

PROSPECTS FOR ETHNIC AFRICAN PRODUCTS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Tidings P. Ndhlovu and Leopold Lessassy

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to identify some key factors that are conducive to the exportation of ethnic African products into the European Union (EU) market. Our literature review seeks to contextualise the main players and processes at work. We also analyse the prospects for authentic African products in selected EU member states, namely France and the UK. We conclude that the reality on the ground often involves complex structures in socially and culturally heterogeneous contexts. Our exploratory study thus seeks to offer insights into these structures and processes, noting that the relationship between ethnic producers/retailers and their distributional channel members are often volatile and conflictual.

Keywords: African ethnic products; supply chain; distribution channel members; European Union (EU)

INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to identify some of the key factors which are conducive to the exportation of ethnic African products into the European Union (EU); namely, the supply chain or distributional channels (that is, business networks), the significance of the relationship between African (ethnic) producers/retailers and their distributional channel members, and the potential for African producers to form credible and powerful groupings which are not only capable of building relationships with European importers or trading companies, but also of challenging them where necessary. Clearly, such groupings are more likely to facilitate conditions for the expansion of African exports and bring about export income for development.

We therefore focus our attention on the difficulties associated with distributional channels; in other words, the difficulties faced by different actors and intermediaries (who are involved in wholesaling, purchasing and supplying ethnic products) as distinct from the informal nature of and cultural logic within Europe. In addition, while we recognise the wide range of potential factors related to the exportation of ethnic products, such as internal African factors, management-related factors in Africa, consumer behaviour in Europe *per se*, and macro/micro factors, our study will be primarily concerned with internal EU factors and, to a

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lesser extent, the role of the external environment (the national context in relation to the EU and World Trade Organisation, WTO) and the role of trade agreements.

In conducting this study, we interviewed representatives of numerous enterprises: those who are involved in the import-export business; owners of exotic stores; chief buyers and sellers; independent agents; and occasional intermediaries. Informed by these discussions, together with our secondary research, it increasingly became clear that there was a growing interest in authentic ethnic products, such as handicrafts, in the European market, particularly in France and the United Kingdom (UK). The increasing awareness of health and environmental (ecological) issues has been accompanied by a desire to purchase unique products which, in turn, are reflected in the development of theme retail stores, restaurants and/or convenience foods, organic foods and vegetarian products, and traditional handicrafts. Such a ‘revolution’ has been led by, amongst others, hyper/supermarkets such as *Marks and Spencer (M & S)*, *Sainsbury’s*, and *Tesco* (in the UK) and *Monoprix*, *Carrefour*, *Auchan* and *Xenos* (in France). While the UK was the first country in Europe where distributors sought to promote ethnic products, the French supermarkets, led by the pioneer *Monoprix*, have been conducting yearly (one-week) ‘ethnic food’ promotional campaigns since 1998. In this regard, importers have also tended to work with retailers in organising in-store food ‘tasting’ sessions, advertising and providing marketing materials.

Two factors are also important here: firstly, television cookery programmes and confidence resulting from increased international travel have encouraged more adventurous home cooking, and people are more willing to try out ‘exotic’ and novel ingredients. Secondly, as immigrant communities gained a higher profile in the UK over a number of decades, consumers increasingly became exposed to ethnic food. Afro-Caribbean food, for example, was seen to be offering exciting new tastes and flavours. *Dragon Stout*, among others, has benefited from increased interest in foreign imported beer, particularly as an accompaniment to food, and take-up from non Afro-Caribbean people is also increasing. In one of our interviews, one supplier pointed out excitedly that: “*Our products are crossing over to the mainstream consumer. All our products are authentic and not 'Anglicised.'* We supply a high percentage of the UK's Afro-Caribbean and African community, who demand brands and tastes available in their country of origin. That said, we are working on improving the packaging of our products to give them a more mainstream feel”.

Clearly, the EU market has a number of attractions for African producers: it is the “largest unified market in the world” (Biggs, Miller, Otto & Tyler 1996). There are no language barriers between the EU and African countries; it lies within the same time zone; and the distances, particularly for North and West Africa, are not that huge. Despite the threat from China, African countries such as Mauritius, Kenya, Cote d’Ivoire and South Africa have continued to stage a rear-guard defence of their manufactured goods market, notably handicrafts, clothing and home products. In response to environmental concerns, small-scale farmers in Mali have increasingly switched to growing organic cotton and providing organic dyes to the textile industry. The close proximity of North African producers, coupled with their relatively skilled workers and low wages, has continued to help them meet orders quickly and respond to changing fashion trends, unlike garment producers in Sub-Saharan Africa.

This is the background against which an examination of the potential for African business people within the EU could be conducted. Apart from the opportunities for African producers, there are also parameters or constraints (such as certification procedures) which

tend to obstruct the growth of authentic ethnic products. Given the nature of the EU market, together with the cultural dimension and/or historical ties of African countries to Europe, can producers forge successful and sustainable links with distributors and/or intermediaries?

Our paper first presents a literature review within which the relationship between producers, (ethnic) retailers and their distributional channels is studied. This is followed by a data analysis and an examination of France and the UK as potential markets for African ethnic products. On this basis, our concluding remarks address some of the opportunities and constraints facing African producers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethnic products often conjure up an image of exotic sophistication, even if the reality involves more complex structures in socially and culturally heterogeneous contexts (Omar, Hirst & Brankson 2004; Quah & Tan 2010). It is with this in mind that we first consider the neo-classical viewpoint, building on the preceding discussion to posit the Keynesian/neo-Ricardian perspective which introduces the social context into the discussion, and finally ending with the political economy perspective which seeks to enrich our understanding of the processes in play.

The Neo-Classical Viewpoint: Mechanism for Allocating Resources in an Equitable Way?

For the neo-classical economists, the EU has increasingly become a trading village, where African producers take advantage of whatever opportunities may exist (Ndhlovu forthcoming 2011a; 2011b). To the extent that “immigrant populations integrate with the mainstream and their disposable income rise[s], these ethnic pools begin to have wider choice. Better education opportunities mean that these pools are literate [and] can - - - make informed choices - - - [from] the wide array of competing brands, products and services. Ethnic integration does not mean fully embracing new cultures. On the contrary, these shifting ethnic segments hang-on closely to their cultural root and identity including language and religion” (Myrie 2007, p. 1). While the so-called ‘ethnic sub-cultures’ (Cui 1997) are not as large in Europe as in the USA, it is contended that the presence of immigrants in the EU has led not only to the potential growth of demand for African products, but also to ethnic-minority businesses within the EU itself (Biggs *et al*, 1996, pp. 4; 6).

In the circumstances, the price mechanism will allocate resources in an equitable way (Ndhlovu & Spring 2009), so that any attempt by African producers to charge ‘over the odds’ (premium prices) for sub-standard goods will be met with bankruptcy. In other words, ‘product quality, delivery and price requirements’ are crucial to the success or otherwise of ethnic retailing and distribution (Biggs *et al*, 1996). African producers can also take advantage of the EU market since shopping has increasingly become a leisure pursuit; that is, themed retail environments tend to satiate the “marketplace demands for more leisure” (Sherry, Kozinets, Storm, Duhachek, Nuttavuthisit & DeBerry-Spence 2001, p. 467).

The Keynesian/neo-Ricardian Perspective: Introducing the Social Context?

The Keynesians/neo-Ricardians, on the other hand, point to the ethnically diverse European markets and the uncertainty which permeates decision making. This makes contractual relationships more complex than envisaged by neo-classical economists, particularly in the light of the continuing importance of sovereignty of national governments. The political environment varies from country to country so that risk assessment becomes a crucial part of decision making. Thus, we need to appreciate particular governments' actions with respect to taxation, equity control and expropriation. Clearly, competitiveness in terms of production costs (wages, productivity and exchange rates) can, if circumstances are favourable, enable African producers to gain a foothold in niche markets, despite the seemingly insurmountable institutional and infrastructure constraints, such as local regulations, rules of origin vis-à-vis duty-free access, market size (as well as intensity) and distributional channels (organised network of institutions and agencies such as supermarkets, importers, distributors, specialised shops and wholesalers) (Biggs *et al.* 1996, p. 2; Heide 1994).

According to Brown & Timmins (1981), McCammon (1970) and Usunier (2002), the type of organisation, with respect to producer and distributor, varies on a continuum; in other words, it is predicated on market/hierarchical characteristics and/or the degree of formalisation. Transactions cost theory may then go hand-in-hand with the theory of discrete/relational exchange (McNeil 1980; 1985). Transactions cost theory focuses on the tendency of the supplier to behave opportunistically, and this behaviour can only be mitigated by contractual relationships. If there is market failure, so the argument goes, the firm should embark on integration and assume greater control (Williamson 1979; Cameron & Ndhlovu 2000). Where ethnic products are concerned, our investigation has revealed three categories of intermediaries where a choice between the market and ways of integration (via contracts or cultural factors) can be exercised.

It must be argued that emphasis ought to be put on how distributors can influence the relationship between manufacturers and dealers (Dietsch 1996). Furthermore, “formal and informal networks account for lowering of transactions costs and developing of specific business skills that can serve as deterrents against corruption and/or non-compliance in contractual affairs” (Ndhlovu & Spring 2009, p. 36). Informal traders will, for example, rely on trust. The consequent “strategic collaboration” should not, however, minimize “the role played by government, as well as by political, economic, social and environmental factors” (*ibid.*).

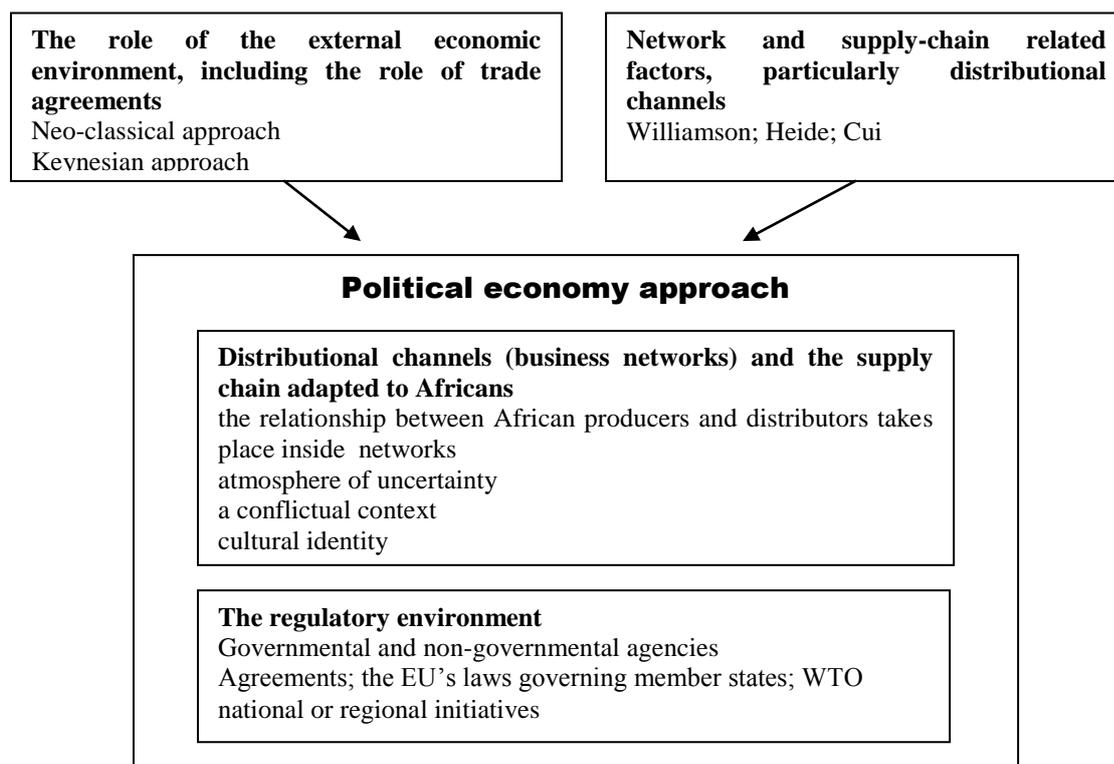
The distortions in developing countries' labour markets, including imperfect labour mobility, have significant effects on trade liberalisation and, in some cases, produce unexpected second-best results which cannot necessarily be solved at the national level. This is why many African politicians adopted regional policies in order to address problems of export promotion and the accompanying regulations. One difficulty is how governance can be enhanced in countries where government institutions are extremely weak and private economic activities are largely concentrated in the informal economy.

The Political Economy Approach: What are the Processes at Work in the Relationship between African Producers, Distributors and Intermediaries?

It is against this background that the political economy approach transcends the notions of individualism and voluntary exchange, as well as those concerning technological-industrial organization. It examines the forms in which the relationship between African producers and distributors take place, including the relationship between intermediaries (small businesses and suppliers) and, for example, the European Export Management or Trading Companies. These relationships exist within a conflictual context. Moreover, formal and informal networks are formed and reshaped against the background of institutional and historical legacies that involve power relationships and globalisation, as well as cultural identity (Ndhlovu & Spring 2009, p. 37; Ndhlovu, forthcoming 2011a, 2011b). Paradoxically, informal networks can confer advantages in terms of price, product counterfeiting and the rapid switch of product lines by informal intermediaries. We must also point out that civil society activism has registered many ‘successes’ in the WTO, including the 2003 agreement on cheaper medicines for developing countries, and the inclusion of discussions on fisheries subsidies, environmental goods and services, and food aid in the *Doha Round* of negotiations.

However, the regulatory environment has some impact on the activities of both formal and informal relationships. Governmental and non-governmental agencies enforce laws or set guidelines for conducting business. Winning government approval is thus part and parcel of doing ‘good business’. Global marketing activities can also be affected by a number of international or regional economic organizations/arrangements, such as the Multi-Fibre Agreement, the EU’s laws governing member states and their relationship with third parties (e.g. the Cotonou Partnership Agreements) and the WTO *Doha Round* of negotiations which are designed to bring about liberalisation and market access at a time when trading blocs regard protectionism as the surest way of coping with the recession. In response, several national or regional initiatives, such as the ACP (African Caribbean and Pacific) Business Forum and the Joint Economic Forum in Mauritius, have been taken by developing countries. Power relations are reflected by, for example, the ability of the USA and EU to pressurise smaller countries into opening up their markets without reciprocity on their part. Moreover, economic institutions, such as *Communauté Économique des États de l’Afrique de l’Ouest* (CDEAO), FAO, World Bank, IMF and political institutions such as the African Union and ACP-EU, often do not take account of the informal economy. Yet these complex environments have an impact on how producers, distributors and retailers conduct business. As one informant put it to us: “*How can distributors like ourselves influence the relationship between manufacturers and dealers and how can African producers without any power cope with that?*”

These constraints do determine whether African producers can actually locate in the themed “retail spaces ... [Increasingly] capitalism achieves its remarkable success and growth in part by way of the manner in which it occupies and produces ‘a space’” (Sherry *et al.*, 2001, p. 469). In the circumstances where African producers do manage to penetrate ‘the profit-making space’, this can concurrently lead to hostility from domestic (EU) producers and even fiercer competition for the retail space.



DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In France, the distribution of ethnic products is concentrated amongst a few big retailers, namely, *Carrefour*, *Auchan*, *Casino*, *Leclerc*, *Intermarche*, *Super U* and *Monoprix*. Of these, the biggest, in terms of revenue and the number of stores, are *Carrefour*, *Auchan*, *Casino* and *Monoprix*. *Carrefour* has more than 150 stores located in France, while *Auchan* has something in the region of 80 stores. Using these criteria, and the fact that these two supermarkets were the most welcoming, we finally chose *Carrefour* and *Auchan* for our representative sample. However, it was difficult to select a sample of the representative stores from these two supermarkets; instead, each supermarket gave us permission to interview staff in one of its top five stores, that is, those which sold ethnic products during 2009. As a result, our investigation became informed, not simply by sampling methods, but by a case study of a *Carrefour* store in Nîmes and an *Auchan* store in Valence in southern France.

The consideration of the UK, which has a longer historical development of promoting ethnic products and also has a more diverse market, was constrained by the difficulty in getting permission to interview importers who dominate the market. This subsequently led to gleaning of information from secondary sources and soliciting the remainder from store managers of *Sainsbury's* and ethnic shop owners who buy from producers in Brixton (London) and the Northern Quarter in Manchester.

This is the context within which we investigated ethnic products which are sold in France and the UK. To summarise:

In France, we conducted interviews with retailers and importers who buy from African ethnic producers as described below:

- ethnic shop owners;
- hypermarket store managers: These interviews involved store managers of *Carrefour* and *Auchan* located in Valence and Nîmes in southern France; and
- importers: We talked to representatives of 4 enterprises, particularly those who are responsible for the import-export business, owners of exotic stores and supermarkets. Amongst the importers, we also interviewed independent agents, one group acting in an informal basis, and whose customers bought from ethnic shops.

In the UK, retailers who purchase African ethnic products in London and the Northern Quarter in Manchester were interviewed:

- ethnic shop owners who purchase from producers in Brixton; and
- *Sainsbury's* store managers.

However, we were unable to obtain permission to interview importers in the UK, and so our information on two importers (Table 1 below) who deal in African ethnic products was gleaned from internet sources.

TABLE 1: Sample

	Hypermarkets	African ethnic shops	African purchasers	Importers
UK	1	2	4	2
France	2	4	6	4

We also used a questionnaire to tease out information about where consumers bought ethnic products, why they shopped at hypermarkets and why they indeed did their shopping at ethnic shops. The questionnaire also asked respondents approximately how many times they had bought ethnic products at the selected hypermarkets in the previous month, and how many times they had done so at ethnic shops in the previous week. They had to mark with an (X) all the reasons, in descending order of importance, why they chose to purchase ethnic products at hypermarkets and ethnic shops (*e.g.* country of origin, quality, price, *etc*); and indeed why they did not buy these products at the designated hypermarkets or ethnic shops.

We questioned 48 people whom we met at the *Carrefour* parking lot, about *Where they bought ethnic products? Why they shopped at hypermarkets? and Why they did their shopping at the ethnic shops?* Using the information obtained, together with other secondary sources, we were able to construct a picture of the origin of products sold (Table 2) and trends in shopping habits (Table 3). Table 3, where the column sum is more than 48, reflects the fact that we allowed the 48 informants to give multiple reasons for their choice of retail outlet.

Table 2: Products sold by hypermarkets, supermarkets and ethnic shops

Ethnic Products	Country of Origin
Tables	Congo, Gabon
Handicrafts / Handmade crafts	Mauritius, Cot d'Ivoire, Kenya, South Africa, Sénégal and Mali
Collection de meubles en acacia massif teinté brillant	Mali, Congo et Guinée
Yam, Ripe Plantain, Green Plantain	Ghana
Potjiekos, Fruit and vegetables from the land	South Africa
Grains and flour: gari, rice flour, beans, potatoes	Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya
Bananas	Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire
Clothing / textiles	Tunisia

Table 3: Reasons why people buy from hypermarkets / ethnic shops

	Hypermarkets	Ethnic Shops
Country of origin souvenir	2	28
Cheap price	15	20
Good quality	25	12
Products are fresh	25	12
Trust the vendor (s)	4	19
Vendors are welcoming	10	28
Clean location	31	9
Availability of products ('I'm sure')	42	5
Habit ('I'm used to it')	36	7
Not far from home	22	20
Exceptional circumstances	4	35
location	20	8

TRENDS FOR ETHNIC PRODUCTS: THE UK AND FRANCE

The United Kingdom

While there has been increasing interest in ethnic products in the UK over the past few years, the so-called 'Afro-centric goods' still hover around one percent of the UK market. It is generally agreed that the lucrative lines are in women's clothes. According to Biggs *et al.*, if Sub-Saharan producers had, for example, been price competitive, revitalised their designs in line with fashion trends and upgraded their aging mills, firms like *Gardner* (UK's biggest importer and distributor of school wear) would not have drastically reduced their orders from their Kenyan suppliers in 1995, nor would buyers of products from Sub-Saharan Africa have lost interest in trade fairs (Biggs *et al.*, 1996, p. 17).

African producers can take cognisance of Europeans' greater awareness of ethnic, decorative goods, which is demonstrated by the number of cultural events and themed collections in stores such as *Harrods* and *Liberty's*, as well as distributors such as *Boots* and *Natural Selection*. Insofar as good management structures and versatility are important, it is not surprising that *Natural Selection* switched from sourcing much of its products from Africa, particularly Kenya, to the Chinese market (*ibid.*: 20). Other retailers, such as *Woolworth's*, *Gardner* and *Primark* have subsequently responded to the recession by following suit. For its part, *Gardner* also vertically integrated its Kenyan supplier, *Bedi*, to meet head-on the challenge posed by discount stores, mail order and out-of-town superstores such as *IKEA*.

Notwithstanding this, African producers selling to hypermarkets and supermarkets in the UK and France were optimistic that growth was possible in areas where the EU giants dominate. One customer of a boutique even remarked that: "sometimes my favourite items are not available, that's something I don't understand". Others noted that vendors appeared not to be concerned about this (for a discussion of acculturation of ethnic consumers in Britain, also see Omar, *et al* 2004).

Some importers buy the goods outright in the country of origin and import them, while others act on their behalf and share the profit. Nevertheless, in the UK, big importers often deal with supermarkets on behalf of producers of goods from Africa. That is the case with *Wanis*, Britain's biggest specialists in Afro-Caribbean products. Given the failure of ethnic producers to conform to certain specifications and/or fulfil their commitments, importers located in Europe, like *Wanis*, set up both national sales forces (of eight, in the case of *Wanis*, with a

growing percentage of its volume in mainstream grocery) and a network of national and regional wholesalers and independents. There are many UK-based importers/distributors of Afro-Caribbean products, some focusing on ‘metamorphosing’ their brands into African products, notably *Suzi-wan*. Others, such as *Wanis*, do not just end there (*i.e.* by carrying the high profit lines), but they also complement their portfolio with a number of less well-known products and, in so doing, provide customers with a wider range of products.

In addition to over 1,000 Caribbean products, UK-based importers market a comprehensive range of products from Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa. But integration based on culture seems not to work beyond ethnic shops, primarily because intermediaries are essentially of African origin, occasional and itinerants. Many intermediaries provide their own warranty-related services based on culture which the modern retailer is unable to match. As far as financial aspects are concerned, informal traders need to develop at least two methods for avoiding some of the associated risks. The first is a personal guarantee, which does not apply to hypermarket managers. Informal traders rely on personal trust. It is effective enough to be accepted by hypermarkets when delay occurs in the delivery of the goods. The second method is chain credit. Clearly, giving credit without formal guarantees only works with strict customer selection, mainly people of the same ethnic group and/or family members. This does not happen within the context of supplier and distributor relationships in Europe.

What is essential for importers is that brands be established as quality products in their country of origin first, and that they have some historical heritage behind them. This will then form a basis for their establishment within the UK market. One respondent noted that consistency of supply is another consideration: “*We work closely with our manufacturers to deliver authentic products that offer attractive margins to our customers and answer a consumer demand or need. Given that the UK market is often very different from the domestic market of overseas manufacturers, it is crucial that we understand each other's expectations*”. In this light, one distributor was heard to say: “*we don't trust African suppliers to deliver on their commitments*”.

France

Despite the growth in the retail market for ethnic foods, products from Sub-Saharan Africa account for a small proportion of the French market. Moreover, the majority of high-quality garments are from Mauritius, while the bulk of textile imports are represented by *gray (ecru)* cloth from Cote d'Ivoire and other French-speaking former colonies. According to AC NIELSEN (Marketing Research, Retailers and Supermarket Consumer Panels), in 2006 the French market for Asian food products represented more than \$41 million, compared to \$25 million for Tex-Mex food products. The latter's market has increased annually by 25 percent. Unlike the UK, estimates show that the informal trade (notably in handicrafts) is as important as formal trade.

Table 4 shows *Carrefour's* revenue following a two-week promotion of fruit and vegetables. Apart from bananas (mainly due to competition), the margins were higher than sales.

Table 4: Carrefour's revenue from fruit and vegetables

Products	Origin	Percentage / Overall Sales of Stores	Percentage Margin
yam	Ghana, Nigeria	5	60
Grains and flour: gari, rice flour, beans, potatoes	Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya	11	50
Ripe plantain	South Africa	9	44
bananas	Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Peru	23	20
Other African fruits, pineapples	South Africa	17	24

There was real interest in 'exotic' products at *Carrefour* stores and we also observed this when visiting *Monoprix*, the first distributor to initiate this type of business. During a two-week promotional period at *Carrefour*, it was clear that *Carrefour* dealt indirectly with African producers via trading importers, a phenomenon which seemed to apply for the UK as well. This poses serious concerns, such as difficulties for ethnic product suppliers to establish their products as brands. For example, during this promotional period, the manager in the Nîmes hypermarket did not even know who the producers were as he only dealt with importers. Managers in other supermarkets also did not know who their African suppliers were: "The only thing I know about these bananas is that they are from Cameroon, delivered by our importer who is located in Marseille". In ethnic stores which are supplied by multinational corporations (MNCs), there were few African brands. Since MNCs have their own channels and marketing, the market share for ethnic products remains relatively small and seemingly static.

Notably, French consumers satisfy their desires for ethnic foods at home by cooking various cuisines, including Asian, African, American and Indian foods. According to SECODIP, a French research and evaluation firm, the typical French consumer who buys ethnic foods is under 50 years old, lives in cities with more than 60,000 inhabitants, has income in the medium-to-upper level, and has two children. He or she buys ethnic meals, not necessarily for dietary reasons, but for taste.

There is thus a chink of opportunity for African producers in the light of demographic trends in France: young adults' (20 to 39 years) demand for domestic furniture rises as clothing loses its appeal with age; and, despite the social conflict accompanying perceived injustices of (illegal) immigration, French people are generally welcoming of other cultures, in particular African cultures. This is also demonstrated by the popularity of African art in, for example, Paris, and the fact that the *Hermes* chain continues to buy jewellery from the Sahel region. Biggs *et al*, 1996 also contend that, unlike UK people, the French can be divided into two discreet groups: those who regard fashion as the be-all-and-end-all objective; and those who, in response to the recession, profess to look for value-for-money products, which is where authentic African products come in. They claim that it is this latter group that has also enticed *M & S* (from the UK) and *Zara* (from Spain) to enter the French market. Judging from these experiences, so the argument goes, ethically influenced products must adapt to changing fashion trends in France, as amply demonstrated by the successful campaign by *Pier Import*, a speciality store (Biggs *et al*, 1996, p. 23).

Producers have to widen their clientele to beyond African customers: "selling only to Africans is not the solution" commented one African intermediary, "we should extend this to French people". There are only 7.5 million black/coloured people in France *i.e.* 12.5% of the population of France (1 million of Asian origin, 4 million originally from North African and

2.5 million of Afro-Caribbean descent). There is thus not much to be gained from targeting a limited number of (African) consumers: “*by doing so we can't expect enough revenue from our exchange*”. Nevertheless, we must take account of specific needs of customers from certain religious or ethnic communities, for example, personal-care is often associated with black or Arabic people.

What seemed to emerge from our interviews is that, selling to the great part of the population is considered to be the only viable strategy for a credible export business. That is why ethnic products have often been designated as ‘exotic’. One respondent remarked: “*Look at some products which, prior to consumption, were focused only on foreigners: the situation has changed, right now everybody, whatever their origin, may enjoy eating, for example, kiwi [fruit] in our hypermarket Carrefour in France*”.

Clearly, big brands are targeting Europeans who like foreign food and have ‘exotic’ tastes – *Unisabi*, which is owned by *Mars Food*, and the *Suzi-Wan* line, which appears as *Le Meilleur de l'Orient*, being cases in point. Indeed, in the supermarkets we visited, we were shown national brands displayed as ethnic or exotic products: *Illusion vraie* of *Gemey (L'Oréal)*, with two ethnic colours, *caramel et cacao*, etc., although there was an avoidance to go as far as introducing special lines which cater for black/coloured skins. A similar trend could be observed in several brands in *Sainsbury's* stores in London. Some hypermarkets also stock specific brands, such as *Fashion Fair*, *Fiori Roberts* and *Naomi Sims*, but authentic products are rare. Many beauty products are not designed for black/coloured customers and, consequently, they (the latter) tend to buy from African ethnic shops.

As in the UK, women's clothing represents by far the largest value and potential for growth. In response to threats posed by specialty chains and hypermarkets, departmental stores, such as *Galeries Lafayette*, have given space in their stores to special boutiques and exhibitions, while also indulging in their own promotional campaigns. The looming danger for African producers is that some of these value-for-money stores, notably the *TATI* company, are not only targeting immigrant communities in France, but have also begun to make inroads in African countries, such as South Africa (*ibid*, p. 24).

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

This paper has attempted to show that an examination of the prospects for the trade of ethnic products with the European Union is not as straightforward as first suggested by neo-classical theory. Alternative approaches focus on the complex interplay of ethnic retailers and their distributional channels, and the contradictory restructuring of such relationships which involves preservation and fierce competition (continuity and change) as part and parcel of the survival strategy. It is in this light that we began to explore the prospects for exporting ethnic African products into France and the UK.

Despite numerous difficulties, there are many reasons for believing that successful relationships between ethnic and modern retailing stores can be established. This will require awareness of economic and cultural factors, of the product and demographic trends, and success of authentic products beyond hypermarkets/supermarkets (Table 5), *Pier Import* in France being a case in point. For example, by sourcing local materials, South Africa's Port Elizabeth-based classic safari equipment supplier, *Melville & Moon*, not only provides authenticity, but also shows how African producers can carve niche markets for themselves.

There is also an increasing attraction for African products within the EU, an enthusiasm which, judging from our interviews, was evidently shared by store managers at *Auchan*.

The importers that risk investing in promising products in the UK do not act as extended sales offices of the manufacturer. They often put forward a four marketing-mix-variable-strategy: the great importance of communicating ideas; best practice; product enhancement; and knowing the market, all of which allegedly gives a competitive edge to both importers and their partners. For brand owners that require more than a sales network, importers offer to take control and manage public relations, marketing and promotional aspects of the brands. Importers focus on the long term, and only invest in activities that will add value and longevity to a brand.

Table 5: Key for success in both hypermarkets and ethnic shops

Key of Success	Conditions for Success	Hypermarkets	Ethnic Shops
Cultural aspects	Integration and partnership based on a country's cultural origins is important	However, it does not work if intermediaries are occasional and itinerant	-Important: ethnic actors meet to share the same practices -But growth is limited
Economic aspects	-Regional African policy -Role of international or regional economic organisations -Relationship with non-profit organisations helping small ethnic producers	- Breakdown in direct relationship between African suppliers and retailers; replaced by contracts pertaining to marketing aspects which have to be respected -Big Growth is expected	
Potential customers, Non- African non-Caribbean people		-Available to hypermarkets	-Less available

The most popular brands stocked by *Wanis* include *Dragon Stout*, *DG Malta*, *Big Bamboo*, *Irish Moss*, *Baldwin's Sarsaparilla*, *Tropiway Fufu Flour* and *Bigga*. Historically these brands have achieved their position in the UK as a result of a loyal consumer base, therefore more work needs to be done to broaden their appeal over time without alienating core customers. Omar *et al*, 2004 also note that 'indigenous' people in Britain are more loyal than 'ethnic minorities' to national and store brands. What is also clear is that African products do not feature strongly amongst the leading brands in supermarkets. According to our informants in hypermarkets, Asian products bring in more revenue. For importers, it is, for example *Jamaica Sun* products, such as *Callaloo* and *Ackee*, which appeal mostly to Afro-Caribbean shoppers who make up the core of that range's customer base; and they do particularly well in areas with a large Afro-Caribbean population. There are, however, encouraging signs that 'the taste of the Caribbean' is beginning to appeal to a wider audience: "*Our 'Tropical Sun' products enjoy popularity across the total shopper profile, with our Hot Pepper Sauces and Coconut Water selling well in the multiples*". It is also hoped that future research will be able to show that a synthesis of economic and marketing aspects can create the right conditions for the expansion of the range of African exports to Europe and concurrently provide the export income for development.

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