

THE DISCOURSE OF CULTURE, GENDER AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING GENDER DIVERSITY FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper is both a critique and a synthesis of earlier studies and recent research on gender, culture and entrepreneurship. The purpose is to achieve an understanding of two crucial areas in entrepreneurship and economic development: (i) the relationship between cultural values and entrepreneurship in the context of gendered entrepreneurial ideas and its praxis, and (ii) the constraints such cultural values and practices may have on the development of entrepreneurship in the context of Africa. The method of inquiry is derived from the tradition of critical theory and discursive praxis. In this paper, the discourse of the subject of entrepreneurship is subjected to critical inquiry. The paper examines the concept of culture, entrepreneurship and economic development and shows how the concept of entrepreneurship is socio-culturally constructed and seen through the lens of a male-dominated discourse. There is evidence that economic underdevelopment and a lack of entrepreneurial ethos in Africa are the results of indigenous cultural practices which are antithetical to the demands of modern economic practices. Moreover, a critical examination of the notion of entrepreneurship and its contiguous concepts indicates how theories and concepts of entrepreneurship privilege masculine oriented ideas to the exclusion of the feminine half of the gender equation in the practice of entrepreneurship. Finally, strategies for managing gender diversity in order to achieve entrepreneurship development that is sustainable are recommended.

Key Words: Culture, Entrepreneurship, Gender, Economic Development.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship as a concept has been perceived differently among scholars and researchers from different perspectives: psychology, economics, sociology, culture and ethnicity. Specifically in Africa, one perspective is that there is lack of entrepreneurial talent in the continent which has resulted in fewer entrepreneurial firms and management of manufacturing industries for productive activities (Mungai and Ogot, 2012; Morch, 1995). Another view is that evidence from the high level participation in the informal

sector of the economy shows that entrepreneurial talent is indeed available but that the economic, financial, infrastructural, political and the institutional environments have not been conducive to allow this talent to develop (Ogbor and Ugherughe, 2016). This study takes on another view, that the manner in which entrepreneurial theories and discourses are gendered is a hindrance for the development of a robust entrepreneurial theory that is inclusive of both male and female entrepreneurs. We argue that the masculine dominated ideas that permeate the discourse

and the eclipse of feminine qualities when defining and reading entrepreneurship is capable of hindering the development of a sustainable entrepreneurial culture and thus national development.

According to Mungai and Ogot (2012), existing research in this field have only covered “gender equality” at the work place in the developed western nations through such policies as equal opportunity programs and various affirmative initiatives that tend to bridge the gap between men and women in terms of employment opportunities and job creation. The existing studies failed to conduct extensive and in-depth investigation on societies with a pattern of shared values, beliefs and traits which are ideally associated with a culture that is patriarchic in nature. Further, much of the evidence on gender-related entrepreneurial activity comes from studies based in United States and European countries; the generalizability of these findings in an African setting is questionable (Mungai and Ogot, 2012). This is considered a research gap in the existing research. To fill this gap, the study suggests a cultural dimension to gender differences within the African society, and proposes a dialogue within the discourse and praxis of entrepreneurship in order to suggest ways in which a theory of culture, gender and entrepreneurship could be developed in the context of socio-economic development in Africa.

Culture, Entrepreneurship and Economic Development

Studies in social anthropology indicate that culture “denotes historically transmitted patterns of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Geertz, 1973: 89). Culture enables people to make sense (meaning) of their world. Knowledge of the concept of culture is thus necessary for understanding entrepreneurship

because certain questions as to why some people, social groups or nations are more entrepreneurial than others and what motivates people towards business entry and self-employment have been answered with reference to the role played by cultural values and partly by those derived from psychological traits. Thus, the relationship between culture, entrepreneurship and economic development has long been established since Weber's treatise on *The Protestant Ethics and Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber, 1930).

Beginning from the early and late 70s, several studies (e.g., Beveridge and Oberschall, 1979; Herskovts and Haritz, 1964; Kilby, 1971; Marris, 1968; Nafzinger, 1977) have examined the relationship between culture, entrepreneurship and economic development in Africa. From these early studies, there is evidence that economic underdevelopment and a lack of entrepreneurial ethos in Africa are the results of indigenous cultural practices which are antithetical to the demands of modern economic practices. In addition to these early studies, culture has been implicated by recent research as the reason for Africa's inability to develop an entrepreneurial mindset (Tshikuku, 2001).

The influence of culture on economic growth and entrepreneurship was first recognized by Max Weber at the beginning of this century. As Weber famously argued, Protestantism encouraged a culture that emphasized individualism, achievement motivation; legitimating entrepreneurial vocations, rationality, asceticism, and self-reliance. Thus, it has been shown that the Protestant ethic was a fundamental drive for the spirit of entrepreneurship, modern capitalism and growth of western economies (Kayed and Hassan, 2011; Percy, 2010). Weber also felt that this ethos of rational individualism and achievement motivation was absent in other cultures. For instance, he argued that a rational economic ethic would not develop in Hinduism owing to its belief in the caste system, fate,

excessive ritualism and reliance on magic or supernatural (Weber, 1930).

Geert Hofstede's works on culture and organizational practices across culture may be applied to indicate how various aspects of national and regional cultures affect entrepreneurial values across a range of countries and regions. Frequently studied aspects of culture in the context of managerial practices and entrepreneurship are value orientations constructed along five dimensions: (i) individualism-collectivism, (ii) uncertainty avoidance, (iii) power-distance, (iv) masculinity-femininity, and (v) time orientation (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 1989; Hofstede, 1993). How these cultural value dimensions relate to the entrepreneurial discourse and patterns of economic development have been extensively covered in the literature. In general, researchers have shown that entrepreneurship is facilitated by cultures that are high in individualism, weak in uncertainty avoidance, low in power-distance, high in masculinity and have long-term orientation. Similarly, the greater the cultural distance from these ideal types, the lower the average individual and aggregate levels of entrepreneurship (Ogbor, 2009; Shane, 1994; Shane and Venkataramany, 2000; Tiessen, 1987).

Culture and Gendered Entrepreneurial Practices

Earlier studies indicate that women are more vulnerable to gender-based discrimination because tradition usually gives them less decision-making power over assets than men, while at the same time their opportunities to engage in remunerated activities, and therefore to acquire their own assets, are more limited (World Bank, 1995). In a different study, ILO (1999) found that in patriarchal societies, such as Africa, customary conventions play a major role in determining the socio-economic status and involvement for women in entrepreneurial activities.

While Africa continues to strongly uphold patriarchal values, this impacts heavily on women's ability to build businesses in many contexts. Cultural/ethnic values can play a critical role in determining who gets into entrepreneurship and what functional role each plays in this activity (Omari, 1991). Thus, it could be suggested that women and men operate in two separate worlds with quite different value systems. Evidence also shows that distinct ethnic groups assume their own behavioral expectations, with some communities emphasizing purely domestic chores for women (passivity in entrepreneurial activities), and for others financial independence for both genders. Still for others, the path to entrepreneurship is reflective of women's frustrations encountered at the domestic front (Nussbaum, 2000; Stichter, 1990).

Cultural pressures and expectations to maintain sexual piety, as well a "sound moral reputation, are brought to bear on women" (Chitsike, 2000:75). These pressures impinge significantly on the economic factors that women face. According to Mungai and Ogot (2012), such pressures constrain women's mobility, limit whom they talk to, and conduct business with, and structure their relationship to the market. For example, a study by Ogbor (2009) indicates that female business owners (such as owners of beer parlors) in some part of Nigeria are considered as engaging in trades meant for men and therefore considered as unfit wives or mothers because they are engaged in dirty pursuits. Studies have indicated in several instances how gender role is a cultural orientation or attribute conditioned by a traditional social system in which men are expected to behave as men (masculine) and women are expected to think and behave as women (feminine) (Mungai and Ogot, 2012). Studies on female entrepreneurship have indicated in many instances how gender discrimination impedes on female entrepreneurial development. For example, women are seen to possess those psychological

attributes that are the antithesis of the spirit of entrepreneurship or antithetical to entrepreneurial orientation (Fay and Williams, 1993; Ogbor, 2000).

In particular, the prevailing discourse has shown how women exhibit a consistently lower likelihood of becoming an entrepreneur than their male counterparts as a result of early socialization (Blumberg, 1989; Chanock, 1985; Nelson and Smith, 1998). In the sense that the typical African society is predominantly patriarchal, the extent to which women are able to freely participate in entrepreneurship activities is, to some extent, determined by the existing socio-religious practices, cultural atmosphere, discourses and ultimately praxis.

Considering the various cultural and structural challenges and obstacles facing women, it is not unlikely that we may draw the conclusion that women are usually discouraged from venturing into enterprise development. According to Mungai and Ogot (2012), early socialization practices emphasize the primary role of women as mothers and wives, influencing girls' total expectations for future participation in the labor force and the choice of career paths. Second, the typical African culture is mainly seen as a barrier to development because it perpetuates culturally sanctioned biases against women and provides excuses for men (Chitsike, 2000; Chanock, 1985; Heyer, 2006). This, according to the existing literature, has resulted in lower participation of women in business activities with the notable exception of their participation in the informal sector (the shadow economy).

In a related study, Ogbor and Ugherughe (2016) argued that one of the most powerful forces working against attempts at achieving gender neutrality in occupations and other forms of social life is excessive adherence to religious beliefs. The researchers reported how in October of 2016, a group of women under the aegis of a women Islamic organization, staged a protest march to the office of the Governor of Bauchi State in Northern Nigeria.

The women were protesting against a bill pending in the Federal House of Representatives in the nation's headquarters in Abuja. The bill which was awaiting passage was designed and presented to abolish years of inheritance and property laws and customs which impose constraints on women to the advantage of males. This religious and customary practice which prevents females from inheriting the properties of their late fathers and those of their deceased husbands is seen as ordained by Allah and should not be questioned by mere mortals (a masculine-dominated and constructed reality). The group justified their protest or “rights” with quotes and references from the Quran, arguing that they were comfortable with their roles as housewives and their duties of taking care of their husbands. To them, doing otherwise is Haraam – sin in the eyes of Allah. The representatives of the Governor therefore advised them to go home and that their matter would be brought to the floor of the House. Incidentally, majority of the lawmakers in the Federal House of Representatives are male-dominated and Muslims by religion.

Traditionally, cultural ideas on gender often mean that men are seen and see themselves as more instrumental, risk-takers, opportunistic, competitive and committed to business activities and career than women: men provides the resources (resource providers) and women take care of the resources (caretakers). Thus, men were and still are privileged in terms of social position, career, income and authority. The fact that most cultures, particularly in Africa, are of masculine nature, with masculine notions, stereotypes, values, beliefs and assumptions, it is not surprising that the discourse and practice of entrepreneurship is dominated by ideas and notions rooted in masculine sensibilities.

Gender differences and its associated inequality, including their manifestation in economic activities have been explained against a backdrop of a cultural value orientation that privileges masculinity over

femininity. According to Hofstede (1993), in a masculine-oriented culture, sex roles in society are clearly defined and it is accepted that men should dominate in certain occupational areas in society. Thus, women's early socialization has significantly affected their level of self-confidence, achievement motivation and even their ability to take risk (Hisrich and Brush, 1984; Moribo, 1998; Omari, 1991).

The gendered dimensions of the cultural, social and institutional environment in Africa are reflected in a number of gender-specific constraints in the context of entrepreneurial development. For example, property laws impose constraints on women, who do not always have the rights to acquire and own property. This practice has significantly limited women's ability to have access to needed capital for business development as they lack property to use as collateral (Blumberg, 1989; Ogbor, 2009).

Constraints resulting from gendered property laws and the practice of confinement due to some religious practices can also impede women to make connections or networks that will become valuable in business development (Omari, 1991; Chitsike, 2000; Blumberg, 1989). Cultural values may conflict with women entrepreneurs' need for freedom of movement and a taboo in socializing with men. This is clearly observed in several countries around the world, and mostly in Africa, where women, due to religious practices and other socio-culturally imposed sanctions, cannot travel outside their homes or transact businesses without their husbands' consent (Heyer, 2006; Kayed and Hassan, 2011). Traditional practices, and in particular the practice of polygamy, customary inheritance and land ownership, perpetuate the differences in the roles and status of men and women, limiting the later to certain roles that are antithetical to entrepreneurship, that is, street hawking, vendor of foodstuff, tailoring, operators of beauty salons, etc (Moribo, 1998; Downing, 1990; Heyer, 2006).

In addition, civil code and other types of laws such as customary and Sharia laws, inheritance laws, property laws, credit laws, marriage and divorce laws, commercial codes, agricultural acts, privatization and investment laws offer women scarce protection against discrimination and are examples of practices that are reflective of the socio-cultural, institutional, politico-legal and regulatory environments that impede women entrepreneurial efforts and aspirations to become key economic players in Africa (Kuada, 2009; Blumberg, 1989).

Many studies have indicated that even when constitutions are formally gender-neutral, they might still contain clauses that perpetuate discrimination and in some cases, allow discriminatory customary laws to take precedence, canceling out the rights given to women under the constitution. The existence of such constraints to business at various levels and throughout the society has a disproportionately negative impact on women (African Development Bank, 2004; Albaladejo, 2002; Kuada, 2009). Ogbor (2000) argued that as a result of constraints imposed on women by various cultural and institutional practices, many prospective African women entrepreneurs tend to be in small sector micro enterprises, mainly in the informal sector that permits a dual role as "woman/mother" in the house and as an "economic agent" in the market. Attempts at reconciling work and family responsibilities are constraints to the development of their entrepreneurial initiatives. Women's more demanding role in the family relative to men's also affect their entrepreneurial ability by reducing the time, energy and concentration levels needed for any entrepreneurial activity. The amount of time they have available for entrepreneurial activity is limited by the time necessary to care for the family (Nelson and Smith, 1998). Thus, household responsibilities make them risk averse unlike their male counterparts who are seen as "Elitists, Risk-Takers, and Rugged Individualists" (McGrath, 1992), while

societal perceptions affect their treatment when they step beyond their perceived boundaries, limiting their access to the resources required for successful entrepreneurship.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of African women's contributions to economic growth and their dominance of certain sectors, particularly agriculture and textiles, women generally remain marginalized, shut out of the formal economy, or constrained due to lack of access to capital (Downing, 1990). For example, most financing provided for women has been at the micro and informal level (IFC, 2006) and credit facility is hard to get by them (Meghji and Virji, 1987). Consequently, rather than becoming an “entrepreneurial woman” the result of discriminatory practices arising from cultural value system has accorded the African woman the unenviable role of the “Market woman” – a term which women themselves have internalized and used to describe their occupational pedigree.

Towards a Theory of Culture and Entrepreneurship

Much of the research on the African entrepreneur seems to suggest that entrepreneurial practice, once it has been culturally programmed into people's behavioral pattern, is hard to change. This approach to studying entrepreneurship and culture is overtly deterministic as it eschews the fact that culture change is one aspect of the phenomenon of culture. Culture is not as static or “enduring” as it seems to be presented in cultural discourses. In fact, the popular euphemism about “change is constant” seems to be more applicable to the phenomenon of culture than in any other sphere of social life. Culture is always in transition and with it, changes in attitudes and values. This is precisely what is going on in most parts of the world as “anti-capitalist cultures” are re-programmed to become “pro-capitalist cultures” through cultural intervention. Examples are the proliferations of

entrepreneurial education and support policies in societies that were once seen as “backward societies”.

In the early and late sixties, McClelland and his associates (McClelland, 1961; McClelland and Winters, 1969), tried in their attempts to “motivate economic achievement” in countries whose cultures are not in sync with the “spirit of capitalism” with various training and “cultural intervention” programs. Specifically, it was “established” that India, with its Hindu culture (which privileges spiritualism and fate or life determinism), was doomed to a society of poverty. Today, India has emerged as a veritable player in the global economy, thanks to a concerted and systematic effort in cultural change whereby the spirit of entrepreneurship and capitalism has been inculcated in the Hindustan mind. As a consequence, the prevailing culture of Hinduism has given way to Weber's “spirit of capitalism.” India's transformation to a vibrant capitalist and entrepreneurial society is rooted in the gradual and guided discontinuity of its predominant Hindustan culture brought about by training and cultural re-programming.

In a similar manner, China, formerly known as the sleeping giant, and was once a communist enclave with inward-looking development strategy has now become a veritable player in the global economy. This feat is achieved thanks to a process that went through ideological synthesis. In her approach to adopt a socio-cultural and politico-economic change in the context of a policy of gradualism, China has now become the second largest economy in the global market.

In terms of cultural value orientation and entrepreneurial orientation, the United States of America is arguably the most masculine society on earth (Hofstede, 1980). Not surprisingly, it was from the US that the idea of entrepreneurship as a masculine ethos emerged. Today, however, the United States is producing more women (feminine) entrepreneurs than male (masculine) ones.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The above examples from India, China and the United States indicate phenomena of cultural intervention, change and discontinuity. In the case of India, change in the culture is brought about by education and training. In the case of the United States, cultural change and discontinuity is brought about by, on the one hand, education, and by the other, laws such as affirmative action and equal opportunity laws and programs designed to eradicate centuries of repressive cultural and institutional practices which had worked against female entrepreneurs. Thus, although culture is a way that people are culturally programmed, this “mental programming” can be re-programmed to support modern entrepreneurial conditions. In addition to training, change in “attitudes”, “reflexes” and values can also be enforced through laws and other form of legislations. The US examples of Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity programs are some of the strategies governments have adopted to promote entrepreneurship among women and other disadvantaged social groups in a culture that was overtly masculine.

Cultural discontinuity and “re-programming” is not new in Africa as the continent has been experiencing all sort of cultural discontinuity – in religion, politics, arts, architecture, education, economics and business, etc. The African culture has embraced the Catholic, Anglican and Pentecostal religion systems, Western-styled political culture, Oxford/Cambridge/Harvard education culture, MTV-youth culture, CNN, McDonald's, Hollywood, Levi Strauss cultures in their symbolic inducement without a concomitant embrace of their substance – the cultural value system in which they are made meaningful.

As Tshikuku (2001:3) points out, Africa is in transition and “in this transition, the attitudes, reflexes, choices, and the values that support them, remain tragically ambiguous and ambivalent. The socio-cultural systems are nevertheless not fixed.” What is needed, as the

examples of India, China and the US indicate, is a “guided transition” or “cultural re-programming” – one in which the attitudes, reflexes, and values are supportive of modern entrepreneurship. It is not enough to accept the symbolism of a culture; to make any difference, the substance of the culture must be equally adopted. Adoption of a cultural ideal without a change in cultural values and attitudes is a futile exercise in terms of entrepreneurial development.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of Africa women's contributions to economic growth and their dominance of certain sectors particularly agriculture and textile and generally in the underground or shadow economy, women have remained either marginalized, shut out of the formal economy, or constrained due to lack of access to capital in the formal financial sector. Women are seen to rely more on informal source of financing such as savings made through contributions than their male counterparts. Even where modern sources of financing are available, most specialized financing provided for women to date has been at the micro level. Furthermore, private equity funds created to provide capital to SMEs in general are very few, and even fewer for women-owned small businesses.

Cultural re-programming (in the context of entrepreneurial training and development) cannot occur by teaching out-dated models, and certainly not by introducing new methods using old infrastructures and mental programming. In the context of African entrepreneurship, the culture of African business ownership ought to be replaced – discontinued (through training and with new infrastructures) with an entrepreneurial culture. For example, a business person's knowledge about the future of the business is less likely to be achieved through seeking the advice of a spiritualist than in engaging in feasibility study and producing a sound business plan. Similarly, going to a traditional witch doctor or engaging the services of a “prayer warrior” for spiritual intervention in

order to prevent a business from failure obscures the reality and real reasons for business failure.

As consistently argued in this paper, entrepreneurial praxis and the discourse on which it is premised seems to privilege the masculine ethos over the feminine ones through the use of certain language over others. Concepts such as aggressiveness, assertiveness, competition, independence, high level of individualism, achievement orientation, risk taking propensity, etc are ideally masculine in nature. On the other hand, concepts such as nurturance, sense of belonging, communality, cooperation, etc are feminine in nature and presented in the discourse as antithetical to the spirit of entrepreneurship.

Sometimes (or perhaps most of the time), the words we speak about something (the discourse of an object) serves as arena for action and the discourse of entrepreneurship and the manner in which the ideas have been gendered is not an exception.

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