Article

Women’s entrepreneurship in the Global South; Empowering and emancipating?

**Abstract:** This paper addresses the questions; are women entrepreneurs empowered by entrepreneurship and critically, does entrepreneurship offer emancipation. Our theoretical position is that entrepreneurship is socially embedded and must be recognized as a social process with economic outcomes. Accordingly, questions of empowerment must take full account of the context in which entrepreneurship takes place. We argue that institutions, formal and informal, cultural, social, and political create gendered contexts in the Global South where women’s entrepreneurship is subjugated and treated as inferior and second class. Our thematic review of a broad scope of the literature demonstrates that in different regions of the Global South women entrepreneurs confront many impediments and that this shapes their practices. We show how the interplay of tradition, culture, and patriarchy seem to conspire to subordinate their efforts. Yet we also recognize how entrepreneurial agency chips away and is beginning to erode these bastions. In particular, how role models establish examples that undermine patriarchy. We conclude that entrepreneurship can empower, but modestly and slowly. Some independence is achieved, but emancipation is a long slow game.

**Keywords:** Women’s entrepreneurship; institutions; freedom; independence; power

1. Introduction

There is an increased awareness that entrepreneurship is a socialized economic phenomenon that occurs differently within diverse contexts (Jack and Anderson, 2002; Steyaert and Katz, 2004; Zahra, Wright, and Abdelgawad, 2014; Welter, Baker and Wirsching, 2019). These diverse contexts; social, cultural, and economic, strongly influence how entrepreneurship is perceived (Dodd, Jack, and Anderson, 2013), how it is practiced (McKeever, Anderson and Jack, 2014), and the consequences and outcomes of entrepreneurship. Contextualizing entrepreneurship draws attention to different normative perceptions of who should be an entrepreneur, and how they should ‘do’ or enact entrepreneurship in different regions and different places (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2017) - the social embeddedness of women’s entrepreneurship (Bastian, Sidani and El Amine, 2018). This highlights gendered perspective of entrepreneurship (Ahl and Marlow, 2012), especially in the Global South (Ramirez-Pasillas, Brundin, and Markowska, 2017; Welter et al., 2019) where women may have different entrepreneurial experiences (Akobo, 2018).

Nonetheless, entrepreneurship is held up almost as a universal ‘solution’ for numerous problems in the ‘Global South’- the World Bank term that includes poor regions outside of Europe and North America, most low-income, and with less developed economies (Adamson and Tsourapas, 2020). Economically, entrepreneurship creates wealth and jobs (Wennekers and Thurik, 1999; Carree and Thurik, 2010); socially, it offers welfare (Anderson and Ronteau, 2017), can build confidence (Mordi, Simpson, Singh and Okafor, 2010) and status (Kalden, Cunningham and Anderson, 2017). Indeed, governments of emerging economies, policymakers, and international donor organizations have embraced entrepreneurship as a strategic tool for economic growth and social advancement (Al-Dajani, Carter, Shaw and Marlow, 2015). This paradigm projects entrepreneurship as a mechanism for independence,- the ability to stand on one’s own legs for satisfying one’s needs without dependence on others (Goyal and Parkash, 2011). For women this indepedence is often,typified as financial independence (Jamali, 2009; Pettersson, Ahl, Berglund and Tillmar, 2017) or contextually presented as autonomy from male family members (Gray and Finley-Hervey, 2005). The *entrepreneurial self* fosters the fulfilment of human potentials. Entrepreneurship liberates from organizational and institutional impediments (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Ogbor, 2000; Rindova, Barry, and Ketchen, 2009). Accordingly, governments of the Global South advocate female entrepreneurship as an element of women’s empowerment (Loh and Dahesihsari, 2013), and a tool for their economic empowerment(Anggadwita, Mulyaningsih, Ramadani, and Arwiyah, 2015).

Although women’s entrepreneurship and empowerment are intertwined conceptually and in practice,empowerment is a multidimensional process wherein women emerge as capable in organizing themselves to be self-reliant, confident in exercising their independent rights to make choices, alongside controlling the resources that will foster challenging and even eliminating female subordination in a society. It includes access to economic power or income generation, education, health, rights and political participation (Duflo, 2012; Kabeer,2005). Women’s entrepreneurship appears to be largely concerned with women’s position and role within society. Rindova, Barry and Ketchen (2009) helpfully describe autonomy as a goal of entrepreneurial emancipation; they explain how the term emancipation arose around the Roman practices of keeping, transferring, and selling slaves, wives, and children. Its focus is escape from, or removal of, perceived constraints in their environments.

This forms the basis for our research problem. We want to know what the literature tells us about entrepreneurship empowering women. We are interested in whether, even broadly, entrepreneurship emancipates women. To do this we offer a reflective account, one informed by what the literature tells us. Our conceptual point of departure is that entrepreneurship is deeply socially embedded and cannot be understood from a purely economic perspective (Anderson, 2015). We recognize the gendered ‘otherness’ and marginalization of women’s entrepreneurship (Stead, 2017), but also note how independence figures in women’s motivations (Goffee and Scase, 2015). Nonetheless, we take a critical perspective (Verduijn, Dey, Tedmanson and Essers, 2014), very aware of assumptions and social constructions of the entrepreneur as a white male (Verduijn and Essers, 2013) that contrast gendered social expectations of women’s work.

Accordingly, we see how entrepreneuringcould be a liberating mechanism, but also how entrepreneurial agency may be constrained or institutionally contained. We challenge the entrepreneurial myth, *‘with one leap she was free*’, yet acknowledge the power of agency to influence or modify structures. We envisage the interplays of dependence and independence, liberty and license, self-determination, autonomy, and independence. Moreover, the dynamics of cultures, institutions, regions, and individuals suggests that it will be impossible to arrive at one single answer for the Global South, but it may be possible to better understand how dynamics and processes liberate.

The prevailing ideology of entrepreneurship is of inclusivity and individualism as, if there are no restraints whatsoever. Ironically, Drakopoulou-Dodd and Anderson (2007) call this the ‘everymanhypothesis’. This implies that we all, women and men, rich or poor, have the capacity to achieve our inherent enterprising potentials if we make the effort and are determined (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Marlow and Swail, 2014). Moreover, influential supranational entities such as the World Bank, the ILO, and the United Nations position entrepreneurship as a pivotal remedy for impoverishment, acknowledging that women are crucial to this remedial process (Naude, 2013; Al-Dajani et al., 2015). For instance, the World Economic Forum proposed that empowering women to engage in the global economy would add US$28tn in GDP growth by the year 2025 (WEF, 2018).

It seems that these high expectations for women’s entrepreneurship intertwine with the idea of entrepreneuringas liberating. Yet women have much lower prospects of controlling their lives, careers, and making economic decisions (Bastian et al., 2019; Revenga and Sudhir, 2012). Largely, academic interest in women’s entrepreneurship was spurred with an article in 1976 (Jennings and Brush, 2013). However, it was only in the early 1990s that a growing stream of literature began to examine the influences of gendered ascriptions on women’s entrepreneurial activities, exposing how gender discrimination and masculine bias frame the underlying assumptions of entrepreneurship and positions women as on the “losing side” (Ahl and Marlow, 2019, p. 5; Mirchandani, 1999; Ahl, 2006; Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Marlow and Swail, 2014; Foss, Henry, Ahl and Mikalsen, 2019). This apposite but complex line of debate has been explicated by several critical reviews, theories, conceptual papers, and clarified by empirical cases (Ahl, 2006; Carter and Shaw, 2006; Calás, Smircich, and Bourne, 2009; Marlow and Swail, 2014). Granted that these prior studies embrace different viewpoints and methods, the compelling general opinion is that the ontological underpinnings of entrepreneurship are premised on a masculine normative (Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio, 2004; Ahl, 2006; Ahl and Marlow, 2012). This discourse has highlighted discordance between the fundamental assumptions of entrepreneurship as an open, meritocratic, and agentic field (Marlow and Swail, 2014; Al-Dajani et al., 2015) and the actualities of “everyday” entrepreneurship (Welter, Baker, Audrestch, and Gartner, 2017) restricted by ascribed social values and norms (Mole and Ram, 2012; Welter and Smallbone, 2008).

Regardless, within the Global South, there is a growing interest in entrepreneurship as an emancipatory instrument for women’s liberation and empowerment from endemic poverty, overt discrimination, and patriarchal restrictions (Rindova et al., 2009; Al-Dajani et al, 2015; Jennings, Jennings and Sharifian, 2016; Alkahled and Berglund, 2018; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013; Banihani, 2020). Yet, we must also take account of the primary function of much women’s entrepreneuring in family welfare (Sarfaraz et al., 2014; Loh and Dahesihsari, 2013; Xiong, Ukanwa, and Anderson, 2018). Here, the dual demands of family and business are the opposite of liberating.

Within these contexts, the form and the structure of entrepreneurial pursuits that women can engage in are largely determined by both formal (policies, laws, and regulations) and informal (societal values, culture, and family norms) institutions, economic conditions, and the prospects for social participation (Welter, 2020; Al-Dajani et al; 2015; Xiong et al., 2018) and a far cry from emancipation. Emancipation, described as a process in which an entrepreneur discovers and pursues opportunity(s) that changes, creates value and wealth, and concurrently changes her position on a social hierearchy by breaking free from existing restraints that would have confined her and her activities (Rindova et al., 2009; Laine and Kibler, 2020). This breaking free may possess transformative strength such that it draws women to improved lives, and could achieve institutional changes (Alkahled and Berglund, 2018; Shepherd, Parida and Wincent, 2020). However, Jennings et al., (2016) maintain that it is unlikely that women’s entrepreneurial engagements change the pre-existing conventional circumstances in their environments. Others assert that women’s endeavors actually sustain their oppression within these conventional systems (Verduijn and Essers, 2013; Verduijn et al., 2014).

Our objective is to critically review the literature to try to establish the nature and extent of liberation in women’s entrepreneurship. This is a thematic rather than a formal bibliographic type of review. We want to build up a picture of what the extensive and growing literature has to tell us about women’s emancipation through entrepreneurship. From this overview, we draw conclusions and theorize the nature of women’s emancipation.

Following this introduction, we examine and provide a synopsis of key issues in women entrepreneurship and empowerment literature within contexts of the Global South. We commence by presenting the conceptualizations, differences and similarities between empowerment and emacipation.We consider the different geographical and social terrains in the literature and how they identify specific regional characteristics and the effects on women’s entrepreneurship. We discuss our findings about women’s entrepreneurship in the Global South as liberation (and from what?), draw conclusions, and propose potential avenues for future research within this domain

2. EMPOWERMENT AND EMANCIPATION

As a concept, empowerment is connected to terms such as agency, autonomy, liberation, participation, self-confidence, mobilization, and self-determination (Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007). While it is a much-debated concept, generally, it is linked to social change work and feminism (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015), with three notable aspects- resources, agency, and achievements (Kabeer, 1999), and it is well-established in an array of literature. Thus, various definitions and conceptualizations exist from various perspectives, embedded in different value systems and beliefs (Mosedale, 2014; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007), posing a challenge to the development of a consistent and logical focus (Batliwala, 2007; Kantor, 2003).

Regardless, the consensus is that empowerment is a process (Rehman, Moazeem and Ansari, 2020; Kabeer, 2005; Chattopadhyay, 2005; Rowlands, 1995; Carr, 2003) and “a condition (of being empowered)” (Akhter and Ward, 2009, p.142) as opposed to a product (Mosedale, 2005; Akhter and Ward, 2009), and it is focused on expanding agency (Malhotra and Schuler, 2005; Kabeer, 2001; Inglis, 1997). Its approaches are categorized into five main groups-social, economic, educational, political, and psychological. Additionally, empowerment applies to women (individually and collectively) and other disadvantaged, marginalized, and socially excluded groups of the society lacking in power such as ethnic minorities and the poor. Notably, women as a category traverse other socially excluded groups and the nucleus of their disempowerment is their household interactions (Malhotra and Schuler, 2005; Duflo, 2012; Narayan, 2002). Thus, empowerment is perceived as the mechanism to achieve emancipation where independence is the outcome.

Although women’s entrepreneurship has become important and motivation-oriented perspectives to women’s entrepreneurship spotlight autonomy (decision making power) as a key driver for women’s entrepreneurial participation, Gill and Ganesh (2007) contend that autonomy interplays with contextual constraints to influence women’s sense of empowerment. Despite that the debate focused on the basic relationship between income-earning and its empowerment possibilities is largely framed within the Western context, this simple relationship between income-earning and empowerment mostly works in this context; however, within the Global South, it has been argued to be too basic given that it overlooks the influences of patriarchy, socio-cultural norms, and institutions on women’s agency to convert resources to empowerment outcomes (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013; Kantor, 2003; Bastian, 2017).

Further, much of the literature explains the significance of and access to resources such as education and microfinance as enabling factors, or means, of empowerment that stimulate the empowerment process (Kishor, 2000; Kabeer, 2005; Malhotra and Schuler, 2005; Tambunan, 2009; Datta and Gailey, 2012), while simultaneously underlining agency as the substance of women’s empowerment (Duflo, 2012; Kabeer, 2008; Datta and Gailey, 2012; Hanmer and Klugman, 2016). Regardless of modern empowerment interventions’ focus on better access to resources (Kabeer, 1999; Malhotra and Schuler, 2005; Swain, 2007), earlier literature argued that empowerment was not a gift aid that could be dispensed by others, but, it is about acknowledging power inequalities, maintaining the rights to have rights, capacity to act as an individual, and collectively achieving structural change that supports more equality (Kabeer, 2005; Batliwala, 2007; Sen, 1997). Thus, highlighting the limitations of modern-day women empowerment agencies and initiatives that merely offer women better access to resources such as microfinance through microenterprises (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015; Sholkamy, 2010), and ignores non-income aspects of inequality and poverty such as education (Bradley, McMullen, Artz, and Simiyu, 2012).

While evidence shows that microfinance is not the magical antidote (Banerjee, Duflo, Glennerster and Kinnan, 2015) for empowerment, many extant studies indicate that microfinance fosters women’s empowerment through entrepreneurship in the Global South (Nader, 2008; Noreen, 2011; Rehman et al., 2020), others perceive a mission drift toward commercial activities instead of empowerment (Aubert, Janvry, and Sadoulet 2009; Copestake, 2007). Further, recent debates on institutional embeddedness of entrepreneurial activities however suggest that the existent power structures and gender imbalances are reproduced and reified in many contexts including microfinance (Zhao and Wry, 2016; Hasan and Shahzad, 2012; Weber and Ahmad, 2014).

Certainly, women’s empowerment is about expanding women’s capacity to make strategic life’s choices in situations where they were once denied (Kabeer, 2002); essentially, it is about women developing the agency to act effectively within the existing system and structures of power (Inglis, 1997). Thus, from an individual’s participation standpoint, empowerment is a passive process in which the outcome relies on the different notions of power, its distribution, and self (Rowlands, 1995).

Within the West, emancipation is an emphatic and reinforced notion, implying liberation, equality, self-determination, and individual responsibility (van der Brandt, 2019; Birkle, Kahl, Ludwig, and Maurer, 2012). However, with diverse conceptions and assumptions about agency, power and the subject, different systems and experiences, various perspectives on society, and how it could or should be changed, emancipation is thus a flexible notion that challenges definition through time and space. Moreover, its specific understanding is contingent on individuals, social categories, and issues involved (Birkle et al., 2012). Accordingly, women’s emancipation has become fluid and understood as significantly context-dependent (van der Brandt, 2019).

Reminiscent of empowerment, emancipation is equally a process. Ruane and Todd (2005, p.238) note that emancipation is “a process by which participants in a system which determines, distorts, and limits their potentialities come together actively to transform it, and in the process, transform themselves”. It is traditionally synonymous with liberation or freedom but, not essentially with equality (Scott, 2012). It entails critical analyzing, challenging, resisting, and transgressing existent systems and structures of power- socio-political and economic alongside narratives and discourses (Inglis, 1997). Contrary to empowerment, it is an active process wherein the ‘othering’, domination, and social exclusion by a group or class is challenged, resisted, transgressed, and transformed individually or collectively (Ackelsberg, 2005). It requires the collaboration of various stakeholders in society - women, men, political actors, and activists (Brieger, Francoeur, Welzel, and Ben-Amar, 2019).

Although emancipation is not an “all or nothing” phenomenon (Fraser and Liakova, 2008, p. 4); the comprehension of the ‘proper’ women’s emancipation is predicated on manifold assumptions of which agency is pivotal and understood as the property of abstract individual, who affirms autonomous will, independence, choice, and resistance (Bracke and Fadil, 2012; Scott, 2012; van der Brandt, 2019).

Despite the increased attention on entrepreneurship as a necessary tool for women’s empowerment especially in the Global South, the emphasis is largely on the economics, thus failing to address key issues “of identity, phenomenology, ideology, and relations of power” (Tedmanson, Verduyn, Essers, and Gartner, 2012). Further, the taken for granted assumptions and the essentialist conception of the entrepreneur as a “white, middle-class, male”(Ogbor, 2000; Ahl, 2006) in entrepreneurship research reinforces the “otherness” in women entrepreneurs and impinges upon their legitimacy and agency particularly within the Global South (Essers and Tedmanson, 2014). Thus, bringing to the fore the question of the relevance of entrepreneurship as emancipatory for women in the Global South, where patriarchy and power imbalance is commonplace (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013; Alkhaled and Berglund, 2018).

Even though women’s empowerment particularly, economic empowerment, promotes their decision-making ability (Swain and Wallentin, 2009), the ability to make decisions does not necessarily indicate that they actually make them, thus, the effects of empowerment may continue to be constrained in practice. Conversely, because of active engagement, emancipation advances women’s freedom and boosts their confidence. Granted that both empowerment and emancipation are process-based concepts, emancipation challenges, disrupts, and defies the ‘othering’, thus, selects gender equality over patriarchy, autonomy over authority, tolerance over conformity, and participation over security, (Welzel and Inglehart, 2010; Brieger et al., 2019). Consequently, allowing women to take more control of their lives.

3. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Although no formal laws prohibit women-owned enterprises, the number of women entrepreneurs trails well behind the males in this region (Hattab, 2012). Due to the social structure of this region, women’s entrepreneurship possesses some unusual features compared to their global counterparts (De Vita, Mari, and Poggesi, 2014; Bastian et al., 2019; Banihani, 2020). The conservative social structure is embedded in patriarchal norms with political, legal, and religious systems that accentuate male domination and impedes women’s entrepreneurial activities and empowerment (Al- Kwifi, Khoa, Ongsaku, and Ahmed, 2020; Bastian et al; 2018; Caputo, Mehtap, Pellegrini, and Al-Refai, 2016; Banihani, 2020). This is regardless that in most MENA countries, constitutionally, men and women are proclaimed equal in rights and obligations (Hattab, 2012). Moreover, as opposed to being inspired to explore business opportunities like their males, economic necessity seems to be a major inducement for women to engage in entrepreneurship (Bastian et al., 2019; Sarfaraz et al., 2014; Bastian et al., 2018; Al-Kwifi et al., 2020). Thus, social and consequential economic subjugation is a cause for entrepreneurship and hardly a liberation.

For instance, in Jordan, a more liberal regime, and regardless of the increase in the educational achievements of women, only 15% of businesses are female-owned (Banihani, 2020). In the conservative Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the government recently promoted women’s entrepreneurship as a part of the country’s developmental plans (GEM, 2017). Yet only 4% of registered businesses are female-owned (Al-Kwifi et al., 2020). Restrictive cultural practices stipulate that even the “right” to own a business is problematic since permissions and approval must be sought from familial male authorities. Under this societal code, even the supposedly autonomous financial institutions are reluctant to offer credit to female entrepreneurs (Loh and Dahesihsari, 2013); banks may require a male co-signature on credit applications. Moreover, socio-cultural norms set boundaries for women such that to be socially accepted, women are often compelled to choose and engage in a family business arrangement as opposed to sole proprietorship to legitimize their undertakings; but even then, only after they have secured the backing of the men (Caputo et al., 2016; De Vita et al., 2014).

Women’s entrepreneurial choices must respect traditional gender norms and religious guidelines such as gender segregation (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010; Al-Alak and Al-Haddad, 2010; Caputo et al., 2016). Consequently, many women-owned businesses are home-based, they reflect traditional feminized roles and are organized in such a way that the traditional family structures are maintained. With less economic power and the limitations of culture, they achieve little empowerment, accompanied by little or no social legitimacy (Banihani, 2020; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010; Caputo et al., 2016).

Moreover, women’s physical mobility in countries such as Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Bahrain, and Kuwait are restricted by the laws concerning securing permissions from their legal guardians to travel (Banihani and Syed, 2017; Metacalfe, 2008; Banihani, 2020). In Saudi Arabia, only recently were women permitted to drive their vehicles (Welter, 2020), it is socially unacceptable for a woman to travel unaccompanied by a man (Kattan, Heredero, Botella, and Margalina, 2016). These constraints relate to ascribed women’s domestic responsibilities but are often presented as concerns about women’s safety (Assaad and Arntz, 2005; Banihani, Lewis and Syed, 2013).

Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the religious perspective given the predominance of Islam in this region, and the adherence to the Islamic Sharia laws with its outright gender-discrimination rules (Alkhaled and Berglund, 2018). The conventional interpretations of Islam strongly promote conformity with the traditional stereotypical gendered roles for women (Karam and Jamali, 2013). Nevertheless, in the UAE, Kuwait, Lebanon, and Oman (Al-Balushi and Anderson, 2017), some women entrepreneurs are inspired by Islamic precepts. For example, the Prophet Mohammed’s first wife, Khadija was a successful business owner. Essers and Benschop (2009) note how some women follow her model. These women embrace a feminist interpretation of Islam and regard restrictions as incorrect patriarchal interpretations of the Holy Qur’an (Naguib and Jamali, 2015). The agency of these women offers them the opportunity to circumnavigate cultural norms (Tlaiss, 2015). Interestingly, Anggadwita et al., (2015) note that due to their beliefs, these women refuse credit from financial institutions because the interest system contradicts the Islamic practice (Banihani, 2020). Rather, they depend on their personal funds and investments (Roomi, Rehman, and Henry, 2018).

Owing to patriarchal systematization, support from household males is almost essential, irrespective of how bounded such support might be (Gill and Ganesh, 2007) since ironically, women consider men to be an “empowering resource” (Alkhaled and Berglund, 2018, p. 889). Apart from emotional support, male support is commonly used for facilitating access to capital and the males’ network opportunities (Caputo et al., 2016; Al-Alak and Al-Haddad, 2010; McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003). While these women do not perceive themselves as less able to succeed in business, society expects them to take up their businesses or careers without undermining their gender ascribed roles and responsibilities as wives and mothers (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010; Banihani, 2020). As such, they may not be able to exploit opportunities for increased control over their lives because they shoulder the burden of running a household (Kabeer, 2005; 2012). Therefore, women’s entrepreneurial undertakings are often created such that they sustain the conventional family structures. Some semblance of empowerment is achieved, but the endemic patriarchal system with its power imbalance wherein the women-owned businesses are embedded is hardly challenged or defied.

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Women’s empowerment and entrepreneurship are emphasized in South Asian literature (Parvin, Rahman, and Jia, 2012; Yunis, Hashim, and Sajida, 2020). Nonetheless, the challenges women entrepreneurs face feature in many papers. Moreover, the literature on Bangladesh, India, and Sri-Lanka emphasize widespread explicitly feminized poverty (Lucy, Ghosh, and Kujawa, 2008; Mahmood, Hussain, and Matlay, 2014). A major feature is the problem of social acceptance of women entrepreneurs and how choice is constrained (Nawaz, 2010; Bhatti, Shar, and Shaik, 2010; Ayadurai and Sohail, 2006; Sharma, 2013; Tripathi and Singh, 2018).

These are patriarchal societies. Traditions, especially in India, are embedded in a social structure that underlines women's subordination and male chauvinism is pervasive (Shukla, Chauhan, and Null, 2018; Goyal and Parkash, 2011; Rashid and Ratten, 2020). Early female marriage is a norm in these societies, thus curtailing women’s access to formal education (Kishor and Gupta, 2004). Even women high in the Hindu caste system are constrained and inherently disenfranchised. However, and irrespective of their limited agency, some women have a sense of social responsibility (Anderson, Younis, Hashim, and Air, 2019). They may engage in not-for-profit ventures that train and empower other rural women in their local communities (Field, Jayachandran, and Pande, 2010; DeVita et al., 2014). This is seen as chipping away at the patriarchal social order.

Most women enterprises are small, arguably due to gendered arrangements. However, microcredit can bolster their bargaining power (Osmani and Khan, 2007; Parvin et al., 2012). Nonetheless, socio-cultural beliefs restrict their chances, particularly in rural women’s limited access to credit. Indeed, Nawaz (2010) believes microfinance funds from NGOs and MFIs are considered heathen and sinful. Moreover, in Nepal, women may end up with ‘empowerment debts’ from microfinance loans from NGOs since these funds are used for household expenses, rather than business development (Rankin, 2008; Rashid and Ratten, 2020). Although women entrepreneurs are interested in and are supposedly capable of decision-making, they strive to free themselves from male domination. Still, they are at the mercy of familial male authority (Nawaz, 2010; Goyal and Parkash, 2011).

Indeed, women are their husband’s properties once married (De Groot, 2001; Goyal and Yadav, 2014). Husbands have the ‘right’ to control women’s behaviors, even if force is required (Kishor and Gupta, 2004). Women’s entrepreneurial participation is, at best, regarded as complementary to household incomes and duties. Bhuiyan and Abdullah (2007) and Nawaz (2010) report how husbands may instruct women to close their businesses if they challenge the existing order.

Further, within Islamic Pakistan, gender disparity, systemic subjugation of women, and the underpinning socio-cultural structures strongly constrain women’s entrepreneurial activities and empowerment (Azam Roomi and Harrison, 2010; Yunis, Hashim, and Anderson, 2019). Gendered societal norms marginalize women and generally expect them to refrain from business endeavors (Yunis, Hashim, and Sajida, 2020). It appears that ‘containment’ by gender mostly affects the lower class and poorer women. Yet, even for higher social class and educated women, any ‘empowerment’ is expressed within families and circumscribed by household responsibilities (Malhotra, Schuler and Boender, 2002; Kabeer, 2005). Despite women’s cognizance of their capabilities and improving educational achievements, persistent socio-cultural structures, and the economic framework continually disenfranchise women (Kabir and Huo, 2011; Parvin et al., 2012).

In East Asia and the Pacific, though the countries are very different, culture, traditions, and religion play a critical role in women’s entrepreneurship and empowerment (Loh and Dahesihsari, 2013; De Vita et al., 2014). These societies are patriarchally systematized (Cole, 2007) with a high power distance culture “with emphasis on obedience, conformity, authority, supervision, social hierarchy and inequality” (Reisinger and Turner, 1997: 141). Nonetheless, women’s entrepreneurship and development are policy issues within this region, but women’s entrepreneurial endeavors are not widely embraced (Tambunan, 2009). Again, the literature emphasizes how the socio-economic and socio-cultural characteristics of these countries and the influence of religion dominates empowerment. While it is claimed that many Islamic laws are devoted to women’s welfare, interpretations of Islam constrain Malaysian and Indonesian women; traditional women’s duties take priority over a business (Tambunan, 2017; Loh and Dahesihsari, 2013). Women entrepreneurs may be compelled to choose between their businesses and their marriages (Hashim, Ho-Abdullah, Raihanah, Yusof, Hamdan, and Jamsari, 2012; Teoh and Chong, 2014). Social, cultural, and religious taboos reinforce and reproduce these gendered norms. For example, they inhibit rural women from accessing (higher) education since it is a common belief that education is for males (Tambunan, 2009). Granted that skills acquisition through experiential learning has advanced women entrepreneurial pursuits (Arsana and Alibhai, 2016; Indarti, Rostiani, Megaw and Willetts, 2019), low education levels, feminized poverty, gender-discrimination and inequality foster these women’s lack of confidence in their personal capabilities in business activities (Kelley, Brush, Greene and Litovsky, 2011). Simply put, women are restricted from empowerment and from transforming their lives through entrepreneurship (Anggadwita et al., 2015; Teoh and Chong, 2014).

In China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Lao PDR, female subordination and gender-bias, arguably emanating from Confucianism, are entrenched (Nguyen, Frederick, and Nguyen, 2014; Inmyxai and Takahashi, 2010; Leahy, Lunel, Grant, Willet, 2017). In Vietnam, although the gender gap has narrowed, gender inequality persists in the economic and social lives of women (World Bank, 2016; Oxfam, 2017). Women themselves are not opposed to economic independence. However, cultural values and ‘face-saving’ behaviors can confine their agency. Most often, women-owned businesses are household-based microenterprises (Rankin, 2008). Indeed, women are rarely encouraged to start businesses (Pham and Talavera, 2018; Leahy et al., 2017). Moreover, gender bias restricts women entrepreneurs’ access to social networks and financial institutions (Zhu et al., 2019; Zhu, Kara, Chu, and Chu, 2015). Nonetheless, access to small loans from NGOs and MFIs are meant to empower and improve the livelihoods of rural women through entrepreneurship (Nguyen et al., 2014).

Soviet-era ideology promoted the emancipation of women and had a progressive effect on women’s lives in the Central Asia Soviet countries (Smallbone and Welter, 2010; Khitarishvili, 2016); albeit with a built-in glass ceiling in politics and economy (Welter and Smallbone, 2008). With the demise of communism, there was a rebirth of patriarchal systematization that strengthened the notion of “male guardianship” (Akiner, 1997, p. 285), changes in gender balance had adverse effects on the economic, social, and political participation of women (Welter and Smallbone, 2008; Kandiyoti and Azimova, 2004; Smallbone and Welter, 2010; Sattar, 2012; Khitarishvili, 2016). Culturally, entrepreneurship is considered a male domain demanding male qualities such as assertiveness (Ogbor, 2000). Thus, for women entrepreneurs, this signifies “breaking out of the norms” (Berg, 1997, p. 265) of socially accepted women behaviors. Despite, or perhaps because of this, some employ their femininity as the chief tenet in their entrepreneurial endeavors (Smallbone and Welter, 2010; Bruno, 1997). Although recent studies note that some women in this region use entrepreneurship to exploit opportunities (Korosteleva and Stępień-Baig, 2020), restored traditional institutions now constrain women’s choices and capacity to act (Harris, 2004; Smallbone and Welter, 2010).

Uzbekistan society leverages Islamic philosophy as well as the traditional values that accentuate male domination and fosters power imbalance to impose housebound roles on women. Further, local neighborhood committees often control women’s activities. Women are compelled to engage in home-based businesses which are largely subsistence (Korosteleva and Stępień-Baig, 2020). Essentially, for women entrepreneurs, their gendered role constricts access to resources, confines their chances of enterprise development, and jeopardizes their welfare and empowerment (Khitarishvili, 2016). Nonetheless, several women entrepreneurs empower other women by training and developing their skills and establishing businesses that address local needs (Smallbone and Welter, 2010). Thus, they are determinedly socially responsible and promote institutional change, albeit within their locale (Brush, De Bruin, and Welter, 2009).

5.Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

This is a region of contrasts that falls behind developed nations on several counts (Buendía-Martínez & Carrasco, 2013; Amorós, and Pizarro, 2007). Nonetheless, the World Bank (2020) reports that 50% of businesses are women-owned. Female entrepreneurship is wide-ranging and observable in most sectors (Terjesen and Amorós, 2010). However, social exclusion and prevailing gender discriminatory practices in the labour market provoke women to engage in entrepreneurship as an avenue to change their personal situations (Rubach, Bradley, and Kluck, 2015; World Bank, 2010, 2011; Khwaja, 2005; Herranz, De Lara, Barraza and Legato, 2010). Put differently, women in LAC consider entrepreneurship as an escape from unemployment and discrimination (Giménez, Gabaldón, and Seierstad, 2017) because it can grant them economic independence.

Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Paraguay have anti-discriminatory legislation to foster gender equality and economic autonomy (Giménez, et al., 2017; IFC-World Bank, 2013). Nonetheless, machismo conventional cultural norms and values promote gender inequality that values women as mothers (Tabbush, 2010). Thus, women entrepreneurial activities are bounded by their social positioning as subordinate breadwinners. Women’s endeavors are typically microenterprises (Buendía-Martínez and Carrasco, 2013) and informal (Marques, Leal, Ferreira, and Ratten, 2018). Empowerment is minimal with limited decision-making power and could hardly effect social change in their overall material and symbolic situations (Escobar Latapı´ and Gonza´lez de la Rocha, 2009; Tabbush, 2010; Gurău, Lasch and Dana, 2015).

In Mexico, men are often overtly against their spouses working outside the home, women need to seek permission and accept their husband’s opinions to run businesses (Appendini, 2010; Kabeer, 2012). The power dynamics within the household dispossesses women entrepreneurs of control, particularly over finance. This often forces them into a circle of debt and credit, limits their coping strategies, and compromises their long-term economic independence (Tabbush, 2010).

In Latin America over 54% and in the Caribbean, 48% of women businesses are informal. In Brazil, women entrepreneurs seem to prefer the formal sector of the economy (Marques et al., 2018). However, their choices are bounded by tax and regulatory burdens, high barriers to accessing credits intermixed with feminized poverty, low education levels, gender and race discrimination which play background roles in compelling them to consciously remain in the informal sector as a marginalized group (Van der Sluis, Van Praag, and Vijverberg, 2005; Muravyev, Talavera, and Schafer, 2009; Klapper and Parker, 2011).

Access to finance remains a major concern for women entrepreneurs (Smith-Hunter and Leone, 2010). MFIs loans and programmes can offer more opportunities (Bruton, Khavul and Chavez, 2011) helping women to “challenge the existing social norms, culture, and effectively improve their wellbeing” (Swain and Wallentin, 2009, p. 544) by empowering them and improving their social welfare (Banerjee et al., 2015). Unfortunately, the financial products of MFIs in LAC target richer clients (Churchill and Appau, 2020) and exclude poor rural women. Regardless of being opportunity co-creators (Alvarez and Barney, 2014), women borrowers often end up paying higher interest rates, which deters their loan repayment capability (Sun and Im, 2015) and pushes them into an empowerment debt trap. Moreover, Silverman (2014) explains how MFI loans can create conflict at the home front. Economic autonomy garnered from their enterprise may seem threatening to their spouses.

56. Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA)

Women entrepreneurship rates in sub-Sahara Africa are the highest globally (Kelley et al., 2017), women are twice as likely to start an enterprise than in other places (AfDB, OECD, & UNDP, 2017). Women represent 50% of entrepreneurs in SSA, although their ventures are mostly micro and small businesses in the informal sector (GEM 2019; De Vita et al., 2014). This is explained by weak and counterproductive formal institutions (AfDB, 2017; Mair and Marti, 2009; Webb, Pryor, and Kellermanns, 2015). Women are thus often driven into entrepreneurship by economic necessity. Moreover, within an informal institutional order, the inherent patriarchy in most African societies accentuates women’s subordination, stipulating men as household heads, providers, and protectors of the family (Woldie and Adersua, 2004; Bawa, 2012; Okafor and Mordi, 2010). Socio-cultural values, norms, and traditions position the women as inferior to the men, stress the traditional role of homemaking for the women, expectations to bear children, yet to be responsible for their livelihoods (Amine and Staub, 2009; Quagrainie, 2016). The family, characterized by an imbalanced power structure, is critical as it plays a pivotal role in women entrepreneurship and empowerment activities (Amine and Staub, 2009; Mordi et al., 2010). As an institution, it sets the rules of the game (North, 1990; Xiong et al., 2018), and the women are deeply embedded in their families (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Webb et al., 2015).

Although society expects women to be less involved in income-making activities (Singh, Mordi, Okafor, and Simpson, 2010), in poor rural Nigeria, women are literally the *de facto* heads of the households since they organize how production and consumption happen in their microenterprises in order to sustain the families and to attempt to free them from abject poverty (Xiong et al., 2018). The family’s minimal income is primarily derived from these women’s enterprises. Yet, they are mostly excluded from household decision-making, property rights, security, education, and resources. Culturally, husbands are supreme, and women are their property through marriage (De Groot, 2001; Goyal and Yadav, 2014; Woldie and Adersua, 2004; Okafor and Mordi, 2010).

It appears that spousal support is important to these women entrepreneurs (Powell and Eddelston, 2016) since the husbands sometimes provide the enterprise’s inputs on credit (Xiong et al., 2018). However, many African men do not want the income women make from their entrepreneurial activities to give them economic independence or bargaining power such that they become dominant (Wolf and Frese, 2018). Correspondingly, in Ethiopia, the husbands insist that women entrepreneurs must continually display an inferiority charade especially at home (Wolf and Frese, 2018). Essentially, husbands can have lubricating or braking effects for women’s businesses; they are decisive stakeholders in women entrepreneurs’ endeavors given the economic restraints within marriage and the shared, delegated responsibility for the family (Jang and Danes, 2013; Wolf and Frese, 2018).

Women entrepreneurs are also constrained by their access to finance, over 70% of women entrepreneurs in developing countries lack access to financial products that suit their enterprise needs (World Bank, 2017). Due to patriarchal power structures in SSA, few women own properties and this general lack of suitable property as bank collateral decisively restricts their access to finance for growth. Formal financial institutions are also elitist, and male bank officials may prefer to speak to the husbands (Mwobobia, 2012; Goyal and Yadav, 2014). Only South Africa legally proscribes gender-based discrimination in accessing credits (World Bank, 2015). However, women are further restricted by the gender-bias entrenched in the financial institutions’ lending models (Derera, Chitakunye, O’Neill, 2014).

Nonetheless, microfinance can be useful for developing women’s enterprises, arguably reinforcing their confidence and empowering them (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013; Ukanwa, Xiong, and Anderson, 2018). In practice, however, in rural Africa male family heads may take control of this resource (Gobezie, 2009), denying the borrower access (Tamale, 2004). Not only does this disempower (Salia, Hussain, Tingbani and Kolade, 2018), but burdens the women with repaying the loan (Ssendi and Anderson, 2009). If the loan is applied to the family wellbeing rather than the business, high interest rates may also disempower by locking the women into a debt trap (Ukanwa et al., 2018).

Male spouses may feel threatened by women entrepreneurs’ ‘achievements’. This can disrupt family power structures and creates tension about any perceived abandonment, or even diminishing of domestic responsibilities. As such, there is an increase in polygyny as men strive to regain their traditional authorities through a divorce or a second marriage (Salia et al., 2018). Thus, women may ultimately be forced to choose between their marriages or being empowered through their enterprises.

7.. Findings and Discussion

Our overview shows the burgeoning academic interest in women’s entrepreneurship as empowerment in the Global South. However, exploring women’s entrepreneurship within this context highlights the gendered nature of these societies, but forms an important element in the Global South discourse. Although each country’s context differs, the literature across the regions draws a picture of limited empowerment. Entrepreneurship does offer some agency and has some power to challenge male hegemony and oppression, power imbalance, and the deeply entrenched cultures that marginalize women’s enterprises. We noted how these socially embedded features create conditions, the formal and informal institutions that characterize these societies, adversely influence and shape what women can legitimately do and how they restrict their businesses. Essentially, these make it much harder for women to seize the power to reshape their futures and improve their wellbeing. We noted how ownership can confer some autonomy and some financial independence, but also how that was hedged and bounded by institutionalized constraints. In particular, the gendered cultural allocation of household responsibilities has an overwhelming influence on both the perceived legitimacy and practice of entrepreneurship. It is thus little surprise that most women’s entrepreneurship is at a micro level, informal and unlikely to grow.

Culture seems to be the most comprehensive and cumbersome form of subjugation and it is manifested in numerous ways. Most obvious is the embeddedness of male power as patriarchy to construct the world through an everyday struggle of influencing, inducing, ordering, and enforcing their choices upon us (Inglis, 1997). Across the board, women proclaim a desire to be liberated from the ‘status quo’ (Rindova et al.,2009) and poverty (Bruton, Ketchen, and Ireland, 2013) by being empowered within the systems in which they live through entrepreneurship (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013). They consider their lack of economic autonomy, the associated feminized poverty, and the double standards manifested within these existing social systems confinement but perceive entrepreneurship as a gateway out of this ‘imprisonment’ to achieve more as individuals in their households. This is not only individual agency, but also conferring agency by striving to involve other women who are interested in entrepreneuring, altering the established societal status quo, and rectifying women’s subjugation.

We see how even the partial and incomplete power that entrepreneuring brings carries with it some marginal agency to confer some relative independence. Particularly, we see financial independence creating more autonomy. Broadly, we see how the restricted agency has begun to erode the cultural bastions of patriarchy and control. Moreover, we observed how these women are role models for change. It may be that women’s entrepreneurial practices will not only challenge the dominant order but demonstrate how things can and should be done. Women entrepreneurship, or rather entrepreneuring,is likely a challenge to the pre-existent social order since it seems to promote independence and an escape from dependency on male hegemony. It liberalizes some constrictions, yet, it never completely succeeds. We propose that the auspicious powers accredited to entrepreneurship seem to be overstated. Regardless, entrepreneuring gradually loosens the strongholds of masculine power and offers some degree of autonomy, since when constraints to action are loosened, the capabilities for action (agency) are increased (Mosedale, 2005, p. 248).

Indeed, it is emancipatory on some counts, albeit a restricted form of freedom. It is a loosening, rather than unshackling individual’s freedom in how it changes the rules of the game (North, 1990). These women creatively *entreprende* within their own taken-for-granted norms whilst slowly transforming these cultures. Thus, the “power” within these rules (norms and values) are continually adopted and transformed by individual agents (women entrepreneurs) (Giddens, 1984, p.14). Entrepreneuring is a breaking out of the norms for the women (Berg, 1997), and in breaking out, a ‘successful’ woman entrepreneur through her endeavors opens the doors for others to follow. This, Giddens (1984) explains as structuration, where, in the interplay of the agency (individuals) and the structure (institutions), the agent (the successful woman entrepreneur) alters the structure for the next interaction.

8.. Conclusion

Our thematic review enabled us to contribute to the debate on women’s empowerment and emancipation through entrepreneurship by bringing to the fore the paradox in the dominant view of women entrepreneurship as liberating from both organizational and institutional inhibitions. Our findings reveal that the meaning, themes and the struggle of empowerment and emancipation in women entrepreneurship are not particularly new within the literature focused on the Global South. However, we enrich extant scholarship by revitalizing and reconceptualizing the interplays of dependence and independence, liberty, and license, while highlighting the dynamics of culture and institutions.

The impediment to women’s empowerment is the fact that they are women, which is reinforced by the cultures and the dominant patriarchal social order. Empowerment and the attendant liberation that present the choice of living autonomously remains to be attained in the Global South, given the entrenched power imbalance in most of the regions. Still, entrepreneurship poses as a formidable counteragent to these established social structures by offering the women some limited form of liberation. Regardless, women need to continually chip at the glass ceilings to slowly modify the structures for emancipation.

Although our review is a critical account of the literature on women’s emancipation through entrepreneurship, it has its limitations. Due to space limitations, we adopted a broad geographic grouping for each region with countries that are heterogeneous on many counts. While we realize this is a convenience, however, given our objective of painting a big picture, it allows us sufficient depth to describe this literature. While highlighting predominant themes, the papers explored may not be exhaustive for all the management and sociological literature on women’s entrepreneurship within the Global South. For future research, we noted how the literature indicates some improvements and developments, therefore, future studies might monitor these changes across regions. Fine-grained, possibly even ethnographic studies could show us what women can achieve. Moreover and similarly, we noted that women employ various strategies and tactics for empowerment; future studies could explore these more closely to establish what works and why.

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