

Structural Bias, Agency, and Migrant *Habitus*: The Case of Bangladeshi and Indian Small Business Owners in the UK

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Abstract

The existing scholarship often adopts a cultural perspective or a neo-liberal socio-economic lens to study UK-based South Asian ethnic minority migrant businesses (EMMBs). In doing so, the literature offers an incomplete depiction of migrant business activity, emphasising either ethnocultural identities or market forces and opportunity structures. The diverse nature of South Asian populations, such as Indians and Bangladeshis, is also overlooked, leading to a problematic homogenisation that conceals their unique experiences as small business owners. Challenging binary and conflationary analyses of South Asian EMMBs, we utilise Pierre Bourdieu's sociology to examine Bangladeshi and Indian migrant business owners' habitus within their field. Using data from 50 interviews, we explore how embedded bias and EMMB owners' agency reveal complex class and ethno-religious inequalities. Applying Bourdieusian concepts like habitus, doxa, and symbolic violence, we show the dynamic relationship between dispositions and the varied positions of South Asian EMMB owners in the UK.

Keywords: *small business owners, South Asian migrants, agency, field, habitus, doxa, symbolic violence*

Introduction

Ethnic minority migrant businesses (EMMBs) illustrate the complexities of migration by highlighting the influence of structural barriers and cultural resources on entrepreneurial outcomes. Additionally, they inform discussions about social mobility and the economic impacts of migration in host societies, particularly within the context of the UK, which has a large and diverse migrant community. However, UK academic and policy circles tend to consider self-employment as a panacea for community-level economic deprivation (Jones & Ram, 2012; Sinkovics & Reuber, 2021), despite EMMBs experiencing significant disadvantages. In this sanguine view, how EMMBs navigate constraints and opportunities through agentic choices in a structurally unequal context is still largely neglected. Furthermore, EMMBs are often categorised broadly, concealing potentially divergent experiences across different sub-populations. Notably, the variations in entrepreneurial behaviour within the South Asian (SA) community remain almost entirely invisible (Basu, 1998; McPherson, 2017), and the scholarship on UK-EMMBs presents a largely monolithic portrayal of their presumed advantage over other immigrant groups [e.g. Caribbean and Chinese migrants] (Ram & Jones, 2008). Intra-group heterogeneities in class structure, religious and racial differences, varied migration journeys, and choice of entrepreneurial ventures (high vs low economic value addition), leading to differential encounters with structural racism/discrimination, also go unnoticed (Khattab & Modood, 2015). Oversimplified views of entrepreneurship as a catalyst for improvement and flat accounts that erase distinctions across sub-populations of migrant business owners' experiences risk reproducing partial research accounts of the experiences of EMMB owners. This is crucial for understanding the distinctions between Indian and Bangladeshi EMMBs, as they represent different ends of the spectrum of diverse SA migrant businesses (Jones et al., 2019), in the context of this study.

Contemporary scholarship argues that migrant entrepreneurship should not be viewed solely through structural constraints, but also through the lens of individual agency (Ram et al., 2017; Vincent et al., 2014a). Scholars have highlighted factors shaping entrepreneurial agency, such as embodied capital, aspirations, and cultural resources (Villares-Varela et al., 2022). Therefore, an informed and intersectional perspective is necessary to explore how the interconnectedness of structure and agency unpacks inter-group diversity, where issues of ethnicity, gender, race, and religion are contrasted and continuously evolving. Using a critical sociological lens, we explore the experiences of UK-based Bangladeshi and Indian EMMB owners by focusing on their distinctive *habitus* [deeply ingrained habits, skills, and

dispositions] (Bourdieu, 1986), which undergirds their practices as business owners in a challenging field context marked by structural inequality. Our main research question is: *how does habitus influence the field position and negotiated agency of Bangladeshi and Indian EMMB owners differently in the face of structural discrimination?* We operationalise *habitus* as a flexible and non-deterministic concept for understanding the subtle differences in the agency of diverse EMMB owners. We further utilise Bourdieusian concepts, such as *doxa* and *symbolic violence*, in deploying *habitus* in its complex relationality with field and capital (Tatli et al., 2014a). After a brief overview of the EMMB literature, we delineate the SA EMMBs' issues and challenges as they navigate an inequitable societal and institutional landscape. We then offer a Bourdieusian theoretical framework to support our analysis, followed by the research methodology. We present our findings and discussion afterwards, with the final section detailing the concluding remarks.

Theoretical Overview of the EMMB Literature

EMMBs have been explored primarily through sociocultural and socio-economic lenses in the past fifty years. Sociocultural disadvantage-based accounts suggest that immigrants face challenges such as alienation and discrimination in the host country, which restrict their access to the labour market and propel them toward self-employment (Li, 2001). Similarly, blocked-mobility explanations view business ownership as a limited option for immigrants seeking to navigate political and institutional barriers to paid employment. (Raijman & Tienda, 2000). These explanations are significant in the literature for understanding how push factors for business ownership relate to immigrants' perceived lack of social fit and limited rights in paid work (Basu, 1998). More optimistically, some cultural explanations suggest immigrants benefit from greater diligence, communal solidarity, and risk appetite, entailing better facilities with entrepreneurial behaviour (Fregetto, 2004). These theories, however, have been critiqued for their inattention to context, divisive value judgments, and stereotypical portrayals of certain communities (Ram & Jones, 2008).

Alternatively, a significant strand of the literature draws attention to the economic impetus behind EMMBs. Migrant business owners, known as 'middleman minorities,' often seize economic opportunities by filling specific market niches in trades and services, using skills they bring to address shortages in new environments (Zhou, 2004). Similarly, other concepts emphasise value-creation through immigrant socio-economic connections (Volery, 2007). The ethnic economy includes enterprises controlled by minority groups and ethnic enclaves. It

fosters connections among co-ethnic firms, lowering competition and costs, which can result in profitable monopolies. Additionally, it creates jobs within the community, often paying lower wages to compensate for perceived lower skills (Zhou, 2004). On the other hand, Ethnic enclaves represent a tertiary economic sector where EMMBs utilise low-cost labour from within the community and cater to ethnic minority consumers with specialised products and services (ibid.). While valuable, economic explanations often essentialise ethnic groups by emphasising community-related economic opportunities and business potential, neglecting structural inequalities and the impacts of race, class, and religion on EMMB practices.

More recently, the idea of mixed-embeddedness perspective (Kloosterman, 2010) emphasises the need for relational explanations that explore the interplay of business owners, their unique networks, and the wider socio-economic structures that shape the conditions within which they operate. It argues that migrant resources are embedded in institutions that largely determine the migrant entrepreneurial journey. However, in mixed embeddedness, the impact of contextual constraints and opportunities (whether at the level of groups or the system) has primacy, limiting the possibilities for a fully relational perspective. Indeed, mixed embeddedness has been critiqued for its limited attention to the agency of ethnic minority entrepreneurs (Vincent et al., 2014). Taken together, the literature lacks an explanation of how migrant resources are integrated into institutions that largely shape migrants' entrepreneurial pathways and a framework that accounts for the differences in how agency is formed (Dağdelen, 2024). It also tends to favour structure or agency, isolating cultural or economic factors without sufficiently accounting for their dynamic interplay. This can be achieved through the ideas of class, gender, ethnicity, and race, thereby calling for an intersectional lens, such as Bourdieu's.

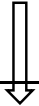
Bourdieu's sociology offers an apt theoretical toolkit for analysing how EMMB owners' differentially constrained agency comes head-to-head with structural inequality and how implicit norms and hidden forms of domination in the field complicate their agentic struggles. Our qualitative exploration of SA EMMB owners' variegated experiences deploys Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, doxa, symbolic violence, and the field to bridge the persistent agency-structure divide in the literature (Tatli et al., 2014).

Bourdieuian Conceptual Framework

Our theoretical framework draws from Bourdieu's approach to social class, culture, and capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1989, 1990, 1996, 1997; Wacquant & Bourdieu, 1992). For Bourdieu, social positioning results from hierarchical relationships rooted in differences embodied by the

dominant and dominated. This relative positionality in a multidimensional social space - a 'field' of power - is contingent on accessing various resources or 'capitals' (Bourdieu, 1986). This placement is further linked with dispositions, a subjective system of internalised structures embedded through socialisation, also known as '*habitus*' (Bourdieu & Nice, 1977). *Habitus* internalises dominant notions (doxa) and reproduces itself through habitual practices (symbolic violence) without upsetting social and cultural orders. Taken together, Bourdieu's conceptualisations – particularly the relationalities of *habitus*, doxa, and symbolic violence - provide a fitting framework to explore EMMB owners' constrained agency. In this study, rather than engaging with 'field' - structured environment with its rules, logic, and power dynamics and 'capital' as primary analytical categories, we refer to them insofar as they concern the *habitus* of EMMB owners, our main focus. The diagram below depicts how *habitus* fits within Bourdieu's relational framework:

Figure 1 The Relational framework

Concepts		Operationalisation
Field		Regulatory framework Legitimate discourses Structured positioning of key players Societal, business, and sectoral contexts
Structural	Doxa	Taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs in a field relating to presuppositions of the game
	Symbolic Violence	Doxic submission to values and rules of the field
	<i>Habitus</i>	Habitual practices Sense of the game and embodied understanding of the rules of the game
Capitals		Social: networks and ties Cultural: education, experience, mannerism Economic: material and monetary assets Symbolic: influence, legitimacy, and power to define the rules of the field

Source: Tatli et al. (2014)

Bourdieu defines *habitus* as a system of dispositions accumulated by agents through their ongoing relationship with their field's specific nature and demands (Bourdieu, 1996, 2004). In other words, *habitus* emerges as the embodiment of the field's structures by its agents (individuals, groups, or organisations), helping them to understand and act according to the field's standards/conventions. There are two important characteristics of *habitus*. First, *habitus* reflects a 'taken for granted' mode of self-conduct that informs the agent's behavioural

consistency; usually, agents are unaware of their *habitus*. Second, *habitus* does not impede agents from artful practice and altering their behaviours contingently (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009). As Özbilgin and Tatli (2005) aver, although *habitus* reflects the internalisation of structural norms, agents can utilise their capitals to reconstitute boundaries and negotiate the connections between *habitus* and the field. They further emphasise the importance of primary and secondary *habitus*. Primary *habitus* relates to socialisation resulting from family interactions during childhood and is often linked to the parents' social status. Secondary *habitus*, though related to the former, is also the outcome of education and life experiences that might differ from one's parents. Bourdieu (1990) describes primary *habitus* as 'embodied history' with a perpetual impact on secondary *habitus*.

Habitus can also be individual and collective. Individual *habitus* refers to norms and values that a person subconsciously assimilates as they navigate their social context (Özbilgin & Tatli, 2011). In contrast, collective *habitus* is based on the notion that 'individual's dispositions are mediated through an institution's organisational practices and collective forms of cooperation' (Burke et al., 2013:165). Understanding institutional and familial influences can help grasp the channelling of individual behaviours into group practices. Both individual and collective *habitus* shape actors' perceptions of their agentic possibilities; they define reasonable ends and means for potential practices based on perceived (symbolic) positionings in a stratified society (ibid.). Lastly, *habitus* reinforces the collective conformity to the 'taken for granted' forms of presumed reality (doxa) in the field (Bourdieu, 1977, 1989).

Doxa, a structural construct, is situated beyond notions of enquiry, remaining unanimously unquestioned (Bourdieu, 1977). Deer (2014:115) argues that 'doxa refers to pre-reflexive, shared but unquestioned opinions and perceptions conveyed within and by relatively autonomous social entities – fields – which determine "natural" practice and attitudes via the internalised "sense of limits" and *habitus* of the agents in those fields.' Hence, doxa refers to self-evident rules defined by the agent's position, limiting social mobility. Doxa contributes to the stability of objective social institutions, structures, and relations through continual reproduction in agents' understandings (Deer, 2014). It thus often creates an illusion, encouraging subordinate agents to unquestionably follow field norms, internalising their legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1977). Hence, doxa is inextricably linked to *habitus*, establishing linkages between structural and agentic elements.

Bourdieu (1986) uses the concept of symbolic violence, explaining how orders and restraints are established through indirect sociocultural mechanisms shaped by the common sense (doxa)

in a field and the dispositions of the agents of that field (*habitus*). Symbolic violence reflects and legitimises dominant groups/agents' self-interest, ensuring that skewed social orders remain either ignored by or 'naturalised' for the dominated, resulting in acquiescence to discriminatory conditions. As Tatli et al. (2014:625) emphasise, 'symbolic violence is exercised over agents with their complicity and manifests in daily exchanges and practices'. Symbolic violence thus imprints structural inequality on marginalised agents, such that the dominated come to view their unequal position as an outcome of their own making.

UK EMMBs in the Shadow of Structural Racism

This section focuses on the contextual details of UK-EMMBs and establishes the case for them meriting a closer examination, particularly regarding aspects of agency and structural bias. Post-war migration from SA occurred in phases, beginning in the 1950s to fill labour market gaps in manufacturing, transport, and hospitality (Peach, 2006). The 1970s saw further migration due to Idi Amin's expulsion of Asian Ugandans and the formation of Bangladesh. More recently, migration has continued alongside globalisation, albeit cyclically, with periodically tightening immigration controls (*ibid.*). During the 1950s-1970s, migrants faced multi-level discrimination, including ideological, institutional, and interpersonal marginalisation (Koopmans & Statham, 2019). Ideological racism showcased the colonial mindset of dominance, labelling SA migrants as culturally inferior. On the other hand, institutional discrimination was evident in employment, as migrants were assigned to undesirable jobs despite their qualifications (*ibid.*). By the mid-1970s, the economic downturn resulted in significant job losses for migrant workers. It increased discrimination from the white British population, resulting in SA migrant communities being pushed into self-employment (Peach, 2006). Furthermore, ostensible government-sponsored self-employment schemes often incorporated unfavourable conditions, failing to consider ethnic minorities' interests (Jones et al., 2012). As a result, self-employment for EMMB owners in the UK during the 1980s and 1990s tended to be more 'necessity-driven' than 'opportunity-driven' (*ibid.*). Between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, Indian EMMBs gained significant prominence with increasing representation in society and politics. Additionally, migrants of Indian heritage from East Africa formed a wealthy trading community, utilising their financial and cultural resources (Peach, 2006). Self-employment levels for Bangladeshis also remained high during this period (Jones & Ram, 2003). Since the late 1990s, Bangladeshi and Indian EMMB owners have diverged, with Indians moving towards higher-paying jobs and sophisticated businesses (high-value-added businesses, aka HVAs). At the same time, Bangladeshis have retained low-value

self-employment (low-value-added businesses, aka LVAs) (Jones et al., 2012). These vital economic distinctions, in turn, influence the dynamic interaction of socio-cultural and class categorisation. Scholarly disagreements emerged, with one view emphasising cultural and religious barriers (Metcalf et al., 1996) and another suggesting time-lagged perceptions among Bangladeshis (Jones and Ram, 2003), often overlooking inequalities among SA migrant groups. While the upward mobility of some Indian EMMBs (“high-flyers”) is noteworthy, the ubiquity of the low-flyers, including many Bangladeshi and Indian EMMBs, is significant (Ram & Jones, 2008). Many EMMBs experience structural discrimination, including unequal access to capital and social discrimination, which influences spatial clustering (Clark & Drinkwater, 2010). Discrimination targeting migrant communities became further entrenched over the past decade, as influenced by significant public and media anxiety regarding immigration (Griffiths & Yeo, 2021). Policies were created to prevent undocumented migrants from accessing basic services, limiting work opportunities for both documented and undocumented migrants. The 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts greatly limited access to banking services, creating significant challenges for EMMBs needing financial resources. Hostile environment policies undermined equality and social cohesion by legitimising xenophobia and racism (ibid.). In 2016, Brexit exacerbated the intertwining of racial nationalism and anti-migrant sentiment, intensifying exclusionary socio-cultural practices (Virdee & McGeever, 2020).

Considering this contextual backdrop through the lens of structural racism can help us parse the complex, multi-layered discriminatory practices involving EMMBs. Bonilla-Silva (1997:470) argues that structural racism operates through the racial categorisation of socio-political and economic hierarchies; ‘generally, the more dissimilar the races’ life chances, the more racialised the social system, and vice versa’. This is particularly evident among SA migrants, as magnified further by significant internal variations in class, ethnicity, and religion. Problematically, as social relations get organised around racial identification, race-influenced class structure becomes a ‘normalised’ and independent element of the operation of the social system, yet also a less visible and more legitimised force that is harder to resist, to the extent that it is normalised (Stone, 1995). Often overlooked amidst broad-brush stereotypes, it is thus vital for research to consider the social positioning of Bangladeshi and Indian EMMB owners, focusing on their different ethno-racial stratification influenced by class and religious realities (ibid.). Such fragmentations, contingent on the specificities of a particular social order, may interact counterintuitively vis-à-vis racial (dis)-advantage.

The question of agency is somewhat muted in Bonilla-Silva's (1997) system-level theorisation. Recognising structural racism as a dynamic feature of our participants' context, we utilise Bourdieu's sociological framework to illuminate how competition over power and privilege ensues in a racially stratified social context. Additionally, as explained in the earlier section, Bourdieu's relational sociology provides a holistic framework that reconciles subjectivist and objectivist (i.e. cultural and socioeconomic) explanations while accommodating diverse perspectives reflecting the intra-community variations among SA EMMBs. Therefore, we take structural racism as an orienting notion as we explore the variegated confluence of EMMB owners' agency within their context through Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*, *doxa*, and symbolic violence.

Research Methodology

Our study focuses on a diverse range of migrant businesses in London and surrounding areas. Methodologically, we utilised qualitative enquiry to elucidate the complex theories influencing the EMMB opportunity structure and individual characteristics. We conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with Fifty EMMB owners from HVA & LVA service sectors over three years (2018-2021), reached through purposive and snowball sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We further employed observation techniques to appreciate corporal cues, a significant constituent of *habitus*. In our sample, HVA-EMMBs comprise service providers generating significant value through advanced skill and/or sophisticated business models. In contrast, LVA-EMMBs undertake limited enhancement/differentiation in transforming resources into outputs. Twenty-four participants were of Bangladeshi origin, and twenty-six were of Indian heritage. Two key-actor interviews were also conducted to include critical stakeholders' viewpoints: an East London-based business syndicate advisor and a loan officer from a retail bank in Whitechapel. Table-1 presents the participant characteristics.

Table-1 Participant details

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Industry	Business process	Ethnicity (self-defined)	Age at arrival	Generation
Jagjeet	M	46	Computer hardware	HVA	Indian	34	1st
Rishav	M	56	Convenience store	LVA	Indian	24	1st
Rajesh	M	36	IT Security	HVA	Indian	27	1st

Utpal	M	62	Accountancy firm	HVA	Indian	14	1st
Ali	M	59	Convenience store	LVA	Bangladeshi	12	1st
Noor	M	64	Butchery	LVA	Bangladeshi	26	1st
Keshav	M	29	Pharmacy	LVA	Indian	0	2nd
Kinjal	M	43	Exporting business	HVA	Indian	27	1st
Ambika	F	38	Law practice	HVA	Indian	0	2nd
Ashfaque	F	42	Real-estate	HVA	Bangladeshi	0	2nd
Gursant	M	35	IT service company	HVA	Indian	23	1st
Mujiboor	M	39	Real-estate	HVA	Bangladeshi	0	2nd
Preeti	F	43	Market research company	HVA	Indian	29	1st
Gary	M	52	Cobbler/key-cutting business	LVA	Indian	0	2nd
Sanjeev	M	58	Accountancy firm	HVA	Indian	8	1st
Simran	F	27	Art dealership	HVA	Indian	0	3rd
Manir	M	43	Law practice	HVA	Bangladeshi	22	1st
Mostafizur	M	49	Law practice	HVA	Bangladeshi	27	1st
Rehan	M	52	Law practice	HVA	Bangladeshi	25	1st
Imon-Sakib	M	46	Law practice	HVA	Bangladeshi	23	1st
Tania	F	34	Media	HVA	Bangladeshi	0	3rd
Ayesha	F	42	Media	HVA	Bangladeshi	25	1st
Haradhon	M	39	IT services	HVA	Indian	9	1st
Sunil	M	41	Hardware store	LVA	Indian	29	1st
Alauddin	M	40	Convenience store	LVA	Bangladeshi	27	1st
Awais	M	43	Accountancy firm	HVA	Bangladeshi	23	1st
Asma	F	39	Catering service	LVA	Bangladeshi	27	1st
Nasiruddin	M	52	Legal consultancy	HVA	Bangladeshi	24	1st
Md-Fazlur	M	52	Remittance service	HVA	Bangladeshi	27	1st
Kumar	M	57	Pharmacy	LVA	Indian	21	1st
Shahed	M	54	Restaurant	LVA	Bangladeshi	33	1st
Nawshaba	F	37	Law practice	HVA	Bangladeshi	24	1st
Mansoor	M	39	Law practice	HVA	Bangladeshi	22	1st
Narendra	M	52	Restaurant	LVA	Indian	29	1st
Tejinder	M	47	Restaurant	LVA	Indian	21	1st
Krishna	M	27	Convenience store	LVA	Indian	0	2nd
Rajneesh	M	55	Convenience store	LVA	Indian	31	1st

P.Akhter	F	46	Retail-clothing	LVA	Bangladeshi	24	1st
Gurmeet	M	57	Convenience store	LVA	Indian	21	1st
Sameer	M	43	Convenience store	LVA	Indian	28	1st
Jaya	F	41	Cleaning services	LVA	Indian	0	2nd
Khairul	M	45	Law practice	HVA	Bangladeshi	28	1st
R.Reddy	M	46	Educational Institute	HVA	Indian	29	1st
Iliyas	M	43	Accountancy firm	HVA	Bangladeshi	22	1st
Zahra	F	45	Jewellery shop	LVA	Bangladeshi	11	1st
Kaji-Lutfikar	M	47	Law practice	HVA	Bangladeshi	24	1st
Ajit	M	57	Law practice	HVA	Indian	27	1st
Simu	F	46	Beauty salon	LVA	Bangladeshi	27	1st
Rekha	F	31	Speciality restaurant/consultancy	HVA	Indian	25	1st
Hasrdeep	M	37	IT services	HVA	Indian	24	1st

Note: Age at arrival = 0 if the participant was born in the UK

Our study of EMMB ownership experience arose through an analytical process that supports middle-range and grounded approaches. Theoretical observations have emerged inductively from newly collected data instead of testing hypothesis within an existing framework. However, the fieldwork findings are not entirely discoveries; instead, they extend and refine the existing literature based on the relational framework. We conducted interviews in two phases: the first from October 2018 to the end of 2019, and the second included new and repeat interviews after the 2021 COVID phase, with seven participants. This allowed us to investigate the variation in the socioeconomic experience of the same participants under varied settings and phenomena over time (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011).

We consciously opted for manual coding to avoid the detached and depersonalised impact of the software packages (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). The primary researcher translated (in many cases, interviews were conducted in vernacular or often in a mixed language) and transcribed all the interviews, capturing verbal and non-verbal cues such as exclamations, pauses, and gestures. The initial analysis began during the transcription with pre-constructed codes informed by an underlying conceptual framework that shaped the interview schedules. These pre-constructed codes helped in capturing the large volume of data concisely but was employed provisionally. The primary analysis used Strauss & Corbin's (1998) three level coding process: open, axial, and selective coding, each focusing on higher abstraction. During the open coding process, the source of codes emerged from the empirical data, including key phrases like 'issue', 'funding', 'racism', 'discrimination', 'public policy', etc. Various themes also emerged, like a failure of public policies,

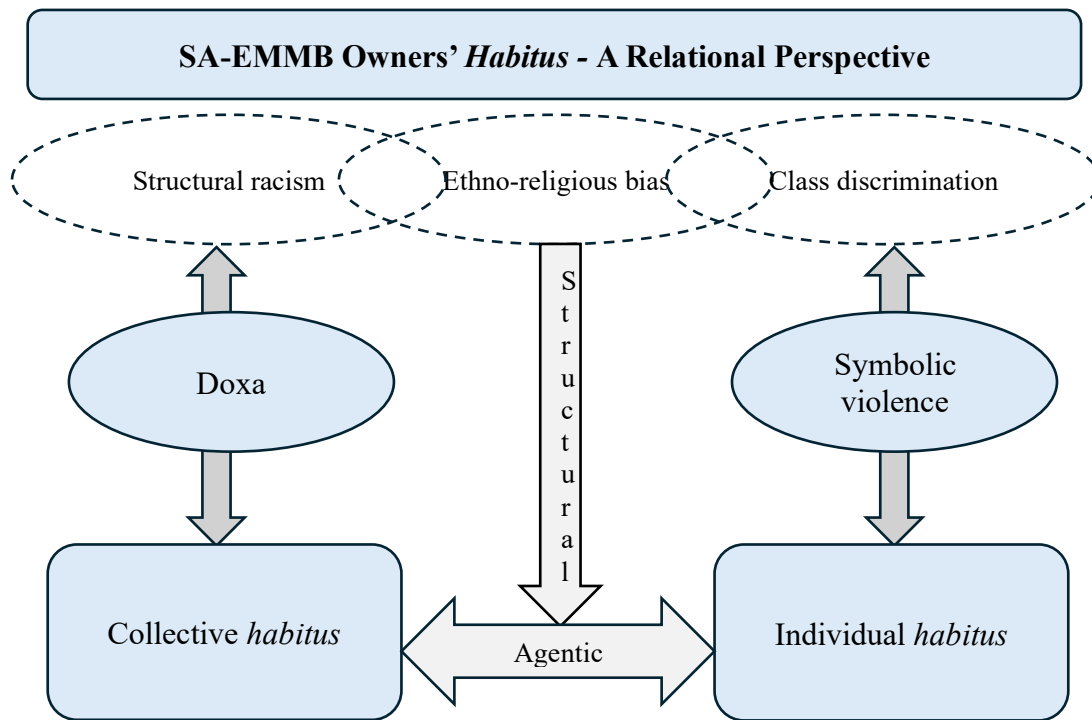
a lack of understanding of EMMB needs, structural discrimination, racism, etc. The second phase introduced axes across the codes to establish the relationship across various categories. For example, the similarities among LVA-EMMB owners, irrespective of ethnicity and service offerings, and race and ethnicity's influence in dispositional variations could be linked. Finally, selective coding helped conceptualise the relationship in the axial stage around the theoretical framework. This helped identify four major themes: habitual expression of structural bias toward EMMBs, ethnoreligious distinctions as an impetus for discriminatory practices, harmonisation in *habitus* in terms of collective practices, and the emergence of breakthrough collaborative links between conventional businesses and HVA EMMBs. These themes also helped develop an interconnected narrative that empirically explores the differential influence of *habitus* over the field position and negotiated agency of EMMB owners.

Finally, observations were crucial in developing a much deeper insight, which allowed witnessing participants' behaviour in the context of the 'real world' (Fetterman, 1989). Observations were initially recorded while conducting lengthy interviews or interviewing multiple partners from the same enterprise. Subsequently, several participants permitted the researcher to utilise their premises for observation. This technique was particularly instrumental in assessing situations when the participants were self-contradictory. It also helped to understand how interactions vary based on formality, service offerings, office size and appearance, language use, and stakeholder familiarity.

Findings

The findings are thematically woven around the layered influences of structural racism, class distinction, and ethnoreligious biases in shaping dominant notions (doxa) and reproducing themselves through habitual practices (symbolic violence) of the SA EMMB field. These are further internalised as distinctive dispositions—collective and individual *habitus* (please see the fig.2 below).

Figure 2 SA-EMMB Owners' Habitus - A Relational Perspective



Source: Compiled by the authors

Habitus as an Expression of Structural Bias

Arguably, inequality operates optimally when objectified in various bodies, including institutions and actors (Samaluk, 2014). governing socio-cultural norms are cascaded into everyday practices by various dominant actors in a field (e.g. policymakers, lobbyists, funding providers, consultants/advisors, mediators, etc.). The field-level institutions further legitimise these actors' capacity to reinforce the commonsense understandings (i.e. doxa) regarding what is feasible. In our data, a comment by a white British woman who serves as the representative of a business syndicate comprised of more than 350 small independent businesses in East London was illustrative of how inequalities were reproduced by key actors. Occupying a critical agentic position in the field, she illuminated how structural disadvantage was inscribed into institutions and practices:

No matter your policy changes, one can't change the class structure; regular people would resist, and a level playing field won't ever be created.'

For this interviewee, class distinctions were so deeply embedded within the field that they were insurmountable. Her view perhaps did not overtly support the class division or denigrate certain groups regarded as belonging to a lower class. Still, she acquiesced to the supposed inevitability of a fundamentally unequal structure where only some EMMBs belonged legitimately. When

key institutional actors endorse existing biases and reproduce the doxa, the system gains further durability despite the jarring effects of inequality (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The same key-actor went on to claim the irrelevance of institutional assistance for LVA-businesses that, in her view, would not survive competitive market forces in the long run:

What help do you want? You are just prolonging the process ... by fuelling their parasitical needs. They need an amputation. No point in prolonging these businesses for the older generation.

Another key informant, a business loan officer in a bank, offered equally dismissive views about the prospects of LVA EMMBs:

We do not get too many serious applications for small-business loans, as they would require people to follow a documentation process and, more importantly, file an income tax. Most businesses here evade taxes...it's not unknown.

The institutionalised disregard for EMMB owners' legitimacy, expressed in such starkly worded narrations, is echoed in a Department for Communities and Local Government report (2013), which dismisses the criticism of persistent discriminatory practices dissuading EMMBs from seeking financial support. The denial of systemic biases in policy circles and the key informants' miscasting of first-generation LVA businesses as incapable of creating commercial value reflect the inhospitality of a small business field that seemed to continually reproduce inequalities instead of questioning them.

In our data, the reduced legitimacy of LVA-EMMBs seemed to have been internalised by their owners over decades (Khattab & Modood, 2015). Many consented to systematic marginalisation by buying into their supposedly inferior economic status and submitting to the dominant order through acts of symbolic violence. Shahed, a Bangladeshi restaurant owner, affirmed his doxic acceptance of myths about Bangladeshi-EMMB owners' dishonesty:

Bengalis have earned a bad name for not abiding by laws. We habitually try to replicate acceptable things in an amenable Bangladeshi legal framework. Furthermore, we are often unaware of rules and policies and are not good at following rules like them [white British people].

Such racially charged self-denigration was further fuelled by the neoliberal economic order that celebrates human activity to the extent it contributed to wealth maximisation (Maton, 2018). It was palpable to the participants that only entrepreneurial activities prioritising capital expansion were valorised in the field, and as such, LVA-EMMB owners often felt disfavoured

and overlooked (Jones et al., 2019). Structural racism was not only apparent in the hierarchies within the category of EMMB owners but also featured in the dismissal of ethnic minority migrants' capitals. Even in cases where participants might be said to have highly valued skills according to the market logic, their capitals were disregarded. For example, after a 4-year corporate communications industry experience following the attainment of a degree from a premium Indian business school, when Rekha immigrated to the UK, she realised she had no marketability as a potential employee:

After moving to the UK post-marriage, I struggled to find a suitable job. My experience at Tata Communication and my business degree from Fore Business School were insufficient.

Some participants shared that they experienced a systematic and symbolic devaluation of their skills (Vershina et al., 2011). Such devaluation was particularly stark in professional work contexts, where credentials acquired in SA were diminished significantly. Interestingly, even UK-educated graduates who were first-generation migrants expressed experiences that featured significant structural inequality. This section emphasises how normalised and harder to resist form of race based structural discrimination is embodied in the *habitus* of various actors. However, the discriminatory practice overlaps with ethno-religious biases and class distinctions, emphasising the layered interactions of influences on distinctively different *habitus* of Indian and Bangladeshi EMMB owners.

Ethnoreligious Bias and Class Distinctions as Catalysts for Discriminatory Practices

Our findings indicate that religion and ethnicity shaped how structural bias infiltrated discriminatory practices differentially, and also reinforced class distinctions. This manifested as a hierarchy within the SA migrant communities, where Indians (primarily Hindus) are often cast in a relatively more favourable light than Bangladeshis (primarily Muslims). As the business syndicate advisor asserted:

I know an Indian family where the man moved from India and qualified here as a doctor. His wife is also a medical professional, and they now own a surgery in Birmingham. This is how people advance, not by sustaining their small, worthless businesses.

Similarly, Haradhon, an IT firm owner, claimed:

Many clients prefer Indian-run IT companies due to our proven credibility and hard work. Others fall short.

Such judgements constructed capital-rich Hindu migrants as more entrepreneurially capable than less privileged SA Muslims (Ghuman, 2003), where racial disadvantage was partially counterbalanced through class advantage, and it interacted with religion in contrasting ways based on Hindu vs. Muslim affiliation. Furthermore, in our data, Bangladeshis were often assumed to be less educated, less ambitious, and socio-culturally restricted. Many SA EMMB owners reproduced these symbolic hierarchies by internalising them into their *habitus*. For example, Kinjal, an Indian export business owner, argued:

My Bengali neighbour [a woman] has four children, whose husband left her for another wife. The poor lady is not qualified for employment and is on social benefit. The children go to some religious school [Madrassa]. Will they ever be part of the broader society?

In a similar vein, Kaji-Lutfikar, a Bangladeshi owner of a legal practice, claimed:

Undoubtedly, the Indian (Hindu) community has progressed more than us. But we are complacent with our status, which is better than many in Bangladesh, and don't have the zeal. We are engrossed in our small world.

Such observations reinforced persistently deleterious portrayals of Bangladeshis in the UK. The 'ethnoreligious penalty' incurred by Muslims in British society has long been normalised due to the construction of the Muslim identity as 'problematic', but also compounded based on ethnicity (Khattab & Modood 2015). Bangladeshi Muslims are among the most marginalised groups in the UK. In our data, many EMMB owners from this community seemed to be relegated to less prestigious industries due to systemic barriers (Jones & Ram, 2003). In participant accounts, negative social feedback shaped Bangladeshi EMMB owners' acquiescence to unfair accounts of their community as legitimate and valid (Aziz, 2022). Findings reveal Bangladeshi-origin second/third-generation migrants often face more discrimination than their Indian counterparts, both from dominant groups and within cross-community interactions. Ambika, a partner in a London-based law firm, argued that it is not 'practical' to expect certain professional commitments from Bangladeshi women:

We have some female partners with childcare responsibilities. X [a native British woman] was on maternity leave and worked at a reduced capacity for two years; now, she has returned and has been promoted as a partner. She's a really good example of the fact that children aren't a deterrent. She goes home for childcare but then logs back on at 9:30/10:30 p.m. However, such expectations aren't practical for Bangladeshi

women. Y, a talented Bangladeshi solicitor living with her in-laws, already works double shifts. Once she has children, we cannot expect her to maintain the same pace, and her progression will likely halt.

Ambika, a second-generation migrant with Indian heritage, cast doubt on Bangladeshi women's professionalism and ambition through hypothetical scenarios ('once she has children'). In our study, several high-skilled Indian professionals in decision-making roles in HVA-EMMBs expressed similar views, exhibiting the strength of their doxic submission to community-specific stereotypes prevailing in the field and reinforcing the class distinctions. Compounding this disadvantage was the mirroring process, noted earlier, by which some Bangladeshi business owners systematically diminished their symbolic positioning in the EMMB field through negative dispositions (Bourdieu, 1986). The layered influence of discriminatory practices can be further examined on the collective and individual habitus of EMMB owners, as discussed in the following sections.

Harmonised *Habitus* Structuring Collective Practices

Habitus harmonisation occurs when individual EMMB owners cultivate analogous dispositions and practices shaped by their shared social conditions in the field, resulting in coordinated patterns of collective practice. Bourdieu (1977:72) describes habitus alignment as 'collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action'. The collective harmonisation (mobilisation) process results in a symbolic groupness facilitated by a shared *habitus* (Bourdieu et al., 1996). The harmonisation of groups of agents into collectives generates practices that result in 'collective accomplishment of networks of variously disposed of agents, whose actions must be accounted for, negotiated and aligned' (Bottero, 2010:10), which in our data newer HVA-EMMBs seemed to experience frequently. Preeti, managing partner of a market research firm specialising in Indian food items, narrated her journey:

We didn't initially plan to enter this domain, but our previous freelance experience gave us an advantage due to our cultural understanding. We focused on a niche market instead of competing with bigger firms, as there was little market research in our sector. When we started, larger companies weren't involved, allowing us to tap into the market easily.

Like many other skilled migrants in our data, Preeti could not find a suitable market research job. She relaunched her career as a business owner and established a niche based on her unique understanding of Indian food. This participant account exemplified the formation of a symbolic

‘groupness’ through a partial harmonisation process, extending beyond the individual dispositions of an entrepreneurial disrupter and enacting business practice at a more collective level. Many of our participants running HVA businesses utilised mobility, transnational links, and cultural resources strategically to establish a stronger reservoir of capitals to negotiate successfully the constraints imposed upon them by the dominant culture (Samaluk, 2016).

In contrast, such harmonisation was not very common in LVA businesses. Tejinder, a curry house owner, experienced the dominant groups’ resistance to recognising LVA-EMMB offerings as special or unique and thus capable of generating value, which reflected neo-liberal ideas regarding the creation of winners and losers within a diverse population (Collier, 2013):

Many people say all curry dishes taste the same. Using different recipes and high-quality ingredients would raise costs, leading customers to resist paying more than what’s typical for curry houses. That’s why we rely on a few basic sauces for most dishes.

We further explored the collective practices of LVA-EMMB owners as they negotiated their positions in the field. One prominent coping strategy was forming clusters by different EMMB owners and developing community-specific production practices. Such practices shaped collective culture and processes, informally governing the field’s code of action and interaction (Wacquant & Bourdieu, 1992). For example, a collective maintenance/repair fund was set up by a group of Bangladeshi EMMBs operating within a single commercial complex in East London, to which each business contributes monthly. Ali, a Bangladeshi corner shop owner, explained:

The landlord wants to avoid expenses since he can’t raise the rent. However, we need to maintain the place for our customers and ourselves. We decided to create a monthly fund where everyone contributes, which will help with upkeep and support urgent personal or business needs. It acts as an emergency loan fund.

In this example, individual dispositions were mediated through the collective habitus of shared ‘intuition and ideals’, which helped meet EMMB owners’ needs where shortcomings in an inequitable relationship with the commercial property owners were set to fail them (ison et al., 2022). Similar collaboration could also be observed among Indian LVA-EMMB owners. However, such cooperation was often linked to specific ethnicity/caste-based communities, signalling the relevance of historical and cultural influences on collective *habitus* (Burke et al., 2013b). Rishav, a Hindu convenience store proprietor, explained: ‘The Gujarati Business

Association supports us with various business and non-business issues, especially in challenging times when community matters most.’ The sense of belonging at the community level differed between Indians and Bangladeshis, influenced by the Indian caste system and linguistic diversity, leading to distinct symbolic identities among Indian EMMB owners (Bal, 2006). This highlighted the diversity in norms, values, attitudes, and behaviours and the challenges business owners face, often obscured by a homogenised view of SA business communities.

Family Legacy and Social Inequalities Subtly Shaping Individual Dispositions

In exploring various influences on individual habitus, our data indicated that intergenerational transfer of entrepreneurial know-how significantly influenced the self-employment decisions and business activities of EMMB owners. In our data, the familial influence on individual *habitus* was particularly strong among the first-generation migrants operating LVA businesses, often inflected with experiences of racism. Noor, a Bangladeshi butcher who had migrated to the UK after marriage, recounted:

For generations, my family ran a butchery in Rongpur, Bangladesh. I originally had my own transport business, but decided to restart the family business after moving here. My father-in-law assisted me in getting a shop, and becoming a black cab driver was challenging then.

On the surface, Noor’s business choice in the UK replicated his well-trodden family business path. However, the lack of desired qualifications and perceived subordinate field positioning of white drivers dominate the London black cab industry, and significant covert discrimination exists against non-English speaking migrants (Gebrial, 2024). This was instrumental in Noor’s self-employment decision. LVA-EMMB owners’ business choices often reveal the influence of secondary *habitus* formed through life experiences in shaping their dispositional practices, even if this may not be immediately apparent. Özbilgin & Tatli (2011) have made a similar argument elsewhere, showing the impact of factors like ethnicity, race, migrant status, class, etc., on career decisions.

Such compulsions were even more decisive for the Bangladeshi women in our sample, as they faced multiple constraints rooted in their familial histories and class locations (Carter et al., 2015). Asma, a catering business owner, graduated from university and worked as a librarian in Bangladesh before starting her catering business in the UK. On the one hand, she said:

I love bringing smiles through food. It makes me happy when people enjoy my cooking, much more than being stuck in the library.

On the other hand, she later revealed that she faced significant obstacles in her job search for a librarian role in the UK, as her qualifications were often dismissed. While Asma offered a positive entrepreneurial narrative, her backstory reflected continuing labour market biases against first-generation SA migrants, who are often seen as only fit for low-skilled jobs (Dale et al., 2002). At the same time, despite the obvious constraints of the field, it was notable that our participants often shored up their agency on an ongoing basis to gain a better foothold in their field, in a similar vein as observed by Dağdelen (2024) in a study of migrant truckers in the US.

Second/third-generation migrants often viewed familial connections as important but not decisive in their business choices, unlike first-generation EMMB owners. However, it was remarkable that structural inequality was at play even in these narrations.

Mujiboor, a Bangladeshi real-estate agency owner, left his four-year banking job to join the family-run business. He aimed to expand it using his network, but admitted to having faced discrimination at work:

I requested internal mobility at my previous bank but was told I'd be better suited for a client-facing role. It was disappointing, especially since I knew others had moved roles. Feeling limited to catering to Bengali clients, I resigned instead of waiting.

Second/third-generation migrants often faced more complex self-employment decisions than first-generation migrants due to a better field-specific understanding and access to capital (Vershina et al., 2011). For example, Simran, a third-generation Indian woman from a wealthy Punjabi family, chose an unconventional career as an art dealer. Simran explained: 'When I mentioned the art gallery to my parents, they were surprised and thought I might work in a gallery or as a consultant. However, they were very supportive once I explained everything.' Like Simran, many UK-born HVA-EMMB owners sought to found relatively more high-value-added businesses, exploring options rarely considered by earlier generations, even if their ability to take risks often depended on family support.

Intention to build legitimacy in partnerships with mainstream companies

The diversity of the SA-EMMB field creates challenges in categorising specific influences that lead to self-employment decisions. Pull and push factors were not always distinct but remained

intertwined with the layered field dynamics (Basu, 1998; Clark & Drinkwater, 2000). In our data, the launch of EMMBs is mainly related to push factors owing to unfavourable labour market experiences. In contrast, the pull factors primarily included entrepreneurial opportunities stemming from the vacuum in the niche markets, less explored by conventional businesses. Interestingly, we found evidence of movements beyond the conventional push-pull narratives, where certain EMMB owners artfully altered the dominant norms of the larger field of business. The influence and contribution of some HVA-EMMBs operating in what might be considered ethnic enclaves successfully capitalised on new possibilities for collaboration with conventional majority-owned enterprises that wanted a share of the growing market of ethnic minority consumers and businesses. Thus, some EMMB owners attracted partnerships from established white British-led businesses. This illustrates a new value proposition whereby more privileged businesses engaged with EMMB business owners in productive and relatively more egalitarian ways. Nasiruddin explained:

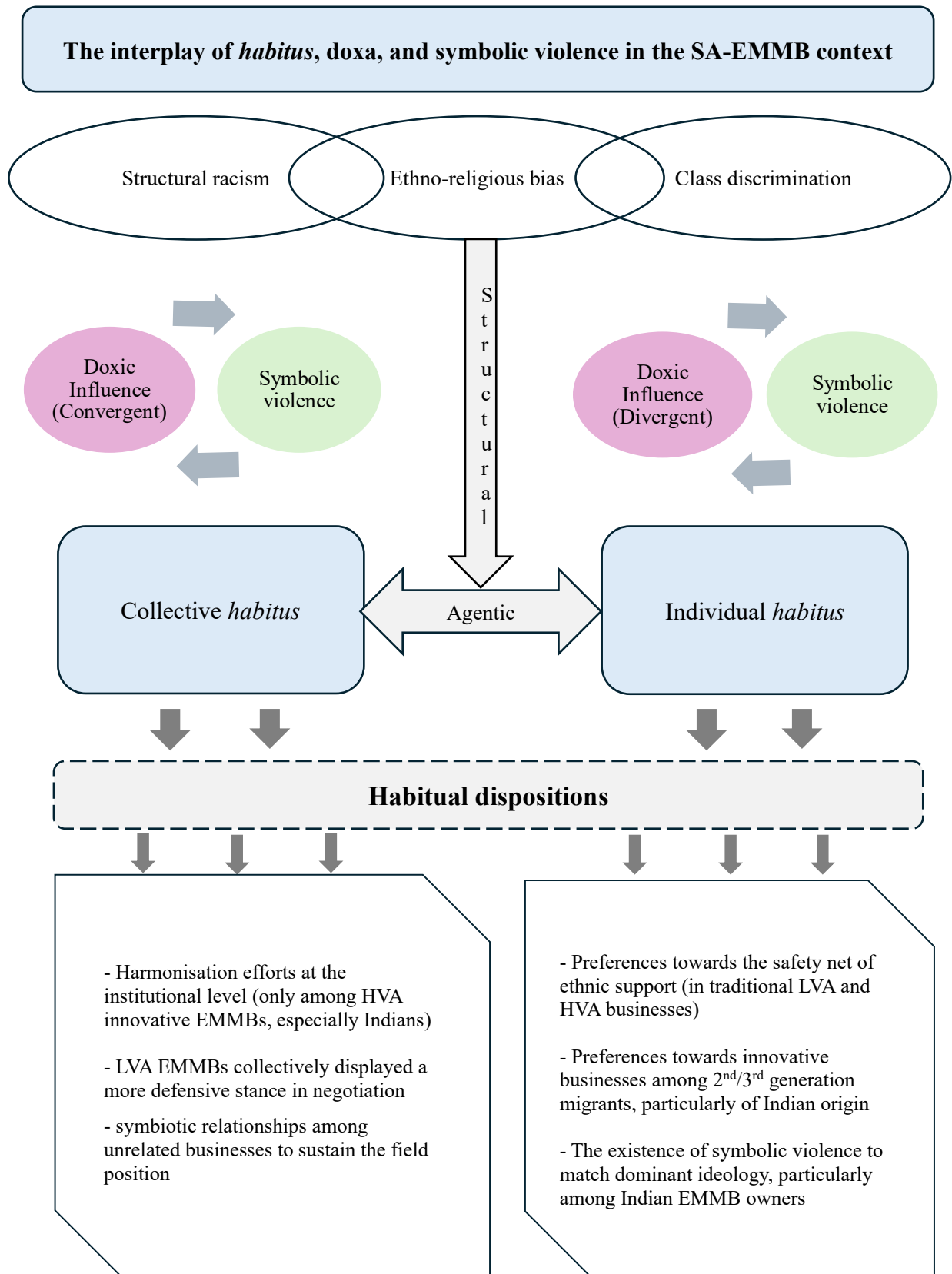
Some city firms have approached me for partnerships, recognising the potential of migrant businesses. They see value in collaborating with a trusted ethnic minority law firm.

Similarly, Preeti mentioned collaboration with a traditional market research organisation. ‘We did a project with IPSOS recently, and there are possibilities of future collaborations. This likely reflects the positive impact our consultancy has made.’ To the extent that EMMB owners offered increased access to their valued ethnic minority clientele and consumers for majority-ethnic organisations, they served as a bridge between the dominant players and the dominated. While the HVA EMMBs accumulated new privileges that could redefine their field positioning, such interactions potentially offered large commercial dividends to the businesses owned by the ethnic majority, not necessarily with commensurate gains for the dominated. This understanding and acceptance of the subordinate position, even in a field where EMMBs have greater cultural capital, often discourages them from forming collaborations. Illyas did not agree to a merger with a more traditional Chartered Accountancy firm, stating, ‘I would prefer to stick with my current working styles rather than adopt the newly imposed guidelines.’ This also indicates the artful reorganisation of *habitus*, where individual preferences took precedence over gaining legitimacy in the field.

Discussion

Our findings reveal the significance of relationality amongst *habitus*, doxa, and symbolic violence in the EMMB field, where doxa and symbolic violence symbolise structural dimensions, and *habitus* denotes individual EMMB owners' agentic embodiment of the structure as they navigate constraints and opportunities (Tatli et al., 2014). Our findings show how structural racism, class discrimination, and ethnoreligious bias shape field-specific doxa and are ingrained in the habitus of SA-EMMB owners. The relationalities of our findings are depicted in Fig. 3 below.

Figure-3 The interplay of *habitus*, *doxa*, symbolic violence in the EMMB context



Source: Compiled by the authors

As depicted in this figure, the impact of structural racism, ethnoreligious biases, and class discrimination is felt across both structural and agentic elements and influences the legitimacy of the EMMB field. The taken-for-granted norms (or doxic influence) reinforce institutional practices in a structurally biased field, influencing collective and individual *habitus*. In our data, the doxic influences ensue relatively either convergently or divergently in EMMB owners' practices, depending on their recency of migration and generational cohort. This reflects distinct experiences with racially inflected bias that permeates the UK context, as well as their diverse socioeconomic statuses and religious affiliations. Accordingly, some EMMB owners variously opt for the shelter of ethnicity-based support in sustaining their businesses (convergence effort), and some pursue riskier, high-growth opportunities (divergence preference). Doxic submission is internalised through collective and individual *habitus*, often leading to engagement in symbolic violence, where EMMB owners construe their subordination in the field of small business as largely legitimate. These relationships are examined throughout our findings, resulting in layered and intricate dispositions among EMMB owners, demonstrated through unique entrepreneurial outcomes.

Our Bourdieusian conceptual framing benefited from considering the discriminatory practice patterns saturating the field, as we used Bonilla-Silva's (1997) construct of structural racism to assess its impact on the EMMB owners' *habitus*. Institutional racism in Britain is inextricably linked to its colonial history; however, the overt discrimination of yesteryear has gradually transformed into covert and indirect patterns of domination (Ozturk & Berber, 2022). The UK labour market is often considered race-neutral, yet EMMBs reveal deep structural inequalities (Tackey, 2006). The concept of doxa helps appreciate how race neutrality further normalises dominant actors' privileges and shapes collective and individual *habitus*. The internalisation process affects the *habitus* of dominant agents and EMMB owners, who are often critical of their survival practices. The concept of symbolic violence highlights how field-specific prejudices are internalised and legitimised in everyday practices, particularly among Bangladeshis, who often cast themselves as less proficient than Indians.

The contextualisation of collective *habitus* helps decipher various forms of collaborative practices. Although the collective responses of EMMB owners are more defensive vis-à-vis the dominant class, the collective *habitus* often encourages a harmonious interplay among the dominated agents, indicating some possibility of symbolic power for EMMB owners. The study shows that while intergenerational inheritance strongly influences entrepreneurial choices, a more deliberate and involved effort in self-determination is also apparent. Secondly,

the collective dispositions of EMMB owners are often more defensive towards discriminatory practices and develop resistance through various shared practices. Finally, the broader collective *habitus* of various EMMB field participants (including dominant and subordinate actors) also induces harmonious coexistence, as some EMMB owners develop preferential symbolic identities by engaging in economically meaningful shared practices. However, a tendency to internalise perceived economic insignificance, particularly among Bangladeshi-led LVA-EMMBs, reinforces social hierarchies through the compliance and consent of the dominated.

Our analysis also emphasises that the influence of secondary *habitus* is more substantial on the individual dispositions of EMMB owners. Perceived field positioning, enhanced understanding of critical resources, and aspirations to match the dominant ideology often transform into multifaceted dispositions. Most EMMB operators with traditional offerings preferred the safety net of ethnic support. Ethnicity or type of service offerings did not have differential impacts in most cases. In contrast, 2nd/3rd generation EMMB owners offering innovative services mainly displayed a better understanding of the field due to their familiarity with the UK markets. Finally, the intergenerational divergence often translated into symbolic violence to match dominant ideology, which was more prevalent among the Indian EMMB in HVA sectors.

Comparing the entrepreneurial experiences of the two SA communities, this study emphasises the increased marginalisation faced by Bangladeshi-run EMMBs. It highlights (a) how a racially oppressive structure shapes the *habitus* of Bangladeshi and Indian EMMB owners and (b) how their distinctive histories, socioeconomic locations, and religious affiliations entail varied individual and collective dispositions, influencing business practices. Within the EMMB sphere, the cultural subordination of Bangladeshi migrants, in particular by the dominant actors, including Indian counterparts, is internalised by the dominated as valid as well. In this way, there are distinct layers of symbolic violence, one particular mechanism of misrecognition shaping the experiences of EMMBs as a whole, and another mechanism of symbolic violence operating as a within-category hierarchy, where Bangladeshi business owners (with class disadvantages and religion-based inequalities) come to accept as legitimate unfair processes of marginalisation and discrimination enacted against them within the EMMB community. The key actor interviews add to the understanding of the gradual and normalised institutional marginalisation of most EMMBs. The continued covert discrimination against Bangladeshi-owned LVA ventures highlights structural biases and the prevailing market tendency to undervalue less commercially significant businesses (Davison and Shire, 2015). The negative

perception of LVA EMMBs significantly affects institutional functioning and policy, shaping the field's logic. Table-2 below further details the unique experiences of Bangladeshi and Indian EMMB owners concerning various conceptual focus areas.

Table-2: A comparative study of Bangladeshi and Indian EMMBs

Conceptual focus areas	Indian LVA EMMBs	Bangladeshi LVA EMMBs	Indian HVA EMMBs	Bangladeshi HVA EMMBs
Structural racism inflicted on EMMBs	High, but relatively less than Bangladeshi EMMBs (greater acceptance of sociocultural and religious practices)	Maximum discrimination experienced among others	Relatively less acute towards more diversified or sophisticated businesses	Exposed to structural racism but more insulated than LVA-businesses
Perceived positioning of EMMBs undergirding the field doxa	Low economic-significance but perceived more valuable than Bangladeshi EMMBs	Perceived as relatively less legitimate, also an insignificant economic contributor	A few niche businesses are well-accepted, however, traditional EMMBs are perceived as part of an enclave economy	Traditional EMMBs are perceived as part of an enclave economy catering co-ethnic clientele
Exhibition and engagement in symbolic violence	Some evidence of symbolic violence, but to a lesser extent than Bangladeshi counterparts	Strong and pervasive, with many EMMB owners deprecating their value creation	Exists among traditional EMMBs, but tend to negotiate and survive it. Alongside, HVA-EMMB owners often discriminate against other migrants based on race, ethnicity, gender, and religion	Palpable especially in submitting to the dominant notion of irrelevance and lacking capabilities, though they are involved in relatively higher value-creation activities
Collective <i>habitus</i> and its influences	- Collaborative efforts to combat socio-economic adversity - Influence of class/caste/linguistic segregation dominates the collective practice	- Collaborative efforts to combat socio-economic adversity observed among various unrelated businesses – Highest level of community-based practices	- Collective-collaboration is less common - Strong desire to actively ‘integrate’ within the dominant socio-cultural practices	Evidence of some collective effort to combat socio-economic adversity - Desire to integrate and business diversification is often lesser than Indian counterparts
Subconscious impact of discrimination on choice of business activity	Substantially high	Substantially high	Higher for traditional EMMB owners	Higher for traditional EMMBS
Influence of familial <i>habitus</i> on choice of business activity	High	High	High for traditional EMMBS owners, but repudiated by more innovative EMMB owners	High for traditional EMMBS owners. Second/third-generation migrants often prefer independent career paths

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the potential of innovative theoretical and conceptual interventions supported by the Bourdieusian relational framework in migrant entrepreneurship literature. It also empirically contributes to UK migrant business literature by distinguishing between Bangladeshi and Indian EMMBs, a rarely examined aspect.

We utilise the concepts of doxa, symbolic violence, and *habitus* to explore the relationship between the diverse business practices of Bangladeshi and Indian EMMB owners and their negotiated agencies. Bourdieusian concepts have been used in the migrant entrepreneurship literature before (Dağdelen, 2024; Forson et al., 2014; Samaluk, 2016), but we explored the conceptual interconnectedness in Bourdieu's theorising to present a comparative portrayal of EMMB owners within the category the differences in terms of agentic dispositions. Focusing on two distinct communities - differentiated based on ethnic origin, class, socioeconomic status, and religion, as well as, based on varied service offerings and inter-generational divergences - needed a holistic analytical framework to establish links based on similarities and differences. Our findings illustrate how structural discrimination against SA EMMB owners creates a multifaceted system of dispositions. Although the EMMB *habitus* embodies dominant structural norms, the internalisation of doxa varies based on the agents' perceived positioning in the field. The diverse manifestations of doxa implicated with divergent *habitus* are further demonstrated through symbolic violence, in which various EMMB owners exercise business practices with shifting degrees of consent and complicity concerning the field norms. As we exemplify the variations in the interconnectedness of doxa, symbolic violence and *habitus* based on the symbolic positioning of SA-EMMB owners in the small business field, we demonstrate the potential of innovative theoretical interventions to which the Bourdieusian framework can lend itself.

Secondly, this study's primary empirical contribution is its analytical separation of Bangladeshi and Indian EMMBs, a crucial distinction rarely addressed in contemporary scholarship. Bangladeshi and Indian EMMB owners share similar service offerings and spatial factors, but their agency differs in dispositional practices and symbolic positioning. Hence, they should not be subject to homogenised portrayals that offer an incomplete picture of their richly varied practices as they navigate the still highly unequal EMMB field (Jones & Ram, 2003; Metcalf et al., 1996). The differences in symbolic positioning - owing to varied degrees of structural discrimination inflicted on Bangladeshi and Indian migrants - impact their collective and individual *habitus* disproportionately and unequally.

Our research is limited to London and nearby areas, highlighting the need for more studies to capture demographic diversity, particularly in the north. Various parts of the study have indicated the juxtaposition and interplay of multiple dimensions of various identity dimensions and their crucial role in shaping shared *habitus* and relationships. There remains, thus, a scope for adopting a broader and intersectional lens to bring out further the gendered, ethnic, and class dimensions (exploring the substantial sub-ethnic compositions within each community), leading to yet more profound and granular insights.

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