

# The multifaceted face of neighbourhood change; diverse effects, strategies and perspectives among small migrant businesses in gentrifying Brixton

Maarten Kaptein, 4149319  
m.h.kaptein@students.uu.nl  
Supervisor: Dr. Ilse van Liempt  
Word count: 12295

## Abstract

International migration has been growing and diversifying in recent decades impacting both sending and receiving societies. Among migrants self-employment is a common source of income which is visible in the great number of ethnic businesses in major cities. Gentrification, tourism and place-consumption has been altering the residential and commercial landscapes of cities, not in the least ethnic neighbourhoods. Theory on migrant (or ethnic minority) business considers entrepreneurship to be shaped by the interaction between personal characteristics and well as the institutional and socio-economic context. Whereas many studies on migrant business focus on ethnic groups, this study investigates migrant businesses from various backgrounds in a particular neighbourhood. This approach sheds light on the various effects of neighbourhood change among a variety of migrant businesses. The aim of this study is to investigate the various effects of neighbourhood change on migrant businesses, the adaptive strategies employed by migrant entrepreneurs and the implications of these changes for the neighbourhood in Brixton, London. The data was collected using qualitative methods. Among the various participants neighbourhood change proves to be a challenge as well as a potential opportunity. While some business transform to more mainstream types of business, the future of many of the more traditional ethnic businesses is precarious.

## Keywords:

Migrant entrepreneurship, mixed embeddedness, adaptive strategies, urban transformations, gentrification

## Introduction

International migration has been growing and diversifying in recent decades impacting both sending and receiving societies. Western cities now host a sizable number of migrants that is increasingly diverse. This condition of 'superdiversity' is distinguished by a 'dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants' (Vertovec, 2007:1024). One major need of arriving migrants is being able to sustain themselves financially. Acquiring employment can be a challenge due to a lack of human capital or limited transferability of skills and knowledge. Partly because of this self-employment in small or medium sized business is a common type of employment among migrants from a variety of

backgrounds. In the UK the self-employment rates among both first and second generation migrants are higher than among native citizens (Eurostat, 2017).

Opinions differ among scholars whether employment in ethnic minority businesses (EMB's) is beneficial or detrimental for owners and their personnel. While some tend to focus on the pull factors surrounding EMB's and its potential for social mobility, others emphasise the push factors and arduous working conditions (Barrett, Jones, & McEvoy, 1996). It is, however, generally agreed upon that the position and success migrant businesses varies widely with regards to the personal characteristics of the entrepreneur, the type of business and the institutional and socio-economic context.

Studies on migrant businesses have generally taken the ethnic group as their unit of analysis, either separately or in comparison to other groups. Despite being useful in highlighting the significance of culture and ethnic ties, this approach could lead to a bias towards explaining outcomes on the ground of group characteristics. Over time research on EMB's has developed from a narrow focus on the supply side, the ethnic entrepreneur, and cultural explanations to a more comprehensive approach combining the supply and demand dimension to better understand ethnic entrepreneurship. The introduction of the concept of mixed embeddedness by Kloosterman, van der Leun and Rath (1999) has been instrumental in this regard.

With regards to attention the significance of the local business environment a valuable study was conducted by Sepulde and Syrett (2011) which investigates the implications of superdiversity for various EMB's in London. Instead of starting from the ethnic group, this study takes the local context of the neighbourhood as a point of departure. Such an approach allows to gain insight into the interaction between 'superdiverse' migrant entrepreneurship and the local, neighbourhood context.

One process that has been affecting urban neighbourhoods in various ways is gentrification. Gentrification not only alters the demographic, social and physical landscape of an area, but also its commercial landscape. Two major features of gentrification that affect businesses are demographic change and rising rents and property values. These developments create potential challenges and benefits for migrant businesses in the gentrifying neighbourhood. Entrepreneurs employ various adaptive strategies in response to economic, institutional and local developments (Hall, 2011).

In this study the neighbourhood of Brixton in South- London serves as a case study to investigate the role of the local environment for migrant businesses. Since the 1960s Brixton has been hosting many ethnic shops that are largely geared towards a black, Caribbean population. Having once been a deprived, multicultural area the neighbourhood is rapidly changing, witnessing a rapid processes of gentrification (Butler & Robson, 2001). This development has created concern about the future of small independent (ethnic) businesses in the neighbourhood. The combination of a strong presence of migrant businesses and processes of gentrification makes the neighbourhood an interesting case study.

While several studies have been conducted on the influence of gentrification on the supply of shops in a neighbourhood, little is known about the perspectives and responses of (migrant) entrepreneurs in gentrifying neighbourhoods. This study aims to integrate a focus on migrant entrepreneurship and the neighbourhood context by investigating the various effects of neighbourhood change on migrant businesses, the adaptive strategies employed by migrant entrepreneurs and the implications of these changes for the neighbourhood in Brixton, London. The data that will be presented was carried out through the employment of qualitative research techniques.

## Theoretical framework

### EMB theory; integrating supply and demand

When the field of EMB (ethnic minority business) theory started to develop it initially focused mainly on the supply side of ethnic business, employing a so-called ethnic resources model. Scholars generally took a culturalist approach, explaining the propensity for, and success of migrant entrepreneurship on the grounds of perceived cultural characteristics of ethnic groups. Over time, scholars have started to pay more attention to the role of context in shaping business outcomes. One important contribution was the interactive model by Aldrich and Waldinger (1990) which is built on three interactive components; opportunity structures, group characteristics, and strategies. Opportunity structures consist of market conditions which may favour products or services oriented to co-ethnics, and situations in which a wider, non-ethnic market is served. In addition, it includes the ease with which access to business opportunities is obtained, which is highly dependent on the level of interethnic competition and state policies. Group characteristics include factors such as selective migration, culture, ethnic social networks and aspiration levels. Ethnic strategies emerge from the interaction of opportunities and group characteristics, as ethnic groups adapt to their environments. Although the interactive model has been influential in EMB theory and research it has also been criticised for being too narrow ignoring the influence of the destination country on immigrant's entrepreneurial activities (Light, Bhachu, & Karageorgis, 1990).

The concept of mixed embeddedness was introduced by Kloosterman, van der Leun and Rath (1998) aiming to overcome these shortcomings. In addition to investigating the supply side, mixed embeddedness pays attention to the demand side, the matching process between entrepreneurs and potential openings for new businesses. Mixed embeddedness is not only concerned with the entrepreneur's rather concrete embeddedness in social networks of immigrants but also their more abstract embeddedness in the socio-economic and politico-institutional environment of the country of settlement. In addition, it is concerned with the insertion of migrants into the host environment, which impacts on the socio-cultural and institutional sectors on the level of the neighbourhood, city, nation and the international level. Despite acknowledging the gains of a mixed embeddedness-approach Peters argues that the model insufficiently explains - like preceding models - *'the wide-ranging, inter-ethnic variation in entrepreneurial concentration observed among immigrant groups in host environments around the world.'* (Peters, 2002).

### Supply side; The (ethnic) entrepreneur

EMB theory has long been approached from the perspective of (established) migrant groups. In addition to causing the risk of ethnic exceptionalism, this approach insufficiently accounts for the diversity of migration, which been conceptualised as superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007). The premise behind the concept is that because of emergent demographic and social patterns conventional ways of conceptualising diversity are no longer suited. The current condition is distinguished by a 'dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade' (Vertovec, 2007:1024). In accordance with Bourdieu, Vertovec (2007) stresses the interplay of variables which in the case of migrant include country of origin, migration channel, legal status, access to employment, locality, transnationalism and responses by local authorities, service providers and residents.

The aforementioned ethnic resources model has been criticised for the fallacy of 'ethnic exceptionalism' and the absence of context. In the case of ethnic exceptionalism values and behaviour patterns are presented as typical for an ethnic group instead of being seen as products of a small-business class culture (Barrett et al., 1996). Within the context of EMB research there

has been a call to moved 'beyond the ethnic lens'. To critique this lens is to neither neglect nor privilege ethnic identities, but rather to emphasise that *'business entrepreneurs are first and foremost entrepreneurs seeking a viable support network and customer base'* (Schiller & Çağlar, 2013).

The personal assets of entrepreneurs are commonly conceptualised through various forms of capital. I follow Nee and Sanders (2010) by focusing on the social, financial and human-cultural capital of entrepreneurs. The concept of human-cultural capital is a specific variety of human capita which emphasises the cultural components of human competence. The human-cultural capital that immigrants bring with them, and continue to accumulate in their new country, can be important resources that open up employment opportunities in the social mainstream and in the ethnic community (Nee & Sanders, 2010).

Although the various forms of capital have a defining influence, they do not influence entrepreneurship autonomously. Rather, one's overall capital is mediated by individual's 'position-taking; which constitutes how they strategize to employ their capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Within the context of migrant entrepreneurship strategies constitutes an important part of this position-taking. For migrants who have insufficient financial and human-cultural capital, social capital serves as an important form of capital. Among elite and middle-class immigrants on the other hand, human-cultural and financial capital are preferred forms of capital (Nee & Sanders, 2010).

### Context of business; spatial dynamics

Migrant entrepreneurship is shaped by the institutional, social and economic context on various spatial scales. On the national level, markets are shaped by the regulatory function of the state and the distinction between markets and non-markets. On the regional/urban level, the intensification of global competition has led to the emergence of a diversity of regional economies. Drawn by the urge to compete urban regions are becoming more connected and at the same time more specialised in certain activities. Global cities generate their own distinct opportunity structures with high-value-added services driving the expansion of low-level services that are accessible to low-skilled immigrants (Sassen, 1991 in Kloosterman & Rath, 2001).

On the local level, the neighbourhood can be important for migrant entrepreneurs in various ways. The distribution of the population affects the spatial structure of consumer markets within the city. With regards to the spatial distribution of migrant businesses it is important to distinguish between two main types of migrant entrepreneurs. The typical ethnic entrepreneur services an ethnic market and is therefore most often dependent on ethnic residential concentration in the vicinity of their business. (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001). Conversely, 'middleman minorities' have the majority population as their market (running convenience stores and laundries for instance) and are therefore not dependent on ethnic concentration (Aldrich & Waldinger, 1990).

In addition to concentration of a (co-)ethnic population, concentration of ethnic businesses can be beneficial for migrant entrepreneurs in various ways. Firstly, ethnic businesses in close proximity have the opportunity to deal with each other to promote the exchange of information, credit and other supports. Secondly, the development of several ethnic businesses within the same area may create conditions similar to agglomeration economies; existing ethnic shops increase the market for other ethnic shops. Thirdly, a concentrated ethnic economy eventually services a more spatially dispersed ethnic residential community, thereby becoming a kind of ethnic central place, serving a much broader hinterland (Kaplan, 1998: 494-495).

## Neighbourhood processes; gentrification, tourism and place-consumption

In recent decades there has been considerable academic and political debate about the dynamics and effects of gentrification. While much has been written about the demographic changes associated with gentrification, less attention has been paid to the implications for local retail and services. One notable exception includes a study by Zukin et al. (2009) that explores the role of new stores and services (“boutiques”) as agents of change in gentrifying areas in New York City. In these neighbourhoods the sharp growth of these ‘boutiques’ has coincided with a sharp decline of traditional local stores and services in the studied areas.

With regards to gentrification, Smith (2002), describes how it evolved from a marginal phenomenon in the 1960s<sup>1</sup>, to a central goal of British urban policy by the end of the twentieth century. Whereas the key actors in Glass’ story were assumed to be middle-class and upper middle-class moving into a neighbourhood, the agents of urban regeneration thirty-five years later are governmental, corporate or corporate-governmental partnerships. The strategic appropriation and generalisation of gentrification as a means of global interurban competition finds its most developed expression in the language of ‘urban regeneration’. In the case of Brixton, the term is commonly used in policy documents by the council, as well as in media and among participants. Tracing the term ‘regeneration’ to its biomedical and ecological term – applied to plants, species and organs - Smith underscores the (false) insinuation that the strategic gentrification of the city is a natural process. Thus, *‘the advocacy of regeneration strategies disguises the quintessentially social origins of urban change and erases the politics of winners and losers of which such emerge’* (Smith, 2002: 445).

In the case of the rise of ethnic neighbourhoods as places of leisure and consumption, a similar development has been the increasing adoption among national and local authorities of the re-imagining of (ethnic) neighbourhoods as strategies to revitalise urban districts and local economies. While the state’s role as a comprehensive provider of services and its ‘decommodifying’ socially protective institutional layers may have weakened, local and national government policies increasingly support place-promotion efforts (Aytar & Rath, 2012). Clearly gentrification is not a natural phenomenon but partly the result of political choices. For that reason, the effects of gentrification (or ‘regeneration’) on citizens, entrepreneurs in this case, can partly be attributed to government policy.

Opinions vary on whether processes of gentrification are beneficial to the neighbourhood and its residents. Often new stores and services have been taken as a sign of improvement for struggling shopping streets. These new outlets are often presented as offering a better range of healthy, green and ‘authentic’ consumption choices than the shops they displace (Hubbard, 2016). Contesting this optimistic perspective, Hubbard argues that we need to resist this change as it typically represents the first stage of a more thoroughgoing retail gentrification process. In addition, we should remain suspicious of forms of hipster consumption which, while aesthetically ‘improving’ local shopping streets in deprived areas, encourage the colonisation of neighbourhoods by the more affluent. Hubbard regards hipsters as central actors in these processes and regards them as partly responsible for displacement through their involvement in the refiguring of local taste cultures. However, he argues, we rather need to critique the local authority policies that encourage the displacement of existing working class communities through strategies of stock transfer and the redevelopment of council estates by private developers (Lees 2014 in Hubbard, 2016). Despite these drawbacks Hubbard argues that the influence of new hipster businesses is not by all means negative. For instance, new hipster businesses can diversify the range of goods and services available on

---

<sup>1</sup> As described by Ruth Glass in her study on Islington, London. Glass, R. (1964) London; aspects of change. London: Centre for Urban Studies and MacGibbon and Kee

some local shopping streets. In addition, existing independent traders and businesses can be welcoming of these in instances where they are more in keeping with the local business ethos than multiple chains like Starbucks or Subway (Hubbard, 2016).

The demographic change associated with gentrification can be a challenge for businesses as they potentially lose their customer base. In a study on the impact of gentrification on small businesses Meltzer (2016) concludes that if the local consumer base has tastes that do not align with the services or goods that existing establishments provide, then local businesses could suffer. On the other hand, new residential activity could be a stabilizing force if it provides an injection of cash flow that the neighbourhood was previously lacking. In addition, these socio-economic changes could draw new businesses and services into the neighbourhood.

One commonly witnessed consequence of gentrification (that is particularly apparent in Brixton) is that shops providing basic goods such as groceries, greengrocers, butchers and fishmongers are declining while the number of restaurants and bars rise (Hackworth & Rekers, 2005). This can be regarded as part of a model that '*replaces an economy of necessity and thrift with one of distinction and display*' (Hubbard, 2016:5). In a study on traditional retail markets Gonzalez and Wiley (2015: 21) argue that the idea of a market as a gastronomic destination has been emphasized in market redevelopment, meaning 'essential goods such as affordable fresh fruit, vegetables, meat and fish become secondary or disappear'.

Another related process that is shaping Brixton's retail landscape is a growth in tourism. Historically, urban tourism has been largely limited to the central areas of city. Although tourism beyond the city centre is not a recent phenomenon, increasingly (formerly) marginalised areas are becoming destinations for tourism and are often marketed as such. Some of these areas have become popular international tourist destinations such as Harlem in New York City, Kreuzberg in Berlin and Shoreditch in London. In addition to tourists, these areas attract place-consumers, city residents who explore parts of their hometowns where they do not reside (Novy, 2011:1). Although not exclusively, many of these neighbourhoods can (or could) be considered ethnic neighbourhoods, which is in fact part of their appeal. Recent years have witnessed the global rise of ethnic neighbourhoods - their shopping areas in particular - as sites for tourism, leisure and consumption. These neighbourhoods have become breeding grounds for various forms of ethnic entrepreneurship, notably forms that are driven by the commodification of ethno-cultural diversity (Aytar & Rath, 2012:1).

Attempts to account for tourism's benefits and costs within a given area often aim to identify the impacts for a given territory as a whole. As a result they '*neglect that different groups within them - the very wealthy and those on welfare; tenants and home owners, those with the capital to invest and/or spend and those without to name only a few will be affected differently by tourism development*' (Novy, 2011:245-246). Our evaluation of the effects of (retail) gentrification, place-consumption and tourism should be grounded in a locational approach and varies whether we focus on the neighbourhood, residents and/or its entrepreneurs. In addition, also within these groups there can be considerable variation on how people are affected by, and regard processes of neighbourhood change.

### Looking for opportunities; ethnic and adaptive strategies

As was previously mentioned entrepreneurship is shaped by the interaction of personal characteristics and the opportunity structure. Employing the concept of ethnic strategies Boissevain et al. (1990) have focussed on the that strategies emerge from this interaction, as entrepreneurs mobilize resources to meet market conditions, adapting to or creating solutions to problems. Entrepreneurs must overcome various barriers in order to succeed as entrepreneurs that relate to their ability to contend with others competitively in securing low-cost labour, gaining access to skills, training, and capital, customers and suppliers, fighting prohibitive statutory regulations, and meeting price undercutting from competitors (Boissevain et al.

1990:155). Based on studying a number of case studies, the authors conclude that there is remarkable similarity between ethnic groups regarding the strategies that are adopted.

Similar to the concept of ethnic strategies but with an emphasis on change, Hall employs the concept of the adaptive strategies; the various responses of migrants to deal with a changing business environment. Based on a case study of entrepreneurs on Walworth road (South London) she found that local social ties and interactions were of vital importance in running a business. A central concept was that of longevity, particularly articulated as the relationships between generation of proprietors and customers. In the case of Walworth road an important strategy for forging these kinds of relations was understanding the cultural aspirations of the local population. Another common strategy was compartmentalisation within the shop space, where small territories were rented out. This latter strategy was partly motivated by high businesses rates and high rental costs (Hall, 2011).

## Methods and research context

To address the research questions a qualitative methodology was deployed. Data was obtained through 29 semi-structured interviews with business owners or shop staff from 29 small businesses in Brixton, 15 short structured interviews conducted among shoppers on Electric Avenue, and one interview with Tree Shepherd. Tree Shepherd is a social enterprise that is active in Brixton and focuses on promoting and supporting employment and business growth in marginalised communities. In addition, data was obtained from observations, attending meetings, and informal conversations. The research data was gathered in the period of September till December 2018.

Brixton is a district in South London, England, within the London Borough of Lambeth with a population of 78,536<sup>2</sup>. The neighbourhood is home to seven large housing estates accounting for a large part of the Brixton residence. In addition, Brixton features some Victorian housing as well as some more recent housing developments. Brixton is well known for its market which consists of a street market in the centre of the neighbourhood and the adjacent covered market. Since the 1960s the neighbourhood has featured a lot of small ethnic businesses attracting both locals and non-locals. In previous years Brixton has witnessed gentrification expressed in demographic change, the construction of high-cost housing and changes in the supply of shops, which has received much public and media attention. Brixton history of small ethnic business combined with recent gentrification makes it an interesting case to study the implications of gentrification for small ethnic businesses.

The research population includes business owners and shopping staff that work in small retail businesses in the town centre of Brixton. This study focusses on traditional small (ethnic) businesses in Brixton and their more modern counterparts, most of them run by migrants. Because of this the middle-class small businesses and enterprises that have recently been established in Brixton are not included in the sample. This study limits itself to retail as the neighbourhood environment is more important for these businesses - with regards to customers - than for instance manufacturing businesses. A mapping of businesses on Electric Avenue was done to gain insight into the type of businesses present, their frequency and distribution on the street. Businesses were subsequently sampled to reflect the diversity of shops available in the neighbourhood. Because not all businesses were able or ready to participate in the research, some businesses types are not represented in the sample. Nevertheless, most of the common business types are represented, as well as some less typical business types. Businesses in various locations in the neighbourhood were included to reflect the diversity of business locations.

---

<sup>2</sup> 2011 UK census

## Results

### Brixton and business; a lasting bond

While the area of Brixton has been inhabited since medieval times, it remained undeveloped and mainly agricultural up until the Industrial Revolution and the coming of the railways. The small settlement underwent a huge transformation between the 1860s and 1890s, as the arrival of railways and trams linked Brixton with the centre of London. In 1880, Electric Avenue was opened, which acquired its name because it was the first street in the area to be lit by electricity. In the same year Morleys department store (at the time known as Morley & Lancelty) opened on Brixton Road, where it has been up until today. During its first major stage of development Brixton transformed into a middle-class suburb as large expensive houses were constructed along the main trunk routes into Brixton. At the turn of the century the area witnessed change in the social make up as the middle classes moved out to be replaced by a big working-class population. Many of the big houses were converted into flats or boarding houses which became very popular with theatre people working in the West End theatres.

By 1925, Brixton had the largest shopping centre in south London with department stores, a thriving market, cinemas, pubs and a theatre attracting many (non-local) visitors. After WWII many houses were in serious disrepair and slum clearances followed with Council housing filling the gaps, leading to a demographic shift in the area. In the 1940s and 1950s many of the immigrants who came to Britain from the West Indies settled in Brixton which marked the beginning of its Caribbean history and identity (Urban75, n.d.). Increasingly shops opened that started to cater to the black, Caribbean population. Meanwhile the prominence of the market trades remained (butchers, fishmongers, greengrocers), partly adapting to the needs, tastes and preferences of the Caribbean population.



Fig. 1: Electric Avenue in 1910 and 2018

Since the 1960s a large part of the shopping in Brixton has been characterised by shops offering ethnic products and services. Today Brixton town centre hosts many small ethnic businesses, many of them run by entrepreneurs with a migration background. Whereas many high streets in the UK have gradually become dominated by (inter)national chain stores, Brixton has largely managed to resist this trend. However, different change is underway, as a number of these shops have closed (and others struggle to survive) while more restaurants, bars and boutiques have been opening in the neighbourhood. Gradually, commerce in Brixton is once again more and more catering to a middle-class clientele.



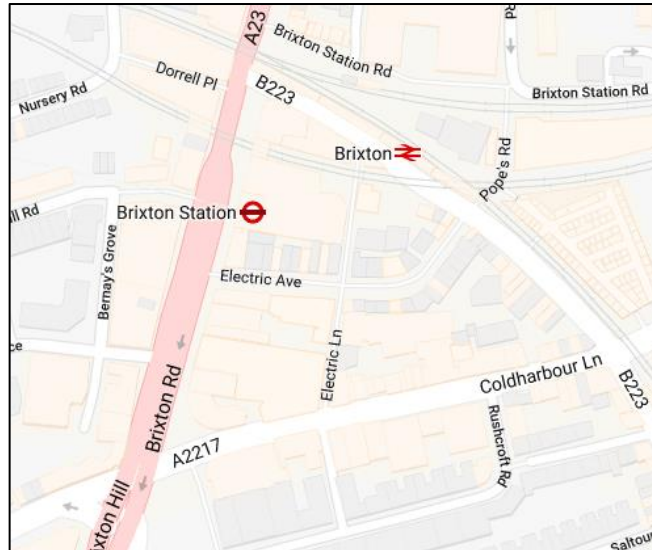


Fig. 2: Brixton market area

Since Brixton's development in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century commerce has clustered on Brixton Road, Brixton Station Road, Atlantic Road, Electric Avenue and Coldharbour Lane. In the 1920s and 1930s more commercial space was created through the construction of three indoor markets; Reliance Arcade, Market Row and Brixton Village (formerly called Granville Arcade). In addition, many small businesses have been based in the railway arches that intersect the town centre. The future of many of these businesses is however unsure as the railway arches are currently being redeveloped by a private developer. This development, a feature of the neighbourhood's 'regeneration', will be discussed more elaborately in the next section.

Brixton's demographic diversity is reflected in the broad array of businesses that are concentrated in the town centre. Brixton's high street, Brixton Road, matches the image of a typical high street with its combination of fashion chain stores, chemists, coffee shop chains, banks, and small supermarkets. Meanwhile a great deal of the town centre hosts a plethora of largely small, independent shops run by a variety of ethnicities. Four types of businesses are particularly numerous; market shops (butchers, fishmongers, greengrocers), ethnic supermarkets, natural hair shops, and hair and beauty salons. Other shops and/or market stalls specialise (among others) in fabrics, Afro-Caribbean-style fashion, phone sales and repair, kitchen utensils, luggage, Reggae and dub music (cd's and vinyl), money exchange, and travel agencies. In addition to often targeting a (co-)ethnic clientele, these businesses match the image of migrant businesses through their involvement in low entry markets. In addition to shops Brixton hosts a diversity of coffee shops, (ethnic) restaurants, pubs and bars. A recent addition to the retail space has been Pop Brixton, a complex on the edge of the town centre hosting a variety of businesses, organisations, restaurants, bars and events. A lesser known addition is Brixton Mall, a temporary small business space in a former job centre on Brixton Road.

Although West-Indians are the largest ethnic minority in Brixton and many businesses in cater to a Caribbean or more general black population, West-Indians are fairly underrepresented among its entrepreneurs and staff. The participants included in the sample were mostly first or second migrants from a variety of (national) backgrounds including Ethiopian, Ghanaian, Malagasy, Nigerian, Senegalese, Somali Kurdish, Pakistani, West-Indian, Cypriot and Colombian. Practically none of the businesses catered exclusively to a co-ethnic clientele. In fact, the various specialty clothing shops frequented mainly by West-Indians were run by Asians and Africans exclusively. Although Pakistani are a visible presence in the market trades, no ethnic group dominates a particular type of business.

When studying the impact of neighbourhood change on small businesses it is important to consider in what ways the neighbourhood level is relevant for ethnic businesses. One straightforward way in which a neighbourhood is relevant for businesses is because it hosts a clientele for the business. This is especially true for ethnic small businesses that supply a specific ethnic niche product to a particular ethnic group (Aldrich & Waldinger, 1990). Many businesses included in the sample were (among other reasons) opened in Brixton because of Brixton's large black/Caribbean population. However, few businesses were actually limited to a purely local clientele. A high concentration of ethnic shops can eventually become a regional ethnic shopping centre with national and international significance (Waldinger, McEvoy, & Aldrich, 1990). Based on my data Brixton can be considered an example of such a regional shopping centre. Many entrepreneurs specialising in ethnic products receive lots of non-local (even international) customers, because of Brixton's reputation as a centre of black, Caribbean shopping. Additionally, various participants mentioned the advantage of this reputation for their business. This reputation has made Brixton an attractive location for ethnic businesses.

### A changing business environment

In the previous section it was shown that Brixton has been subject to several phases of change during its existence, with gentrification being a major recent development. This section is concerned with neighbourhood change from the perspective of the entrepreneur. It delivers insight into the evaluation of change among entrepreneurs and the challenges and opportunities that gentrification generates for their business.

*“.... for the last seven years it's not easy, but same in Brixton, it has really changed. And people coming there, it's really different now. Like when we compare it to fifteen years ago that I came here, it's a very massive change.” (Abena, 50s, bags and accessories)*

Among the entrepreneurs that were interviewed there was a strong awareness that the neighbourhood has been changing rapidly in recent years, which is illustrated in the quote above. In fact, many participants expected more change in the nearby future. While there was common agreement on that Brixton is changing, the picture of change painted by the various participants is diverse. The various changes that were mentioned by participants involved changes in the physical environment (upgrading, regeneration), demographic change, changes in rents/business rates, social change (decline in crime), changes in the neighbourhood's reputation, changes in visitors, and changes in the supply of shops. Participants regarded these as positive forms of change, negative forms of change and often a combination of both.

With regards to positive changes, developments that were widely mentioned include improved safety, cleanliness and a tidier appearance of the market area. When discussing improved cleanliness and appearance Electric Avenue was mentioned multiple times. As the street is for a great deal characterised by market trade there used to be a lot of waste on the street, especially around closing hours. This problem has been increasingly addressed and tackled in recent years by Lambeth Council and Brixton BID<sup>3</sup>. Although most entrepreneurs regard this as beneficial, some also doubt whether it will really improve their business. Besides this development Brixton has more broadly witnessed a sweep of regeneration which is especially visible in the Brixton Village arcade (formerly called Granville Arcade) which increasingly specialises in specialised 'boutique' goods and the consumption of food and drinks. This will receive more attention in a later section.

---

<sup>3</sup> Brixton BID is a Business Improvement District which is a not-for-profit collective of local businesses that collaborate aiming to improve their immediate area.

Apart from physical changes, Brixton's reputation has also been changing. Among participants Brixton's development towards a safer neighbourhood was contrasted to a period when Brixton suffered from a lot of crime and unsafety. This contributed to Brixton's reputation of a dangerous area, which partly persists today. Increased safety is regarded beneficial for business as Brixton has become more accessible for visitors, both in an objective and subjective sense. From being a 'ghetto' avoided by many (white, middle class) Londoners, the neighbourhood has become a go-to-place for a range of different people. In recent years Brixton has increasingly become a destination for tourists and place-consumers. Some informants regarded this as an opportunity for their business. The potential of this change was expressed by a business owner who owns a shop selling organic products in Brixton Mall:

*"... And obviously Brixton is now developing... like trendy, as well. So to have a business here seem like a good idea. To be in this area, yeah."* (Khalil, 30s, organic products)

With regards to concrete changes in the business environment one major challenge for almost every entrepreneur is the rise in rents and business rates in recent years. In addition to paying rents (most businesses rent their premises) businesses pay a business rate which is a tax on property used for business purposes. The challenge of paying business rates has become especially pressing since 2017 when a revaluation of business rates came into effect<sup>4</sup>. Because the latest revaluation had been in 2010 and the price of real estate had meanwhile been rising strongly, many businesses had to deal with a dramatic rise in costs. While Brixton for a long time has been an affordable place for small businesses these rises in costs poses a threat to the survival of these businesses. This rise in costs is especially challenging for businesses that already deal with declining revenues due to various reasons.

Another typical feature of gentrification that was mentioned among the participants is demographic change and its effect on business. In recent years the black, Caribbean population has been declining while the share of middle-class people and other migrant groups (Latinos in particular) has been growing. This is partly a result of middle-class people buying up houses in the area and various newly built developments for middle class incomes. Meanwhile many former low-income tenants have moved elsewhere because of rising rents. In addition, many house owners moved as they decided to sell their house because of attractive prices. Because of these developments the local clientele for products and services catering to black and/or low-income groups has become smaller. This is not necessarily problematic for all business as many customers keep loyal to their Brixton shops, and few shops have a purely local customer base. However, this loyalty to shops after moving seems to be more common among hairdressers and specialty shops selling products such as fabrics and clothing than among those selling market goods such as butchers, fishmongers and greengrocers. Former Brixton residents will likely find similar shops in their new area or might switch to supermarkets for their daily food needs.

A similar process of decline is taking place with regards to people visiting the area for 'traditional' (ethnic) shopping. Many businesses providing in 'traditional' (market goods and ethnic products) shopping suffered from a strong decline in customers, also those from outside the neighbourhood. This decline was often attributed to a decline in parking space, which made Brixton less accessible for non-local shoppers. Ironically a part of the area that used to host a car park is now occupied by the trendy Pop Brixton complex that draws in a largely middle-class crowd. Indicating the decline in customers, many traders on Electric Avenue commented that the streets has become a lot quieter in recent years, whereas previously it used to be very busy.

---

<sup>4</sup> based on data from 2015.

Overall there is a decline in various types of shopping that used to characterise Brixton in previous decades; butchers, fishmongers and groceries and different kinds of shops catering to black, Caribbean customers. Many shops that used to cater to Caribbean struggle to attract new customers for several reasons. Firstly, they are increasingly losing their old clientele because they move, stop visiting or decease. Secondly, they fail to attract new customers to replace the declining clientele. One clear example includes a number of specialty clothing shops catering to black, Caribbean customers. These shops generally lose their aging customers and struggle to attract a younger generation to the shop who prefer to shop at the high street fashion shops. The market shops providing food have a hard time competing with supermarkets that have become more numerous in the area. While part of the challenges for businesses can be attributed to neighbourhood change, they are also caused by developments on a larger scale. High streets across the UK are losing their shops, which can partly be attributed to the rise in online shopping and a general decline in customer spending due to stagnating wages and relatively high levels of inflation (Holder, 2019). In addition, several participants thought the growth of online shopping partly explained the loss of customers.

While Brixton is losing a number of its traditional business, it has not lost its function as a centre of black, Caribbean shopping which is visible in the omnipresence of natural hair shops, black hair salons and the abundance of yam, plantain and salted fish on display in the neighbourhood's shops. While part of the market catering to a black, Caribbean is declining the markets of hairdressing and natural hair are very much alive and tight with new shops opening and lots of competition existing between shops. This matches Wang's (2013) observation that while ethnic neighbourhood may be a depleted market for one, group, it can provide a unique opportunity for another. Within this 'beauty' market there is, however, considerable differentiation among businesses. Several of the natural hair business are relatively big and well-established employing a sizable staff. These shops can offer a broad supply, are well-known, and have the resources to draw in more customers through marketing. Many smaller businesses, on the other hand – often operated by only one person - struggle to compete with these bigger establishments.

During my stay in the neighbourhood a natural hair shop opened which was part of a French chain that had decided to open its first shop in the UK in Brixton. Additionally, some participants specialising in hairdressing and natural hair had customers coming in from various Western European countries. These customers are attracted to Brixton because of its broad supply of products and services at an affordable price (partly as a result of the fierce local competition). These examples indicate that shows that the market of ethnic products is transnational, not only with regards to supply but with regards to retail as well.

Several participants attributed a number of changes in the area to local government policies. A few of them had the impression that Lambeth Council is deliberately trying to push out small businesses and poorer residents. One controversial development in Brixton that has gained a lot of attention has been the redevelopment of the railway arches by Network Rail in partnership with Lambeth Council. These arches have for a long time been the home of many small businesses. Former occupants of the premises have been invited to move back after the refurbishment although with a considerable higher rent. Despite fierce public resistance the project has been carried through and is currently underway. Among many residents and activists this has raised doubts about the social objectives of the council. One participant argued that the council was investing in the town centre to attract and draw in new (middle-class) businesses that would then replace older businesses. Higher residential and commercial in the area would raise the council's revenues, so it would benefit from the area becoming more middle-class. The idea that regeneration is a deliberate strategy to change the demographics of the area is illustrated in the following quote:

*“... all London is changing, not just this particular area, but all London is changing, and this is... I believe it's the council et cetera, they are trying to push out those of working class, and they wanna have more people who are, say, middle class, who've got good jobs, who can afford to pay the council tax, that's the main thing. Because those who are working class, some of them are on benefits, and they don't like to give benefits out” (Patrick, 50s, menswear shop)*

With regards to business support some businesses felt neglected by the council, especially with the challenges associated with gentrification. Brixton hosts a large number of independent businesses, something which Lambeth Council is aware of and takes pride in. In policy documents the council has voiced to be aware of the challenges that small businesses face and has said to be actively engaged in preserving the diversity of shops available in the neighbourhood. However, many participants felt neglected by the council and opted for more support. The council has on its turn been facing severe budget cuts in recent years which makes it increasingly challenging to provide services.

While ‘gentrified’ small businesses in places such as Pop Brixton may be thriving, many businesses elsewhere in the neighbourhood struggle to survive. For many businesses the rise in rents and business rates is a challenge, but not all are equally affected by neighbourhood change. As some ethnic businesses see their clientele diminishing, other businesses profit from the influx of middle-class consumers. The existence of some types of enterprise might even be considered a result of neighbourhood change. When evaluating the situation of independent enterprise in Brixton it is important to differentiate between different independent businesses and their owners. Celebrating Brixton’s lasting reputation as a haven for small independent businesses misses out on the challenges that many small migrant businesses face.

### Responses to change; survival and potential

*“Brixton is different from before. So we need to change the goods, our products. The kind of beer... It's changed. There's less black people in Brixton now, it's more multicultural in Brixton now. Spanish... everybody is in Brixton now. Compared to... You know before it used to be black mainly. And that's one of the reasons why we have to change.” (Samuel, 40s, Convenience store)*

This section is concerned with the various strategies that entrepreneurs employ in response to neighbourhood change. Among the various responses to neighbourhood change three sets of strategies can be discerned. The first one is concerned with *maintaining* the current business. This includes ‘surviving’ which might hardly be regarded a strategy but was widely mentioned among participants. The condition of surviving is reflected in the following remark by an entrepreneur specialising in groceries and fruit and vegetables:

*“Well, to try to survive is hard yeah. Just doing the same thing and not much you can do. Because the same thing in/and everyone's selling the same thing, it's a lot of competition around here. You have to be on your toes and be nice and look good after your customers.” (Tarif, 40s, small supermarket)*

Surviving in the context of these businesses is basically concerned with keeping the business open as long as possible. Obviously, growth or development is not an objective in this case. Among businesses several ‘survival strategies’ are employed. Firstly, one straightforward strategy to deal with financial pressure is to downsize, either by moving to a smaller premise or cutting down on staff. Secondly, businesses value attention to customer service highly as a way to at

least maintain their existing clientele. For instance, the owner of a fashion shop regarded the provision of credit as one of the main reasons his business was still running. Apart from these more concrete services, entrepreneurs mentioned the importance of taking the time to listen to customer and even provide emotional support in some cases. However, participants perceived the latter generally as an act of altruism rather than a business strategy. The importance of gaining customer loyalty through practical customer service as well as general service among migrant entrepreneurs was also recognised by Aldrich and Waldinger (1990). The benefit of customer relations is reflected in the fact that a lot of businesses still received customers that had moved out of Brixton. Thirdly, a common way to deal with the decline in customers among market traders (greengrocers, butchers, fishmongers) is to supply food to the growing number of restaurants in Brixton. In this case change in the neighbourhood (the increase of restaurants) create new opportunities for existing businesses.

Another strategy is the practice of compartmentalisation and subletting. In the case of compartmentalisation, a business unit is divided into several smaller units which are rented out to microbusinesses. This allows very small businesses to have an affordable place and provides the landlord with a steady income. This practice is quite common among ethnic minority businesses and arguably becomes more attractive (and necessary) in a context of rising commercial expenses. An of compartmentalisation in my sample includes a shop that hosts two barbers, a beautician, a clothing shop and a bag shop in a rather small space. On an ever smaller it is common practice among beauty and hair shops to sublet, rent out chairs to hairdressers and beauticians. While many shops in Brixton specialise in a particular market, some have a more hybrid nature. This allows the entrepreneur some flexibility to respond to changes in demand. One shop for instance served as a convenience store, a shop selling typical Somalian food, non-food and clothing and kind of community centre for the Somalian community. The business owner told me that she had recently started doing henna trying to make up for the rise in rents.

One final strategy is following the clientele to where they are moving. This strategy would be attractive for outspoken ethnic businesses that lose their existing clientele because they are moving elsewhere. A few participants had heard of actual cases of businesses doing this. One participant who specialised in natural hair (extensions and wigs) had just opened her shop in Brixton but already considered moving her business to Croydon because that's where part of here clientele had moved to. More generally, however, entrepreneurs were reluctant to move to other (more affordable) premises as they would largely lose their current customer base.

Another set of strategies that I have grouped as *developing* are aimed at creating avenues of growth, partly in response to neighbourhood change. Several businesses in Brixton had achieved 'break out' which means that migrant businesses aim to attract a wider customer base; moving beyond a specific ethnic clientele (Ram & Hillin, 1994). Apart from other benefits, this potentially enables entrepreneurs to cope with the loss of their existing clientele and rising expenses caused by gentrification.

One example of break out from the data includes an entrepreneur who had recently opened a hair salon in Brixton and who, because of work experience, was skilled in doing both black and white hair. She regarded this as an advantage as it enabled her to attract a diverse population. Another example is a business that is a combination of barber and beauty shop that had recently opened on Electric Avenue. Being aware of the changes in Brixton the owners aimed at attracting a wider clientele through a wide skill set and a more neutral and professional appearance of the shop (as opposed to the more traditional hair salons in Brixton). In addition to specific skills, one obvious condition for break out is that there is a broad demand for your products and/or services. To attract a wide clientele the supply of a shop might have to change or diversify. In addition, the previous example illustrates that marketing and appearance is an important way to attract a broad population and distinguish yourself as a business.

Instead of aiming to be a more mainstream, neutral business the 'ethnic' can be employed by creating a niche in catering to a demand for exotic goods (Aldrich & Waldinger, 1990:117). This is particularly attractive in the context of gentrification of a multicultural neighbourhood, as people are attracted to Brixton partly because of its multicultural, ethnic character. One example includes a shop in Brixton Mall which had developed out of a wholesale business for Ethiopian products. While the wholesale branch was mainly supplying to Ethiopian restaurants, the shop was set up to sell Ethiopian products to a wider clientele. The Ethiopian business owners emphasised the importance of being able to tell the story behind the products and demonstrate their use to non-Ethiopians. Evidently their 'ethnic resources' were instrumental in finding suppliers in Ethiopia, but also in marketing the product with a focus on experience. While for the Ethiopian clientele the shop provides familiar products, it can meet a desire to explore exotic food and culture for others.

Another development is the *aestheticization* and *professionalisation* of small business, which is mainly visible among newer business. Traditionally, many migrant businesses, in Brixton at least, have an informal character. I mean that these businesses are often characterised by modest growth goals, a dependence on personal ties with regards to employment and clientele, and the absence of a business plan. Many new migrant businesses increasingly do not conform to this image. This could partly be attributed to the fact that these entrepreneurs have made a more deliberate choice for self-employment. Generally being second generation migrants and having received more schooling, their self-employment is motivated by pull factors rather than push factors. This difference between first and second migrant entrepreneurs was also found in a study by Abada et al. (2014) on motivations for self-employment among migrant parents and their children.

The *aestheticization* of migrant businesses was particularly visible in the recently opened Brixton Mall on Brixton Road that hosts several (mostly young) small business as a temporary use scheme. Most of the shops have a more coherent and deliberate design than for instance older shops on Electric Avenue. One entrepreneur in Brixton Mall had the impression that in response to new businesses opening up the standards of running a small business have been raised up to the point that "*It's gotta be looking like it's on the high street*"<sup>5</sup>. In Brixton Mall businesses look at each other for inspiration and elevate their units in response. Although there was some awareness of competition between shops, businesses in the mall also employed their proximity by exchanging information and business recommendations. This signifies the benefit of business concentration for entrepreneurs (Kaplan, 1998).

With *professionalisation* I mean that businesses conform more to the image of mainstream businesses. This becomes visible in the attention to marketing, notably on social media. The use of Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat is popular for promoting the shop and products available. Several entrepreneurs in the Mall deemed it important to collectively market the mall to draw in more customers. Another sign of professionalisation is the growing number of shops that sell their own brand. For instance, the aforementioned Ethiopian business sold a combination of products from their own brand and other brands. Another example includes a business that opened a shop to sell clothing of their own street fashion brand. For these entrepreneurs owning a shop was not an end itself, but part of a wider business goal.

### Typology of businesses

Among the various small businesses in Brixton some businesses are more successful than others in running their business in a changing business environment. To clarify and understand these differences a typology of the businesses in Brixton was developed. Based on the research data one can roughly discern three kind of businesses;

---

<sup>5</sup> As mentioned by Esther, 30s, street fashion shop

The first group exists of the typical market traders as well as some shops specialising in Afro-Caribbean products. Both types of businesses have been around in Brixton for a long time, which is also true for many of the individual businesses. Especially the ethnic shops opened in response to ethnic concentration (of West-Indians) and currently suffer from its decline. With regards to neighbourhood change many of these businesses are struggling because of declining revenues and rising costs. Several entrepreneurs referred to a period when it was in fact very good businesses to be involved in these trades. More recently, however, most witnessed a decline in sales. In fact, a number of these businesses expected to close in coming years.

The second group comprises a heterogeneous group of businesses that experience similar challenges as the previous but manage to get around through employing various strategies. Examples include selling online, online marketing, and changing or adding the supply of products. Some of these businesses have been around in Brixton for a long time while some have opened in the previous year. While many of these businesses serve an ethnic market, their field of business is less dramatically impacted by neighbourhood change than in the previous group. One notable example is the beauty and hair industry which fairs well. In fact, various new shops opened during the fieldwork period. This market still attracts a large black population to Brixton. Although this market is not declining, business is challenging for small businesses because of competition and high rents.

The third group consists mainly of new business with a more professional character. These businesses are generally young and offer readymade (exotic) food or specialised, niche products. All these businesses aim to attract a wide audience as opposed to a particular ethnicity. Among the entrepreneurs much worth is attached to aesthetics and marketing. Examples include two street fashion shops, a coffee shop and a shop specialising in organic products. These businesses have partly opened as a response to neighbourhood change. Brixton's growing reputation as an attractive, trendy, and multicultural place to some extent motivated their choice to open a business in Brixton. For most entrepreneurs self-employment was a deliberate choice which was motivated by a desire for independence and/or the opportunity of higher financial rewards (as opposed to wage labour). Although entrepreneurs were generally positive about the performance of their businesses, some acknowledged the challenge of high rents.

### Opportunities to adapt

Among businesses, the opportunities to employ strategies are not equally distributed. Most strategies aimed at *maintaining* (downsizing, preserving existing clientele, compartmentalisation) are available to most businesses, but their benefits are also limited. The strategies associated with *developing* have more potential in the light of neighbourhood change but are also less accessible. In the case of break out, for instance, entrepreneurs might transform their existing business or start a new business. While the previous example of the Ethiopian shop shows the potential success of this approach, this might not be accessible to any shop. Either the products might not appeal to a wider audience, or the entrepreneur lacks the skills to market the product. Another option would be to change to another type of business. This, however, requires some financial capital, skills and social connections that might be lacking. In addition, it would mean losing the existing business that, despite declining, still provides a source of income.

In addition, personal characteristics influence the opportunities to adapt. Firstly, motivations for self-employment differ. Most of the more optimistic entrepreneurs have made a deliberate choice for self-employment and are mostly motivated by its pull-factors. These entrepreneurs are generally young, second generation migrants running new businesses. They are generally higher educated and were employed in other jobs before setting up a business. Their experience and human capital can prove to be beneficial in running the business. In



addition, younger entrepreneurs are more experienced in using the internet, which is an advantage with regards to the growing importance of online marketing in businesses.

Lastly, access to capital strongly influences the opportunities of a business to, adapt invest and innovate. Among many businesses lack of financial capital is a major constraint. Businesses that have been struggling for a prolonged time often have a hard time to pay their staff and keep the business running, this leaves little capital for improvements in the shop, let alone taking on a drastic overhaul of the business. In addition, several entrepreneurs mentioned that it was hard for them to acquire loans, which is a common problem among migrant businesses. Entrepreneurs who have made a deliberate choice for self-employment (motivated by pull-factors), have likely secured a certain amount of capital before starting their business.

In the context of neighbourhood change both the type of business and personal characteristics influence the opportunities of the entrepreneur to adapt. As was previously illustrated there is considerable variety in perspectives, challenges and opportunities among migrant entrepreneurs in Brixton. While some established businesses see their business and market declining, newer businesses see opportunities in change. We should therefore regard migrant businesses (and their owners) as a heterogenous whole.

### A neighbourhood in transition

*Business-wise certainly [the neighbourhood has changed] because we did not see a lot of eating places, or fast-foods, or restaurants in the area as much as there were. There were not that many in the years by, but now I can see that's changing. We have a lot of coffee shops, sandwich shops, cake shops. I think Brixton is getting to be known for its diverse foods that are served here, types of restaurants... and that's why people come in just to eat and not to spend money on clothing I suppose. (Hamid, 50s, menswear shop)*

While the previous sections have focused on the implications of gentrification for people working in small business, this section pays attention to the implications for the neighbourhood and its residents. The changes in the supply of local shops and businesses (along with demographic change) signify a transformation to a different type of neighbourhood with a different role within the city.

Many businesses in Brixton have been serving both locals and people from neighbouring places and beyond. For a long time already, black minorities have been visiting the area for its supply of black shops, although Brixton has always also attracted a share of white customers. Recently the group of people visiting the neighbourhood has been changing as middle-class *place-consumers* and (international) tourists are increasingly visiting the area. The current clientele of businesses in Brixton can broadly be divided in two groups. This was also recognised in a study on the Brixton Street Market for Lambeth Council, which coined the two groups 'struggling estates' and 'city sophisticates' (London Borough of Lambeth, 2018).

This division, although perhaps slightly exaggerated, is also visible in the streetscape of Brixton. While Brixton is increasingly regarded as a place to be for the middle class, its consumption by 'city sophisticates' seems to largely be limited to the indoor markets (Brixton Village mostly), Pop Brixton, the neighbourhood's clubs and concert halls and several pockets of restaurants and shops. On the other hand, Electric Avenue and parts of Atlantic Road retain the more traditional image of Brixton shopping and are largely the domain of the 'struggling estates'. It is especially in these streets that entrepreneurs report a decline in footfall in recent years. Meanwhile the food and night-time economy flourishes, especially in the weekends. The duality is also visible in the appearance of different shops in the neighbourhood. As more traditional stores are often characterised by a rather undefined design, new shops appeal to middle class tastes, both in terms of products and design. Within the rather small area of the

Brixton town centre there are two commercial domains that seem to exist almost independently of each other.

With its famous markets Brixton has since long been known for its supply of food. The neighbourhood has a long history of being of a market place offering a wide array of (affordable) meat, fish fruit, vegetables and other food products. In previous years the role of food in the neighbourhood has been changing through a decline in the markets and a rise in restaurants and bars. Among participants this rise in restaurants and bars was overwhelmingly mentioned as a major change in the area. Food as a commodity is not vanishing from the neighbourhood, but it increasingly involves the consumption of food in restaurants. While this brings in many visitors to the area - and could therefore be deemed beneficial to the local economy - there is concern that the availability of affordable food in the markets is at peril. This could be especially detrimental for lower incomes, for whom the markets are a source food that is still often cheaper than the supermarkets. This development matches Hubbard's (2016) observation that in gentrifying neighbourhoods the economy is shifting from providing necessities to a focus on distinction and display.

Regarding the cultural identity of the neighbourhood the Caribbean community has played a central role since the 1960s. Nowadays this legacy still lingers on in the way the neighbourhood is described by people and represented in media. It is also still clearly visible in the streetscape around Brixton. On Pope's Road, for instance, a huge mural featuring Michael John, a community originally from Grenada, reminds passers-by of the neighbourhood's Caribbean identity. However, people are also aware that some (or much even) of it has withered already and that more might be lost in the future. A large part of the Caribbean population has moved, which raises the question whether Brixton could still be regarded Caribbean. Demographic change was recognised by participants who mentioned that the neighbourhood had become more multicultural. Others would on the other hand emphasise that the neighbourhood is becoming more white and middle class. A quick look at media articles describing Brixton brings up an image that is typical of upcoming neighbourhoods; bustling, exciting, cultural, ethnic and colourful. However, there seems to be little attention to what has been lost. While trendy, Caribbean and multicultural Brixton is eagerly consumed, there is a risk of a certain amnesia about who, and what, has been displaced (Crinson, 2005). In addition, several participants articulated a sense of injustice in the process of neighbourhood change. Many of the residents and entrepreneurs that shaped Brixton's ('exciting') character and worked and lived in the neighbourhood during its more precarious periods, cannot be part of the new 'regenerated' Brixton.

There is considerable variety among participants with regards to how they perceive the development of the neighbourhood and its future. Among part of the participants there is an awareness of loss, whereas others (although aware of the challenges) tend to emphasise the benefits of change. More pessimistic accounts revolve around a loss of culture, identity, and diversity, which is illustrated in the following quote:

*"... now you have lots of cafes now, in the marketplace where they used to sell incredible foods, incredible clothing, incredible sorta like stuff that catered for the Afro-Caribbean et cetera. Now it's all little cafes et cetera, where we'll sit down opposite each other... With their mobile phones in their hands, looking, chatting you know. And it's just, you know, little mummies and daddies with their little kiddies. Before used to have lots of carnivals in Brixton, the Brixton Splash et cetera..."* (Patrick, 50s, menswear shop)

Some of the participants mentioned that changes in consumption have impacted on the attachment of visitors to the neighbourhood. Some complained about the behaviour of clubbers at nights, such as loitering and urinating on the streets. These visitors seem to be little attached

to the neighbourhood, as opposed to shoppers who have been visiting Brixton for decades already. Other participants on the other hand applauded the arrival of new businesses and visitors and expressed a sense of pride that Brixton about what Brixton is becoming. This more optimistic perspective, focusing on the gains of change, is illustrated in the quote below:

*“Brixton is a place now where they want to come to. Same as Camden, same as West End, or Central London. Brixton is one of them places that they want to come to. And it’s not... it’s changed people’s mindset as well, it doesn’t have that reputation of just being gang, drugs, crime... It’s like nice food, nice restaurants, nice bars, independent shops, loads of culture, very diverse... which is a good thing!”* (Andrea, 20s, coffee shop)

One issue that many participants agreed on that in order for a neighbourhood to be attractive there needs to be fair degree of diversity in shops. However, opinions differed on whether Brixton was becoming more or less diverse in the process of gentrification. Some argued that the new shops and restaurants were contributing to more diversity in the shopping area. Others, however voiced a concern about a possible overkill of restaurants and bars and the growing prominence of chains in the area. With regards to implications of change for the neighbourhood, accounts of loss and gain co-exist among entrepreneurs, most of whom feel attached to the neighbourhood.

The changes in Brixton relate to wider processes occurring in London. A growing number of neighbourhoods are going through processes of gentrification, increasingly also those further away from central London. Many of these neighbourhoods are also increasingly becoming spaces of place-consumption. When tourists visit London they increasingly visit ‘upcoming’ neighbourhoods in addition to the more obvious tourist attractions. Meanwhile London locals visit neighbourhood across the city as well. As opposed to residential gentrification this type of tourism and place-consumption is less dependent on the supply of attractive (and affordable) housing, but rather on the amenities a neighbourhood has to offer to visitors. Brixton’s town centre with its markets, famous nightlife and growing restaurant scene, positioned conveniently on the Victoria line, is an attractive option. In the case of Brixton this development is for instance illustrated by the buzz about the neighbourhood in blogs and articles as well as the opening of a hotel by the Premier Inn hotel chain in 2016. Although neighbourhoods like Shoreditch and Camden have an established reputation, there is a dynamic shift between neighbourhoods that are ‘trendy’ and ‘upcoming’. One participant worded it as people *following the restaurants*. While some participants thought Brixton was still within this process, some regarded it to be already beyond its peak. This is illustrated in the following quote:

*“I think in the last, I would say, two years there’s been some sort of stillness, I’ve observed from like four years ago... Brixton was crazy, it was like a whole... it was like the new Oxford Street or the new SoHo, it was like so overwhelming. It’s not as overwhelming anymore. I don’t know because I’ve gotten used to it, or because it’s started to come down a little bit. There’s now Peckham in the last three years that has really exploded out of nowhere, Newcross.. So I think people are more open to different areas in South London, not so much like going to, like, destinations anymore.”* (Andrea, 20s, coffee shop)

Neighbourhood processes such as gentrification and a rise in tourism and (middle class) place-consumption have impacted the neighbourhood and its identity, partly mediated by changes in the type of shops. Thus far, ‘traditional’ Brixton and gentrified Brixton seem to coexist simultaneously. In addition to Brixton’s role as a regional centre of ethnic shopping, the

neighbourhood is increasingly attracting tourists and place-consumers. Among entrepreneurs there was generally a strong engagement with the neighbourhood and its development. Opinions vary on the effects of these developments; while some participants articulated a sense of loss, others voiced a sense of pride and optimism. With regards to the neighbourhood, gentrification was regarded as a blessing or a curse and, more often, something in between.

## Discussion and conclusion

This study has found that gentrification profoundly influences the business environment for small migrant businesses. Among migrant entrepreneurs there is considerable diversity with regards to perspectives on change, the effects of change and the adaptive strategies employed in response. Demographic change and rising rents costs, typical features of gentrification are affecting businesses to various degrees. As a result of demographic change many ethnic businesses have lost part of their customer base. These businesses deal with hardship as in many cases their revenues are declining, while the costs in running a business rise. Among the market shops specialising in food many of the business are struggling. In addition, some particular ethnic shops (in fashion for instance) face a declining clientele as well. Participants indicated that besides the nature of the changes, the speed of developments leaves little time for businesses to adapt.

Although gentrification in Brixton poses challenges for businesses it does not mean the end of small (ethnic) businesses in the neighbourhood. For instance, the demand for (ethnic) beauty and hair services remains high. In this industry, however, small businesses deal with a lot of competition. In addition, recently new businesses have been opening by migrant entrepreneurs with a more mainstream character usually aiming at a broad clientele. These entrepreneurs are usually optimistic about their future but acknowledge the challenge of high rents. Despite variety among businesses we can conclude that the business environment of Brixton has become more challenging for small businesses in recent years.

One feature that alleviates the implications of demographic change in Brixton is the fact that few businesses rely on an entirely local customer base. Brixton is an established regional centre of black, Caribbean culture and shopping and therefore attracts many non-local 'ethnic customers', although their number is falling according to some participants. In addition, some businesses are successful in binding their customers to the extent that many stay loyal customers after moving out of Brixton. This signifies the importance of customer relations in migrant entrepreneurship, which was also found in earlier studies.

With regards to the response to change entrepreneurs employ different strategies which I have grouped in two categories; *maintaining* and *developing*. *Maintaining* includes survival strategies that are mainly concerned with keeping the business open as long as it lasts. In addition, entrepreneurs can engage in adaption through practices like (online) marketing, online selling and small changes in the supply, not dramatically altering the business. *Developing* is more common among newer businesses and is characterised by break out, a provision of specialised goods and a more mainstream approach to business involving more attention to marketing and defined business plans and ambitions.

Opportunities to adapt in response to neighbourhood change are not evenly distributed among migrant businesses. To better understand these differences a typology was developed that distinguishes between three groups of businesses. The first group matches the typical image of ethnic entrepreneurship as these largely serve an ethnic clientele. Among these businesses the demand for their products is declining, which leads to a decline in revenues. For these businesses Brixton is longer the attractive location it used to be. Entrepreneurs generally see little more opportunity for their business than to employ survival strategies. The second group also mostly provides ethnic products and services but the market for these products in Brixton is more favourable. The partial persistence of Brixton's reputation as centre of black shopping

makes the neighbourhood attractive for these businesses. The beauty industry is a major example. The last group exists of younger businesses that aim to attract a wide clientele, both in terms of class and ethnicity. These businesses have the most mainstream character and pay particular attention to marketing and aesthetics.

In the case of Brixton the ethnic component of migrant entrepreneurship is not always that apparent in the conventional EMB sense. Many businesses sell ethnic products that are not tied to their own ethnicity and often serve a different (and often diverse) ethnic clientele. In addition, many entrepreneurs specialise in non-ethnic products and consider themselves entrepreneurs in the first place. Nevertheless, the ethnic has not become irrelevant and can in fact be turned into an asset within the context of the 'commodification of ethno-cultural diversity' (Aytar & Rath, 2012). In the light of demographic change entrepreneurs employ 'the ethnic' in various ways. Some businesses opt for a neutral, professional appearance to distinguish itself from the more conventional ethnic businesses. In other cases the entrepreneur employs its ethnic identity and knowledge (products, food, cuisine), coupled with marketing, to attract a diverse clientele.

Gentrification has altered the face of Brixton and signifies a new era in the neighbourhood's history. Brixton is losing part of its black, Caribbean population. Options differ on whether it is also losing its identity in process. In recent years the existing businesses have been joined by boutique shops and many bars and restaurants, largely catering to new middle-class residents, tourists and place-consumers. Within this type of 'the ethnic' and 'multicultural' is still relevant, although in a more cosmopolitan, exotic way. In addition, the neighbourhood's long bond with food is re-defined as market stalls and groceries make way for restaurants and bars. In a citywide change in tourism and place-consumption Brixton has joined the rank of other London neighbourhoods as a go-to place. While some participants celebrated the exciting combination of 'old' and 'new' Brixton it is questionable how long the 'old' will remain.

While most studies into migrant entrepreneurship depart from ethnic groups this study has taken the business context, the ethnic neighbourhood, as a point of departure. In addition, it has addressed the subject of neighbourhood change from the perspective of the migrant entrepreneur. In this article I have aimed to deliver more insight into the local dynamics of migrant entrepreneurship by presenting the changes associated with gentrification for migrant entrepreneurs (settled and settling) and the adaptive strategies they employ in response. The research findings highlight the diversity of migrant entrepreneurship with regards to neighbourhood change. This awareness of diversity is crucial to understanding migrant entrepreneurship more generally.

Although this study has addressed the topic of adaptive strategies it should be made clear that the data does not allow to draw solid conclusions on the effectiveness of these different strategies. This would, however, be an interesting research topic for future studies. With regards to generalising the research data one should be aware of the specificity of the research case Brixton is a specific neighbourhood because of its various markets, the exceptional number of ethnic businesses and its long-standing function as a centre of ethnic shopping and commerce. A neighbourhood with a less pronounced presence of ethnic businesses might altogether lose its ethnic shopping and character in the process of gentrification.

Employing a focus on adaptation does not mean that we should not take change as a given. The challenges that migrant entrepreneurs face can partly be attributed to political choices and policies. Failure to adapt should not be regarded as a failure of the entrepreneur, but a result of structural and political processes. Small businesses should be supported better in adapting to changing market and neighbourhood conditions. Various governmental and non-profit organisations (such as Tree Shepherd in London) show the way by providing enterprise training,

business support and practical help in the context of regeneration. A government that fails to have a response to gentrification risks to lose the diversity, affordability and individuality of urban neighbourhoods and end up with a commercial landscape characterised by chains and (pseudo-)independent boutiques, bars and restaurants.

## References

- Abada, T., Canada, S., & Lu, C. Y. (2014). Choice or necessity: do immigrants and their children choose self-employment for the same reasons? *Work*, 28(1), 78–94.
- Aldrich, H. E., & Waldinger, R. (1990). Ethnicity and entrepreneurship. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 16, 111–135.
- Aytar, V., & Rath, J. (2012). Introduction: Ethnic Neighbourhoods as Places of Leisure and Consumption. In V. Aytar & J. Rath (Eds.), *Selling ethnic neighborhoods: The rise of neighborhoods as places of leisure and consumption*. New York: Routledge.
- Barrett, G. A., Jones, T. P., & McEvoy, D. (1996). Ethnic Minority Business: Theoretical Discourse in Britain and North America. *Urban Studies*, 33(4–5), 783–809.
- Boissevain, J., J. Blauschkee, H. Grotenberg, I. Joseph, I. Light, M. Sway, R. W. and P. W. (1990). Ethnic entrepreneurs and ethnic strategies. In *Ethnic Entrepreneurs: Immigrant Business in Industrial Societies* (pp. 131–157). London: Sage.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. University of Chicago press.
- Butler, T., & Robson, G. (2001). Social Capital, Gentrification and Neighbourhood Change in London: A Comparison of Three South London Neighbourhoods. *Urban Studies*, 38(12), 2145–2162.
- Crinson, M. (2005). *Urban memory: History and amnesia in the modern city*. London: Routledge.
- Eurostat. (2017). First and second-generation immigrants - a statistical overview. Retrieved May 17, 2019, from [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/First\\_and\\_second-generation\\_immigrants\\_-\\_a\\_statistical\\_overview](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/First_and_second-generation_immigrants_-_a_statistical_overview)
- Gonzalez, S., & Waley, P. (2013). Traditional Retail Markets: The New Gentrification Frontier? *Antipode*, 45(4), 965–983.
- Hackworth, J., & Rekers, J. (2005). Ethnic Packaging and Gentrification. *Urban Affairs Review*, 41(2), 211–236.
- Hall, S. M. (2011). High Street Adaptations: Ethnicity, Independent Retail Practices, and Localism in London's Urban Margins. *Environment and Planning A*, 43(11), 2571–2588.
- Holder, J. (2019, January 30). High street crisis deepens: 1 in 12 shops closed in five years. *The Guardian*.
- Hubbard, P. (2016). Hipsters on Our High Streets: Consuming the Gentrification Frontier. *Sociological Research Online*, 21(3), 1–6.

- Kaplan, D. H. (1998). The spatial structure of urban ethnic economies. *Urban Geography*, 19(6), 489–501.
- Kloosterman, R., & Rath, J. (2001). Immigrant entrepreneurs in advanced economies: Mixed embeddedness further explored. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27(2), 189–201.
- Kloosterman, R., van der Leun, J., & Rath, J. (1998). Across the border: Immigrants' economic opportunities, social capital and informal business activities. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 24(2), 249–268.
- Kloosterman, R., van der Leun, J., & Rath, J. (1999). Mixed Embeddedness: (In)formal Economic Activities and Immigrant Businesses in the Netherlands. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 23(2), 252–266.
- Light, I., Bhachu, P., & Karageorgis, S. (1990). *Immigration and Entrepreneurship: Culture, Capital, and Ethnic Networks*. New Brunswick/London: Transaction Publishers.
- London Borough of Lambeth. (2018). *Brixton Street Market Masterplan & Action Plan*.
- Meltzer, R. (2016). Gentrification and Small Business: Threat or Opportunity? *Source: Cityscape*, 18(3), 57–86.
- Nee, V., & Sanders, J. (2010). Understanding the diversity of immigrant incorporation: a forms-of-capital model. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 24(3), 386–411.
- Novy, J. (2011). *Marketing Marginalized Neighborhoods: Tourism and Leisure in the 21st Century Inner City*. Columbia University.
- Peters, N. (2002). Mixed embeddedness. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 8(1/2), 32–53.
- Ram, M., & Hillin, G. (1994). Achieving “break-out”: developing mainstream ethnic minority businesses. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise*, 1(2), 15–21.
- Schiller, N. G., & Çağlar, A. (2013). Locating migrant pathways of economic emplacement: Thinking beyond the ethnic lens. *Ethnicities*, 13(4), 494–514.
- Sepulveda, L., Syrett, S., & Lyon, F. (2011). Population superdiversity and new migrant enterprise: The case of London. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 23(7–8), 469–497.
- Smith, N. (2002). New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy. *Antipode*, 34(3), 427–450.
- Urban75. (n.d.). Brixton: a short history. Retrieved May 15, 2019, from <http://www.urban75.org/brixton/history/history.html>
- Vertovec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(6), 1024–1054.
- Waldinger, R., McEvoy, D., & Aldrich, H. (1990). Spatial Dimensions of Opportunity

Structures. In R. Waldinger, H. Aldrich, & R. Ward (Eds.), *Ethnic entrepreneurs: Immigrant business in industrial societies* (pp. 106–130). London: Sage.

Wang, Q. (2013). Constructing a multilevel spatial approach in ethnic entrepreneurship studies. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 19(1), 97–113.

Zukin, S., Trujillo, V., Frase, P., Jackson, D., Recuber, T., & Walker, A. (2009). New Retail Capital and Neighborhood Change: Boutiques and Gentrification in New York City. *City & Community*, 8(1), 47–64.