Summary of different layers of food consumption behaviour.

Stages	Evidence of authenticity seeking attitude and behaviour	Evidence of fusion and improvisation
Food ingredients and food brands	Spice brands, goat meat, red meat on bones, Indian vegetables, Amul butter, ghee, Indo-Chinese food, single malt whisky, Heinz ketchup.	Mixing lemongrass in curry preparation, home-made preparation of ghee, lamb instead of goat, British fish instead of South Asian fish, turkey curry during Christmas, falafel with lentils.
Food preparation, eating style and eating out	South Asian utensils and serving dishes, banana leaves, food aroma, traditional recipes, YouTube lessons on authentic food preparation, collective eating, use of fingers, lavish breakfast and lunch, taking home-made food to work and late dinner, exploration of authentic cuisines.	Avoidance of food smell, spicy pasta, improvised recipe, spicy salmon preparation, work dinner to anglicised Indian restaurants, frozen foods, pizza with spicy toppings.

**Table 3**  
Summary of Findings.

Components of Acculturation Process	Personal context	Work context
Drivers	Association (friends and family), accommodation (the place of residence), social aspiration and affordance (knowledge, skills and means for interaction).	Collegial association, career aspiration, and knowledge (affordance) of and ability for interaction with work colleagues and work environment. For Bahrain-based blue-collar workers, there is a thin boundary between work and personal lives, as they share accommodation and dining with their work colleagues.
Acculturative Orientation	Desire for perceived authenticity and willingness to adopt hybridity: this involves how people assess food ingredients and various food brands, how they plan and organise their lifestyle around their dietary habits, how they perceive and evaluate their in-group and out-group traditions, and what they consider to be essential and whether or not they are willing to improvise and blend food preparation.	Desire for perceived authenticity and willingness to adopt hybridity: this involves how individuals feel about demonstrating their culture within an organisation, how individuals perceive diversity and their identity within organisation, and how they perceive members of the out-group within an organisation and learn from their cultures.
Behavioural outcomes	Decisions about food purchase, preparation, and eating out, leading to cultural adoption and/or adaptation.	Adoption and/or adaptation of in-group and out-group culture within an organisation and also in personal and social spheres.

processes, and items/artefacts, including purchase, storage, preparation, use of utensils, and dining practice. Two broad orientations underpin their adoption and consumption patterns – ‘authenticity seeking’ and ‘boundary spanning’.

#### 5.1.1. ‘Authenticity seeking’ and essentialism

Essentialism is an underlying belief that all things are imbued with specific, stable, predetermined characteristics which define them, and that the members of cultural categories are discrete, bounded, exclusive, and homogenous (Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2017). It is related to authenticity, as certain fundamental attributes – the ‘essence’ – are ‘essential’ constituents of an object or concept (Chao et al., 2017; Phillips, 2010). We conceptualise essentialism as the pursuit of certain key characteristics that reify the socially constructed nature of a phenomenon. It is neither static nor universal, but is an outcome of individuals’ preconceptions arising from their interpretation of accumulated knowledge into meanings. It is influenced by upbringing, education, and experience, driven by the multilevel fluid interaction between accommodation, aspiration, association, and affordance, as identified in our findings. For this reason, first-generation South Asian (im)migrants often favour the interpretation of Chinese food that is prevalent in Indo-Chinese fusion cuisine. Whilst recognising that Chinese food in India is inauthentic, they construe the Indian influence as an essential criterion when seeking Chinese foods outside South Asia. Contrastingly, they reject the inauthenticity of anglicised Indian dishes that are popular in the UK, as the original dishes were the normative versions consumed during their formative years.

Essentialism in food culture goes beyond taste, extending to ingredients and the manner in which food is consumed. Our participants often bring utensils, such as pressure cookers and *thalis*, from their home countries for cooking and serving purposes respectively. The familial and collective bonds of eating together are maintained by South Asian

labourers in Bahrain despite being far from their own families. Likewise, using fingers to eat rice and/or using *ghee* in food preparation further articulated essentialist behaviour amongst our participants. Moreover, essentialism was demonstrated amongst those participants adopting new cultures, including the food culture of the host country, with one preferring to try a traditional English Sunday roast dinner in their local pub rather than microwaving a frozen version sold in supermarkets.

#### 5.1.2. ‘Boundary spanning’ and innovation

We conceptualise boundary-spanning behaviour as the manifestation of a desire or willingness to redefine or reconfigure a phenomenon. In organisational studies and the management literature, the term refers to a trait of individuals who seek to transcend departmental or organisational silos to explore opportunities for interaction and collaboration with others. As such, the term has been widely used when analysing employee behaviours (Wang et al., 2019), innovation (Pershina et al., 2019; Wu & Wu, 2014), leadership (Collien, 2021), and negotiation (Roberts & Beamish, 2017; Woo & Myers, 2020). Social science researchers consider boundary-spanning behaviours to stem from cultural omnivorousness (Goldberg et al., 2016) and eclectic cultural tastes (Jaeger & Katz-Gerro, 2010).

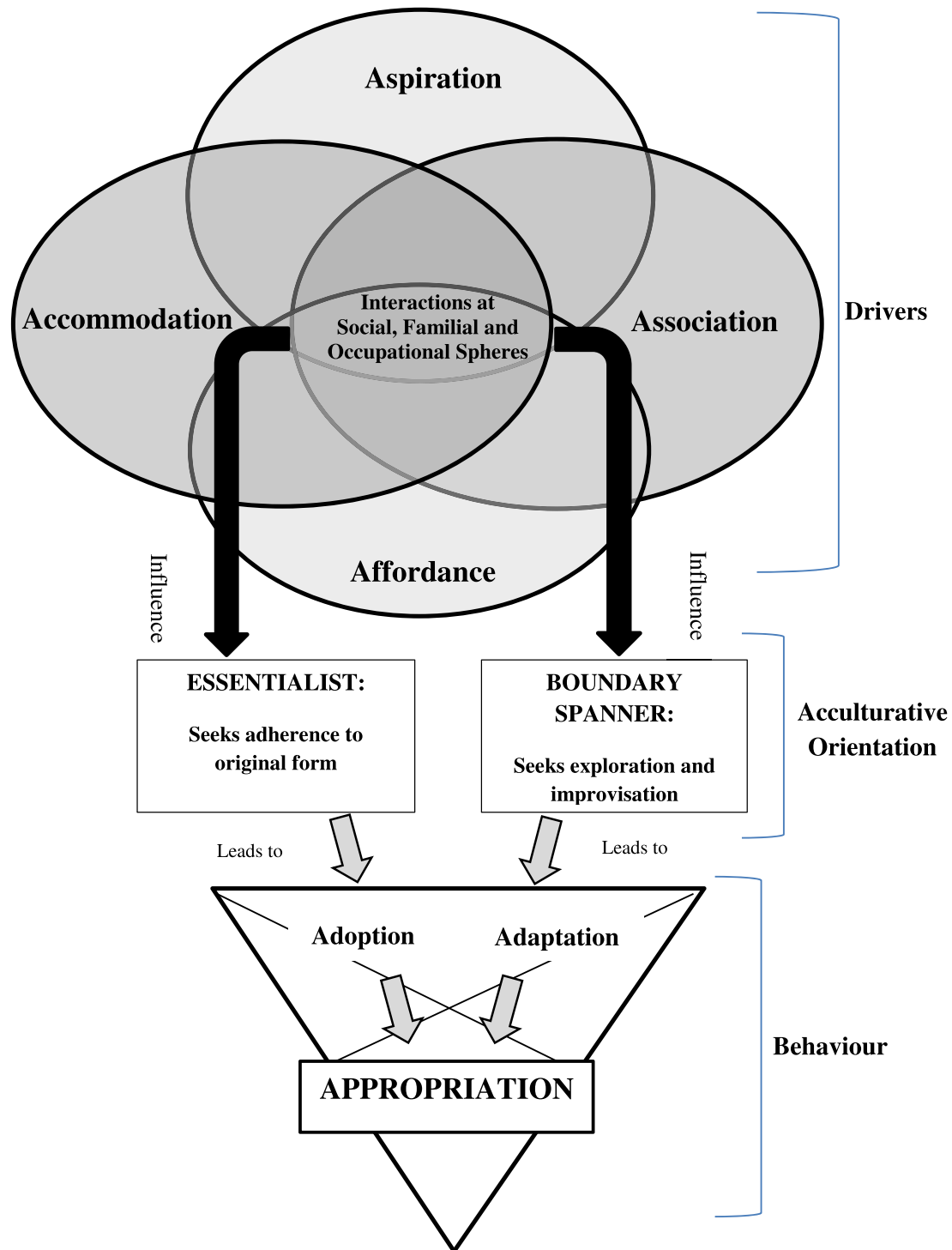
As discussed in the literature review, boundary-spanning behaviour denotes how individuals creatively link with out-group members (Dokko et al., 2013; Sosa, 2011; Tortoriello et al., 2012), and it enables individuals to negotiate with multiple identities (Schotter & Abdelzaher, 2013). Boundary-spanning entrepreneurs, managers and ordinary employees exercise their creative, flexible, and improvising capabilities to overcome intra- and inter-organisational complexities (Pedersen et al., 2019; Schotter et al., 2017). In the context of this study, we triangulate the interpretation of boundary-spanning behaviours from IB and IM (Schotter & Abdelzaher, 2013; Schotter et al., 2017), sociology (Sosa, 2011; Tortoriello et al., 2012), consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2007), and cultural studies (Goldberg et al., 2016) and conceptualise it as individuals’ exploration of various cultural attributes with an open mind that is free from predisposition, prejudice, and stubbornness. This is an orientation toward adopting and/or adapting out-groups’ cultural attributes.

We observed our participants mixing food items, ingredients, and customs from different traditions. Sometimes, boundary-spanning was driven by necessity, such as when traditional South Asian ‘goat’ (mutton) was replaced by lamb, and salmon was prepared in a mustard-soaked curry due to the unavailability of traditional South Asian fish. However, it was also sometimes driven by a desire for innovation, such as the preparation of turkey curry at Christmas or the serving of falafel with rice, lentils, and spicy pasta.

Essentialist intent presented itself paradoxically and simultaneously with boundary-spanning behaviour. The two were not mutually exclusive, as participants exhibited both behaviours in different contexts. One may be essentialist in single malt whisky consumption but boundary-spanning in creating a Mexican fusion vegetable curry. Essentialism and boundary spanning can complement each other. One participant explained that her home-based preparation addressed her desire for *ghee*, and she was happy to forego authenticity to achieve this. By identifying the dialectical influence of these two apparently divergent intents, we demonstrate the flow of behaviour that leads to acculturation and enculturation. Fig. 1 presents a summary of these findings.

#### 5.1.3. Appropriation

In common with certain branches of the acculturation literature (Dey et al., 2017; Peñaloza, 1994), we seek not to theorise acculturation strategies but to conceptualise the orientations that lie at the core of the acculturation and enculturation processes. We argue that if (im)migrants are driven by an essentialist orientation, they are likely to adopt a cultural attribute in its purest form, whereas those driven by boundary-spanning orientation may combine adoption and adaptation. This constitutes the appropriation of culture and derives from actors



**Fig. 1.** (Im)migrants' appropriation of culture

Note: The figure demonstrates the influence of four drivers of acculturation (4As – aspiration, accommodation, association and affordance) on the acculturative orientations (essentialist and boundary spanning) that determine the adoption and adaptation of a cultural attribute leading to its appropriation. Hence, the figure encapsulates the drivers and dialectical flow of (im)migrants' appropriation of culture.

exploring their own or another culture without any particular concern for perceived purity. As seen in our review of the literature, 'appropriation of culture' does not necessarily entail the hegemonic, commodified distortion of marginalised culture, as described in the existing literature (e.g., [Gertner, 2019](#)) but may represent an organic outcome or improvised version of a cultural attribute inculcated by situational constraints or a lack of experiential understanding.

Nevertheless, (im)migrants' appropriation of culture inevitably

occurs in multicultural social or occupational contexts, where individuals can neither resist the attraction of adopting other cultural attributes nor master fully the skills and understanding required to adopt those attributes puristically. Food consumption demonstrates this practice, and our findings indicate that individuals may choose to appropriate traditional foods from their own cultures as much as they appropriate food from other cultures. Even though they have the desire for an essentialist way of adopting their own or other cultures, often they

are enforced to adapt due to the contextual needs. Individuals' personal/familial and work life have a reciprocal influence on each other, as the appropriation often smooths cultural integration within social and occupational settings.

## 5.2. Theoretical contribution

### 5.2.1. Contribution to the acculturation literature

This article has theorised acculturative orientation as a determinant for a relatively overlooked concept: (im)migrants' appropriation of culture. Evident within the data is the dialectical nature of the acculturative orientations that lead to food culture appropriation. The desire for authenticity and the drive for innovation – seemingly irreconcilable, bipolar extremes – produce dialectical tensions which indicate the discursive struggles inherent in the everyday lived experiences of (im) migrants. However, these appear not as an antithetical clash of home and host cultures, as alluded to in the post-assimilationist literature in which the dominant culture shapes emergent meanings (Banerjee et al., 2022; Kizgin et al., 2018; Peñaloza, 1994). Rather, a triad of home, host, and hybrid cultures combine to co-produce meanings that are negotiated, dynamic, and contextualised. Co-dining is situated in the localised contexts of friendships (Rawlins, 2008) and rituals (Galvin et al., 2018) – etymologically, a 'companion' is 'one who breaks bread with another' – which enables home and host cultures to interpenetrate, producing indeterminacies and an eclectic cultural liminality, as shown in Fig. 2.

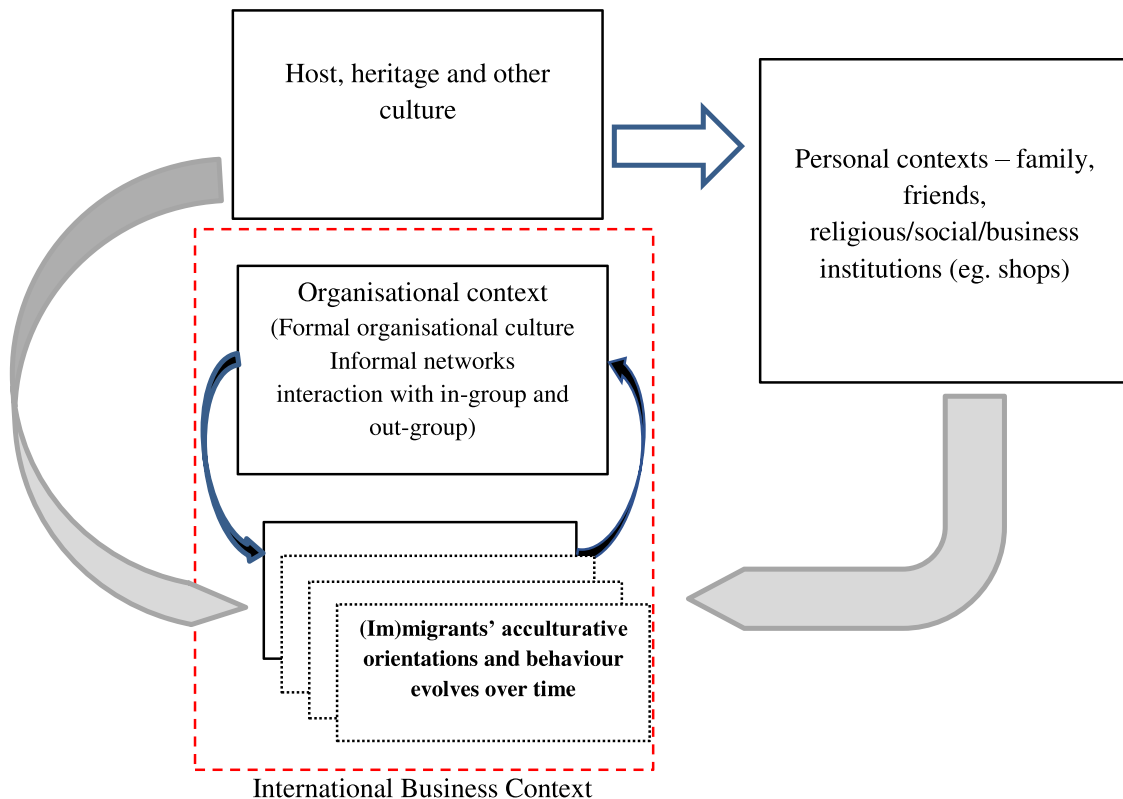
We go beyond the existing IB literature (Li et al., 2021; Valenzuela & Rogers, 2021) to suggest that the influence between work and personal/familial/social acculturation is not one-way traffic; instead, they are reciprocally interwoven, a perspective that has remained underexplored

thus far. As the emergence of dialectical phenomena necessitates a discourse committed to the assumption of change, the challenges of normative cultural values and practices is consistently present amongst participants. Whilst this presents as playful and casual rather than as a consciously politicised act of defiance, it nonetheless represents a form of normative evaluation in which the actors' otherness is simultaneously subverted and subverting.

Hence, the negativity surrounding 'appropriation of culture' due to unscrupulous and exploitive intent may not be applied to individuals seeking to explore cultural hybridity. The dialectical tensions experienced by our participants erode monolithic norms. However, this ambivalence does not trigger a rejection of hegemonic cultural norms through abrogation but rather harnesses bricolage to complement pre-existent norms through appropriation. As such, the ambiguity and hybridity of our participants' worldliness may be understood as a reaction against reductionism and essentialism, and a desire to build new meanings through rationality, openness, and experimentation.

Challenging the orthodoxy and contributing to IB scholarship – context matters

As mentioned, the PSA and IB literature on acculturation have evolved in parallel, with limited evidence thus far of the two converging. While global migration remains at the core of both streams, the paradoxical nature of globalisation, which puts us simultaneously in homogenous (due to global culture) and heterogenous (due to multicultural composition) societies (Cleveland & Bartsch, 2019), warrants a more holistic perspective to study acculturation. However, there is a lack of axiomatic conceptualisation of how organisations can deal with (im)migrants who constantly endeavour to negotiate cultural differences between their in-group and out-group members. Their



**Fig. 2.** Context matters – dynamic inter-relationship between work and personal contexts leads to the evolution of acculturative orientations and behaviours  
Note: The figure highlights the importance and reciprocal interrelationships of work and personal contexts in the acculturation process. Acculturative orientations and behaviours are neither static, nor independent of the contexts where they are appropriated and, hence, need to be studied from a holistic perspective. The dynamics within the wider social and personal contexts influence an employee's interaction within an organisation that eventually shape the evolving nature of their acculturative orientations and behaviour. The figure merges the two streams of acculturation studies – PSA and IB - and challenges the orthodoxy of IB literature by underscoring the essence of contexts.



experience and the formation and reformation of identity within wider society are not disconnected from what and how they behave within an organisation, shown in Fig. 2.

As described by Schotter and Abdelzaher (2013), Muslim *halal* traders, having triple identities, often exercise their boundary-spanning capabilities to mitigate intra- and inter-organisational challenges. The application of Berry's (1981)  $2 \times 2$  matrix may not be appropriate to acculturative orientation that defines an (im)migrant's adoption and/or adaptation of cultural attributes in their personal and occupational lives. We address the growing need of this increasingly globalised world by integrating the two apparently distinct acculturation contexts and focusing on the nuanced and intricate interactions of human actors within these contexts.

As argued in the extant literature (Delios, 2017; Schotter et al., 2017), a meticulous selection of a rich context can provide stronger implications for theory and practice. Barring some exceptions (eg. Banerjee et al., 2022), the existing acculturation literature mostly focuses on a single context. Our research has covered two geographic contexts; converged personal, familial, social and work-related settings; and engaged with both immigrants and migrants. By basing our findings on these diverse contextual settings, we are able not only to differentiate our work from conventional PSA acculturation (Berry, 1981; Peñaloza, 1994) and IB literature (Gillespie et al., 2010; Okpara & Kabongo, 2011; Selmer & De Leon, 1996) but also to extract (im)migrants' underlying orientations toward the adoption and adaptation of cultures.

Rather than considering home or host cultures to be static and isolated, and for (im)migrants to make straight-line transitions from one culture to another, we capture the continual turbulence created by the interplay of cultures and the haphazard ways in which actors move between and amongst them. Moreover, rather than understanding business culture in terms of an aspirational (often 'Western') value-set designed by managers for employees to conform to, we instead explore the tacit, informal, organic, and 'bottom-up' emergence of organisational culture, and the reciprocal manner in which employees and organisations endlessly influence each other's cultures. To achieve this, we treat the research contexts not simply as background characteristics to be accounted for but as pivotal to our concept of acculturation amongst international workers.

Hoorani et al. (2023) argue that context is intertwined with a phenomenon, as both evolve in a dynamic manner. We move back and forth between the context, the phenomenon, and the actor, and between work, home, restaurant, and birthplace. In doing so, we mirror the way in which actors constantly contextualise, decontextualise, and recontextualise themselves and their cultural development, either consciously or through the imposition of frequently changed conditions and environments. Our perspectives flow, ebb, and eddy turbulently with the acculturational actions of our participants, their enveloping contexts, and the phenomena in play.

We demonstrate how (im)migrants engage in a network of journeys between different cultures, journeys whose intricacy has not hitherto been acknowledged by theorists. (Im)migrants absorb their home cultures before emigrating for work, but they also absorb their own cultures' interpretations of other cultures. Thus, the research participants absorb their host countries' cultures, and those of their employers, but these are constantly moderated by their encounters with other non-native colleagues and diluted both by employers' representations of the national culture and by colleagues' collective co-creation of a multicultural environment. They move between the workplace, social gatherings of host communities and immigrants, and third spaces, such as shops or restaurants, which constantly vary in the extents of their indigeneity and foreignness, authenticity, and diversity.

Participants also oscillate between home and host countries, and their increasingly multicultural habits and outlooks are counter-balanced, subdued, diffracted, or reoriented by renewed exposure to the traditions and cultures of home. We notice that, there is no 'old' or 'new' culture, as actors and cultures continually shape each other dialectically.

(Im)migrants' acculturative orientations (essentialism and boundary spanning) and their behaviours (adoption/adaptation and appropriation) evolve through the dialectic and dynamic processes within different contextual settings, as shown in Fig. 2. Hence, our paper finds resounding and compelling evidence to suggest that context matters! The prevalent IB conceptualisation of business culture as dominant, static, and benevolently transformative of employees (e.g., Askegaard et al., 2005) does not capture this nuanced iteration between personal and occupational cultural interaction, adoption, and adaptation.

### 5.3. Managerial implications

Our study offers several future directions for international business, as, taken out of the food context, the concept of consumer appropriation of culture can be used to explore and understand better the behaviour of various business stakeholders, including (im)migrants. International and global businesses ought to find how their employees and customers perceive essential components of certain cultural attributes and when and how they tend to go beyond cultural boundaries and are willing to appropriate those cultural attributes.

The taste of pizza, offered by Pizza Hut, or sushi sold in Western supermarkets may not be the most authentic versions, but they have created their own brand of essentialist components, as Indian (im)migrants develop an appropriated taste of *Chindian* cuisine. Marketing communications for products can highlight target consumers' perceived essential attributes, which may go beyond just country of origin effects. For instance, Cobra Beer, despite being brewed in the UK, promotes 'Indianness' by associating itself with the UK curry industry. On the other hand, Nando's encourages customers to use different sauces to determine the spice strength and appropriate the food to their own liking.

In fashion, many Western Muslim women choose to appropriate the Islamic *hizab* with Western attire. In sports, cricket is organically appropriated in the Indian sub-continent and is played in climatic and environmental contexts that differ from cricket's origin in England. On the other hand, the global popularity of *yoga* is underpinned by the Indian root and ethos, which are deemed as essential components. In an organisational context, encouraging cross-cultural interaction and the adoption and adaptation of cultural attributes can be helpful for employees to have an acculturative experience. This goes far beyond the realm of knowing cultural sensitivities. It rather requires a practice-based and agile approach to support and instil a symbiosis between an organisation's own culture and what employees experience in the wider society.

### 5.4. Future research

The current study challenges many of the conventional constructs on which the 'traditional' acculturation literature has heavily focused, and introduces the 'novel' concept of the (im)migrants' appropriation of culture. As such, it creates opportunities for future research and theoretical development.

One interesting direction would be the exploration of the appropriation of culture from an organisational point of view, and how heritage and host cultures are being adopted, adapted, and appropriated by organisations operating in culturally different (and diverse) markets. Managing diversity and multicultural environments is no longer a challenge only for multinational companies. Local and small and medium enterprises must also now understand (im)migrant employees' acculturative behaviours and their effects.

Accordingly, organisations are required to appreciate the dynamic interrelationships between organisational and wider socio-cultural contexts, which shape employees' adoption, adaptation and appropriation of organisational cultures. In this stream of research, it would be particularly interesting to explore how the global mindset and the cultural awareness and understanding of business owners or managers can

lead to acculturation by promoting (im)migrants' appropriation of culture.

## Supplementary materials

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:[10.1016/j.jwb.2022.101417](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2022.101417).

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