

Catering authenticities. Ethnic food entrepreneurs as agents in Berlin's gentrification

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ABSTRACT

Ethnic cuisines are an integral part of gentrifying neighborhoods in Berlin. This is not surprising, since the consumption of authenticity plays a decisive role in commercial gentrification. However, while there have been many studies on artists and white creative entrepreneurs as facilitators of urban upgrading, only few research has focused on the active role of ethnic entrepreneurs in selling culture in commercial gentrification. In this article, we want to ask how ethnic food entrepreneurs stage authenticity and create new tastes in Berlin's gentrification in their ethnically marketed restaurants. How does this relate to their positioning towards the city and towards commodified ethnicities? And what role do social backgrounds and dispositions of consumers play in this staging? To answer these questions, we embed the topic in three theoretical discourses at the interface of migration and urban research: ethnic commodification, commercial gentrification and migrant entrepreneurship. We then present two cases as examples of entrepreneurial distinction practices in different settings and periods of Berlin's gentrification: an orientalized Arab snack bar in the early 2000s in Prenzlauer Berg, and a Vietnamese breakfast restaurant in 2017 in the rapidly gentrifying neighborhood of Neukölln. With these two examples we point to critical aspects that shape migrant entrepreneurs' selling strategies in gentrification, such as the representation of an ethnic group within a city, the phase and local context of gentrification as well as political paradigms of urban regeneration. In Berlin, the two case studies relate to the overlapping shift from a "multicultural-differentiated" to a "cosmopolitan-diversified" city.

1. "Authentic" dining experiences in Berlin

Ethnic cuisines are an integral element of many neighborhoods in the process of gentrification. Their importance is reflected in food reviews that emphasize how "authentically ethnic" the locales are in one illustrative case from 2005, the falafel snack bar Habibi in Berlin's district Schöneberg was described by the Zitty magazine as follows: "Authentic from the floor tiles to the orientally painted walls. Nothing is artificial here." (Zitty, 2005, p. 82).¹ Another example is the Vietnamese restaurant Eden in Mitte: "Guests from all over the world – Berlin and tourists alike dine here in the middle of Vietnam. Not only the food such as duck in a home-made sauce or chicken in curry and lemongrass carry off your senses towards the far east (...)." (Zitty, 2018).

In line with the inherent 'authentic ethnicity' assumed by food critics and consumers, we posit that the production of authenticity plays a decisive role in the sector of ethnic (branded) economy as well as for commercial gentrification in Berlin. Berlin has undergone a rapid

urban transformation in the last two decades and its reputation changed from a "sub-cultural metropolis" (Lanz, 2007, p. 188) to a center for creative industries (Arandelovic, 2018). This development goes hand in hand with an extensive commercial gentrification of inner city neighborhoods that entail commodified versions of authenticity: from "hand-made" bags to retro bars and "authentic" ethnic food. However, while there has been critical research on the role of artists and white middle-class entrepreneurs in commodifying culture in gentrification (Lange, 2011; Kirchberg/Kagan 2013; Mattson, 2015; Pradel-Miquel, 2017), ethnic entrepreneurs have been far less often understood as a driving force. Ethnic infrastructures are mainly perceived as a "social wallpaper" of these upgrading processes that attract new middle-class residents (Butler, 2003).

In this article, we therefore ask how ethnic food entrepreneurs, that we do not define by origin but by marketing strategies, actively stage authenticity and create new tastes in their ethnically marketed eateries. How do their entrepreneurial distinction practices refer to positions

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¹ This and the following quote were translated from German.

within urban upgrading and towards representations of ethnicities within the city? What role do the social backgrounds and dispositions of consumers play in this staging? And how do entrepreneurs shape commercial gentrification within these processes?

To answer these questions, we first seek to embed our topic in the theoretical discourse at the intersection of migration and urban research. In doing so, we wish to examine the connection between ethno-cultural consumption, commercial gentrification and the active role that ethnic food entrepreneurs have in the latter (section 2). In the following, we will present empirical case studies of an Arab falafel snack bar in the 2000s in Berlin (section 3) and a Vietnamese eatery in Berlin's district Neukölln in 2017 (section 4). In the fifth section, we embed our two case studies in different urban paradigms that substantially influence ethnic commodification in Berlin.

2. Commercial gentrification, ethnic commodification and entrepreneurs' distinctions

In the recent past, German cities have come to see the ethno-cultural diversity that shapes large parts of the migrant economy as a resource. While the Chinatowns and Little Italies in Paris, New York and Toronto have been regarded as positive image factors and marketed in tourism for many years (Aytar & Rath, 2012; Dinnie, 2010; Donald, Kofman, & Kevin, 2008), segments of the migrant economy have only recently become an integral part of city branding in German metropolises. Branding "aims to create a clear, singular, and consumer-oriented version of the urban imaginary" by reimagining a city, constructing place-based identities and controlling consumer impressions of a certain locale (Gotham, 2007, p. 828). Corresponding branding processes often take place in inner-city neighborhoods, which were once associated with poverty and decline but have now been re-imaged in order to provide the culinary experiences of migrants' countries of origin (Shaw, 2011, p. 381). Although there is some consensus in the literature that the desirability and marketability of migrant groups differ when it comes to the use of ethno-cultural diversity in branding (e.g. Kaltmeier, 2011, p. 14f., Schmiz, 2017), it is not clear what exactly leads to the commodification of some ethnic groups in 'neo-liberal and entrepreneurial forms of urban governance' (Young, Dieb, Drable 2006, p. 1690). Hence, a closer look into ethnic branding in cities focusing on actors and their practices can offer valuable insights.

Of particular relevance here are ethnic eateries in inner-city neighborhoods, since these attract those young, qualified, mobile residents over whom metropolitan cities are currently competing on a global scale (see Rekers & van Kempen, 2000, p. 63). This connection is especially observable in Berlin as it is ultimately the consumable version of cultures provided by ethnic entrepreneurs that has attracted – and continues to attract – young creative professionals to the city (Lanz, 2007). Indeed, creative companies and start-ups have been among the most important factors of economic growth in the rapidly transforming city over the past twenty years (Arandelovic, 2018; Krätke, 2004; Lange, 2011; Pradel-Miquel, 2017). In 2012, every fifth enterprise was part of the creative sector, with a fast and steady increase of 14 percent between 2009 and 2012 (Senatsverwaltung für Wirtschaft, Technologie und Forschung Berlin 2013, 4ff.). This transformation overlaps with a tremendous rise of migrant solo-self-employed businesses from 37.000 in 2005 to 52.000 in 2014. The number of self-employed persons with migrant background in Berlin increased from 50.000 to 73.000 in the same period (Sachs, Hoch, Münch, & Steidle, 2016, p. 46ff.). Because of its accessibility, food service is known to be one of the preferred sectors for migrant entrepreneurs, particularly for non-European migrants who face wider exclusion from the German job market (Hillmann & Hedwig, 1997).

It is as a spatial expression of these overlapping economic developments that we understand the increasing commercial gentrification of inner cities: ethnic eateries are found where those young, qualified, mobile consumers who often work in the creative sector prefer to live

and reside. This coincidence is not by chance: the marketing of creativity and culture is an essential part of gentrification (Ley, 1996; Rofe, 2003; Zukin, 2008). Zukin writes: "But it is not the presence of artists that sets the process of displacement in motion: it is the presence of their taste for authenticity in the product mix, store design, and intangible ambiance of restaurants, boutiques, and gourmet stores." (Zukin, 2008, p. 734). Taste thus has a transformative power in gentrification (see Stock, 2013). In a nutshell, the driving cause behind gentrification is a commodification of consumable authenticity. Zukin (2010) defines authenticity as an urban marketing and framing concept that has become central in late capitalist urban spaces, because it is based upon the production of value in the symbolic economy. The role of authenticity in re-shaping gentrification has been reflected in recent years, like in Osman's "The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn" (2011), which offers deep historical insight into the romanticized invention of Brooklyn by the so-called 'brownstoners', and in Brown-Sarancino's (2010) "A Neighborhood that Never Changes" which analyzes so-called "social preservations" in Chicago where people are driven by the desire to live in an authentic place.

Authenticity is commonly staged and has been identified as a criterion for measuring quality as well as adding value, most prominently in the research of tourist practices (e.g. Cohen, 1988; Lunchaprasith & Macleod, 2018; Molz, 2004). Authenticity is associated with "reality, history, traditions, locality and otherness" (Özdemir & Seyitoğlu, 2017, p. 2). However, we understand authenticity from a social constructivist point of view, which perceives it as relativistic, since it is commonly produced, reproduced and re-evaluated. In marketing approaches, authenticity is not seen as static but as "a reflexive process that is manufactured and maintained by both the producer and consumer" whose meaning changes over time (Dickinson, 2011, p. 8). Last but not least, staging and consuming authenticity re-produces power relations in societies, which Gaytán (2008) demonstrated in the production of ethnicities in the Mexican restaurant industry in the US, which has a direct impact on less powerful "ethnicized" groups.

The most noted pioneers and "authenticity seekers" in gentrification are the above-mentioned members of a culturally affluent new white middle class (Butler 1997, 2003). Bourdieu (1979) identified them in his work "La Distinction" as an (initially) marginal part of the middle-class with the name "La petite bourgeoisie nouvelle". This social group, which includes artists, journalists, scientists, and designers, among others, has grown strongly since the 1960s with increasing academization, tertiarization and precarization and has become the defining factor in the current professional world (Butler, 1997; Ley, 1996). Although members of this group are highly educated, they often live economically precarious lives. This new middle class secures its social status through its cultural capital, which is expressed in the taste disposition for the authentic and used as a vehicle of distinction from other social groups. It is this group that has increasingly appropriated inner-city neighborhoods as residents and consumers in recent decades (see Butler, 1997; Ley, 2003). Ley (2003, 2536) states that "the origins of gentrification included the establishment of an urbane *Habitus* that drew its identity from a perspective rich in cultural capital but (initially) weak in economic capital".

In contrast, far less attention is paid to the cultural capital and distinction practices of ethnic entrepreneurs, who open up new localities and help shape the taste of the middle class. Ray has criticized that, while they play a critical role in urban consumer culture of the US, ethnic entrepreneurs have been neglected in sociological research of taste (Ray, 2017). Ethnic food entrepreneurs can indeed be understood as "facilitators of a particular buzz on the street" that change "local urban streetscapes, soundscapes and smellscape" (Rath 2018, p. 85). These facilitators often belong to the above mentioned "new middle class", but they are often "ethnicized" in research because of their migrant background and wider ethnic representation in society. Their entrepreneurial practices are unquestioningly identified as an expression of their supposed "origin", not as practices of cultural capital, which are

both creative and marketable (Stock, 2013, p. 116ff). Even the differentiation between “migrant entrepreneurs” and “creative entrepreneurs” points to this asymmetric notion of cultural production. Ray highlights a similar hierarchy when analyzing food critics and media in “The Ethnic Restaurateur” (Ray, 2016, p. 63ff). He finds a clear distinction between haute ‘foreign’ cuisine, such as French, Italian and Japanese, and other popular non-European “ethnic” cuisine in the US.

Following these critics, we prefer to use the term “ethnic food entrepreneurs”, which refers to the practice of branding ethnic food, not a migrant origin, even if these may be closely interconnected. In this article, we thus argue that the role of ethnic food entrepreneurs in gentrification processes is not to be underestimated. They deploy their cultural capital in order to impart new tastes to the new residents and consumers and thus pave the way for gentrification, particularly by selling authentically staged versions of their products. The strategic staging of one’s own origin both in the sense of “incorporated ethnicity” (Comaroff/Comaroff 2009) and “strategic essentialism” (Spivak, 1987) should thus be regarded as a central creative entrepreneurial strategy and a form of agency among the entrepreneurs.

Migrant agency has been highlighted in several research approaches at the nexus of migration and urban development, such as the rescaling approach (Glick Schiller & Caglar, 2009). For one, this approach illustrates the degree of a city’s neoliberalisation, which is central to the role of migrant entrepreneurship in gentrification processes, because entrepreneurial cities brand and thereby commodify migrant entrepreneurship as part of their neoliberal agendas, for tourism and for cosmopolitan consumers (e.g. Hackworth & Smith, 2001). Moreover, by focusing on migrant agency, this perspective draws on the mixed embeddedness approach that conceptualizes self-employment among migrants as embedded between possibility structures and individual resources (Kloosterman, van der Leun, & Rath, 1999). This approach is particularly relevant for the following examination because it identifies constraints of migrant agency between individual possibilities and market structures. In the case of ethnic economies, market structures are often determined by consumer demands and expectations, which are closely bound to the symbolic positioning of an ethnic group within a city (Niedermüller 1998, 293), an aspect to which Bourdieu refers to as symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 310f).

Taking these arguments into account, we will present the entrepreneurial distinction practices of two ethnic eateries, one falafel snack bar in Prenzlauer Berg and one Vietnamese restaurant in the district of Neukölln. These case studies refer to two different periods and localities of Berlin’s gentrification. We decided on these two case studies due to their strong embedding into processes of gentrification: Falafel snack restaurants in Berlin are first and foremost found in Berlin’s gentrifying areas. And while Vietnamese eateries used to serve fast food over the whole city, many upscale Vietnamese restaurants

have opened in gentrifying neighborhoods. As we later conclude, these periods are reflected in the two partially opposing paradigms of a multicultural vs. a cosmopolitan city of Berlin (Kosnick 2009; Lanz, 2007). The case studies will be portrayed as examples of entrepreneurial distinction in staged (ethnicized) authenticity. In doing so, a special focus will be placed on the expectations of consumers with a high cultural capital who, in their search for cultural hegemony, are looking for staged authenticities.

Methodically, the present article is based on qualitative interviews with the respective entrepreneurs, an evaluation of consumer statements drawn from qualitative interviews, from cuisine guides such as Zitty and Tip Berlin as well as (participant) observation series in both of the described types of eateries. We provide a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of both empirical cases with the focus on one illustrative interview each.

The research on Arab cuisine, from which the special case is extracted, took place between 2008 and 2010 and consists of 40 qualitative interviews with owners and consumers, a mapping and a participant observation² (Stock, 2013, p.25ff). Regarding Vietnamese cuisine, the above-mentioned narrative interview as well as the evaluation of statements on internet forums were conducted in the period from 2016 to 2018 as part of ongoing research on Vietnamese and other ethnic eateries. This research builds upon a broader study of Vietnamese retail and wholesale business in Berlin, conducted between 2007 and 2010 (Schmiz, 2011). All interview quotes have been translated into English for this article.

3. Falafel snack in Prenzlauer Berg in the 2000s

Der Phönizier (trans. The Phoenician) is a snack bar that sells “Lebanese specialties” and opened in 2004 near Mauerpark in the Prenzlauer Berg district. As Fig. 1 shows, a hand-written board advertises its offerings to the exterior. Above it, diverse “Lebanese” dishes such as falafel, halloumi and shawarma are advertised. After entering the restaurant, the customer stands in front of a glass display case with plates filled with salads, hummus and rolled grape leaves. Behind the bar, the meat skewer rotates constantly, and different pots are filled with hot oil for frying the chickpea balls on demand. The eye catcher of the restaurant is the orientalized seating area (Fig. 2) that is decorated with patterned rugs and cushions in warm colors, and furnished with flat wooden tables. To take a seat there, you have to take off your shoes.

The Phoenician is one of many falafel restaurants found in Berlin’s inner-city neighborhoods. Falafel began to be sold in Berlin in the 1980s, first on street markets in Kreuzberg and Schöneberg, then in snack bars, and quickly became one of the most popular dishes. One mapping survey conducted in 2009 found nearly 100 snack bars branded as “Arab” within the inner city of Berlin, as defined by the commuter train circle. These locales served first and foremost falafel, along with other food such as shawarma, halloumi, hummus, and tabbouleh.³

The opening of Arab eateries was a result of migratory movements from Arab countries to (West) Berlin, which increased steadily in the 1970s. At that time, Lebanese and Palestinians fleeing from the Lebanese Civil War migrated on the transit route from East Berlin to West Berlin, where they then settled, holding the immigration status of “Duldung” (temporary permission to remain) for years because they



Fig. 1. Outside of “The Phoenician”. Picture: Miriam Stock.

² Consumers interviewed and quoted in this article have been theoretically sampled regarding their place of residence in Berlin, gender, age, profession and length of stay in Berlin. The latter was important as Berlin’s gentrification quarters are marked by a high fluctuation. Moreover, this offered insight into the adoption of new culinary practices when moving to Berlin. All of the consumers were approached in front of falafel stores.

³ “Döner” snack bars, which often include the pre-cooked frozen version of the falafel on their menu, are not counted here.

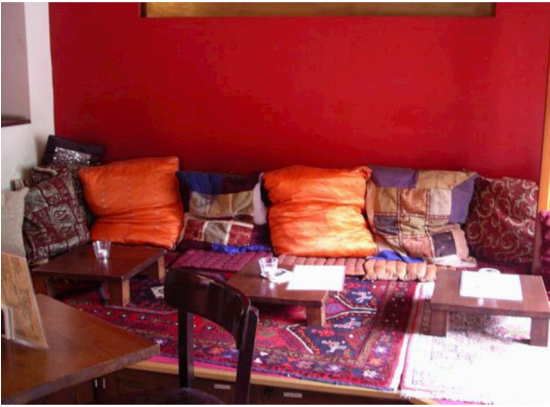


Fig. 2. The Phoenician. Picture: Miriam Stock.

were not granted asylum. The other large group that immigrated to Berlin were exile Iraqis fleeing the Saddam regime (Stock, 2013, p. 60ff). Many people with this background gradually opened Arab branded snack bars. This is also the case for the owner of the Phoenician. He was born in Lebanon and migrated to Germany in the 1990s. For a long time, he worked in the construction sector before he decided to open up his own shop together with his German wife.

However, as pointed out elsewhere (Stock, 2013), German-Arab entrepreneurs never addressed their offer to Arab communities in Berlin. From the very beginning, they have targeted a young, trend-oriented European middle class, who have appropriated inner-city districts over the last thirty years, including Prenzlauer Berg. The numbers reflect this: in 2010, there were 17 Arab snack bars in Prenzlauer Berg, a district with a small population of Arab nationalities. In Neukölln, the district with the highest number of residents with origins of Arab countries, there were only 11 Arab snack bars at the same time (Stock, 2013, p.83). In neighborhoods like Neukölln, Arab branded chicken restaurants and male coffee locales are much more common (Stock, 2017).

The owner of the Phoenician describes his audience as typical (early) gentrifiers: "young people" in their 20s and 30s, at most 40 years old with higher education. He also states that his audience is shifting in between months pointing to the vast transformation of residents in the neighborhood of Prenzlauer Berg in the beginning of the 2000s. This neighborhood has been quickly gentrified since the fall of the wall, pioneered by students and artists, and in the 2000s by young middle class professionals and middle class families, who have become the dominant group in the neighborhood (Dörfler, 2010).

The owner of the Phoenician refers to this early group of customers, stating that the "scene" on the ground is not financially affluent but is, in his opinion, more "culinary" than elsewhere in Berlin, where Currywurst and other German sausages are mainly consumed (interview from 06.05.2009). With this statement, he addresses the cultural capital of his clientele, which appears not only to be based in their educational background but also in their distinguished incorporated taste (Bourdieu, 1979). He has adapted his offer to the appropriate audience in the neighborhood and especially markets it as vegetarian or vegan. His luscious version of the falafel sandwich includes various salads and yogurt, mango or spicy sauce by choice and has little in common with a sparingly filled version he knows from Beirut, as he tells in the interview. There, a falafel, traditionally seen as a greasy food for poor people, would cost barely half of a chicken shawarma and extras like mango sauce do not exist. In Berlin, however, falafel is perceived as healthy, and customers pay attention to freshness and quality (interview from 06.05.2009). Here it becomes clear how the falafel has undergone a revaluation and bourgeoisification, its own gentrification. Nevertheless, the falafel was fairly priced at 2–3 euros in the 2000s. As the owner adds, the consumers highly value "getting full for little money" and would therefore ask for generous, filling portions (Bourdieu, 1979).

Hence, he refers to the early gentrifiers with often limited financial resources.

Aside from it being labeled "Lebanese", the authenticity of the food is produced primarily through the decoration and the atmosphere in his restaurant, especially the floor seating. In fact, several interviewed consumers responded positively to that sitting area when shown the photo during the interview.⁴ Ben, a 24-year-old Swiss Erasmus student living in Friedrichshain, commented: "Of course I think so. With shisha and pillows like that. That's how I'd imagine it." (interview from 17.07.2009). Sarah, a 22-year-old music student from Prenzlauer Berg states: "Yes, with the pillows, that looks comfortable, you could sit down and have the feeling, you're not in Berlin" (interview from 03.08.2009). Reflecting this customer point of view, a correspondent of the city magazine Tip commented on his visit at the Phoenician in 2006:

"As dark clouds rise in the sky, the stroll over the flea market on the Mauerpark ends with a spontaneous meal in the Phoenician. As outside the first raindrops fall, inside, guests make themselves comfortable on a soft-cushioned podium. (...) Asked about the spicy taste of [the food], the chef only puts on a mysterious smile and refers to the long tradition and richness of Lebanese cuisine." (Tip Berlin, 2006, 52)⁵

These quotations clearly reproduce stereotypes of an Orient which Said presented in his influential work "Orientalism" (2003), and they show how these stereotypes are used in the Phoenician. Since interviewed consumers have not been to the Middle East, they base their assessments exclusively on images of the Arab world conveyed by media and popular culture, as well as on their perceptions of Arab migrants in Berlin (Stock, 2013, p. 158ff).

However, it would be misleading to claim that the success of an eatery like the "Phoenician" is mainly based on the construction of stereotypes. The owner caters to the customers' particular taste. Florian, another interviewed consumer in his early 30s described why he likes eateries like the Phoenician:

"I just don't like these gentrification pubs. These hip Prenzlauer Berg restaurants, I can't see the appeal. Better something more down to earth, like they say, more traditional. Even with Falafel snack bars, I just like those that have a traditional flair." (interview from 17.07.2009).

Consumers are looking for folkloric, exotic and down-to-earth-seeming stagings in order to express their cultural capital and differentiate themselves from economically affluent groups inside and outside the city. However, with their cultural capital and their disposition for authenticity, they themselves form an active part of (early) gentrification processes in Berlin.

The owner of the Phoenician consciously stages consumers' preferences for the traditional, the authentic and the culturally intensive as a marketing strategy. At the same time, he exaggerates his staging towards kitsch, also to distinguish himself from this preference. So, he comments the design: "That was just an idea in my head. Just a fantasy" (interview from 06.05.2009). The ornate cushions, shishas and lamps he got mainly from stores in Berlin.

His playful approach is certainly not accidental, because he describes himself as a Lebanese Christian, not as "Arab" or "Oriental". Deliberately offering wine in his shop, he desires to distinguish himself from the Muslim-influenced, in his opinion, ultra-conservative Arab community. Moreover, the name of the shop "The Phoenician" clearly indicates his identification as Lebanese Christian. At the same time, he is well aware of the orientalist tastes of his clientele. In fact, the expectations of his customers constantly limit his presentation options. He

⁴ In the qualitative interviews with falafel consumers, the interview partners were provided with photos of the exteriors and interiors of 10 snack bars during the interviews. These proved to be very useful to the evaluation by contextualizing the taste.

⁵ Translated from German.

tells for example, that he would like to play non-oriental music: “*But one time; the CD recorder was broken and the consumers immediately complained why there is no oriental music*” (interview from 06.05.2009). Thus, the Phoenician represents a type of ethnic eatery in which the folkloristic is strongly emphasized and in demand.

Such orientalized falafel snack bars and other folklorized eateries were particularly successful in the early stages of Berlin's gentrification in the 1990s and 2000s. Examples for similar snack bars are the Habibi and the Maroush in Kreuzberg or the Babel in Prenzlauer Berg. Paradoxically, it is precisely this ethnicization that has rendered the snack bars so successful in Berlin's gentrification process: the entrepreneurs have staged their falafel snack bars as “authentic” and “oriental”, while clearly adapting the offer to the needs of Berlin's consumers.

However, “authentic” productions of ethnic cuisine also find themselves in a permanent development process in Berlin, as the second example, a Vietnamese breakfast restaurant, shows.

4. New “authentic” Vietnamese breakfasting in Berlin Neukölln

In 2016, the Vietnamese breakfast restaurant Maison Han opened in Berlin Neukölln, fusing a restaurant with a coffee roasting facility. Upon entering, the visitor finds herself in a bright room with a striking oak-wood counter, upon which lie house-roasted Vietnamese coffee, hand-made Vietnamese chocolates and matcha cheesecake (Fig. 3). The mixed German-Vietnamese staff serves Vietnamese food and specialty coffees. The meals are served in traditional rattan baskets on golden and silver trays, embodying a modern but ethnized canteen aesthetic (Fig. 4). On the wall plaster that has been cracked off in places, the designations *Monsieur* and *Madame* point to the restrooms (Fig. 5). A large table acts as a co-working space and, in combination with the counters and bar stools along the large windows, creates an atmosphere for work and exchange in which young people sit at their laptops and sip their coffees. In this minimalist interior, the Vietnamese-ness only becomes visible at second glance.

Vietnamese cuisine emerged in Berlin as Vietnamese moved from contract workers to self-employment at the beginning of the 1990s. Pan-Asian specialties such as Crispy Duck or Chinese Wok were offered out of food trailers or snack bars, mostly in East Berlin (Schmiz, 2011). A phase of diversification began as Vietnamese opened up or took over Thai, Chinese, Korean and Sushi restaurants, availing themselves of various national cuisines without revealing their Vietnamese nationality in the phase of ‘partial masking’ that Bui (2003) identifies in her study of Vietnamese restaurants in Berlin. The unmasking began in the early 2000s, as new Vietnamese restaurants, such as the *Monsieur Vuong*, started to offer Vietnamese noodle soups and steamed rice



Fig. 3. Space concept, Maison Han. Picture: Antonie Schmiz.



Fig. 4. Vegan ‘Banh Cuon’, Maison Han. Picture: Antonie Schmiz.



Fig. 5. “Industrial purism”, Maison Han. Picture: Antonie Schmiz.

dishes for the first time in Berlin-Mitte. His concept quickly expanded into other districts in the process of upgrading, especially in Prenzlauer Berg. This differentiation of the restaurants involved the staging of the cuisine as authentically “Vietnamese”.

Presently, new openings can be especially observed in the “trendy neighborhood” Neukölln North, where Vietnamese restaurants are co-producing current food trends locally. Many of these new restaurants specialize in vegan, vegetarian and gluten-free foods – thus tying into global food trends. This fits into the neighborhood of Neukölln, which is currently at the forefront of Berlin's gentrification and portrayed as a global center for young “creative urbanites” (Huning & Schuster, 2015). The process of gentrification which, since the early 1990s, has affected Berlin's neighborhoods like a “caravan” (Holm, 2010, pp. 89–101), can be read in the houses formerly occupied for subcultural usages by a creative scene that gave way to a major wave of investments and restorations in East Berlin. Holm (2010, pp. 89–101) describes how this same dynamic hit the districts in the center of the reunified city, beginning in Mitte in the early 1990s (location of Ms. Vuong). Shortly after, in the late 1990s, the same process could be observed in Prenzlauer Berg (location of the Phonenizier) and slowly hit Friedrichshain from which it spilled over to Neukölln North, the location of Maison Han. This process is only limitedly traceable with quantitative data: rents for businesses and restaurants rose from maximum rents of 29 € per square meter in district centers in 2004 to 50 € per square meter in 2014; e.g. for Schönhauser Allee, one of the main streets of the district Prenzlauer Berg (IHK, 2014). The displacement of traditional local

stores and their replacement by boutiques, trendy cafes and franchises, described as commercial gentrification in the literature (Hubbard, 2016), is an ongoing process in Neukölln North.

This is also the case for the Maison Han. The owner is an experienced restaurateur, who enjoys partial or full ownership of several eateries in Berlin and other German cities. As Berlin native whose parents came from Vietnam to West Berlin as boat people, he runs Maison Han together with his wife, who belongs to the second generation of a Vietnamese family which came to the former GDR as contract workers. Trained in media management and music management, he established himself through designing and translating menus, working kitchen jobs and taking on joint ownerships and finally his own Vietnamese restaurants. Based on a barista training completed in El Salvador, the entrepreneur has established his own coffee brand and imports fair-trade Arabica beans from small farmers in the highlands of Vietnam, which he roasts on his own premises without additives, flavor enhancers or flavoring agents. This upgrade coffee business marks a specialization and upgrading of Vietnamese food services in Berlin.

Building on his Vietnamese language proficiency and ethnic networks, the owner recruits chefs through advertisements in the Vietnamese wholesale market "Dong Xuan Center" in Berlin-Lichtenberg. He looks not so much for formally trained chefs, but for those who, like himself, have received a Vietnamese cuisine handed down for generations. The restaurateur adapts the traditional cuisine for his Berlin clientele as healthy, modern Vietnamese cuisine:

"So in my kitchen, I cook a dish as authentic as possible, in terms of color, consistency, in every way. If I then add my own spin, then we've arrived at the generation that refines it a bit. Only once the traditional dish has been cooked successfully, only then we modify it. For example, if we cook a stew, in Vietnam they take the most basic beef, which is actually just streaked with fat. Sure, that's delicious, but we need a beef that breaks down more easily, with less fat – also because it's healthier. But in any case, you have to leave fat on it, because it is authentic to leave the fat on." (interview from 29.10.2016)

In the described case, the entrepreneur himself becomes the representative of the outside, who creates authenticity for his clientele as the reconstruction of a lost past (see Zukin, 2008). His entrepreneurial strategies trace various trends in Vietnamese eateries – increasing diversification, specialization, and establishing authenticity. The Maison Han shows that the Vietnamese cuisine, offering short preparation times and set in new minimalist spatial concepts, is highly compatible with a healthy, cosmopolitan, urban and cultural affinity.

The staging of the restaurant as Vietnamese is an interaction of the owner's strategic essentialisation and external characterizations relating to the space and the culinary art by the audience:

"The food is typically Vietnamese and yet a little more refined than in other restaurants. The owner seems to value new trends and likes to try new things (...). The crowd was mixed, there were a lot of tourists there but also students, business people with their laptops and "hipsters" – which I find very nice, as it just fits the Berlin culture." (Yelp, 2018)⁶

This quote does not only demonstrate the ability to distinguish a "typical" Vietnamese cuisine from a non-authentic other. It also describes the clientele of tourists, students, business people and hipsters as typical for Neukölln's ongoing gentrification. It is especially this mixture of clientele that is addressed in the literature on branding and commercial gentrification, as it embodies a high cultural capital while often lacking economic capital. It is also exactly the mixture of clientele that is found in neighborhoods in the process of gentrification.

The staging of "Vietnameseness" as a strategic essentialisation happens mainly through the cuisine. Hearty Vietnamese specialties and desserts are paired with specialty coffees, prepared upon request with

the Vietnamese coffee filter "phin". Together with the decor, name, smell and the Vietnamese kitchen team, these contribute to the staging of an authentic Vietnamese breakfast restaurant. With the name of the restaurant, Maison Han, the entrepreneur "chose a name this time that does not clearly say, where it comes from". Han has different meanings in Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese and Thai – and is thus found "almost in the whole of Asia" (interview from 29.10.2016). Whereas Han does not particularly refer to Vietnamese culture, "Maison" awakens the association of Vietnam's French colonial past.

The entrepreneur deliberately chooses a modern and minimalistic spatial concept and describes it as: "Industrial purism meets natural material" (Royals & Rice, 2017). Here, his distinction from the folkloristic productions of the 1990s becomes clear, because his spatial concept is a "complete counter-design to the usual style of decoration and ornamentation in Asia-restaurants" (Royals & Rice, 2017), which are characterized by waving Maneki Neko cats and moving waterfall pictures.

This is also the subject of one consumer evaluation, which attempts to classify the restaurant concept as well as the restaurant's culinary and interior staging:

"Best Vietnamese I ate in a while": Maison Han is a bit of a peculiar place in terms of positioning. Is it a restaurant, a coffee place or lunch cafe? Well, it's all three. They take their coffee very serious and offer a selection of beans, blends and roasts. But you can also eat very good Vietnamese street food here, like pho's (soups) and buns (rice noodles). I had a near perfect Bun Cha Hanoi and my partner enjoyed delicious veggie spring rolls. The decoration of this bright place is a bit of a mix between traditional elements and bricks. Very tasteful. Recommended. (The Hague, Netherlands. 04.11.2016, quoted from Tripadvisor Germany, 2018)

Maison Han embodies one current differentiation along the lines of general restaurant trends. The large table allows for co-working, exchange or shared dining. Here, the narrative of the owner about his memory of eating together with friends or with the extended family at just such large tables and the associated recourse to his context of origin enable him to construct a community atmosphere as authentic. The labeling of individual dishes as vegan is also tied to current nutritional trends. In the described case study, the branding as a breakfast restaurant and the associated focus on a new coffee culture with slow-roasted, fair-trade, hand-brewed coffee represents a specialization. The spatial proximity of dining room and production – here the roasting facility – is another restaurant trend: the highlighting of industrial elements. This offers the entrepreneur the chance to slip in specific ethnic details, such as the visible stacked coffee sacks labeled "Dalat", the center of coffee cultivation in the Vietnamese highlands.

It is in this regard that we understand the following review, signed with a Vietnamese name:

"The Maison Han is really a cool, authentic spot: (...) So don't expect any standard mango curry rice or crispy duck or any of that lot, which is delicious but woefully little real Vietnamese!!! Here you get Banh Cuon with Cha Lua (a kind of Vietnamese sausage) – really delicious. Tastes like in Vietnam! Bo Kho and Dau Phu Kho – stew with beef or tofu, and of course, the Vietnamese breakfast and some desserts like che and cake (banana and matcha cheesecake) and good Vietnamese coffee" (Huyen L., Berlin, 6.11.2016, quoted from Tripadvisor Germany, 2018)

Here, taste preferences are conjoined with the clientele's conceptions of authenticity, by calculating with the consumers' ability to distinguish.

5. Summary and conclusion

As the two case studies show, migrant entrepreneurs with their ethnically marked eateries take an active role in shaping tastes in the gentrification processes, which is not to be underestimated. Thus,

⁶ quoted from German.

ethnic cuisine is clearly not simply about a product taken from the context of origin and replicated as similar to the imagined original as possible. Rather, it is about the staging of a hybrid product that contains elements from the context of origin which are adapted to Berlin's local trends and taste preferences. The statement of the owner of Maison Han brings this co-production to the point: "Berlin has inspired us, now we are inspiring Berlin" (Royals & Rice, 2017 website). Thus, the staging of authenticity through the product becomes an entrepreneurial strategy in which the entrepreneurs use their cultural capital and distinguish themselves from other social groups within the city. However, it has also been shown that the construction of staged authenticity is always a mutual and reflexive process involving both entrepreneurs and consumers. This also entails the ongoing reproduction of ethnic stereotypes and power asymmetries that have a direct impact on migrant entrepreneurs (see Gaytán, 2008). This is clearly illustrated in the case of the Phoenician whose owner had to portray himself as an oriental 'other', thus limiting him in his self-expression.

Still as this paper has shown, stagings of authenticity reflect different self-positionings, both in terms of ethnic representation and in the context of gentrification. To attract his clientele of students and young academics in Prenzlauer Berg in the 2000s, the Phoenician's owner chose a folkloristic staging, from which he subtly delineates himself personally – since he wants to distance himself from other representations of Arab migrants in Berlin. The owner of the Maison Han, on the other hand, distinguishes himself from Asian folklore through the minimalist, modern presentation with which he addresses a cosmopolitan, creative-minded audience in Neukölln.

This observation may reflect different stages of gentrification, since falafel seem to have played out as particularly successful among customers with limited economic capital, yet high cultural capital. The new Vietnamese coffee shops, in contrast, represent later stages of gentrification where there is a high amount of cultural capital and also more economic capital at play. Here, it becomes clear that the making and re-making of "authentic constructions" must always be contextualized. Still, the examples also show that by staging their respective versions of authenticity, both restaurants cater to the cultural capital that is central for gentrification, be it in the early phases or hyper gentrification (Zukin, 2010).

Moreover, our findings tie in with Ley's statement that "relations between cultural and economic capital in the gentrification field must be seen not only together but must also be placed in historical context" (Ley, 2003, p. 2542). The two entrepreneurial strategies may therefore reflect broader political paradigms of urban regeneration in the diverse city of Berlin, such as the "multicultural" versus "cosmopolitan" city (Lanz, 2007, Kosnick, 2009). As Kosnick argues, multicultural policies aim at integrating the residential ethnic minority population, regardless of their multiple transnational ties and mobility, whereas cosmopolitan politics regard the city not as a space that contains diversity, but as "a node in a global cultural network, open to a diversity of cultural flows" that triggers innovation (Kosnick, 2009, 164). Lanz, too, has identified a transformation from the "multicultural" to the "cosmopolitan" over the last twenty years (2007). However, we argue that these two urban paradigms merge and partially overlap, meaning they cannot be understood as consecutive phases of urban development. As Kosnick (2009, 164) explicates, both paradigms may coexist and complement each other.

This said, the paradigm of the multicultural metropolis Berlin describes the establishment of the falafel snack bars. Here, the Phoenician stands for a phase of urban transformation in Berlin in which cultural capital was central as a vehicle of distinction. In that way, Berlin was long considered "poor, but sexy". By contrast, the staging of Vietnamese cuisine is incorporated into the brand of the cosmopolitan and diverse metropolis (Lanz 2007: 119ff.). As a recent product of Vietnamese restaurant trends, the Maison Han therefore represents a new phase of regeneration in Berlin's neighborhoods, which involves a closer integration of cultural and economic capital. This is embodied in the

entrepreneurs themselves, and in the inflowing cosmopolitan clientele. This development runs parallel to rapidly rising real estate prices, which tripled for tenement houses between 2007 and 2017 (Investitionsbank Berlin, 2019, p. 7). In this phase, the lines between cultural capital and economic exploitation become blurred, and new inclusions and exclusions from emerging consumer landscapes are defined. Further studies are needed to investigate the relationship between shifting gentrification processes and ethnic commodification.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ccs.2019.05.001>.

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