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Hugo Gaillard

## ► To cite this version:

Hugo Gaillard. Entrepreneurship and religion: Toward a religionbased transformation of the labor market? The feeling of exclusion in question. *Revue internationale de psychosociologie et de gestion des comportements organisationnels*, 2021, 67, pp.5-21. hal-03887263

**HAL Id: hal-03887263**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03887263>**

Submitted on 22 Dec 2022

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# **Entrepreneurship and Religion: Toward a Religion-Based Transformation of the Labor Market? The Feeling of Exclusion in Question**

Hugo GAILLARD

*Translated by Scribendi*

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## **Abstract**

This article examines the influence of the feeling of exclusion from the labor market on the choice of entrepreneurship to reduce the tension between religiosity and professionalism. Using a life story method, we address experiences of perceived exclusion from Muslim employees who are now entrepreneurs. In particular, the results highlight the dynamics of generalized feelings of exclusion in the labor market during one or several work experiences. This work sheds light on the movements at work toward affinity-type activities and the development of precarious and undeclared business activities after professional disillusionment, without denying the opportunistic dimension of choice. It thereby provides elements for understanding the labor market's marginal shift toward so-called affinity structures by mobilizing work on entrepreneurial motivations and constraining factors. The study also discusses the need for organizations to take steps toward inclusion. Lastly, this study opens the way for further research on affinity organizations and the inclusion of people who prioritize their religiosity over their professionalism in non-religious organizations.

## *Keywords:*

Spirituality and religion at work, Entrepreneurship, Necessity and opportunity, Constraints, Religious rules-based firm, Life stories

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The most recent large-scale study shows that religion at work has matured and become commonplace (Institut Montaigne, OFRE, 2019). Seventy percent of individuals claim to encounter it at least occasionally, notably through requests for adjustments to working hours, prayers during breaks, or the wearing of visible religious signs.

We consider religion in the monotheistic sense as intrinsically linked to the question of salvation and thus of access to the afterworld, conditional on the “good” behavior of the faithful. It is therefore normative, referring to a dogma, traditions, and institutions, and proposes a certain vision of transcendence. Religious fact (Debray, 2002) in the work context can be defined as the set of behaviors that arise from the interpretation of the faithful (who must

have self-defined as such) of the religious doctrine to which they refer and that occur in a professional context (Gaillard and Jolivet, 2019). To address these behaviors, organizations seek a point of balance through regulation to define their posture (*i.e.* position) on the matter (Galindo and Zannad, 2014). These positions can sometimes be perceived as unfair or exclusionary by employees (Benaïssa, 2019; Gaillard, 2019).

This work allows us to understand how the management of religious behaviors perceived as exclusionary can contribute to the development of activities that reconcile religiosity and professionalism. In the first section, we propose a research state of the art on the impact of religious fact in organizations and the perceived inclusion of religious behaviors. We then discuss the feeling of exclusion as a factor leading to entrepreneurship, particularly ethnic self-employment. We then present the life story method in the second part of the article. Finally, we examine life stories that testify to the development of affinity-based entrepreneurship following labor market experiences perceived as exclusionary, leading to formal or informal structures, by highlighting the profiles of four ethnic entrepreneurs. The discussion of the results invites, in particular, a rethinking of the theoretical opposition between entrepreneurship of necessity and that of opportunity by adding the notion of constraint (Tessier-Dargent, 2015).

## **2. ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A RESPONSE TO PERCEIVED RELIGIOUS EXCLUSION: A LITERATURE REVIEW**

This first section links research on religious expression in the workplace and the inclusion issues that arise in regulatory situations to address the contribution of theories on entrepreneurial motivations and explain the behaviors of actors who perceive these regulations as exclusive.

### **2.1. Religion at Work: A Sometimes Exclusive Regulation?**

Spirituality and religion in the workplace forms a field of research in its own right in in American and British works, although the micro-level study of religious individuals' behaviors in organizations remains relatively rare (Tracey, 2013). Dean et al. mention, for example, the possibility of considering the religious fact to respect individuals' rights and satisfy a company's needs (2003, 2008). Hicks states that a separation between religion and work is not tenable and testifies to a differentiated approach in America (2003). The literature also highlights the existence of secular gurus in secularized societies (Gintrac, 2016). More recent research from Africa testifies to the international dimension of the religious issue at work and engages with the cognitive dissonance between corporate activity and belief in the case of a lottery company (Ba and Niang, 2019). In French research, several research orientations are worth mentioning (Volia et al., 2019): they are disciplinary (finance, marketing) and interested in the origins of managerial practices or organizations' spirituality. Barth (*dir.*, 2012), Honoré (2014, 2016), and Galindo and Zannad (2014) address the impact of religion on management. Finally, religious entrepreneurship (Castro, 2002) is a minority research field, as is work on trendy or affinity companies, which can be defined as structures that function on the basis of a particular orientation (e.g., trade union, political, religious). A recent study points, for example, to the influence of religious logic on an organization (Maire and Liarte, 2019). This type of entrepreneurship is more frequent among individuals belonging to a minority religion within their

country as part of a search for autonomy and freedom, which can lead to the adaptation of the organization's functioning under their religious precepts (Valliere, 2008, p. 186).

In France, many organizations practice reasonable accommodation "*à la française*" due to the wide dissemination of Honoré's work, which recommends neutral, factual, and work-centered management (OFRE, since 2013) and legislative and jurisprudential evolutions (Gaillard, 2019; Honoré et al., 2019). This implemented training concerns diversity in general or the religious fact in particular within the general framework of prohibiting discrimination and proselytizing. To note, religious expression in the workplace is recognized as less conflictual than the problems coming from the work itself (OFRE, 2019). Some organizations seem to be in the process of transforming their regulatory position (Galindo and Suprly, 2011). Thus, possibilities are becoming clearer for managers and employees, who are increasingly aware of their rights and wish to assert them, allowing them to reconcile their religiosity and professionalism (Honoré, 2018) to end the need to implement strategies to practice their religion at work (Mahmoudi, 2019). Some companies already apply legal criteria without regulating it. Still, the company, reputed to be less at risk for discrimination issues, can be exposed to the risk of perceived exclusion, contrary to the concept of inclusion, based on the postulate that all employees are *a priori* part of the work group and do not have to demonstrate this (Ferdman, 2014). Feelings of injustice have also been put forward, particularly concerning the wearing of a religious sign or even praying in the workplace, which can lead to feelings of exclusion (Gaillard, 2019).

The feeling of exclusion can also be explained by increasingly diversified expectations and the growing autonomy employees expect. Indeed, the logic of personalization or individualization in HRM allows for increasingly more career choices (individual training plan, skills assessment), working hours (flexible working hours, part-time work upon authorization), and even remuneration or communication (Pichaut and Nizet, 2000). This undeniable movement attests to leaders' desires to offer their company "*à la carte*" (Bouchikhi and Kimberly, 1999), *de facto* considering employees as "customers" (Arnaud et al., 2009). In short, this forms an injunction to "come as you are" (Gaillard, 2019) to a workplace whose promise could be difficult to keep (Benaïssa, 2019) and pose potential impacts on professional choices. The following section connects perceived exclusion with entrepreneurial motivations.

## **2.2. Facing Perceived Exclusion: Ethnic Entrepreneurship on a Continuum of Necessity/Opportunity and Constraints**

Henley discusses the influence of religion on entrepreneurial motivations at the macro level but invites the study of this relationship at a micro, individual level in future work (2016, p. 25). One of the most widely used approaches to discrimination against entrepreneurs with respect to their entrepreneurial motivations involves the concepts of pull and push factors (Williams and Williams, 2012). Pull factors associate business creation with opportunities that are seized as deliberate choices (opportunity entrepreneurship), referring to voluntary entrepreneurial activity (Reynolds et al. 2001). The reasons for entrepreneurship are multiple: the quest for satisfaction and personal fulfillment (Harrison and Hart, 1983), the need for autonomy, innovation, and being a role model (Verheul et al., 2010), and the challenge or possibility of greater financial gain (Uhlaner and Thurik, 2007).

As for push factors, the creation of a business, for example, might result from a decision forced by circumstances. Necessity entrepreneurship thus refers to "individuals who are driven

to start a business because they perceive no better employment alternative” (Cowling and Bygrave, 2003, p. 544). In this context, individuals perceive entrepreneurial activity as a last resort resulting from constraining circumstances. It concerns people who never intended to start a business and are not motivated to pursue this goal that was imposed by external constraints (Tessier-Dargent, 2015). These external constraints include chronic unemployment (Verheul et al., 2010), discrimination (Clark and Drinkwater, 2000), job dissatisfaction and frustration (Uhlaner and Thurik, 2007), and various life situations (Fayolle and Nakara, 2012). These entrepreneurs are often by necessity people from ethnic minorities, immigrants without proficiency in the host country’s language, women, young people (especially those without degrees or qualifications), and people with disabilities (Tessier-Dargent and Fayolle, 2016).

In 2015, an extensive literature review by Tessier-Dargent identified 240 works on necessity entrepreneurship and addresses, among other concepts, theories and approaches to explain ethnic entrepreneurship (Ram and Carter, 2003; Menzies et al., 2007; Stambouli, 2013, 2017). Retaining an ethnic explanatory prism allows us to examine the sense of exclusion that drives some individuals toward entrepreneurship. Indeed, this literature offers insight into the behavior of ethnic entrepreneurs (Chaganti and Greene, 2002), defined as those “who identify, evaluate, and exploit opportunities through a business they create, acquire, or inherit, and who maintain close relationships with an ethnic community to which they belong” (Allali, 2010, p. 3).

Finally, recent works consider the opportunity/necessity duo more from the perspective of a continuum influenced by certain factors, as the original dichotomy can be presented as “too simplistic” (Giacomin et al., 2016, p. 198). These works distinguish between so-called hard factors that cannot be influenced, which are either internal (e.g., gender, minority status, etc.) or external (e.g., long-term unemployment, work history), and soft factors, such as risk aversion and low self-esteem. Added to these are environmental factors (political, economic, and legal; Tessier-Dargent, 2015).

This work’s objective is to understand, through an exploratory study, what the factors and motivations are that lead ethnic entrepreneurs to undertake and, more particularly, what the role of feelings of exclusion is in this context, especially regarding the sometimes difficult reconciliation between religiosity and professional identity as mentioned in the literature. We therefore chose the following research question: ***How can the management of religious behavior contribute to the development of activities that reconcile religiosity and professional identity?*** The next section is devoted to our method, constructed to study our objective at the micro level in the wake of Henley’s call (2016, p. 25).

### 3. METHOD: THE CONTRIBUTION OF LIFE STORIES TO UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYEES’ EXPERIENCES

We chose the life stories method, which allows use to highlight the detail of a chosen piece. The life story can be limited to a particular episode in the subject’s history to give information on internal dynamics, relationships, and particular contexts (Galligani, 2000). This method allows the main subjects to have their say, rather than only question their managers. Our work does not aim to demonstrate a structural trend, but rather a marginal one limited to employees for whom the tension between religiosity and professionalism is difficult to envisage and who find it more difficult to renounce their practices and ethics in a professional context. To this end, life stories, which are based on a logic of presence and contradiction, make it possible to identify

certain elements of the subject matter that contradict presuppositions (Joyeau et al., 2010). Ultimately, it is a matter of “approaching a human process, a phenomenon, in the strong sense of the term, anthropological, which permanently concerns the construction of a person in his or her being in the making” (Le Grand, 2000 in Pineau and Le Grand, 2013, p. 4).

The sample was composed of eight individuals, though we selected four for the presentation of our results because they illustrate four different profiles of ethnic entrepreneurs following an experience deemed exclusionary. We therefore conducted our study from a perspective of significance to bring to light the motivations and constraints shared by individuals with different backgrounds. From an interpretivist perspective, and in line with Valliere’s work with eight Buddhist entrepreneurs in Canada and Nepal (2008), we interviewed individuals who reduced religion/profession tension through self-employment. The interviews were conducted in a centered and semi-directive manner to let the subjects question themselves on a precise event and describe their feelings on that occasion, with the aim of analyzing the mechanisms at work a posteriori. The interviews were conducted between December 2016 and August 2019 at an average duration of 1 hour and 16 minutes, face to face, with the aim of producing life stories. The advertised event was “I am self-employed and principled.” To establish the interviews, we followed the four stages of constructing empirical material proposed by Heinrich: (1) written re-transcription, (2) analysis of the words, (3) telling the story, and (4) submission of the text to the subjects for validation (1999, pp. 32-37). The interviews were conducted in an atmosphere of trust, with a pre-discussion with the interviewer taking place over the telephone. Anonymity was guaranteed and the principle of trust established (Heinrich, 1999). The data were coded manually and emergently to identify critical incidents toward entrepreneurship and then coded again, this time thematically, based on internal (i.e., “Minority Status” and “Gender”), external (i.e., “Employment Status” and “Perceived Inclusion/Non-Inclusion”), soft (i.e., “Entrepreneurial Intention”), and environmental factors (i.e., “Unemployment Rate of Employment Area”), as proposed by Tessier-Dargent (2015), and pull (i.e., “Family Isolation” and “Graduation”) and push factors (i.e., “Community Network” and “Search for Personal Religious Fulfillment”; Williams and Williams, 2012). The following table offers an overview of the individuals’ profiles.

**Table 1:** Profiles of the presented individuals and their life stories.

First Names (Pseudonyms)	Samia	Yaëlle	Hamid	Salim
<b>Sector</b>	Personal services	Undefined	Transport and logistics	Retail trade
<b>Occupation (Training)</b>	Hairdresser (Certificat d’aptitude professionnelle)	Undeclared saleswoman on social networks (master’s in finance and accounting)	Company manager (BTS Transport and Logistics)	Company manager (Bac Professional Commerce)
<b>Religion</b>	Muslim	Muslim (converted)	Muslim	Muslim
<b>Civil status</b>	29 years old, divorced, 1 child	24 years old, single, no children	37 years old, married, 4 children	27 years old, married, 2 children

The following section presents the results, highlighting four distinct profiles that illustrate the participants’ life stories.



## 4. FEELING OF EXCLUSION ON RELIGIOUS GROUNDS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN AFFINITY LABOR MARKET: A FLIGHT TO THE FRONT AND CONCRETE CONSEQUENCES

The results highlight, on the one hand, an informal entrepreneurship of withdrawal or network and, on the other, a formal entrepreneurship of mission or refuge.

### 4.1. “Small Jobs” and “Working from Home”: Fallback and/or Network Entrepreneurship

The first two life stories show a situation in which both interviewed individuals came to the conclusion that the expression of their religiosity had no place in the traditional labor market and slid toward the affinity and informal market through withdrawal (Samia) or their friendship and confessional network (Yaëlle).

#### Case 1: Samia’s life story

We asked Samia for an in-depth interview about her status as a “Muslim woman entrepreneur,” as she defines herself. She is 29 years old and holds a CAP in hairdressing, which she obtained six years ago. We were received at her home; Samia, a single mother, found this easier. The 30-year-old presented her job as a “real pride” or a kind of calling, to take a religious analogy. She described her job as a way to stay in touch with reality, “to meet people, different people, to keep up to date.” The discussion did not initially revolve around religion. She told us that after earning her CAP, she was hired at a salon owned by a large, high-end company with a clientele from the “bourgeoisie + +.” She liked this job very much, which symbolized for her the social elevator, and on a daily basis met “people she should never have met, and [she] was surprised at the common points [that they found with] each other.” She then talked about her religion, defining herself as moderate, explaining that she practices traditional Islam mainly during Ramadan, but that she “feels the need to wear the headscarf.” She was wearing one when we met her, but not when she was hired at the salon. Samia explained to us that it was “there that everything changed.” At the time, she spoke to the salon manager about her wish to wear the veil, explaining that she thought that the law allowed her to do so and that she was “not in the process of becoming radicalized.” The manager closed up, says that “customers will run away,” that they would end up “saying it’s a salon for Muslims” and asked her if she would end up “refusing to do men’s hair.” Samia felt betrayed; she was expecting reluctance but not a “trial of intent.” The next day, she came to work wearing a veil without the manager making the slightest remark. She said that customers asked questions and that she enjoyed answering them, as “I had no problem justifying myself.” The following Monday, her manager told her that the customers had complained and that she had enough arguments to “kick her out for gross misconduct,” ending by offering her a contractual termination. The young hairdresser accepted because “it maintains my rights at the Pôle Emploi,” and she found herself unemployed in a few weeks. Before leaving, Samia’s manager told her that she was very disappointed and assured her that she would “never find a job in hairdressing dressed like that.” After two months of unemployment, of questioning herself, of sending her CV with a photo in which she wore a veil, Samia put an ad out on a social network and offered home hairdressing services that she combined with religious formulas. The ad began with “my dearest sisters” and ended with “salam or aleykoun wa rahmatoulah and see you soon.” She specified that at the time she “got closer to God” and that by writing such words, she was well aware that she was aiming at her co-religionists. Today, she offers services only to women, mainly Muslim, and works with her veil. She receives the ARE (*i.e.* French benefit that helps unemployed people), and her business activity is not declared, so she does not contribute to unemployment insurance or pensions. She said she earns “about €600 in cash per month” from her home hairdressing business. She is worried about the future but has not applied to traditional hairdressers for several months. She prefers to do hair for “people who understand.” She would like to open her salon, but cannot find anyone to finance it. Samia said she will never take her veil off again and is thinking of going to work “in England or Sweden, because people are more open there.” The only problem is that she does not speak English.

This life story illustrates a situation where the veil is described as “bad for business” and will not be accepted by clientele. Samia still justified her choice to wear it, especially concerning the attacks, and asserted that she is part of “good Islam.” She could “not imagine that my boss did not know the law” and therefore perceived French law as systematically discriminatory (i.e., that discriminations are deeply embedded in the functioning of organizations and institutions). We observe here a process of generalizing Samia’s own experience to the global perceptions of labor market inclusion.

Moreover, she left a situation of stability for a situation of precariousness (unemployment benefits, concealed work), which is an original move compared to what the literature notes. Here, religiosity took priority over professionalism, and the feeling of exclusion pushed the individual toward a compatible activity. Finally, Samia mentioned her intention to leave for another country (Allali, 2010), which shows that she is still questioning her entrepreneurial project. The language barrier appears to be a constraining factor (Tessier-Dargent, 2015).

The following life story demonstrates the influence of perceived exclusion on the development of informal affinity activity unrelated to initial training.

#### Case 2: Yaëlle’s life story

We contacted Yaëlle via the social network Instagram, on which she presents herself as a “woman Muslim shopper.” We were surprised by her profile, which was very sales-oriented with professional photos of the abayas and jilbabs she was selling. The models had voluntarily hidden their faces with the logo carrying the name of the products’ brands names, which contracted two concepts to evoke both beauty and modesty. After a message explaining our approach, Yaëlle accepted the interview, which lasted 3 hours. Yaëlle was born in Versailles, and her two parents are civil servants. She explained to us that she received a simple education and grew up “upper middle class.” When she was 18, she entered a Parisian university and met two Muslim women with whom she became friends and whose culture she “fell in love with.” She converted to Islam “for the love and tolerance that I see in this religion.” She continued her studies until she obtained a master’s degree in finance and accounting “in a nationally ranked school.” After graduation, she was hired as a junior auditor at a consulting firm. She did not wear the veil, believing that the majority of Muslims were mistaken about the interpretation of the corresponding verse and understanding it differently. However, she was “uncompromising about Ramadan” and committed to “praying on time.” She had a closed office at the consulting firm “without glass walls.” She did her prayers there and thought of it “like a smoke break.” One day, she was summoned by her manager for an exchange. The day before, she had gone to a business meal at a client’s but had not eaten since she was on a fasting period. The client brought this information up to her manager and expressed that he felt it was “disrespectful to his invitation.” Yaëlle explained that she knew the law, that nothing obliged her to eat, and that she wanted to go there so that she could not be blamed. Her supervisor retorted that her position was not acceptable, that “with [her] level of education, [she] shouldn’t bother with religion.” She felt attacked, closed up, and did not respond. Her manager also brought up the issue of prayers by saying that he “knows what goes on in [her] office.” Yaëlle remained “speechless.” She told us that at that moment, she already knew that she would not be able to “set foot in this company again”: she went on sick leave from the next day until she resigned, a few weeks after her employer checked on her at her home. During her sick leave, she went to the mosque more frequently and did not systematically remove her veil after leaving. One of the imams told her that “all this would never have happened if you had put on your veil at the job interview.” He encouraged her to think about “an alternative *fi sabillah* solution.” He said no more. Yaëlle has always had an entrepreneurial spirit. She inquired about “what was sold at the sisters” and the possibilities of buying products in Morocco since she had friends of Moroccan origin “who often go there.” She gathered her friends for a snack one afternoon, and they came to the conclusion that “religion sells because religion saves.” Yaëlle launched an Instagram account, created a logo with her knowledge of Adobe Illustrator, commented on influencers’ accounts to advertise, and worked a lot “by word of mouth.” She has not declared her business but said she earns “a lot more than I did at my first job.” Retirement is not a concern for her, as she is convinced “that all those who contribute today are contributing at a loss.” So she works from home, prays whenever she wants, fasts, and wears the veil daily. Yaëlle said she “feels closer to my creator, and I feel like I am working for him.”



This case is particularly interesting since Yaëlle is an individual who suffers few constraints in the sense described by Tessier-Dargent (2015). She has a postgraduate degree, does not belong to a minority, and her family situation allows her satisfactory social conditions. As in the first life story, the elements presented testify to the influence of the perceived exclusion on the choice of entrepreneurship and are completed by the accompaniment of a faith-based network to consolidate and activate an entrepreneurial project, which is not recent.

#### 4.2. “We’ll Do It without You” and “It’s Easier that Way”:

##### **Mission or Refuge Entrepreneurship with Countervalue**

This section discusses the impact of discriminatory and/or non-inclusive behaviors on employees’ propensity to undertake entrepreneurship as a mission (Hamid) and as a refuge, even at countervalue (Salim).

#### **Case 3: Hamid’s life story**

Hamid was introduced to us by a university friend of the Muslim faith as a “model of success from back home.” This former truck driver only transported fresh produce in his “old life” and had “never intended to become a company manager.” He sometimes prayed on his breaks in his trailer “so as not to tarnish the company’s image.” At the time, his supervisor found this incompatible with his duties and considered it his work time, which Hamid refuted. The incitements to leave his religion at the door of the truck were insistent, but the driver never agreed to “submit” to them because “[he knows] the law, in France, [that] the freedom to practice one’s religion is sacred.” The climate between Hamid and his manager grew cold, and the desire to exchange words only professionally, to greet each other with distance and coldness, was clear to Hamid. He knew that his employer had “never forbidden [him] to pray, but advised [him] against it” insistently, and that in doing so, “he remains within the law.” However, Hamid confirmed that he did not feel welcome, at least not as a Muslim. He said that he felt that it is a “general trend in France, that clearly the worm is in the fruit.” One day, he made an appointment with his employer and asked to go on sabbatical with financial support to set up a project. His employer replied that this was not done in the company, but that “for a case like you [Hamid], we will find solutions.” One week to the day later, Hamid left the company for a renewable period of one year to “set up his own business.” He showed us a letter from his employer wishing him “good luck” and assuring him that all the formalities for his departure would be facilitated if his project was successful. Hamid took it as confirmation and said to himself, “Ah, yeah, it’s like that, well, you know what, we will do without you.” He confided to us that he would have liked his employer to “hold him back a little” and to tell him that finally “a compromise was possible because I wasn’t asking for much.” Today, Hamid is the general manager of a halal wholesale company. All his employees are Muslims, and in the company, a prayer room is available to agents, who can also adjust their schedules during Ramadan; moreover, the business structure’s hours change automatically during that month so “everyone starts later.” Hamid said that if he “happens to recruit non-Muslim employees,” he still finds it “better to work between people of the same faith” and that sometimes “religion can even make management easier, especially for someone like me who didn’t study in this field.”

Hamid’s use of the term “old life” is significant and testifies to a rupture, a sort of disenchantment (Allali, 2010). This expression is followed later by a vengeful “we will do without you.” Another observation is that prayer seems, once again, harmful to the traditional company’s image. This story returns again to the feeling of systemic discrimination in France and the feeling that even in a non-discriminatory context, Islam is not welcome. The consequence is Hamid’s creation of a business structure in which, especially during Ramadan, the company automatically and systematically changes its operating rules (i.e., schedules).

The following life story discusses a situation in which affinity entrepreneurship works against the grain and acts as a refuge.

**Case 4: Salim's life story**

We met Salim in the context of another study. He had just left a supermarket in the Lyon area. He is the owner of a halal grocery store that employs four people. Two years before we met him, he was working as a liquid department manager at the franchise of a large retail chain. He immediately told us about his job interviews, which were always complimentary of him: "punctual, good customer service, [and] able to work in a hurry and comply with time flexibility requirements and management skills" were some of the qualifications his superiors used. He quickly explained that "Daesh killed him." His colleagues were always asking him for explanations the day after the attacks, asking him why he "still believed in all that" when "religions have always made a mess of life." He told us that some colleagues sent him emails to his professional mailbox about the "scientific elements which according to them contradicted the Muslim texts." He spent most of his time explaining to them that he did not know the texts well, but that religion "was part of me, that it was my culture." Salim did not linger in the break room; frequently, his colleagues put forward arguments "against religion" to "corner" him. He was very surprised that his colleagues presented his religion as a constraint, whereas he lived it as a path to follow. He explained that he is "not very religious," does not eat halal, and always "drinks a glass of mulled wine with [his] colleagues at the end of the year," and he seemed almost embarrassed to admit that he asked for a day off "to go celebrate Eid-el-Kebir with [his] family." He went to see his manager to point out his colleagues' actions, explaining that for him it was proselytizing since they were trying "to convince me to join their belief." The store manager replied that proselytizing only applies when "religious people try to convince and not the other way around." Salim felt misunderstood and started to think about a professional reorientation. Finally, he would create, with his brother-in-law, a much more religious halal grocery store. The only condition he set was to hire at least one non-Muslim employee, explaining that he was afraid "people would think I was a sectarian." Today he is paid minimum wage "or even a little more," which is a significant drop in pay for him. He regrets his past in the supermarket but explained that he is relieved that he does not miss the "constant debates" and the feeling of being "an alien." He said that he sometimes feels bad that he still does not eat halal because he is now identified at the forefront "in the local Muslim community and promoter of a precept that I don't follow," a status he could have done without. He "mostly only runs into Muslims" on a daily basis and regrets it. His greatest pride is hiring Kevin and guaranteeing him freedom of belief without judgment in a business that by essence functions according to the principles of Islam. He concluded with a final and resigned "it's simpler that way."

In this last life story, Salim's former manager believed that proselytizing could only come from the religious. This led Salim to consider that even before the law, there is no equality between believers and non-believers in France. Finally, Salim's counter-intuition is remarkable, since by creating a business structure that respects the principles of Islam, he voluntarily chose to recruit a non-Muslim collaborator to open his company to other tendencies.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study confirms the influence of the feeling of exclusion from the traditional labor market on motivations for ethnic entrepreneurship in various forms. Four profiles appear: (1) the creation of an affinity activity after traditional experience in the same sector (Samia), (2) the creation of an affinity activity outside one's initial field of expertise (Yaëlle), (3) entrepreneurship as a mission to create a space open to religiosity (Hamid), and finally (4) countervalue entrepreneurship as a refuge from the feeling of exclusion (Salim). In profile (3)'s mission, Hamid became a model of success within his community, a success that combines professional success and religiosity in the space open to religious practice that he proposed in response to a feeling of exclusion and his own discriminatory experience. In the so-called "withdrawal" profile, Salim undertook ethnic activities when this was not his initial intention. He activated family resources in response to needing to escape from a constraining situation in which he perceived his colleagues as assigning him a daily Muslim identity, even though he described

himself as non-practicing. These last two cases are particularly original in that they show the frequent back and forth between factors of attraction, pressure, and constraints.

The results confirm that individuals make their choices not only as a function of so-called pull factors (Reynolds et al., 2001), but also of pressure factors (Fairlie, 1996) that should be considered sequentially on a continuum (Giacomin et al., 2016). These people are in a process within which they no longer perceive satisfactory alternative opportunities in the conventional labor market (Cowling and Bygrave, 2003). As such, the fourth story is particularly significant, as pressure pushed the individual to undertake entrepreneurship against his personal principles, which he seemed to experience as a renunciation. This story also sheds light on the role of the family circle in entrepreneurial choices (Allali, 2010). The individual thus left one psychological conflict (Ba and Niang, 2019) for another. It appears here that reconciling religiosity and professionalism is perceived as impossible, and the feeling of exclusion is the only factor common to all the narratives, regardless of the typology chosen (the constraints of Tessier-Dargent, 2015 or motivations of Williams and Williams, 2012). This work invites us to rethink the opposition between necessity and opportunity, considering it as only one part of the explanation (Giacomin et al., 2016). Indeed, while individuals seem driven by their perceived exclusion experiences in particular, the choice to undertake in an affinity manner is sometimes guided by opportunity (i.e. religious fulfillment, family networks, friendships etc.). Opportunity thus succeeds necessity for personal fulfillment (Harrison and Hart, 1983), recognition, and involvement within a religious community. The continuum approach (Tessier-Dargent, 2015) seems to explain the situations to the fullest extent (Table 2).

Other observations are possible, notably in terms of confirming a complex climate in companies with regard to Muslim religious expression. In particular, there is an amalgam between wearing a religious sign (most often the veil) and the issue of radicalization. This interpretative shift is in line with the idea that wearing a religious sign is harmful to a company's image and therefore to its performance. Research has not addressed this link, but it offers interesting interdisciplinary perspectives at the border between human resources management and marketing. Moreover, if the intention to organize the global operation is not manifested in past experiences, it can be through affinity entrepreneurship.

We also see a devaluation of degrees as trained individuals fail to get hired due to religious issues in their field or voluntarily leave their field to move on to other activities they deem more compatible. This confirms the literature, which reports on low-skilled or graduate individuals who enter business out of necessity (Tessier-Dargent and Fayolle, 2016), except in the case of immigrant workers, who are presented in some works as overqualified (Stambouli, 2017). This work thus provides an explanatory look at the exception that seems to exist among populations belonging to a minority religion, who ethnically undertake entrepreneurship after experiencing the feeling of exclusion, here on religious grounds, among their pressure factors.

We also uncovered a phenomenon of renouncing religious freedom in Samia's (profile 1) contractual termination, which led to the maintenance of her unemployment rights, considered a "lesser evil." Hers was indeed a situation of "disillusionment and despair," evoked in Allali's conceptual model of forced entrepreneurship in Quebec, that led to entrepreneurship (2010, p. 11). This situation of disillusionment resulted from a feeling of exclusion in our cases, which led to affinity or ethnic entrepreneurship (Clark and Drinkwater, 2000).

**Table 2:** Cumulative explanatory power for affinity entrepreneurship motivations (adapted from Tessier-Dargent, 2015 and Williams and Williams, 2012).

	<b>Constraining Factors (Tessier-Dargent, 2015)</b>		<b>Soft</b>	<b>Environment</b>	<b>Opportunity/Necessity (Williams and Williams, 2012)</b>	
	<b>Hard</b>				<b>Push</b>	<b>Pull</b>
<i>Participants</i>	<b>Internal</b>	<b>External</b>				
<i>Samia</i>	Woman Young Minority Single mother	<b>Exclusion</b> Unemployment	<b>Feeling of exclusion</b> Lack of positive entrepreneurial intent	Area of high unemployment Perception of systemic discrimination	<b>Exclusion and feeling of exclusion</b> Single mother	Fulfillment through religious practice
<i>Yâëlle</i>	Young	<b>Exclusion</b>	<b>Feeling of exclusion</b>		<b>Exclusion and feeling of exclusion</b>	Religious Community and family network Fulfillment through religious practice
<i>Hamid</i>	No diploma or other qualifications Minority	<b>Exclusion</b>	<b>Feeling of exclusion</b> Lack of positive entrepreneurial intent	Area of high unemployment Perception of systemic discrimination	<b>Exclusion and feeling of exclusion</b> No diploma	Religious Community and family network Fulfillment through religious practice Becoming a community role model
<i>Salim</i>	Minority	<b>Exclusion</b>	<b>Feeling of exclusion</b> Lack of positive entrepreneurial intent	National climate resulting from terrorist attacks (amalgam)	<b>Exclusion and feeling of exclusion</b>	Family network Fulfillment by the end of the justification

Entrepreneurship can therefore be a solution that allows access to several professional realities: one of the individuals we interviewed is now the head of a company and employs several employees, while two others carry out informal and/or precarious activities. For all of them, at the time of their decision to become entrepreneurs, they did not consider the alternatives in salaried employment satisfactory (Cowling and Bygrave, 2003). Their choice was therefore “driven” by external constraints (Uhlaner and Thurik, 2007), and none of the four individuals mentioned a pre-existing aspiration for self-employment, corroborating the literature (Tessier-Dargent, 2015).

This work also confirms the particular attention given to certain types of religious facts in French companies, namely the wearing of religious signs (in this case, the veil and ritualized and time-defined prayer; Gaillard, 2019). This presents the question of the place given to believers, and in particular Muslims, within traditional organizations. Entrepreneurial choices, if they stem from leaders' personal ethics or a local consultation, can result from reactions to the environment (Verheul et al., 2010)—as in other studies (Delorme and Lapoutte, 2019; Gaillard and Jolivet, 2019)—or pressure factors (Williams and Williams, 2012).

These results should not lead us to overestimate the weight of metaphysical considerations in decisions. It is clear, for example, that in the first life story, Samia's situation as a single mother may have influenced her professional choices, where she favored a home-based activity to alleviate the constraints of her personal life (Fayolle and Nakara, 2012). That said, the perception of exclusion from the labor market is present in all four narratives. Moreover, the sample is composed solely of practicing Muslim employees, so the scope of the results must be understood accordingly but without essentializing the situations experienced or perceived: we are opening the black box. It would also be appropriate to extend this study to employees who are believers and practicing members of other religions to test the specificity of Muslim membership, especially since recent studies carried out in, for example, Catholic organizations suggest a more internalized and less demonstrative relationship with religion (Maire and Liarte, 2019). This is an important line of research and should be conducted primarily with populations that describe themselves as minorities and in perceived tension with the national culture (Valliere, 2008).

For corporate projects that are religiously bent, questions of inclusion arise again. What place is there for individuals who do not belong to a religion? What are affinity companies' inclusive practices? Are they a source of inspiration, and if so, on what condition(s)? What is the professional trajectory for individuals who only pass through these affinity companies and return to a classical business structure? What sense of exclusion from the labor market is there? The case's scale seems promising, with studying the impacts of entrepreneurial motivations on the function of affinity organizations in line with recent work (Maire and Liarte, 2019; Delorme and Lapoutte, 2019). Many classical organizations are now deciding to equip managers, either by relaying institutional documentation or offering their own guide, to manage the religious fact (Galindo and Zannad, 2014; Benaïssa, 2019). While inclusive approaches seem active, many uncertainties remain for small and medium-sized companies, which have fewer resources to effectively work on inclusion. What are the devices (perhaps not mutual) that can allow resource sharing? What is the role of the state in these initiatives for an inclusive society or one that is perceived as less exclusionary? The questions opened by this work constitute many avenues for future research.

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**Hugo GAILLARD** is a Assistant Professor in HRM at Le Mans University and Doctor of Philosophy in Management Sciences, he has completed a CIFRE Thesis at Le Mans University on the contributions of organizational justice theories for the regulation of religious expression at work, defended in 2019. His research focuses on the tensions and transitions that individuals and their organizations experience. He is also a social media administrator for the Revue Française de Gestion, as well as for the AGRH.

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*Titre* : Entrepreneuriat et religion : vers une mutation affinitaire du marché du travail ?  
Le sentiment d'exclusion en question

*Résumé* : Cet article s'intéresse à l'influence du sentiment d'exclusion du marché du travail sur le choix d'entreprendre pour réduire la tension entre religiosité et professionnalité. Grâce à la méthodologie des récits de vie, nous abordons les expériences d'exclusion perçue de salariés musulmans aujourd'hui entrepreneurs. Les résultats mettent notamment en avant la dynamique de généralisation à l'ensemble du marché du travail du sentiment d'exclusion au cours d'une ou plusieurs expériences salariales. Ce travail éclaire les mouvements à l'oeuvre vers des activités de type affinitaire, et met au jour le développement d'activités précaires et non déclarées dans certains cas, après une désillusion professionnelle, sans pour autant nier la dimension opportuniste du choix. Il apporte donc des éléments de compréhension de la mutation marginale du marché du travail vers des structures dites affinitaires, en mobilisant les travaux sur les motivations entrepreneuriales et ceux sur les facteurs contraignants. La nécessité pour les organisations d'engager des démarches en faveur de l'inclusion est discutée. La recherche ouvre finalement la voie à d'autres travaux sur les organisations affinitaires, et sur l'inclusion des personnes qui donnent la priorité à leur religiosité face à leur professionnalité, et ce dans les organisations non affinitaires.

*Mots-clés* : fait religieux au travail, entrepreneuriat, nécessité et opportunité, contraintes, entreprise affinitaire, récits de vie

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