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Religion, Migration and Business

Faith, Work And Entrepreneurialism in the UK

María Villares-Varela
Olivia Sheringham

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Religion and Global Migrations

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María Villares-Varela
Department of Sociology, Social
Policy and Criminology
University of Southampton
Southampton, UK

Olivia Sheringham
Department of Geography,
Environment and Development
Studies
Birkbeck University of London
London, UK

Religion and Global Migrations

ISBN 978-3-030-58304-0

ISBN 978-3-030-58305-7 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-58305-7>

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The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

PREFACE

At the time of writing, the UK is in the midst of heated discussions on the positive and negative effects of migration against the backdrop of the post-Brexit referendum vote and the so-called hostile environment. Migrants are conceptualised in these debates as either important assets for the country's economy or as a burden on the welfare state and disruptors of social cohesion. Within these debates, the value and contribution of migrant workers are in contention, as is the religious pluralism of new migrants settling in our communities. This book explores the intersections between work and enterprise, and religiosity for migrant communities and seeks to understand the role of religious values and faith in shaping the aspirations of migrant entrepreneurs and the role of churches in addressing the dearth of business support for business owners.

But why this research, and why now? Research conducted independently by both authors has looked at two differentiated themes: the labour market incorporation of migrants, particularly as business owners, mostly in Spain and the UK (Villares-Varela), and the role of religion in the everyday lives of migrants in the UK and from a transnational perspective (Sheringham).

Villares-Varela's fieldwork in Spain was mainly focused on data collection amongst Latin American migrants, which constitute the largest community due to postcolonial links between Spain and the region, language and cultural similarities as well as more favourable migration policies towards this migrant community. During her years conducting

fieldwork in Spain with business owners, one issue that kept coming up was the role of the church in their spiritual/social lives but also in their working lives, and this was particularly prevalent amongst the Brazilian and Colombian communities. Moreover, some interviews that took place in church premises showed evidence of how Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations seemed to place a strong emphasis on narratives of self-betterment through individual success, which included access to financial skills and encouragement of entrepreneurship. However, this aspect always remained as an anecdotal account of the fieldwork experiences and never featured in the research analysis, mainly owing to a strong secular perspective on the subject in the fields of Sociology of Work and Enterprise. When doing fieldwork with new migrant entrepreneurs in the UK, in the west Midlands specifically, similar narratives emerged amongst entrepreneurs in relation to the importance of religiosity, the mosque, the temple or the church in providing support. Again, this theme was not the main focus of these past research projects, so the faith, spiritual and religious aspects of work and entrepreneurial activity were, once again, put to one side.

Sheringham's doctoral research focused on the role of religion in the every day and transnational lives of Brazilian migrants in the UK as well as in the context of 'return' to Brazil for migrants who had previously lived in the UK. Her decision to focus on religion emerged through similar encounters to those Villares-Varela outlines above. Rather than seeking to research religion *per se*, religion and spirituality emerged as fundamental to people's experiences of migration, their identities, and their senses of belonging. For example, during earlier fieldwork conducted amongst Brazilian migrants living in the small Irish town of Gort, Ireland—in which the focus was on integration and placemaking practices—religion featured centrally in migrants' narratives, in many cases determining their decision to migrate or return home. Her research highlighted the need to take religion seriously with the social sciences which have often tended to side-line religion as one amongst a series of factors shaping people's lives rather than deeply intertwined with all aspects. Yet whilst Sheringham's work sought to foreground religion in migrants' everyday lives and migration experiences, questions of migrant work and enterprise remained in the background.

Whilst working together at Oxford's International Migration Institute, we began to discuss our overlapping research interests and identified the notable lack of research on the role of religion in relation to the

workplace and enterprise. Our different disciplinary backgrounds (Sheringham trained in Human Geography and Villares-Varela in Sociology) also shaped the way we approached our research and subsequently this book. Whilst the core scholarship on migration and entrepreneurship has developed within the fields of Entrepreneurship, Management and the Sociology of Work and Employment the field of religion (and migration) has been explored predominantly within Geography and Sociology. Hence we felt that an interdisciplinary project would enable us to bridge some of these fields and find convergences (and divergences) in different ways in which they have approached the role of religiosity in the entrepreneurial endeavours of migrants, whilst also developing new perspectives.

We decided to put together our areas of expertise and submitted a proposal to the British Academy/Leverhulme Trust. We chose to focus on a specific form of protestant Christianity, Pentecostalism, which is the fastest growing Christian denomination in the UK, and is particularly popular amongst migrant communities from the Caribbean, African and Latin American countries. This form of Christianity is guided by the direct experience of God's presence by the believer, faith is lived as a strongly experiential process and it emphasises the promise of prosperity. Hence, our research design sought to explore churches of different sizes, denominations (within the Pentecostal stream) and origins (migrant/non-migrant) to gain a broad perspective on the narratives of pastors and congregants who are business owners. The recruitment of business owners was more challenging than expected: the intersection of the variables (business ownership/self-employed, born abroad and congregant of a Pentecostal church) that made up our criteria meant that finding participants was a lengthy process. We were supported, however, by research assistants who had connections to some of the communities and allowed us to establish relationships of trust and familiarity within several church networks.

This small-scale project has allowed us to see how Pentecostalism—as lived and practised by migrant entrepreneurs and their leaders—is closely intertwined with the world of work and enterprise. We do so by showing how the emergence of these churches in our urban spaces, goes hand in hand with the rise of neoliberal subjectivities and discourses, including those surrounding the hostile environment in the UK. We hope that the reader gets a sense of how some of these accounts of lived religion within the migration trajectories of individual migrants, their aspirations for individual self-betterment through establishing their own businesses, and

the community-based support provided by churches, speak to some of the broader processes of the effects of neoliberalism on migrant communities in Britain. The book shows that Pentecostal churches simultaneously provide cultural legitimacy in the formation of neoliberal subjectivities whilst counterbalancing the effects of neoliberalism in relation to the erosion of community and family lives.

We hope the book appeals to a wide and interdisciplinary academic audience in the fields of Sociology, Geography, Work and Employment, Religious Studies, Business/Entrepreneurship. Yet we also hope that the findings are insightful for business support providers and religious organisations supporting migrants, given that it provides an overview of the ways in which these institutions are actually making an impact on the trajectories of migrants.

Southampton, UK
London, UK
April 2020

María Villares-Varela
Olivia Sheringham

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has been funded by the British Academy/Leverhulme Trust, Small Grants scheme (Project title ‘Religion, migration and entrepreneurship: The impact of transnational Pentecostalism in migrant entrepreneurship in the UK’; Reference: SG160477). We are indebted to the funder for their financial support and for the broader emphasis on supporting research within the Social Sciences and the Humanities. The project has allowed us to produce this monograph, two policy briefs and a workshop that brought together specialists in the fields of migration, religion and entrepreneurship. More information about the project and other outputs can be found in the project website <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/sociology/research/projects/religion-migration-and-entrepreneurship.page>.

We are thankful to our project participants who have generously shared their time and experiences with us so this book could materialise. The execution of the project was possible thanks to the support in various capacities of research assistants who helped with some of the desk research, recruitment of participants and conducting interviews, amongst other tasks. We are extremely grateful to Nathaniel Telemaque, James Lukano Omunson, Ana França Ferreira, Lakshmi Nair and Satomi Oya for the contributions.

We are also grateful to the speakers and participants of the workshop held on the 8th of May 2019 at Queen Mary University of London, in particular to Dr. Andrew Davies, Dr. Scott Taylor, Dr. Bindi Shah, Dr. Natalia Vershinina, Dr. Anabelle Wilkins and Dr. William Monteith. Our

discussions helped us to advance our analysis of the project findings. We would also like to thank the reviewers of the manuscript for their insightful comments. Finally, we are indebted to our institutions for their support to complete this project (University of Southampton and Queen Mary University of London and Birbeck University of London).

ABOUT THIS BOOK

The book is structured in six chapters.

Chapter 1 ‘Introduction: At the Intersection of Migration, Religion and Entrepreneurship’ introduces the rationale for the study, the academic debates the book is speaking to and defines key terms used in this monograph such as migrant entrepreneurs and the use of religion and spirituality. We introduce in this chapter the specificities of Pentecostalism, and provide an account of the research design, methods, data collection and analysis.

Chapter 2 ‘Lived Religion and Migrant Entrepreneurship in the Contemporary (Neoliberal) City’ engages with some of the debates around secularisation, postsecular urbanism and the complex relationships between religion and neoliberalism. It critically engages with work on migration and religion, paying particular attention to discussions of ‘lived’ or everyday religion. The chapter develops a conceptual framework through which to consider how migrants’ work and entrepreneurial practices shape, and are shaped by, everyday and institutional forms of religious practice.

Chapter 3 ‘Conceptualising Religion in the Drivers and Outcomes of (Migrant) Entrepreneurship’ reviews the main debates in the field of (migrant) entrepreneurship and religion by critically engaging with accounts that have situated religiosity as part of the group characteristics of migrant entrepreneurs and advocates for placing it within the enabling and constraining effects of structural factors.

Chapter 4 ‘Values and Faith as Drivers of Entrepreneurship: The Trajectories and Practices of Pentecostal Migrant Business Owners’ constitutes our first empirical chapter by providing an account of the ways in which religion is intertwined with the trajectories and practices of migrant business owners. The chapter analyses how business owners relate to their religion and churches as part of their migration trajectories before and during opening their own businesses.

Chapter 5 ‘Becoming an Entrepreneur in Church: The Role of Religious Organizations in Supporting Migrants’ explores the role of churches in providing business support for migrant entrepreneurs by focusing on how pastors see their role in assisting their members in the world of work and how entrepreneurs perceive the access to these resources. We highlight here how entrepreneurs gain financial skills, mentoring and coaching, pastoral and spiritual care and access to networks of suppliers and customers.

Chapter 6 ‘Conclusions’ brings together the main findings of the book by highlighting the core theoretical contribution the book is making, signalling future avenues for research and providing some policy recommendations for churches and business support agencies.

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