

*Money, marriage and motion - aspects of South Africa's history of consumerism*

My current research builds on a long-standing engagement with South Africa's history of race and power, adding a new focus for me on the politics of consumption, status and inequality. The project initially took root in the present, with an interest in the post-apartheid 'freedom to consume', which has had a conspicuous, and highly contested, imprint in the contemporary conjuncture (see 'Races to Consume', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2010). This has since been a suggestive lens to hold to recent political controversies, not least the furore that attached to Julius Malema and the politicization of race in the ANC Youth League under his leadership (publication forthcoming).

I am now wanting to approach such issues within a wider historical and geographical frame. I have begun working on aspects of South Africa's history of consumerism, beginning in the late nineteenth century ('the great acceleration', as Chris Bayly puts it), and with an eye to the global movements of people and things that traversed more local aspirations to consume.

A series of issues and themes inform this work – which I hope to grapple with to varying degrees. While a study of emergent consumerist longings and desires is clearly important, I seek to anchor this in the material circuits of money and goods, and the modes of commerce, that made the imaginative life of things possible. In the first instance, this pertains to the conditions that enabled the supply of commodities to urban and more remote reaches of the country – including access to credit, banking, risk-taking and other ingredients of commercial success, as well as the changing repertoires of selling and shopping, from hawking and spaza shops through to department stores. This story of commerce is in turn inseparable from a history of the variegated 'middle class', along with the international and national migration that fed so powerfully into these dynamics of class and inequality. I hope to look in particular at the ways in which ways of doing business took root in Jewish and Asian communities of migrants, from the late nineteenth century – and how these were linked to marriage and familial attachments.

I'm also interested in a history of advertising and the making of consumers – a history linked, of course, to the regulation of race, class and gender, and emergent notions of status, taste and social standing.