

The Business of (Im)Migration: Bodies Across Borders

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Abstract

Irrespective of length of stay or voluntariness, (im)migration is the movement of individuals across borders. From national identity to labor markets, (im)migration affects various dimensions and spheres of social life. Currently, 3.6% of the global population are international (im)migrants, underscoring its profound significance in contemporary debates on humanitarianism, ethical governance, socioeconomic realities and sustainability. The analysis of migration as a business is relevant since it raises important questions about the precarious conditions and situations including marginalization, exploitation, and vulnerability in which (im)migrants often find themselves, and about the much-needed policy and management and organizational practice responses needed to address them. This Special Issue aims to bring (im)migration to the attention of business and management researchers interested in ethics. The intention behind it is to enhance the current understanding of (im)migration in order to develop comprehensive policies, foster inclusive societal and organizational frameworks, and focus on the ethical issues raised by (im)migration for organizations and management, as well as the complex realities faced by (im)migrants all over the world. Moreover, we aim to call for new research perspectives and streams that would address the novel challenges that (im)migrants encounter as a result of technological advancements, climate (in)justice, the ‘dark side’ of the business of international (im)migration, and new – or the lack thereof – migration policies.

Keywords: ethics; immigration; migration; migrants; refugees

International (im)migration refers to the movement of bodies from one’s place of origin (or last residence) to another while crossing a political border regardless of whether the relocation is long-lasting, temporary, voluntary or involuntary (Lee, 1966). This movement of bodies occurs for various reasons ranging from education, work, marriage, ambition, or social and/or economic crisis. We use the expression “(im)migrate” to highlight the fluidity of this movement

of bodies, and the fact that any act of migration involves both a departure *from* one location and an arrival *in* another location. Migration is a highly relevant topic, not least because 3.6% of the world's population are international migrants (Interactive World Migration Report, 2024). In contemporary world, migration has become a paramount and often contentious issue, influencing debates on national identity, sovereignty, labor markets, and social cohesion. There is a clear and urgent need to achieve a better understanding of what migration entails in order to create policies that balance humanitarian concerns, ethical implications of migration, socioeconomic realities, and sustainability demands.

The “business” of migration can be understood in various ways, including capitalist practices and transactions relating to pre-(im)migration, represented by the activities of (im)migration agents, as well as post-(im)migration, exemplified by (im)migrants' integration agencies, the labor market for migrant workers, and hosting organizations in various social sectors (Anderson, 2010; Tarrabain & Thomas, 2024). The (im)migrant bodies, on the surface, may be seen to contribute to the discourse of ‘diversity’ and ‘internationalization’; however, at a deeper level, they are often marginalized and excluded (Johansson & Śliwa, 2014; Kangas-Müller, Eraränta & Moisander, 2024), and experience abuse, exploitation, precariousness, and vulnerability.

For a number of years now, research developed by scholars based in business schools has addressed (im)migration and the experiences of (im)migrants, although extant discussions have been framed mainly through reference to ‘expatriates’ (Haak-Saheem et al., 2024; Qian et al., 2024; Rodriguez & Ridgway, 2019, Śliwa & Johansson, 2020) and to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) matters (Back & Piekkari, 2024; Farashah & Blomquist, 2022; Kangas-Müller et al., 2024). One of the objectives behind this Special Issue was to draw the attention of business school researchers to the notion of (im)migration, to provide space for critical

reflection on the business- and organizing -related aspects of it, and to focus on the experiences of a range of migrants in different geographical contexts. We wanted to bring out the diversity of challenges and needs of (im)migrants in different locations and circumstances, from the relatively privileged, educated workers in countries of the Global North, to the highly vulnerable refugees in detention centers. For us, of paramount importance was to keep individuals as the main focus of the discussions which are presented in these papers.

In preparing this special issue, we aimed to challenge the idea of viewing migrants as victims and to emphasize the productive manifestations of their agency (Agustín, 2003). Furthermore, we paid attention to micro perspectives on (im)migration, including the cultural, economic, social, material, political, and emotional challenges faced by (im)migrants. We also explored the meso level of (im)migration, focusing on inter- and intra-national reception systems, migration intermediaries, civil society organizations supporting refugees and asylum seekers. From a macro perspective, we were concerned with the geopolitics of migration policies and (re)settlement programs (Distinto, 2020). Moreover, we considered the way in which the COVID-19 pandemic brought new challenges to (im)migration policies.

The business of (im)migration raises ethical considerations related to labor rights, human dignity, exploitation, vulnerable populations, climate justice, and environmental and social sustainability. (Im)migration has been recently researched with a focus on Trumpism and its effects on freedom of movement such as travel bans (Tsoukas, 2020); the politicization of immigration (Grande et al., 2019); right-wing extremism and undocumented immigrants (Segarra & Prasad, 2020; 2024); the integration of refugees (Distinto, 2020); and the consequences of climate change on migration flows (Bettini, 2019) to mention some examples.

The collection of articles included in this Special Issue pushes the agenda of research on (im)migration forward by highlighting to us how different populations live the (im)migrant

experience and how they manage their identity and status in host countries. A collective finding emerging from the articles is that ethics is imbued in the (im)migration experience and there is still much to be done in order to provide (im)migrants with a fair and equitable treatment. The fact that the (im)migrant experience begins long before crossing a border is brought by Kamini Gupta and Hari Bapuji's (2024) discussion of how economic migration is not the same for everyone due to the privilege – or lack thereof – that their demographic characteristics endow them with. In their article 'Migration under the Glow of Privilege: Unpacking Privilege and its Effect on the Migration Experience', they address this issue by considering the ways in which the integration experience of migrants is contingent upon the structures that have long privileged certain groups above others. The authors theorize the integration experience of migrants using the framework proposed by Black et al. (1991) who conceptualized the integration experience based on general interaction and work-related adjustment. Furthermore, Gupta and Bapuji assert that structural inclusion and exclusion in home countries are the source of inequality in host countries and set the grounds for the way in which migrants will be able to adapt (or not) to their new homes.

The authors bring a novel approach to debates on (im)migration and ethics by centering their attention on caste to illuminate entrenched historical privilege. They provide a 'typology of immigrants' which serves as a useful vehicle for comparing and contrasting different levels and sources of privilege (race, gender, caste, ethnicity, and country of birth). The authors also provide very relevant insights of the effect of the identified sources of privilege on the integration experience of immigrants. Providing logistical and administrative support, conducting audits of immigration policies, improving mobility of skills and qualifications, and addressing inequalities are all actions that allow to enhance the integration experience and are therefore described as fundamental and urgent for organizations to undertake. Lastly,

the authors call for ethical considerations in relation to migrants, which include the way in which migrants are treated upon arrival in the host country and how they are integrated into a new culture. In Gupta and Bapuji's view, organizations have a responsibility to consider differences in privilege among migrants to ensure fairness and ethical treatment for all employees.

The subsequent papers in this special issue highlight the variegated ways in which different categories of social difference as well as legal status influence the (im)migrant experience. Some might believe that negative experiences are only encountered by those (im)migrants in precarious jobs or when not holding legal status in their host country. However, in their article 'How does legal status inform immigrant agency during encounters of workplace incivility?', Amal Abdellatif and Ajnesh Prasad argue that hostility towards (im)migrants can appear at any place and any time. Their study explores the importance of legal status for the ways in which immigrants exercise agency when workplace incivility is experienced.

Through a duoethnography, the authors reflect on their own experiences when facing a specific incident of workplace incivility in business schools, while inviting readers to write their own narratives and reflect on their own positionalities. Abdellatif and Prasad share candid accounts relating to their own positionality, their personal histories of becoming immigrants, and the challenges that came with that process. They also discuss incidents of workplace incivility each of them faced at their universities and offer insights into how each of them responded. It is thought-provoking to reflect on how immigration status shaped their responses to the incidents that affected them at work, as it illuminates how agency is not evenly distributed among individuals, particularly when differences in legal status are at play. Abdellatif and Prasad's article reveals how immigrant academics can sometimes experience workplace incivility and systematic racism in the workplace setting, even when equity and

diversity policies are in place. Through employing personal narratives, the authors call for further exploration of the interplay between power, privilege, and workplace incivility while seeking to bridge the gap between theory and practice when illuminating the complex dynamics that immigrants with different legal status are entangled in in the workplace.

In her article ““I can only do my best and leave the rest to God”: Religious/spiritual coping strategies of African nurses in the UK”, Florence Karaba takes an agentic perspective to analyze the religious/spiritual coping strategies that are deployed by African nurses who have immigrated to Great Britain. These coping strategies are described as including an array of actions such as praying, fasting, and church attendance to preserve the nurses’ mental health in an environment that is often experienced as racist and discriminatory. The author aims to share the stories of immigrant African nurses to not only contribute to extant academic debates but to raise awareness of African nurses’ often-disadvantaged position within the British health- and social care system, and to draw attention to the need for new policies which would improve their workplace experiences. Karaba places particular importance to the relevance of organizations, particularly those involved in healthcare, in addressing racial harassment and discrimination through zero-tolerance policies, their clear communication at all levels and their consistent enforcement. Supervisors and managers are to play a pivotal role in fostering supportive environments which facilitate immigrant workers’ integration and wellbeing. Through powerful empirical insights which allow readers to get to know the participants’ stories, the author shows us how the interviewees relied on their religious faith and practices to cope with racist day-to-day experiences they encountered at work, such as “bullying, discounting of skills, unfair treatment, and incivility.” The ethical obligations of their employing organizations and supervisors are highlighted since organizations need to

create and maintain a work environment in which the unique challenges faced by immigrant African nurses are understood and appropriate support is given.

Another article which addresses the specific difficulties that female (im)migrants face, is written by María José Zapata Campos. Her study, ‘The expansion of alternative forms of organizing integration: Imitation, bricolage, and an ethic of care in migrant women’s cooperatives’ contributes to research that has focused on migrant women navigating the integration process as well as the efforts of civil society organizations in supporting them by filling the gaps left by state-driven policies and programs. The article analyzes the case of Yalla Trappan, an immigrant women-led work cooperative based in Malmö (Sweden), that aims to expand its integration approach nationwide. Zapata Campos draws on organizational theories of imitation and bricolage to explore how alternative forms of organizing integration are transferred across various settings, by considering how local embeddedness and an ethics of care enable this circulation of practices. The author demonstrates that expanding alternative forms of labor market integration requires a multi-scalar and collective approach to bricolage, imbued in an ethics of “care-giving and care-receiving”, rather than embedded in instrumental market logics. This approach to organizing migrant integration enables more ethical training programs, fostering women’s sense of belonging to the host country. This paper highlights the role of social cooperatives in upholding immigrants’ human rights and the empowering effect of collective bricolage in affirming women’s agency by favoring the transformation of traditional (unpaid) duties tied to their reproductive roles into competences valued by local communities and the labor market.

One more article that focuses on the importance of the ethics of care is Laura Reeves and Alexandra Bristow’s ‘Political organizational silence and the ethics of care: EU migrant

restaurant workers in Brexit Britain.’ The authors study the experiences of EU migrant restaurant workers in the United Kingdom, who faced increased vulnerability and uncertainty post-Brexit. The article explores the care-ethical dimensions of organizational practices at the intersection of right-wing populism and authoritarian forms. The authors use Tronto’s (1993) framework of care ethics to evaluate organizational practices, arguing that political organizational silence (POS) fails to address the needs of migrant workers. As argued in the article, silence was one of the main characteristics of Brexit since most organizations failed to take a stand in a time of particular instability and divisiveness mostly felt by migrant workers in low-paid occupations. On the basis of a qualitative study of EU migrants in three UK restaurant chains, Reeves and Bristow explore how POS can contribute to caring practices or exacerbate feelings of neglect and vulnerability among migrant workers. The authors point out that caring responsibilities are mostly undertaken by peers and managers; however, this is not enough, and organizations cannot and should not leave migrants without institutional and policy support. The article illuminates the ethical challenges and responsibilities organizations face in caring for their employees amidst political upheavals.

Also building on Tronto’s (1993) framework of political ethics of care, Marke Kivijärvi, Ida Okkonen and Marjo Siltaoja, in their article ‘(In)vulnerable Managers in an Immigration Context’ explore the vulnerability of managers in the context of immigration centers, and specifically reception centers for asylum seekers. Through interviews with 20 immigration center officers in Finland, the article uncovers two alternative positionalities of managers: professional and temporal disconformity. While ‘professionalism’ helped the immigration officers in distancing themselves from the asylum seekers to be able to do their jobs ‘as required’, ‘temporal disconformity’ helped them reconnect themselves to their human and ethical sides. The authors suggest that even in highly bureaucratic and ‘extreme’ environments

such as those in reception centers, managers manoeuvre within the bureaucratic structures to mobilize their agency through collective care and ‘microactivism’. The analysis highlights the balancing act of being a professional manager (hardening themselves) and being a moral human (feeling and expressing compassion). Overall, the study contributes to dismantling binaries around managerial work and care and vulnerability and shows how managers position themselves in relation to vulnerable clients while managing their own sense of vulnerability.

Sendirella George, Erin Twyford and Farzana Aman Tanima continue to explore the intersection of immigration, neoliberalism, and accounting practices while focusing on the context of asylum seekers in Australia. In their article, ‘Authoritarian neoliberalism and asylum seekers: The silencing of accounting and accountability in offshore detention centers’, the authors provide a critique of traditional accounting practices, since these are considered instruments that allow the perpetuation of neoliberal hegemony and unethical behaviors. The text discusses the case of offshore detention of asylum seekers, arguing that the Australian government’s approach reflects authoritarian neoliberalism. The authors introduce counter-accounts to reveal the hidden realities that asylum seekers are forced to deal with while human rights are violated. These counter-accounts are powerful since they make it possible for readers to hear the voices of those detained in Nauru island – where Australia has one of its offshore detention centers –, and to learn about their experiences of self-harm, sexual assault, and child abuse. In this article, the relevance of reevaluating traditional accounting practices while considering their ethical implications is highlighted. Using a closed reading method to explore counter-accounts of a set of leaked documents published in *The Guardian*, George and colleagues, challenge the current rhetoric that shapes Australia’s policies within the neoliberal logic that rules the country’s immigration detention system while calling for collective action and further research to promote more ethical immigration policies.

The article ‘Refugee entrepreneurship: Resolving multi-contextuality and differential exclusion’ by Ugur Yetkin and Deniz Tuncalp concludes this Special Issue. Their article explores tensions between inclusion and exclusion, as well as local and multi-local embeddedness, in the context of refugee entrepreneurs in Turkey. Despite the growing body of research on entrepreneurship, the specific role it plays in favoring economic empowerment among refugees remains overlooked. Accordingly, it has the potential to enable refugees’ contribution to the local economy while promoting their social integration in the host countries, many of which do not have the infrastructure that would enable creating pathways to sustainable livelihoods. The authors emphasize the crucial role of designing and implementing more ethical and supportive integration policies that foster a favorable environment for refugees, allowing them to thrive and contribute meaningfully to local economies. The article offers a series of important contributions to the literature, cutting through fields of entrepreneurship, migration studies and integration. Firstly, to effectively address the multifaceted nature of refugee entrepreneurship and to detect the conditions in which it fosters social inclusion, the authors identify three categories of entrepreneurs: survival-type entrepreneurship, ethnic-targeting entrepreneurship, and integrating entrepreneurship. Secondly, the article sheds light on the counter-strategies developed by refugees to overcome the differential inclusion and exclusion experienced as they embed further in the host country’s business and social environment. Thirdly, the authors develop the mixed embeddedness model (MEM) by examining how refugees can forge intricate webs of connections across social, political, institutional, and spatial contexts while facing challenges related to their uncertain status and their inevitably precarious and ever-changing living conditions.

Through the above contributions, we are able to develop knowledge about and critically reflect upon the (im)migrant experience in different contexts. The collection of articles included in this Special Issue has given us the opportunity to learn more about the lived realities of the ‘business of (im)migration’ from different types of (im)migrants moving from and to locations around the world, and to gain insights into how they respond to their experiences depending on their perceived privilege, profession, race, gender, and legal status. There is an undeniable need to develop policies and organizational practices that will lead to a fair and equitable treatment for (im)migrants who have long been overlooked and mistreated.

The articles included in this Special Issue focus empirically on (im)migrants from Africa, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Fiji, Iran, Iraq, Sri-Lanka, Pakistan, Syria, and the European Union who are located in Australia, Canada, Finland, India, Turkey and the United Kingdom. In terms of employment, the (im)migrants represent different occupations from academics to restaurant workers and entrepreneurs. While it can be said that the Special Issue has ‘covered the world’ and many different life circumstances, employment conditions and socioeconomic realities, there is still much to be done to advance comprehensive and rich insights into issues at the intersection of (im)migration, business and ethics. For example, we still need to achieve a better understanding of an (im)migrant as someone who is not only crossing a border but someone who is often completely changing contexts, with all its implications. We are putting forward an agenda for future research that will continue to bring to light the experiences of (im)migrants in different locations and to analyze how (im)migration is organized in different contexts and against the background of different local policies.

We hope to inspire further research on the business of (im)migration on some of the areas that this Special Issue has not addressed or has left under-explored, such as climate (in)justice, the effect of digital technologies on migration patterns, the gender dimensions of (im)migration, the effects of remittances on poverty reduction, and the ‘dark side’ of the business of international (im)migration, as exemplified by human trafficking, modern slavery or organ trafficking. Lastly, we call for the development of research on (im)migrants from the Global South, considering the importance of human rights, and the ways in which businesses can help (im)migrants achieve a better life.

While in this collection of articles, we considered (im)migration with reference to international borders, there is still much to be said about other types of (im)migration, such as rural to urban migration by those seeking a better quality of life (Doshi, 2021) due to a lack of security, economic resources or the need to leave areas which have been plagued by natural disasters or made unlivable as a result of climate change. Through this Special Issue, we hope to have highlighted the importance of caring for those who have left everything in pursuit of better – or simply, bearable – living conditions for themselves and their families. We also hope to have provided valuable reflections and suggestions for future research, and to have raised awareness about the relevance of learning more and sharing the realities of those who have long remained invisible in research on (im)migration pursued by academics based in business schools.

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