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Mobilising identity: entrepreneurial practice of a 'disadvantaged' identity.

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Mobilising Identity: Entrepreneurial Practice of a ‘Disadvantaged’ Identity

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We examine how female migrant entrepreneurs overturn disadvantage through social resourcing. We argue they are disadvantaged by the intersectionality of their identities; that social constructions and ensuing entrepreneurial expectations are a poor fit with their ascribed identity, that they are marginalised by their ‘otherness’. However, entrepreneurship is not only socially situated, but also socially enacted.

We studied their entrepreneurial social enactment and found they had used agency to mobilise their identity. The shared identity of marginality as cultural strangers fostered a sense of togetherness as social capital. In turn, this produced group social responsibility, a socialised obligation to help each other. The entrepreneurs used this intangible resource to first establish their businesses then as a platform for wider engagements. We found that when the entrepreneurial self became superimposed on intersectional identity, disadvantage almost disappeared. Respondents reported confidence in themselves through their entrepreneurial achievement, paradoxically empowered by a negative social identity.

KEYWORDS

disadvantaged entrepreneurs, social capital, networks, intersectionality, gender, ethnic minorities, BAME, strategy

INTRODUCTION

We investigate the entrepreneurial practices of ‘disadvantaged’ small business owners. We believe that examining less typical forms of enterprise may help us better understand the dynamics of entrepreneurial processes more generally. Initially interested in how Nigerian women migrants operating UK small businesses confront and overcome difficulties that are associated with their identity, we became intrigued by the interplay and positive interaction of identity and entrepreneurial practices. We observed how marginality (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990), a condition emanating from identity and normally associated with disadvantages that limit opportunities and hinders entrepreneurship, was worked to become a critical part of their enterprising behaviour. Our research aim was to understand their entrepreneurial practice and our broad research question became; how do migrant women entrepreneurs use their identity?

We believe this question is conceptually interesting and useful because it examines the links between ascribed identity and agency in entrepreneurship practices. Moreover, the literature, especially on intersectionality, presents a largely deterministic, rather negative picture of disadvantaged identity curtailing enterprise. The literature suggests that as women and as migrants, their identity appears a poor fit with the socially constructed entrepreneurial white male stereotype that shapes expectations (Ratten and Welpel, 2011) and normative assumptions (Rehn et al., 2013). As migrants, they are isolated from the benefits and cultural security of embeddedness in their home country; as cultural strangers they encounter differences in cultures (Brännback et al., 2014) and are deemed outsiders (Godwyn and Stoddard, 2017). Together, these features compound their ‘otherness’ (Essers and Benschop, 2009) which promotes the marginality (Maâlaoui et al., 2013) which may hinder enterprise.

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Previous studies relate marginality with the importance of community for immigrant entrepreneurs (Gomez et al., 2015). They may rely on their co-ethnic community, personal networks. However, Heilbrunn et al. (2014, p. 143) explain, 'race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and other characteristics influence the process of entrepreneurship via opportunity structure'. Moreover, Ram et al. (2017) note that the structural disadvantages experienced by migrant entrepreneurs has not been accorded much intellectual space. Accordingly, our research tries to understand how marginalised identity was used and how entrepreneurial processes engage with disadvantage.

Our findings confirmed the respondents' experience of disadvantage; an initial lack of perceived legitimacy, difficulty in securing local customers and obtaining finance. This was a detrimental outcome of the intersectionality in their identities, experienced as incongruity with socialised expectations. Yet we also found remarkable fulfilment through their identity as entrepreneurial women. We saw satisfaction, even pride, realised through their entrepreneurial efforts. Being entrepreneurial created a sense of achievement; a confidence in who they are. As one respondent, Jessica, put it, '*Finishing my first property was so fulfilling, when I sold it and made some profit, I could not sleep for two nights. My family and friends celebrated me*'. Entrepreneurship provided the means of fulfilment; but surprisingly, their marginal identity also provided the mechanism.

We found that the shared *otherness* of their ethnic identity helped to explain how they operated and managed their business. We shall describe how this shared identity formed bonding social capital. Moreover, this was accompanied by a shared sense of ethnic responsibility, a social obligation to help each other. In time, this spilled over into bridging social capital connecting to the wider community. It also seems that entrepreneurship practice helped assimilation into the host society. We see a fascinating connecting, correspondence and interplay at different levels embodied in these entrepreneurial practices; the entrepreneurial self as a meaningful identity, the social obligations of an ethnic identity and yet also social integration and reduction of 'otherness'. Remarkably, this can be explained in the social situation of entrepreneurship practice. Put differently, the disadvantages associated with identity were transformed into advantage by employing the social capital associated with their identity.

In showing how disadvantage is turned on its head by social engagement, conceptually, we draw attention to different ways of being enterprising, and away from a narrow economic view of resources towards what Ram et al. (2017) describe as the melding of the economic and social. We thus contribute to a fuller conceptual appreciation of entrepreneurship as a socially situated practice. We show how entrepreneurship can be understood as socially embedded practice and theorise how

entrepreneurship as an agile process can turn 'disadvantage' into an asset. This demonstrates the remarkable scope and adaptability of agency in entrepreneurship. We also contribute towards recognition that whilst cultural structures inform attitudes, they do not determine outcomes; entrepreneurial agents have power to influence outcomes. At a practice level, we contribute to a better understanding of the promise, problems and practices of women's ethnic minority enterprises.

Our research question is simply, how do these ethnic migrant entrepreneurs use their identity? We see this is as interesting because it demonstrates the agency of entrepreneurship; the power and ability to influence and change things.

The paper continues with a critical review of the literature around the topic of identity and intersectionality, disadvantage and entrepreneurship. The review shows how entrepreneurship is a context dependent social process in which social and cultural dynamics help understand entrepreneurship in practice. We integrate social capital literature in our review to explain social capital is a social resource offering entrepreneurial benefits. Drawing different strands of literature together, the review identifies the socially embeddedness of entrepreneurial practices and offers us tentative themes for analysis. We then explain and justify our methods, followed by our data and analysis. We conclude with reflections on our findings and how this contributes to entrepreneurial theory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Identities, intersectionality, disadvantage and entrepreneurship

The purpose of this review is to establish what we know about social identities and entrepreneurial practices. Crenshaw (1997) developed the concept of intersectionality to stress the importance of simultaneous categories of oppression that constitute differences in power. Thus, the disadvantage of gender combines with problems of ethnic otherness that contrasts and clashes with socially constructed perceptions of the heroic white male entrepreneur (Nadin et al., 2020). Intersectionality recognises the overlap of multiple social identities, including gender, race, ethnicity, social class and religion (Abbas et al., 2019). Collins (2015, p. 2) argues that intersectionality not only references multiple social identities, but 'shapes complex social inequalities'. Entrepreneurs encounter social inequalities, facing significant hurdles such as consumer discrimination (Borjas and Bronars, 1989), disadvantage in obtaining bank loans (Bewaji et al., 2015), limited access to economic resources and social support (Haynes et al., 2000). Romero and Valdez (2016) point out that intersectionality captures 'inequality among social groups and changing

configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions' (McCall, 2005, p. 1173). Dhamoon (2011, p. 236) argued that analysing intersectionality is 'ideally examined by contextualizing the processes'; accordingly, we adopt this processual approach (Jack et al., 2008).

As Goffee and Scase (1983) pointed out so long ago, entrepreneurship can be a response to the subordination of women and ethnic minorities; a 'push' into entrepreneurship (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990; Osowska, 2016). Moreover, as migrants, they may experience the effects of ethnic 'otherness' (Verduijn and Essers, 2013) and lack the established social support mechanisms of their home countries (Brzozowski et al., 2014). Consequently, it seems reasonable to assume that they have to be enterprising to overcome these disadvantages. Hence, we are interested in what our respondents do, how multiple dimensions of social identities shape their experiences as women migrant African entrepreneurs.

Moreover, entrepreneurship is essentially a context dependent social process (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017) where social and cultural dynamics are key for understanding entrepreneurship in practice (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001). Abbas et al. (2014) thus propose focusing on the interplay between structures of a society and entrepreneurs as agents. Social structures are represented in ascribed identities; as women, black and foreign. In contrast, agency is the power and ability to change things. We therefore see this not only as a conceptually interesting problem, but as socially and economically important (Low, 2008).

Social capital and resources

Studies of intersectionality highlight the importance of social networks; linking entrepreneur's personal networks and the cultural dimension in which the actors are connected (Saker, 1992; Ram, 1994; Fadahunsi et al., 2000). Socially, Gomez et al. (2015) suggest that shared experiences lead immigrant communities to develop increased levels of trust and reciprocity. Immigrant entrepreneurs may rely heavily on their co-ethnic community for resources and support. Thus, social capital as the interconnectedness of migrants may bring some entrepreneurial advantages, albeit with concomitant social liabilities (Anderson and Obeng, 2017).

Social capital is the 'cumulative capacity of social groups to cooperate and work together' (Woolcock, 2001, p. 11), but may also be born of necessity. For Putnam (2000) social capital facilitates coordination and cooperation. Social capital is thus a group social asset which may accrue to groups who share identities in an alien environment. For example, Jiang et al. (2011) describe how it is easier to generate trust within ethnic cultural groups than with others outside the group. They note how 'cultural ethnicity is not only highly salient; it also influences social interactions that in turn

shape basic patterns of cooperation and reciprocity, and ultimately people's trust in each other' (Jiang et al., 2011, p. 1151). McKeever et al. (2014a) demonstrated how social capital is developed and accessed through social interaction and a shared identity. Conceived in an entrepreneurial context, social capital is a social resource that enables connections (Anderson et al., 2012). Accordingly, we examine if, and how, social capital is employed by our respondents. The concepts of social capital and social interaction may provide us with some explanatory conceptual leverage. For example, Jiang et al. (2012) recognising the disadvantages faced by women entrepreneurs, found they may use intangible resources such as social capital.

Thus far we have tried to frame our research problem within the literature. Drawing together different strands of the literature, it seems evident that female migrant entrepreneurs are likely to encounter some difficulties. Although these surface as practical problems, we argue that an underlying cause is that 'entrepreneurship' as a concept *and* as a practice are socially situated; thus perceptions about legitimacy and appropriateness may arise (Kalden et al., 2017). We discuss the social construction of the concept below, but also emphasise the socially *enacted* nature of enterprise demonstrated in some literature (Jack and Anderson, 2002; Holt and Macpherson, 2010; Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011).

Entrepreneurship from a social constructive perspective

Because social constructions frame normative expectations of behaviour, our theoretical perspective is that social constructions of gender and ethnicity help account for how entrepreneurship is valued and practiced (Aldrich and Martinez, 2010). As Verduijn and Essers (2013) suggest, 'the female entrepreneur' is constructed as the 'other' entrepreneur, as is 'the ethnic minority' entrepreneur. They argue that the entrepreneurial discourse (a manifestation of the social construction) not only constructs a heroic archetype, but that it is also gendered and ethnocentrically biased. Lindgren and Packendorff (2009) explain how cultural constructions of gender and ethnicity detrimentally affect unfolding entrepreneurial processes. Within a constructionist perspective, the disadvantages of gender and ethnicity can be explained at a less theoretically abstract level as the so-called push factors of blocked mobility (Kloosterman, 2000), cultural influence within the ethnic group (Dana, 1997) or social marginality (Dana, 1995) caused by perceptions and expectations of socially constructed values (Jones et al., 2008; Ram and Jones, 2008). Pull factors may include women's household responsibilities and a wish for flexibility (McGowan et al., 2012). We are also conceptually aware of the role played by context (McKeever et al., 2014b) and the idiosyncratic nature of small

business practices (Anderson and Ullah, 2014). Accordingly, we use social constructionism to *unfold* middle range theories about interaction and context.

Achtenhagen and Welter (2011) propose that from a social constructivist perspective, entrepreneurship is an 'enacted' phenomenon. Yet the socially constructed meanings of entrepreneurship are rarely specifically articulated, but are taken for granted (Anderson et al., 2009). However, for women's entrepreneurship such constructions contribute to regulating its nature and most likely also its extent, as they describe 'typical' and 'wanted' behaviour of a woman as well as of an entrepreneur (Ogbor, 2000). Hamilton (2014) describes how expectations about entrepreneuring are masculinised, despite the substantial number of female owned businesses. Nicholson and Anderson (2005) assert the entrepreneurial myth remains resolutely male. Verduijn and Essers (2013) claim women are typically marginalised within the dominant entrepreneurship discourse which is gendered and ethnocentrically biased. Their discursive analysis of research texts on entrepreneurship reveals that feminine aspects of the entrepreneur are rarely promoted (Ahl, 2004), that the accepted notion of morality in entrepreneurial narratives is patently a 'masculine' gendered form (Smith and Anderson, 2004). Moreover, female entrepreneurs and ethnic minority entrepreneurs are often ignored in mainstream entrepreneurship texts, or at best, depicted as the 'other' entrepreneurs.

Essers and Benschop (2009) thus note the importance of studying the intersectionality of social categories of exclusion within entrepreneurial contexts. De Vita et al. (2014) describe the 'double discrimination', the interrelationships between gender and ethnicity that female migrant entrepreneurs may encounter in the host country. Intersectionality is a useful notion to understand how these axes of difference are simultaneously implicated in entrepreneurship. Nonetheless, Kalden et al. (2017) note that appeal of the discourse is not hegemonic, whilst Dodd et al. (2013a, 2013b) explain social constructions may vary with context. Thus, we argue that social constructions are influential, but do not determine how female migrant entrepreneurship is practised. We are therefore aware of possible effects (theoretical sensitivity) but will not assume them to be present.

Informed by our review, we are particularly interested in their entrepreneurial social enactment and how they use their marginalised identity as an entrepreneurial asset.

RESEARCH METHODS

Although our research objectives are exploratory, different research methods reflect the different research questions we ask (Dana and Dana, 2005), as well as their ontological and epistemological underpinnings (Hamilton, 2014). We first asked what was going on here,

then analyse these descriptive findings to explain what and how this happened. Accordingly, a post-positivistic interpretative approach (Karatas-Ozkan et al., 2014; Galloway et al., 2015b; McDonald et al., 2015) enabled us to examine subtleties of content and processes (Anderson et al., 2012) of social interaction and practices in a theoretical context. We were informed by theory, but not determined by theoretical preconceptions.

Our research design sampled for intersectional characteristics, gender, ethnicity, and migrant status. Sampling was both theoretical and purposeful. Neergaard (2007) describes theoretical sampling as informed by the characteristics of the phenomenon, in our case, intersectionality. Purposeful sampling (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2015) links sampling strategy with the purpose of the research project, which is more concerned with what people *do* (McKeever et al., 2014a), which allows the researchers to choose respondents based on the strength of their knowledge and experience of the phenomenon under study (Bryman, 2008; Patton, 2015; Saunders and Townsend, 2016). Put slightly differently, theoretical sampling is appropriate where the descriptive category is also conceptually informed, or theoretically meaningful. We considered our respondents were possibly subject to the disadvantages that are associated with being identified as black, female and migrants; cultural strangers in a foreign land. In turn, we wanted to know if and how that affected their enterprising practices.

Data collection

Our qualitative approach is appropriate for building theoretical understanding (Oinas, 1999; Pratt, 2009) in a micro business context; enabling a detailed analysis of our respondents' entrepreneurial practices. Our unit for analysis was the situated experiences of Nigerian female entrepreneurs operating small businesses in North East Scotland. Accordingly, our data collection consisted of extended semi-structured interviews, using a narrative life history approach. This helped to ensure that we captured context as well as actions. Cope calls this a phenomenological interview (Cope, 2005; Pittaway and Thorpe, 2012) to study phenomena as experienced. This method is frequently used for similar entrepreneurial research problems (Jack et al., 2010; Resnick et al., 2011; Soetanto, 2017). One author knew Nigerian businesswomen and some became willing respondents and also introduced us to other participants. All our respondents had operated a business for at least two years. Our 12 respondents (Table 1) fitted these criteria, operating different types of businesses with two to five employees. Notably, all were graduates, yet had not taken up graduate level employment despite most having spent several years in the United Kingdom. The sample theoretically fitted the characteristics of the research enquiry (Abrahamsen and Håkansson, 2015). All interviews were

TABLE 1 Respondents

Respondents	Business activity	Age of business (years)	Background
1 Grace	Childminding	7	Initially employed in the city council, but started childminding business as she needed more income while raising her children
2 Glory	African fashion retail and wholesale	6	Due to unemployment started fabric sales to support her husband
3 Judith	Children party organiser	8	Lawyer by profession, due to childminding issues could not practice again, started children party business while taking care of her children
4 Adamma	Shipping services & hair accessories	6	Initially employed in oil and gas, was laid off during the downturn, started a freight business and hair accessories sales
5 Omo	Hair and Beauty Salon	4	A homemaker who identified her passion could earn her some income and worked in a saloon for a year and went into partnership with a colleague.
6 Karan	Grocery Shop	10	Accountant and business degrees identified an opportunity and started the sales of African foodstuffs, now in partnership with other Europeans
7 Joyce	Catering business	7	Works in the city council and into catering business for extra income to support the family
8 Blessing	Childminding	10	Due to unemployment, identified child care as a challenge and started up a childminding business, currently employing some locals.
9 Lola	Make-up artist	2	Works at the city council and into make-up business on weekends to support family back home.
10 Ama	Fashion designer	2	Due to unemployment started fashion designing business to support the husband in school.
11 Jessica	Property investor	2	Worked as Human resource manager in oil and gas company. Identified her passion and the opportunity for property business
12 Funke	Catering	Over 5 years	Laid off during the downturn and started Nigeria cuisine restaurant, now upgraded to international dishes

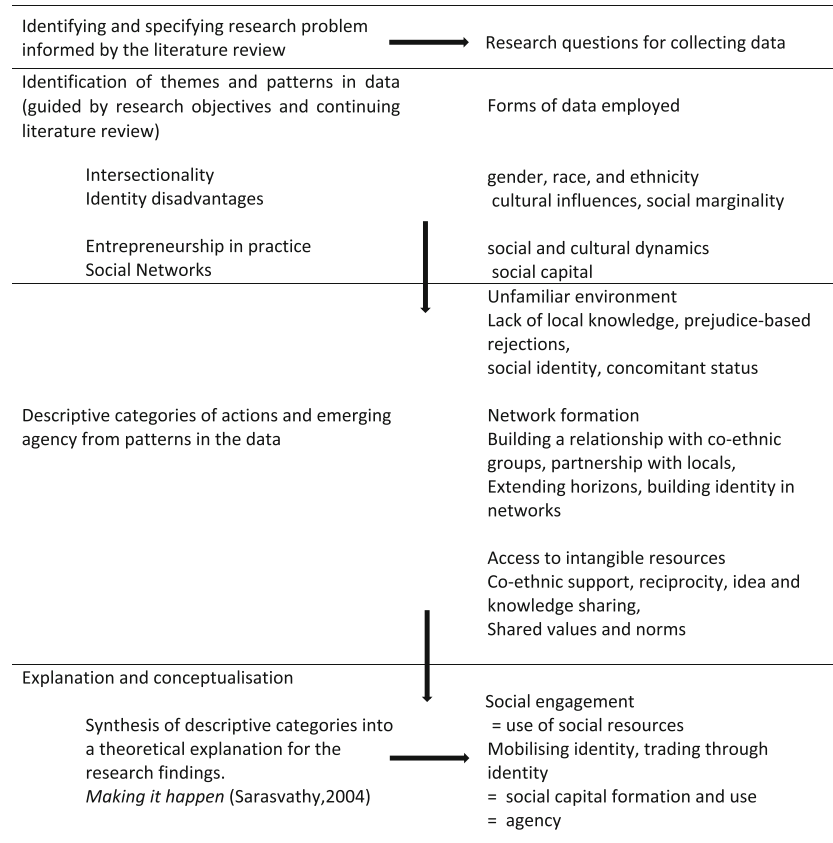
carried out at the respondent's business premises and lasted for around 90 to 120 minutes. The interview protocol directed and also encouraged conversation, allowing respondents to give their individual account of entrepreneurial practices and contexts. We also probed respondents about interesting areas (Creswell, 2007). Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and large volume of data was generated.

A reflexive note on our research process

We describe our research process in the publication 'convention', as a smooth linear process. However, progress was rather different, much messier with steps forward and backwards. For example, the literature review was retrospectively rewritten, after the analysis. Our original version was not sufficiently focused on what we were finding and had significant gaps. The processes of analysis forced us to change direction from what we had first envisaged as the research problem. We had started out thinking that something interesting was happening; if

intersectionality raised such formidable obstacles, why did these women continue? We had good access to our early respondents, and they were very happy to tell us about their activities. As we began to look at what they told us, it became clear they did not treat discrimination as a barrier, but as something to be overcome. Intersectionality was not working out as we had expected. At the same time, we noticed how often they referred to other Nigerians, prompting us to think about social capital. In fact, we tried numerous 'explanatory' frameworks, the most salient was a kind of insider-outsider argument. Others included mixed embeddedness, where the respondents operated in two cultures. As we gathered more data, none of these theories seemed to resonate with the data or, more importantly, *explained* what we saw. Almost by chance, we talked about types of social capital and stumbled on our key point that the same forces that tended to exclude them also worked to bond them together. One of us was already familiar with applications of social capital. Using this as a theoretical observation point, we were able to see how this offered a kind of competitive advantage. In turn, these data offered our

FIGURE 1 Data: analysis as process



explanation from which we could theorise. We describe the final process in Figure 1.

Data analysis

Although the data collection process was sensitised by our literature review and theoretical understanding, the analysis was not constrained by this understanding. Our inductive data analysis started by sifting and sorting through all data and discarding irrelevant information and bringing together what seemed important (Eisenhardt, 1989). The next step was to search for patterns and explanations. We used the constant comparative technique, which involves a recursive sense-making of the data (Jack et al., 2010, 2015); iterative reviewing of data with emerging categories and themes. Each of the experience of our respondents’ entrepreneurial process in adverse circumstances represents an illustration of their attempt to cope with the disadvantages caused from how gender and ethnicity are socially constructed (Menzies et al., 2004). We grouped data according to the categories of identity disadvantages (cultural influences, social marginality) and our respondents’ strategies, how and what resources they use (network formation, social engagement, access to intangible resources). During the process of repeatedly comparing within the same categories and action patterns, different themes appeared. For example, eight quotes from different respondents include

the theme of the dynamics of network development creating wider business community, not just within ethnic community. We attempted to detect themes, patterns of similarity that may be later conceptually linked to form explanations. Iterations between data and data, data and theory are essentially trial and error, a craft rather than science, and dependent on the researcher’s skills (Pratt, 2009). We persevered until we were satisfied that we had captured the nuances of our respondents’ meanings and practices. The next stage was to interpret these themes detecting any patterns of causality. Thus, we moved through descriptive categorisation to analysis for an explanation. We present these data thematically then offer our explanatory analysis. We believe our data is theoretically saturated; we have enough good data to establish an explanation, and further iteration will be unlikely to provide a better understanding (Eisenhardt, 1989). If our explanation (theory) provides sufficient convincing explanation, this is sufficient until a better account is found. The key to ‘satisfactory’ is how convincing the explanation (Jack et al., 2015).

FINDINGS

Enterprising in an unfamiliar environment

Our respondents were not well rooted locally. We found the ‘contexts of reception’, how migrants are received,

TABLE 2 Mobilising intersectional identity and shaping of entrepreneurial practice: some examples

Theme in data	Initial practices	Social resource and interaction	Entrepreneurial practice and development
Co-ethnic support	'I did not have premises for the business due to limited financial resources at the time I needed to start' (Grace).	Local community identity offered practical support	'I had the know-how and drive so got into partnership, they provide the accommodation and I run the business'.
Co-ethnic support	'Yeah being a Nigerian helped me at the very beginning of my business, because my first customers were my Nigerian friends, they did all the word-of-mouth recommendations and raised awareness within the Nigerian community' (Blessing).	Ethnic group support to become established, then extending to others	'Over time going to school fairs and community programs and advertising our services and products there, being a black is no longer the issue, its satisfying my customers. Although the locals might want to know who you are... ..but once you convince them of your capability, they recommend you to their friends and family'.
Co-ethnic c support	'I went to work for a lady who had a black people saloon. I worked there for a year and then went into partnership with my colleagues for another year. And then I decided to open my own shop' (Omo).	Sharing of ethnic experience and knowledge, progressively building confidence	'So that's where we are now. Last month I opened another shop in Aberdeen market for walk-in customers'.
Mobilising Identity	'Being a black is no longer affecting the business. A lot of my customers feel that we (Nigerians) know a lot about hair because most of the hair ingredients are from African origin and we are very fashionable' (Adamma)	After becoming established with co-ethnic, knowledge and skills are extended	'We have customers all over. White people also like to wear extensions and wigs ... (They) see variety of hair extensions they are excited'.
Trading in identity	'Being a Nigerian has really helped my business. We sell Ankara, and its African fashion, so must of my customers are Nigerians and other Africans' (Ama)	Changing perceptions through familiarising by interaction	'... lately am beginning to have customers from other parts of the world. I also work at City Council and I wore some of my Ankara dresses to work. My colleagues loved them and placed their order as well'.
Limiting of scope	'Being Nigerian has disadvantages' (Blessing). My customers restricted to co-ethnic'.	Non-ethnic customer reluctance, probably because of unconscious identity discrimination. Engagement with outsiders led to greater familiarity.	'What I did after a while was to employ a local minder, who also prepares the snacks for the children at the club. She brought in her son and her brother's daughter. So now we have five local children with us'.
Extending horizons	'Being a Nigerian is restrictive. I can do the Europeans hairdo, but I will be required to go the extra mile to prove my capabilities'. (Omo)	Perception of limits of ethnic based skills. Co-ethnic support encouraged extending and demonstrating broader range of skills	'I did go for training on how to style the Europeans and other hair textures. So now I can comfortably style both male and female hair'.
Extending horizons	'I have a Facebook business page. A lot of the white girls will call for my services but once they find out am black, they are a bit worried' (Lola).	Perception of limits of ethnic based skills. Triggers and motivation	'But I have learnt about applying makeups on all skin shades and am good at it. These initial rejections keeps me on my toes to do excellent work to be approved by the locals as well ...'

add further disadvantages (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006). Our respondents described the unfamiliarity of the business and social environment they encountered.

Clearly, our respondents' social identity and status worked to disadvantage their efforts.

In our first descriptive round of analyses we examine and describe how social identities of race and gender

created inequality and impeded the entrepreneurship of our immigrant women entrepreneurs. Table 1 describes our respondents and their businesses. The compounding effects of multiple identity expectations present a thicket of disadvantage for our entrepreneurs; intersectionality takes their identity clash to a more complex level (Chasserio et al., 2014). All respondents reported

experiencing disadvantages associated with their identity; effects included social exclusion, discrimination and the consequences of perceptions of ‘otherness’. We offer a selection of examples:

These findings were as we anticipated; a duality of discrimination where gendered expectations combine with uneasiness and apprehension about the ‘otherness’, the unfamiliarity with black businesswomen. But this unfamiliarity, this cultural ‘strangeness’ works in both directions. Our respondents enact entrepreneurship in an alien environment; one that is culturally and economically different from their home country.

Social engagement, intangible resources and entrepreneurial practices

We now provide some explanation about how respondents deal with this apparent structure of disadvantage. This sheds light on understanding their entrepreneurial processes, especially in adverse circumstances. We asked (indirectly) about their entrepreneurial experience and about strategies for coping with the disadvantages. Table 2 first offers illustrations of the impacts of identity as descriptive themes, but then shows how identity was mobilised to create advantage. The key role of social resources is identified, which we now discuss in more depth.

The respondents demonstrated creative entrepreneurial practices, making use of limited but available resources, and importantly intangible resources to ‘make it happen’ (Sarasvathy, 2004). Jessica’s business of property development offers us a rich example of intersectionality in process and for entrepreneurial practice. She discovered:

Perception of a black female in property business was not making sense, they foresee incapability or will I say what should not be. And because of the high capital involved in the business, it was even frowned upon within my friends and family. People think that property business should be done by a male and a rich one. So being a foreigner and doing a property business was not seen as something great. Most people even tell me to my face that it will not work out. Finance and getting to investors was very difficult for me as a woman ... When I approach them, they look down on you as if I don’t know what am talking about.

Jessica then described how she tackled a key problem, ‘I needed people’s money, angel investors who believe in me and what I was doing’. She told us about building competence and reputation, but emphasised how ‘family and friends was important’.

It was really difficult getting to meet the local investors; I didn’t have the access to them, but through networking and referrals, investors were willing to listen to

me. The misinterpretation of female approaching male investors was an issue too.

Jessica explained how she connected to social resources:

Networking more – going to where I will meet more people who were willing to invest in my business. I even attended meetings where I asked the organisers to introduce me and my business ... Eventually I started to raise funds for my business. It took quite a while, but it was worth it. People know me now, accept me, refer me and even advise me and all that.

This is a classic version of overcoming identity problems by social engagement. In effect Jessica mobilised social connections to demonstrate that she was not defined by her social identity. Jessica’s business was more capital intensive than our other respondents, so it is interesting to note how she positioned herself to tap into funding from outside the ethnic community. Light and Dana (2013) describe how ethnic minority may acquire business resources from a dominant group by bridging into it. These bridging ties enabled an entrepreneurial response by a less powerful group on the strength of externally introduced resources. Entrepreneurship becomes ‘a means of coping with marginality and social blockage’ (Dana, 1997, p. 60). Conceptually, Anderson and Jack (2002) had posed the question of how a social glue can become a social lubricant. They argued these are different dimensions of social capital formation and use. This is precisely what we see in Jessica’s practice.

More typically, practices were first directed to engage with the co-ethnic community. The co-ethnic community extends commercial relationship beyond family members and friends.

My first customers were mainly my friends or church members. (Adamma)

In the early days of my business in Aberdeen, Nigerian were my major customers. (Omo)

The process of engaging with others was often about developing some recognition of value and then in demonstrating that value to others. Judith told us how, ‘Some of my friends that attended (my girls’ birthday) party called to ask who planned the party and I told them I did it myself. So after that I planned a few for my friend’s children free and when some called, I started putting a price on it. That how the business started’.

Moreover, ‘I tell parents and potential parents, almost everyone about my business. In church or any gathering where parents are, I share my flyers. I post pictures of our events in WhatsApp and Facebook’. Our respondents clearly identified and mobilised intangible

resources (social, human, and reputational capital as well as social competence) (Jiang et al., 2012) to address the problems shaped by their identity.

Furthermore, we recognised mutuality where their shared identity becomes an asset. For example, Blessing told us, 'I needed to buy a minibus for picking up the children from school'. However, she lacked capital to make the purchase. 'I have these twelve friends and we set aside a certain amount every month to save and each of us takes turns of collecting every month. So with this I plan my expansion. I don't go to the bank or any form of loan institutes'. The social ties of co-ethnic group membership appear to foster mutual trust, collective self-help and co-operation.

It is evident that disadvantage had been experienced by all. However, these experiences seemed to have fostered a strong sense of a group identification, through these shared experiences. Initially, this caused the nascent entrepreneurs to look inwards. Later, more positive personal experiences encouraged them to look outwards from the co-ethnic community. This development is well established in the literature. Granovetter (1995) suggests that the local decoupling of co-ethnic community to other groups facilitates a wider network of relationships. Immigrant entrepreneurs thus may have an advantage over local business in achieving the right balance (Granovetter, 1995). The interaction between co-ethnic group and social structure of other groups turns ethnicity into business assets (Dana, 1997).

However, the processes involved in this inward orientation are not well established and we attempt to explain how and why. Our analysis *demonstrates* that our respondents mobilised their identities as Nigerian women to relate to others who shared this identity. It seems likely that shared disadvantage created a community, a mutuality in disadvantage. Within this group, sameness in contrast to the otherness of ethnic identity became a bond, forming social capital. We saw this at the early stage; For example, Grace explained, 'My friends actually talked me into business when I was nursing my babies and could not get a full-time employment ... It was just mainly friendship'. Similarly:

Being a Nigerian has really helped my business, we sell Ankara, and its African fashion. (Glory).

'Being black has been very helpful especially during my start-up stage'. (Karan)

We also saw how this persisted through business development as Blessing described: 'Because my first customers were my Nigerian friends, they did all the word-of-mouth recommendations and awareness within the Nigerian community'.

This identity bond even extended outside the local ethnic community, 'I came across a Nigerian lady in

England who is doing the same business in a very large scale, although she is very busy and always travelling, she has been very helpful'. (Judith).

These data help explain the social responsibility that accompanies group social capital. Their shared experiences, manifest as their identity, created an obligation to help each other; the untraded dependencies of social capital (Drakopoulou Dodd et al., 2006). Whilst we already know that social capital eases transactions, our analysis explains the social enactment of entrepreneurship for this ethnic group. Their social situation, relatively disenfranchised from others and manifest in an identity of otherness cut them off. Yet this same process strengthened group identity and it was this identity that was often entrepreneurially enacted. We conclude that because entrepreneurship was socially situated and socially enacted, the entrepreneurial processes were able to turn disadvantage into an asset.

The mechanism that made this happen is the use of social resources. In this case, the obligation and responsibility that accrues to a disadvantaged identity. The process of enterprising mobilised this as a resource. In turn, an entrepreneurial identity, a very positive and advantageous identity (Dodd et al., 2013a), became superimposed on other identities. The black female migrant became the entrepreneurial self, duly legitimised by what they do, rather than who they are.

Although the business led by our respondents were modest in size and profitability, the businesses were generally successful; if success is in achieving recognition and a modest living. We note the modest ambition, and perhaps the survival, was related to starting out with *who* they knew and *what* they knew how to do. They utilised co-ethnic community for building awareness and competence before breaking out to others in the host community. Our respondents are all well-educated, many have degrees from UK universities. Yet, 'being entrepreneurial' was their way of earning a living in the host country. 'The business is doing very well. I am happy for choosing this path' (Grace). 'I like the business ... and I strive harder for better tomorrow' (Adamma).

DISCUSSION

Our study examines how Nigerian female migrants negotiate the intersectionality (Essers and Benschop, 2009) of their entrepreneurial identities. We are concerned with identifying what Kašperová and Kitching (2014) call the human capacity to create, negotiate, maintain and transform identity. We believe that females, but especially Nigerian women, may suffer from how gender and ethnicity are socially constructed (Menziés et al., 2004). In other words, gendered normative social expectations, crystallised as their social identities, clashes with perceptions of appropriate entrepreneurial roles and practice. We follow Galloway et al. (2015a) suggestion to collect

experiences (Galloway and Cooney, 2012). We are interested in their strategies, how and what resources they use.

It is clear from our findings that that our respondents encountered the exclusion and discrimination in a context where they are not typical socially and economically embedded actors. Traditionally, 'Classics' such as Bowen and Hisrich (1986) and Covin and Slevin (1989) highlight single identity issues where a gendered or ethnic identity clashes with the socialised expectations of entrepreneurial discourse and the social legitimacy of entrepreneurial practices. The discourse, meanings and expectations of entrepreneurship are imbued with what Verduijn et al. (2014) call the archetypical 'white' (European) male; white men became the benchmark of entrepreneurial behaviour (Osowska, 2016). This creates legitimacy problems for those whose identities do not conform to this stereotype, with all its enduring prevailing hetero-normative assumptions (Ahl and Marlow, 2012). The marginality of one single identity is amplified when multiple non-entrepreneurial identities overlap.

This study challenges the view that disadvantaged identity simply curtails enterprise. Our findings show how female migrant entrepreneurs employ social and intangible resources such as ethnic 'otherness', mobilising an entrepreneurial social asset. Family, friends and co-ethnic networks are used as building blocks for their business start-up and development. Women are thought to be particularly good at developing trust via direct personal contacts (Renzulli et al., 2000); but our data suggests they are also able to mobilise trust through shared identity. Moreover, they were able to extend this towards more structured and formal business networking. In turn this helped our respondents become integrated into, rather than excluded, from business community.

The relationship and networks that lead to social capital resources are often seen as static, unchanging (Gedajlovic et al., 2013). But we observed the interplays of individuals and social environment to discover, evaluate and develop intangible resources. Networks are dynamic, so when networks changes, interaction with institutions may also change (Sydow and Staber, 2002). For example, institutional theory assumes and emphasises the intersectionality among systems of oppression and how individuals experience disadvantages. What we saw was certainly an initial response to the experiences of institutional discrimination. However, our respondents used entrepreneurial agency to alter these institutional arrangements. In dealing with the disadvantages of intersecting identities that shaped their everyday reality, they became empowered by their entrepreneurial practices.

This empowering ironically related to shared intersectional disadvantages. Their initial customers shared the same problems created by a social identity. Yet the mutuality of shared experience also formed the social capital which became the critical resource for the businesses. In the absence of munificent tangible resources, they turned to these social resources, intangible but useful, and

available within their relationships such as word-of-mouth, advice and modest finance. This very socialised version of doing business continued and even extended the businesses, such as partnering with an ethnically different neighbour.

We believe that dominant (economic) theories of entrepreneurship may lack sufficient social contextualisation (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019) and consider the explanatory power that accrues from recognising entrepreneurship as socially situated and socially enacted (Steyaert and Katz, 2004). Like Byrne and Fayolle (2010), we recognise both individual agency and the power relations that structures impose. Elfving et al. (2009) argue that entrepreneurial events result from interacting situational and social-cultural factors, whilst the entrepreneurial process is dynamic between the entrepreneurial self and circumstances (Anderson, 2000). We studied entrepreneurial social enactment of female migrant entrepreneurs and found that when entrepreneurial self became superimposed on their identity, disadvantage began to dissolve. We thus argue that social constructions influence, but they do not determine outcomes; entrepreneurial agents have power to influence outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

We believe that we make a modest contribution to theory. Intersectionality, the intersection of ascribed social identities and experience of exclusion has emerged as a paradigm in social research (Walby et al., 2012) and entrepreneurship studies (Carter et al., 2015; Valdez, 2016). Intersectionality is generally considered to be a structural condition and detrimental for enterprise. Yet our analysis demonstrates that it is not deterministic, although influential. By looking at practices, we demonstrate how agency works ethnicity and identity.


Our explanation was social capital. We saw how the mutuality of shared identity formed bonding social capital. Yet the agency in enterprising reshaped this to the bridging social capital that fostered these businesses. Indeed, this process turned disadvantage into an entrepreneurial asset. Moreover, our respondents were no longer simply and unfavourably identified as who they are; but now identified in terms of what they do.

Our respondents may lack the glamour of hi-tech and the job creation of rapid growth; yet for these individuals it produced well-being and sense of self-worth. However, there are many questions remaining. We thought them empowered by entrepreneurship; we believe they achieved self-satisfaction. But was this entrepreneurial empowerment able to overcome disadvantage; or does it simply work around disadvantage? It would also be useful to look at other social identities, perhaps in other places, to establish the generalisability of these practices. The implications for theory are largely about the

importance of entrepreneurial agency. For practitioners the implications are less obvious, but it may be useful for them to examine their practices in the light of our findings about social resources.

Our analysis of one of the many forms of entrepreneurship offered us a theoretically rich, but possibly extreme case. The dynamics of interactions, but especially the social interactions, allowed us to conclude that entrepreneurship can be understood as a social process. We saw how intersectionality was agentially ‘worked’. We conclude that the ‘social’ in entrepreneurship is not a particularity of ‘social enterprise’, but the social permeates entrepreneurship and may be considered the fabric of entrepreneurship. Recognising the complexity of intersectionality and how intangible resources works in the social structure, the agency of entrepreneurs constructs and makes use of networks as an enabling mechanism. Moreover, we argue that functionalist economic views are too narrow, too limited in their explanatory scope to allow us to appreciate the richness and diversity of entrepreneurial capacity to reengage the disenfranchised.

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