

Resisting discrimination and embracing marginalized identities: a catalyst for global entrepreneurship

In their new book chapter, **Lakshmi Ramarajan**, Assistant Professor at Harvard Business School, and **Emily LeRoux-Rutledge**, PhD candidate at LSE, illustrate that when people resist discrimination by embracing their marginalized identities, it can spur them to become successful global entrepreneurs.

When Bimpe Nkontchou, a successful Nigerian lawyer, moved to the UK she came to a disturbing realisation:

I soon realized that the opportunities in the legal services sector in the UK for an ethnic minority female were severely restricted and that my career would stagnate even if I was able to find a job in a prestigious English law firm.

Her experience demonstrates how discrimination, based on social categories such as race, class, gender and nationality, can have negative consequences for people's professional advancement.

In chapter 4 of the newly published book *Positive Organizing in a Global Society*, Dr. Ramarajan of Harvard Business School and I illustrate that discrimination can also be transformed, through resistance, into a catalyst for global entrepreneurship.

Looking in depth at the case studies of three African entrepreneurs operating in global contexts, we identified three common aspects of their experience which spurred them to success as entrepreneurs.

Global transitions as jolts

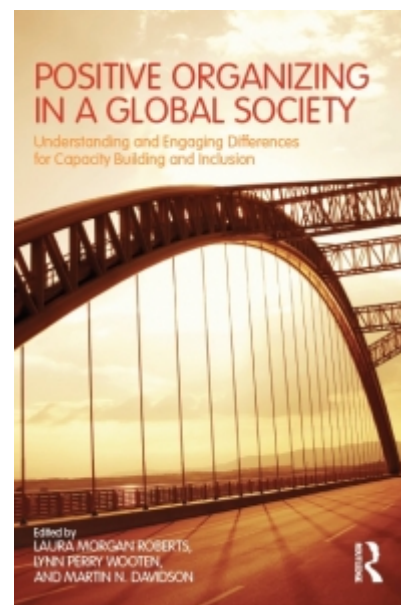
Firstly, all three of the entrepreneurs experienced global transitions that acted as jolts (unusual events which cause people to pause and contemplate their experiences). For example, Claude Grunitzky, one of the entrepreneurs, was jolted when he began attending an elite private school in France and became conscious of his 'outsider' status as a Togolese man. Encountering discrimination as a result of a global transition may cause people to stop and reflect, ultimately leading them down an entrepreneurial path.

Prior status as a buffer

Secondly, all three of the entrepreneurs knew what it was like to belong to high-status groups prior to their jolts. Another of the entrepreneurs, Nimi Akinkugbe, had a high-status career in the Nigerian banking sector before she experienced her global jolt and became an entrepreneur. This prior experience of high status may act as a buffer against discrimination, helping people to maintain critical distance and hold on to the positive aspects of their identities – which may increase their confidence to pursue entrepreneurship.

Combined identities as unique resources

Thirdly, all three entrepreneurs were able to draw on their multiple identities as unique resources in their entrepreneurial ventures. Bimpe Nkontchou, our opening example, ultimately founded her



own London-based law firm, advising foreign investors doing business in sub-Saharan Africa, and Africans doing business in both Africa and Europe. All three of the entrepreneurs were able to leverage the experiences and relationships from their supposedly 'subordinate' identities, and integrate them with their professional identities to create value in their entrepreneurial endeavours.

Implications for aspiring global entrepreneurs

Our case studies yield several insights for aspiring global entrepreneurs. Firstly, building a sense of agency, resilience, and awareness of which aspects of oneself one will not compromise is critical to global entrepreneurship. Secondly, forging and maintaining close relationships with those that value one's unique identities can help buffer entrepreneurs when they face challenges in global contexts. And finally, seeking ways to combine aspects of oneself that have been marginalized with one's professional skills and experiences can help budding entrepreneurs add value to their businesses.

Moreover, our case studies suggest that when people choose to engage in entrepreneurial activities that resonate with marginalized identities in the face of discrimination, global entrepreneurship can become a form of resistance, and marginalized identities a source of strength, giving the entrepreneur more power and passion to succeed in their ventures.



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