

Chapter 6

The South African Female Entrepreneurship Context: Enabling OR Constraining?

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ABSTRACT

For a long time, women have been excluded from economic activities in male-dominated organizations and patriarchal society. Therefore, due to this factor, their participation in economic activities such as employment and entrepreneurial initiatives has been a subject of scholarship for some time. Drawing on institutional and feminist theories, this chapter argues that feminist entrepreneurship should consider the emerging economies as heterogeneous regions with unique contexts that affect the entrance into and performance in entrepreneurial activities. Any entrepreneurship scholarship that conflates the different regions and contexts within which female entrepreneurs are found, underplays the nuances that affect them through a compressive use of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor and Global Entrepreneurship Development Institute databases. This chapter illustrates how the South African context enables, as well as impedes, women from total entrepreneurial activity. While current regulative institutions are in place, the number of women entering TEA and flourishing is still low.

INTRODUCTION

For a long time, women have been excluded from economic activities in the male-dominated organisations and patriarchal society. Therefore, due to this factor, their participation in economic activities such as employment and entrepreneurial initiatives has been a subject of scholarship for some time. (cf. Ahl, Berglund, Pettersson, & Tillmar, 2014, 2016; Henry, Foss, Fayolle, Walker, & Duffy, 2015). This has resulted in the emergence of feminist entrepreneurship which seeks to understand the reasons for the disparities in the entrance and performance between male and female entrepreneurs and then proposing of ways to narrow such gaps (Vossenbergh, 2013). However, another body of feminist entrepreneurial

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scholars do not see the challenges of women entrepreneurs as affecting them, but as a phenomenon that characterises all small businesses irrespective of their gender (cf. Henry et al., 2015). They agree that gender-based socio-economic positions affect performance negatively. However, this should not be equated to under-performance. In their quest to gain some insight into women entrepreneurship, scholars should focus on the nature of small businesses. Convincingly, Henry et al., (2015) assert that any arguments that seek to explain the situation of women entrepreneurs on the basis of gender are flawed because they are not based on empirical data. While this argument is theoretically defensible, it is misleading because it fails to acknowledge the unequal effect of institutional, social, and spatial contexts on male and female entrepreneurs.

Unfortunately, there is a paucity of literature on the unequal effect of context on male and female entrepreneurs in the emerging economies. Studies on the entrepreneurially- gendered effect of context often take a global perspective or are focused on continental Europe and were mainly theoretical (Welter, Brush, & De Bruin, 2014). Such studies often yield partial knowledge that is unusable for evidence-based decision-making. Despite the growing importance of contextualized feminist entrepreneurship research in informing decision-making at the national or local level, there is, surprisingly, a dearth of research that has examined gender in the context of spatial, institutional, and social contexts. Such studies often provide little insight into the role of women entrepreneurs in different spatial contexts of the emerging economies. In line with the focus of this book, which is to provide relevant theoretical frameworks and the latest empirical research findings within the area, and make a significant contribution to the field of women's entrepreneurship within emerging economies, such an understanding is extremely important.

This chapter adopts a flexible and comprehensive definition of entrepreneurial as any activity in different sectors of the economy. This definition includes self-employment in the formal and informal sectors. This scope of the definition is broad enough to include entrepreneurial activities in every sector from survivalist enterprises to medium enterprises. The conceptualization of entrepreneurship as proposed by Welter et al. is useful for this chapter as it allows one to grasp how context influences entrance into and survival of female entrepreneurs in businesses of different sizes and sectors.

Drawing on the institutional and feminist theories, this chapter argues that feminist entrepreneurship should consider the emerging economies as heterogeneous regions with unique contexts that enable or impede the entrance into and performance of entrepreneurial activities. Any entrepreneurship scholarship that conflates the different regions within which female entrepreneurs are found underplays the nuances that affect them. For instance, the database of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2012) shows that the entrepreneurship participation rate of women in Ghana is higher than that of men. Arguably, the traditional macro feminist paradigm of entrepreneurship scholarship may provide very little insight into this deviation from the normative narrative that views entrepreneurship as male-dominated. To grasp this phenomenon, one needs to explore the social, institutional, and spatial contexts. To that end, this chapter seeks to explore those contextual factors that enable or hinder women's entrance into and performance in entrepreneurial activities. This chapter argues that the institutional context can support or hinder women entrepreneurs. Drawing on Welter et al., (2014), Greer and Greene (2003), Jagger (1983), and Bruton, Ahlstrom, and Li (2010), the chapter questions entrepreneurship studies that have considered the context mainly as social networks, spatial and institutional contexts of entrepreneurs with little emphasis on the notion of gender. Furthermore, through a comparative study, this reveals how the South African female entrepreneurship context conforms or differs from global patterns. All this should be read in the context of other chapters of this book that primarily focus on feminism, start-up capital, contemporary issues in women's entrepreneurship and women empowerment.

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