

Contextualising ethnic minority entrepreneurship beyond the west

Insights from Belize and Cambodia

Ethnic minority entrepreneurship

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Abstract

Purpose – Literature on immigrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship almost exclusively focusses on the west, while neglecting other world regions. This neglect is problematic not only because international migration is on the rise outside the west, but also because it reveals an implicit ethnocentrism and creates particular presumptions about the nature of ethnic minority entrepreneurship that may not be as universally valid as is often presumed. The purpose of this paper is to examine ethnic minority entrepreneurship in non-western contexts to critically assess two of these presumptions, namely that it occurs in the economic margins and within clear ethnic community boundaries.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors draw on academic literature (including the authors' own) to develop two case descriptions of ethnic minority entrepreneurship outside the west: the Mennonites in Belize and the Chinese in Cambodia. For each case, the authors describe the historic entrepreneurial trajectory, i.e. the historical emergence of entrepreneurship in light of relevant community and society contexts.

Findings – The two cases reveal that, in contrast to characterisations of ethnic minority entrepreneurship in the west, the Mennonites in Belize and the Chinese in Cambodia have come to comprise the economic upper class, and their business activities are not confined to ethnic community boundaries.

Originality/value – The paper is the first to elaborate the importance of studying ethnic minority entrepreneurship outside the west, both as an aim in itself and as a catalyst to work towards a more neutral framework.

Keywords Cambodia, Context, Chinese, Ethnic minority entrepreneurship, Belize, Mennonites

Paper type General review

Introduction

The manner in which contextual factors enable and constrain entrepreneurship is increasingly appreciated (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017). The earnest consideration of context – which broadly refers to “the set of circumstances in which phenomena (e.g. events, processes or entities) are situated” (Griffin, 2007, p. 860) – entails situating the phenomenon of entrepreneurship within society and its spheres of interaction, and to do so with a general historical awareness (Watson, 2013). Scholars adhering to a social sciences view frequently deploy the notion of context to transcend the methodological individualism that stems from the dominance of economic and psychological approaches to studying entrepreneurship (Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson, 2007). Arguably, accounts of immigrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship pioneered the context-sensitive study of entrepreneurship. After all, these accounts revealed variations in rates of self-employment and economic specialisation among different migrant groups in society, and these variations can neither be explained by personality traits nor by the availability of economic opportunities alone (Light, 2004; Pécou, 2000).

Thinking about the context of immigrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship has become increasingly sophisticated. Early studies, most of which on ethnic minorities in the USA,



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thought of context in terms of ethnic community culture, networks and resources (e.g. Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990; Sanders and Nee, 1987). It was argued that migrants and their descendants rely on “bounded solidarity” and “enforceable trust” within their family and community to secure capital, labour, supply and consumer markets (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993, pp. 1324-1325), spurring notions of ethnic economies and enclaves (Zhou, 2004). Since the turn of the millennium, predominantly European approaches have criticised the tendency to overemphasise the ethnic community context to the neglect of the host society context (Rath, 2000). Proponents of the “mixed embeddedness” perspective have convincingly argued that ethnic minority business activities not only develop from ethnic community resources, but also depend on the host society’s regulatory framework and market structure (Kloosterman *et al.*, 1999; Ram *et al.*, 2008, 2017).

In one respect, however, the contextualisation of minority entrepreneurship continues to fall short: studies are almost exclusively conducted in Northern America, Western Europe and Australia (Aliaga-Isla and Rialp, 2013; Dheer, 2018). We argue that the paucity of research in countries outside the west represents a lacuna for at least three reasons. First, international migration is on the rise outside the west, hence also prompting immigrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship (Aliaga-Isla and Rialp, 2013; Bosiakoh, 2017). Second, the neglect of non-western contexts reveals an implicit ethnocentrism, setting apart the west from the “rest” (Nederveen Pieterse, 2003; Verduijn and Essers, 2013). Third, if context matters for entrepreneurship, then it follows that the particularities of the western context create particular presumptions about the nature of ethnic minority entrepreneurship that may not be as universally valid as is often presumed. The objective of this paper, therefore, is to examine ethnic minority entrepreneurship in non-western contexts to critically assess these presumptions.

In the next section, we outline the western bias in ethnic minority entrepreneurship studies in more detail. Subsequently, in an effort to work towards more contextual heterogeneity, we introduce two contrasting cases: one on ethnic Mennonite entrepreneurship in Belize and the other on ethnic Chinese entrepreneurship in Cambodia. We draw on existing academic literature, including our own, to develop descriptive accounts of these two minorities, highlighting how their business activities emerged over time and within their communal and societal contexts. In the discussion section, we draw on these accounts to critically assess two persistent presumptions about the nature of ethnic minority entrepreneurship. First, whereas minority entrepreneurship is generally associated with economic marginality, our cases show that ethnic minorities may also come to comprise the economic upper class. Second, whereas minority entrepreneurship is generally considered to take place within clear ethnic community boundaries, our cases instead reveal ambiguous ethnic boundaries by way of internal community differentiation and the intersection of ethnic and mainstream economies. Ultimately, we show that more contextual heterogeneity – going beyond the persistent empirical focus on the west – has the potential to foster new insights on the manifestations of ethnic minority entrepreneurship and work towards a “more neutral conceptual framework” (Engelen, 2001, p. 203).

Literature review: the western bias in ethnic minority entrepreneurship studies

It has been repeatedly pointed out that research on immigrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship is rather uniform in its empirical focus. Most studies focus on established ethnic minorities in the west, including for example Chinese, Cubans and Koreans in the USA or Turks and Indians in Europe. Studies on more recently arrived migrants, who tend to be more differentiated in terms of country of origin, immigration status, labour market experiences and age and gender profiles (Vertovec, 2007), are still scarce (for exceptions, see Jones *et al.*, 2014; Kloosterman *et al.*, 2016; Ram *et al.*, 2008; Sepulveda *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, while research into the differences among communities on the national level is prominent (Danes *et al.*, 2008), few studies adopt an international comparative perspective (Ram *et al.*, 2017; Rath, 2000). Most striking, however, is that almost all studies are conducted in urban

settings in North America (the USA and Canada), Oceania (Australia and New Zealand) and Europe (especially the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries), while research on ethnic minority entrepreneurship outside the west is lacking (Aliaga-Isla and Rialp, 2013; Bosiakoh, 2017; Dheer, 2018; Verduijn and Essers, 2013). For at least three reasons, this empirical bias cannot be glossed over easily.

First, international migration outside the west – sometimes labelled “South-South migration” (Bosiakoh, 2017, p. 144) – is on the rise, and hence also is migrant entrepreneurship outside the west. While countries in the west still host more international migrants as percentage of the population, more international migrants now live in Asia (80m) than in Europe (78m), and “less developed regions” host some 112m out of the total of 258m international migrants worldwide (United Nations, 2017). Especially on a regional level, greater disparities between countries lead people to migrate to countries with better opportunities, such as Thailand, South Africa and Turkey. Also, while many countries outside the west have adopted more liberal economic regimes attracting migrants and fostering entrepreneurship (Wadhwa *et al.*, 2011), western migration regimes have shifted to more protectionist policies that curb the inflow of migrants since the turn of the millennium, when economic recession swept across the west (Ybarra *et al.*, 2016). In all, as Aliaga-Isla and Rialp (2013, p. 835) argue, “the panorama of immigration is changing”, which “is bringing new opportunities for researching new contexts” of immigrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship (cf. Nazareno *et al.*, 2018).

Second, the neglect of ethnic minority entrepreneurship outside the west reveals a questionable scholarly division of labour between the study of the west and the study of the “rest”. Surely, studies on immigrant and ethnic minority business outside the west exist. These for example consider Indians in China (Cheuk, 2016) or in Trinidad (Nevadomsky, 1983), Nigerians in Ghana (Bosiakoh, 2017) and Africans in Japan (Schans, 2012). However, these studies tend to be published in anthropology and especially in area studies journals and book series, and hence go largely unnoticed by scholarship on minority entrepreneurs in the west, which is based in ethnicity, migration, sociology and entrepreneurship journals. Indeed, there are very few studies on immigrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship outside the west published in entrepreneurship journals, although there are exceptions (e.g. Koning and Verver, 2013; Khosa and Kalitanyi, 2015), and publications exist on the related phenomenon of diaspora and returnee entrepreneurship outside the west (e.g. Elo, 2016; Nkongolo-Bakenda and Chrysostome, 2013). Yet, in a recent review, Dheer (2018) did not find any study that focusses on immigrant entrepreneurship in emerging economies. This scholarly division of labour inheres an implicit ethnocentrism that cannot be the basis of scholarly inquiry (Nederveen Pieterse, 2003; Verduijn and Essers, 2013) and, moreover, may foster understandings of immigrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship that are skewed to the west. This latter point has been made with respect to other scholarly fields as well. Family business studies, for example, is predicated on the idea of the nuclear family-run business, while in many contexts, especially outside the west, relatives outside the nuclear family play an important role in business (e.g. Verver and Koning, 2018). Writing on international relations, Acharya (2014) argues that the discipline “does not reflect the voices, experiences, knowledge claims, and contributions of the vast majority of the societies and states in the world” (p. 647). His claim that a more global orientation is needed that “transcends the divide between the West and the Rest” (Acharya, 2014, p. 647) certainly applies to ethnic minority entrepreneurship studies as well.

Third, and stemming from this scholarly division, there are vast contextual differences between western and non-western settings that may greatly affect the nature or degree of ethnic minority entrepreneurship, but that are currently overlooked. Of course, important differences exist within the west, especially between the welfare states of continental Europe and the more neoliberal model in the English-speaking countries (Light, 2004; Rath, 2000). Yet, some contextual factors are more or less shared among western countries, but not globally.

These include the presence of advanced, industrialised economies within which ethnic minorities have to carve out entrepreneurial niches, as well as generally well-educated native populations with whom they have to compete (Dheer, 2018; Rath, 2000). Other important contextual factors that affect ethnic minority entrepreneurs include relatively strong state, legal and financial institutions, but also the purported “backlash against multiculturalism” and often rigid “us vs them” discourses that prevail in much western political and societal debates since the turn of the millennium. If context matters for entrepreneurship, then it follows that these and other contextual factors have brought about particular presumptions about the nature of minority entrepreneurship that may not be as universally valid as is often presumed. In this paper we critically address two of such presumptions.

The types of business activities undertaken by ethnic minority entrepreneurs, first, are associated with a relatively marginal position in the economy. Studies show that ethnic minority entrepreneurs tend to concentrate in underserved or impoverished urban areas, and mainly engage in business activities neglected by ethnic majority firms, such as all-night convenient stores or clothing sweatshops, or tap into ethnic markets (Dheer, 2018; Nazareno *et al.*, 2018). Most ethnic minorities cannot compete with natives in high-growth, investment and technology intensive sectors, and therefore resort to more peripheral retail and service niches characterised by low entry barriers, low profits, low economies of scale and high labour intensity (e.g. Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990; Barrett *et al.*, 2002). These niches allow them to capitalise on their competitive advantages, including their willingness to settle for small profit margins, do tedious jobs, work long hours and use low-paid and informal family or co-ethnic labour (e.g. Kloosterman *et al.*, 1999). At the same time, concentration in these niches reflects the vulnerability of ethnic minority businesses, as does the observation that the strict enforcement of government regulations, for example pertaining to licences, environmental policy or undocumented workers, tends to present challenges for their survival (e.g. Rosales, 2013). Indeed, many prominent notions within the literature can be considered variations on this theme of marginality. For example, ethnic minority entrepreneurs are often considered “necessity entrepreneurs” who are “pushed” into self-employment because they cannot compete with ethnic majority populations on the job market due to discrimination, language barriers or a lack of educational or occupational credentials (Abada *et al.*, 2014; Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990). Rarely are they portrayed as “opportunity entrepreneurs” who, instead, are “pulled” by the desire to exploit an innovative business idea. These and other notions reinforce the idea that, by and large, ethnic minority entrepreneurship is an economically marginal phenomenon found at the “lower end of the market” (Kloosterman *et al.*, 1999, p. 255).

A second and related presumption is that ethnic minority entrepreneurship takes place within clear ethnic community boundaries. Typically, literature highlights how migrants and their descendants draw on their ethnic community resources, culture and networks to establish businesses and thereby, in the aggregate, erect ethnic economies, defined as “any ethnic or immigrant’s self-employed group, its employers, their co-ethnic employees, and their unpaid family workers” (Light and Gold, 2000, p. 3). In the face of exclusion and disadvantage in the host society, or stemming from a desire to preserve their own ways, these ethnic economies offer a sense of security for minority members (Light, 2004). Within ethnic economies, solidarity exists between co-ethnics and family members, and reciprocal and trust-based relationships are formed among them to secure credit, labour or supply (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993). Other prominent concepts, including ethnic enclaves and ethnic niches, bear close resemblance to the ethnic economy concept: ethnic enclaves refer to the clustering of co-ethnic business owners, employees and customers in particular urban areas, while ethnic niches instead indicate the predisposition towards certain types of economic activity or sectors. Mirroring ethnic economy, enclave and niche frameworks, which have decided the contours of ethnic entrepreneurship literature (Zhou, 2004), ethnic communities are typically taken as the units of analysis in research. Most scholars inquire

into community characteristics – e.g. rates of self-employment, network endowments, concentration in niches, economic performance – or country-level differences between ethnic communities along these parameters (Aliaga-Isla and Rialp, 2013; Danes *et al.*, 2008; Pécoud, 2000; Rath, 2000). As a result, ethnic communities tend to be portrayed as internally homogenous and externally bounded, and considered relatively unproblematic units of analysis for explaining ethnic minority entrepreneurship.

In line with the changing nature of immigrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship in the west, recent literature increasingly questions economic marginality and ethnic community as its defining characteristics. We will touch upon this critical literature in the discussion section. In the ensuing sections, we describe ethnic minority entrepreneurship in two non-western contexts – Belize and Cambodia – thereby showing that when migrants and their descendants face different historical, communal and societal predicaments, entrepreneurship also takes on different forms. In the discussion section, we tease out the insights of our two cases *vis-à-vis* the two presumptions described above.

Approach: two cases of ethnic minority entrepreneurship outside the west

Below, we present two case descriptions of ethnic minority entrepreneurship outside the west based on academic literature, including our own work on the Mennonites in Belize (by the third author) and the Chinese in Cambodia (by the first author). Although the first and third authors have conducted fieldwork among the two ethnic minorities, we do not present primary data, but instead draw on existing literature to provide a more composite picture of the historical and contemporary dynamics of entrepreneurship. For each of these two minorities, in the case descriptions we trace what might best be labelled their “historic entrepreneurial trajectory”, teasing out temporal and sociocultural dimensions relevant to entrepreneurship. On the one hand, we describe how their entrepreneurial trajectories unfold in parallel with trajectories of migration and settlement over time. The case descriptions thus work towards historical contextualisation, meaning “interpretation of past event(s) in relationship to their time and place, in ways that address a question or problem that arises in the present” (Wadhvani, 2016, p. 66). On the other hand, we examine the ways in which these entrepreneurial trajectories are embedded in ethnic community and wider society contexts, in accordance with the basic premise of the mixed embeddedness perspective (Kloosterman *et al.*, 1999). Taken together, the following question guides the development of the two case descriptions: How, over time, have the Mennonites in Belize and the Chinese in Cambodia manoeuvred their societal and communal contexts while engaging in entrepreneurship?

A brief explanation of the terminology used is necessary at this point (cf. Brzozowski *et al.*, 2014). Whereas “immigrant entrepreneurship” concerns first-generation migrants who were born in another country (Aliaga-Isla and Rialp, 2013), “ethnic minority entrepreneurship” refers to collectives of migrants and their descendants who “share a common origin and culture” and nurture “a set of connections and regular patterns of interaction” (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990, p. 112). The two cases that we develop below comprise established Mennonite and Chinese minorities in Belize and Cambodia, respectively, which include very few first-generation migrants, and hence we use the term ethnic minority entrepreneurship to describe them. In discussing the literature, however, it is hard to set apart both terms (cf. Brzozowski *et al.*, 2014). Immigrant entrepreneurship is sometimes considered a subset of ethnic minority entrepreneurship (e.g. Volery, 2007), while, vice versa, “the (implicit) approach” of many other studies is to consider both migrants and their descendants as immigrant entrepreneurs (Ram *et al.*, 2017, p. 5). While our focus is on ethnic minority entrepreneurship, we therefore relate our cases to literature on immigrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship more broadly (as is also clear in the literature review above).

The merit of presenting case descriptions to critically examine existing presumptions about ethnic minority entrepreneurship is twofold. First, by developing two case descriptions, we

provide rich and varied insights into minority entrepreneurship outside the west, and hence speak to the general lack of knowledge on this phenomenon. As Cunningham (1997) argues, “a variety of cases can provide a better demonstration of a theory or a set of concepts” (p. 405), and thus the two cases allow us to reflect on the manifestations of minority entrepreneurship in a more comprehensive manner than a single case would. The fact that we elaborate contrasting cases – for example in terms of ethnic and religious background, geographical area and economic activities – only means an even more comprehensive depiction of what ethnic minority entrepreneurship outside the west can entail. Second, case descriptions typically explore “a significant phenomenon under rare, unique or extreme circumstances” (De Massis and Kotlar, 2014, p. 18), and the contextual detail provided renders case descriptions especially suitable as stepping-stones for reflecting on and possibly extending existing concepts. In that sense, the Belizean and Cambodian cases are the result of purposeful, “theoretical sampling” stemming from our aspiration to extend or assess an existing concept, namely ethnic minority entrepreneurship (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

In providing the two case descriptions below, we highlight those dynamics that set apart our cases from ethnic minority entrepreneurship literature on the west. First, for both cases we show that, while minority entrepreneurship is associated with economic marginality, ethnic minorities may also come to comprise the economic upper class. Second, while ethnic minority entrepreneurship is generally considered to take place within clear ethnic community boundaries, our cases instead reveal ambiguous ethnic boundaries. More specifically, in the case of the Mennonites in Belize ambiguous ethnic boundaries take the form of extensive differentiation within the community, while for the Chinese in Cambodia this is witnessed in the highly entwined nature of ethnic and mainstream economies. The ensuing case descriptions depict how this came about.

Case 1: ethnic Mennonite entrepreneurship in Belize

The historic entrepreneurial trajectory of Belizean Mennonites has its roots in the reformation of sixteenth-century Western Europe. The name Mennonite derives from Menno Simons, a religious leader who wrote *Foundation of Christian Doctrine* (1539). Menno Simons developed an alternative interpretation of the Scripture stipulating that Christians are not to be baptised by birth, but should choose to be baptised when they become adults. This Anabaptist practice was outlawed because it was at odds with religious and state authorities’ control. As a result Mennonites suffered persecution and discrimination throughout Europe. The attempts of European states to assimilate Mennonites led to several waves of migration; first to Prussia and Russia, and from the eighteenth century to North America (Loewen, 1993). Wherever they went, Mennonites mainly ventured into agriculture, gradually expanding into agribusiness and sometimes relying on income from carpentry or construction. When the secular state of Canada obliged Mennonites to send their children to school, some Mennonites again migrated further south to Mexico, with others continuing to the country of Belize in 1958 (Kraybill, 2010).

Belize is a multi-ethnic former British colony comprised of, amongst others, Maya, Chinese, Creole, Mestizo, Garifuna and East Indian ethnic groups. Some 12,000 Mennonites live in Belize, out of a total population of 320,000. While the lingua franca is English, most Belizeans also communicate in Spanish or Creole; in addition, most Mennonites speak Low German (Statistical Institute of Belize, 2013). Belizean authorities welcomed the Mennonites in 1958 especially because the Belizean economy was highly dependent on imports, while the Mennonites brought with them skills that could develop an internal market (Roessingh and Boersma, 2011; Roessingh and Schoonderwoerd, 2005). From the outset, Mennonites occupied the economic niches they had occupied before, engaging in cultivating cash crops, such as rice, papayas, corn, sorghum and potatoes, producing daily necessities such as dairy and meat and running feed mills. The Mennonites also make furniture, light machinery, and tools and play an important role in the construction sector (Penner *et al.*, 2008).

Mennonite presence since their entry in Belize in 1958 is characterised by locally isolated settlements as well as prominent contributors to the Belizean economy. On the one hand, they have taken up vital roles in the Belizean economy. Mennonite entrepreneurs deliver key products for the internal market, expand local job markets, unlock transnational networks that enable Belize to develop an export market and perform contracts with the government, for example to construct parts of the road network of Belize. On the other hand, as always, Mennonites retained their independence from state institutions by living in isolated “colonies” (settlements), arranging their own communal organisation and foregoing registration in state-run systems such as healthcare and education (Roessingh and Plasil, 2009). The relationship between the Mennonites and Belizean state authorities thus amounts to a tacit agreement where the Mennonites retain their autonomy in exchange for their contribution to Belizean society. In fact, such an agreement was indeed made between the authorities of Belize – then called British Honduras – and the first settlers to arrive in the country. It stated rights and privileges for Mennonites to run their own churches and schools, “the right to administer and invest the estate of their own people [...] according to their own rules and regulations”, and to be exempt from the social security system (Roessingh and Boersma, 2011, p. 176). In return, settlers were to “bring into British Honduras capital investment in cash and kind amounting to five hundred thousand dollar more or less British Honduras currency [and] produce food not only for themselves but also for the local consumption and for export market” (Roessingh and Boersma, 2011, p. 177). Owing to this agreement Mennonites were able to enter the country, benefiting from the rights and privileges established in 1958.

The diverse contributions of Mennonite entrepreneurs to the Belizean economy that developed since 1958 reflect the significant internal differentiation within the Mennonite ethnicity. This internal differentiation is a result of debates existing within and between different Mennonites communities about the interpretation of the religious scripture and its translation into the values upheld by the communities. The debates often revolve around the notion of “worldliness”. Worldliness connotes impurity and being morally compromised by the use of advanced technologies, fashionable dress, habits such as smoking and drinking alcohol and other profane or “worldly” activities. Within Mennonite communities, which are organised around a church, worldliness is kept at bay by a religious-moral order that is represented by the *Älteste* (eldest) and *Prediger* (preachers) (Kraybill, 2010; Loewen, 1993). These religious authorities promote and enforce adherence to the *Ordnung*, which translates as regulation or discipline, and contains the particular interpretation of scripture as applied to everyday life of the community members (Kraybill, 2010). Some of these rules affect business life considerably, such as when there are limits or prohibitions on the use of computers or even electricity, the amount of working days during the week, the driving of cars or trucks, the use of rubber wheels on tractors, venturing outside the settlement or using advanced agriculture machinery such as combines and crop dusting aircrafts (Roessingh and Plasil, 2009; Ryman, 2003). Because of such restrictions, Mennonite entrepreneurs may experience severe obstacles in the growth of their business, and their ability to produce and distribute their produce (Ryman, 2003).

Because of the internal debates about religious-moral codes, the Mennonites in Belize are far from a homogeneous group. They are scattered across different settlements throughout the country and adhere to different churches representing different communities that each have their particular codes of conduct. Some communities strictly adhere to a formalised *Ordnung* and lead very isolated lives, while the *Ordnung* as such has become a more informal affair in other communities where members are able to use modern technologies (Roessingh and Plasil, 2009). Indeed, the various interpretations of the scripture that developed across several communities over several decades make that Mennonite identity itself is sometimes contested. A conservative Mennonite might dispute the liberal ways of life of more progressively oriented Mennonites and hence contest the label Mennonite for more progressive Mennonites (Roessingh, 2013).

From the few, initial settlements in 1958, subsequent differentiation between Mennonite settlements evolves. First, land shortage, which tends to become particularly acute considering the religiously inspired intention to raise many offspring, causes new generations to expand beyond the original settlement grounds. Mennonites are not always able to buy state land adjacent to existing settlement lands and therefore have had to move elsewhere in the country (Roessingh and Bovenberg, 2018; Roessingh and Smits, 2010). Second, schisms sometimes develop in communities revolving around different interpretations of the scripture and the implications for the conduct of everyday life and business (Roessingh and Schoonderwoerd, 2005). Disagreements between members of the community can arise over time, for example over interaction with outsiders or the use of electricity or modern equipment. Sometimes more conservative voices prevail and those challenging the *Ordnung* are *ausgeschlossen* (excommunicated); at other times, progressive voices become dominant and a group of more conservative members separates from the community to establish a new community in a settlement elsewhere. Notably, entrepreneurs who in search of business expansion or differentiation seek to use more modern technologies or venture outside the settlement may drive the gradual loosening of religiously inspired restrictions, possibly to the annoyance of more conservative community members.

As a result of the differentiation inherent to their historic trajectory, some Mennonites have become part of the Belizean economic upper class, while others – out of choice – remain isolated, rural and marginal. There are currently four major religious communities (Old Colony, *Kleine Gemeinde*, Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church (EMMC) and the Old Order Hoover Mennonites), scattered over 12 settlements across Belize. In a more conservative settlement such as Springfield, economic activity might be limited to subsistence farming and economic transactions almost exclusively occur between members of the community. The community is largely self-sustaining, evidenced by an internal trading system where community members can lend money during the start-up phase of their business. Interactions with outsiders are kept to a minimum (Roessingh, 2013). The marginal trade occurring with outsiders concerns selling produce such as fruits at the bi-weekly communal market within the settlement (Roessingh and Bovenberg, 2018). As such, communities such as Springfield represent geographically bounded ethnic enclaves characterised by highly localised economies and little specialisation. These communities remain impoverished, travel on rudimentary roads and some people may only speak Low German.

At the other end of the spectrum more progressive communities, such as those in Spanish Lookout and Blue Creek, expanded to include large, sometimes internationally oriented businesses that can be considered a part of Belize's economic upper class. Here, businesses run by Mennonites, owing in part to their transnational networks, developed specialised production processes employing Mennonites as well as non-Mennonite Belizeans living in nearby towns (Penner *et al.*, 2008; Roessingh and Boersma, 2011). Businesses in Spanish Lookout include construction firms, feed mills, restaurants and shopping malls. Furthermore, rather than subsistence farming, Spanish Lookout farmers engage in cash crop cultivation, such as rice and potatoes, destined for the wider Belizean market, and businesses from Spanish Lookout are the primary source of poultry in Belize (Penner *et al.*, 2008; Roessingh and Boersma, 2011; Roessingh and Schoonderwoerd, 2005). Businesses make use of modern technologies such as computers, internet, electricity generators, cars and various machinery to cool dairy, provide air conditioning, slaughter cattle and process meat (Penner *et al.*, 2008). The roads from and to Spanish Lookout are in better condition than the average road network of Belize and the town is frequently visited by non-Mennonite Belizeans who are attracted to do shopping or look for work (Penner *et al.*, 2008). Spanish Lookout has a reputation for value-for-money products and has outposts in other cities to access a bigger market (Roessingh and Boersma, 2011; Roessingh and Schoonderwoerd, 2005).

In contrast to Spanish Lookout, the settlement of Blue Creek is more isolated geographically. However, Blue Creek residents use their strong ties within the EMMC, which is based in

North America. In fact, the progressive EMMC came to Belize from Canada to resolve a schism between Mennonites in Blue Creek, who were first members of the more conservative Old Colony church. Ultimately, the EMMC came to dominate Blue Creek, while those who remained loyal to the Old Colony church founded a new settlement: Shipyard. Today, as a result of the historical connection, many Mennonites from Blue Creek travel back and forth between Canada and Belize have family members in both countries, and hold dual Belizean and Canadian citizenship. This transnational EMMC network has enabled the expansion of business ventures. For example, Blue Creek's supermarket or two large construction companies import products and machinery from North America that is otherwise unavailable. In doing so, these businesses rely on family members in Canada and the USA, or for example on connections established during EMMC religious conferences that are sometimes held in Winnipeg, Canada. The EMMC transnational connection is also visible in the cultivation of cash crops. Take the case of a large papaya business, which was established when an inhabitant of Blue Creek partnered with EMMC Mennonites from Manitoba, Canada, and Arkansas, the USA. These partners from North America use their connections there for the benefit of the business, for example by hiring a fruit expert to advise about the cultivation process or to arrange access for their papayas to the North American market (Roessingh and Smits, 2010).

While there is debate and disagreement about religious-moral codes between the conservative and more progressive Mennonite entrepreneurs, there is also solidarity and collaboration between them. To stick with the example of the papaya business: although they employ workers from various ethnicities, preference is given to Mennonites from conservative settlements like Indian Creek (Roessingh and Smits, 2010). In times such as when a bad farming year leaves the community impoverished, Indian Creek Mennonites may come to work for the company at Blue Creek. The company management is eager to solicit this labour because they trust their co-ethnics more than others and consider Indian Creek Mennonites hardworking and reliable. Thus, overall the Mennonite presence in Belize is characterised by a differentiated, yet also somewhat cohering spectrum of intentionally marginal niches to an economically successful business class.

Case 2: ethnic Chinese entrepreneurship in Cambodia

The historic trajectory of Chinese entrepreneurship in Cambodia begins as a diversified, sometimes marginalised, even persecuted presence, that over the course of more than 700 years develops into a dominant economic presence that is more ambiguously defined. Throughout the centuries, poverty and political turmoil in Southern China pushed the Chinese to look for novel opportunities abroad, while the promise of trading partnerships and the demand for Chinese labour pulled them to Southeast Asia (Kuhn, 2008). On arrival, Chinese migrants were absorbed in dialect communities, representing different dialect groups from South China, of which Cambodia hosts five, namely Cantonese, Hokkien, Teochiu, Hainanese and Hakka. A symbiosis emerged between the majority Khmer, who were largely agrarian, and Chinese traders and merchants in the cities, also reflecting a contrast between the mobility of the Chinese diaspora and the more localised, village-based character of Khmer traditional society. Khmer kings handed the Chinese monopolies, for example in alcohol and fishing, and preferred they arrange the maritime trade, not only because of their extensive regional networks, but also because, as outsiders to the local hierarchy, the accumulation of wealth in their hands did not pose a political threat (Kuhn, 2008; Willmott, 1967).

Under French colonial rule (1863–1953) most Chinese entered Cambodia, sometimes via destinations such as Singapore or Bangkok and often facilitated by Chinese merchants already established in Southeast Asia (Kuhn, 2008). In the capital Phnom Penh, the colonial administration promoted occupational and spatial separation of the Khmer, Chinese and Vietnamese residents. The French organised the Chinese through *congrégations* that represented the five dialect groups. The *congrégations* formed the cornerstone for business

relationships, marriage arrangements and cultural expression, and were used by the French for surveillance and taxation (Edwards, 2007; Muller, 2006; Cooke, 2007; Willmott, 1998). The French depended on the Chinese for cheap labour and to run plantations and collect revenue, and essentially used the Chinese and Vietnamese as economic and bureaucratic middlemen, respectively (Edwards, 2007). The Chinese business community wielded considerable economic power, as the different dialect groups were active in most urban economic niches as well as extensively involved in the cultivation of cash crops. The Cantonese, for example, dominated various trades in the capital Phnom Penh, including the rice and salt trade (Willmott, 2012). They allied with fellow Cantonese in the Vietnamese twin-city of Saigon-Cholon, which was the political and economic centre of French Indochina, in co-opting these trades. For another example, already before French colonisation the Hainanese community had settled in the coastal province of Kampot, where they had established large pepper plantations with the capacity to export pepper to China and Europe. To the frustration of the French, Chinese businesspeople allied with the Khmer throne, which was still the legitimate power in the eyes of most Cambodians. To curb Chinese economic influence, the French implemented regulation that banned the Chinese from landownership (i.e. cultivating cash crops and mining) and certain occupations, effectively driving them into the tertiary sector, and levied special tax on the Chinese (Willmott, 1967).

After 1953, when Cambodia gained independence and King Sihanouk came to power, Chinese commercial dominance persisted, presenting “a near impenetrable wall” (Gottesman, 2003, p. 19). William Willmott (1967) estimated that some 400,000 Chinese lived in Cambodia in the early 1960s. In the countryside, Chinese were engaged in two kinds of activities. Some grew cash crops – most notably pepper and vegetables – to sell at the local or international market. Others established themselves in villages as middlemen for Khmer peasants, buying surplus rice to sell to urban millers, providing urban commodities at the local level, and lending peasants money (Willmott, 1981). Most ethnic Chinese, however, lived in the cities, especially in Phnom Penh. Then as much as today, most urban Chinese were not particularly wealthy, but owned family-run shops, working as shoemaker, carpenter, dentist, cinema owner, barber or baker (Muller, 2006). In Phnom Penh, they established niches along dialect lines, with the Hainanese for example concentrated in hotel and catering and the Cantonese in carpentry and mechanics. A smaller group of urban businesspeople consisted of wealthy business magnates that were either active in trade or engaged in revenue farming (Muller, 2006; Willmott, 1967). The latter was especially profitable, and entailed an arrangement that enabled the monarchy to subcontract all kinds of business niches – e.g. fisheries, alcohol, bananas, pawning, lottery and customs – to businesspeople at an annual fee (Cooke, 2007). Almost exclusively, these contracts came into the hands of strategically positioned ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs, who entertained strong connections to the Khmer throne, had access to extensive regional kinship networks to round up capital and credit (Muller, 2006), and possessed the local connections necessary to erect a pyramid system of sub-farmers and agents – who were, again, mostly ethnic Chinese – in order to manage the revenue farming operations. At some point, the countrywide revenue farming operations of opium and gambling alone accounted for 25 per cent of the King’s revenue (Cooke, 2007).

While the wealth and influence of the Chinese in Cambodia increased, with at least 80 per cent in business families (Willmott, 1967), the community also became more multiform in the post-colonial period. As a result of intermarriage between Chinese and Khmer, which was common practice, a category of “Sino-Khmer” (people of mixed Chinese–Cambodian descent) came to exist next to “Sino-Cambodians” (Cambodian citizens of full Chinese descent) (Willmott, 1967, p. xii). Interestingly, Phnom Penh’s upper class – positioned just below the monarchy – consisted of a largely Sino-Cambodian economic upper class and a political elite in which many Sino-Khmer were active. These two categories of ethnic Chinese were closely connected through kinship, friendship and ethnic solidarity, and gained ground over the

leadership of the traditional *congrégation* (Willmott, 1967). In fact, gradually the dialect-based communities became obsolete, first because the *congrégations* collapsed and were replaced by a spectrum of voluntary organisations (such as sports clubs, temple or funeral associations), and second because the Teochiu came to constitute the great majority of ethnic Chinese in Cambodia.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the destruction and oppression of Chinese enterprise. King Sihanouk failed to remain neutral amidst Cold War pressures and was ousted in 1970, followed by a five-year civil war between a US-backed military government and Pol Pot's China-backed Khmer Rouge. The communist Khmer Rouge overtook Phnom Penh in 1975, emptying the city overnight and forcing people into rural labour camps. They closed off connections to the outside world, killed the intelligentsia and banned private enterprise, property and all commercial transactions. In less than four years (1975–1978), an estimated 1.5–2m Cambodians died from starvation, overwork, diseases and execution. The ethnic Chinese were hit particularly hard as they were persecuted for being urban dwellers, capitalists or Chinese, labels that were often conflated. While many ethnic Chinese managed to flee the country, an estimated 50 per cent died inside Cambodia (Willmott, 1998). In 1979, the Vietnamese army invaded Cambodia, drove the Khmer Rouge towards the border area with Thailand and installed a government of former Khmer Rouge who had fled Pol Pot's internal purges to Vietnam, including Hun Sen, who has been Cambodia's prime minister since 1985. Due to hostility between Vietnam and China, ethnic Chinese were discriminated during the period of Vietnamese occupation (1979–1989), and Chinese language and culture were forced underground. The regime tried to develop state-led enterprises, but these failed to take root, while ethnic Chinese created home-based businesses and ventured into petty trade along the Thai border (Gottesman, 2003). The latter was arranged by Teochiu – the majority of ethnic Chinese in Cambodia as well as Thailand – who had to manoeuvre the Thai army and remaining Khmer Rouge cadres while smuggling goods such as cutlery, cigarettes or motorbikes across the border.

The period since 1989, when the Vietnamese left, has witnessed the political rise of Hun Sen and his Cambodian People's Party (CPP), which grew out of the Vietnamese-backed regime. Under Hun Sen's rule, the Cambodian Chinese re-established themselves as the driving force of the economy and re-asserted the Chinese language, schooling and cultural expression (Edwards, 2009; Verver, 2015; Willmott, 1998, 2012). The informal trading networks of the 1980s expanded and public enterprises that were privatised came into the hands of ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs. As before the war, Cambodians of Chinese descent ventured into all kinds of economic niches, from the small-scale import and retail of consumer goods to the large-scale exploitation of Cambodia's natural resources and cheap labour (Verver, 2015; Willmott, 1998). In doing so, Cambodia's ethnic Chinese benefit greatly from transnational connections. Extended family members who fled the Khmer Rouge to Europe or North America for example provide start-up capital or access to business-related studies at top-universities for the younger generation, while regional Chinese family and ethnic networks assure access to the supply of raw materials or consumer goods and openings for joint ventures (Verver and Koning, 2018). Also, a new stream of Chinese migrants, who have been coming to Cambodia since the 1990s in the slipstream of China's growing political and economic influence, has brought along novel opportunities in the form of partnerships, investments and supplies.

Looking at present-day Cambodia, the first notable outcome of their historic entrepreneurial trajectory is that the ethnic Chinese now represent the economic elite. While small ethnic Chinese family businesses re-occupied their established niches, a dominant force comprises business tycoons within the political clout of CPP top-officials and military generals on which Hun Sen relies, and within which favours, status positions and money are distributed (Verver, 2017). The tycoons part of this elite, most of whom are ethnic Chinese, carry the title of *oknha*, an honour once carried by the Khmer nobility, but which was revitalised in 1994 to award businesspeople spending in excess of \$100,000 to

national development projects, such as constructing a school or Buddhist pagoda (Verver and Dahles, 2015). While formally awarded by the King, in practice CPP officials, especially Hun Sen, identify candidates, and hence the *oknha* title has become “the preserve of businessmen interested in formalising their relationship with the State (and by extension the CPP)” (Ear, 2011, pp. 72-73). The *oknha* tycoons and the CPP leadership cultivate a highly reciprocal relationship. The tycoons rely on the CPP for a range of privileges, which assure their success in business. Prominent *oknha* have for example acquired the ticketing rights for the famous Angkor temple complex, import monopolies for prominent international electronics or liquor brands, public contracts for the construction of government buildings or delivering rice to the army and exclusive licences to pick up the garbage or operate industrial zones. Moreover, high-level politicians assure that state officials turn a blind eye to illicit practices such as tax evasion, smuggling goods and illegal logging and sand dredging. The tycoons reciprocate via under-the-table money or company shares for their political patrons as well as financial support for the CPP as a whole (Verver and Dahles, 2015). Within this business-state elite, which is concentrated in Phnom Penh, patron-client ties are forged and rearticulated for example on the golf course, via arranged marriages of the younger generation, and through charity events, such as events of the Cambodian Red Cross, which is headed by prime minister Hun Sen’s wife. In all, a sizeable ethnic Chinese business elite has emerged under Hun Sen – comprising at least 700 *oknha* (Odom and Henderson, 2014) – that is highly intertwined with the political elite.

The second notable outcome of the historic entrepreneurial trajectory is that ethnic boundaries have become ambiguous in Cambodian society, and especially in Phnom Penh. This is a result of spontaneous processes such as intermarriage, the merging of Khmer and Chinese interests within the elite and the presence of a sizeable ethnic Vietnamese community that absorbs much Khmer hostility towards the ethnocultural “other”. It is also an effect of the Khmer Rouge years, when the ethnic Chinese were forced to “become Khmer” in terms of the food they ate, the way they dressed, the names they adopted, the language they spoke and the work they did (Edwards, 2009). Currently, most ethnic Chinese are third or fourth generation migrants, speak Khmer as their mother tongue, hardly organise themselves on the basis of ethnicity and have often never been to China. Blurred ethnic boundaries are also reflected in popular lexicon: Cambodia’s ethnic Chinese are mostly referred to as *kmae-cen* (Khmer-Chinese) and sometimes as *coul kmae* (meaning “entered the Khmers”) or *kmae yeung* (“we Khmer”, indicating attachment to the nation) (Edwards, 2009). At the same time, however, “doing business” is very much associated with “being Chinese”, to such an extent that, irrespective of actual ethnic background, businesspeople situationally employ both Khmer and Chinese ethnicity. This is for example observed in Cambodia’s silk industry (Dahles and Ter Horst, 2012). Silk weavers, who are located in the rural areas of the Mekong river delta and mostly engage in weaving as part of the household economy next to farming, are portrayed as Khmer, conforming to tourists’ expectations for “authentic” Khmer products. In contrast, the urban silk traders, wholesalers and retailers, most of whom are based in Phnom Penh, are portrayed as Chinese, in accordance with the historical dominance of the Chinese in commerce (Dahles and Ter Horst, 2012). Arguably, ethnic Chinese entrepreneurship “has become disembedded from a definable Chinese community and, over the last two to three decades, reembedded in Phnom Penh’s socioeconomic sphere, which is largely made up of Cambodian Chinese entrepreneurs” (Verver, 2012, p. 49).

Discussion and conclusion: insights from ethnic minority entrepreneurship outside the west

The historic entrepreneurial trajectories of the Mennonites in Belize and the Chinese in Cambodia reveal the communal and societal contexts faced by two ethnic minorities outside the west, and the ways in which these contexts bring about a mode of entrepreneurship that stands in sharp contrast to conventional understandings derived from western contexts.

First, whereas ethnic minority business activities are generally associated with economic marginality, our cases show that ethnic minorities may also come to comprise the economic upper class. Mennonite and Chinese immigrants did not enter advanced economies in which it was hard to carve out profitable niches and compete with existing populations. Instead, they possessed entrepreneurial resources that natives lacked, such as the agricultural expertise of the Mennonites and the regional trading networks of the Chinese, which they could readily employ in the host countries. Moreover, immigrants' business ventures were welcomed by power-holders because the latter recognised the economic benefits thereof for themselves or the local economy. In time, some among these two minority groups have further embedded themselves in the local political and economic structure, thereby climbing to the ranks of economic upper class. The Mennonites of Blue Creek and Spanish Lookout have gradually adopted more liberal interpretations of their religious-moral codes of conduct, which allowed them to use modern technology, trade with outsiders and, thereby, grow and diversify their businesses. In Cambodia, ethnic Chinese tycoons have forged reciprocal ties with Khmer kings and, currently, the ruling CPP party, thereby acquiring the benefits and protection necessary to establish themselves in the country's most lucrative sectors.

Second, whereas ethnic minority entrepreneurship is generally considered to take place within ethnic community boundaries, our cases instead reveal ambiguous ethnic boundaries by way of internal community differentiation and the intersection of ethnic and mainstream economies. Community differentiation among the Chinese in Cambodia occurred along dialect lines, with different dialect groups traditionally occupying different economic niches. While dialect-based differentiation among the Chinese in Cambodia has become largely obsolete, internal differentiation is rather perceptible among the Mennonites in contemporary Belize. Here, more conservative and progressive Mennonite communities have emerged, which differ in terms of the economic activities undertaken contingent upon their religious-moral code. Reflecting ethnic economy-like arguments, there are largely self-sufficient Mennonite communities in Belize that hardly interact with outsider, and there are ethnically defined markets for Chinese products, especially food, in Cambodian cities. However, the more apparent pattern is that, in the process of migrating, settling and venturing into business in new lands, the Mennonites and the Chinese have manoeuvred the Belizean and Cambodian economies in such a way that they have become an integral part of these economies, defying the distinction between ethnic and mainstream economies. In the case of Cambodia, this process has gone hand in hand with the blurring of boundaries between Chinese and Khmer ethnicity, while in the case of Belize especially with internal differentiation among Mennonites.

Taken together, the general image of ethnic minority entrepreneurship as an economically marginal phenomenon that is largely confined to and organised within homogenous ethnic communities does not hold for our two cases. Instead, this paper reveals that sub-ethnic differentiation can strongly affect entrepreneurship, and that some sub-ethnic groups can come to comprise the economic upper class. Our argument is not so much that economic marginality and ethnic economy are false characterizations of ethnic minority entrepreneurship, but that while these characterizations are often taken for granted, they are in fact historically contingent upon the particular mode of settling and venturing into business by immigrants and their descendants in the west. In other parts of the world ethnic minority entrepreneurship takes different forms, and currently these forms remain underexposed.

It must be noted that literature on immigrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurs in the west is not completely devoid of the sort of dynamics that we observe in Belize and Cambodia. First, there is increasing recognition of an emerging middle to upper class of ethnic minority entrepreneurs. Kloosterman and Rath (2010) observe a "qualitative shift from low-value to high-value added business" (p. 101; cf. Nazareno *et al.*, 2018). Business diversification is seen to occur within ethnic niches (Bagwell, 2008) and by developing opportunities outside existing niches. Especially second-generation migrants make use of education, ethnically pluralistic

networks and technological or market knowledge attained in their formative years, and thereby manage to “break out”, which allows them to circumvent the barriers to growth of “staying in” the ethnic economy (Engelen, 2001; Rusinovic, 2008; Wang and Warn, 2019). Also, the transnational networks and cross-cultural competencies of ethnic minorities, which allow them to create lucrative brokerage opportunities across national borders, are highlighted in recent studies (Brzozowski *et al.*, 2014; Nazareno *et al.*, 2018). Members of some ethnic minorities have thus moved from “necessity” to “opportunity” entrepreneurship – often leaving paid employment voluntarily (Ndofor and Priem, 2011) – by establishing innovative businesses in professional services, the creative industries or high-tech sectors (Dheer, 2018; Hart and Acs, 2011; Smallbone *et al.*, 2005; Soydas and Aleti, 2015).

Second, the suitability of the ethnic economy framework, and especially its underlying assumption of homogenous ethnic communities, is increasingly questioned in literature on immigrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship in the west. Internal differentiation of ethnic communities is highlighted for example by scholars who use the notion of “super-diversity” (Vertovec, 2007) to indicate an increased “diversification of diversity” (Jones *et al.*, 2010, p. 565) among recent migrants, for example with respect to national origin, migration status or age group (e.g. Sepulveda *et al.*, 2011). Similarly, the idea of “intersectionality” attests to the observation that various modes of social differentiation (e.g. ethnicity, class, gender, age) may simultaneously affect entrepreneurship (Barrett and Vershinina, 2017). Also, the ethnically hybrid character of ethnic minority businesses, for example in terms of business partnerships (Griffin-El and Olabisi, 2018) or management teams (Arrighetti *et al.*, 2014), has become more tangible. Interestingly in this respect, Zubair and Brzozowski (2018) show that recent migrants, who cannot rely on an ethnic economy because it is not (yet) developed, instead forge linkages with natives or people from other ethnic groups to sustain their businesses. Studies on super-diversity, intersectionality and hybridity thus counter the tendency to “reduce immigrant entrepreneurship to an ethnocultural phenomenon” (Rath and Kloosterman, 2000, p. 666).

Recent reviews of the field (Aliaga-Isla and Rialp, 2013; Dheer, 2018; Nazareno *et al.*, 2018; Pécoud, 2010; Ram *et al.*, 2017), however, show that these new developments are only beginning to gain ground, while conventional understandings remain dominant. In line with the presumption of bounded ethnic economies, studies still “tend to consider all immigrants from a particular nation as a homogenous group” thereby downplaying “significant sub-cultural differences” associated with “religion, class, caste, race, gender, language, occupations, native and local cultures, etc. in influencing the process of new venture creation by immigrants” (Dheer, 2018, p. 606). Similarly, domain analysis shows that terms like “marginalisation” and “institutional discrimination” remain central in the literature (Aliaga-Isla and Rialp, 2013), while recent empirical studies show that, despite their “super-diverse” backgrounds, “newcomers seem to be engaged in much the same restricted range of low-value businesses as earlier groups [thereby] reproducing the marginality of their forerunners” (Jones *et al.*, 2014, p. 501; cf. Kloosterman *et al.*, 2016).

In our view, more contextual heterogeneity in the field of ethnic minority entrepreneurship studies should be an aim in itself, especially in light of changing global migration patterns and ethnocentric connotations implied in the sole focus on the west. While we have focussed on ethnic minority entrepreneurship in two small developing economies, it would be illuminating to also acquire more insight into other kinds of countries outside the west, for example in more industrialised countries such as South Korea, Japan and China. Moreover, we very much encourage more comparative research on immigrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship (cf. Ram *et al.*, 2017; Rath, 2000), especially between western or developed and non-western or developing contexts. Such research will likely uncover vastly different entrepreneurial trajectories, while at the same time it may show similar outcomes across these different entrepreneurial trajectories. Based on the above we may tentatively argue, for example, that in developed countries it is largely through break-out strategies by (grand)children of migrants

that an economic middle to upper class of ethnic minority entrepreneurs emerges and that ethnic and mainstream economies become more intertwined; in developing countries, in contrast, first-generation migrants may more immediately climb to the ranks of economic upper class because natives lack the entrepreneurial resources or skills migrants bring, and ethnic and mainstream economies may therefore also be more immediately intertwined. We hope to have inspired future research on ethnic minority entrepreneurship that investigates such contextual heterogeneity in more depth.

While more contextual heterogeneity in ethnic minority entrepreneurship research should be an aim in itself, it is also a promising catalyst to work towards a “more neutral conceptual framework” (Engelen, 2001, p. 203) that goes beyond the existing western bias. Drawing on our cases, we may tentatively identify two dimensions of such a framework. First, a more neutral framework would have to recognise that, rather than attaining a universal form, ethnic minority entrepreneurship manifests in different ways depending on historical, societal and communal contexts. To that end, it may be more suitable to think about ethnic minority entrepreneurship along the lines of spectra. Overlaying our cases and existing literature, one may usefully consider spectra from economic marginality to dominance, from relatively clear to more ambiguous boundaries between ethnic and mainstream economies, and from more locally to transnationally embedded business networks (cf. Nazareno *et al.*, 2018). Second, a more neutral framework would have to go beyond the analytic focus on structural features at the ethnic community level, which currently reifies ethnic economy-like understandings and obscures the importance of internal differentiation and interactions across ethnic boundaries (Danes *et al.*, 2008; Pécoud, 2000). A promising alternative may be a more micro-level focus on the process of entrepreneurship (Storti, 2014). In line with super-diversity and intersectionality arguments, through such a focus one may be better able to uncover the range of sociocultural ties – ethnic as well as other ties – involved in this process (Verver and Koning, 2018). In all, we hope to have shown in this paper that contextual heterogeneity holds the potential to contribute “renewed analytical tools” (Pécoud, 2010, p. 71) working towards a field of immigrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship studies that is at the same time more context sensitive and globally oriented.

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