

# Navigating liability of foreignness: analyzing immigrant entrepreneurship using Bourdieusian lens in V.S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aims to highlight how fiction offers a rich context for analyzing the liability of foreignness (LOF), a concept extensively examined in international business literature. For this purpose, it focuses on a famous novel *A Bend in the River* written by V.S. Naipaul.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper uses V.S. Naipaul's novel *A Bend in the River* as a setting to analyze and highlight the experiences of immigrant entrepreneurs and strategies adopted by them to overcome the LOF. Using Bourdieu's work on *field, capital and habitus* – this paper undertakes narrative analysis of the chosen novel to show how the immigrant entrepreneur (Salim) navigated individual, structural and contextual challenges linked to LOF.

**Findings** – This study demonstrates how fiction can enrich the understanding of the complexities of LOF. An interesting finding relates the fact that in the novel immigrant entrepreneur is not able to fully overcome his outsider status and LOF despite having economic access, potential and aptitude to succeed as an entrepreneur. The findings also reveal the limitations of economic capital, and enhanced importance that cultural and symbolic capital play in constituting the experience of immigrant entrepreneurs.

**Originality/value** – This paper is among the first to use fiction as a lens for studying LOF and immigrant entrepreneurship. By integrating narrative analysis of the chosen novel (*A Bend in the River*) with Bourdieu's work on *field, capital and habitus*, this paper's findings enrich theory development in relevant literature streams of immigrant entrepreneurship and LOF.

**Keywords** Bourdieu, Fiction, Immigrant entrepreneurship, International business, Liability of foreignness, V.S. Naipaul

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Liability of foreignness (LOF) is one of the most researched topics in international business (IB) studies (e.g. [Denk et al., 2012](#); [An et al., 2022](#)). Prior studies have addressed LOF at the



individual level including expatriate managers and migrant entrepreneurs (e.g. Matsuo, 2000; Mezas, 2002; Gurău *et al.*, 2020; Cao and Alon, 2021; An *et al.*, 2022) as well as at organizational level especially in relation to multinational enterprises' entry to foreign markets and internationalization (Santos *et al.*, 2021; Weerasekera *et al.*, 2025). Scholars have undertaken both quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyze the influences of LOF (e.g. Denk *et al.*, 2012; An *et al.*, 2022). In the specific case of individual immigrant entrepreneurs (IEs), scholars have also investigated the related concepts such as liability of outsidership (Aluko *et al.*, 2022), its links with the cultural contexts of the country in which the IE operates (Abd Hamid and Teng, 2025) and how IE use resilience and informal resources to navigate the obstacles of the liability of outsidership (Olarewaju and Muhumuza, 2024). Despite being significantly researched topics, LOF remains a visible aspect in the IB domain. It should further be noted that in the current climate of an increasingly visible anti-globalization backlash (e.g. Scheiring *et al.*, 2024) and increasingly nativist (inward looking) attitude in many societies (e.g., Abadi *et al.*, 2024), it is critical that new perspectives concerning the navigation of LOF are presented, along with highlighting limitations of different strategies adapted. In this paper, we present the use of fiction as one such new perspective in enriching our understanding in this regard. Almost three decades ago, Carney (1994) referred to the potential of fiction to enrich IB teaching and suggested several strategies to incorporate novels in teaching. The multidisciplinary roots in most works of fiction could be useful in equipping students with deep cross-cultural understanding and provide a truly global perspective. However, to the best of our knowledge, so far, fiction has not been used as an empirical context and technique while analyzing LOF (and the associated concepts like outsidership), its influences and strategies used to overcome it. This paper aims to fill this gap by advocating for and demonstrating the use of fiction as a potentially rich research method.

This paper explores how the study and application of fiction can enhance and enrich the understanding of a well-established IB concept such as LOF. Using Bourdieu's work on *field*, *capital* and *habitus*, we analyze one of the most famous novels by Nobel prize Laureate author V.S. Naipaul, *A Bend in the River*. This novel was first published in 1979, and in this paper, we have used the version that was published in 1989 by Vintage International. Through a narrative analysis focused on the experience of its IE protagonist – Salim, we bring insights on how IEs experience and navigate LOF and address the following research questions: *How is outsidership and LOF experienced by the immigrant entrepreneur (IE)? What are the strategies adopted by the IE to navigate LOF and what is the outcome thereof?*

The current paper offers three contributions to the IB and larger management literature. First, it is one of the first works to use fiction as a context to enrich the understanding and highlight nuances of a widely researched IB concept of LOF. Therefore, the paper responds to the calls by IB scholars who have referred to the need of diversity in research approaches (especially qualitative methodologies) and criticality of context in IB studies (e.g. Michailova, 2011; Aguzzoli *et al.*, 2024), by highlighting the potential of fiction as a research method. Second, this paper showcases the criticality of nonwestern contexts as a setting to study and analyze immigrant entrepreneurship. Most of research on immigrant entrepreneurship has focused on developed (mostly) western economies, even though migration and people movement have been visible across the globe. Although, our analysis focuses on a work of fiction linked to a particular point in history, the critical understanding it provides about the limitations of economic capital in case of IEs, and significance of the influence of cultural and symbolic capital on their success or failure transcends space and time.

Finally, integration of Bourdieu's work on *field, habitus and capital*, with a core IB concept of LOF using this novel as a context, helps to demonstrate that LOF is not just an economic, social or institutional barrier but is also deeply intertwined with the symbolic dimensions (particularly of capital). Moreover, by applying Bourdieu's concepts, our paper shows that LOF is not a static concept, but it is as a dynamic interplay between an IE's *habitus* and the host country's field. Hence, the paper shows criticality of adaptive strategies which IEs use to convert and leverage their capital within new fields, despite challenges associated with LOF. These specific elements have not been highlighted in any prior IB study in this context (at least to our knowledge), and this further strengthens our paper's contributions.

The rest of this paper is organized so that the section 2 links fictional narrative with the individual narrative approach and explains the choice of the novel and process of analysis. After that, we present a brief overview of the main theoretical lens used in this paper, i.e. Bourdieu's work on *field, capital and habitus*, in section 3. This is followed by the presentation of our analysis of the novel with a focus on changing field, the roles of different types of capital and IE's journey as described in the novel, in section 4. Section 5 concludes the paper with a presentation of implications, limitations and future research directions.

## 2. Linking fictional narrative with individual narrative: the case of *A Bend in the River*

The topics related to prejudice, challenges, human resilience and agility are common across the experience of LOF and literature (e.g. Winter, 2009; Le Lay, 2022; Anis *et al.*, 2024). Scholars have also argued that business and humanities (including literature) as academic disciplines have significant potential to learn from and enrich each other (e.g. Chandra, 2010) due to their focus on issues linked to human nature and behavior. In recent years, some scholars have stressed the potential of fiction as a useful setting to enrich organization studies (Savage *et al.*, 2018) and entrepreneurship research (Nordqvist and Gartner, 2020). For example, in a very interesting study, McCabe (2015) used fiction (novels) by Franz Kafka to explain the problems associated with distance due to bureaucracy in a British bank.

Kearney (2002, p. 31) suggested that "everyone seeks a story that will give meaning and purpose to the baffling unpredictability of existence, and, not coincidentally, the structure of life is similar to that of most stories in having a beginning, a middle and an end." Herman (2013) argued that stories serve not just as a target of interpretation but also as a means for making sense of experience itself. Rather than focusing on general, abstract situations or trends, stories are accounts of what happened to particular people – and what it was like for them to experience what happened – in particular circumstances and with specific consequences (Herman, 2007). We take a position that fictional narratives hence may be subjected to narrative enquiry as is undertaken to understand the experience of individuals through, for instance, primary qualitative data. In its broadest sense, a narrative is an account of a sequence of events, real or fictional. This definition seems to designate stories as a subset of the larger group called narrative – for story seems to imply a fiction – but the two terms are used interchangeably (Young, 2008). In qualitative research, narrative is understood as *chronological, meaningful and social*, and provides a form of communication in which an individual can externalize his or her feelings and indicate which elements of the experiences are most significant (Elliott, 2005, p. 4). In literary narrative, the secret life of the fictional characters is visible or may be visible (Forster, 1927) and a similar access may be obtained through the focalization of the character. Focalization, a term coined by Genette (1980), may be defined as a selection or restriction of narrative information in relation to the experience and knowledge of the narrator, the characters or other, more hypothetical entities in the story world. Through focalization of the protagonist Salim, we obtain a similar access and

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undertake a narrative analysis of a fictional character to understand IE's experience of navigating LOF.

The title of Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* signifies both change and continuity, the word "bend" indicating a postcolonial state at the cusp of change; and perpetuity inherent in the term "river" signifying how societies and systems outlive the process of flux and change. Set in a central African town battling the aftermath of independence, the "bend in the river" offers a space constituted by both opportunities and obstruction for its IE protagonist. It suggests what immigrant (or migrant) entrepreneurship motivation studies would identify as pull factors for IEs while also providing the social, cultural, economic and political context within which an IE would potentially succeed or fail (Duan *et al.*, 2023). It offers an opportunity to understand how the performance of the IE is often dependent on a combination of individual and contextual factors, something which literature also refers to as a mixed embeddedness (Kloosterman, 2010; Azmat, 2013). Although the novel is considered about Africa, Vincent (1991) argued that it constitutes a vision of Africa as well as the western civilization. The novel has been chosen for its appeal that lies in the ubiquity of the city at the bend of the river. This unnamed city could be any city across the world, like London and Rome that appear in the novel, as such city "wasn't simply a place that was there, as people say of mountains, but that it had been made by men" (Naipaul, 1989, p. 151). It is through men and "out of the mingling of peoples" that such cities are made and "great things were to come one day" (Naipaul, 1989, p. 64), a sentiment that reflects the belief and motivation of IE. In addition to the narrative depth, characterization and literary richness of the novel, the political moment of a country in transition from colonialism to independence offers a unique context to understand how IEs navigate the contextual and institutional challenges of changing power structures and the attendant socioeconomic landscapes. While the novel is set in a particular moment in its history, the characters' individual continuous struggle to establish and maintain business activity amid political instability, cultural dissonance and their outsider status showcases a broader reflection on the precarity of IE and how they navigate the LOF to survive.

### 3. Bourdieu: *field, capital and habitus*

Bourdieu proposed the conceptual elements of *field, capital* and *habitus*, reflecting the layered social reality at the macrostructural, micro/individual and meso/organizational levels, respectively. Bourdieu replaced the concept of society with his visualization of the social world as an ensemble of relatively autonomous spheres of play or fields as "structured system of social positions" (Jenkins, 1992, p. 53) characterized by "particular values and regulative principles" in which "agents struggle, depending on the position they occupy in that space, either to change or to preserve its boundaries and form" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 17). It is equated with "battlefield," as a "*space of conflict and competition*" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 17, emphasis in original) wherein actors compete "according to the rules of the game, as defined by the specific set of capital most valuable for holding power within the field" (Mayrhofer *et al.*, 2007). In layman terms, *field* may be understood as a structured social space with its own set of rules, schemes for action and process of legitimization which are aimed at securing positions and access to resources within the field. In "*The forms of capital*," Bourdieu extended the idea of capital from mere economic to that of cultural, social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). *Economic capital* is immediately and directly convertible into money, can easily transfer from generation to generation and is efficiently convertible into other forms of capital. *Cultural capital* exists in *embodied state* as long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body, in the *objectified state* as cultural goods like pictures, books, machines, etc. and in the *institutionalized state* through

academic and educational qualifications. *Social capital* is constituted by actual or potential resources generated out of networks of relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition and is based on social connections and membership of particular groups (Bourdieu, 1986). A fourth type of capital, *symbolic capital*, is specified by the particular rules of a field that legitimize “which combination of the basic forms of capital will be authorized as symbolic capital” (Mayrhofer et al., 2007). Hence, capital is contextual, making the value of the type of capital dependent on the field in question. Conversion of social, cultural and symbolic capital into economic capital is not that immediate, easy or efficient. However, the convertibility of capital provides the rationale behind the strategies to affect the reproduction of capital and determine the actor’s position in the field as against other players. Linking the *field* with individual action is the idea of *habitus*. *Habitus*, in Bourdieu’s words, is produced as “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). As Swartz explains, “the habitus consists of deeply internalized dispositions, schemas and forms of know-how and competence, both mental and corporeal, first acquired by the individual through early childhood socialization” (Swartz, 2002, p. 62S).

Hence, *habitus* is constituted by the inherent dispositions, attitudes and behaviors of the individuals developed over the life course, which then influences how they navigate the *field*. The *field* and *habitus* together shape the actor’s reasoning behind actions. *Habitus* and *field* are mutually linked, affecting the relationship between the individual and society. Involvement in a *field* shapes the *habitus*, which, in turn, shapes the actions that reproduce the *field* (Crossley, 2001, p. 87). The concepts of *field*, *capital* and *habitus* have been deductively interpreted and analyzed in the context of the novel and its protagonist, as discussed further in the next section.

#### 4. An outsider as an entrepreneur in *A Bend in the River*

##### 4.1 Seeking new entrepreneurial opportunities: changing field and capital and the liability of foreignness

Salim, the protagonist of the novel, is an Indian Muslim whose parents had moved to the eastern African coast seeking business opportunities during British colonial times, when both East Africa and India were part of the same empire. Their settlement also underlines a usurping of earlier Arabian settlers, entrepreneurs – surviving only in the stamps with dhow pictures, a remnant of the IE vulnerable status that remains open to displacement. As political disturbances create an environment of unrest and discomfort on the coast, Salim is pulled by the stories of opportunities and abundance in central Africa brought by another entrepreneur from their own community, Nasruddin. Nasruddin represents the epitome of immigrant success, a role-model, who interprets the formula of survival through mathematics, balancing greed and opportunity, and depends on a clarity about the moment of exit:

Never become hypnotized by the beauty of numbers. A businessman is someone who buys at ten and is happy to get out at twelve. The other kind of man buys at ten, sees it rise to eighteen and does nothing. He is waiting for it to get to twenty. The beauty of numbers. When it drops to ten again, he waits for it to get back to eighteen. When it drops to two, he waits for it to get back to ten. Well, it gets back there. But he has wasted a quarter of his life [...] What you must always know is when to get out. (Naipaul, 1989, p. 24)

The inherent structure of such an equation behind entrepreneurial success suggests relatively weaker connection of IE with the local society, the *field*, one that is transient and

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transactional and considers little long-term connection with the local culture and geography. Salim buys Nasruddin's shop and embarks on his journey from the coast to the center of Africa. Despite being the speculator and in possession of *economic capital*, Salim identifies himself with African slaves, where both the entrepreneur and the slave share the loss of home and the impossibility of return while hoping for a stable future in hitherto unknown territories:

The further away they got from the centre and their tribal area, the less likely they were to cut loose from the caravans and run back home [...] they were positively anxious to step into the boats and be taken to safe homes across the sea. Like a slave far from home, I became anxious only to arrive. The greater the discouragements of the journey, the keener I was to press on and embrace my new life. (Naipaul, 1989, p. 4)

Cut-off from the origins and hoping for a better tomorrow, Salim's endeavor is classic of an IE that presses on with resilience toward uncharted territories undertaking the risk of success or failure in the process. He arrives at his unnamed destination at the beginning of a period of fragile peace after the "troubles" marked by political volatility and the consequent violence. He finds his shop devoid of stock and its goodwill meaningless within such sociopolitical environment, highlighting the dependence of an entrepreneurial venture on their surroundings. However, the premise with which the entrepreneur in him works; he looks at the future possibilities, toward a time when the social and economic activity would pick up. As it happens, people begin needing the goods which he is able to supply and grow his business.

However, Salim's surroundings in the new town and the conditions of his new *field* are different from those on the Eastern coast. The presence of a strong Indian business community settled over the course of time had penetrated the local geography in the Eastern coast to an extent that it stripped its identity, rendering it "not truly African." Rather, it had hybridized into "an Arab-Indian-Persian-Portuguese place" (Naipaul, 1989, p. 10). At the same time, the Indians had merged into the local environment in such fashion that it had also allocated them a new identity where "when (they) compared (themselves) with Arabians or Indians or Persians, (they) felt like people of Africa" (Naipaul, 1989, p. 11). Hence, as IEs, the Indian community had established their own *field*, creating space through a hybridization of their own values with the local community, which regulated their life and business over a long period of time. Although, the apparent seamless crossing between the Indians and Africans on the Eastern coast ultimately proves to be illusory as is evident in the disturbances that push to Salim to leave the coast and the eventual deterioration faced by the Indian community he leaves behind. The discomfort and sense of insecurity in his existing *field* deepens with the awareness of the lack of political identity or representation as a group of immigrants, suggesting a lack of power, participation and belongingness in the local system. In Bourdieu's terms, in the space of conflict and competition, where actors compete based on the capital that is most valuable for holding power (e.g. Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Mayrhofer et al., 2007), the Indian IEs lacked political power that arguably negatively impacted their economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. As Indar reveals, "to be in Africa, you have to be strong. We are not strong. We don't even have a flag" (Naipaul, 1989, p. 18).

As Salim identifies this inferior position within the *field*, he also identifies that entrepreneurial success requires keeping pace with time, which requires following opportunities and movement. He acknowledges his ancestors as opportunity seekers and reflects the *habitus* informed by their entrepreneurial sensibilities in his foresight of imagining the breakdown of the immigrant business amid the changing political scene on the Eastern coast. It becomes the push factor for his decision to leave, exposing the temporary nature of the immigrants' integration in the local geography as they chase security and

entrepreneurial success. "I could no longer submit to fate. My wish was not to be good [...] but to make good," he reflects (Naipaul, 1989, p. 20).

However, in his new location, Salim struggles to establish the connection that he had witnessed growing up on the Eastern coast. As the proprietor of the shop and its business, and having made the financial investment, Salim owns the economic capital that reflects in his economic presence in the market square in the main commercial area. However, socially and culturally Salim remains an outsider, a foreigner, one from the far-off coast. His inherent *habitus* expected an acceptance and intermingling as on the Eastern coast and while he is able to somewhat connect with the Indian immigrant families, the environment of uncertainty and distrust left by the difficult period of "troubles" curtails his involvement with the non-Indian immigrants, as well as locals. His difference is accentuated in his Indian identity and as an English speaker, who is different from the other resident European foreigners. He is addressed "mister," whereas others are addressed as "monsieur." His sociocultural status is symbolically further minimized as the address is shortened as "Mis," underscoring his non-African identity within the local African community that is reclaiming and emphasizing their own cultural identity as "citoyen" and "citoyennes." In the Bordieuan sense, his *field* changes as he shifts to the town at the bend of the river, and he faces the challenge of navigating the new *field* while overcoming the constraints and differences his inherent *habitus* may imply in the new surroundings. Salim is endowed with the critical initial economic capital to enter the market but at the same time is constrained by his limited sociocultural capital arising from his dual identity as a non-African and a nonwhite, which limits his potential to establish networks.

Salim's self-reflection on his own identity, where he feels more African than Indian is disrupted and his isolation as an outsider to the local community is sustained unlike his half-African servant boy. Ali's name change to "Metty" signifies his exoticized closer association with the locals and local network. The ease with which he absorbs the intonations of the local language and culture is unachievable by Salim. This complicates the outcome of his entrepreneurial venture while dealing with Africans and competing with other foreign operators in the local economy. Ironically, his sense of impermanence provides comfort in the knowledge that if things do not work out, he could always leave.

#### 4.2 Navigating liability of foreignness: Salim's strategies and outcomes

One of the key strategy Salim adopts to overcome the burden of his foreignness, of being an immigrant and an outsider for the establishment and expansion of his sundries shop, is his relationship and reliance on Zabeth, a female African entrepreneur retailer – a "merchande." Zabeth acts as a link between Salim and the rural markets of the indigenous fishing communities deep inside the bush. While Salim himself lacks the knowledge and understanding of their needs and direct access to these extended markets, he uses Zabeth's local expertise and network to overcome his own limitations of social and cultural capital. Dealing with people who are interested in new things and yet culturally had their tastes set around the accepted and trusted varieties, which were unfamiliar for Salim, he falls short of achieving the *symbolic capital* of trust, recognition and visibility among the consumers. However, "Zabeth knew exactly what the people of her village needed and how much they would be able to or willing to pay for it" (Naipaul, 1989, p. 5). While entrepreneurial activity takes both Salim and Zabeth far from their respective territories, Zabeth enjoys the privilege of being the local who is assured of the security offered by the bush. Her barge could penetrate the local markets in ways that are not available to Salim as an outsider. Interestingly though, Salim commands perceived value as a bearer of better education as a foreigner and it is his *cultural capital* that adds to his *symbolic capital* in the form of prestige

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and honor and is crucial in expanding the foci of his relationship with Zabeth. This is reflected in Zabeth's decision to choose him as the local guardian for her son. He makes it clear that it is his education and not the trust arising from the business relationship that has driven Zabeth's decision.

Despite forming such local alliances and making progress, the entrepreneur's dependence on the political climate, power structures and the institutional environment remains crucial. Even when through most of the novel, the capital city of the country remains unknown to Salim, his *field* being the microworld of the day-to-day life in the town, his overall possibilities are susceptible to macro outside world. Salim's observations around the developing version of African and African men under the new President signified by the unrealistic interpretation of African self and a lack of maturity toward the vision of the country and its people, is suggestive of the future new wave of troubles and violence. As Dulai (1991, p. 309) suggested, the "quest for purity and glorification of the native culture signifies an imaginary identity (of the country), distracted from confrontation with and redress of the present (actual) conditions." The power struggles and the shifting allegiances in the postcolonial political landscape emphasize Salim's isolation, impermanence and outsidership. The *field* for IE in this aspect remains similar in the Eastern coast and central Africa, in their lack of political voice, vulnerability and dispensability for the local system:

In good times or bad we lived with the knowledge that we were expendable, that our labour might at any moment go waste, that we ourselves might be smashed up; and that others would replace us. (Naipaul, 1989, p. 86)

While self-preservation and safety are prioritized against resistance and action, as IE, Salim focusses on survival, waiting for the change an upwards business cycle. In fact, Thieme (1983) called the novel a chronicle of endurance, comparing it with Robinson Crusoe, where Salim shows pragmatism and stoicism to cope in the life in the turbulent world. This echoes in Salim's reflection:

But now we who remained – outsiders, but neither settler not visitors [...] put our heads down and got on with our business [...] Unless we believed that change was coming to our part of Africa, we couldn't have done our business. (Naipaul, 1989, pp. 85–86)

A brief period of peace following the second round of troubles allocates such an opportunity to Salim at the beginning of a new cycle of economic boom. Activity increases in the *field* with changes in the business models and additional opportunities which Salim is quick in embracing, including corruption in trading and smuggling of ivory and gold. However, he remains conscious of his vulnerable position within the network due to reliance on the institutional and governmental structures, "because a government that breaks its own laws can also easily break you" (Naipaul, 1989, p. 92). As the sense of insecurity deepens with an atmosphere of arbitrariness and risk, Salim is forced to think of ways to protect his wealth and assets. This requires a kind of adjustment from the *habitus* he had carried from his life at the Eastern coast, which was marked by rules and certainty that Nazruddin credited for the lasting presence of Indian IEs in the Eastern coast. However, in his current *field*, Salim felt he was stripped of all such rules and the support they provided to him. Salim's inability to protect his financial and physical assets underlines IE's vulnerability, where due to the dependence on the institutional and surrounding environment, the IE cannot always choose entry or exit from the market or align it perfectly with the opportunities or risks. As an outsider, Salim's LOF remains a constant and he is exposed to the arbitrariness of the system within which he operates when nationalization is announced by the President. Haslam (2017) suggested that nationalization is just the seizure of assets held by international actors by the

government for redistribution as rewards to the party faithful, that leaves even the legal foreign residents like Salim in a legal limbo. There is no place for foreigners in the new nationalist vision of Africa. In its aftermath, Salim loses his business, getting reduced to an assistant to an incapable local appointed by the government as the owner of his shop.

The changing political climate of the country and its different outcome for people is accentuated in the contrast that the development of Ferdinand, Zabeth's son, a local, offers as against Salim's trajectory. The power demonstration by the President made local and immigrant Africans alike in terms of control exercised on them, as Salim feels that "whether African or not, we had all become his people" (Naipaul, 1989, p. 177); however, the future possibilities and outcomes are very different for the immigrant and the local. Salim, in initial meetings with Ferdinand concludes that "his (Ferdinand's) mind was not empty [...] it was a jumble, full of all kinds of junk" (Naipaul, 1989, p. 54). However, Ferdinand, as a local, accumulates *cultural capital* in the form of education and social capital through his connections and appointment as a senior government official. "From dugout to a first-class cabin on the steamer, from a forest village to the polytechnic to an administrative cadetship – he had leapt centuries," Salim reflects (Naipaul, 1989, p. 158). Looking at his ascent, Salim "couldn't help thinking how lucky Ferdinand was, how easy it had been made for him" (Naipaul, 1989, p. 102), even if the country was in disorder and the future unenviable. It is Ferdinand who possesses enough power to protect Salim and provide him with a route to escape from Africa. The changing dynamics of power in the country impact the political, social, economic and cultural *fields* for all the actors therein who struggle and contest for the different forms of capital. However, within the scope of the novel, IE ultimately loses out. Salim is not able to fully overcome his outsider's status and LOF across the barriers of cultural, political and social capital despite having economic access, potential and aptitude to succeed as an entrepreneur.

### 5. Implications, limitations and future research directions

This paper aimed to understand the experience of immigrant entrepreneurship and navigation of LOF through the analysis of V.S. Naipaul's novel *A Bend in the River*. Using Bourdieu's work on *field*, *capital* and *habitus*, we focused on the novel's protagonist Salim's journey as an IE in newly liberated postcolonial Africa. Salim represents the uncertainty that marks the situation of an IE facing the challenges of socioeconomic survival and identity crisis as an outsider. Using Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, our analysis showed how Salim's behaviors and choices are shaped by both his inherited sociocultural outlook and his adaptation (resilience) to the constantly changing (volatile) *field* in which he operates. The analysis of the novel from LOF perspective further shows that in the context of postcolonial developing country, where political and business power hierarchies are in a state of constant unpredictable change, LOF gets further complicated for an IE. The attempts to apply existing economic capital to expand further acquisition thereof are thwarted in a setting where IE lacks legitimacy in terms of social, political and symbolic capital. While Salim strategically uses his connections with the local business operators, displays some evidence of successfully converting his cultural capital to symbolic capital and shows resilience in surviving through the political and economic changes around him, he is ultimately not able to fully overcome the LOF and the wider limitations of his cultural and symbolic capital, which precipitates his departure.

Despite being an academic piece of work focusing on a novel written in the context of newly independent Africa, our paper offers several implications for theory development of the relevant literature streams. First, by showing importance of *habitus* in shaping how IEs perceive and respond to LOF, our paper enriches theorization of LOF. The analysis of IE's

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journey in this specific novel suggests that *habitus* has the potential to act as a mediator, influencing whether the entrepreneur (outsider) views foreignness as a liability or an opportunity. Hence, the roles of premigration experiences and cultural dispositions emerge as being vital in shaping immigrant entrepreneurial behavior, while facing LOF. Therefore, we argue for these specific needs to be incorporated in LOF theorization especially concerning immigrant entrepreneurship in volatile (rapidly changing) contexts, which is the case of many emerging and developing economies.

Our analysis of Salim's journey in this novel further demonstrated how an IE can strategically convert one form of capital (e.g. cultural or social) into another (e.g. economic or symbolic) while trying to navigate challenges associated with LOF. This finding enriches Bourdieu's work on forms of capital in the context of immigrant entrepreneurship, by describing mechanisms through which marginalized groups (outsiders such as IEs) navigate structural barriers. This change in capital forms by IEs according to the need of a situation (including navigating LOF) has the potential to enrich theorization of LOF, immigrant entrepreneurship and forms of capital literature streams. Moreover, sociocultural capital's limitations due to the identity of immigrant also emerge as a visible aspect in this novel. These limitations have also been discussed in different ways in some recent immigrant entrepreneurship research works undertaken in diverse contexts (e.g. [Bhachu, 2017](#); [David and Terstriep, 2025](#)). Hence, IE's identity in relation to specific forms of capital and associated benefits (as well as limitations) also need to be considered in theorization by the scholars focusing on these topics.

Our paper does offer some practical implications as well. First, the paper establishes fiction as an interesting and insightful tool to understand IB concepts including LOF. Management academics who are increasingly facing challenges concerning student engagement with course topics can consider using fiction from different cultural contexts along with other unconventional sources to increase student engagement and enrich their learning. For IEs, a key takeaway from the current paper is criticality of resilience and pragmatism, where despite odds, one carries on and explores new markets and businesses. Also, local networks and embeddedness in them to overcome lack of sociocultural capital is also critical for their survival.

Like any academic study, our paper has limitations as well. We focus on one specific novel written at a particular time in postcolonial history focusing on a peculiar context to analyze LOF. This can make our analysis and findings limited in scope. However, the purpose of our paper was to demonstrate the potential of fiction to enrich our understanding of complex IB topics, which we think we have achieved especially by showing the suitability of Bourdieu's work as a lens to study immigrant entrepreneurship depicted in fiction. Hence, future studies can build on our paper and analyze other novels or works of fiction to explore how LOF or other IB concepts manifest within literature and strategies adopted by the main characters (such as managers or entrepreneurs) while facing different challenges and dynamics. Future studies can also explore how LOF and Bourdieu's framework apply to immigrant entrepreneurship in different geographical, cultural and institutional contexts, and see how their findings are similar to or differ from our analysis. For this purpose, they can use fiction as a setting or adapt other qualitative methods, as applicable in their case. In this concern, a comparative approach of fiction with contemporary events similar to the ones being discussed in novel, can also be followed to enrich the extant literature.

Finally, it is important to highlight that this particular novel describes a particular time when information and communication technologies were not very advanced and also globalization including immigration in current form was not very visible. Further on,

knowledge about “others” was very limited at that time, and more so, in the setting where this novel is based. All this contributes to increasing LOF (as well as sociocultural alienation) for IE in this novel. It will be interesting for future studies to include digitalization and increased cultural knowledge due to globalization in their analysis of immigrant entrepreneurship and LOF in different contexts and see how these specific aspects manifest in relation to *field*, *habitus* and forms of capital. For this purpose, future studies can also use recently written fiction as a setting for analysis, following the footsteps of our study.

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#### **Further reading**

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