

Migrant Visibility, Agency, and Identity Work in Hospitality Enterprises

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■ **ABSTRACT:** This article examines how migrants create value through food- and hospitality-related enterprises, focusing on the ways in which they exercise their agency in mobilizing various cultural resources and on how their organizational practices intersect with identity work. Drawing on empirical research conducted in São Paulo, Brazil, it explores how specific dishes, knowledge of food, recipes, craft skills, and migration histories are transformed into valued cultural resources in these kinds of enterprises. The article explores three themes: first, how foods become “pliable heritage” through migrants’ identity work; second, how migrants’ ongoing identity work shapes their activities and experiences in food and hospitality businesses; and third, how migrants’ individual identity work is entangled in collective interests and the activities of a wider set of (migrant) stakeholders.

■ **KEYWORDS:** Brazil, culture, food business, heritage, identities, immigrants, migration, value creation

Migrants often access labor markets through hospitality-related employment (Backman and Klaesson 2021; Janta et al. 2011). However, these are frequently seen as problematic spheres of work, characterized by difficult working conditions and status devaluation for migrants (Lugosi and Ndiuini 2022). Nevertheless, these economic domains also provide opportunities for migrants to develop entrepreneurial ventures, which facilitate their individual settlement and create wider impacts for other migrants and members of receiving societies (Harima et al. 2021; Lugosi and Allis 2019). Studies have shown that migrant-owned-or-operated hospitality businesses become part of wider mobility infrastructures, acting as social focal points and informal marketplaces, where social capital is built while information and cultural goods are transferred (Jung and Buhr 2022; Sabar and Posner 2013; Sammells 2016). Migrants’ entrepreneurial ventures are also enrolled in the leisure and tourism economies of cities, becoming attractions that entice visitors and provide experiential consumer services (Jung and Buhr 2022; Lugosi and Allis 2019).

These can be read as positive dimensions of migrants’ hospitality enterprises. However, an alternative interpretation is that migrants are increasingly forced to pursue entrepreneurial ventures because states withdraw from their responsibilities or create hostile environments, and because migrants are excluded from labor markets or denied state support (Jones et al. 2014). Crucially, the necessity for self-reliance among migrants, coupled with the need to create dis-



tinct experiential offerings in competitive leisure marketplaces, involves the instrumental mobilization of migrants' identity-based resources, including cultural competencies, artifacts, and social practices.

Within these realms of enterprise and employment, where social and commercial imperatives become entangled, knowledge of ingredients, recipes, craft skills, and techniques, alongside individuals' life experiences, become important cultural resources for migrant groups in two ways. First, these resources become symbolic "devices" that are used to maintain and celebrate distinct heritages and identities, enabling migrants to become socially and economically "present" (or visible) in urban areas. Second, cultural resources within the experiential propositions of commercial hospitality generate economic capital, which further supports migrants' and migrant communities' vitality and agency.

Mobilizing identity-based cultural resources in the pursuit of diverse social and economic objectives has the potential to create disparate spillover effects for migrants. Valorized cultural resources become the basis for value creation, and hospitality enterprises are domains of practice through which migrants enact their agency and solidarity by utilizing those resources (Lugosi and Allis 2019). In contrast, the reconstruction and recontextualization of cultural resources within a commercial business strategy in hospitality enterprises risks fragmenting and commoditizing migrants' heritage, culture, and identities. Ji-Song Ku (2014) argued that the marketization of food- and hospitality-related cultural resources often results in problematic reinterpretations of those resources, which effectively devalues them. However, following Robert Shepherd (2002), it is important to avoid assuming that cultural resources (e.g., regional dishes) have a "true" form or have stable value attributions. Rather, it helps to stress that the manifestation of those resources, and the value ascribed to them, is always negotiated between actors and thus remains open to contestation. The multiple implications of these spillover effects suggest that it is necessary to examine how interdependencies and tensions concerning the form, deployment, and value of identity-based cultural resources emerge and are negotiated within migrant-owned-or-operated hospitality enterprises.

A rich and expansive body of work has explored the role of foods and foodways in migrants' lives more generally (Abbots 2016). For example, studies have shown how food production and consumption mediate acculturation strategies, as migrants negotiate the food systems and cultures of "host" populations (Porreca et al. 2020). The production and consumption of food and drink also enables the perpetuation of diasporic identities, particularly as hospitality-related practices of welcoming and resource-sharing reproduce and create norms, values, and cultural codes among migrant groups (Al-Sayed and Bieling 2022; Gabaccia 2000). However, food- and drink-related practices and the enactment of hospitality can extend beyond migrant groups, which has wider implications for how migrants conceive of themselves and how others view them (Scagliusi et al. 2018). For example, Robin Vandevordt (2017) argued that the provision of foodstuffs by refugees in the context of extending hospitality within an asylum context can be seen as a political act, insofar as this practice is used by migrants to exercise their agency and to create distinct social spaces. However, there is limited and fragmented knowledge regarding the processes and practices through which cultural resources are mobilized within the production of commercial hospitality and how they are entangled with wider processes of identity work among migrants (Miranda-Nieto and Boccagni 2020; Sabar and Posner 2013; Sammells 2016).

Drawing on qualitative research conducted in São Paulo, Brazil, this article explores (a) how diverse migrants engage in hospitality- and food-related enterprises, with particular reference to the ways in which they transform and mobilize various forms of cultural resources; and (b) how their hospitality business and organizational practices intersect with identity work. The

study contributes to our knowledge of this topic by examining how migrants exercise their agency through hospitality- and food-related enterprises to articulate their sense of presence in a socioeconomic landscape. This exploration of migrants' agency allows us to reevaluate the nature of hospitality and food employment, challenging the reductive and frequently expressed views of work in these sectors as low-skilled, low-status, and done only by necessity (Lugosi and Ndiuini 2022). Moreover, it helps us to understand how migrants negotiate their sense of identities alongside and through cultural resources to create various forms of social and economic value for themselves, their communities, and a wider set of societal stakeholders.

Identity and Identity Work

This study conceives of identities as ongoing constructions rather than as concrete, stable entities. Identity construction is seen as relational, with notions of self being shaped by how people identify with or against an "other" or others (Bhabha 1990, 1996; Hall 1996). However, following Daniel Miller (2007), "relationality" is invoked here in reference to embodied and experiential conceptions of social engagement, rather than with regard to structural relations between social groups or classes. Individuals position themselves affectively and mentally as belonging to a group of people, or being certain types of people. Moreover, belonging to a group or identifying with certain individuals also positions people as being different from others. In other words, as Fredrik Barth (1969) argued, boundary maintenance and the articulation of difference become central to defining individual, group, and cultural identity.

Identity is viewed here as performative, and therefore tied to embodied, representational, sociomaterial, and sociotechnological practices. Conceived as "identity work," this approach stresses ongoing evolving processes of investment and negotiation (Brown 2022; Daley and Singo 2018). Importantly, this negotiation is relational and can be viewed as being entangled in broader processes of organizing. This refers in part to the contextual aspect of identity work, insofar as selves are constructed within informal and formal organizational structures and practices that represent attempts at order(ing). For example, these include rules governing what behaviors employees are expected to perform, what emotions they should display, and how they should interact with customers (McDowell 2009). Within organizational contexts, different human and nonhuman actors (e.g., design features and work technologies) attempt to exercise power over organizational spaces, practices, and their outcomes, for instance regarding what value is created and who is able to extract value. These influence how organizational actors construct and articulate their identities. These factors become particularly important for understanding migrants' food-based enterprises because the foodstuffs themselves, the associated apparatus of cooking and serving, in conjunction with the sociomaterial features of food- and drink-related hospitality venues, are fundamental to production and consumption practices and experiences (Lugosi and Allis 2019).

This conceptualization of identity work acknowledges that institutional(ized) practices, such as legal and organizational governance regimes, also shape self-conceptions. This can refer to the identities that individuals are potentially ascribed by others, which can shape access to resources and their mobilities (Brown 2022). Such institutional processes are particularly relevant for migrants and refugees, who often encounter status reduction, restrictive rights, and discrimination while working in hospitality organizations (Lugosi and Ndiuini 2022). However, stressing the performative nature of identity work also recognizes migrants' agency insofar as they actively negotiate their status and resist attempts at categorization or marginalization. Following Ulrich Bröckling (2016), if identity work is viewed in the context of wider entrepreneur-

ial practices, as is the case with migrant hospitality business operators, their negotiated identity work can thus be seen as agentic investment projects. As Bröckling argued, “the entrepreneurial self . . . is not something that exists but something that ought to be brought into existence” (2016: 20–21). This implies a teleology involving aspirational conceptions regarding identity-related goals and outcomes. More importantly, for the current study, Bröckling’s entrepreneurial view of the self positions identity work within market logics. The construction of the self, and its future trajectory, are thus fundamentally tied to value creation. Identity work involves creating unique value propositions that are qualified, differentiated, and positioned within sociocultural marketplaces, targeting and engaging potential consumers who appreciate those identity-based propositions. Cultural practices, especially in food-, drink-, and hospitality-related domains of social and economic activity, provide opportunities for migrants to create forms of value that express, transform, and mobilize unique conceptions of their selves and their heritage (Lugosi and Allis 2019; Turgeon and Pastinelli 2002).

However, coupling identity work with market logics raises questions concerning the opportunities and risks for migrants. As stated at the outset, the transformation and mobilization of identity, culture, and heritage as part of a commercial strategy has the potential to translate these into economic value, but it also risks devaluing them through commoditization, as their authenticity and credibility are compromised (hooks 2015). This article thus examines how these tensions associated with identity and value creation emerge and are negotiated by migrants in the context of food- and hospitality-related enterprises in São Paulo, Brazil. In order to do this, the next section considers how migrants’ value creation relates to food- and hospitality-related work and organization.

Hospitality as a Domain of Value Creation

Hospitality and the foodservice sector in particular represent contentious areas of employment for migrants. As noted at the outset, migrants often enter labor markets through working in these and related leisure service sectors because of relatively low barriers to entry (Harima et al. 2021; Janta et al. 2011; Lugosi and Ndiuini 2022). However, these employment domains are frequently seen in negative terms, characterized as being low-skilled with difficult working conditions and as industries where migrants are exposed to racialized and gendered social sorting, discrimination, and exploitation (Jayaraman 2013; Slavnic 2013; Sönmez et al. 2020). Their emotional and their physical labor thus become valued resources for employers at the expense of migrants’ agency and well-being. In contrast, studies have shown that hospitality workplaces can also become sources of instrumental and emotional support for migrants while also enabling them to develop social and cultural capital, which they can deploy beyond those spheres of employment (Janta et al. 2012; Lugosi et al. 2016; Lugosi and Ndiuini 2022).

More importantly, it is argued here that hospitality becomes a domain of activity where migrants, and migrant entrepreneurs in particular, can create alternative forms of value through their identity work. This value may refer, primarily, to the mobilization of cultural resources, for example knowledge of ingredients, recipes, and techniques, through which they create monetizable cultural “products.” These represent value creation through the commodification of culture and identity, practices that carry inherent risks to the original meanings and value attached to them (hooks 2015; Ku 2014). However, this should not necessarily be seen as a denigration of identity, heritage, or culture; rather, they can also be viewed as forms of valorization. Importantly, hospitality is a domain of socioeconomic practice across which identities and the value of identity-based resources are negotiated (Clair et al. 2011).

An alternative way to view intersections of identity work and value creation within commercial hospitality concerns the construction, representation, and use of venues as spaces. The ventures created and operated by migrants have the potential to become symbolic spaces that encompass curated interpretations of them (as individuals) and their cultures (Turgeon and Pastinelli 2002; Zambonelli 2013). As physical spaces, they also act as community hubs, encouraging fellow migrants to interact, coupling these with experiential “goods” in the form of familiar foods, drinks, music, and objects that connect the venue to their countries and cultures of origin (Miranda-Nieto and Boccagni 2020; Sabar and Posner 2013; Sammells 2016). In these situations, the owners and operators are engaged in processes of identity work where their constructions of self may be seen as part of wider aspirational entrepreneurial projects, in Bröckling’s (2016) sense, representing the interests of migrant communities and maintaining diasporic identities.

Previous studies examining intersections of migrants and hospitality venues have provided fragmented insights into the various forms of identity work that may be involved. For example, Clare Sammells (2016) suggested that a Madrid-based Bolivian venue utilized various design and layout features to create a discreet, compartmentalized space facilitating “intimate” interactions among and between different migrant groups. The venue’s unique identity was tied to the foods and drinks created by the chef-owners, whose identity work was part of the commercial hospitality proposition. Importantly, the venue was constructed as a liminal space of social encounter that extended beyond commercial hospitality transactions for migrants.

Similarly, Galia Sabar and Rachel Posner (2013) showed how hospitality venues acted as communal spaces for asylum-seekers in Tel Aviv, stressing how common foods and the presence of co-nationals became sources of psychological and emotional support. Patrons’ consumption was therefore entangled with their identity work. This was evidently seized upon and catered for by the venue operators in their hospitality offerings in terms of the foods and the sociomateriality of the service and consumption experience.

More recently, Alejandro Miranda-Nieto and Paolo Boccagni (2020) extended this area of inquiry by examining how Ecuadorian venues in Madrid engaged with their migrant clientele. Their study explored how the owner-operators utilized different objects to invoke affective notions of home. More specifically, culturally familiar objects, including furnishings, decorations, and foods, were deployed in conjunction with inclusive rituals to blur the boundaries between private and public space, thus helping to stress the homeliness of these venues for consumers.

These studies provide unique but fragmented knowledge regarding the intersections of migration and commercial hospitality. This article therefore contributes to this small but rich body of work by examining the multiple ways that migrants’ identity work operates in and through commercial hospitality provision. The data are used to examine how diverse forms of value are created not only for the migrant entrepreneurs but also for wider imagined communities of stakeholders through the design and operation of food and hospitality ventures.

Methods

This collaborative, interdisciplinary study used a combination of nonparticipant observation, content analysis of online and venue-based representations, and semistructured interviews with owner-operators of food or hospitality-related businesses. The project was co-designed and managed by the team of authors in the United Kingdom and Brazil. The empirical research adopted a purposive approach to sampling based primarily on organizations’ links to migrants

and migration. Sampling and data collection began with mapping ethnic businesses in three purposefully selected locations in central São Paulo—Bom Retiro, Brás, and República—that have experienced different waves of historical and contemporary migration, domestic and international. This focus helped to identify data-rich examples, which informed the second stage of sampling and recruitment.

During this second stage, we collected relevant background material about the venues and their staff, which included visual and textual representations of the operations, menus, services, and experiential propositions, and, where possible, about the owner-operators. This paved the way for the third stage, when we conducted semistructured interviews with 35 owners or operators from 33 enterprises (16 females and 19 males). The youngest was 23 and the oldest was 78 years old; the majority of them were aged between their mid-30s and their late 40s. Of those who told us, most had migrated since 2000, three had arrived in the 1970s, and the oldest in 1955. The sampling and data collection initially focused on people from Bolivia, Peru, Korea, Syria, Venezuela, and Colombia because these constituted some of the largest migrant groups in Brazil in general and São Paulo in particular (Baeninger et al. 2019). Food and hospitality businesses owned and operated by migrants from these nations also had a strong presence in the three sample areas. However, the study also included individuals with Argentinian, Armenian, Greek, Indian, Mexican, and Serbian heritage. We do not claim this to be a representative sample of migrants in São Paulo, but the heterogeneity of our participants allowed us to capture a rich and diverse set of experiences and perceptions.

During the first stage of the fieldwork (i.e., the mapping and content analysis), we decided to also consider internal migrants who had moved to São Paulo from Northeast Brazil. Scholars have recognized that distinctions between international and internal migration are increasingly blurred while also stressing the importance of studying intra-national movement for understanding migration as a social phenomenon (King and Skeldon 2010). Brazil's vast size and wealth discrepancies have driven a long history of internal migration from the North to the more prosperous South, particularly to São Paulo, and past studies have shown that many of these migrants entered the labor market through service sectors (Fiess and Verner 2003; Tannen 1992). Brazil also has distinct regional cuisines that are widely recognized by consumers (Fajans 2012). Moreover, it became evident that many internal migrants explicitly branded their ventures as Northeast Brazilian, so they were also seen to be engaged in negotiated identity work through food- and hospitality-related practices in the districts, despite being from the same country. Only one of the formal interviewees was from Northeast Brazil, but her insights enriched our overall dataset, providing an alternative perspective on migrants' experiences.

The interviews explored individual histories, current food- and hospitality-related activities, and migrants' experiences of living in São Paulo. During visits to venues and the surrounding areas between November 2020 and September 2021, we also created still images and filmed the locations to help contextualize the interview data. The COVID-19 pandemic limited our ability to visit venues in person and collect visual material, so 17 of the interviews were conducted via video conferencing rather than in person. Nevertheless, digital recordings were made of all the interviews, and field researchers wrote additional notes on their impressions and observations concerning their interviewees, their responses, and their interactions.

The interviews were conducted and transcribed in Portuguese by the team. The transcriptions were initially reviewed by two of the native speakers among us, who translated selective parts into English to support subsequent analysis. These translations were reviewed by a third bilingual Portuguese–English speaker on our team as part of the data reduction and analysis.

Data analysis was an ongoing process during the study, which started with the initial mapping and continued as the project unfolded. Open coding was conducted alongside focused

coding, which concentrated on two areas: (1) foods and their intersections with identity work; and (2) the intersections of hospitality enterprise activities with identity work. This encompassed issues such as foodstuffs, their preparation, presentation, as they reflected migrants' histories and experiences, and their deployment within the commercial enterprises. These initial analyses led to a focused examination of consequences for individual migrants but also for other stakeholders.

Food as Pliable Heritage in Identity Work

The forms, meanings, and thus value of foods, especially as they are translated across commercial hospitality provision and cultural representation, are subject to reinterpretation (Harris and Phillips 2021). For the owners and operators in this study, cultural resources became pliable assets to be (re)made and mobilized according to specific social and business objectives. Foodstuffs, cooking techniques, recipes, and the presentation of foods and drinks, coupled with decoration and entertainment, were packaged to create experiential propositions that foregrounded specific national, ethnic, regional, or even class-based identities. However, similar sociomaterial assemblages were sometimes used to create delocalized food- and drink-based experiential propositions, which blurred divides between one nation or group's culture and another's. Migrant chefs and venue operators thus exercised their agency through culinary experimentation and entrepreneurial innovation, creating new hybridized expressions of identities that referenced and amplified some cultural markers while rejecting others. For example:

We are not Colombians. That's not the idea. The first thing is that Colombian cuisine is not what we do here. Of course, I take my backpack everywhere. . . . Every time I do something, whether here or abroad, I take it with me. But, in fact, we don't make strictly Colombian food. We don't do traditional cooking either. . . .

Every country has taken this idea of what a "marisquería" [seafood restaurant] is and adapted it for their country. So what we wanted to do was to bring out this story, this dynamic, but to still have the freedom to bring in influences from various other countries. In many cases, they are not even Latin American influences. . . . We have the ceviches [raw fish or seafood marinated in fresh citrus juice], the patacones [double-fried snacks made of green plantain], the cocktails, in short, many things, ingredients and techniques that go into making our menu. . . .

In other words, we don't want to be . . . we never wanted them to say "that's what they are," because that would place limits on the ingredients, a whole series of things that would make us, I don't know, have to be more structured.

We are a restaurant with a Latin footprint. You'll find here many influences, many ingredients, and many techniques from different countries. So people ask: "Wow, what about this ingredient here?" Ah, that's from there. So people can go find it on the map, which is really great. . . . We use names in Spanish for our entire menu, so that also helps orient people. . . . So there is all this interaction. It's fun. It's not just coming for a meal; it becomes part of the experience. And then it permeates the food, the music. The music also has to bring in some of these influences. (Roberto, chef from Colombia)

This type of gastronomic hybridization—in its influence of specific dishes and the co-presence of several national dishes, and in the presence of delocalized/relocalized "Latin American" dishes—has been observed in other studies of so-called "ethnic" restaurants. Miranda-Nieto and Boccagni (2020), discussing this type of eclectic menu design in the context of Ecuadorian restaurants in Madrid, referred to this as a form of "flexible identity." Alternatively, this can be seen as a form of "strategic ambiguity" (Eisenberg 1984) that allows multiple stake-

holders to associate different values and norms with an object or action. Utilizing this type of flexibility and ambiguity regarding the origin, authenticity, and therefore propriety of foods enabled diverse migrant entrepreneurs to translate them into valued resources (see Lugosi and Allis 2019).

For example, Vera, originally from Venezuela, participated in several entrepreneurship workshops for immigrants held by a social enterprise that specialized in working with migrants and refugees to bring their cultural products to market. She was invited to participate in a project called “Mi Arepa” (My Arepa), where she worked for two months in a Bolivian chef’s restaurant. The goal was to teach participants how to make *arepas*, a common South American dish made using cornmeal-based dough that can be baked, fried, or grilled. However, the project’s broader aim was to enable individual chefs to create their own versions of dishes that reflected their unique identities and distinct hospitality propositions. Foods as markers of identity were seen as pliable devices, subject to reinterpretation as the market demanded:

What happens is that I started making cakes the way Brazilians like them, you know? My clientele is Brazilian, so I have to cater to their taste. If I were to make a Venezuelan cake, the clientele would be curious about it for a while, but they wouldn’t like the ingredients very much, they wouldn’t find it suited to their palate. (Vera, Venezuelan migrant)

It is important to highlight that this reinterpretation and redeployment of foodstuffs in value creation should be seen as more than the endeavors of isolated individuals. Rather, it can be understood as occurring in a wider evolving marketplace and value-creation ecology. In part, this refers to the network of actors involved in the translation and identity work associated with food and business innovation. For example, for those involved in Mi Arepa, profits from food sales were shared between the social enterprise and the participants. Vera used the money to invest in her own business. The enterprise also helped to publicize her business, including through recorded interviews during which she told stories about her life and demonstrated typical Venezuelan dishes.

However, it is also important to recognize the wider contextual changes in the marketplace, including the role of various constituent actors, which shaped the scope and substance of hospitality-related value creation and involved migrants’ identity work. As Roberto observed:

And we talked about ceviche being a common denominator within Hispano-America. It turns out that at that time the Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism was making a fuss about it. So you started to see that the Brazilian public, which is the biggest consumer of tourism in all of Latin America, started to consume Peru in a crazy way. This was in 2010 when I opened.

Moreover, the valuing of migrant foods and the hospitality contexts in which they were presented was ultimately shaped by the evolving landscape of cultural food offerings:

And nowadays there are also lots of things from the Northeast. Lots of places [selling Northeastern food in São Paulo]. In the old days, when [the Northeastern food court] first opened, it was crowded because it was something new, but it’s not anymore: you see Northeastern houses, bars, many other places. When this place opened up, it was overflowing, but it is not like that anymore. There are many other places. (Paola, Northeastern Brazilian)

There was ongoing market pressure to evolve and to differentiate in a competitive landscape. As Roberto’s previous observations suggest, competitive strategies sometimes involved the purposive use of ambiguity regarding identities associated with foods, drinks, and related traditions, making value claims on the basis of fusion and reinvention. Following Ning Wang (1999),

it is possible to argue that these types of value propositions stressed “experiential authenticity,” the inherent affective value stemming from embodied experience, rather than “objective authenticity,” which foregrounds the historical, scientifically traceable, and thus formally legitimized value of something. Nevertheless, the processes of authentication, where actors sought to ascribe value to foods and associated hospitality experiences, could continue to involve identity work, for example in making claims on the basis of chefs’ expertise and the ethnic identities of operators and their staff. Consequently, the following section shifts the focus of discussion to the identity work of individual entrepreneurs before broadening the scope to consider how these were part of wider claims regarding collective identities and interests.

Hospitality Enterprise and Identity Work

I am Venezuelan, so is my boyfriend. I have lots of cakes to deliver at the moment, so he comes with me. He told [the client] that we are Venezuelan, and she looked at him, and he is much whiter than me. Then she said: “My god, I thought that everyone in Venezuela was Indian, [you know] indigenous people.” No, there’s a lot you don’t know about Venezuela. Venezuela has beaches, Venezuela has sand, Venezuela has mountains, Venezuela has snow. Then she was staring at me, and she said: “Are you guys together? Wow, it’s just that he’s so white and you are so . . .” I never thought something like that could happen to me. (Vera, Venezuelan business owner)

Vera’s experience reflects wider practices of racialization embedded in Brazilian society that have been highlighted in other studies (Telles 2004, 2014). Observable physical characteristics intersect with discursive constructions of national and ethnic groups to frame everyday social interactions, which shape self-conceptions and identity work (Ikemura Amaral 2022; McDonnell and De Lourenço 2009). The consumer-focused, interactive nature of food- and hospitality-related enterprises frequently brought migrants into contact with “locals,” where ascribed identities became prominent. Interactive service work in the context of commercial hospitality provision requires individuals to mobilize psychological and emotional capabilities in conjunction with physical and aesthetic resources (McDowell 2009). For migrants, the embodied experiences of hospitality labor often have additional cross-cultural dimensions, insofar as their identities or “otherness” are made perceptible by their physical features, linguistic skills, and knowledge of cultural norms (McDowell 2009). Vera’s incident illustrates how these cross-cultural challenges, for example involving racialized preconceptions of a national group and everyday racism, could drive migrants to engage in identity work within these interactional contexts. Hospitality thus acted as a distinct domain of social and commercial practice through which migrants negotiated ascribed identities and created alternative notions of self (see Ikemura Amaral 2022 for similar struggles among migrants working in other sectors). Importantly, for some of the interviewees, their ongoing identity work was viewed in the context of their wider work and life histories:

I came [to Brazil] with my parents when I was 7. And then, as I was making street food and, as always, I was known as a Bolivian cook. It is a really funny thing about being an immigrant—I have been here since ’73. . . . As a child in Brazil, I suffered a lot of bullying for being Bolivian, for being Andean. . . . I think that I rejected my origins because everyone busted my balls about it. I was ashamed of being Bolivian; if you told people that you were Bolivian, they’d say: “Is your father a drug dealer?” They always had something negative to say about it; it was very pejorative, so I wanted to get away from that image. . . . So, it took 40 years to build my identity . . . I reject the term Latin. Latin is a term that people in the US use pejoratively to talk about

us, putting everyone in the same basket, but I have nothing to do with Cubans, I have nothing to do with Mexicans; our cultures are completely different. Nowadays, I define myself as colla, as Bolivian, as South American and as Latin American last. . . . I live in a state of existential crisis, so it was during one of my crises that I began to come and understand who I am, where I am going, and what I want. . . . As I said, I started out as Latin American, then I started to focus. . . . What I am serving is basically street food from La Paz. But it's not regional cooking. . . . No. [I don't use Bolivian ingredients.] My identity is precisely that of an immigrant; sometimes I find something or other [from my heritage] and use it, but it's not an obligation. (Juan, Bolivian cook and restaurateur)

Juan's reflections stress evolving processes of identity work and the importance of relationality in these formative practices. His repeated references to how external actors sought to define him highlighted the symbolic and psychological impacts of those ascribed identities. Moreover, his observations also point to the role of boundary work in constructing identity through, or as a result of, repeated social encounters, during which others tried to define him. Reflecting Barth (1969), who sought to foreground the agency of social actors in recognizing and articulating difference in transactional encounters, Juan's shifting self-definition was expressed in contrast to others' identity categorizations. Importantly, questions of self and active attempts to craft notions of identity were tied to his cooking and involvement in commercial hospitality provision. His business decisions and food-related practices were thus entangled in his wider entrepreneurial identity project to create distinct, hybridized forms of value.

Individuals' entrepreneurial identity work was often coupled with collective self-interest. Many of the operators reflected on the scope and implications of their value creation within the context of commercial hospitality for a wider set of stakeholders. For example:

I love Colombia. I am here with my café. I talk about Colombia, about the food, the coffee, about what we Colombians are like, about what it means to be Colombian. Being known in a city outside my country means a lot of responsibility; it involves a lot of commitment, because the people who come to [my café] want to know everything about Colombia. And talking about Colombia is not just talking about food, it's talking about politics, talking about education, talking about music, dancing, many other things, talking about history and what's going to happen in the future. So, in this sense, I am really happy that I still have this relationship with Colombia. (Rico, Colombian restaurateur)

Rico, like Juan, had encountered many negative attitudes in the past toward his country and fellow nationals. It is also worth stressing that his nationality seemed to be a source of inter- and intra-cultural conflict (i.e., among other Colombians). Consequently, the provision and consumption of hospitality presented an important opportunity, and arguably responsibility, to exercise his agency in challenging widespread conceptions of Colombians, including among other Colombians:

What the violence in Colombia has killed is trust. We Colombians distrust each other a lot. . . . So, for us Colombians, unfortunately, this is a legacy of the war in Colombia. So, as there was, and still is, this question of the war, that means you don't know if the other person is from the military, if they're a paramilitary, if they are a drug trafficker, if they are a guerrilla, if they are part of the self-defense force, which is another thing. . . . So, even for those of us living outside the country, we Colombians have this thing. Therefore, the fact that we have created spaces where we can meet up is cool. When we get together. . . you see other Colombians; it's great. . . . People say bad things about Colombia. . . . but I always speak highly about Colombia. If I fight for and say good things about Colombia, it is because I want and am dreaming of a good Colombia, a better Colombia, a fairer Colombia, you know? (Rico, Colombian restaurateur)

Rico's position toward Colombianness communicated pride, and investing in the hospitality enterprise combined economic goals with wider aspirations. In part, Rico's venturing reflected the efforts of other migrant operators, for whom commercial venues were communal spaces for co-nationals to network and exchange resources (Sabar and Posner 2013; Sammells 2016). However, following Bröckling (2016), it is possible to argue that his production and consumption of hospitality was part of a wider entrepreneurial project of visibility and rehabilitation, and that it reconstituted his sense of what he wanted his country of origin to become.

Rico's foregrounding of nationhood and national identity in his business proposition contrasted with the practices of migrants such as Juan, who, because of Bolivia's associations with narco-culture, initially downplayed his heritage and rearticulated his ethnic identity within the context of food and hospitality as part of wider and more amorphous set of identities. Others viewed the invocation and valorization of distinctive national, ethnic, and cultural identities in narrower and more instrumental ways. Some Peruvian operators used ethnic identity to brand, differentiate, and thus position their food offerings and experiential propositions, particularly where their ethnic foodways could capitalize on contemporary food trends, as in the creation of quinoa-based dishes. These examples again serve to stress how individual attempts at identity work and value creation through hospitality enterprises were tied to the activities of disparate gastronomic and migrant stakeholders. Consequently, the final part of this article examines in greater detail how migrants' food- and hospitality-related practices engaged diverse identity-based groups.

Extending Identity-Based Networks

Individual operators were often involved in wider groupings, which were formed on the basis of professional (i.e., gastronomic or entrepreneurial) interests, common ethnicity and nationality, or through some combination of these domains of identification. Engaging in these networks facilitated knowledge exchange, but it could also be seen to promote collective self-expression and mutual interest. Angela, a Brazilian–Colombian restaurateur, reflected on one of these networks:

There used to be a Brazil–Colombia association, but it was also quite elitist. We hadn't even thought about a restaurant yet, nothing, but we participated. Every year, there was a party for Colombian Independence, which is something people celebrate more in Colombia than here in Brazil. And we always went, every year, because we wanted to drink in a little Colombian culture. That longing that you have [for your country], the idea was that on that holiday—it was a typical dinner—you drank in some of that. So, there was always this association. And then that association died, and we don't have that anymore.

In response to the disappearance of this network, Angela and others established a “Cultural Circuit,” which utilized food- and drink-related activities in establishing new connections between migrants with a shared cultural background. This endeavor indicated wider ambitions for an imagined community; a future to be brought into existence (Bröckling 2016). As Angela noted: “Really, I think the movement that we make of the Cultural Circuit is creating a new thing because it is adding other Colombians, right? So, like this, the possibility of an ethnic community is being born here, which is still distant, but which may come to exist.” Echoing Vandevoordt's (2017) observation, migrants sought to create empowering spaces through the provision of food and hospitality, albeit through an enterprising market logic. Seemingly altruistic ambitions were entangled with wider opportunities for commercial and cultural value cre-

ation, which continued to use notions of shared identities, food histories, and common interests in commercial hospitality as the basis for collaboration. Angela continued:

During the pandemic, we held the Colombian Cultural Circuit. It was all virtual, and it was really cool. We even made Colombian food live. And we interviewed some Colombian chefs, Colombian women and men. And we prepared the food together. It was lots of fun. . . . We tried to showcase, as [a venue], to bring other Colombian restaurants inside [our venue]. So, we interviewed people virtually, we did a live show, and we cooked together. I was at home. Everyone was at their own place. I asked the questions, and we cooked together. And the people watching could do it with us as well. It was cool! So, we have done this cultural event. I guess our problem was that over the last four years, we didn't make the Circuit official—with the CNPJ [National Registry of Legal Entities], for instance, which is something we intend to do now. Because if we do that, we'll [have official status as a cultural project], and maybe we could benefit from it, too. Since culture and education are spontaneous for us, we haven't made it official yet. But we intend to do that and even start working more systematically so we can take advantage of the resources that are available for this.

These types of collective endeavors could be seen as positive attempts to create value for a wide set of migrant stakeholders on the basis of common identities and interests. However, as Iris Young (2011) argued, invocations of community involve power differences and are potentially exclusionary, as their proponents attempt to define the conditions of inclusion and participation. For example, in reference to a specific food-related fair, one interviewee observed:

When I used to go there, it was run by a Brazilian person, it was a gang running it. I thought it was awful that there were churches there, evangelizing. I thought that the unfortunate position of the immigrants was terrible—you could see they weren't happy there. They needed some kind of management to take care of the physical space, to take care of cleaning, organization. I think that the exhibitors deserved something better, you know. I don't know how it works. Once or twice, I went to record a program there, [and] I had to get license for that. They have a whole scheme going; they pay for security. Actually, I don't really know how it works, but I've always understood that it's run by a gang. (Juan, Bolivian restaurateur)

These types of observations served as reminders that migrant entrepreneurs operated in complex ecosystems where disparate actors and organizations potentially competed over geographical spaces and the food- and hospitality-related forms of value that were created and extracted through them. Just as these networks and the spaces they created could be seen to facilitate migrants' physical, economic, and thus symbolic presence, they could also be exclusionary, thus short-circuiting migrants' agency in creating value through their identity work and hospitality enterprises.

Conclusion

For migrant entrepreneurs, the (re)construction of identities through purposeful representations and the mobilization of foodstuffs, coupled with other aspects of the hospitality experience such as music- and arts-based supporting activities, was part of instrumental commercial decisions. However, in many situations, beyond narrow financial goals, these practices were tied to wider processes of identity work as migrants supported their settlement and well-being. Importantly, migrants exercised their agency in pursuit of entrepreneurial projects that articulated possibilities for a wider set of actors. Food- and hospitality-based practices were used

to valorize migrants and the cultural resources they could mobilize. Following Vandevordt (2017), migrants' provision of food and hospitality, utilizing their unique heritage, knowledge, and skills, can be seen as attempts to create empowering spaces through which they construct representations of selves and of migrants more generally that challenge other actors' efforts to ascribe identities and statuses. Moreover, drawing on Bröckling (2016), it is possible to argue that migrant entrepreneurs adopt market logics to pursue wider-reaching aspirational goals concerning how migrants, as well as the cultures they represent, are perceived as sources of value and of value creation. The universality of food and hospitality, and their entanglement in contemporary leisure economies of cities, enabled the migrants in our study to pursue these individual and collective goals through these domains of social and commercial practice.

These findings have implications beyond this empirical context. Specifically, as migration becomes increasingly politicized globally, food- and hospitality-based enterprises provide migrants with opportunities to create and disseminate positive representations of themselves and their cultures. Arguably, the ability to create value through their identities and cultural capacities provides pathways to economic and social empowerment, insofar as migrants become financially independent and are able to view their cultures as assets. The challenge for future research is to examine how these food- and hospitality-related practices are entangled in wider processes of urban change, commercial interests, and policy developments. This line of inquiry may question how urban rehabilitation initiatives mobilize migrants' cultural assets and their identity work to pursue social or economic agendas. Similarly, future research may examine how migrants' identities and their cultural resources are utilized in destination marketing practices and how the presence of migrants influences tourists' experiences of place.

■ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This article is based on data collected as part of the Political Agency, Migrant Presence and Cultural Resources project (UNFSF\100001) funded by the British Academy and the Conselho Nacional das Fundações Estaduais de Amparo à Pesquisa, Brazil. We are also grateful to Mark Lewis (University of the Arts London, UK) for his contributions to this project.

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