

## **Faith, migration and business: the role of Pentecostalism in migrant entrepreneurial practices in the UK**

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### **Abstract**

This paper analyses the role of Pentecostalism in migrant entrepreneurial practices. Whilst the link between religion and enterprise is at the core of foundational sociological essays – including Weber’s discussion of the relation between religion and the emergence of capitalism - the connection between religious faith and business practices has remained, until recently, notably under-explored. We contend that more attention needs to be paid to faith and churches as generators of particular norms and values about entrepreneurship, and the wider entrepreneurial *aspirations* of believers. Our focus on Pentecostalism emerges from its importance amongst new Christian migrant communities in the UK and its emphasis on the promise of prosperity, its success among the poor and its role in career aspirations. Drawing on qualitative interviews with Pentecostal migrants in the UK, in this paper we critically examine: i) the role of Pentecostal churches in supporting entrepreneurial activities among migrant communities; and ii) the ways in which Pentecostal beliefs and values influence the aspirations and practices of migrant entrepreneurs. Our research suggests that the influence of Pentecostalism is fundamental to understanding the positionality of these migrants, not just in terms of in their entrepreneurial behaviour but in terms of their experiences and practices within wider socio-economic contexts.

**Keywords:** religion, migration, entrepreneurship, Pentecostalism, UK.

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## Introduction

This article explores the role of Pentecostalism in migrant entrepreneurial practices<sup>1</sup>. Whilst the link between religion and enterprise is at the core of foundational sociological essays – including Max Weber’s (1930) discussion of the relation between religion and the emergence of capitalism - the connection between religious faith and business practices has remained, until recently, notably under-explored. A growing body of work is emerging which examines the connection of religiosity and workplace practices and enterprise. In the fields of migration studies, sociology of religion and geography, scholars have examined the ‘post-secular’ landscape of many European cities and the role of Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) in welfare provision. Yet less attention has been paid to FBOs as generators of particular norms and values about entrepreneurship, and the wider entrepreneurial *aspirations* of believers. In particular, the study of entrepreneurship and religiosity has been highlighted when looking at the experiences of migrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurs in a *superdiverse* context (Vertovec 2007; Sepulveda et al. 2011), where attention to new forms of religiosity has been prominent. These contributions have looked at religiosity as part of myriad cultural resources that entrepreneurs bring and mobilise (Jones and Ram 2007), providing them with a competitive advantage. This competitive edge emerges from specific religious networks, access to workers and suppliers and credit. Yet despite welcomed contributions to the field looking at religion as an important resource, some of these accounts focus disproportionately on these so called ‘cultural’ factors as part of the unique feature of heroic entrepreneurs, without acknowledging that these take place against the backdrop of racism and discrimination in the labour market, and a generalised exclusion from other sources of support (Ram et al. 2017; Jones et al. 2012).

Our focus on Pentecostalism emerges from its importance amongst new Christian migrant communities in the UK and its emphasis on the promise of prosperity, its success among the poor and its role in career aspirations. Drawing on qualitative interviews with Pentecostal migrants in the UK, in what follows we critically examine the role of Pentecostal churches in supporting entrepreneurial activities among migrant communities as well as the ways in which Pentecostal beliefs and values influence the aspirations and practices of migrant entrepreneurs.

Our findings show that affiliation to churches and religious values have an important role for congregants both in terms of accessing resources (e.g. knowledge exchange networks, capital, mentoring) and enhancing their resilience when confronting business and life setbacks, which take place within a particular context of dismantling of mainstream business support services and narratives of a hostile environment towards migrants in the last years. We engage here with approaches that are sensitive to context and structural factors (Kloosterman, van der Leun and Rath 1999; Welter 2011) in order to explain the role of religiosity and its interaction with markets and regulations. The paper contributes to and advances previous discussions on

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religion and enterprise. We do this, first, through highlighting the importance of the neoliberal context within which these entrepreneurs are working. Secondly, we draw attention to the ways in which how processes of social exclusion from the mainstream world of work for these entrepreneurs are cushioned by the services provided by churches for their businesses and beyond. Our research suggests that the influence of Pentecostalism is fundamental to understanding the positionality of these migrants, not just in terms of in their entrepreneurial behaviour but in terms of their experiences and practices within wider socio-economic contexts.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we provide a review of the intersections between migration, religion and entrepreneurship, with a particular focus on Pentecostalism. We then present the methodology, data collected and analytical strategy of the research. A subsequent section exploring our key findings provides insights into the overall characteristics of entrepreneurs and their businesses, the role of faith and values in the emergence of their businesses, and how churches are important sites of support for entrepreneurs.

### **Migration, religion and entrepreneurship**

There is a growing body of work on the relationship between religion and migration across a range of disciplines. This includes work on the ways in which religious and spiritual practices shape and are shaped by mobility (e.g. Levitt 2007); the formation of transnational religious networks (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2002) and the growing visibility of diasporic religious identities in urban spaces (Garnett and Harris 2013; Garbin 2012). Moving beyond a focus on practices that are tied to religious institutions, other scholars have called for more attention to be paid to the more embodied aspects of religious experience and instead drawn attention to ‘everyday’ or ‘lived’ religion’ to examine how religion and everyday life are deeply intertwined (Ammerman 2007; McGuire 2008; Sheringham 2013). Yet despite this acknowledgement, *there remain few examples of research that take work and entrepreneurial practices as a site of analysis.*

Since the seminal work of Light (1972), and later Wilson and Portes (1980), migrant and ethnic entrepreneurship literature has looked at the drivers and dynamics of this type of labour incorporation amongst minorities and newcomers in the Global North. This field was dominated in the first years by supply side accounts, where the characteristics of migrant entrepreneurs were understood as the variable with the strongest explanatory capacity to understand the development and success/failure of migrant-owned businesses. Amongst these characteristics, faith/religiosity was accounted as one of the many ‘cultural’ factors that explained migrant enterprise. Examples include studies that have looked at the weight of ‘ethnic/cultural resources’ as the core focus of entrepreneurship (Basu, 1998; Srinivasan, 1995; Werbner, 1984, 1990); highlighting, for example, the propensity of South Asian (Basu and Altinay 2002) and Jewish (Saracheck 1980) minority groups, or the differences between Muslim and non-Muslim migrant entrepreneurs in Britain (Rafiq, 1992) (for a critical discussion on cultural factors see Jones and Ram 2007 and Cederberg and Villares-Varela 2018). In the 1990s, more balanced accounts taking into account structural factors emerged,

particularly by the operationalization of the *interactionist* model of Waldinger (1990) where migrant entrepreneurship was analysed as the result of the interplay between market environment and the characteristics of entrepreneurs.

A transformational shift in the field was advanced by a stronger sensitivity to context theorised by Kloosterman, Van der Leun and Rath (1999) through their mixed embeddedness approach where ethnic resources are studied in relation to markets and regulations. In this model, markets are understood as the forces that shape the possibilities for migrant entrepreneurs to develop and sustain their businesses, and regulations appear as the institutions and laws that entrepreneurs ought to comply with (Kloosterman, van der Leun and Rath 1999; Rath 2000; Kloosterman and Rath 2003) (for an extended review of the field see Jones et al. 2016).

The link between enterprise and religion is also central to the work of Max Weber who explores the interplay between the emergence of capitalism and Protestantism (1930). In his thesis, Protestant values and ethics underpin engagement in secular work, and its subsequent accumulation of wealth and re-investment. The role of values here is central to nature and development of capitalism. The nature of this connection has been explored through the study of religiosity at the workplace through the revived interest in the sacred nature of work and enterprise (e.g. study of values for social entrepreneurs) (Pio 2010) which has been under-researched in organisational and entrepreneurship studies (Essers and Benschop 2009). Moreover, Schaeffer and Mattis (2012) have highlighted the intersections between diversity, religion and the workplace. They argue that traditional theories of work have disregarded the religiosity of individuals whose identities mark them as minorities and should take into account diversity at the workplace beyond an idea of a 'unified spirituality' (p.330) which can actually reproduce structural discrimination at the workplace. If different groups have different trajectories at the workplace, the role of religiosity will be very different. They call for studies looking at work trajectories of minority groups to understand how religion can help them to make sense of the diverse meanings of work.

Experiences of religion and enterprise in particular have been also studied by accounting for how the values and mind-sets of entrepreneurs influence their activities (Balog et al 2014). As Balog et al (2014) highlight, this body of work looks at spirituality as another individual trait of entrepreneurs, as well as drawing out other macro and micro level factors, including how religiosity conditions the sources of funding of entrepreneurs, the networks, and organisational culture, as well as the motivations and business behaviour.

Although research on migrant businesses in particular has extensively explored the role of variables such as ethnicity, gender, access to finance and support in relation to drivers and outcomes of entrepreneurship (Jones et al, 2000; Ram and Jones, 2008; Jones and Ram, 2012; Jones et al 2014), the role of religion in migrant entrepreneurship has been scarcely researched. There are some notable exceptions to this, however, which focus in particular at the role of Islam in migrant enterprise from an intersectional perspective (e.g. Pio, 2010 and Essers and Benschop 2009).

Pio (2010) uses a mixed embeddedness approach to highlight the role of spirituality for Muslim women entrepreneurs in Sweden in relation to how women draw on spiritual resources by giving meaning to their enterprises. Her paper shows that the businesses opened by Muslim women entrepreneurs comply with spiritual values (e.g. separation of men and women; women as customers) and these are used to develop successful businesses. In a similar way, Essers and Benschop (2009) explore how Muslim identities are constructed for migrant women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands and how gender/femininity are useful as symbolic markers to illustrate the tensions between Western and Islamic values. They analyse how women interpret Islam in their working lives from an intersectional stance. They find that women comply and contest with Muslim values in different ways (by for example using Islam to develop niche markets for their businesses; but they also legitimise being independent businesswomen by embracing feminist interpretations of Qur'an. They highlight how identities as Muslim women are maximised to accommodate the success of their businesses.

### *Pentecostalism, migration and enterprise*

Research on migrant enterprise has to date not looked in depth at the influence of Christian values for entrepreneurs (to the best of our knowledge). However, there is a growing body of work that looks at the role of Pentecostal beliefs and practices in entrepreneurship and its impact on economic development in the Global South. Pentecostalism is the fastest growing Christian denomination in the UK and it 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 the presence of God by the believer, and faith is lived a strongly experiential process. This research area has paid particular attention to themes such as the emphasis on the promise of prosperity, its success among the poor and its role in aspirations (Togarasei, 2011), the encompassment of its message with neoliberal reforms in the Global South (Haynes, 2012) or the involvement of the church in the understanding of entrepreneurs in their success in their business ventures (Ojong, 2008). The Gospel of Prosperity, a core component of Pentecostalism, preaches that God's will is reflected on wealth, success and health for believers in exchange for faith and gift giving (Haynes 2013; refs). The link between market and non-market exchanges and Gospel of Prosperity has been explored by Haynes (2013) in the Zambian Copperbelt to illustrate the 'morality of money' (2013, 123) within Pentecostal values.

Existing research on the role of Pentecostal churches for migrants in the Global North has also highlighted some important factors. Toulis's (1997) ethnographic study in a Pentecostal church in Birmingham shows how attending services at these churches as the outcome of racism and exclusion from white churches given that Pentecostalism helped believers to conceal race and class differences. This research also illustrates how education attainment is linked to higher status both in church and at work but, on the other hand, irrespective of your occupation collective membership is given by being part of the church which might override hierarchies amongst occupations (ibid).

The intersection of Pentecostalism and migrant enterprise has been timidly studied in the field of entrepreneurship by looking at Pentecostal African-Caribbean community in London: the role of faith in entrepreneurial values (Nwankwo and Gbadamosi, 2013) and of the ethnic capital and faith-based networks in facilitating entrepreneurship (Ojo, 2015; Gbadamosi, 2015). Nwankwo and Gbadamosi (2013) study how faith is used by African-Caribbean Pentecostals in the UK to exploit the cultural resources of faith-based networks to promote their firms. Their qualitative research shows that in-group identity for entrepreneurs is based on religion affiliation where the identity as an entrepreneur is aligned with God's mission within a prosperity narrative. They also explore the role of community level relationships that aid entrepreneurship, such as reciprocity in business relationships, using church networks for advertising, finding a community of clients, etc. The use of these networks also relates to the generation of trust to generate both suppliers and providers within the church ranks. Finally, they show how interconnections between faith values and entrepreneurship helps entrepreneurs to guide their enterprises and at the same time generate resources to sustain the church. In his study of the connections between entrepreneurship and Pentecostalism in London, Gbadamosi (2015) explores the ways in which Pentecostalism becomes a source of support to overcome exclusion from mainstream institutions, particularly for African-Caribbean entrepreneurs. This paper underlines the value of networks within church as well as how these are also capitalised by churches which are starting to offer this sort of workshops/support within their premises (*ibid*). Using Mead's framework of symbolic interactionism, Ojo (2015) explores African Pentecostalism as 'entrepreneurial space.' He does so by highlighting the role of 'spiritual agency' to adjust to the country of residence as entrepreneurs. Using a single church as a case study, he explores motivations for setting up an enterprise, including the role of social networks at both the local and the transnational level.

The above examples provide a useful overview of some of the interconnections between faith and enterprise for Pentecostal migrants in the UK. However, we identify two key areas that require further enquiry. First, existing research does appear to sufficiently reflect on the importance of the neoliberal context within which these entrepreneurs are acting. Secondly, there is notable lack of reflection on the processes and experiences of social exclusion for these entrepreneurs from both mainstream churches as well as from the wider world of work.

### **Methodology, data and context**

The research design, data collection and analysis has followed an interpretivist approach (Bryman 2003) in order to grasp the perceptions, experiences and practices of migrant entrepreneurs who are members of a congregation under a Pentecostal Christian denomination. This approach also guided the data collection on the role of church in the support of migrants in the world of work and enterprise in particular by interviewing pastors and other staff.

The analysis in this paper draws on the narratives of 25 migrant entrepreneurs (defined as individuals born abroad who own a business or a self-employed) from a wide range of nationalities (Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Poland, amongst others),

residing in London, Birmingham and locations in Hampshire. The diversity of countries origin amongst our participants has enabled us to capture the commonalities in experiences regarding the role of faith and churches in business practices beyond nationality-based specificities. The interviews followed a biographical approach, which included questions about participants' migration, life, religious, occupational and entrepreneurial cycles, allowing us to capture both individual trajectories as well as the development of the business (Kontos 2003). The interviews touched upon topics such as the migration trajectory, previous occupations, level of education, aspirations, origin of the business, business support, religious affiliation, the role of church and pastors in their lives, aspirations for the future.

We have accessed our participants through a mix of formal contacts through pastors and other stakeholders connected to churches, as well as informal contact. Fieldworkers in the community contributed to the fieldwork which allowed for a richer and more varied sample in the different locations.

The data collected have been analysed using thematic analysis. Some of the emerging themes we have touched upon relate to the role of faith and values, the support obtained in church and elsewhere, access to capital, mentoring networks and the experiences of lived religion at the workplace.

### **Preliminary findings**

#### ***Business ownership as a means to exiting low paid employment and achieving self-realisation***

The characteristics of the businesses and occupational trajectories of our participant confirm the overall findings of previous research on migrant entrepreneurship (Ram et al. 2016). These businesses are generally placed in saturated sectors of the market, with cut-throat competition from similar companies (Ram et al. 2014). E1 (female, Hampshire, Zimbabwe, home care company) conveys that care work supply in her area is fragmented amongst many small companies that compete with each other for workers and customers, which make the business less stable in terms of supply and demand. Similarly, E4 (female, London, Jamaica, hairdresser salon) explains, for example, how she needs to expand the services she offers as people are less likely to use her services given the large number of salons in the area and the growing number of people who learn hairdressing skills and techniques via online tutorials.

Strategies displayed to survive/succeed rely on the use of intensive labour, and flexible family arrangements (Song 1999; Villares-Varela 2017, 2018). Family support strategies are often signalled as one of the pillars of survival and/or success, where interviewees frequently refer to how their partners have been important for the business to be set up and to develop, from liaising with providers, helping with paperwork, driving to business appointments or using family resources to support the business when necessary. Narratives of multiple job-holding are also prominent, with business owners dipping into the new sector whilst keeping part-time paid employment elsewhere, such as the case of E2, from Trinidad and Tobago, when she explains that she is still works as a hairdresser whilst developing her catering business.

Experiences of exclusion and lack of mobility in the labour market are signalled as the main factors to enter business ownership together with the aspiration to ‘better themselves’ and their families once in the UK. Entrepreneurs often allude to discrimination in the labour market in sectors where they could not prosper according to their experience and qualifications, such as the case of a female entrepreneur with a home care company who struggled to get ahead the promotion ladder (E1, female, Hampshire, Zimbabwe, home care company). Hence, opening up a business here emerges as a means of moving beyond these limitations. Amongst these, our interviewees also refer to the hierarchical power relations at the work place with employers as a motivating factor to start up their businesses, as explained by E2 (male, Hampshire, Poland, construction company) when he conveys that *‘I was tired of always having to be under someone else’s preference to how I should work, when and the way he was treating me, as if I come from a developing country, the arrogance of my boss when he was talking to me because I am from where I am from. I could not put up with it anymore’*.

Opening up a business and ‘being your own boss’ is perceived to cushion some of these disadvantages, as stated by our interviewees when they convey that being an entrepreneur means that you are your own boss with nobody to answer to and the self-realisation of growing something bigger from your own effort and personal investment:

“It’s good because you don’t really have nobody to answer to, as such [...] So, the advantage is that it’s not a nine-to-five with people telling you what to do...” (E5, couple, London, Barbados, social enterprise)

“The advantages [of being an entrepreneur] is that you see the business growing, you see that can lead you to something else bigger. You open up your mind that you see the ... you can have other opportunities. Maybe not within the same industry but elsewhere, and you know already how to run a business, you know what challenges you’re going to face and how you can overcome that.” (E3, male, London, Brazil, cleaning company)

### ***Religion and mobility trajectories***

The role of religion, faith and churches heavily feature in the migration decisions and trajectories of some of participants who allude to God and prayers as a key part of the process of moving to England and their wider trajectories. Praying for a successful migration to the UK is common in the narratives, where family members in the country of origin are also involved in these spiritual resources to form the aspirations to emigration and cushion any barriers that might occur. For example, one participant explains that prayer by family members was important in shaping their decision to migrate:

“I suppose so [religion was important when deciding to emigrate] because sometimes, you pray about – you say, I would like to go to England, although you say, nobody – my mother will take it, my grandmother, and they’ll put it before the church and they would pray about the decisions that you want to make [...] they’ll tell you they would seek God on your behalf, [...] mothers and fathers, all much older than you are, who took you underneath their arms and all this prayer for you.”(E5, couple, London, Barbados, social enterprise)

Secondary migration movements or return are also left on the hands of God, where the power and control of individual decision making seems to be mediated by their relationship with God. For example, E3 (male, London, Brazil, cleaning company) explains that:

“When we [as a family] had a discussion whether we want to go back to Brazil I mean none of us, none of my family has a solid answer whether we’re going to stay here or whether you’re going to go back and because we’re Christian we always ask God as well, you know, whether we should take the ... for God to lead us and give us a guidance whether we should maybe, you know, plan our future here or maybe one day eventually go back to our country.” (E3, male, London, Brazil, cleaning company)

Indeed, for most/several participants, engagement with their faith was recounted as integral to their entire migration trajectory, to the point that several attended services in the UK from very early in their migration cycle, finding support, a location for praying, and fellowship. At times, the church had already located from the country of origin.

“I knew this church X already when I was back home because I found out through an aunt who lives in Leicester. I asked her ‘can you find out good churches in the city X-location in Hampshire-?’ I then knew, I had a name and an address, and I think after 10 days in the UK I attended the first Sunday service” (E1, female, Hampshire, Zimbabwe, home care company)

“[After arrival] I went straight to the nurses’ home and we had a lot of girls from various West Indian islands that were Christian, so we used to meet in each other’s rooms and have our sing-songs, our prayer meetings, things like that... have fellowship” (E5, couple, London, Barbados, social enterprise)

For some participants, however, their relationship with the church and God shifted as a result of migration, a change manifested through changing denominations and/or through a strengthening of their existing faith. This is the case of one interviewee who conveys that being a good Christian for her was only possible if it was not in her country of origin given her perceived strictness of the practice there:

“I used to always love God, but I said to God ‘God, I want to become a Christian, but not in Jamaica’. That was strange, as a child I remember I whispered that prayer to God. I said, ‘God, I love you and I want to be a Christian, but not in Jamaica,’ because in Jamaica they were so strict, so I said, ‘Not in Jamaica’ (laughing). Yeah, that’s what I said to God, I need to come here [England]. And, then I did pray that, but then I remember getting a vision that the Lord is calling me, and I did not go, and God allowed something to happen to me and thereafter turn to God. And, I said to God, ‘If you help me, I will serve you until I die,’ and that is a promise that I made to God until today [...]Yeah, and from there God has given me visions, dreams, messages, a lot of things to serve him.” (E4, female, London, Jamaica, hairdresser salon)

These first contacts in the country of destination seem to be important to shape their further occupational strategies, as explored in the following sections.

## **Relationship with God shaping the business trajectory and experiences**

Becoming an entrepreneur is shaped and conditioned by the structural factors referred to in the first section of our findings (i.e. limited access to satisfactory employment, discrimination, and difficulties for social and occupational mobility). However, the role of revelations, dreams and/or prophecies intersect strongly in their narratives and provide, at times, the final reassurance that our participants needed to take the next step in their entrepreneurial trajectories. This transpires strongly in the interview with E4, owner of a hair salon in London, who explained thoroughly how a prophecy from the Lord forecasted her opening her own business:

“[I opened the business] because I got a prophecy from the Lord that I was going to have my own business. So, if you get a prophecy, you have to run with the prophecy. It was a minister. I went to a convention and he said, ‘Someone in here is doing a hair business,’ and when he explained where I was doing the hair, I knew it was me. And he said, ‘Prepare yourself, God is going to move you into your own business’. So, I just begin to start, because I used to pray about it and I know, because God had already shown me things, he used to show me, and I realised. So, you know, you have to just save for it. So, I saved for it, so when the time comes, bang I am there ready to do it. (E4, female, London, Jamaica, hairdresser salon)

Similarly, E1, owner of a home care company in Hampshire explains that a prophecy foretold that she was not meant to be under a boss but to manage others in order to ‘achieve great things’ which gave her enough strength and trust to quit her job as a nurse in the NHS and start her own care provision company.

“I was told in a prophecy in church that I was not meant to be ruled by others, that I was born to achieve great things and that in my current position I wasn’t able to. I saw the Lord speaking to me clearly because this is what I was suffering after years of trying to get promoted and seeing my white colleagues with less experience do very well for themselves. So... I saw it clearly then. I had the courage because God is now seeing this for me, and I started the process of setting this up.” (E1, female, Hampshire, Zimbabwe, home care company)

Participants also explained how other business-related decisions are mediated by dreams or prophecies, such as the location, who to hire, or the appropriate time of opening. For example, E4 from Jamaica with a hair salon explains how the exact location and subsequent move of her business to a different borough in London was based on God’s indications. E1 from Zimbabwe also explains how she visualised the premises where she eventually opened her agency in a dream ‘sent by God’ days before actually seeing the place with the letting agency.

“[I opened the business in this location because] He told me, He sent me that message, that he was going to put me right below my church. Until God blessed me, when things were right, then I could go out in big shops and [to open] in this area, X borough, He [God] told me [...] the Lord placed me right here (E4, female, London, Jamaica, hairdresser salon).

“God sent me this vision in a dream of a place, with high ceilings and a green area in the back. I have never been to this part of the city before. And then when the letting agent told me of this place, I came here and I recognised it from my dream. I knew then this was the right place for me.” (E1, female, Hampshire, Zimbabwe, home care company)

Prophecies and revelations are not the only ways in which God has indicated our interviewees they should set up their businesses. Several participants also referred to the inspiration of individual testimonies of fellow congregants given during church services. This is the case of E2, who owns a small construction company and explains how hearing a fellow congregant and compatriot giving a testimony illuminated his pathway:

“During a Sunday service... it was so powerful. I heard the story of X [member of same church], and he talked about the same struggles I had, issues with alcohol. All the things that were not good in my life before he also experienced. I had terrible jobs too but I was trying to work hard, did not have many skills. It was as if I was speaking there, like we were the same person. At that time, I felt God was speaking to me by giving me this inspiration from X. He then said how the moment he set up his company all changed: respect from his friends, his wife and children paid him more respect, admiration. So after the service I asked him and he helped me set up my business (E2, male, Hampshire, Poland, construction company)

As we can see with this particular case, it is difficult to disentangle the role of faith/church rituals with the experiences of exclusion in the labour market our interviewee has gone through, which shape the way in which faith and rituals reinforce aspirations.

The role of faith and religious values transcends the first steps of setting up the business. Our interviewees frequently narrate how having Christian values and a Christian life-style helps them to build relationships of trust with their customers and other stakeholders they have to deal with in their businesses. For example, E3 (Brazil, owns a cleaning company) explains that the spiritual life dictates the business life and how he proudly displays this affiliation with customers and suppliers:

“And I always tell them [customer/suppliers], you know, yeah, I’m a Christian. Because I ... I’m ... maybe my perception it might be wrong but I think when you say it’s because you are Christian then they expect the best of you [...] they will give you more trust [...] Those two [religion and business] they go together. In my business that’s when the spiritual life dictates, you know, you have to be honest, calm mind, so that’s the part side of it that the spiritual comes into it.” (E3, male, London, Brazil, cleaning company)

He continues by explaining how the values of being a good Christian are good for their working and business life since then you will be a more trustworthy entrepreneur, such as the example given about one of his workers breaking something at a customer’s office and how being honest about was conducive of a good business relationship:

“One of the things that ... my religion dictates that you should never lie. When it comes to business whatever happens I will never lie. So, I’ll give you an example, which it happened ... one of my employees, he broke something and he told me so maybe, I don’t know, if it was another businessman they try to hide the truth. Because he was working inside cleaning offices he could just give the person that advice perhaps just hide it somewhere and leave it, you know? And when they find out just say that wasn’t me. But that wasn’t the case, I just said to him inform the owner, “Look, it got broken, I don’t how much that is going to cost you but, you know, if I have to replace, I have to replace”. Then the lady [...] she was fine with

it. I wouldn't feel good on my, I don't know, maybe it's my conscience.” (E3, male, London, Brazil, cleaning company)

Whilst the Christian values they represent and exercise are important to build relationships of trust, our participants strongly emphasise that having faith and being religious has proven extremely important in navigating challenges in the business and life more broadly. For example, E4 (Jamaican, owner of a hairdresser salon in London) explains that black businesses are more vulnerable, and it is God protecting her business what is helping her to make it:

It is only [because of] God that the business goes, you know stronger. But, the thing about it, as was said, they always say that black business don't last, a black business closes down very quick [...] So, because I know, as a child of God I pray about it, so I push to do it to show others that it can happen. And, it's good because a lot of people congratulate me for doing this. And, some days you feel like you want to give up, but it makes you push because people come and say, 'That's very good,' so how can I try to give up now? Do you understand me? You have to make people see that a black person can do it. (E4, female, London, Jamaica, hairdresser salon)

Worries about finances and the businesses are also put in the hands of God as explained by two interviewees who explain that their worries are left in their prayers and in the Sunday service for God to solve, almost like a form of meditation that lets them focus on their present activities, in order to be more effective in actually carrying out their business activities.

“It helps me to keep doing my job, have a smile on my face, continue going... if I have problems with the bank or finances or I don't know if I will cover all my expenses this month my customers will notice, I will be moody, my family will be suffering too. So I leave my worries in church in my prayers and things eventually get better.” (E1, female, Hampshire, Zimbabwe, home care company)

“God still keeps us in the time of recession. Since I came to X borough, it is a strain. This is the one where, proper that the Lord said, 'I put you here'. That is the one that I was struggling, and that is why I always say to people, 'Whatever God gives you, the enemy always make you feel as if it is not God, and things aren't going to be better'. It is like you know, like you have got to struggle, but God has already told me that my finance does not belong to me. No, my finance is not my problem, God said my finance is his problem. So, now I am just sitting and relaxing.” (E4, female, London, Jamaica, hairdresser salon)

Their faith also helps them to deal with everyday difficulties and challenges at work, such as dealing with difficult customers, as conveyed by the owner of a catering business from Trinidad.

“[It is good for the business] because that sometimes you get difficult people and being a Christian you have to know how to be patient and you have to know how to control yourself and not let things get the better of you and not get too angry because somebody might offend you. Because as Christians even though somebody offend you must turn the other cheek, so it's learning patience [...] Being a Christian could help me in my entrepreneurship because as I say I have difficult people to deal with but as a Christian.” (E2, female, Trinidad and Tobago, catering business)

The influence of religiosity at the workplace for business owners takes a step further for some of them, when the customer-owner relationship allows for an extended conversation. For example, some of our interviewees explain how at the work place they also make the most of any chance of evangelising clients too, which would not be possible in paid employment. This aligns their business ventures to their religious values:

“Well, it’s been quite good because I always talk about my Christian life so I will talk about it to my clients, I will try and encourage them and sometimes I don’t know like my new clients I don’t know if they are Christians or not so when I start to talk about God or here I’ll play Christian music some of them will be like, oh, you know, I’m a Christian as well and you know we get to go round that Christian way of talking. Some of my clients they are living off the world, they go parties, they go this and that, and I try and encourage them, come to church, you know, just come and see how it is. So, it’s very good as well because I use my Christianity to also win souls for the kingdom and also talk with other Christian members as well and learn more because we share different views and my view mightn’t be your view or you might know this and I might not know this so it’s quite good working with, yeah.”(E2, female, Trinidad and Tobago, catering business)

“By doing people’s hair, that is good, I came here to share Christ with them. The Lord asked me to minister to people, I have people will come when they need me here, even sometimes working, I will stop. Somebody may be hurting, and it is so much, you know you can go in the kitchen, you can go and pray with them. Someone will come, people come to me and say to me that God has sent them here for me to pray with them, do you know what I mean? So, it is a lot, so now I was running from here, because I used to say, ‘God, I don’t like X borough,’ but then the Lord, I came out here and the Lord put me back, and he told me this is where he placed me. So, this is where my minister is at work.” (E4, female, London, Jamaica, hairdresser salon)

### **Church support, specific groups, networks: entrepreneurs’ voices**

Our interviewees explain in detail what church gives them in life, beyond the business activity, by referring to both the spiritual and life and work arenas. The list of how church contributes to their lives is very extensive and it goes from peace, cheer, prayer, fellowship, guidance, support, discipline, love, etc. They particularly focus on how church has helped them specifically as migrants in a new country, by providing fellowship, networks, relationships, counselling in their relationships, and how this support is specific and separable from the support you get from your partner, family or workmates.

To me, it is a place, because we are the church really, but going in there I find peace, I always find peace with God. But, sometimes when you have a situation or a problem, and you are going to church, and you cheer, and somebody prays with you, you come back all refreshed, you feel so much better, you feel uplifted. But, I enjoy going to church because I love to worship, and I love the fellowship, because to me it is my church family. So, it is like, I am excited when Sunday comes. (E4, female, London, Jamaica, hairdresser salon)

I think the role of the church in my life is guidance, support (participant 2). Discipline (participant 1) And fellowship (participant 2). (E5, couple, London, Barbados, social enterprise)

[It-church- provides] social networks, visits to the vulnerable [...] relationship counselling, family [...] relationships, parenting (E5, couple, London, Barbados, social enterprise)

It's a guidance really. You know? It's ... I would say it's a path that when one decides to take is very fulfilling because you understand that the spiritual life is very important if it's not one of the most important things on your life. And you can't rely on anyone. Spiritual life, you only can rely on you and you can't rely on your family. For you or your wife it's all about yourself and God. But also I find it very challenge. That's how I see it, I perceive God as my father so if I do something that I know I shouldn't be doing, displacing then, you know, I'm letting my father, my spiritual father down. So, that's how I see it. So, I don't think it is an easy path. Like those that decides to take it then has to take very serious. (E3, male, London, Brazil, cleaning company)

These resources provided by their churches are supplemented by specific support for their businesses. For example, most of the churches and entrepreneurs we engaged with mention that they have had some sort of finance training through the church.

[In church] they teach us finance, sometimes when they are teaching finance, how to manage your finances well. (E4, female, London, Jamaica, hairdresser salon)

[In church, they teach you] about the finance, like how you ... you have that budget and, you know, if there are any debts how you can set up a budget to make sure you pay all your... But it's more like individual coaching rather than a business that, even a business sense. (E3, male, London, Brazil, cleaning company)

Knowing how to budget is particularly important to run your business and your household finances in a foreign country but, in the narratives of our participants, this support moves beyond secular frameworks to encompass spiritual values and practices . For example, practising business prayers is common amongst our interviewees, with some churches offering these services in particular to business owners.

It helps. If you are having a problem you put it up on the WhatsApp, and answer prayer, or pray for family, do you know what I mean? It's good. Good support [...] and church sisters I am in two prayer groups. (E4, female, London, Jamaica, hairdresser salon)

Conversely, their entrepreneurial trajectories do not seem to have any involvement from mainstream business support providers. This is consistent with the findings of existing research/in the literature where migrant entrepreneurs are rarely connected and embedded into main circuits of support (Ram et al. 2017). Interviewees who have had their businesses for a few years recall how business support was available a few years ago and how in the last years this has decreased. For example, a couple from Barbados who run a social enterprise explain that *'[there was more support then than now] We had a lot of people that we were able to go*

*to and tell them our plans. They would push you in a direction [...] but they would help you.*' (E5, couple, London, Barbados, social enterprise).

Support in the form of capital, and loans is equally rare amongst our interviewees, who actually proudly display that they have not borrowed any money from financial institutions, and that their start-up funds generally come from family savings. This distrust or lack of access has led some to use community level rotating credit systems, such as our Jamaican participant who explains the role of *partner* to support her business:

I used partner [rotating credit scheme] from Jamaica, that's what buy my ticket and bring me to England. And, that is what helped me, when I came to this country, I tried to find someone that do *pardner*. So, I just go in *pardner* and save the *pardner*, and the Lord told me that I was going to have a business. (E4, female, London, Jamaica, hairdresser salon)

Many of our participants also referred to the crucial role of pastors for encouraging congregants to set up their own businesses. The pastors tend to be entrepreneurs themselves, so they have the legitimacy and authority to be role models for their community of potential entrepreneurs. The pastor transmits the benefits of being an entrepreneur from a narrative of liberation, to be financially independent, being able to employ others in your family and in your congregation, which resonates with the experiences of discrimination in the labour market and exclusion from social mobility that many of our interviewees have experienced. Pastors also encouraged members of the congregation to support business owners who are starting up by suggesting church fellows to use their business services if possible and help each other.

The pastor has his own business with his wife so I ask him when I am lost about how to run things. He is like a coach. But he has always said to us that we are putting our own limits, that we can do what we think we can always with a good heart and thinking of making things better for ourselves, our families and the church. He helps me also by praying with me for the business. (E2, male, Hampshire, Poland, construction company)

Well, the pastor is always telling us to open our own business, open our own business and we should always be the head, we should always be, you know, wanting to do more, yeah, because me as a Christian if I've got my own business and there is a member in the church that don't have a job I could always employ them. Even as a non-Christian if I'm the manager at work and I know that somebody's looking for a job even if they are Christian or non-Christian I can employ them, like say my Christian brother might have a friend that's looking for a job and I'm a manager I could employ them whereas if my Christian brother don't have a job and I'm the manager or I know that there is jobs going here there and everywhere I can always introduce it to them so yeah. (E2, female, Trinidad and Tobago, catering business)

He [my pastor] comes, he encourages, he prays, you know he tells me to do something else, bring another business. He tries to encourage you and tell you, 'You can do it'. And, when you feel like you want to give up, he will say, 'No'. You know, he is very encouraging". He always shares, and tell us you know, he talks to us about the business, and then he is one of those, he is always encouraging the church to support us. That's one other thing as well, always tell the church to support. And, I remember one day he said, 'If you lot all start supporting

Sister [Name 4] business, she would really credit. So, I find he really always encourages and supports it in that way. And, pray as well, he has supported a lot with prayers. (E4, female, London, Jamaica, hairdresser salon)

Mentoring also works in both directions, where some of our interviewees explain that they have also helped others.

I have given advice before how to open up a business. There's a lady in our church that her husband need to set up a business. Yeah, I told her how ... what she need to do but that was just one lady. (E3, male, London, Brazil, cleaning company)

The church networks also prove useful for congregants allowing them to publicise their businesses amongst the wider community, by having a supportive circle of friends who might use your premises when needed, and even the church and pastors become their own customers.

Some of them [customers] is through friends. They go to my church. And it's pretty much like referrals. Yeah, that's how I know them. (E3, male, London, Brazil, cleaning company)

Just recently one of the sisters in church she cooked for our junior pastor and he said to her oh this food is really good, go into business so when she did go into business I was trying to get her customers so I called on my friends and I messaged them I said, look, this lady in church is cooking, you guys should buy the food, the food is really nice, I've tried the food so I'm trying to get clients and customers in for her as well, yeah. (E2, female, Trinidad and Tobago, catering business)

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have explored some of the ways in which Christian migrants draw on their faith as well as institutional support, to navigate and address experiences in the labour market. Our findings contribute to and advance existing research in this area in two key ways. First, we draw attention to ways in which the retrenchment of the state in the last years have voided the sources of business support, and churches are filling these voids. Secondly, in this paper, we highlight how processes of social exclusion for these entrepreneurs from the mainstream world of work are cushioned by the services churches provide for their businesses and beyond.

Indeed, the narratives discussed in this paper reveal some of the ways in which Christian Pentecostal faith is aligned with the need to overcome the limitations found in the labour market. Becoming an entrepreneur is shaped and conditioned by the structural factors (i.e. limited access to satisfactory employment, discrimination, and difficulties to escalate the mobility ladder), which is consistent with previous findings (Ram et al. 2017). However, our research suggests that these structural factors intersect with revelations, dreams and/or prophecies which provide, in many cases, the final reassurance that our participants needed to take the next step in their entrepreneurial trajectories. Participants' narratives suggest that religious affiliation and values are also perceived as positive for working and business life since entrepreneurs are perceived as trustworthy which translates in a competitive advantage in the market. Financial concerns and other business challenges are navigated through their faith, and by what church gives them in their working lives. Finally, our participants assert that they are disconnected from business support agencies and where the little support they

have had comes from church and its networks providing access resources (e.g. knowledge exchange networks, capital, mentoring), inciting resilience when confronting business and life challenges, which take place within a particular context of dismantling of mainstream business support services and narratives of a hostile environment towards migrants in the last years.

Thus, moving beyond existing studies, our paper suggests that in order to fully understand the interconnections between Pentecostalism and entrepreneurship for migrants, closer attention needs to be paid to individual lives and trajectories that extend beyond merely a focus on religiosity or work as well as sensitivity to the wider structural factors that shape migrant entrepreneurs navigate. As such, we argue that religion – and in this case Pentecostalism – needs to be taken seriously by both scholars of entrepreneurship not just as a ‘residual category’ (Kong, 2010) but as something that has far wider implications beyond the realm of the enterprise. Relatedly, we contend that scholars of religion must take into account the ways in which entrepreneurial practices and experiences shape and are shaped by people’s faith-based practices and values. Finally, our research highlights the need for a more nuanced engagement with the relationship between entrepreneurship and work to acknowledge the everyday, embodied, practice of work by these migrant entrepreneurs.

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