# 12. The tastes of Arab Berlin

## Manifestations of Arab snack culture in the changing urban migration regime of Berlin

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### A new taste for Berlin?

On Sonnenallee in Berlin in the summer of 2016, customers crowded into long lines before a newly opened restaurant called "Al Dimashqi" (The Damascene). They would wait up to an hour to get a shawarma sandwich. Judging by the dialect, many were of Syrian origin, though other patrons also found their way to Al Dimashqi.

At first, the success of Al Dimashqi may seem obvious. Berlin is a major destination for Syrians fleeing to Germany since 2011 and in increasing numbers since 2015 (Statista Research Department 2022). Moreover, Al Dimashqi chose a strategic location at the entrance to Sonnenallee, a street now internationally known as "Arab Street" (Stock 2019: 2).

However, a closer look is warranted to determine what made "Al Dimasqi" in particular so novel. After all, it was not the only restaurant on Sonnenallee, which had established itself as a commercial street over the years, with its Arab infrastructure of shisha cafés, chicken restaurants, and supermarkets. Sonnenallee was already home to two chicken restaurants, "Ris A" (opened in 2004)[1] and "City Chicken" (opened in 1996).[2] In addition, shawarma is available not only in Neukölln, but in many places in Berlin. Since the 1980s, a shawarma and falafel culture has developed, with Berlin's trendy neighborhoods now home to nearly a hundred such shops with Arabic connotations selling falafel and shawarma (Stock 2013: 79 ff).

What is new about Al Dimashqi, however, is its flavors. For example, a chicken shawarma has previously been served in Berlin's trendy neighborhoods with a mix of mango, sesame, and hot sauce seasoning, accompanied by salad and raw vegetables, appealing predominantly to young, white, middle-class people (ibid., 82). At Al

1 See tageszeitung 2004, Fundgrube Sonnenallee. Süßes Leben in arabischer Einkaufsmeile: 36 (https://taz.de/Suesses-Leben-in-arabischer-Einkaufsmeile/!677657/).

2 Interview with the owner of City Chicken, Aug. 2010.

Dimashqi, however, the same sandwich is filled exclusively with meat and "toum," a garlic paste – a version that is also common in Lebanon and Syria. Interior decoration also differs a lot upon closer inspection. While falafel snack bars in trendy neighborhoods often feature retro-chic and Oriental elements, and the established chicken fast food restaurants on Sonnenallee tend to lean on the McDonalds style, new snack bars such as Al Dimasqi are now opting to look cosmopolitan-modern, while still featuring clear references to Damascus and other Arab metropolises (cf. Stock 2019: 7–10).

Based on this observation, this chapter examines various forms of taste and presentation and thus manifestations of Arab snack bar culture in Berlin.[3] Different manifestations are characterized by three determinants to be examined here in more detail. First, they reflect different social backgrounds of the Arab migrants who have opened snack bars, addressing different groups of customers. Here, it is worth taking a closer look at immigration movements from Arab countries as well as socio-spatial localizations within Berlin's urban landscape. In addition, the various manifestations of Arab snack bar culture are embedded in urban neoliberal restructuring processes in Berlin that were closely interwoven with migration and have led to a range of urban phenomena. Finally, the question of what representation of "Arabness" is possible and marketable depends on the symbolic position assigned to Arab migrants in Berlin. Thus, immigration policies and discourses set an important framework for possible spaces of representation, and these have changed in the Berlin migration regime over the last fifty years. In the following, these aspects will be examined in more detail based on three typical manifestations of Arab snack bars.

To accomplish this, the following section first provides a brief theoretical context for ethnic food, urban transformation, and the role of migration regimes, before discussing the background of Arab migration and related migration policies, as well as shifting immigration discourses and their urban manifestations. Following this, three types of Arab snack bar culture in Berlin are presented: Two of them represent relatively standard manifestations before 2011, viz. gentrified and Orientalized falafel snack bars on the one hand, and chicken restaurants and men's cafés on the stigmatized Sonnenallee on the other. The third type has emerged since 2011. It can be witnessed in the new Syrian snack bar culture and the reinterpretation of the now internationally famous Sonnenallee, marketed by merchants to both Arabic-speaking consumers and a wider international audience as "Arab Street".

3 This chapter builds on a German publication in the periodical "Kuckuck – Notizen der Alltagskultur" (Stock 2017: 50–55) that looks at the changing landscape of Arab-owned restaurants in Berlin. This chapter has been updated and extended in terms of evidence and theoretical argumentation.

This chapter is based on ethnographic research conducted between 2009 and 2012 as part of my doctoral thesis on Arabic snack bars in Berlin, which included interviews with vendors, consumers, mapping, and observations, published by transcript Verlag under the title "Der Geschmack der Gentrifzierung" (cf. Stock 2013). With the reopening of Syrian eateries, the empirical material is being updated and expanded from August 2016 based on ethnographic observations and secondary analyses.

## Ethnic commodification, taste, and the role of migration regimes

Turning ethnic culture into a commodity plays a major role today in how ethnicities are represented (Comaroff/Comaroff 2009). A few examples include festivals, clothing, tourism, music concerts, and restaurants (cf. Lu/Fine 1995: 535). Commodification is also reflected in the urban context, where ethnic marketing has become an integral part of consumer landscapes. This is true for the diverse ethnic restaurants found in city centers, where they attract a broad audience – especially the mobile, highly educated middle class and tourists that major cities compete for (cf. Rekers and van Kempen 2000: 63). Berlin's urban policy has therefore also recognized ethnicity as a key resource in city branding (Lanz 2007; Schmiz 2017).

The success of ethnic commodification is based on far-reaching socioeconomic transformations in late capitalism, with culture moving to the center of economic exploitation since the late 1970s. Jeremy Rifkin (2000, 19) therefore also speaks of "cultural capitalism" where culture and economy increasingly converge. At the center of this process is staged authenticity as an urban consumer experience (cf. Zukin 2010). Ethnicity as a mark of authenticity has thus become a central resource for late capitalist surplus-value accumulation (Jain 2003: 264).

At the same time, on closer inspection, not every form of ethnic commodification is equally successful, at least not among the highly educated middle class. Ethnic marketing is socially anchored in different ways and serves different tastes. According to Pierre Bourdieu, the tastes of a social group reflect its social position. This position is determined by the degree of endowment with various capitals (cf. Bourdieu 1987), first and foremost economic and cultural capital, leading to distinct sets of tastes and social spaces (cf. Bourdieu 1983). Cultural capital in particular takes on a special function in the current late capitalist transformation. This has turned the cultural and creative industries into central drivers of urban economies (Lange 2011). The development of social space plays into the gentrification of inner-city neighborhoods, where culture is transformed into economic added-value, and authentic productions are turned into commodities in both residential and commercial sectors (cf. Zukin 2010). This begs the question of how providers and consumers manifest their cultural and economic capital in the urban environment they meet in.

Symbolic capital plays an important role in the context of migrant-owned business. It expresses the extent to which a social group is socially valued in society and determines whether a social group's cultural and economic capitals are considered legitimate or are held in disregard (Bourdieu 2001: 311). Immigration policies and associated discourses have a significant influence on the symbolic capital of migrant entrepreneurs running ethnic restaurants, because they define the spaces where representation and marketing are possible. As ethnologist and migration specialist Péter Niedermüller has shown, it is the majority in society and its dominant groups that prescribe these spaces of possibility (Niedermüller 1998: 293).

Ethnic commodifications are always embedded in an urban "migration regime" – i.e., a system of migration regulations with complex outcome of actions carried out by a multitude of actors (states, EU policy, local actors, NGOs, media, migrants), all of whom are connected through hierarchical and vertical power relations (Mecheril, Karakayali 2018, 227f). As Schwenken (2018: 214–215) suggests, migration regimes shape not only institutional arrangements, but also the immigration discourses that accompany related policies. Moreover, they create subjectivations, which means certain ideas of being a successful migrant entrepreneur, which is closely related to migration policies. Finally, this chapter explores how immigration discourses affect representational practices and the positioning of Arab migrant entrepreneurs. Let us begin with some background on Arab migration.

## Arab Migration in Berlin's Migration Regime

Even before the Arab revolutions and upheavals following 2011, about 30,000 people of different nationalities and origins (in the case of stateless Palestinians) lived in Berlin. Larger influxes of Arab migrants have increasingly come to (West) Berlin, especially since the 1970s. Before that, there were only a few Arab students or guest workers in Berlin, for example from Morocco. Among the largest immigration groups between then and 2011 were Palestinians (2008: 11,839), Lebanese (2008: 7,553), and Iraqis (2008: 2,025) (Stock 2013, 62). After the founding of the Israeli state in 1947/48 and their expulsion (*nakba*), Palestinians initially fled to Lebanon and lived in refugee camps. They continued to flee from there to East Berlin during the Lebanese civil war, which lasted from 1975 to 1990, and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Among the Lebanese migrants, it was mainly the rural Shiite underclass and minority groups, such as Lebanese Kurds, who came to Berlin as refugees of war. All of these groups found access to Europe via a GDR transit visa, which they would otherwise have been denied due to their diminished status including the lack of financial resources and contacts. From East Berlin, they crossed the border on foot or by public transportation such as S-Bahn to West Berlin, where they remained after their arrival, as few were granted asylum in West Germany. However,

due to the unstable situation in Lebanon, their lack of citizenship and passports, they could not be sent back, so they lived for decades under a Tolerated Stay Permit – not infrequently also banned from working. Despite these precarious conditions, this influx of refugees resulted in chain migrations and family reunifications. The populations then established themselves in Berlin, primarily in the districts of Neukölln, Wedding, and Moabit (Stock 2013: 262).

The exiled Iraqis who later migrated to Berlin, fleeing the Saddam regime and the Gulf wars, often had a higher educational background than their counterparts. Moreover, most of them were granted asylum. Unlike Lebanese and Palestinian refugees, however, this group did not become concentrated in Berlin; most Iraqi migrants now live in Bavaria (Shooman 2007).

Since 2011, Syrians have made up the largest group among Arab migrants. In 2020, 40,480 Syrian nationals lived in Berlin (Statista Research Department 2022). Most of these migrants came from the middle and upper classes because they had the necessary networks, financial resources for the escape route or other access to visas (Stock 2021: 22). Berlin is popular among newcomers because of personal networks, the existing Arab commercial infrastructure, and ultimately its reputation as a "subculture metropolis" (cf. Lanz 2008, 88). The latter in particular has attracted a scene of female artists in exile establishing themselves in Berlin (cf. Bank 2018). The conditions of residence and opportunities for refugees have improved, at least temporarily, compared to that for Palestinians described above. During the tolerant asylum policies in 2015, 95.8% of Syrian asylum seekers were granted refugee status, German language courses, and access to the labor market. With the tightening of the asylum package in 2016, the admission situation became more tense and uncertain, especially with regard to family reunification and long-term prospects in Germany (ProAsyl 2016). However, the majority of Syrian immigrants received a residence permit. However, not only migration policies changed, so did the discourses about refugees and migrants.

## Immigration Discourses and Urban Transformations in Berlin

Before 2011, "Arab" migrants received little attention in the public media, and if so, only under the keyword "Muslims". For example, there was little knowledge among the German public that Germany was home to the largest Palestinian diaspora in Europe (Shiblak 2005, 13), and there has been little scholarly research on their backgrounds and living situations in Germany (see El Bulbeisi 2020). One reason for this is their comparatively small numbers compared to Turkish migrants in Berlin. Even more important, however, is the increasing Muslimization that began in the 1970s (Schiffauer 2007: 117), i.e., the blanket attribution of a Muslim cultural identity that shaped how immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa were viewed.

In the 1960s and 1970s, public perception of immigrants in Germany was still strongly influenced by the recruitment contracts for "guest workers" (*Gastarbeiter*) from the Mediterranean region, and a dichotomous division into "natives" and non-native "foreigners" (*Ausländer*) prevailed, affecting all migrants from the Mediterranean region in the same way. With the recruitment stop in 1973 and the more restrictive immigration policies that followed, the discourse changed, moving "from the category of 'foreigners' under state law to an 'ethnological view' of the 'strange other' (*Fremde*)" (Radtke 1996, 337). This was accompanied by a culturalization of migration groups, which were divided into acceptable "strangers" (*Fremde*) and all-too-strange others (*Allzufremde*), according to imagined distances and in correspondence with EC policies (Radtke 1996, 339). While immigrants from southern EC countries were identified as relatively close "culturally," migrants from the Middle East were considered particularly "alien".

This culturalization – namely to only perceive the other through a cultural lens – led to two dominant and seemingly contradictory strands of discourse typically expressed in late capitalist urban transformations: the dramatization of cultural diversity on the one hand, and the positive exaltation of cultural diversity on the other (cf. Rodatz 2012).

Dramatization involved warnings of "ghettoization," alienation, and Islamization. In the 1990s, for example, the district of Berlin-Neukölln was already referred to as a "ghetto" (Lanz 2007, 69,256). Stigmatizing the district accompanied urban neoliberal policies that saw the state withdraw its social welfare assurances as Neukölln went through de-industrialization without a social net. The district's social decline was culturalized, as migrant women became scapegoats (Soederberg 2017). This was accompanied by other migration policy measures, such as putting a temporary stop to Turkish migrants moving to Berlin-Kreuzberg in the 1980s, which caused many families to move into Neukölln (Lanz 2007, 71).

On the other hand, cultural diversity was exalted, and multiculturalism propagated, especially in left-wing circles, which celebrated the coexistence of diverse minorities in the urban environment as enriching, giving rise to the catchword of "*Multi-Kulti*" (Lanz„ 2007 81). This found its consumerist, everyday practical expression in the demand for ethnic eateries as well as in the construction of multi-cultural Kreuzberg. Both strands of discourse are, of course, two sides of the same coin, as they build on a reductionist notion of cultures as determining identity.

Since 2015, the perception of Arab migrants has shifted to focus on the "refugee," focusing on the plight and flight of these specific migrants (see Grittmann 2017). Conversely, German society can be reassured to encompass a humanistic and paternalistic "welcome culture." But since New Year's Eve in Cologne in 2015/2016 at the latest, culturalized stereotypes of "Arab men" perceived as threatening have again become dominant in discussions, following on the traditional stigmatization of Muslims and Arabs (see Schmidbauer 2017; Dietze 2016).

The same time period, however, saw the revaluation of Sonnenallee, now marketed in German mass media (cf. e.g., Küpper 2016). And in neoliberal urbanism, diversity was increasingly discovered as an urban resource for cities to compete on the global market (Yildiz 2011).

These discourses of immigration have a direct impact on the representational opportunities of Arab gastronomies in Berlin. Indeed, two reactions to the two strands of the culturalization discourse can be found before 2015, i.e., falafel snack shops in Berlin's trendier neighborhoods and the stigmatization of Sonnenallee. The media attention enjoyed by Syrian refugees since 2015 has, in fact, created space for new, self-confident representational concepts in gastronomy – developments we will now explore.

## Gentrification and Orientalization – Falafel in Berlin

When the Iraqi owner of the later snack bar "Baharat" sold falafel in Kreuzberg pubs and later at weekly markets in the early 1980s, he did not yet know that he would play a decisive role in shaping a new trend. In 1993, the *taz* described the trendy snack as "cult balls made of chickpeas" (Arns 1998: 21), and in 2010 *Spiegel-Online* even referred to Kreuzberg as the "Falafelkiez", and thus designating it a quarter or 'hood'. Since then, falafel has been sold in Berlin mainly in restaurants connoted as Arabic, along with dishes such as shawarma, halloumi, and hummus.

Entrepreneurs like the owner of Baharat aimed their offerings less at an Arab community than at trendy young, predominantly white middle class that has made inner city neighborhoods their own over the past thirty years – starting with Kreuzberg and Schöneberg, moving on to Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg and Friedrichshain after the fall of the Wall, and more recently beginning to occupy Neukölln. Falafel snack bars helped shape this everyday variant of gentrification over the past 30 years by offering food staged as vegetarian and vegan (Stock 2013: 77). In 2010, there were 100 such snack bars in Berlin's inner-city neighborhoods. Their geographical distribution underlines how closely aligned they are to gentrification. In 2010, there were 24 snack bars in Kreuzberg, 18 in Prenzlauer Berg, and only 11 in Neukölln, which at the time was still considered less gentrified, but housed by far the largest number of Arab migrants.

Many of the initial operators were Iraqi migrants, often with an academic background. 1998, for example, saw the "Dada-Imbiss" open in Berlin-Mitte. Its Iraqi owner had a background in the theater arts and claimed to have "brought life to the neighborhood" ( Stock 2013: 107) by opening his shop. Consequently, not only consumers but also entrepreneurs possessed a high level of cultural capital, which they knew how to stage in their snack bars. Their new eateries were among the much-noted "creative milieus" seen to drive early gentrification. However, due to their cul-

turalization as "Arabs," they were hardly perceived as active agents of gentrification. Their cultural capital was thus symbolically misunderstood (Stock 2013: 105).

Paradoxically, it was precisely this culturalization that assured falafel shops such success in the course of gentrification, because entrepreneurs were able to stage their falafel snacks as "authentic", just like other ethnic restaurants (cf. Stock, Schmiz 2019), thus serving the demand of a middle-class intent on maintaining cultural hegemony.

*Fig. 12.1: Rissani, Kreuzberg*

*Fig. 12.2: Zweistrom, Penzlauer Berg*




> "I don't really like those gentrified bars. Those hip Prenzlauer Berg cafés don't do much for me. I'd rather have something more down-to-earth, you know, more traditional. Even with Arabic snack bars, I just like the ones that feel more traditional." (Stock, Schmiz 2019: 197)

With his preference for culture, Florian situated himself outside of gentrification, but at the same time, as an immigrant with a middle-class background and cultural capital, he belonged precisely to the early group of gentrifiers. The supposedly Orientalized decoration was then also based on retro style elements typical of Berlin neighborhoods undergoing gentrification, such as worn walls and handwrit-

ten blackboards. This also applied to the food, which the entrepreneurs had adapted to the health and food preferences of the Berlin milieus, which is why a falafel or shawarma sandwich was served with rich salads and a range of sauces.

This demand for cultural stereotypes in turn limited the snack bar owners in their possibilities of representation. This was evident in snack bars that did not follow the Oriental design logic, or only to a limited extent, such as the "Zweistrom" snack bar in Prenzlauer Berg, which chose a modern, minimalist presentation. This was perceived by Florian and other consumers as too acculturated and German to still be appropriate for "Arab" culture. For example, Ben, a 24-year-old student, said when he saw the photo of Zweistrom (Fig. 12.2)[4]:

> "Hm, I find the name funny. It's too German for me. So, with Arabic, I associate more tradition and old culture. And this is so very modern and compelling." (Stock 201, 168)

However, the snack bar owner of Zweistrom in particular found more room for differentiated representations instead of oriental stereotypes in Prenzlauer Berg, which had been gentrified and was no longer considered particularly "authentic" (Stock 2003: 13ff). It remains to be noted that even if the operators of Arab-owned snack bars actively shaped Berlin's gentrification, culturalization led to their clear symbolic subordination in the process, as the operators repeatedly culturalized themselves to achieve success. Nevertheless, falafel snack bars helped shape commercial gentrification, especially in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s in Berlin. Neukölln, on the other hand, was long considered marginalized.

## Men's cafés and chicken restaurants on the stigmatized Sonnenallee before 2015

Even before 2015, the district of Neukölln was home to by far the largest number of Arab migrants in Berlin. Lebanese and Palestinian refugees had moved here in the 1980s and 1990s because the rents were cheap. Neukölln, with its industries and then later deindustrialization, was long a predominantly lower-class district. Only since the early 2000s has the district experienced rapid gentrification and thus a significant change in population structure (Huning, Schuster 2015).

Seen from the outside, the district had a very bad reputation, especially in the 1990s and early 2000s, and was regarded throughout Germany as a prime example of "ghettoization," which seemed characterized by criminalization, radicalization, and the development of a Muslim "parallel society." Reducing the ghetto discourse

4 During the consumer interviews conducted for the dissertation, respondents were presented with photographs of falafel snacks. These helped to classify their taste (Stock 2013: 32).

to focus on "Muslims," made it possible to distract attention at the same time from grievances and failures in urban and migration-related policies (Lanz 2007: 245).

People who suffered from this stigmatization found a variety of ways to react to the bad reputation of Neukölln. For example, the rapper Massiv, whose parents had fled to Berlin from Palestine, staged ghetto discourses in his songs in the style of other gangsta rappers (cf. Janitzi 2012). In the documentary "Neukölln Unlimited", the main protagonist, belonging to a Lebanese family who still lived under toleration status, wore a T-shirt saying, "I am Muslim – don't panic".[5] And Samira, from a German-Palestinian family, for a while sold handbags bearing the imprint "Islam.ist.in"[6], thus creating a logotype to react to the incessant stereotype of Islamic threats (Stock 2013: 52).

In everyday consumer life, the presence of Arab migrants in Neukölln became increasingly apparent on Sonnenallee. Since the nineties, it has seen an economic service economy of Arab-owned stores emerge, including supermarkets, cell phone stores, travel agencies, bridal wear, butcher stores, and Arab restaurants. This new infrastructure closed the gap resulting from the district's poor image (cf. Bergmann 2011).

Shisha cafés and chicken restaurants were the most formative Arab-owned gastronomies for Sonnenallee. The shisha cafés were predominantly frequented by men, which is why they were also perceived from the outside as "men's cafés". An example is the "Umm Kulthum", named after the famous Egyptian singer. It is a large coffee house with simple seating, Oriental-style wall decorations, and fluorescent lighting typical of such shisha cafés (Färber/Gdaniec 2006: 116).[7] Thus, shisha cafés followed a culturalized self-representation that served as nostalgic staging for first-generation immigrants.

5 Cf. http://www.neukoelln-unlimited.de/ (Update March 15, 2017)

6 "Islam.ist.in" has two connotations. First it means, "Islam is in" and then it reads "Islamistin" meaning a female Islamist.

7 This is just one form of shisha café in Berlin. In this case, too, there are upgraded lounge-like cafés, as Alexa Färber describes. However, these no longer have a clear Arab connotation.

*Fig. 12.3: City Chicken*




The chicken restaurants, on the other hand, have demonstrated the representational strategies of a second generation of Arab migrants located in Neukölln, consciously breaking with Oriental projections. An example is the highly successful "City Chicken," a restaurant that opened in 1996 and is run by three brothers from a Lebanese family who grew up in Germany. The menu consists primarily of chicken halves with fries, hummus, salad, and garlic paste. Falafel is not on the menu. The owners consciously decided not to go for an Oriental staging when they set up the restaurant: "We didn't want that either. Because there's so much of that everywhere. Falafel and stuff, really everywhere." By contrast, their design leans – as the English name suggests – toward McDonalds-style neon signs with photo boards depicting the food they serve: "We always focus on modernization".[8]

8 Interview with one of the owners of City Chicken, Aug. .2010.

Turkish kebab bars had previously also followed this representation strategy, which gave their premises a McDonalds-style makeover to escape the trap of being pigeonholed as folkloristic and to be taken seriously as modern entrepreneurs in Germany. This can be seen as a strategy to increase their symbolic capital (cf. Çağlar 1995). Moreover, the modernized forms of presentation appealed to their own tastes.

On the other hand, the predominantly "white" middle-class consumers who enjoyed dining in Orientalized falafel snack bars strongly rejected this McDonalds-like presentation, finding the photo boards "commercial" to the point of being "desperate" when shown them during interviews (Stock 2013: 263). Even if they were not aware of it, they considered the meat-centered chicken restaurants to be lower-class eateries.

## "Arab Street": New Syrian-marketed gastronomy on Sonnenallee

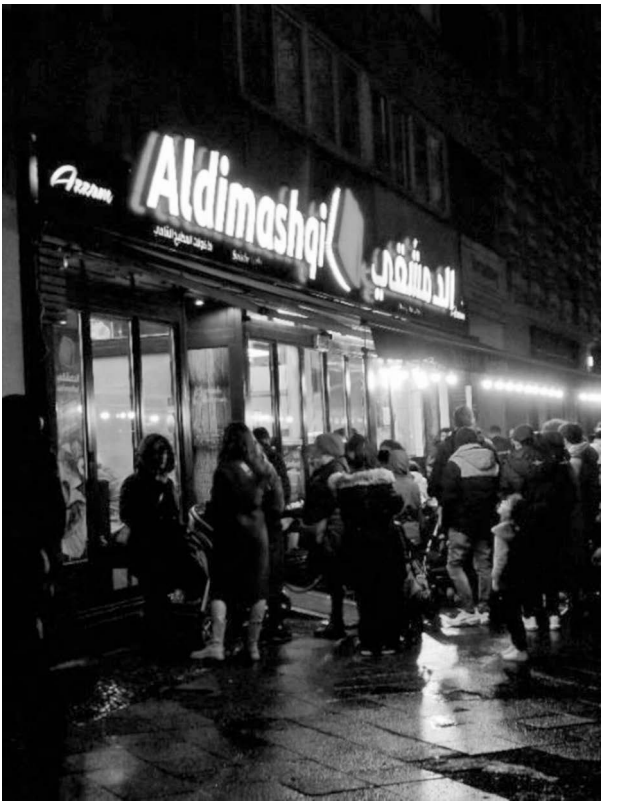
Sonnenallee was marginalized and stigmatized in the public media for a very long time. Only in 2010 did word begin to spread that this was an "inside tip" as the surrounding neighborhood gentrification gradually began to extend to Sonnenallee. In 2014, for example, an organic market opened across from City Chicken. The increasing gentrification of Neukölln, with more economically affluent stores, gradually became evident on Sonnenallee as the trendy pubs, bars, organic food stores, and falafel shops so typical of Berlin's gentrification began to open. This was accompanied by "urban renewal programs" in Neukölln, where redevelopment was also intended to attract residents and entrepreneurs with purchasing power (Steigemann 2020: 95).

The symbolic revaluation was also helped by the rapidly increasing Syrian presence since 2015, which led to a rapid increase in demand for Arabic food and gastronomy. This initially had an impact on existing Arab-owned snack bars. Previously marginalized stores and eateries that marketed themselves as Arabic saw a significant increase in sales, with numerous stores offering the typical breakfast dishes foul (a broad bean dish), hummus (chickpea puree), fatteh (a yogurt dish with chickpeas), as well as Lebanese and Syrian pizzas, so-called manaquish.

At the same time, an astonishing number of new Syrian stores and eateries emerged on Sonnenallee starting in 2015 (Steigemann 2020: 97), including Al Dimashqi in 2016, Yasmin Al Sham (The Jasmine of Damascus) in 2017, and Bab al Sham (The Gate of Damascus) in 2018. What these new Syrian entrepreneurs have in common is that they confidently promote "Syrian cuisine", bringing new dishes and serving styles to Berlin, and model their presentation on cosmopolitan Damascene snack stores by, among other things, combining Syrian photographs with modern stylistic elements (Stock 2019: 8). This is shown by the name "Damascus" alone,

which appears again and again, even if the entrepreneurs do not all originally come from Damascus (cf. Fig. 12.4).

*Fig. 12.4: Al Dimashqi*

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The most common snack on offer here is shawarma, in its Syrian variant: Chicken and garlic sauce are rolled into an Arabic flatbread and fried in the fat of the meat skewer. In addition, the "Arabian plate" known in Syria has made its way to Berlin, where the rolled shawarma is cut into pieces and served with French fries, garlic, and pickled vegetables. In addition, other grilled dishes are also on offer. Beyond this, however, the new reputation of Sonnenallee has also revealed an increasing diversification of offerings, which on the one hand, has followed the diversification of residents and visitors in Neukölln (cf. Monroe Santillan,Martinez, Mouritz, Ayoub 2018), while also responding to new urban discourses on marketing

diversity (Steigemann 2020). In this context, Arabic snack foods alone are shown to have very different representational strategies, depending on the consumer group addressed. Thus, Orientalized falafel snack bars, modernized McDonaldized chicken restaurants, and the new Syrian gastronomy are often found side by side and with different customer structures. At the same time, many restaurants on Sonnenallee are also turning into chain stores and opening second outlets in other locations. For example, the chicken restaurant Ris A, which has become very popular with diverse consumers, is located in both Wedding and Prenzlauer Berg. Meanwhile, Al Dimashqi has also opened in Wedding.

## Conclusion

As the examples illustrate, the representational strategies of Arab snack bars remained relatively stable from the 1990s to 2015, responding to the two forms of culturalization that characterized Berlin's immigration discourses: on the one hand, providing positive valorization and, on the other, increasing the fear of alienation. This also manifested itself in urban space, with "gentrification" of neighborhoods on the one hand and "ghettoization" on the other, as assessed by the public. The Orientalized variation of falafel snack shops took and continues to take center stage in Berlin's gentrification process, adapting to the local tastes of the Berlin scene. Different representational strategies were possible, especially in gentrified neighborhoods such as Prenzlauer Berg, as shown by the example of Zweistrom, which relied on symbols with Arabic connotations (in the form of black-and-white photos or the name's reference to Mesopotamia) while breaking with classic Orientalized, down-to-earth decor. In general, falafel snack shop owners have contributed to everyday gentrification in Berlin through their cultural capital, even if they were often misjudged by the public as creative actors and remained subordinate to other entrepreneurs (e.g., bars or cafés) in gentrification.

On the other hand, the Arab Sonnenallee began establishing itself in the late nineties as a shopping lane for the local Arab community, where shisha cafés and McDonalds-like Arab chicken restaurants, among others, dominated the image and tended to be avoided by other milieus in Berlin. Therefore, the providers chose McDonald-like presentations to enhance their snack bars, present them as modern, and resist symbolic stigmatization, stepping outside of culturalization. Especially by consumers of a new white middle class, however, this presentation was described as unfavorable, as it was perceived as commercial and did not reflect their own cultural capital.

Since 2015, the perception and manifestation of Arab gastronomy in Berlin have changed, predominantly on Sonnenallee, which has been experiencing an international revaluation, where many new stores presented themselves as modern,

but also consciously chose a reference to Damascus and other large cities and thus staged themselves as both origin-oriented and cosmopolitan. These were initially aimed at a newly immigrated Syrian public, but Sonnenallee, with its diverse stores and restaurants, is now also being marketed in the international media as "Arab street"[9] to attract tourists. Reflecting changes in immigration discourse about Arab immigrants, a new urban focus is apparent here, with entrepreneurs consciously choosing new presentation practices. Their self-confidence derives from both their cultural capital and the attention received from the German public. Recent years have seen a diversification of Arab snack cultures in Berlin, reflecting the different backgrounds of entrepreneurs and consumers and building on the new urban policy framework of staging diversity. How will snack culture develop in the coming years? And how will Arab snack shops continue to shape Berlin's inner-city neighborhoods?

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