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The contextual embeddedness of women's entrepreneurship: Towards a more informed research agenda

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'For the modern man the patriarchal relation of status is by no means the dominant feature of life; but for the women on the other hand, and for the upper-middle class women especially, confined as they are by prescription and by economic circumstances to their 'domestic sphere,' this relation is the most real and most formative factor of life'. (ThorsteinVeblen [1899] 1931, 324 as quoted in van Staveren and Odebode, 2007: p.903)

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is positioned within contemporary scholarship as a noun that describes the 'world as it is' (Calás, Smircich and Bourne 2009, p. 561). Krueger and Brazeal's (1994, 91) definition of entrepreneurship as 'the pursuit of an opportunity irrespective of existing resources' is consistent with the common assertion that entrepreneurship offers gender-neutral meritocratic career opportunities. In practice, however, interaction with the environment determines the future of women's entrepreneurship, that is, women are never just women, but also are located within a specific context (Ahl and Marlow 2012; Calás et al. 2009; Mirchandani 1999; Yousafzai et al. 2015).

Feminist philosophers argue that the constitution, development, critique and application of knowledge is profoundly gendered (Butler 1993; Harding 1987, 1991; Marlow and McAdam 2013). Even though gendered institutions have long been recognized as exemplary for how historical and cultural contexts influence the economic process of provisioning (Veblen 1899; van Staveren and Odebode 2007), they have received considerably less attention in the institutional analysis of the 'gendered terrain' of the women's entrepreneurship landscape (Brush et al. 2009; Tedmanson et al. 2012; Welter et al. 2014). Indeed, a critical shortcoming of research on women's entrepreneurship is that instead of pursuing a more reflexive, theoretically informed and holistic understanding of the embedded context, it tends to focus on a direct relationship between general conditions and arrangements in the overall entrepreneurial environment (for both male and female entrepreneurs) and women's entrepreneurial activity (Ahl 2006; Brush, de Bruin and Welter 2009; Hughes et al. 2012; Tedmanson et al. 2012). Such 'all are alike' (Aldrich 2009) and 'extreme decontextualisation' (Welter et al. 2014) approaches ignore research, which suggests that gender-differences should be conceptualized as fluid processes and rooted within a historical context that informs and sustains the normative, hierarchical subordination shaping women's life chances

(Marlow and McAdam 2013). This is important because ‘a mismatch between theory and context can result in false leads and inconclusive findings’ (Zahra 2007, p. 445). Accordingly, researchers have pointed out that a gender-neutral approach may have accounted for the failure of research on women’s entrepreneurship to unravel the complex web of intertwined socio-economic and politically framed realities constructed by gendered institutions (Ahl and Marlow 2012; Lansky 2000; Marlow and Swail 2014).

Although, the impressive expansion of scholarly interest and activity in the field of women’s entrepreneurship within recent years has done much to correct the historical lack of attention paid to female entrepreneurs and their initiatives, scholars consistently are being asked to take their research in new directions. Most importantly, the need for greater gender consciousness has been highlighted in the women’s entrepreneurship literature, with calls for future research to ‘contextualize’ and enrich the ‘vastly understudied’ field of women’s entrepreneurship (de Bruin, Brush and Welter 2006, 585) by going beyond biologically essentialized identities and questioning gendered hierarchies and structural constructions embedded within highly informed conceptual frameworks (Ahl 2006; Ahl and Marlow 2012; de Bruin, Brush and Welter 2007). Such changes in direction help shift the focus towards the ‘more silent feminine personal end’ of the entrepreneurial process (Bird and Brush 2002, p. 57), with significant implications for women’s entrepreneurship research, policy, and practice (Brush and Cooper 2012; Carter, Anderson and Shaw 2001; Hamilton 2013; Minniti and Naudé 2010).

Hughes et al. (2012, 431), quoting Ahl (2006), note that the entrepreneurship literature ‘by excluding explicit discussion of gendered power structures, [and discussing] the apparent shortcomings of female entrepreneurs … reinforce[s] the idea that explanations are to be found in the individual rather than on a social or institutional level’. These perilous suppositions are counterproductive, as they tend to perpetuate the ‘hierarchical gendered

ordering' in which femininity is associated with deficit in a context of masculinized normality (Marlow and McAdam, 2013). Furthermore, such suppositions challenge the importance of balancing different perspectives on women's entrepreneurship by inferring that individual attributes alone result in entrepreneurial success. Thus, regardless of the varied contextual settings in which entrepreneurs operate, all ultimately are alike. Consequently, our partial understand

ding of the construction of the gender gap - rather than being grounded in a gendered perspective and based on a female norm - is developed, measured, and evaluated in terms of how women's entrepreneurship deviates from the yardstick that is the male norm (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2011; Ahl 2006; Bird and Brush, 2002; Mirchandani, 1999). Accordingly, the patriarchal economies and societies, along with their gendered power structures that not only shape the context of entrepreneurs (men and women alike), but privilege men over women, remain unchallenged (Vossenberg, 2013). This has considerable consequences for research and policy-making and may well explain why the gender gap continues to exist and, more importantly, why real reform for women's entrepreneurship has not yet occurred (Ahl, 2006; Calás et al., 2009). Consequently, as Ahl and Marlow (2012, 545) suggest, research on gender and entrepreneurship is reaching an epistemological 'dead end'.

In light of the above, this special issue is timely, encouraging both a change in research direction and a move away from traditional yardsticks towards a deeper understanding of the influence of context on women's entrepreneurship. In our call for papers, we sought contributions that offered valuable and novel perspectives on the contextual embeddedness of women's entrepreneurship; papers that were informed by robust theoretical or empirical research and employed qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods to critically explore the phenomenon in different countries, cultures, and industry contexts. We received 45

manuscripts and, following an initial review by the editorial team, a shortlist of papers was subjected to a double blind, peer-review process. After a series of review-and-revision rounds, nine papers were finally selected for inclusion in this double special issue.

Our final selection has a strong international dimension. The selection comprises both conceptual and empirical papers, employs a mixture of methodological approaches, and adopts a range of gender perspectives. While each paper offers its own unique perspective, collectively, the papers offer a contemporary view of the contextual embeddedness of women's entrepreneurship at the global level that should contribute usefully to extending scholarly debates and pave the way towards a new research agenda for the field.

In the next section we categorize the papers according to their overarching theme, and discuss them in the context of extant literature. We subsequently draw on this discussion to map out a more informed future research agenda, which, if implemented, could potentially offer a more theoretically holistic and empirically informed understanding of the contextual embeddedness of the phenomenon that is women's entrepreneurship.

Defying contextual embeddedness

While entrepreneurial practices and processes are evolving, models of entrepreneurship remain embedded in advanced economies, are masculinised, and still widely associated with beliefs of individual agency and heroism. Consequently, defiance through entrepreneurship is rarely considered (Al-Dajani et al., 2018). Inherent in Schumpeterian beliefs of 'creative destruction', defiance is the daring and bold disobedience towards authoritarian regimes (e.g., patriarchy) and/or opposition to forces (e.g., established cultural norms). Even though, women's entrepreneurship can be conceptualized as an act of defiance, it rarely has been framed as such. The theme of defiance characterises our first paper, by Al-Dajani, Akbar, Carter and Shaw (2018), which explores the collective defiance practices of Palestinian

diaspora females operating in the context of a Jordanian patriarchal society. In a longitudinal, ethnographic study the authors draws parallel between the deeper political connotations of heritage craft production that has kept alive memories of Palestinian traditions with the organizing actions of the socially excluded women in their study. While the women in this study could not change the restraints themselves, they find ingenious ways to circumvent and navigate the boundaries through their highly creative ventures and strategies in hidden entrepreneurial practices. They argue that these actions are instilled within the deeper purpose of defying contextual embeddedness by resisting contractual, social, and patriarchal subjugation. The authors uncovers the formation of a feminized economy and a secret production network led by the women to defy the supressing boundaries inflicted by their restrictive contractors, community, and family members. Their findings on the proactiveness, innovativeness, and risk taking actions of Arab women of Palestinian diaspora contradict much of the existing literature that portrays them as subservient, disempowered followers rather than defiant entrepreneurial leaders (Yamin 2013). The authors suggest that that regardless of how constrained the context, women entrepreneurs of Palestinian diaspora can thrive and succeed when they take higher levels of risk through ‘hidden’ entrepreneurial enactment. Thus, their entrepreneurial activities cannot be restrained, and eventually 'finds its way'.

Contextualising transnationalism and migration

Gender roles are embedded in specific contexts and may stipulate entrepreneurial behaviour (Welter et al. 2014). Thus, a thorough consideration of context allows researchers to grasp the effects of the social, spatial, and institutional factors that can either restrain or facilitate entrepreneurship (Fayolle et al. 2015, Welter 2011; Zahra, Wright and Abdelgawad 2014). For example, more traditional gender norms from the countries of origin of migrant women

has been shown to affect their entrepreneurial behaviour in their destination countries where they must navigate different social settings (Villares-Varela et al. 2017). In our second paper, Villares-Varela and Essers (2018) enhance current migrant entrepreneurship accounts by addressing the overlooked gendered structures that shape women's work in the migrant economy. They argue that while feminist researchers have studied the specific experiences of women entrepreneurs in the migrant economy, it often is circumscribed by specific national boundaries and lacks contextualized insights into the transnational experiences. Accordingly, they adopt a translocational positionality approach by focusing on transnational trajectories and their influence on women's social positions and business strategies. They draw upon the transnational entrepreneurial journeys of females migrant from Latin American in Spain and from Turkey in the Netherlands. The findings explain how female migrant entrepreneurs redefine their social status in different contexts through their entrepreneurial activities and, in this manner, defy or comply with gender relations.

Contextual embeddedness of entrepreneurial career success

Although research on career success has attracted significant consideration in management and organizational studies, the entrepreneurship research seems to examine primarily the objectively measured success of business ventures (e.g., Katre and Salipante 2012; Kiviluoto 2013) or the economic and demographic antecedents of entrepreneurial success (Fisher, Martiz and Lobo 2014). In a context which is already characterized by expectations of female weakness and male normativity and superiority, failure to account for the role of gender has reinforced the gender stereotype of women's inappropriateness for entrepreneurial careers and perpetuated the myth of female deficit and the underperforming female entrepreneur (Ahl 2006; Ahl and Marlow 2012; Marlow and McAdam 2013). In our third paper, Tlaiss (2018) criticizes the existing research for not questioning the socially embedded gendered

assumptions of the so-called female deficiency and their impact on female entrepreneurs' experiences and conceptualizations of their career success. She addresses entrepreneurial success by examining the interplay between gender and culture, the interactions between agency and institutional factors and their specific relationship to women's entrepreneurial experiences as a critical reflexive interrogation of Lebanese female entrepreneurs' 'deficiency' in entrepreneurial competency, ambition, and business performance. Tlaiss' study explains how the significant contradictions of masculinity and femininity disadvantage women, further sanctioning their inferior social and entrepreneurial status. While Tlaiss agree that Lebanese females enjoy greater social freedom than their peers in neighbouring Arab countries, the culture retains its masculine, patriarchal structures and endorses rigidly defined gender-specific roles. In such societies, the desirable qualities for success in entrepreneurship, such as aggressiveness, independence, and decisiveness, are commonly attributed to men while women are expected to follow the social rules of conduct and prioritize their families' needs and household tasks over their personal career aspirations (Tlaiss 2015). The findings suggest that Lebanese female entrepreneurs draw upon their agency and take the conceptualization of their entrepreneurial careers success into their own hands. They experience it as an act of defiance against socially imposed cultural and gendered mandates by challenging deeply rooted societal and cultural norms and persevering in their entrepreneurial careers. This study also supports the argument that explaining career success using notions and constructs developed and conceptualized in Anglo-Saxon/North American contexts may not be completely suitable for patriarchal societies.

Staying with the entrepreneurial career success theme, but focusing on a slightly different dimension, the fourth paper, by Cheraghi, Jensen, and Klyver (2018), considers the gender gap in entrepreneurship participation by exploring women's entry into entrepreneurship. Here, the authors contend that low gender egalitarianism results in a gender gap in new

venture creation endeavours, presenting both different opportunities and constraints to men and women. Previous research assumed - unrealistically so - that gender-related opportunities and constraints occur evenly throughout an individual's different life stages. In this study, the authors detail an institutional life-course model to explain gender-related patterns in an individual's propensity to engage in entrepreneurship, highlighting contingencies related to the level of gender-egalitarianism in society and an individual's life stages. Their conceptual model is tested on an extensive integrated dataset of 71 countries drawn from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) and the World Value Survey. While previous research investigating gender effects in individuals' entrepreneurship participation suggests that gender effects are expected to be centered primarily around women's roles in giving birth and nursing children (Klyver, Nielsen and Evald 2013; Thebaud, 2015), this study observed that the gender gap in entrepreneurship participation was smaller in the launching stage than in the anticipatory stage. Moreover, the gender gap in the launching stage increases with an increase in gender-egalitarianism and is guided by a decrease in men's – not women's – entry into entrepreneurship in countries with low gender egalitarianism. Apart from the generally higher levels of entrepreneurship participation for both women and men in more gender egalitarian countries, this life course dynamic constituted the most significant gendered difference in individuals' entry into entrepreneurship in high and low egalitarian countries, respectively. Building on traditional gender role reasoning (Jayawarna, Rouse, and Kitching 2011), the authors argue that young males are less concerned with future family responsibilities and thus more willing to take risks by performing entrepreneurship at the early stage, while females prepare for future parental roles at a much earlier stages.

Contextualizing women entrepreneurs' business-family negotiations in patriarchal societies

The highest cited motivation for women's pursuit of entrepreneurship has been their need to achieve work-life balance. Yet, research on how women negotiate the boundaries of their work and family roles, highlights that entrepreneurship is gendered and the model entrepreneur is characterised with masculinity, while women are expected to fulfil family roles (Ahl 2006; D'Enbeau et al. 2015; Özbilgin et al. 2011; Munkejord 2016). Consequently, these struggles shape the processes through which women entrepreneurs 'nurture' the work-family interface (Eddleston and Powell 2012). However, the existing research is skewed towards the experiences of 'ideal work-life balancer' and the psychological and emotional effects of these work-family conflicts on individuals (Özbilgin et al., 2011). In our fifth paper, by Xheneti, Karki and Madden (2018) argue that despite several scholarly calls for contextualized accounts of women's entrepreneurship, we know little about the negotiating actions taken by women in the context of both livelihood challenges and patriarchal contexts. They further suggest that while women entrepreneurship research has focused mainly on roles such as 'motherhood' (Brush et al. 2009) or 'business ownership', it has failed to acknowledge other family-related junctures and the strategies of women entrepreneurs to adapt to changing family needs with regard to income, spare capacity, and human resources (Alsos et al. 2014; Poggesi et al. 2015).

In their study, they highlight how Nepalese female entrepreneurs legitimize their business activities, respond to family/societal expectations, and mobilize support for their business. By going beyond existing temporal and spatial strategies of entrepreneurs, the authors shed light on how the patriarchal context and livelihood challenges influence resource mobilization and work satisfaction through three main and interrelated themes - negotiating consent, family resource access, and gaining status. By focusing on factors other than gender, this study

opens up avenue to recognise how the diverse experiences of responding to business-family demands stem from the paradoxical expectations of different types of institutions.

Challenging existing gender structures through female entrepreneurial networks

While, programs to support women's entrepreneurship play an important role in encouraging more women to become entrepreneurs and in changing the gendered entrepreneurship discourse. Roos (2018) in our sixth paper argues that such initiatives are determined by masculine foundations and thus comply further with the masculine norm of economy. For example, by stating that women need to network more to become more successful entrepreneurs merely establishes the notion that it is women, and not the structures, that need to change (Mirchandani 1999; Hughes et al. 2012). In line with Marlow and Patton (2005), she agrees that there is a limited discussion on the structural issues surrounding gender and entrepreneurship (Marlow and Patton 2005). To fill these gaps, in her study, Roos (2018) investigates how a female entrepreneurship network is constructed, and how it simultaneously reinforce**s** and challenge**s** existing gender structures. This paper sheds lights on how embeddedness in context can offer a pathway towards gender equality by looking into the interplay between the gender process (i.e., a dichotomy of either reinforcing or challenging structures) and the embeddedness process (i.e., a process of moving between two extremes; rational market behaviour) within entrepreneurship. Between the two extremes of gender process and embeddedness process lies the entrepreneurship process that is embedded in the social context and enables people to realise the importance of context, become part of it and access resources bound to it (Jack and Anderson 2002; Korsgaard, Ferguson, and Gaddefors 2015). Roos (2018) further suggests that while embeddedness is associated with positive effects to some extent, at a certain point, a threshold is reached when embeddedness becomes associated with the negative outcomes of over-socialization (Uzzi 1997; Waldinger

1995). To get the most out of being embedded, entrepreneurs need to balance embeddedness through negotiation with the context, being cautious not to cross this threshold (Gaddefors and Cronsell 2009; Kalantaridis and Bika 2006). As Roos (2018) shows in her study, balancing the embeddedness process within an entrepreneurship process is one way of challenging gender structures. Based on an ethnographic study, Roos (2018) identifies three processes in the female entrepreneurship network: making proper entrepreneurs, building relationships and engaging in change.

The seventh paper, by Liu, Schøtt and Zhang (2018), extends on the inequality dimension of female entrepreneurial networks by exploring women's experiences of legitimacy, satisfaction, and commitment in the context of gender hierarchy. As an entrepreneur, when women perceive legitimacy from networks that often are influenced by the gender hierarchy that privileges men over women, they feel encouraged. Using a GEM-derived sample of 5,997 female entrepreneurs in developing countries, the authors seek to identify the specific effects of gender hierarchy and networks on the legitimacy female entrepreneurs perceive. They also explore the impact on the women's satisfaction and commitment to their entrepreneurial endeavors. Findings suggest that women entrepreneurs experience legitimacy in their networks both in the private and business sphere. Gender hierarchy constrains legitimacy more in the private sphere than in the business sphere. Furthermore, while legitimacy in the business sphere fulfills the need to feel competent and enhances job satisfaction, legitimacy in the private sphere fulfills the need to feel related and enhances job commitment. Findings contribute to a dual contextualization of experiences: micro-level embedding in networks that are nested in macro-level embedding in gender hierarchy.

Gender and technology entrepreneurship: underscoring the token[1]-nature of women

Despite the persistent notion of entrepreneurship as a meritocratic and equally accessible field of gender-neutral opportunities, the historical and cultural masculinity embedded in the concept of entrepreneurship has made it difficult for women to claim symbolically and logistically the position of 'entrepreneur' and this is particularly true when situated within the context of technology. In the eighth paper, Wheadon and Duval-Couetil (2018) review the literature on gender and entrepreneurship in technology to explore individual and contextual factors maintaining the token status of women in this field. The authors argue that despite extensive work done to generate female participation in entrepreneurship generally and to raise awareness of gender disparities in technology entrepreneurship globally, females in highly developed economies with advanced technological infrastructures remain "token" or minority players in what is still a fundamentally masculine field. Female entrepreneurs are underrepresented in the more profitable, faster-growing types of entrepreneurship that are increasingly valued by this new economy (GEM, 2010; Kelley, Brush, Greene, & Litovsky, 2012). The authors examine how the intersection of gender and context influence participation rates in entrepreneurship, and suggest that the deeply embedded cultural and cognitive associations that frame both technology and entrepreneurship, as masculine concepts create barriers for women when these contexts overlap. Given calls for women to participate more fully in high-growth technology ventures, this study highlights the need for research to incorporate broader analytical perspectives that simultaneously examine both the barriers faced by women in these contexts and the factors that systemically sustain them. If

[1] According to Wheadon and Duval-Couetil (2018), the term "token" is used in this article to mean more than just minority status or a problem of numbers and momentum that will resolve itself once more members of the missing group are added to the equation (Kanter, 1977). More significantly, the term is used to highlight the inadequacy of scholarship and policies that superficially addresses inequalities by universalizing diverse experiences into a single social group, identity category or context to simplify the search for causal explanations and concrete solutions (Scott 1986; Zimmer 1988).

research and practice continues to focus primarily on the resources women lack and the improvement of “female deficits,” it may be inadequate for driving significant increases in participation and retention. The authors’ proposed framework extends the concept of the “capital” required for participation technology entrepreneurship beyond that of financial investment and social networks, to human capital and cognitive capital, thereby providing a more comprehensive and descriptive approach to measure the influence of embedded individual and contextual factors influencing intent, outcome, and participation.

The ninth and final paper extends the notion of women entrepreneurs’ underrepresentation in traditionally male-dominated sectors by bringing us right back to the beginning of the entrepreneurial process to explore how gender influences entrepreneurial preferences. In their study, Wieland, Kemmelmeier, Gupta, and McKelvey (2018) explore the social-cognitive factors that lead both women and men to pursue ventures consistent with their gendered social identity, therefore, reinforcing the gender gap in entrepreneurship. Drawing on social role theory, the authors measured the self-assessments of individuals presented with experimentally manipulated entrepreneurial opportunities that were either consistent or inconsistent with their self-reported gender. Findings suggest that a gender match (mismatch) with the entrepreneurial opportunity results in higher (lower) reported self-efficacy, anticipated social resources and venture desirability, and lower (higher) venture risk perceptions. Indeed, self-efficacy and anticipated social resources were found to mediate the effect of gender congruency on perceived risk and venture desirability. The findings from this study offer valuable insights into the insidious barriers that help reproduce the gender gap in entrepreneurial outcomes by ‘nudging’ women into lower-return ventures, and by extension, into possibly less lucrative industries.

Moving forward: Where to now?

Our objective with this double special issue was to assemble scholarly contributions that offer valuable and novel perspectives on the contextual embeddedness of women's entrepreneurship; perspectives that could help us better understand the phenomenon of women's entrepreneurship in its myriad contexts. Such new perspectives also could help develop a more informed and relevant future research agenda.

The findings from the included chapters, as well as the insights these chapters provide, suggest that, as scholars, we need to broaden significantly our empirical gaze to accommodate a wider variety of methodological approaches. As Al-Dajani et al. (2018) highlight, contextual embeddedness takes many different forms, operates on several different levels, and can be found in unexpected places and spaces; as such, different methods are needed to capture each. Longitudinal approaches that more deeply explore concepts such as the defiance embedded in entrepreneurship could not only deepen our understanding and theorising of women's entrepreneurship, but also of entrepreneurship more broadly (Al-Dajani et al. 2018).

More extensive multi-level analytical frameworks also are needed; frameworks that could more effectively explore how social practices and cultural discourses shape women's entrepreneurial preferences, facilitate (or not) access to important support infrastructures, influence experiences and impact (or not) on performance. As Roos (2018) highlights, context and people can only truly be analyzed when considered together because context is not the background to entrepreneurship but a foreground actor in the entrepreneurial process, therefore, women's entrepreneurial experiences need to be fully contextualized if they are to be fully understood (Tlaiss 2018). This means that future research approaches will need to shift from sampling large scale, accessible data sets or convenient, homogenous groups to conducting more in-depth examinations of diverse marginalized populations so that we can

better understand how to decrease barriers and increase participation sufficiently to carry out more generalizable studies. Sample groups of women entrepreneurs such as migrants, for example, cannot and should not be pigeonholed as one homogeneous group because their experiences are highly diverse and dependent on their both their countries of origin and their destinations (Villares-Varela and Essers 2018).

Research objectives also must shift from the development of short-term strategies to help women overcome existing barriers to longer-term approaches that focus on discovering how to prevent gendered barriers in the first place. This may require scholars who are willing to apply those more macro-level sociocultural methods traditionally found outside of the discipline - such as case studies, discourse analysis, media content studies, and rhetorical framing analysis - to women's entrepreneurship research. Of course, this would require academic entrepreneurship departments to shift their faculty selection criteria to cultivate and/or value more discipline diversity and to ensure that these research methods are rendered acceptable for inclusion in top-tier journals. Most importantly, new approaches to research in this area must be recognized with the award of research funding and be valued in promotion and tenure decisions. Finally, when it comes to the assessment of women entrepreneurs' ventures, support programs and policies, we must consider including much broader evaluation frameworks as opposed to the existing narrow measurements that are so clearly based on stereotypical forms of masculinity yet have somehow become the embedded yardsticks of success.

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