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Gurkha Warriors as Entrepreneurs in Britain: A Social Anchoring Lens on Martial Heritage and Migrant Enterprises

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Abstract

Using the social anchoring approach, this article investigates the entrepreneur experience of one of the newest migrant groups in Britain, the Nepali Gurkhas. The findings derived from the semi-structured interviews show how these migrant entrepreneurs employ multiple 'anchors' to engage in family-based enterprises and to navigate structural constraints. Their military heritage, which has provided them with psycho-social resources in the form of subjective and mixed anchors, has been central to their exercise of agency and enabling them to gain a foothold in Britain. This has rendered Gurkha entrepreneurs a distinct group within migrant entrepreneurship. The article contributes to the literature on migrant entrepreneurship by delineating how agential capacity, by deploying different anchors, can cause variations in migrant enterprises, which in turn imbue migrant entrepreneurship with distinct characteristics.

Keywords

Britain, migrant entrepreneurship, Nepali Gurkhas, social anchoring

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Introduction

This article investigates how one of the newest migrant groups in Britain, Nepali Gurkhas, are gaining a foothold in their host society through entrepreneurial activities. Different forms of migration have an impact on both the home and host societies. The impact of settled permanent immigrant populations such as diasporas, has shaped the culture and social structure of host societies, for example, the diasporic settlement of Turks, Moroccans, and Algerians in Western Europe, with many of these experiences differentiated by varying levels of human capital, social agency and skills of the migrants in question (Massey et al., 2002; Portes, 2010). For some migrants, economic and cultural otherness leads to a complex nexus of assimilation and dependency (Kofman, 2007). Extant work shows that migrant enterprises are typically microscale, and concentrated in poorly rewarded, labour-intensive and fiercely competitive services, such as catering and retail sectors with low-entry barriers and high failure rates (Jones et al., 2014).

However, the experiences and trajectories of entrepreneurs have been distinctly heterogeneous across migrant groups, as each group is exposed to different opportunity structures, enablers and constraints (Berntsen et al., 2021; Brynin et al., 2019; Kloosterman, 2010; Ram et al., 2008). Portes and Martinez (2020) refute the claim that ethnic minority migrants are subject to occupational and economic subordination as a result of their businesses being labelled as, and trapped in, 'ethnic enclaves'. Instead, they provide evidence of the heterogeneity of migrant entrepreneurship and its impact on transnational forms of organising, with varied implications for the home and host societies. This heterogeneity is also shaped by migrants' unique psycho-social resources, containing both relational and cultural dimensions, as these have a profound impact on their attitudes towards work-family balance, economic priorities, co-ethnic networks, stability and integration (Craig et al., 2012). Such resources provide migrants with different forms of anchors which result in variations in the way that they exercise their agency (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2016, 2018). The scope for migrant entrepreneurs to use such resources and exercise their agency has, however, been relatively underexplored in the migrant entrepreneurship literature (Cederberg and Villares-Varela, 2019; Villares-Varela et al., 2018).

In this article on the entrepreneur experience of Nepali retired Gurkhas, both the subjective and objective aspects of migrant enterprises are identified, along with the varied anchors and types of agency that they deploy to help them make connections and gain a foothold in the host society. With 200 years of continuous service to the British Crown, the Gurkhas are renowned for their military strength, loyalty, discipline, resilience and cultural disposition (Kochhar-George, 2010). They are perhaps the only immigrant group in Britain relatively less targeted by far-right populist parties with an anti-immigration stance. Drawing on the concept of 'social anchoring' (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2016, 2018), this article shows how the use of different anchors – tangible, subjective and mixed – have also provided psycho-social resources that have differentiated Gurkha entrepreneurs from other migrant entrepreneurs, thereby contributing to the debate on the heterogeneity of migrant entrepreneurship.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: in the next section, we discuss prior work concerning migrant entrepreneurship and elaborate on social anchoring; this is followed by an explanation of the research method, and then a brief discussion on the

history of Gurkha migrants; we then present our empirical findings, demonstrating the strategic extraction of psycho-social resources by Gurkha entrepreneurs. The final section analyses how the application of the concept of social anchoring has enabled us to shed light on some of the novel aspects of Gurkha enterprises, which have rendered them a distinct group within migrant entrepreneurship, and offers some concluding remarks.

Migrant entrepreneurship and social anchoring

Despite experiencing similar socio-structural constraints (Jones et al., 2014; Portes, 2010; Portes and Jensen, 1989; Ram et al., 2008), entrepreneur experiences vary across different migrant groups. The entrepreneurial experiences of long-standing and culturally diverse South Asian, African-Caribbean and Eastern European migrant groups have been covered in prior work (Bryson and White, 2019; Kononen, 2019) and comparisons made in terms of their different orientations. Migrant-led businesses tend to be more influenced by family networks involving homogeneous family members, whereas others are bounded by co-ethnic networks and ethnic enclaves (Naldi et al., 2007). Family connections and social capital have benefitted some migrants by enabling them to obtain financial capital easily from within their own ethnic community (Light et al., 1990). As recent migrants to Britain, Vershinina et al. (2011) explore Polish entrepreneurs' pathways through the forms of capital that they accessed, used and converted into entrepreneurial activity. The mixed dual embeddedness approach (Kloosterman, 2010; Kloosterman and Rath, 2018) blends the structural context of markets, the state regime and the wider economic and institutional environment, while recognising the role of race relations and racism, and incorporating migration histories as well as the individual agency of entrepreneurs.

More recently, the social agency of migrant entrepreneurs has come to attract increasing attention, as it has a direct bearing on the way in which they overcome structural and cultural constraints (Kloosterman, 2010). Villares-Varela et al. (2018) discuss different forms of 'patch-working' strategies, including holding multiple jobs and activities and setting up a portfolio of businesses to help them survive and grow. Berntsen et al. (2021) demonstrate the role that different personal enablers have played in triggering the agency of migrant entrepreneurs for whom entrepreneurship was once regarded as a distant goal. Few studies, however, have explored the role played by migrants' psycho-social resources in combination with their agency or theorised about the ways that such resources are implicated in shaping entrepreneurial trajectories. In addition to the socio-economic and structural constraints within which migrant entrepreneurs have to operate, this article focuses on how they use psycho-social resources as 'anchors' to help them adapt to the host society and exercise their agency.

Grzymala-Kazlowska (2016) introduces the notion of social anchoring as a linking concept, incorporating psycho-social dimensions, whereby there is an alteration of focus 'from relations between people to individuals and their resources, and changes perspective from structural to the interactional and cognitive' (p.1133). A key aspect of social anchoring concerns individual strategies, types of agency and their social connections, all of which serve as a basis for psycho-social functioning. Baltes (1997) emphasises the importance of psycho-social resources in understanding how people confront certain

opportunities and limitations, which are successfully navigated by orchestrating the selection, optimisation and compensation of resources. In this case, resources can be those that 'either are centrally valued in their own right (e.g., self-esteem and close attachments) or act as a means to obtain centrally valued ends (e.g., money, social support and credit)' (Hobfoll, 2002).

The concept of social anchoring is useful in understanding how migrants attempt to locate their place in a host society, establish their own sense of being and connect to different social spaces. In this regard, the concept offers a more comprehensive insight into the adaptation of migrants to new life settings, embedding the cultural, emotional and relational aspects and other structural constraints (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2016). For instance, Grzymala-Kazlowska (2018) applied the notion of social anchoring to illustrate the varied strategies and types of agency exercised by Polish migrants to ensure their stability in Britain. The theoretical significance of social anchoring in migrant entrepreneurship is yet to be established, despite a call to apply the theory beyond migration studies (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2016, 2018). The current article addresses this call by delineating how Gurkha migrants, drawing on their specific resources, traits and networks, establish essential footholds in Britain through entrepreneurial activities. In order to do so, the research draws on Grzymala-Kazlowska's (2016) range of 'anchors' that are analytically distinguished and differentiated as subjective (internal), objective (external and tangible) or mixed.

Tangible anchors, such as legal and institutional anchors, involve legal status (the right to settlement) in combination with the strategic mobilisation of economic resources through social networks, and thus act as a means of adaptation that allows migrants to anchor themselves within the host society. Other examples of objective anchors related to emotional and symbolic elements are material objects not regarded as economic resources, such as photographs, images and practices (including habitual behaviour). Subjective and internal types of anchors refer to values, beliefs and memories that draw on individual and personal traits, whereas social and professional traits can be regarded as 'mixed anchors', which internalise cultural behaviours. These are forms of psycho-social resources that can be 'relational' in nature (Villares-Varela et al., 2018), between migrants and their host communities, allowing them not only to strengthen their foothold in the host society to stabilise their trajectories but also to connect them with their countries of origin and/or anchor them in transnational social spaces. However, Grzymala-Kazlowska (2016) argues that some persistent anchors, in particular those linking migrants to their country of origin, could also act as a barrier to their integration in the host society.

The Gurkhas' complex relationship with the Crown, preserved through memories and images, their right to settlement and access to pensions, have all provided them with different anchors that distinguish them from other migrant entrepreneurs. These new migrants have drawn on their unique Gurkha cultural traits of hard work, resilience and courage, and deployed them as a form of psycho-social resources. In this regard, the Nepali Gurkha migrants represent a unique case of social anchoring, delineating the intersection between socio-economic motivations for economic pursuits and psycho-social resources. The operationalisation of social anchoring in the context of Gurkha migrants therefore engenders deeper insights into a relational and agentic perspective on migrant entrepreneurship.

Research methods

The study areas selected were Colchester and Aldershot, due to the presence and ease of access to the Nepali societies in these two towns. According to the 2011 Census, 6131 people, accounting for 6.5% of the total population of Aldershot's Rushmoor district, are Nepali, mostly comprising the families of former Gurkhas.[1] Although exact figures are not available for Colchester, the researchers were told during the interviews with the executive committee members of the Nepali Society that more than 500 Gurkhas and their family members have settled in Colchester. Details about enterprises owned by Gurkhas in these two locations were gained through members of the executive committee of the Nepali Society and the Gurkha Trust, respectively.

In total, 35 interviews, which included two follow-up interviews, were conducted with 33 informants (29 male and 4 female) over a period of two years (2016–2018) (Supplementary Appendix A). Apart from 2 non-Gurkha partners, the remaining informants were either retired members of the Brigade of Gurkhas or their spouses. All Gurkha informants were aged between 40 and 60 and involved in small businesses as an owner or partner (Supplementary Appendix A). The interviews, conducted in the Nepali language by the two Nepali-origin co-authors, lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Prior to beginning the interviews, the informants were assured that their anonymity would be guaranteed. Having obtained consent, all interviews were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed into English by the two interviewing authors. Following this, a verbatim transcription was created, which all the authors were involved in discussions about, as well as in developing a common understanding of all the relevant issues raised. These iterative discussions held between the co-authors also helped to ensure the reliability of the interview statements.

From the outset, we were influenced by the concept of social anchoring, focusing specifically on identity, security and integration (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2016), and how Gurkha migrants are strengthening their foothold in Britain through entrepreneurship. However, their complex relationship with the Crown, and its unique cultural and relational character, was evident during the early interviews. This led us to focus more on the psycho-social resources of Gurkhas which have acted as important anchors in the process of entrepreneurship, in addition to the structural constraints that they face as a migrant group. The interviews therefore started by presenting informants with open-ended questions about their Gurkha heritage and culture, their expectations and perceptions of British society and their attitudes towards work, employment and family. This was followed by a discussion of the factors that motivated them to start businesses; the challenges they experienced in the process; labour organisation and the use of unique Gurkha resources, traits and networks in facilitating and sustaining the businesses; community responses to the enterprises; and the contributions they have made to the community.

Applying the qualitative method enabled the research team to collect in-depth information about the anchors that Gurkha entrepreneurs used to set up and facilitate their businesses and to differentiate themselves from other migrant entrepreneurs. Such information, particularly that about Gurkhas' psycho-social resources and the social agency that Gurkha entrepreneurs exercised to deploy these resources, would have been difficult to gather through the analysis of documents or the application of other quantitative methods (Miles and Huberman, 2002). Interviews with non-Gurkha Nepali entrepreneurs allowed us to

explore the perceptions of Gurkhas among a group that is close to but not the same as the study group and, in particular, illuminated aspects of the Gurkhas' psycho-social resources that may otherwise have remained hidden. In addition, the research team interviewed the executive committee members of the Nepali Society in Colchester and the Gurkha Welfare Trust in Aldershot, to understand the challenges that Gurkha enterprises face in establishing and operating businesses as well as the support available to them. Two follow-up interviews were conducted, one with a Gurkha business owner and another with the Chairman of the Nepali Society. The purpose of the follow-up interview with the Chairman was to further explore the extent to which the Nepali Society has contributed to anchoring entrepreneurs within their local communities, whereas the owner was interviewed to generate more in-depth insights into the Gurkhas' historical connections to Britain and their cultural and relational memories, in light of the fact that he had over 30 years' experience of living, working and being an entrepreneur in Britain.

The research team followed several steps to manually analyse the data. We applied the concept of different anchors both to structure our analysis, and to make sense of the findings. Initially, the transcripts were collated, and the team coded the views and issues frequently identified by the interviewees in the process of setting up businesses, as well as the psycho-social resources which offered Gurkha enterprises important anchors. This was similar to the open coding method, mentioned by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Next, a number of themes underpinning social anchoring were selected and developed, including the socio-economic contexts of Gurkha entrepreneurship, the deployment of Gurkha-specific resources, networks and labour, and unique Gurkha traits, memories and values which have offered entrepreneurs subjective and mixed anchors (Supplementary Appendix B). In the final stage, the identified themes were clustered, and the team attempted to establish links between them to develop narratives of Gurkha migrant entrepreneurship. The embedding of the theory within our analysis enabled us to engender a wider understanding of the cultural characteristics and social agency of Gurkha entrepreneurs, thus distinguishing them from other migrant entrepreneurs.

Overview of Gurkha migrants and their settlement in Britain

Gurkhas are soldiers of Nepali origin who have served in the British Army's Brigade of Gurkhas for the last 200 years. The tripartite agreement between Nepal, India and Britain signed in 1947, formalised the process of recruiting Gurkha regiments for Britain and India (Rai, 2018). The agreement required the Gurkha soldiers to resettle as Nepali citizens in order to be eligible for a pension. Their pension entitlements were index-linked to the Indian Pay Code (IPC) and the cost of living in Nepal, and claimed to be more generous in comparison with those received by their counterparts of the same rank in Nepal (Thurley, 2019). The Gurkha Pension Scheme (GPS), which admitted the last entrants in 2006, consists of 22,000 members: 15,000 serving pensioners and around 7,000 widows or family members (Ministry of Defence, 2020).

The right of settlement in Britain, together with subsequent changes to the immigration rules in 2004 and 2009, has appeared to be a life-changing development for many Gurkhas.

Both pensioner and non-pensioner Gurkhas, who had served the British Crown for a minimum of four years, were allowed to relocate themselves and their children under 18 to Britain. The Gurkhas' settlement in Britain therefore started from 2009 and was concentrated mostly in garrison towns such as Aldershot, Ashford, Farnborough, Folkestone and Colchester, where they had spent some part of their working lives and where their friends and relatives had settled (Pariyar, 2020). The establishment of Gurkha and Nepali committees in these towns, for instance, the Colchester Nepali Society and the Gurkha Welfare Advice Centre in Aldershot, has made these towns even more attractive to Gurkha veterans. Given that many Gurkhas were previously mandated to retire after 15 years' service (Kochhar-George, 2010), they were relatively young when they found themselves in the position of pursuing economic trajectories post-retirement. For instance, most of these retirees were in their early thirties, and involved in a second career in Nepal or other countries abroad, mainly as security personnel, prior to their relocation to Britain (Thurley, 2019).

Based on the brigade and badge membership system, Gurkhas identified themselves through *numbaries* (groups enlisted in the military together and at the same time) (Rai, 2018), and their unique Gurkha identity has become firmly established through their military heritage, all of which demarcates them from other migrant groups. The Gurkhas represent a close-knit and trust-based community; each member settling down in close proximity to their *numbaries*, friends and family members. A traditional trust-based mechanism of raising capital in Nepal, known as *dhukuti* (for example, rotating credit – Rogers, 2006), has in fact helped some Gurkha migrants to raise additional capital for settlement and investment in business ventures. While Gurkhas have embraced different types of footholds in their attempts to become insiders, few Gurkhas have selected entrepreneurship as a means of strengthening their anchoring in Britain.

Empirical findings

The findings are based on the categorisation of data in terms of socio-economic characteristics, such as business experience and aspirations, triggered by the right to settlement in Britain, alongside types of economic activity and the scale of the operations that participants engaged in. This system of categorisation helped to extract information about the nature of the structural conditions faced by Gurkha migrants, which reflects both convergences with and divergences from other migrant entrepreneurs. Our data show that the strategic use of different objective, subjective and mixed 'anchors', has provided Gurkha entrepreneurs with the necessary psycho-social resources for building footholds in the host country, to enable them to achieve economic and social transformation through these economic ventures. The strategic extraction of these resources can be seen in the following three areas: socio-economic contexts and business trajectories; mobilisation of labour, networks and resources in line with their martial heritage; and Gurkha traits, memories and values.

Socio-economic contexts of Gurkha entrepreneurship

In elaborating on their motivations for undertaking economic ventures, the respondents pointed to convergences with other migrant entrepreneurs, even when entrepreneurial

traits were absent due to their military heritage. Most claimed that they had little choice but to start such enterprises, given their age and the educational and linguistic disadvantages they faced, as well as the fact that they had little or no access to mainstream labour markets or skill sets. Although most of them were in receipt of the standard military pension, they reported that this pension, when converted into British pounds, was inadequate (Supplementary Appendix C). One owner of a grocery shop remarked:

> My pension allowed me to have a comfortable life back home, but it was not enough to survive here. I also did not feel comfortable working in low-skilled and low-paid jobs. I invested in a Nepali grocery shop using my savings from Nepal. (G1)

Age disadvantage is particularly notable among Gurkhas, as most of them arrived in Britain in their forties and fifties. This, coupled with their limited cultural disposition towards entrepreneurship, has made many of them risk-averse entrepreneurs. An owner of a Gurkha catering and party venue commented:

> We arrived in this country a bit too late having passed the age for obtaining education and training. Business was the only alternative left to me should I wish for financial security. No one in my family was involved in business. Therefore, I was not ready to take a huge risk and make a big investment. (G4)

However, the Gurkhas have certain privileges in the low-skilled job market, mainly due to their military reputation and settlement rights. While the majority of retired Gurkhas are employed as security guards, their wives work as support workers and in care homes. Lacking a history of family and inter-generational entrepreneurship, experience and confidence, entrepreneurship was therefore not an immediate focus for many Gurkhas and thus their transformation towards launching their own enterprises has taken the form of an incremental process. For instance, a partner in a car servicing centre recalled:

> I worked as a security guard for five years. Business was a distant goal. But low pay, erratic work schedules and personal safety led to me rethinking my future. (G3)

In a few instances, however, the experiences of other Asian and ethnic entrepreneurs have motivated Gurkhas to overcome the structural barriers they experienced. They perceived the autonomy and security enjoyed by these entrepreneurs as serving as an inspiration. The owner of a travel agency remarked:

> I saw Indian and other migrants running shops and travel agents. They were confident and financially viable. When working for others for almost two years, I was always scared of making mistakes and being made redundant. Therefore, I started this company targeting Gurkhas, Nepalese and South Asians. (G5)

There are a few cases of relatively young (in their early forties) and educated Gurkhas evolving into entrepreneur enablers, motivating their family members and friends with the entrepreneurial desire to overcome the barriers they face. The owner of a Nepali fast-food restaurant and takeaway explained:

> The previous owner asked me to take over the business. He knew how much I wanted to have my own restaurant, so asked me to make instalment payments. Today I see so many members of my own community wanting to become an entrepreneur but struggling to find a way. I invite them to become my partner, I provide them with training and later ask them to run the business. (G6)

Gurkha pride and generational impact was also a notable feature of their entrepreneurial decisions. This served as a unique pull factor in setting up businesses, as the owner of a Gurkha restaurant stated:

> During the initial years, stability was the key issue. I was worried that my children and parents would not be happy seeing me, who once was a renowned soldier, doing ordinary jobs. Today, I am proud of owning this business and having an entrepreneurial identity in front of them. (G2)

The evidence shows that age and skills barriers have impeded these migrants in their attempts to secure satisfactory employment despite gaining the right to settlement, added to the fact that their basic pension is less than that of their British counterparts. These migrants have leaned on their settlement rights as an objective anchor with which to secure other economic ventures as a way of developing a foothold in the host society. Their internalised values of serving the Crown coupled with ethnic personal enablers have proved to be important in terms of navigating their agency towards such economic ventures, in particular entrepreneurship.

Mobilising familial labour, resources and networks

The ways in which Gurkhas have built on and used resources and social networks are distinct from how other migrant groups have done this, as many in the sample were earnest in their pursuit of serving and relating to the British Crown. Thus, despite facing age and skill constraints, Gurkha households have made strategic work choices. The majority of men took on multiple jobs that aligned with their military heritage, such as security guards in private companies, while working on their businesses during their own time, and their wives shared responsibility for these family ventures. Compared with many other migrant groups (Villares-Varela et al., 2018), labour arrangements therefore appear to be different among Gurkha enterprises due to the active involvement of both husbands and wives. The sharing of responsibilities between them is quite common, as a takeaway owner confirmed:

> My wife helps me in dealing with the orders. She does not hesitate to ask me to take care of our children and their food. Both of us are aware of the importance of having a good household income. (G6)

As evidenced in previous studies (Villares-Varela et al., 2018), raising financial resources through formal sources such as banks and building societies has proved to be a struggle for these groups. For instance, a restaurant owner remarked:

> All banks and building societies were positive with my application saying I am a Gurkha – a trusted person with a settlement permit and pension. But my application got rejected everywhere and the reason was that I do not have a history of doing business. (G2)

Mobilisation of financial resources specific to the Gurkhas is a notable aspect of their entrepreneurship experience. The tradition of *dhukuti*, which the majority of Gurkhas have continued in their new home, has become a source of raising additional financial support and of enabling entrepreneurial activities. The owner of a taxi company explained how this system works:

> We have 25 participants; all of us are somehow related to each other. Each of us contributes £250 per month, meaning we collect £6250 per month for 25 months. A name is selected randomly at the end of the month like in a lottery and that person will be given that money. That person is not allowed to participate in the remaining months but keeps on contributing. Luckily, I was selected, and it helped me to extend my business. (G7)

The *dhukuti* system functions at multiple levels and with multiple groups, which is similar to other forms of informal credit that are frequently cited in the migrant entrepreneurship literature (Light et al., 1990). However, within the Gurkha networks, the mobilisation of this form of credit through *numbaries* is distinct in that each member (*numbarie*) can ask for multiple turns based on the need for financing. The respondents stated that among *numbaries*, there was an inclination to support those who are in greatest need of finance, for instance for buying property and starting up businesses; the following statement from a partner in a hair salon serves as an example:

> *Numbaries* are closer than family members. When involved in *dhukuti* with them, we do not rotate the turns randomly. Whoever needs the money will get the first turn. I had the first three turns when starting this restaurant. This helped me to sustain the business in the first few difficult months. (G8)

The role played by social ties, connections and transnational networks in Gurkha enterprises was evident. Aided by settlement rights and the presence of close ethnic networks, Gurkhas are a growing community in Britain, lending them psychological stability. Due to this stability, increasing numbers of Gurkhas have started repatriating money from Nepal, and selling their ancestral property, as a grocery shop owner commented:

> All my close family members are now settled in Aldershot. I sold everything and brought it here. My *numbaries* encouraged me to better utilise my money by opening up a local shop, as our community was continually increasing. My *numbarie's* son is helping me by supplying traditional and local food and items of clothing directly from Nepal. (G1)

However, for many Gurkhas, especially those of the older generation, settlement rights have placed them at a disadvantage, as their grown-up children (aged over 18) are required to meet specific criteria under immigration rules if they wish to join them in Britain (Laksamba et al., 2013). While a number of court cases have lodged appeals for family reunification, the hope that one day their children will be able to join them and the aspiration to help them settle quickly in their new home have provided an impetus to continue with their businesses. Inter-generational aspirations and struggles are therefore present in many ways in the Gurkha entrepreneurship experience, as the following quote from an owner of a taxi company illustrates:

I am fighting in the court to bring my older son to Britain. I do not want him to go through the same difficulties and struggles I faced in the process of settlement. I want him to join us and take over this company and expand it. (G7)

Transnational and local networks have been an active source of connections for many Gurkha entrepreneurs. However, resource repatriation and family unification have not undermined Gurkhas' sense of belongingness to their birthplace. Gurkha entrepreneurs have supported various Gurkha organisations and communities set up to help the veterans who remain in Nepal, as well as contributing to the relief and rescue of Gurkha families affected by natural disasters. The chairman of the Nepalese community stated:

Gurkha entrepreneurs' contribution in raising funds to promote the welfare of Gurkha veterans is immense. The owner of the taxi company provided buckets for fund collection during the earthquakes of 2015. The restaurant owners asked every customer whether he/she would like to contribute to the victims. Gurkha entrepreneurs are involved in our charity work, such as the Gurkha Cup. (G10)

Gurkhas appear to be strategic in terms of how they mobilise resources and labour and maintain local and transnational networks. The cultural traits of *numbaries* make these ties more distinct and help enable the transformation of Gurkhas into entrepreneurs. Family arrangements in which the female members share in the entrepreneurial activities while the men combine paid employment in line with their military heritage and subjective anchors such as their belief in family reunification, have helped nurture their footholds in Britain. Gurkhas have continued to engage in a relational approach both with the host society and with transnational networks, not only to maintain these business ventures as secure footholds for the next generation, but also to connect with their homelands. Such traits render them as both insiders and outsiders in their host societies.

Warrior entrepreneurship: Traits, memories and values

One of the recurrent themes in the sample relates to the Gurkha heritage of individual and personal traits, as subjective and internal types of anchors, expressed through values, beliefs and memories, and also as 'mixed anchors' via which such cultural behaviours and norms relating to martial behaviour are internalised. The respondents fondly recalled memories and emphasised the values of loyalty and patriotism in relation to the British Crown, and their ventures were imbued with these values. Their entrepreneurial activities show the extent to which they aspire to represent themselves as insiders and as distinctly different from other migrant entrepreneurs. The following excerpt from an interview with a restaurant owner, commenting on his martial memories, illustrates this point:

I want locals to know our history. I have therefore hung historical pictures of the barracks where I served, my medals and key certificates I earned and the *Khukuri* [a Gurkha knife] I used in service on the wall of the restaurant. My customers even refer to me as a military entrepreneur. This makes me emotional, although our fight for equal pension and family unification rights continues. (G2)

Such historical connections and cultural memories are unique traits of migrant enterprises, particularly among first generation migrants. While many Asian restaurants promote their Indian and Chinese heritage as 'different', through exoticisation or orientalising their interior décor, menu and food items, most Gurkha restaurants use images, artefacts, and memories to 'relate to' and 'interact' with the host community. For example, the menu card is deployed in a way that is designed to encourage interaction with the customers and to share their memories, and the curry is referred to as 'Gurkha curry' to evoke memories of the barracks and their relation to the Crown. Internalising patriotism is central to these entrepreneurs, offering them an important psycho-social resource. This can be seen in the following statement from a restaurant owner:

> I serve homecooked curry, referring to them as Gurkha curry. I prepare this exactly the way we did in the barracks. Customers expect a traditional Indian/Chinese curry when they visit, so first-time visitors are always reluctant. I have to explain to them our background if they are unaware of Gurkhas. Once they taste our food, they become perplexed. I have been asked about how to identify Gurkha food from those offered by other migrant groups. (G2)

A key issue, however, concerns separating themselves from fellow Nepali and other diverse and transnational ethnic entrepreneurs, as the following comment from a pub owner illustrates:

> In front of my pub, I have put the Union Jack and the flag of Nepal. So it is easier to identify that the pub belongs to Gurkhas, as we continue representing both the countries. Only Gurkhas can do this. (G2)

Public sympathy for and connections with the Gurkhas, as well as their particular skills, have in many instances created a demand for Gurkha enterprises. Some of the Gurkhas had therefore already been approached by their relatives and friends who had settled in Britain prior to their arrival, and explored business opportunities that could exploit their reputation. A non-Gurkha partner in a restaurant explained:

> I was searching for a Gurkha partner and connection. Not only due to their patriotism to this country, but the Gurkhas' 'messing' and curry are very popular among the locals, especially those who know them. We could not get the same flavour and taste. Some clients are emotionally connected to Gurkhas. It was obviously a win-win situation for both of us. (G9)

Gurkhas' martial image has resulted in making them more visible, particularly among the older generations. Many of that generation are aware of the Gurkhas' contributions to the British Crown and society and are thus willing to show their gratitude by promoting their businesses. Loyalty therefore appears to be central to many Gurkha enterprises, and clients' acknowledgement and appreciation often outweigh financial success, as the owner of a taxi company affirmed:

> Many older people always prioritise my company, knowing my background. They place trust in me. I have cancelled long distance airport and station pick up and drop off services many times rather than cancelling their bookings. Money is important, but I get satisfaction when they appreciate my work, to see them satisfied. (G7)

However, their reputation has also meant that Gurkha entrepreneurs have been subject to community scrutiny in terms of adhering to council and other employment related regulations. The Chairman of the Nepalese community stated:

> I have strictly asked all Gurkha-run businesses in our community to follow all health and safety protocols and council regulations. We [Gurkhas] need to show our simplicity rather than lavishness. Also, I do not want people to point at Gurkhas for any wrongdoing, having served this country for 200 years. (G10)

In many ways, being an entrepreneur and participating in local events has facilitated Gurkhas' process of 'anchoring' in their local communities, in a way that extends far beyond 'ethnic enclaves' (Portes and Jensen, 1989). This is also reflected in the following statement from a pub owner:

> I want to serve our communities, both the Nepali and British. We [Gurkhas] have a special relationship with locals but I was not confident enough to face the locals. The business has helped me to know about Britain. Now I participate in their charity events and in collecting donations with locals. This is a moment of joy for me. (G2)

However, the Gurkhas' interactive and relational approach to operating small businesses has raised concerns over their entrepreneurial orientation. Their bonding through the Gurkha community, garrison towns and *numbaries* and overdependency on ethnic products, markets and enclaves, have to some extent limited their growth potential. Several characteristics of migrant enterprises, for instance as traditional, conventional, labour-intensive and risk-averse, are clearly evident in many Gurkha enterprises and some of them face increasing difficulties for survival as a result, as the owner of a grocery shop confirmed:

> Aldershot is a small place and we already have more than 10 grocery shops selling similar Nepali food items and products. Some businesses are now closed, making the owners rely on council support. This is a bad signal for our integration, as people may think we are no different than other migrants. (G1)

Some of the key Gurkha traits, networks and resources are embedded in the entrepreneurial process, offering Gurkha entrepreneurs different forms of anchors. The deployment of these traits, resources and networks in establishing interactions with clients and community members signals the distinctive role they play in migrant entrepreneurship. Indeed, many of the structural constraints faced by other migrant groups have also blurred the bifurcation of Gurkha entrepreneurs with them. However, what is different about Gurkha entrepreneurs is the prevalence of a systemic agential approach which goes beyond structural factors and which is driven by their inherent psycho-social resources.

Concluding remarks

Using the notion of social anchoring (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2016), this article has delineated emerging Gurkha enterprises in Britain and their attempts to deploy different

anchors which serve as psycho-social resources to differentiate them from those of other migrant entrepreneurs. Gurkha entrepreneurs are not an exception in comparison with other ethnic and migrant entrepreneurs, as discussed in prior work (Berntsen et al., 2021; Cederberg and Villares-Varela, 2019; Jones et al., 2014; Villares-Varela et al., 2018), and operate on a continuum that involves a simultaneous ricocheting between structural and material constraints, as many have pensions that are well below the level required to maintain a minimum standard of living in Britain. However, their military heritage has provided these migrant entrepreneurs with important anchors and psycho-social resources with which to exercise their agency and establish a foothold in the host society. A strong social agency comprised of aspiration and a work culture, imbued with loyalty and patriotism to the state and Crown, are central characteristics of Gurkha entrepreneurs and are continuously deployed to sustain Gurkha pride.

Compared with other migrant groups, Gurkhas have certain privileges in relation to low-skilled and low-paid jobs. This is primarily due to their martial reputation, along with tangible anchors such as their settled status and access to transnational resources. On the other hand, their relative age and skills disadvantages have impeded their chances of securing satisfactory employment. Their entrepreneurial trajectory has therefore been largely incremental, being inspired by other ethnic entrepreneurs and enablers in some instances. Although prior work has discussed migrant networks, support structures and the pooling of resources (Berntsen et al., 2021; Villares-Varela et al., 2018), Gurkha entrepreneurs are in many instances distinct in terms of their access to resources and use of social networks. This is evident in the way they exercise their agency by pooling resources through *dhukuties* and their close ties with *numbaries.* They also appear to be more resourceful in terms of labour arrangements due to the active participation of husbands and wives in enterprises. This also serves as an example of their resilience and survival strategies, which differ from those pursued by other migrant entrepreneurs. The relational approach pursued by these entrepreneurs connects them with both local and transnational networks. Other subjective anchors involving the Gurkha heritage of individual and personal traits such as values, beliefs, memories and mixed anchors, particularly the internalised cultures and norms relating to martial behaviour, are further elements that render Gurkha entrepreneurship distinctive.

The mobilisation of these varied and persistent anchors illustrates the Gurkhas' complex relationship with Britain, as both insiders and outsiders. Gurkhas' aspiration to represent themselves as insiders is reflected in their entrepreneurial activities and their attempt to relate to and interact with locals by displaying their unique knives (*Khukuri*), medals and certificates, and using menu cards and dishes distilled from memories of the food served in the barracks. Such historical connections and cultural memories are unique traits of migrant and ethnic enterprises, particularly among first generation migrants. Entrepreneurship has provided many Gurkha migrants with an impetus to exercise their agency and deploy their unique Gurkha warrior traits to relate to Britain and anchor themselves within local communities, in a way that extends beyond ethnic enclaves. With a few exceptions, the findings also show that many Gurkha businesses have remained small and labour intensive, occupying low-value market spaces and battling for survival because of their overdependence on ethnic markets. Despite reflecting many distinct characteristics of migrant entrepreneurship, the Gurkhas' psycho-social resources and cultural heritage have also proved to be constraints in terms of growth, in

particular, transformational growth, as also witnessed in the case of a few other migrant groups (Villares-Varela et al., 2018).

The application of the concept of social anchoring has enabled us to understand the socio-cultural and relational dimensions and shed light on some of the novel aspects of Gurkha enterprises which make them distinct from migrant entrepreneurship in general. The distinctive features of Gurkha entrepreneurs are anchored to their inherent psycho-social resources, including their complex relationship with the Crown. So far, the concept of social anchoring has been largely applied to discuss the adaptation of migrants to host societies by focusing on their identity, security and integration (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2016, 2018). With reference to their integration, the role that different anchors specific to migrants can play in this process by offering them psycho-social resources has yet to be established empirically. This article shows how psycho-social resources, by embedding different forms of anchors, trigger entrepreneurs' social agency to overcome structural constraints, locate themselves within host societies and exercise agency to build on their footholds. While the marginality of immigrant enterprises has been widely discussed, only limited attempts have been made to delineate the variability of outcomes experienced by migrant entrepreneurs from the perspective of social context and agency (Berntsen et al., 2021; Cederberg and Villares-Varela, 2019; Kloosterman, 2010; Ram et al., 2008; Vershinina et al., 2011). Despite facing similar structural constraints, differences in agential capacities in terms of deploying different anchors can cause variations between migrant enterprises (Villares-Varela et al., 2018). For instance, there were found to be similarities in terms of the structural barriers, disadvantages and discrimination faced by groups of new migrants in the formal labour market, yet Gurkhas have been able to draw on their resources in a differential manner. The focus on such psycho-social resources has therefore contributed to extending both the scope and usefulness of the concept of social anchoring, particularly in bringing out the agential aspect of migrant enterprises and the heterogeneity in migrant entrepreneurship. The extent to which forms of anchors are drawn on differentiates their agential capacities, which in turn imbues immigrant entrepreneurship with distinct characteristics.

Lastly, the Gurkha entrepreneurs are in many ways unique from other migrant groups, due to their enduring connection to British society and their martial traits. They moved to Britain with settlement rights, which makes them very different from many other migrant groups. Their access to pensions, strategic use of memories and cultural dispositions discussed in this article, are Gurkha-specific resources deployed in their entrepreneurship trajectories. Generalisations about migrant entrepreneurs' agency within and adaptation to the receiving society with reference to the Gurkhas can therefore be questioned. Further studies are warranted to shed more light on the specific anchors inherent among different migrant groups and the agency they execute in deploying these anchors in establishing a foothold in the receiving society. Such studies may also allow us to discern more about the heterogeneity of migrant entrepreneurship, and engender a better understanding of the complex relationship between migrant entrepreneurs and the receiving society.

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Supplementary material

The supplementary material is available online with the article.

Note

1.   https://www.rushmoor.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=11199&p=0

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