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Women's Entrepreneurship in the Global South: Empowering and Emancipating?

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Received: 25 August 2020; Accepted: 29 October 2020; Published: 3 November 2020



Abstract: This paper addresses the following 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 et al. 2014; Welter et al. 2019). These diverse contexts—social, cultural, and economic—strongly influence how entrepreneurship is perceived (Dodd et al. 2013), how it is practiced (McKeever et al. 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 et al. 2018). This highlights gendered perspective of entrepreneurship (Ahl and Marlow 2012), especially in the Global South (Ramirez-Pasillas et al. 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, mostly 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) and can build confidence (Mordi et al. 2010) and status (Kalden et al. 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 et al. 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 independence is often typified as financial independence (Jamali 2009; Pettersson et al. 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 et al. 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 et al. 2015). Alkhaled and Berglund (2018) sum up this assertion neatly: women are good for entrepreneurship and that entrepreneurship is good for women. This optimistic view may, however, neglect gendered inequality (Bastian et al. 2019), marginality, and the subordination of female work.

Although women's entrepreneurship and empowerment are intertwined conceptually, in practice, empowerment is a multidimensional process wherein women emerge as capable of organizing themselves to be self-reliant and confident of 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 et al. (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 that is 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 et al. 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 entrepreneuring could 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 "everyman hypothesis". 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 International Labor Organization (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 28 trillion USD in GDP growth by the year 2025 (WEF 2018).

It seems that these high expectations for women's entrepreneurship intertwine with the idea of entrepreneuring as 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 by 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 position women as being on the "losing side" (Ahl and Marlow 2019, p. 5; Mirchandani 1999; Ahl 2006; Ahl and Marlow 2012; Marlow and Swail 2014; Foss et al. 2019). This opposite but complex line of debate has been explicated by several critical reviews, theories, and conceptual papers and clarified by empirical cases (Ahl 2006; Carter and Shaw 2006; Calás et al. 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 et al. 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 et al. 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 et al. 2016; Alkhaled and Berglund 2018; Al-Dajani and Marlow 2013; Banihani 2020). Yet, we must also take account of the primary function of women's entrepreneuring in family welfare (Sarfaraz et al. 2014; Loh and Dahesihari 2013; Xiong et al. 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 that changes, creates value and wealth, and concurrently changes her position on a social hierarchy 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 (Alkhaled and Berglund 2018; Shepherd et al. 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 and 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 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's entrepreneurship and empowerment literature within the context of the Global South. We commence by presenting the conceptualizations, differences, and similarities between empowerment and emancipation. 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 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 (Batiwala 2007; Kantor 2003).

Regardless, the consensus is that empowerment is a process (Rehman et al. 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, sociocultural 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 the focus of modern empowerment interventions on better access to resources (Kabeer 1999; Malhotra and Schuler 2005; Swain 2007), earlier literature argued that empowerment is not a gift aid that can be dispensed by others but that it is about acknowledging power inequalities, maintaining the rights to have rights, capacity to act as an individual, and collectively achieve structural change that supports more equality (Kabeer 2005; Batiwala 2007; Sen 1997). This highlights 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 nonincome aspects of inequality and poverty, such as education (Bradley et al. 2012).

While evidence shows that microfinance is not the magical antidote (Banerjee et al. 2015a) 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), while others perceive a mission drift toward commercial activities instead of empowerment (Aubert et al. 2009; Copestake 2007). Further, recent debates on institutional embeddedness of entrepreneurial activities 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 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 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 den Brandt 2019; Birkle et al. 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 den 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, both sociopolitical 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, including women, men, political actors, and activists (Brieger et al. 2019).

Although emancipation is not an "all or nothing" phenomenon (Fraser and Liakova 2008, p. 4), 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 and who affirms autonomous will, independence, choice, and resistance (Bracke and Fadil 2012; Scott 2012; van den 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 et al. 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 Wallenti 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 selecting gender equality over patriarchy, autonomy over authority, tolerance over conformity, and participation over security (Welzel and Inglehart 2010; Brieger et al. 2019) and 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 et al. 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 impede women's entrepreneurial activities and empowerment (Al-Kwafi et al. 2020; Bastian et al. 2018; Caputo et al. 2016; Banihani 2020). This is regardless of the fact 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 male counterparts, 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-Kwafi 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, regardless of the increase in 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 part of the country's developmental plans (GEM 2017). Yet, only 4% of registered businesses are female-owned (Al-Kwafi et al. 2020). Restrictive cultural practices stipulate that even the "right" to own a business is problematic as 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, sociocultural 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; even then, it can only be 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; Metcalfe 2008; Banihani 2020). In Saudi Arabia, only recently were women permitted to drive their vehicles (Welter 2020), and it is socially unacceptable for a woman to travel unaccompanied by a man (Kattan et al. 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 et al. 2013).

Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the religious perspective given the predominance of Islam in this region and the adherence to 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 Islamic practice (Banihani 2020). Rather, they depend on their personal funds and investments (Roomi et al. 2018).

Owing to patriarchal systematization, support from household males is almost essential, irrespective of how bounded such support might be (Gill and Ganesh 2007) because, 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 women-owned businesses are embedded is hardly challenged or defied.

4. Asia

Women’s empowerment and entrepreneurship are emphasized in South Asian literature (Parvin et al. 2012; Yunis et al. 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 et al. 2008; Mahmood et al. 2014). A major feature is the problem of social acceptance of women entrepreneurs and how choice is constrained (Nawaz 2010; Bhatti et al. 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 et al. 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 et al. 2019). They may engage in not-for-profit ventures that train and empower other rural women in their local communities (Field et al. 2010; De Vita 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 2007; Parvin et al. 2012). Nonetheless, sociocultural beliefs restrict their chances, particularly in rural women’s limited access to credit. Indeed, Nawaz (2010) believes microfinance funds from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and microfinance institutions (MFIs) are considered heathen and sinful. Moreover, in Nepal, women may end up with “empowerment debts” from microfinance loans from NGOs as 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 sociocultural structures strongly constrain women’s entrepreneurial activities and empowerment (Azam Roomi and Harrison 2010; Yunis et al. 2019). Gendered societal norms marginalize women and generally expect them to refrain from business endeavors (Yunis et al. 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 et al. 2002; Kabeer 2005). Despite women’s cognizance of their capabilities and improving educational achievements, persistent sociocultural

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 Dahesiharsi 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, p. 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 socioeconomic and sociocultural 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; women's traditional duties take priority over a business (Tambunan 2017; Loh and Dahesiharsi 2013). Women entrepreneurs may be compelled to choose between their businesses and their marriages (Hashim et al. 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 because 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 et al. 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 et al. 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 People's Democratic Republic (PDR), female subordination and gender bias, arguably emanating from Confucianism, are entrenched (Nguyen et al. 2014; Inmyxai and Takahashi 2010; Leahy et al. 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 et al. 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 woman 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 Stepien-Baig 2020), restored traditional institutions now constrain women's choices and capacity to act (Harris 2004; Smallbone and Welter 2010).

The Uzbekistan society leverages Islamic philosophy as well as the traditional values that accentuate male domination and foster 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 Stepień-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 (Khitarišvili 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 et al. 2009).

5. Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

This is a region of contrasts that falls behind developed nations on several counts (Buendía-Martínez and Carrasco 2013; Amoros 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 Amoros 2010). However, social exclusion and prevailing gender discriminatory practices in the labor market provoke women to engage in entrepreneurship as an avenue to change their personal situations (Rubach et al. 2015; World Bank (2010, 2011); Khwaja 2005; Herranz et al. 2010). Put differently, women in LAC consider entrepreneurship as an escape from unemployment and discrimination (Giménez et al. 2017) because it can grant them economic independence.

Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Paraguay have antidiscriminatory 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 et al. 2018). Empowerment is minimal with limited decision-making power and can hardly effect social change in their overall material and symbolic situations (Escobar Latapí and González de la Rocha 2009; Tabbush 2010; Gurău et al. 2015).

In Mexico, men are often overtly against their spouses working outside the home, and 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% of women businesses are informal, while it is 48% in the Caribbean. 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 as well as 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 et al. 2005; Muravyev et al. 2009; Klapper and Parker 2011).

Access to finance remains a major concern for women entrepreneurs (Smith-Hunter and Leone 2010). MFI loans and programs can offer more opportunities (Bruton et al. 2011), helping women to "challenge the existing social norms, culture, and effectively improve their wellbeing" (Swain and Wallenti 2009, p. 544) by empowering them and improving their social welfare (Banerjee et al. 2015b). Unfortunately, the financial products of MFIs in LAC target richer clients (Churchill and Appau 2020) and exclude poor rural women. Regardless of being opportunity cocreators (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, Silverberg (2014) explains how MFI loans can create conflict on the home front. Economic autonomy garnered from their enterprise may seem threatening to their spouses.

6. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

Women's entrepreneurship rates in sub-Saharan Africa are the highest globally (Kelley et al. 2017), with women twice as likely to start an enterprise than in other places (AfDB et al. 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 et al. 2017; Mair and Marti 2009; Webb et al. 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). Sociocultural values, norms, and traditions position women as inferior to men, stress the traditional role of homemaking for women and expectations to bear children, and yet be responsible for their livelihoods (Amine and Staub 2009; Quagraine 2016). The family, characterized by an imbalanced power structure, is critical as it plays a pivotal role in women's 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 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 et al. 2010), in poor rural Nigeria, women are literally the de facto heads of the households as they organize how production and consumption happen in their microenterprises in order to sustain their families and 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 Eddleston 2016) as 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 financial institutions' lending models (Derera et al. 2014).

Nonetheless, microfinance can be useful for developing women's enterprises, arguably reinforcing their confidence and empowering them (Al-Dajani and Marlow 2013; Ukanwa et al. 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 et al. 2018) but also burdens 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 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. Exploring women's entrepreneurship within this context highlights the gendered nature of these societies and 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 and how 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. The 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 et al. 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 observe how these women are role models for change. It may be that women's entrepreneurial practices will not only challenge the dominant order but also demonstrate how things can and should be done. Women's entrepreneurship, or rather entrepreneuring, is likely a challenge to the pre-existent social order as 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 because 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 entrepreneur 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 women (Berg 1997), and in breaking out, a "successful" woman entrepreneur through her endeavors opens the doors for others to follow.

Giddens (1984) explains this 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. Conclusions

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's entrepreneurship as liberating from both organizational and institutional inhibitions. Our findings reveal that the meaning, themes, and the struggle for empowerment and emancipation in women's 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 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 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, 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. 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.

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation, F.O. and A.A.; Methodology, A.A. and F.O.; Formal analysis, F.O.; Writing, F.O. and A.A. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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