

# **The Paradox of Commercial "Gentefication": How Latino-owned SMEs Shape and are Shaped by the Territorial Politics of Gentrification**

## **Abstract**

This paper investigates the reciprocal relationship between entrepreneurial small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and their territorial contexts through the lens of commercial gentrification. While traditional literature on commercial gentrification emphasizes how economic transformation and urban renewal facilitate the entry of external corporations and "boutique" businesses—often leading to the displacement of local, minority-owned small firms—this study complicates the discourse by focusing on the phenomenon of commercial "Gentefication."

Derived from *la gente* ("the people" in Spanish), commercial gentefication describes a process where ethnic minority (Latino) entrepreneurs spearhead redevelopment within their own marginalized neighborhoods. This raises a critical question: does this phenomenon challenge the exclusionary nature of commercial gentrification, or does it merely replicate and reproduce its displacement dynamics?

Drawing on qualitative case studies from three distinct territorial contexts in the United States—Boyle Heights (Los Angeles), Barrio Logan (San Diego), and Pilsen (Chicago)—the research explores how the geographical, cultural, and political characteristics of these territories shape the strategic behaviors of Latino SMEs. I argue that these entrepreneurs do not merely operate within a market; they actively politicize their businesses as a strategic response to the threat of cultural displacement. The study identifies seven main strategies employed by these firms—ranging from the establishment of "political businesses" and the politicization of cultural products to engaging in independent spatial policing. Through these actions, SMEs attempt to foster community resilience and ethnic empowerment. However, the findings reveal a profound territorial tension. While entrepreneurs frame their strategies as acts of solidarity, local residents and activists often contest these narratives, characterizing them as "community-washing" intended to legitimize the entrepreneurs' presence and profits. In their view, these SME strategies lead to internal fragmentation, cultural commodification, and the further displacement of lower-income groups. By analyzing these conflicting discourses, the paper contributes to the session's goal of understanding how local institutional and social contexts influence SME trajectories. It demonstrates that while SMEs can drive the structural transformation of their territories and serve as anchors of territorial identity, the process remains highly contentious.

**keywords:** Commercial Gentrification, Gentefication, SME Strategic Behavior, Territorial Politics, Latino Entrepreneurship, Community-washing, Place-based Identity, Social Polarization

## 1. Introduction

"Sabor Del Barrio," meaning "Flavor of the Neighborhood" in Spanish, was a highly anticipated event for Latino business owners in San Diego's Barrio Logan, orchestrated by the Latino business collective known as ALL FOR LOGAN (AFL). It aimed to reinvest in the community while promoting the neighborhood's cultural richness. Priced at \$40 for external visitors and \$25 for residents, the event featured a self-guided food tour highlighting Chicano culinary arts and culture. On August 27, 2023, crowds filled Logan Avenue, enjoying the array of food stalls, Mexican music, and cultural displays. The aroma of burritos wafted through the air, Mexican music filled the space, and shirts and products featuring cultural icons like Frida Kahlo were proudly displayed alongside fluttering Mexican flags. People with colorful maps with marked points of interest for restaurants, shops, and galleries in the neighborhood were moved about as if in a cultural carnival. Outside one of the galleries, I met Juan, a gallery and ice cream shop owner. "A lot of people showed up," I commented. "Yes," he enthusiastically replied, "It's the first time we're starting the tradition of Sabor del Barrio. We need to showcase the beautiful barrio."



*Fig 1. Advertisement for cultural events organized by AFL in Barrio Logan, SD. Photographs:*  
<https://www.instagram.com/allforlogan/>

The event turned chaotic as a loud boom erupted from Chicano Park nearby. police vehicles swarmed the area with sirens blaring, surrounding a black truck with punctured tires. The driver, hands raised, remained motionless, seemingly aware of his role in adding another chapter to the ongoing saga of police-community interactions. Nearby activists and residents pulled out smartphones to document the unfolding scene. Amidst the tense atmosphere, residents began shouting derogatory phrases at the officers, expressing their frustration with their daily struggles. "He had a flat tire, and they thought he had a gun. And because of the event today, there was a lot of police to secure the tourists [sarcastically]... they just assumed it was gunshots" one resident said. Slowly, people who were at the event began to gather, and customers and tourists from outside the neighborhood observed the commotion from the sidelines. With burritos or drinks in one hand, the other held their smartphones, capturing the unfolding events. Jazmin, a neighborhood resident and activist, suddenly shouted to the onlookers sarcastically, "This is Sabor Del Barrio, everyone, right here! Enjoy it. Film it. Take a picture. Experience it as we experience it every day. Taste it. Get a taste of it. Lick it. This is the real flavor, enjoy it! Welcome to the barrio. *Ese es el barrio, cabrones* [this is the barrio, dude/ bastards]."

Jazmin's mocking invitation calls on passersby to "taste" the bitter truth of their daily reality, in stark opposition to the idealistic vision presented by the "Sabor del Barrio" entrepreneurs. She highlights the tensions associated with processes of redevelopment, commodification, and gentrification in the barrios. Jazmin contrasts the narratives of Latino entrepreneurs, which emphasize economic mobility, branding, and positive representation of Latino culture outwardly, with the narratives of residents and activists experiencing the

exploitation and commodification of culture, and excessive policing they face due to increased interest in the neighborhood.

The scholarly literature on commercial/retail gentrification emphasizes how commercial development and the establishment of new businesses in marginalized neighborhoods, which have suffered from disinvestment, lead to the displacement of existing businesses, physical displacement of residents, and changes in the cultural character of the area, as well as the political power of minority groups (Martínez, 2016; Hubbard, 2018; Summers, 2019). While commercial gentrification is often driven by white developers, investors and cooperation, it can also be promoted by ethnic entrepreneurs themselves. The increasing demand among the middle class for what they perceive as "authentic" cultural products created fertile ground for ethnic entrepreneurs to establish businesses and profit from gentrification (Anderson & Sternberg, 2013; Sakızlıoğlu and Lees, 2019; Sarmiento, 2022).

In US cities, the emergence of Latino commercial gentrification has sparked a relatively small yet growing body of research, delving into the complex interplay of class, ethnicity, and the internal dynamics between residents and Latino entrepreneurs. While Latino entrepreneurs and business owners describe the commercial redevelopment they are spearheading as "gentefication" (derived from "la gente," meaning "the people" in Spanish), intended to emphasize its grassroots, Latino-led orientation, and culturally inclusive nature (Berestein Rojas, 2011; Herbst, 2014), scholars, however, argue that it still results in conflicts and displacement of lower-income residents (Ahrens, 2015; Delgado & Swanson, 2019; Huante, 2021; González and Seeley, 2022; Muñiz, 2023).

This research will contribute to this body of knowledge and expand our understanding of a less explored aspect, which deals with the politicization of these businesses and the conflicting discourses and narratives of entrepreneurs versus residents and activists regarding the political and cultural role of Latino businesses in the neighborhood. The qualitative research

conducted in Latino neighborhoods undergoing commercial gentrification—Boyle Heights in Los Angeles, Barrio Logan in San Diego, and Pilsen in Chicago—will uncover common themes. These insights will be drawn while presenting their unique expressions that derive from the local context and characteristics of each area.

As I will demonstrate, Latino entrepreneurs frame the politicization of their businesses as an act of solidarity with the Latino community, contributing to its political and cultural empowerment, and protecting the neighborhood from cultural displacement. They promote this through various means, ranging from establishing political businesses to politicizing their products and engaging in spatial policing. However, in contrast to entrepreneurs who view their businesses as contributing to the ethnicity and political power of the community, residents see the ethnicity and political power of the community as contributing to the businesses and profits of the entrepreneurs. The politicization of businesses is perceived as a marketing tactic, exploiting and commercializing culture, and promoting displacement. It is also perceived as community-washing, aimed at differentiating these businesses from non-Latino gentrifiers, thereby legitimizing their profits within the context of gentrification and shielding them from local resistance. A mosaic of political discourses and conflicting narratives reflects the complex dynamics generated by Latino commercial gentrification. They expose that beneath the facade of seemingly unified Latino identity and community, gentrified neighborhoods are fragmented and diverse with multiple actors and interests.

## **2. Commercial/retail gentrification and Latino- commercial gentrification**

Gentrification, typically understood as an urban transformation driven by an influx of middle-class residents displacing lower-income families, is often accompanied by commercial gentrification (Zukin et al., 2016). Art galleries, boutiques, trendy cafes, and restaurants targeting the new middle-class and affluent consumers represent the "spatial restructuring of

retail capital" (Hubbard, 2018, p. 297). In ethnic communities this entails a shift from ethnic establishments to gentrified ones, leveraging the distinctive "local" ambiance as retail capital seeks out more lucrative sites, taking advantage of the "rent gap" between existing and potential property values. Commercial gentrification often marginalizes the demands and needs of lower-class racialized individuals, resulting in the physical and cultural displacement of ethnic communities, along with the displacement of local ethnic retail stores and services (Rankin and Mclean, 2015; Sullivan & Shaw, 2011; Summers, 2019).

In Latino communities across the USA, commercial gentrification has displaced locally owned Latino businesses and residents, transforming the cultural character of these areas (Delgado & Swanson, 2019; Sarmiento, 2022; Munoz, 2019; Huante, 2021; Lung-Amam, 2021; Muñiz, 2023). In Los Angeles, colorful gourmet food trucks are seen as "new," "innovative," and "hip," supported by urban policies for progressive development. Meanwhile, local food trucks owned by immigrants since the 1950s remain segregated and excluded in disinvested areas, illustrating "cultural gentrification" (Munoz, 2019). In Santa Ana, a business development policy promoting cultural diversity in the Latino neighborhood displaced local Latino-owned businesses. According to Sarmiento (2022), despite its inclusive appearance, this diversity discourse rationalizes the displacement of immigrant-serving businesses and perpetuates racial inequality through market-driven development.

While commercial gentrification is often studied as a process that marginalizes minorities and alters local culture, ethnicities and classes intersect in more complex ways within these processes. Ethnic minorities, particularly ethnic entrepreneurs, are not just victims but also active agents with the agency to shape and benefit from gentrification. In the Euro-American context, ethnic diversity is often portrayed positively in city marketing, a phenomenon termed "ethnic packaging" (Hackworth and Rekers, 2005). The growing demand among the middle class for what they perceived as "authentic" cultural products contributes to

the success of ethnic/racial minority entrepreneurs' businesses in gentrified areas (Anderson & Sternberg, 2013; Sakızlıoğlu and Lees, 2019; Sarmiento, 2022). Ethnic enterprises also attract gentrifiers seeking affordable groceries (Zukin, 2008). In some cases, municipal authorities preserve the ethnic enclave's reputation for tourism, effectively commodifying its identity and encouraging ethnic enterprises (Terzano, 2014; Rankin and McLean, 2015; Martínez, 2016). Ethnic entrepreneurs thus actively participate in commercial gentrification, driving and shaping it. Some can adapt their shops to the needs and demands of the middle class and new customers, enabling them to survive in this changing landscape (Sakızlıoğlu & Lees, 2019; Derriks, 2011). Similarly, ethnic entrepreneurs from outside the neighborhood can also benefit from the process and open businesses in the revitalized neighborhood.

In US cities, once stigmatized Latino neighborhoods have become attractive "exotic" spaces. Celebrating Mexican culture through food, music, art, and murals drives tourist-oriented redevelopment, turning these areas into sites of "ethnic consumption" (Anderson & Sternberg, 2013) or "ethnic packaging" (Hackworth and Rekers, 2005). This shift has enabled Latino entrepreneurs to thrive in commercial gentrification. Despite the Latino identity of the entrepreneurs, scholars argue that their initiatives have displaced lower-income residents (Ahrens, 2015; Delgado & Swanson, 2019; Huante, 2021). While Latino entrepreneurs frame "gentefication" as a counter to gentrification, González and Guadiana (2013) contend that these processes often ignore the voices of the working class. As neighborhoods undergo commercial gentefication, businesses target specific demographics and exploit Latino culture for profit (Anderson and Sternberg, 2013; Dávila, 2004). Activists assert that gentefication essentially mirrors white-led gentrification (Huanté, 2021; González and Seeley, 2022). As Muñoz (2019) suggested, 'whiteness' can be seen as ontological, representing a lens through which the world is understood via Western ideologies constructed and organized with white supremacy at their core. In this regard, Latino entrepreneurs have contributed to the commodification of culture

by marketing Mexican identity and have normalized the displacement of immigrant-serving businesses that couldn't adapt and survive the gentrification wave (Sarmiento, 2022). Lastly, scholars argue that ethnic/racial gentrification is a commercial precursor that paves the way for corporations and non-Latino gentrifiers to ultimately displace ethnic entrepreneurs (Delgado & Swanson, 2019; Derriks, 2011).

### **3. From Barrios to Boutiques: Case Studies of Latino Communities**

Boyle Heights and Barrio Logan in California, and Pilsen in Chicago, are predominantly inhabited by working-class Latinos (see Table 1), known for their history of activism against spatial injustices. These neighborhoods exemplify commercial gentefication, making them focal points for research. They share a history of segregation, discriminatory policies, inflated rents, and housing shortages, contributing to urban disinvestment and poverty (Diaz, 2005). This led to the "rent gap" (Smith, 1996) and urban renewal policies, ultimately causing gentrification and gentefication.

In these neighborhoods, outdated zoning policies and community plans have led to a mix of residential and industrial areas, causing environmental pollution and health issues (EPA, 2022). The Boyle Heights Community Plan, last updated in 1998, began the update process in 2012, set for approval in 2023. Barrio Logan's plan, untouched since 1978, was approved in 2021. Pilsen has seen multiple proposed plans, with a draft Action Plan in 2018 postponed due to affordable housing concerns. As of now, it remains unadopted. In addition, infrastructure planning and freeway construction policies in these neighborhoods, as part of the U.S. Interstate Highway System construction from the 1950s to the early 1990s, have caused increased air and noise pollution, traffic congestion, and higher disease rates among residents. These policies also divided Latino communities and led to resident displacement (EPA, 2022; Avila; Diaz, 2005). Boyle Heights witnessed the construction of four major freeways in the 1940s and early 1960s.



Barrio Logan had an interstate built in 1963 and the San Diego-Coronado Bridge in 1969. Pilsen saw the construction of Interstates 90 and 55 (Stevenson Expressway) in the mid-1950s.

These spatial processes have spurred similar activism among Latino residents, creating spaces imbued with agency and self-determination, community heritage and solidarity, and political and cultural power. In Boyle Heights, Mariachi Plaza serves as the historic gateway and central hub for mariachi music and culture. Another significant community space is Ruben Salazar Park, named after a prominent civil rights activist killed during the National Chicano Moratorium March in 1970. In Barrio Logan, Chicano Park emerged as an act of resistance following the construction of the San Diego-Coronado Bridge in 1969. Residents, activists, and artists occupied the space beneath the bridge, painted political murals, and established the park, now home to the largest concentration of Chicano murals worldwide. In Pilsen, Casa Aztlán stands as a social services center and cultural organization, established in 1970 by activists critical of Howell House's failure to meet community needs. Adjacent to the National Museum of Mexican Art in Pilsen is Harrison Park, another community space hosting celebrations, festivals, and community events. These spaces also feature political murals, statues, protests, and rallies, embodying the neighborhoods' rich history of grassroots activism and advocacy for rights and political empowerment (Sandoval, 2021). These neighborhoods also boast numerous grassroots movements and organizations advocating for rights and political empowerment.

In recent decades, gentrification has impacted these neighborhoods. In Boyle Heights, it began in the 1990s with initiatives like the federal Hope VI project promoting mixed-income communities and the Metro 5 Gold Line extension, which facilitated downtown development encroaching upon the area (Sandoval, 2021; Huante, 2021). Barrio Logan started gentrifying in the late 2000s due to policies, including its designation as a California Enterprise Zone in 1986 (later as part of the federally designated San Diego Renewal Community) and the San Diego Redevelopment Project Area in 1992, offering tax advantages to businesses and attracting

commercial enterprises (ERA, 2008; Delgado & Swanson, 2019). Pilsen experienced gradual gentrification from the 1990s, driven by its proximity to downtown and low property values, attracting developers' attention (Anderson & Sternberg, 2013). Gentrification in these areas brought demographic shifts with an influx of middle-class residents, entrepreneurs, and corporations. Latino entrepreneurs and business owners have also been documented actively engaging in and promoting commercial gentrification within these neighborhoods (Huante, 2021; Delgado & Swanson, 2019; Ahrens, 2015).

*Table 1. Neighborhood Characteristics*

|                         | Pilsen<br>(Lower West Side) | Boyle Heights | Barrio Logan |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Total population        | 33,751                      | 90,691        | 4,234        |
| Median Household Income | \$59,889                    | \$51,316      | \$45,281     |
| Median age              | 33.1                        | 32.5          | 31.4         |
| Race and Ethnicity      | 68.3                        | 93.28         | 73           |
| % Latino/Hispanic       |                             |               |              |
| % White                 | 22.3                        | 2.28          | 16           |
| % Asian                 | 4.5                         | 2.49          | 2.8          |
| % Black                 | 3.1                         | 1.28          | 4            |
| % Other                 | 1.8                         | 0.67          | 6            |
| % Foreign-born          | 31.7                        | 42.67         | 21.6         |

|                                                          |        |        |       |
|----------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|-------|
| % College graduate                                       | 19.2   | 17.8   | 30.7  |
| % Unemployed                                             | 6.5    | 8.35   | 15.8  |
| Poverty Status<br>(% Of households below the<br>poverty) | 25.8   | 22.86  | 28.3  |
| Household                                                | 13,730 | 22,232 | 1,235 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016-2020 American Community Survey five-year estimates.

#### 4. Methods: Data and Analysis

A qualitative multiple case studies approach (Yin, 2003) was employed to investigate Boyle Heights in Los Angeles, Barrio Logan in San Diego, and Pilsen in Chicago. Conducted from 2022 to 2024, the study utilized three data collection sources<sup>1</sup>:

A total of 115 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with Latino business owners, entrepreneurs, residents, and activists (see Table 2). Interviews were focused on businesses in commercial streets in Barrio Logan (Logan Avenue and 26th Street), Boyle Heights (Cesar E Chavez Ave, 1st Street, Soto Street, and East 4th Street), and Pilsen (Ashland Avenue, 18th Street, Cermak Road, and 21st Street). Participants were recruited through participation in community meetings, direct approaches in stores and Snowball sampling. Interviews, lasting 30 to 90 minutes<sup>2</sup>, were conducted face-to-face in English or Spanish, with two conducted via Zoom. Recordings were transcribed for analysis, ensuring participant anonymity. Approval was obtained from an Institutional Review Board (IRB).

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<sup>1</sup> The pre-analysis plan is available at [https://osf.io/ypgnh/?view\\_only=2438e3122f104268b3acd8c9eda08ab5](https://osf.io/ypgnh/?view_only=2438e3122f104268b3acd8c9eda08ab5) (or [https://osf.io/ugzrm?view\\_only=32c39c53d5374dcc322173e61eea4b7](https://osf.io/ugzrm?view_only=32c39c53d5374dcc322173e61eea4b7)).

<sup>2</sup>Second meetings were conducted with 5 interviewees, resulting in 3-4 hours of conversation each, to gather comprehensive information and updates.

I conducted participant observations: In Barrio Logan, I attended meetings of All For Logan (AFL), the Barrio Logan Association, the community planning group, and the Chicano Park Steering Committee (CPSC). I also observed cultural and political events like Chicano Park Day celebrations, "Walk the Block" initiatives, Aztec dancing, Murals tours, art shows, and Union del Barrio political events. In Boyle Heights, I joined Neighborhood Council board meetings, and in Pilsen, I attended a Pilsen Alliance community meeting at Casa de Cultura, as well as Aztec dancing and a community meeting in Harrison Park. Detailed reports documented each event's objectives, participants, and interactions between business owners and residents.

I reviewed policy documents including community plans for the neighborhoods, alternative programs implemented by community organizations, and records of organization meetings involving business owners (CPSC, AFL, community planning group, and Pilsen Alliance). These documents provided insights into the development processes in the neighborhoods, the organization of residents, and the role of business owners.

I employed thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2016) to identify, analyze, and report themes within the data. The data were coded into themes using the qualitative analysis software Nvivo, to discern various patterns of activism and discursive narrative among businesses, activists and residents.

*Table 2. Participant Characteristics:*

|               |        | <b>Barrio Logan</b> |                  | <b>Boyle Heights</b> |                 | <b>Pilsen</b>   |                  |
|---------------|--------|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
|               |        | Business owners     | Residents (n=22) | Business owners      | Residents (n=9) | Business owners | Residents (n=13) |
|               |        | (n=40)              |                  | (n=14)               |                 | (n=17)          |                  |
| <b>Gender</b> | Male   | 57%                 | 59%              | 57%                  | 44%             | 47%             | 61%              |
|               | Female | 43%                 | 41%              | 43%                  | 56%             | 53%             | 39%              |

|                             |                          |     |     |     |      |     |     |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|
| <b>Average age</b>          |                          | 38  | 45  | 39  | 38   | 40  | 41  |
| <b>Place of birth</b>       | Born in the neighborhood | 15% | 59% | 36% | 67%  | 29% | 54% |
|                             | Born in the city         | 45% | 4%  | 21% | 0%   | 18% | 0%  |
|                             | Born in other US cities  | 20% | 10% | 7%  | 0%   | 12% | 15% |
|                             | Born in Latin America    | 20% | 27% | 36% | 33%  | 41% | 31% |
| <b>Business lifespan</b>    | <b>average</b>           | 5   | NA  | 8   | NA   | 9   | NA  |
| <b>Income: middle-class</b> |                          | 95% | 31% | 93% | 11%  | 89% | 38% |
| <b>% College graduate</b>   |                          | 45% | 27% | 50% | 11%  | 35% | 30% |
| <b>Property Status</b>      | Owner                    | 7%  | 13% | 22% | 0%   | 47% | 15% |
|                             | Occupied                 |     |     |     |      |     |     |
|                             | Renter                   | 93% | 87% | 78% | 100% | 53% | 85% |
|                             | Occupied                 |     |     |     |      |     |     |

## Findings:

In recent decades, commercial streets in Latino neighborhoods have undergone significant revitalization, with new small businesses like restaurants, cafes, bars, art galleries, and boutiques emerging. Many of these businesses are Latino-owned<sup>3</sup>, drawn by cultural and

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<sup>3</sup> For example, based on a street mapping survey I conducted in 2023, I found that approximately 78% (N=77) of businesses on Logan Avenue and 26th Street in Barrio Logan are now owned by Latino individuals. 6% are owned by Whites, 4% by Blacks, 4% by Asians, 1% by owners of more than one race/ethnicity, and 6% have unknown ownership. 96% of these businesses were established since the late 2000s, indicating that they are new

community ties, economic prospects, and still-affordable rents. These Latino entrepreneurs come from various backgrounds: some have grown up in various city neighborhoods or states in the US or returned to establish businesses in their childhood neighborhoods, while others have immigrated from Latin America. The forthcoming sections will delve into conflicting narratives regarding the politicization and the role of commercial gentefication (see Table 3). While Latino entrepreneurs often portray this politicization as a means of community solidarity and empowerment, a critical examination of statements from business owners, residents, and activists presents a contrasting perspective. Gentefication's politicization is perceived as a marketing strategy aimed at bolstering profits and distinguishing Latino gentrifiers from non-Latino gentrifiers. Accusations of exploiting and commercializing local culture and community-washing abound, leading to depictions of gentefiers as "coconuts": brown on the outside, white on the inside.

*Table 3. Conflicting Narratives on Gentrification's Politicization*

| Politicization pattern/<br>perception     | Gentefiers' perceptions                                                         | Residents & Activists' perceptions                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Political Art galleries                   | Community space for political organization.<br><br>Political voice through art. | Politicization serves the target audience and profit.<br><br>Galleries as non-Latino gentrification pioneers that increase property values and displacement. |
| Businesses and<br>Products Politicization | A positive representation of culture.                                           | A marketing strategy, cultural commodification.                                                                                                              |

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businesses "gentrifiers." The number of Latino-owned businesses in Boyle Heights and Pilsen is estimated to be lower.

|                           |                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                           | Support for residents and Mexicans' livelihoods.                                                                                                | Unauthentic, expensive prices.<br>Strategy for defense against resident opposition and legitimizing profit. |
| Informally Policing Space | Solidarity and resisting cultural displacement.<br>Concern for self-displacement as renters.<br>Providing 'protected' spaces for the community. | Ambivalence: support vs. resistance to reverse racism and support for police presence                       |

### 1. Establishing Political Art galleries

The politicization of commercial gentefication is evident in Latino-owned art galleries, which emphasize political motivations through curated exhibitions featuring local Latino artists, their products, community activism space, and gallery design and names. Each neighborhood adds its unique context. In Boyle Heights, Latino-owned galleries showcase Chicano art by local artists as an alternative to new white-owned galleries and the broader Los Angeles art scene, from which they feel excluded. These galleries offer workshops, podcast recording space, and engage in grassroots initiatives. For instance, Manuel, a gallery owner, elucidates his motivations for establishing the art gallery:

To be wealthy, that's not what we're looking for here. it's about self-sustainability and representing our culture, where we are politically [...] in downtown LA, you have the arts district... all the walls are spray-painted, murals. But on this side of the city, it's criminalized [...] they call artwork folk art [...] our mere existence is a political statement in a country that criminalizes people of color [...] our parents as immigrants tell us to be quiet, don't complain... so now you have a generation who was born here [...] we have businesses. we don't have to be afraid of deportation. so when you grow up with that

and you're able to finally express yourself, you want to wear it, to show it in your art.

Speak out on behalf of those that are afraid to speak out.

As a second-generation immigrant, Manuel views the establishment of his gallery as a political act and mission of resistance against racism, marginalization of Chicano culture, and solidarity with the Latino community, extending beyond mere economic profit motivations. In Barrio Logan, Latino-owned galleries highlight local struggles tied to the Mexico border, including deportation and immigration policies, the historic Chicano Park struggle, and the battle against pollution from nearby maritime industries. They host art exhibitions, poetry slams, and community events featuring local activists and organizations like the Chicano Park Steering Committee, Union del Barrio, United Farm Workers, and the Brown Berets. Gallery owners often see their politicization as a 'sacrifice.' Some mentioned the encounter of criticism and financial setbacks due to politically themed art perceived as unwelcoming or discriminatory towards whites. However, a critical analysis of discussions with business owners, like José, a gallery owner in Barrio Logan, uncovers additional complexities regarding whom gallery politicization serves:

Latino who came to our gallery said "I felt comfortable here" [...] And it isn't done to alienate anyone. In fact, we realized the exact opposite. The more we represent Latino, Chicano art, the more interesting and authentic it felt for people who were non-Latino because they were walking to a new space that is unlike any gallery they've ever been to [...] Some non-Latino customers may not like it and leave. but other non-Latinos absolutely love it. because all of the US has been designed for them. so this is the one place that hasn't been. And so they feel like they're experiencing something authentic, real, exciting, and vibrant, like a tourist spot.

Emphasizing Latino culture appeals to the local Latino audience living in these neighborhoods, while non-Latino visitors seek out what they perceive as authentic and activist. Those who are



coming to these neighborhoods and supportive of the culture and political stances of the Latino community from the outset. Thus, politicization can be seen not only as posing no threat to the business's profit, but also as ensuring its survival and profitability.

Galleries owned by Latinos in Pilsen are protesting not only against cultural displacement and immigration policy, but also against police brutality, racism, and in support of the Black Lives Matter movement due to the proximity to black communities in Chicago and the dominance of the movement in the city. In 2020, Latino entrepreneurs opened "Black Dreams Matter" art gallery, offering exhibitions, art instruction, and mentorship, fostering creative community engagement. The gallery's outer wall showcases names of Mexican activists exposing government corruption in Mexico, alongside individuals who lost their lives during police encounters in the US. The gallery hosts pop-up events and exhibitions featuring local and Latino artists, alongside art workshops on identity, politics, and culture. They organize mural tours, offer books on Mexican and indigenous culture, and display posters advocating for social justice, with captions such as "Take back power" and "Stop police brutality". Curating a show at the National Museum of Mexican Art, they highlighted resistance to Latino displacement, involving local artists, activists, and The Chicago ACT Collective. Artworks featured statements such as "Not for sale: our community, our story, our legacy," "Stop deportation," "Housing is a human right," and "Your luxury is our displacement". Carmen, the gallery's founder, discusses the politicization of the gallery and their social relations:

I'm seeing generations like myself coming back to the neighborhood. They can afford the rents or opening businesses, so we're kind of contributing to gentrification [...] there's this very weird dynamic where, you've told now you're enjoying the community we've created, what are you doing to give back? [...] I think we found the balance where we represent Latino local artists from the neighborhood, raising their political voice through

the artwork [...] we are *Genterifers*, not gentrifiers...we acknowledge the platform to keep those conversations going. We don't shy away from political debates.

To navigate the tension between the political role of galleries as spaces for community activism and their contribution to gentrification by attracting interest and capital, Latino entrepreneurs describe themselves as "genetifiers," blending the Spanish word "gente" (people). This emphasizes their belonging to the Latino community and aims to utilize their role in gentrification to uplift the community rather than cause displacement. This ambivalence is also apparent in conversations with residents, as Maria, a resident of Boyle Heights, noted:

I appreciate their efforts to contribute to the community and agree with their messages. [but] art galleries are also the first sign of gentrification [...] They say and support certain ideas, but they're driving up rent prices in the neighborhood, and we're getting pushed out. So it doesn't matter to me who owns them.

Despite the efforts of entrepreneurs to empower the community and increase its political influence, some residents perceive them as contributors to the very process they protest against. Maria's quotes resonate with Zukin et al.'s (2016) argument that art galleries, boutique hotels, and cafes, known as the "ABCs" of gentrification, signal pioneers of the gentrification process. The revitalization of Latin art and culture in the neighborhood attracts not only Latin entrepreneurs and artists but also cultural consumers and non-Latin artists seeking diverse cultural spaces with a unique cultural character, establishing galleries and driving demand for properties in the neighborhood. This transformed the neighborhoods into an "ethnic consumption" (Anderson & Sternberg, 2013; González & Waley, 2012). Latino entrepreneurs, despite political aspirations, are labeled gentrifiers due to their economic involvement in the neighborhood, rather than being recognized as political actors. The conflicting narratives regarding the political role of gentefiers in the neighborhood are also reflected in the politicization of their stores and the products they sell.

## 2. Businesses and Products Politicization

Gentefiers describe the use of their stores and products as a platform to advance Latino political power. Various products like hats, shirts, buttons, pictures, and posters feature Mexican cultural icons and political messages, advocating against immigration policies, racism, gentrification, capitalism, U.S. war policies, and celebrating Chicano identity. Common messages include “Viva Mexico,” (long live Mexico), “Chicana power,” “Chicanas,” “Chingona,”<sup>4</sup> “Brown is beautiful”, “Fuck ICE and the wall”, “Abolish ICE,” “Fuck the police”<sup>5</sup>, “no justice no peace”, “smash racism”, “Daughter of an immigrant,” “First generation but not the last,” “aquí estamos y no nos vamos” (here we are and we are not leaving) and “Todo por la raza” (All for the race/community), “Cultura- Cura”, “Barrio by nature”, “Mas poesia menos policia”(more poetry less police), “the indigenous strike back” and more. Particularly in Pilsen, signs and stickers with the messages “Black love brown pride,” “BLM – united we stand, divided we fall,” and “Black people for black power” can be seen. Some stores offer books covering topics such as native and indigenous cultures, the Chicano Movement, anti-racism, Mexican cooking, and Spanish literature.



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<sup>4</sup>Chingona (Mexico, colloquial, of a person) means a mujer (slang for “woman”) who is intelligent, skilled and capable.

<sup>5</sup>ICE: Immigration and Customs Enforcement



*Fig 2. Businesses Politicization in the Barrios. Photographs: The author.*

Gentefiers convey political and cultural messages also through the production process and store design, featuring Mexican flags, cultural icons like Frida Kahlo, religious statues of Virgen de Guadalupe. Gentefiers exhibit local professionals' and artists' business cards in their stores and sell their handcrafted items, often without personal profit, as a means of supporting the community's livelihood and empowering residents to express themselves politically through products. Similarly, selling products from Mexico is described as an act of economic support, and positive cultural representation. Laura, a Mexican immigrant and café owner in Boyle Heights, explained:

Most beans come from Latin American farms, so there should be more Latino visibility in coffee culture. not only do more Latino roasters and café owners represent the craft and culture from where the beans are grown, but we're also telling you the name of the farmer or producer who made that possible. we are working directly with the farms, supporting them.

Laura emphasizes the significance of Latino representation in coffee production and business management, aiming to make coffee accessible to the community. Similarly, Daniel, Bar owner in Barrio Logan, promotes Mexican-American identity through Mexican Craft Beer:

The craft beer industry, it's predominantly white [...] this place has been designed with Latinos in mind; it's not just the beer, it's the music, the artwork, and the beer names are in Spanglish [...] When someone drinks an incredible beer and they're like, you took something that I grew up as Mexican American and made it into a beer, that's pride. I joke it's pride in a glass [...] your culture has been diminished and now it's being celebrated [...] We are on the border, we celebrate this relationship and some of my workers are Mexicans [...] in other places they are not employed because of the language, and that propaganda that they're illegal, stealing jobs [...] I want to give them a chance.

Gentefiers describe the design of the stores, products, employment policies, and customer service as political actions aimed at enhancing and empowering the Latino community. Marisa, the owner of a coffee business in Pilsen, emphasizes that the recognition of Latino culture also resonates when it reaches the customers:

My bigger passion is I enjoy the communal aspect of coffee and how coffee brings people from the community together.

Latino businesses were also utilized for protests; For example, gentefiers in Boyle Heights, closed their stores during the 2017 immigration policy protests. One owner posted on Instagram, stating, "Sorry we are closed, we're protesting.. we have many ways of protesting. Today, we will not only be joining our community in the streets but also in an economic protest" (see fig. 3). gentefiers used statements like "Chingonas Unidas en la Lucha!" (Chingonas United in the Fight!), "despeluca fascismo (unwraps fascism), "revolt over hate", and "Ya basta con las deportaciones!! #notmypresident" (Enough with the deportations). Similarly, in Pilsen,

Chicago (and other US cities), more than 30 businesses closed on February 17, 2017, as part of "A Day Without Immigrants." This movement aimed to show solidarity with immigrants and their contributions to the US economy. Businesses displayed supportive signs on their windows, called for supporters to boycott businesses to illustrate the potential financial losses without immigrants' involvement. Similarly, they supported the 2020 BLM protests by closing their stores.



Fig 3. Signs in Latino stores. Photographs: Left: <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20170217/pilsen/dozens-of-pilsen-businesses-closed-as-part-of-day-without-immigrants.amp>; Right: [Espacio 1839 \(@espacio1839\) | Instagram](#)

However, contrary to gentrifiers' portrayal of politicizing businesses and products as acts of solidarity and empowerment of Latino community, residents express ambivalence. Some residents, like Hector, positively perceive the business's contribution to the community:

I've lived here my whole life...we have new businesses and cafes...finally, we have a place where we can go to.. celebrate our culture. It's a good thing. Sure. what's the alternative? This street was once with drugs, and crime, it wasn't safe.. we deserve development.

Others view cultural symbols and business politicization as marketing strategies prioritizing financial gain over community well-being. They argue that paradoxically, business owners are doing exactly what they claim to fight against; they commodify and commercialize cultural symbols to attract outside customers for economic gain. For example, a Boyle Heights resident criticized a restaurant for selling green vegetarian tacos, which she, as a native of Mexico, deemed inauthentic. Similarly, Barrio Logan residents noted that some Latino-owned businesses targeted affluent customers, with items priced beyond the means of locals. Paintings in one gallery fetched hundreds, even thousands of dollars, while clothing items in a studio were sold for hundreds of dollars. In Pilsen, residents criticized the excessive and ostentatious use of cultural symbols in marketing, deeming it inauthentic and geared towards attracting outsiders. Observing older businesses, I noted they often opted for simpler designs, incorporating elements like prayer texts, Virgin de Guadalupe statues or pictures, and candles in the store's back area, rather than flashy decorations. Elena, a Pilsen resident, noted sarcastically "How many more Frida Kahlo [images] do we need in the neighborhood?". Similarly, Gabriel, a resident of Barrio Logan argued:

They [Business owners] are looking at the neighborhood from a business perspective...There is also a certain degree of exploitation of culture and its commercialization. [...] and patronizing. [...] Because the average customer is attracted because of the food and culture. But if you ask them about the history of the community, the history of the park, they have no clue... some of them [business owners] become Hispanics. They might be brown on the outside, but they're white inside... because you do whatever it takes to succeed

While presenting themselves as part of the community, and as advocates for cultural empowerment, they are described as "coconuts" by activists; Brown on the outside, white on the inside, presenting themselves as Latinos while prioritizing financial gain. Some residents

also allege the exploitation of cheap labor by business owners. In a disturbing incident in 2016, a Latino restaurant owner in Pilsen physically assaulted an undocumented Mexican immigrant worker. The family worker, afraid to involve the police, shared the case on Facebook, triggering a community backlash and a subsequent boycott of the business. Tanya, a resident, commented on the incident:

He took advantage of his power and their vulnerability because they were undocumented. these workers sometimes refuse to speak up or demand things because they need the job.

Someone posted on Facebook in protest: “Keep supporting these pend&!\$! "Pilseños" accuses white establishments of gentrification, but among countrymen, it's worth it, right? There is no worse enemy of a Mexican than another Mexican.”

Gentefication’ politicization is presented not only as a marketing tactic but also as a defensive strategy against community criticism; a community-washing. It aims to differentiate them from non-Latino gentrifiers and reduce community resistance towards them. For instance, during a conversation with Felipe, a Pilsen activist, he claimed that business owners displaying BLM support signs on their storefronts might not necessarily indicate genuine support for the movement. Instead, it could stem from a fear of vandalism and looting during the riots. These assertions resonate with Latino business owners who highlighted seeking community approval, declaring their intentions, and emphasizing their contributions to the community before opening their establishments to prevent backlash or boycotts. Residents see business politicization as a cover for profit-making at the expense of community struggles, aiming to legitimize themselves within the Latino community or justify their profit through political contributions.

### **3. Informally Policing Space**

While gentefiers seek community approval for their presence and justify it through business politicization and community contributions, they also themselves exercise surveillance



outwardly— towards gentrifiers and law enforcement. Gentrifiers often monitor new entrants into their neighborhoods, particularly non-Latino entrepreneurs, sharing information about their political stances and intentions. This surveillance, aimed at preventing businesses perceived as exploitative or racist, has sometimes led to boycotts, decreased profits, or even the departure of such businesses from the neighborhood. The local context also shapes the nature of boycotts against the gentrifiers. For example, In Boyle Heights, which was previously inhabited by Jewish migrants who relocated to wealthier areas in LA but still owned property there, in 2018 boycott targeted a new Jewish Kosher restaurant owner over his support of Trump's immigration policies. In Barrio Logan, situated near the border, in 2021, a boycott was directed towards a new café owned by a black border patrol agent. Meanwhile, in Pilsen, known for its history of Black activism, few boycotts were aimed at businesses viewed as racist.

As part of surveillance against non-Latino gentrifiers, gentrifiers hang signs on their storefront windows encouraging support for local/Latino businesses. Signs like "Mexican Owned," "Chicana Art," "Local artist store," "Brown woman-owned" "Respect existence or expect resistance" and "Fight gentrification," "El Barrio No Se Vende," [the neighborhood is not for sale], assert spatial ownership. Similarly, products and posters states "Viva Raza no mas gentrification: self-determination," [long live the community, no more gentrification], "Aztlán<sup>6</sup> gatekeeper," "power to la gente", "gente- si, gentify-no!", "chinga tu hipster" [fuck your hipster]. Additionally, businesses advertise themselves online using hashtags like #BlackBrownOwned and #LatinaOwned. In Boyle Heights, Latino businesses have collaborated to publish joint ads on their websites, feature lists of POC businesses in the neighborhood and headings like "support our community," "support Latina-owned businesses in LA," and "we love our small business community". Similarly, in Pilsen, Gentrifiers have hung signs of "Shop Pilsen" as part of a campaign to support local businesses. Gentrifiers also

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<sup>6</sup>The space they called Aztlán, is an area of debated historical accuracy. The Chicano community reveres Aztlán as the ancestral home of the Aztec peoples before the United States occupied it in 1848.

hung posters and signs outside their establishments, featuring statements like "We oppose extra burdens on homeowners!", "No Pilsen landmark!".



Fig 4. Photographs: The author.

At first glance, it may seem unclear why gentefiers oppose gentrification, given they benefit from spatial commodification, beautification, and the influx of new entrepreneurs, customers, and tourists. They frame this opposition as defending the neighborhood's culture against displacement and showing solidarity to protect residents from gentrification. However, this opposition also serves gentefiers. The loss of the neighborhood's cultural identity and community, along with the entry of non-Latino corporations or entrepreneurs, may jeopardize

their businesses, catering primarily to audiences interested in Latino culture or the Latino community. Furthermore, most Latino business owners lease their storefronts, fearing displacement if property demand increases. This concern aligns with studies suggesting ethnic gentrification leads to subsequent super-gentrification by corporations (Delgado & Swanson, 2019; Derriks, 2011). Hence, gentefiers face a dilemma: desiring neighborhood prosperity while fearing loss of cultural identity, rising rents, and displacement. Their neighborhood surveillance attempts to navigate this tension, ensuring Latino ownership and preserving cultural identity. As Juan, a gentefier, explained:

Gentrification is here. You can't stop progress, but you can steer it in the proper direction. That's why we keep an eye on what goes up here [...] that building, they had to go through community permits that those buildings were within our profile [...] that they don't interfere with the neighborhood [...] if you invite somebody to your house and they disrespect you somehow, then you're gonna say, "Hey, you know what? You can leave". It's just common sense [...] we are Gatekeepers [...] We make sure we are not being priced out.

Thus, despite different economic statuses, gentefiers see themselves as part of the community and allies in its fight against gentrification, as they face potential displacement.

A second informal policing practice is refusing to serve police or border guards. In Latino neighborhoods, especially in Pilsen with its history of conflicts between law enforcement and the Black and Latino community, Boyle Heights with some cases of corruption and police brutality, and in Barrio Logan, situated close to the border, the policing issue sparks political engagements and controversial debates. Carlos, a gentefier in Boyle Heights published a statement on his Instagram page: "If you are racist, sexist, homophobic, or an asshole, don't come in", and noted in our meeting:

If we want to welcome our community, we have to understand the history that the police play in a community [...] the number of killings that they have been doing and to say you're not welcome here because we want our community to feel safe... isn't it our duty to speak out against injustice? it's not from a place of hatred. It's a place of holding safe spaces for your community.

In Barrio Logan, this practice is more prominently displayed, with entrepreneurs hanging signs in several stores stating: "Racists Cops ICE Not Welcome Here," refusing to let police or US border guards enter stores (see Fig 5). In Pilsen, gentefiers hang signs with messages like "Hate has no home here," "Cops are the real monsters," "ACAB [All cops are bad]," and "Chinga tu mega.<sup>7</sup>". Some store displays a sign on their doors, stating, "Sanctuary for our people. Immigrants, we have no walls. People, you are seen and loved. Your voice is powerful. You are safe here. You belong." One gentefier displayed a sign titled "Know your rights!" detailing the legal rights of those arrested by ICE, providing a support center phone number, and concluding with the statement "Fight against ICE". This practice can be seen as driven not only by solidarity but also by economic interests to protect or maintain relationships with the customers. As, Javier a gentefier noted:

residents told us that they didn't feel safe in the presence of cops, and they asked us to not serve them anymore. And we agreed...it's my way of saying thank you to the community...for making me feel comfortable here. I'm not trying to please them, I'm just trying to give back for what they've given me.

Interestingly, the economic interests of gentrifiers reveal a contrasting practice regarding law enforcement. For example, in Boyle Heights, a gentefier mentioned offering discounts to police officers as part of his business service. However, despite conflicting stances and practices among gentrifiers, who both occupy the same position- the ownership of businesses and the

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<sup>7</sup> A curse in Spanish that was used during Trump's campaign in 2016 to convey a message against the slogan "Make America Great Again" (MAGA).

economic interests that come with it—whether it's providing a "protected" space for customers or incentivizing officers to shop in the store. This generate disputes among both gentrifiers and between them and residents. Similarly, residents also differ in their attitudes towards the gentrifiers' surveillance practices, where the considerations guiding them are not economic profit but rather their perception of community well-being. However, "community well-being" is perceived differently—for some as protection against excessive policing while for others as protection against a lack thereof. Some residents aim to foster a welcoming community and see gentrifiers targeting non-Latino or police shoppers as reverse discrimination, casting the community in a negative light. In Pilsen, a case in 2022 where a Latino police officer was asked to leave a bookstore (owned by white owners<sup>8</sup>) sparked a contentious debate on social media and called for a boycott. Rosa, a resident, noted:

Just as we do not want to be discriminated against, we cannot discriminate against others. This is not the way to bring about change.

Other residents, like Mario, also argued that in their neighborhoods, especially with high crime rates, they want police presence as residents, unlike non-resident entrepreneurs:

This neighborhood suffers from a lot of crime. so we need the police here [...] We need to respect law enforcement because they protect us...this shop owner isn't speaking for us [...] mind your own business

Some residents argued against police boycott, fearing it may lead to antagonism and police brutality towards them. They also support the integration of young people into public roles, including law enforcement. Lastly, residents, including the landlord, criticized business owners

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<sup>8</sup>Pilsen also attracts white business owners who actively participate in local politics and incorporate this political engagement into their businesses. One such example is a politically active bookstore that serves as a community space for organization while selling products like pins and bags featuring the statement "Always Carry A Book" with the bold initials ACAB (All Cops Are Bad). According to the entrepreneurs, this combination of humor and political messaging aims to encourage individuals to wear these items without necessarily being fully aware of their political connotations.

for representing them without consent. In contrast, other residents, like Roberto, support this practice, stating:

How can you trust the police when they fail to do their job and are involved in corruption? Not only that, but they profile you and arrest you.. killing our own people.



*Fig 5. Informal policing in gentefiers' stores. Photographs: The author.*

Therefore, while there isn't a clear-cut dichotomy between residents and gentefiers regarding their stance on police presence in the neighborhood, their roles as business owners versus residents, along with socio-economic considerations, further divide the Latino community, revealing conflicting narratives regarding the politicization of businesses in the neighborhood. Surveillance of the space thus becomes an act of political resistance, driven by identity, ethnic solidarity, and economic interests, reflecting the various positions in the neighborhood of gentrifiers, business owners, residents, and activists.

## **Conclusion**

In recent decades, urban neighborhoods once stigmatized for their ethnic/racial composition have become attractive hubs for ethnic consumerism (Anderson & Sternberg, 2013; Zukin, 2008; Hubbard, 2018; Sakızlıoglu and Lees, 2019; Delgado & Swanson, 2019; Munoz, 2019; Sarmiento, 2022). In Latino neighborhoods in the US, commercial gentrification presents a complex mix of interests, threats and opportunities. This research emphasizes the agency of Latino entrepreneurs, gentefiers, who actively engage in and navigate commercial

gentrification to align with their interests and objectives. They portray their business endeavors as expressions of community solidarity, political empowerment, cultural preservation, and defense against displacement. This is accomplished through politically-oriented businesses, politicization of products and services, and spatial policing.

However, a critical examination of gentefiers' statements and residents' perceptions reveals an alternative view regarding businesses' politicization. While gentefiers believe their businesses contribute to the ethnicity and political power of the community, residents see the community's ethnicity and political power as enhancing business profitability. The politicization of businesses is often viewed as a marketing tactic to attract customers, increase profits, and maintain their status in the neighborhood. Gentefiers accused of exploiting culture for commercial gain. Residents perceive the products as "inauthentic", inaccessible, and catering primarily to outsiders. The flourishing businesses are believed to create hype around the neighborhood, making it attractive and exacerbating displacement. Additionally, politicizing businesses helps differentiate them from non-Latino gentrifiers and shield them from local opposition, legitimizing their presence amidst gentrification. Consequently, the businesses' supposed contribution to the community is labeled as "community washing." Thus, gentefiers are depicted sometimes as "coconuts": brown on the outside, white on the inside.

These findings raise various implications, insights, and questions. On one hand, the findings underscore the importance of a critical perspective regarding ethnic commercial gentrification as a process that is not inclusive or devoid of costs for the community, contrary to the assertions and intentions of entrepreneurs. Not only does the culture become commodified for economic gain, but this process, ostensibly presented as cultural empowerment and positive representation by minority entrepreneurs, may blur and distort inequalities and displacement, making it even more difficult to address and resolve the negative implications of the process. In this regard, ethnic commercial gentrification shares negative

implications similar to non-Latino gentrification, often described as a rebranded version of white-led gentrification (Huante, 2021; González and Seeley, 2022). At first glance, this insight brings back the basic economic class perspective in gentrification research, highlighting class inequalities and class-based displacement.

However, findings regarding the politicization of ethnic commercial gentrification also emphasize the uniqueness of the phenomenon and the implications or specific questions arising from it. Alongside economic opportunities and interests, the ethnic identity of gentrifiers, their belonging to an ethnic group, and partnership in political struggles shape the phenomenon, political action patterns, and unique spatial relations, even if disputed. The criticism faced by gentrifiers for their politicization and its profit-driven nature does not negate their genuine political intentions or their role as unique political actors in the neighborhood, contributing to amplifying the political voice of minorities alongside economic costs.

Additionally, the findings prompt normative and research-oriented questions about the costs borne by communities, especially vulnerable residents, for the mobility and profits of gentrifiers, the positive representation of culture, and the empowerment of Latino political voice. While acknowledging the negative impact of gentrification, it's crucial to recognize gentrifiers' efforts to pursue economic mobility and activism. Some entrepreneurs, formerly residents in these communities, lower-income individuals, or immigrants, have overcome neighborhood challenges to achieve economic mobility, despite facing obstacles. Similarly, while this research focuses on gentrification, it's important not to overstate the role of Latino entrepreneurs, who have less influence compared to large corporation gentrifiers in these neighborhoods. While Latino commercial gentrification may indeed accelerate the commodification process and pave the way for subsequent rounds of commercial gentrification by non-Latino developers and entrepreneurs, their profits over time are limited (see Delgado & Swanson, 2019; Derriks, 2011). In light of this, it's worth asking: What alternatives could exist



for gentrifiers and the community? How can we mitigate the negative impacts of commercial gentefication? Alongside the negative consequences, the findings suggest the potential for gentefiers to alleviate or redirect cultural and political displacement in gentrification, as well as the possibility of collaborating with the local community to mitigate its risks.

Finally, while criticizing gentefication may inadvertently suggest it primarily concerns intra-ethnic class dynamics, the commercial redevelopment of ethnic neighborhoods is fundamentally a matter of policy, politics and urban planning. Commercial gentrification of Latino/ethnic neighborhoods is tied to past policies that facilitated gentrification, such as business incentives and tourism-promoting policies, which positioned gentefication as an economic growth engine for the city. Hence, responsibility for addressing its consequences shouldn't solely rest on the gentefiers nor the community. Secondly, it's essential to examine the phenomenon from a global comparative perspective. Alongside criticism, the commodification of culture for profit suggests that Latino ethnicity is perceived positively and is in demand, even if it's just a tool for capitalist development. Furthermore, in these spaces, ethnic businesses can engage in political protest through their establishments. It's important to understand in which spaces, and countries in the USA, and generally worldwide, ethnicity and race serve as attractive attributes, fostering ethnic commercial gentrification, and in which spaces ethnicity is associated with the stigma of crime, poverty, and vulnerability, thereby hindering ethnic commercial gentrification. Where does politicization of ethnic businesses serve economic profit for entrepreneurs, and where is it avoided due to being perceived as a 'threat' to consumers? (See, for example, Hwang & Sampson, 2014; Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022; on the inconsistency of gentrification among Black and Latino neighborhoods or Shmaryahu-Yeshurun, 2022 on Arab-commercial gentrification in Israel).

These dynamics of Latino commercial gentrification reveal a complex interplay between entrepreneurs and residents in Latino neighborhoods, characterized by conflicting

perspectives. It highlights the need for a critical examination of gentrification processes, acknowledging both economic and political opportunities and the exacerbation of inequalities. It highlights how beneath the guise of solidarity and collective identity, Latino communities are not monolithic; they exhibit class divisions and diverse roles that complicate motivations, interests, and political positions regarding the neighborhood's vision and its' representation.

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