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More than just shopping: Ethnic majority consumers and cosmopolitanism in immigrant grocery shops

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores ethnic majority consumption practices in immigrant economies. Drawing on recent debates on cosmopolitanism, we focus on the question of how the use of immigrant shops by members of the ethnic majority is intertwined with the erosion and/or the (re)production of symbolic boundaries. We conducted 31 in-depth interviews and 15 go-alongs with consumers in immigrant grocery shops in Vienna. Our findings show how consumption is based upon and shaped by the various ways consumers attribute meaning to the shops, the products on offer as well as their shopping experiences. We identified five different types of consumption: consuming nostalgia, consuming patronage, consuming change, consuming alterity and consuming diversity. However, we only consider the latter two as cosmopolitan consumption in a narrower sense. We show that within these types, the expression of openness towards ‘the other’ constitutes a form of cultural capital displayed by members of the privileged classes. The article argues in favour of a more comprehensive understanding of consumption practices in immigrant economies. This encompasses that not every act of shopping in immigrant businesses is cosmopolitan and that research is called to consider that the various types of consumption effect boundaries along ethnicity and class in manifold ways.

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Immigrant economy; consumption; cosmopolitanism; symbolic boundaries; social distinction

1. Introduction
The consumption of ethnic goods as a form of engagement with ‘the other’ has been a main topic of research in a range of academic disciplines, including anthropology, sociology and cultural studies (Duruz 2005; Heldke 2003; Johnston and Baumann 2015; Long 2004; Wise 2011). Nowadays scholars use the term ‘cosmopolitan consumption’ to describe the purchase, use and appropriation of goods and services associated with ‘other cultures’ (Beck 2006; Kendall, Woodward, and Skrbis 2008; Vertovec and Cohen 2002). Fresh interest has emerged against the background of an increasing significance of immigrant economies in many Western European cities (Aytar and Rath 2012). Immigrant grocery shops and
supermarkets, restaurants or cultural entrepreneurs offer a wide range of opportunities to engage with different ‘cultures’, often right on one’s own doorstep (Duruz, Luckman, and Bishop 2011; Hiebert, Rath, and Vertovec 2015; Zukin, Kasinitz, and Chen 2016). At least in urban areas, cosmopolitan consumption is not necessarily bound to mobility, as ‘the other’ is immediately available (Germann Molz 2004; Nava 2006).

One of the main topics of scholarly engagement with ethnic majority customers in immigrant economies is their role in processes of integration and social cohesion. Most of the literature supports a positive view on consumption practices among members of the majority population, highlighting consumers as important actors in fostering interethnic interaction and, in further consequence, in increasing tolerance (Everts 2008; Peters and de Haan 2011; Yıldız 2013). Other scholars are more sceptical about the positive effects of such interethnic encounters (Blokland and van Eijk 2010; Parzer, Rieder, and Astleithner 2016; Valentine 2008) or more rigorously focus on the conditions under which interethnic contacts within immigrant economies produce positive connections across difference (Wise 2010, 2011). Another strand of research calls attention to the tendency of exoticism, arguing that consumption of ‘the other’ would reinforce rather than dissolve symbolic boundaries (Heldke 2003; hooks 1992; Lin Pang 2002).

Our paper contributes to these debates by drawing on findings of a recently completed research project on ethnic majority consumers in immigrant grocery shops. First, we want to reveal how these consumers use immigrant shops by highlighting the meanings, evaluations and ‘doings’ inherent in such practices. Second, we want to examine how consumption in immigrant shops is intertwined with the erosion and/or reproduction of symbolic boundaries. However, we do not only intend to shed light on ethnic boundaries, but also elucidate class boundaries, as these have rather been neglected in previous research. Only a few studies have examined the role of social distinction and the demonstration of social and cultural superiority through engagement with ‘the other’ in the context of immigrant economies (Agius and Lee 2006; Butler 2003; Johnston and Baumann 2015; May 1996; Zukin 2008).

In terms of theory, we combine practice theory and the sociology of symbolic boundaries. The former allows us to analyse the ‘whole package’ of doings, sayings and meanings at play during consumption (Warde 2005, 2015). Instead of following an approach which focuses on individual consumer choices, practice theory enables the researcher to analyse ‘ways of consuming and how they are entangled in webs of social reproductions and changes’ (Halkier and Jensen 2011, 102). The sociology of symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Wimmer 2013) serves as heuristic tool to analyse the ways in which these practices are closely intertwined with processes of social inclusion and exclusion.

In order to address our research interest, we conducted 31 in-depth interviews and 15 go-alongs with ethnic majority customers in immigrant grocery shops in Vienna. We will show that consuming in these shops is more than just shopping in a two-fold way. First, its meaning exceeds the individual purchase of material goods. It encompasses symbolic dimensions, ranging from nostalgic emotions to the demonstration of openness towards ‘other culture(s)’. Second, such consumption practices have an impact on symbolic boundaries in a manifold and complex way. While there is some evidence of positive classification within interethnic encounters, consumption in immigrant shops also goes along with the (re)drawing of both ethnic and class boundaries.
2. Immigrant entrepreneurship in Austria

In the last decades, immigrant entrepreneurs have become increasingly prevalent in many Western European cities. In Vienna, immigrant entrepreneurs by now account for about one third of all self-employed businesspeople (Schmatz and Wetzel 2014). This share does not only include immigrants but also their descendants. In Austria and several other European countries, these groups are referred to as ‘persons with migration backgrounds’. Austrian statistical authorities use this term for all individuals, whose parents were born abroad. Following this definition, ‘persons with migration backgrounds’ may either be first-generation immigrants (persons who themselves were born abroad) or second-generation immigrants (children of parents born abroad) – regardless of their legal status: many of them have already obtained Austrian citizenship (Statistik Austria 2017). Besides statistical authorities, even third-generation immigrants are considered to have ‘migration backgrounds’ in the media and everyday language, this is particularly the case when referring to immigrant businesses. However, it is important to note that the terms ‘immigrant entrepreneur’ or ‘immigrant economy’ reveal nothing about the role of ethnicity in these businesses. Many immigrant entrepreneurs are no different from ‘non-migrant’ entrepreneurs, neither with regard to their products and services nor their marketing strategies (Rusinovic 2008). Others are associated with and/or rely on ethnicity in various ways: This becomes most visible in the field of immigrant food retail, in which ethnicity is often used as a resource to promote a shop or its products. For our purpose, we focus on the immigrant businesses in food retail that consider themselves or are considered by others as ‘immigrant’ or ‘ethnic’ businesses. In Vienna, immigrant food retail is dominated by immigrants from Turkey, but there are also shops run by immigrants from Ex-Yugoslavia and by Chinese or Indian immigrants. As a result of East European migration in the past 15 years, Polish, Bulgarian, Romanian, Russian and Ukrainian immigrants also run grocery shops in the capital of Austria. The breadth of businesses in this field varies greatly from the ‘corner shop’ over supermarkets to bakeries and butchers.

The problems of an accurate terminology have increasingly been reflected in the literature on immigrant businesses, in which the role of ethnicity, migration and/or mobility has been debated in various ways (Dannecker and Cakir 2016; Pécoud 2010). However, while much attention has been put on the issue of establishing a suitable terminology for immigrant entrepreneurs, there has been only little effort to think about how to address and study their ‘non-immigrant’ clientele.

3. Immigrant economies and their customers

Previous research has mainly focused on roles of immigrant businesses for so-called co-ethnics. Aldrich and Waldinger (1990), for instance, have emphasised that as immigrant economies provide specific products and services, they are important for immigrants whose needs could not be satisfied by entrepreneurs from the majority population. Other scholars have pointed out how consuming familiar products serves immigrants as a resource to construct (ethnic) identity and as a means to preserve specific traditions of their countries of origin (Halter 2000; Wang and Lo 2007).

In political and public discourse, findings of this kind are judged ambivalently. On the one hand, they have led to the propagation of pejoratively connoted terms, including
Immigrant economies are seen as enclaves hindering integration by means of self-segregation. On the other hand, they are celebrated as important contributions to the local economy, offering pathways for social mobility within immigrant communities (Leicht and Langhauser 2014; Zhou 2007).

However, it is worth noting that immigrant economies are not reserved to co-ethnics. Many immigrant businesses have started to address customers beyond their own community (Parzer 2016; Rusinovic 2008). Furthermore, an increasing interest in ethnic products by members of the majority population can be observed (Everts 2008; Stock 2013; Yıldız 2013). This becomes most clearly visible in the case of food consumption. Strolling along ‘multicultural’ markets, selecting ‘exotic’ delicacies in Asian gourmet shops or buying fresh and inexpensive pita at the ‘Turkish’ corner shop are practices that have become increasingly popular among urban residents and tourists.

As such, ethnic majority customers in immigrant businesses are considered to be important actors not only economically but also symbolically, referring to aspects of integration and social cohesion. In his ethnographic study of immigrant grocery shops in the city of Stuttgart, Everts (2008) has shown how consumption practices foster everyday interaction between members of the minority and majority population, resulting in a positive classification of immigrants and dissolved ethnic boundaries. Also concerned with the role of immigrant shops as contact zones, Peters and de Haan (2011) have revealed that interethnic interaction contributes to a higher degree of acceptance of multiculturalism and ethno-cultural diversity. Similar results have been reported by Yıldız (2013) in his study of Keupstrasse in Cologne. And Kasinitz, Zukin, and Chen (2016, 196), in their recent research on local shopping streets in different cities, have pointed out that at their best, the super-diversity of many local shopping streets eases the way towards civility and tolerance as normal conditions of urban public life.

However, a growing number of scholars have recently raised concerns about these positive effects. In a study on what Blokland and van Eijk (2010) define as ‘diversity seekers’, the authors came to the conclusion that many forms of interethnic encounters in urban contexts are mostly restricted to ephemeral and temporarily limited contacts, hardly ever resulting in strong interethnic network ties or yielding any effects on social cohesion. And by drawing on an extensive literature review as well as her own empirical material, Valentine (2008) has argued that individual interethnic encounters do not automatically dissolve prejudice towards immigrants in general.

Another branch of research highlights mechanisms and effects of exotic appropriation. Such investigators have examined how the consumption of ‘other cultures’ may contribute to the (re)production of images of ‘otherness’ which may strengthen symbolic boundaries between a (white) majority and a (black/immigrant) minority (Germann Molz 2007; hooks 1992; Johnston and Baumann 2015; Lin Pang 2002; Long 2004). A more differentiated perspective is offered by approaches that empirically examine the specific conditions under which ‘intercultural mixing’ has positive effects on relationships across difference (Wise 2011, 2016).

Still, much of the literature on interethnic encounters in the context of immigrant economies solely focuses on ethnic boundaries, while neglecting symbolic boundaries along class. Only a few studies focus on the relationship between one’s engagement with ‘the other’ and their access to economic, social and cultural capital, and even these are discussed controversially: On the one hand, there is a notion that cosmopolitanism is no
longer (and has probably never been) restricted to members of the upper and middle classes. Contrary to the widespread assumption of elitist cosmopolitanism, scholars have pointed out that various forms of openness towards cultural diversity, or ‘ordinary cosmopolitanism’, can be found in different social classes, even among those less privileged (Lamont and Aksartova 2002; Ollivier 2008; Wise 2016). On the other hand, some studies in consumption research have identified various types of cosmopolitanism (Kendall, Woodward, and Skrbis 2008) which are variously linked to class position. For example, Cappeliez and Johnston (2013) have documented different perspectives of cosmopolitanism on ethnic food in Canada. ‘Connoisseur cosmopolitanism’ is characterised by expert knowledge and can be mainly found among the upper middle classes, while ‘pragmatic modes of cosmopolitanism’, which are ‘inspired by practical, day-to-day lived experiences – like working or living with somebody from a different ethnocultural background’ (Cappeliez and Johnston 2013, 444), is typical for less privileged members of society.

The role of cosmopolitan consumption as an expression of one’s class position is also reflected in research on gentrification. Scholars have emphasised an increasing interest in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods by members of the middle classes who do not only contribute to processes of gentrification but use their engagement with ‘the other’ as a means of social distinction (Blokland and van Eijk 2010; Butler 2003; May 1996; Zukin 2008). And in research on cultural consumption, the figure of the ‘cultural omnivore’ has become popular to highlight a new pattern of taste (and distinction) characterised by its openness towards different kinds of cultural expressions including highbrow and lowbrow (Peterson and Kern 1996) as well as cultural forms from various countries and regions of the world (Coulangeon 2017; Rössel and Schroedter 2015).

In this article, we contribute to research in cosmopolitan consumption as we untangle boundary-making along the lines of ethnicity and social class in the consumption practices of the ethnic majority.

4. Social practices and symbolic boundaries

Researchers from various fields have stressed that consumption does not correlate with exclusively economic action, but is to be considered as a social and cultural phenomenon (e.g. Bourdieu 1984; Douglas and Isherwood 1978; McCracken 1986). Following Alan Warde’s broad definition, we understand consumption ‘as a process whereby agents engage in appropriation and appreciation […] of goods, services, performances, information or ambience, whether purchased or not […]’ (Warde 2005, 137). Warde (2005, 2015) has suggested applying practice theory to improve our understanding of consumption and ‘to unseat the dominant model of the sovereign consumer and replace it with a conception of the socially conditioned actor, a social self, embedded in normative and institutional contexts and considered a bearer of practices’ (Warde 2015, 129).

With reference to Warde, we capture the consumption practices of the majority population in immigrant grocery shops in terms of their bodily behaviour, their handling and use of products and shops, their practical knowledge, as well as the subjective ascriptions of meanings concerning their routines of consumption. As our empirical focus is on the processes of social cohesion, we need to explore how consumption practices are intertwined with processes of social exclusion and inclusion. Therefore, we additionally
draw on the concept of symbolic boundaries suggested by Lamont and Molnár (2002) and Wimmer’s (2013) ‘boundary-making approach’. Lamont and Molnár have defined boundaries as ‘conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space’ (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 168). These categorisations are expressed through attitudes and practices, patterns of likes and dislikes and more generally through processes of (e)valuation. Symbolic boundaries are elementary for creating lines of inclusion and exclusion and serve as a medium ‘through which people acquire status and monopolize resources’ (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 168). Symbolic boundaries are created and repeatedly reproduced through a variety of different social practices including consumption, which has always been crucial in processes of social exclusion. This has most prominently been documented by Pierre Bourdieu who demonstrated how the preference for high culture (by, at the same time, dismissing popular culture) serves the elites to maintain their class status (Bourdieu 1984).

With regard to ethnic boundaries, Wimmer (2013) has pointed out that boundaries are not the sum of any ‘objective’ cultural differences, but rather the result of characteristics considered to be relevant by various actors. This ‘boundary-making approach’, therefore, focuses on the ‘production’ of groups. Ethnicity is no longer the independent variable, but itself becomes the phenomenon which is to be explained (Wimmer 2013, 3). For our research, such a perspective is appropriate for two reasons: First, it enables investigators to critically reflect on the differentiation that is made between the ‘majority’ and the ‘minority’, emphasising that this boundary is socially constructed and therefore characterised by contingency. Second, this approach comprehends ‘integration’ from an entirely different perspective: While assimilation theory has argued that integration takes place when cultural differences diminish, Wimmer’s boundary-making approach sees integration as a process of shifting ethnic boundaries – as a change in characteristics that are considered to be important in the distinction of ‘the other’ (Wimmer 2013, 29).

Applying Lamont’s and Wimmer’s accounts of ‘symbolic boundaries’ as a heuristic to investigate the various ways of creating identities, by at once drawing lines between people, we aim to acquire a better understanding of early twenty-first century cosmopolitan consumption.

5. Research methods and data

In order to capture consumption practices empirically, we combined in-depth interviews and go-alongs. As to the latter, we draw on the phenomenological approach introduced by Kusenbach (2003). By accompanying individuals on outings in their familiar environments, as well as asking questions and observing, go-alongs serve as a technique to gain access to individuals’ doings, meanings and evaluations in their everyday routines, paying special attention to the meaning of their physical environment. Methodologically, go-alongs are based on interpretive sociology, in particular, phenomenology and the sociology of knowledge, focusing on processes by which individuals and groups understand and apply meaning to their physical and social world. As hybrids between interviewing and participant observation, go-alongs allow researchers ‘to observe their informants’ spatial practices in situ while accessing their experiences and interpretations at the same time’ (Kusenbach 2003, 463).
In concrete terms, we conducted go-alongs in order to accompany the respondents during their everyday practices of shopping in immigrant grocery shops. Subsequent to the go-alongs (or on separate occasions, if the respondents could not spare the time), in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants. Before we started with our go-alongs, we had undertaken explorative city walks revealing the variety of immigrant food retail in Vienna: Immigrant grocery shops vary considerably not only regarding location, size, number of employees, marketing strategies and products, but also according to ethnic classification by the entrepreneurs themselves. We distinguish four types of self-presentation: Most of the grocery shops use national classifications referring to a certain national state: They declare to be ‘Turkish’, ‘Indian’ or ‘Polish’, which does often but not necessarily indicate a coincidence between the entrepreneur’s origin and the shop’s ethnic classification. Transnational classifications are found in shops which present themselves as ‘Oriental’, ‘Arab’ or ‘Pan-Asian’. Shops that offer products from various different countries often refer to international or multi-ethnic classifications. However, some immigrant shops avoid referring to any immigrant or ethnic background and wish to be regarded as mainstream shops (classification beyond any ethnic markers). Besides the aspect of ethnic classification, we attempted to gain as much variety as possible concerning geographical location and its respective demographic structure, the type of shops as well as the products on offer.

In the course of recruitment, which mainly took place in front of diverse shops, we asked participants for permission to accompany them during their excursions. Prior to shopping, we asked the participants to shop in the way they would usually do and to report on their shopping experience while telling us about anything that crossed their minds (Kusenbach 2003). In the process of shopping, we attempted to minimise interventions. The main aim was to motivate customers to talk about anything of importance to them. However, some open questions helped facilitate the participants’ reflexion on and verbalisation of self-evident and routinised everyday lines of actions and ways of thinking (Parzer, Rieder, and Wimmer 2016).

The data gathered with the go-alongs served as a supplement to the in-depth interviews. As a method of analysis, we applied a coding process suggested by Charmaz (2014) in the tradition of Grounded Theory. For identifying and describing various types of consumption, we followed Ritchie, Spencer, and O’Connor (2003, 244–248) in their remarks on how to develop typologies. In a first step, we identified relevant dimensions: ‘emphasis on ethnicity’ and ‘ethical considerations’ were felt to be of central importance in analysing consumption practices in immigrant shops. We then tested these dimensions across the whole data set (including the transcripts of the interviews and the fieldnotes of our go-alongs). As a final step, we formed typological categories resulting in the typology presented.

Our sample consists of adult ‘Austrian’ customers shopping in immigrant grocery shops in Vienna. Thirty-one in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 men and 23 women, 39 and 43 years of age on average, respectively (two interviews were conducted with couples). Even though we tried to make the sample as diverse as possible, there was an extraordinary share of highly educated persons. Out of 33 interviewees, 21 had an academic degree and 6 had A-levels. This over-representation of well-educated customers may indicate a specific characteristic of immigrant grocery shops’ clientele. Quantitative studies of the Viennese population have pointed out that higher educated individuals show an above-average share of positive evaluations of immigrant shops,
restaurants and cultural events (Verwiebe et al. 2015, 80). Furthermore, the high amount of well-educated individuals in our sample may also be due to a higher willingness among these groups to participate in our study – not least because many of them may be (more) familiar with recent discourses on cosmopolitanism and enjoy demonstrating their openness towards ‘otherness’ also in the specific setting of an interview. However, the structure of our sample shows an important limitation of our data: We gained barely any knowledge about working-class residents’ experiences with ‘otherness’ and how they cope with often being denigrated as ‘racist’ by others.

6. More than just shopping

When asked about their shopping routines in immigrant grocery shops, our interviewees referred to various sets of explanations. Many mentioned convenience as a main reason for their use of an immigrant shop, emphasising the shops’ liberal opening hours, the close geographic location or individual services offered in such shops. Others highlighted the products which were not available in most of the mainstream supermarkets. Often the need for special products as ingredients to prepare certain meals was referred to as one of the reasons to go shopping in immigrant grocery shops.

However, a closer look at our data reveals that shopping in immigrant grocery shops cannot be reduced to practicability or convenience. Rather, we must go beyond the accounts and justifications mentioned by the interviewees and take a deeper look at the symbolic meanings and evaluations by which consumers make sense of their shopping experiences beyond the act of mere economic exchange. Based on our analysis of interviews and go-alongs, we identified five main types of consumption: (1) consuming nostalgia, (2) consuming patronage, (3) consuming change, (4) consuming alterity and (5) consuming diversity. This typology serves to propose an ideal-type framework in better understanding the complexity of consumption in immigrant economies. Furthermore, it is important to note that it is a typology of consumption practices and not of consumers. This implies that an individual can theoretically engage in different practices – at different places (i.e. Chinese vs. Turkish supermarket), at different times (i.e. working day vs. weekend) and/or in different situations.

In the following, we describe each type of consumption referring to the meanings attributed (to the shops, the staff and offered and purchased products), the inherent evaluations and the doings. Furthermore, we intend to examine what this means in terms of symbolic boundaries.

6.1. Consuming nostalgia

Many customers talked about their shopping routines in immigrant grocery shops by referring to imaginations of an (often idealised) past. For them, such notions evoked meanings and memories of old times. Immigrant grocery shops were regarded as a pleasant and convenient substitute for formerly existing Austrian groceries which more or less had vanished due to structural changes in the last decades, as reflected by Ms Schmidt.2

The Greißler4 were still around when I was in kindergarten and primary school. That’s 20 years ago, oh my God. And I believe at that time there were hardly any supermarkets.
Now there are so many. And during the time I’ve noticed that the Austrian Greißler have disappeared. Yes, they’ve disappeared. But the immigrants’ shops, they persist. They manage to persist.

For her, like many other customers, immigrant shops offered some of the characteristics of these vanished markets, which mainstream supermarkets fail to (or no longer) offer. The customers positively emphasised the familiar and friendly atmosphere, the individual services provided by the cashier, the casual chats, the possibility to taste products and mutual trust between consumers and shop owners.

Some respondents reported about their intimate relationships with certain shops where they were frequent and regular customers. They referred to them as ‘my Turk’ or ‘my corner shop’ to express that the shops’ significance went far beyond merely economic motivations. Similarly to the former ‘Greißler’, these are personal and familiar relationships which made shopping experiences something special, while evoking memories of the old times.

It is remarkable that neither ethnicity nor other differences in language or religion were highlighted. This indifference concerning ethnicity was also reflected in the observation that mainly such mainstream products as milk, bread, butter or (native) vegetables and fruits were purchased. Rather than referring to ethnicity, immigrant grocery shops were evaluated as to their role in evoking memories of times past. Based on the belief that things were better in the past, customers did not only purchase products. They instead consumed a kind of sentimentality for the past – one could say they consumed ‘nostalgia’. Speaking in a metaphor, the immigrant grocery shops offer the possibility for an imagined time travel. Consumption is then shaped by emotional stimuli as a result of imaginations of an ideal past – rather than emphasising the ‘ethnic’ character of the shops, their owners or the products on offer.

At first sight, these evaluations of immigrant businesses are thoroughly positive. On closer examination of these positive classifications, however, they reveal mechanisms that may strengthen symbolic boundaries between the majority and the minority. This is the case when immigrant grocery shops become the object of pre-modern imaginations. Although the attributed characteristics such as familiarity would seem benevolent and respectful, they inherently bear the notion of an evolutionary process of societal development. Immigrant grocery shops are regarded to be not (yet) standardised, ordered and clean (as is considered to be the case in mainstream food retail); their employees are (still) friendly, diligent and hard-working and their products (still) resist the trends of contemporary marketing. Therefore, positive evaluations – although not intended – may become relevant for ethnic boundaries as they tend to reproduce the stereotype of a backwardly and traditional ethnic and/or immigrant minority and an advanced and modern ‘white’ majority.

6.2. Consuming patronage

Within another type of consumption, the customers highlighted charity issues. Shopping in an immigrant shop then did not merely serve their own (material) needs, but was considered as providing important material support for immigrant entrepreneurs (and their employees) who were considered to require and deserve help. Ms Huber explained how feelings of guilt and remorse may function as shopping promoters:
And I have a bad conscience about not buying anything in these shops. I don’t feel this kind of bad conscience in conventional supermarkets. When I come in here, I see him [the owner] sitting there and he is so cute and I think: Actually, I don’t need all these things. […] And I think, ’he has such a nice shop and he is all alone.’ And finally I buy a lot.

Ms Huber regarded immigrant businesses as disadvantaged, underprivileged and needy, mainly because they would face structural discrimination and strong competition with mainstream supermarkets. The purchase of products was considered to improve the immigrant entrepreneurs’ (uneasy) situation – they were even often assumed to depend on charity-based shopping in order to survive.

However, consuming patronage is not purely altruistic but also motivated by self-interest. Customers who purchase goods in immigrant grocery shops primarily for the sake of supporting others feel some reward for their support. Furthermore, treating immigrant shop owners with an apparent kindness might also betray a feeling of superiority. These patronal relationships between the majority and the minority reveal an elevated social self-positioning on the part of the majority. Recipients may perceive such patronisation as degrading and servility-demanding. A socially constructed hierarchy between the majority and minority may thereby unfold, potentially reinforcing the boundaries between these two groups. At the same time, this type reveals some of the discrepancies in consumption practices: at first sight, altruistic and egoistic behaviour seems to be contradictory. In the case of ‘consuming patronage’, it can be shown that consumers are engaged in internally highly differentiated practices which might include being (or pretending to be) selfless and self-interested. A similar constellation of contradictory consumption practice can be observed when it comes to ‘consuming change’.

6.3. Consuming change

Within the type of consuming change, immigrant grocery shops were associated with meanings of authenticity, originality and honesty. The products were considered to be hand- and homemade, down-to-earth or at least free of industrial production logic. The owners and the employees were regarded to be honest and in particular passionate, offering products not primarily to earn money.

These positive evaluations of immigrant grocery shops were accompanied by pejorative classifications of the common capitalist organisation of production and distribution of goods. Especially mainstream supermarket chains served as a foil, as these were experienced as profit-oriented, greedy and unscrupulous, inconsiderate of ecological or human needs. Mr Angerer explained how he considered employees in these supermarkets as alienated:

There is a tremendous difference. If you go to a native shop, you see that the employees only work there to earn some money.

In contrast, he imagined the employees of immigrant grocery shops to be passionate, producing and selling down-to-earth products, where ‘you realise, they are living this [being an entrepreneur]’.

Immigrant businesses were considered to be bulwarks of honesty and places that resist the logic of capitalist production. Images of family businesses, handmade products and organic raw materials marked the perception of immigrant businesses. Attributes
normally considered as negative, such as disorder or dirt, were to become positively valued in this context; they were interpreted as markers of authenticity.

Although ethnicity and ethnic markers – at least at first sight – do not play a role in motivating shopping in immigrant grocery shops, it is evident that these are considered to be the main variables in explaining the entrepreneurs’ passion. The general anti-captalist view is accompanied by ethical evaluation and judgement on how to live a respectable life and on what products to consume. Such ‘ethic’ judgements on the proper way of living, shopping and consumption are prevalent and go along with negative evaluations of those who do not live up to these moral requirements. Similar findings on consumption practices and distinction have been provided by the growing body of research on ethical consumption (Carfagna et al. 2014; Johnston, Szabo, and Rodney 2011).

6.4. Consuming alterity

Consuming alterity positively evaluates immigrant businesses according to their ethnic difference and thus, in contrast to the previously described, depends on the encounter of ‘otherness’ on a manifest level. Ethnicity, its performance, perception and in particular its construction are at the core of this mode of consumption. Consumers deliberately and positively highlighted the difference to Austrian culture in terms of the shops, the products, other customers and the cashiers. Shopping was associated with ‘holidays’ or ‘southern flair’.

An important aspect was the thrill consumers achieved in experimenting with previously unknown products, as we see in the case of Mr Fuchs:

It’s really exciting when you have a look at all the products you can’t find anywhere else. The labels on the cans are written in foreign languages. You find products you weren’t aware of before. You get familiar with new tastes.

Discovering new and unknown products seem to be one of the greatest pleasures associated with shopping in immigrant shops. This often led to expressions of great enjoyment, as this extract from our field notes (go-along with Mr Steiner) shows:

The participant takes a lot of time for his shopping and examines many products in detail. He says that he always enjoys shopping here because he likes trying new products. When he finds an interesting product, he bursts out: ‘Oh, this sounds great, I have to taste this’, and puts the product in his shopping basket.

Most frequently, alterity was linked to the products, the foreign-language labels of the products or phenotypic characteristics of the people affiliated with the immigrant businesses. The whole process of consumption can be interpreted as a celebration with a focus that shifted from buying products to the act of shopping and its experience.

The perception of ‘the other’ and the appropriation of the products is guided by something we call ‘imagined genuineness’. Customers want to prepare the acquired products according to the way they believe ‘foreigners’ or immigrants would do. Hence, such imaginations and the accentuation of difference to ‘the other culture’ at the same time emphasise boundaries between the majority and the minority. However, such practices of evaluation are not necessarily guided by hierarchical views, as ‘the other’ is classified as something highly positive. Nevertheless, they foster constructions of ‘the other’ as something completely different and may potentially strengthen ethnic boundaries. In
addition, class-specific boundaries are relevant in this type of consuming as well. This becomes most visible when the customers highlighted their expertise in ‘another culture’ as well as their well-informed engagement with ‘the other’. This knowledge is part of what we call ‘cosmopolitan cultural capital’, a term also used by Prieur and Savage (2013) in their application of Bourdieu’s theory on new aspects of cultural consumption. As specific form of cultural capital, cosmopolitan cultural capital serves well-educated consumers in immigrant shops as a way to display their social superiority – a matter that is also relevant within the type of ‘consuming diversity’.

6.5. Consuming diversity

While consuming alterity involves highlighting the differences and characteristics of a specific ethnicity, consuming diversity is based on the appreciation of a simultaneous multiplicity of ethnicities. Immigrant businesses were considered both as an indicator of multiculturalism and as means of stating positive attitudes towards ethno-cultural diversity. This view partly derives from the public discourse on diversity, which has been most prominently described by Vertovec (2012). This becomes obvious in the case of Mr Frank, who highlighted the impact of various immigrant businesses on the urban plurality:

The more different foreign shops exist, the more colourful the city and its inhabitants become.

Immigrant businesses were appreciated because of their importance for the multicultural city. And they were supposed to make people more open. In this context, immigrant shops were seen to offer the background for members of the ethnic majority to display cosmopolitan cultural capital. These processes included distinctions from less cosmopolitan, narrow-minded fellow countrymen, as illustrated by the following statement made by Ms Lang:

Well, it is very important to have different offers from different cultures. This is completely missing in the district I live in now. However, I would doubt that people in my district would accept a Turkish bakery. No, they wouldn’t be open-minded enough, from my subjective point of view.

Ms Lang thinks about herself as a cosmopolitan, favouring a mix of different cultures – contrary to her neighbours, who were described as narrow-minded. Many highly educated customers stressed their own openness, tolerance and acceptance of people wherever they come from. Diversity consumers ostentatiously displayed such openness and associated cosmopolitan world-views.

The perception of social superiority inherent to this lifestyle became visible in the construction of the ‘typical native Austrian’. Mr Gruber distanced himself from the narrow-minded, who were also considered to be less educated:

And I think people who are less open towards foreigners wouldn’t go shopping in immigrant shops, simply because they are against it or because they feel like they wouldn’t belong there. It just doesn’t fit their views.

The ‘typical Austrian’ is considered to be racist or at least as having reservations against immigrants. Further stereotypes relate to older age, rural background and especially to low levels of education. The characteristics of the cosmopolitans are precisely opposed to the construction of the ‘typical Austrian’. The cosmopolitan is considered to be
educated, not racist, and to live in an urban environment. Such views reveal how shopping in immigrant businesses becomes part of a cosmopolitan habitus displayed by higher educated urbanites in the formation of symbolic boundaries between classes.

7. Cosmopolitan consumption revisited

Using the example of immigrant grocery shops in Vienna, we identified various forms of consumption practices within immigrant economies. These partly challenge previous findings concerning the ascription of cosmopolitanism to ethnic majority consumers. Not every use of immigrant shops is necessarily shown to be an expression of cosmopolitanism. We found various types of consumption in which ethnic differences were not part of the customers’ justifications, nor did they serve to explain why those customers used and appreciated the shops. Rather, our respondents emphasised that the shops reminded them of former groceries (consuming nostalgia) or mentioned that they primarily go shopping there because they want to provide support (consuming patronage). However, this does not mean that these types lack effects on symbolic boundaries. In contrast to the widespread assumption that indifference towards ethnic markers is an indicator of the dissolution of ethnic boundaries, we have demonstrated how the superficial appreciation of immigrant grocery shops may be accompanied by the perpetuation of symbolic boundaries between a majority (which is implicitly considered to be culturally superior) and a minority (which is considered to be backwardly or needy). Additionally, we identified a mode of consumption in immigrant grocery shops based mainly on ethical considerations (consuming change). It would be misleading to refer to these types in terms of cosmopolitan consumption. In our view, the term is bound to a form of engagement in which cultural differences are mentioned explicitly and evaluated positively. The actors – and not only the researchers – consider their use of immigrant shops as one aspect of their cosmopolitan lifestyle (Skey 2012). Regarding this narrower conception of cosmopolitanism, two types can be distinguished: While consuming alterity highlights the ethnic difference of a certain ‘culture’, consuming diversity is characterised by the appreciation of an ethnically diverse urban environment. Consuming alterity by tendency may strengthen ethnic boundaries, in particular when the focus is on the ‘ethnic’ as an essentialist category (exotism). Both types have in common that cosmopolitan openness is displayed with ostentation – often by at the same time discrediting those who are considered to be less ‘open’, ‘tolerant’ or ‘cosmopolitan’. Therefore, these types are highly relevant for processes of social distinction and exclusion. This is even more prevalent, when this openness is displayed by those higher educated who do not even live in the areas where they ‘consume diversity/alterity’: who ‘only’ spend their Saturday mornings shopping in the multi-ethnic neighbourhood, while they live, work and send their children to school in districts dominated by the privileged ‘white’ majority.

In sum, we remain rather sceptical with respect to notions that depict consumers in immigrant shops as cosmopolitans per excellence. To classify any given interethnic encounter in the context of immigrant economies as cosmopolitan would obscure the obvious finding that there indeed are forms of consumption not primarily concerned with ‘otherness’. Cosmopolitan consumption in a narrower sense is characterised by positive notions of alterity and diversity. However, it is not our aim to consider cosmopolitan consumers as culturally or morally superior because of their openness and tolerance.
Instead, our enquiry focuses on the ways in which such openness and tolerance serve as a kind of cosmopolitan cultural capital displayed in and through practices of cosmopolitan consumption. This facilitates a more rigorous view on the role of consumption in immigrant economies for the (re)production of social inequality. Furthermore, it contributes to the ongoing debate on intersectionality in ethnic and migration studies (Fresnoza-Flot and Shinozaki 2017; Romero and Valdez 2016).

At least two aspects seem particularly promising for future research:

(1) On an individual level, it would be useful to examine how cosmopolitan cultural capital is accumulated. We should raise the question as to how cosmopolitan attitudes, or what Kendall, Woodward, and Skrbis (2008, 105) called ‘the cosmopolitan disposition’, are associated with education, the family and transnational social practices. The findings of previous investigations have been rather ambivalent (Igarashi and Saito 2014; Mau, Mewes, and Zimmermann 2008; Weenink 2008; Wise 2016; Woodward, Skrbis, and Bean 2008). More research is needed to fully capture the various dimensions and causal relations in the accumulation of cosmopolitan cultural capital. In particular, long-term studies could prove helpful to show how and under which conditions cosmopolitan consumption may develop over the course of one’s life.

(2) On a macro-level, it would be rewarding to explore the historical and structural conditions of practices of distinction through cosmopolitan consumption. In this connection, we should raise the question as to why cosmopolitan cultural capital has become important and powerful in processes of social distinction. It might be useful to have a look at a similar debate in the research of ‘cultural omnivorousness’ in cultural sociology. Scholars in this field have argued that displaying tastes for high culture has lost its potential in pursuing social superiority (Peterson and Kern 1996). Rather, high-status individuals are becoming increasingly open and tolerant, resulting in ‘cultural omnivores’. Omnivores are characterised by their broad taste, incorporating elements from both high culture and popular culture. For many scholars, cultural variety serves as a new way to demonstrate social superiority (Bryson 1996; Emmison 2003). Recently, this discussion has also been linked to questions of cosmopolitan cultural consumption (Meuleman and Lubbers 2014; Rössel and Schroedter 2015; Skribis and Woodward 2013, 105). Therefore, a systematic analysis of the connection between cosmopolitan consumption and cultural omnivorousness would seem imperative.

8. Conclusion

It was the objective of this article to explore consumption practices among ethnic majority members in immigrant grocery shops and to elucidate how such practices are intertwined with processes of symbolic boundary-making. By referring both to theories of practice and sociological accounts on boundary research, we applied a perspective which emphasises the role of consumption as a means of social distinction. We conducted in-depth interviews and go-alongs with ethnic majority consumers in immigrant grocery shops in Vienna. Our findings allowed us to distinguish between various types of consumption. We identified consuming nostalgia, consuming change, consuming patronage, consuming alterity and consuming diversity, the last two types being referred to in terms of ‘cosmopolitan consumption’ in a narrower sense.
What becomes clear is that shopping in immigrant shops cannot be reduced to purchasing material goods: It is not only milk, bread, humus or tomatoes that are bought – rather, a whole package of meanings and experiences, whether along the lines of alterity, diversity, nostalgia, patronage or change, is what is consumed. Beyond that, ‘more than just shopping’ does not only relate to observations of the symbolical dimension underlying economic transactions. Instead, ethnic majority consumption in immigrant shops is relevant for symbolic boundaries between social groups. Even though positive classifications are used, consuming nostalgia and consuming patronage may at least subtly reinforce the boundary between the majority and the minority – ironically, in spite of the observation that ethnic markers do not play a crucial role. It is the claim for the majority’s superiority which is expressed implicitly and unintendedly. Class boundaries are also highly relevant with regard to cosmopolitan consumption. This becomes most clearly visible with customers who display their cosmopolitan cultural capital with ostentation by at the same time discrediting those who are considered to be less tolerant and open-minded. By shopping in immigrant groceries and evaluations inherent to such consumption (and the evaluation which is expressed in informal talk – or in our interviews), people draw lines not only between the ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ or between various ethnic belongings, but also between the highly educated, tolerant and open-minded middle class and those less educated individuals who are considered never to venture into immigrant shops.

Notes

1. When we recruited the participants, we did not classify potential customers according to their assumed status, but rather asked them to reveal whether they saw themselves as ‘Austrians without migration backgrounds’. However, we acknowledge the persistent difficulties regarding this kind of categorisation.
2. The participants were given pseudonyms in order to preserve their anonymity. We conducted all go-alongs and interviews in German. For this paper, the quotes from the interviews as well as from our field notes were translated into English.
3. ‘Greißler’ is the Austrian term for small grocery shops.
4. This definition excludes those accounts of cosmopolitan consumption that highlight what is also called ‘banal cosmopolitanism’ or ‘pragmatic mode of cosmopolitanism’, forms of engagement with ‘the other’ that are taken for granted and not even worth commenting. While we acknowledge these forms of consumption and also see their potential to contribute to a shifting of symbolic boundaries (as we have done in Parzer, Rieder, and Astleithner 2016), we would not consider these as a part of cosmopolitan lifestyle as we defined it for the purpose of our study.

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