


The influence of culture on female entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe



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Background: There is an increasing interest in female entrepreneurship, not only to realise the potential for economic growth, but also in light of the opportunities for female expression, emancipation, agency and empowerment. Literature has found that many female entrepreneurs are profoundly affected by the traditional sociocultural context in which they operate, and that they have needed to work around patriarchal barriers in order to succeed. This study explores the ways in which they do this.

Aim: The aim of this paper was to contribute to an understanding of how female entrepreneurs in a patriarchal African society can work within cultural constraints to achieve success within their own terms of reference.

Setting: The study took place in Zimbabwe among female entrepreneurs who had recently formalised their businesses

Methods: Using a qualitative interpretive research design, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 43 African female entrepreneurs running their own businesses in the Zimbabwean cities of Harare and Bulawayo.

Results: The complex interplay of macro- (national cultural characteristics), meso- (institutional and social factors), and micro- (individual identity) level factors shaped the ways in which the women dealt with the shackles of patriarchy, inequality and high power distance that had historically impeded their economic participation. Through their own agency, they mobilised their public and private identities separately, balancing the seemingly incompatible roles of home-maker vs entrepreneur.

Conclusion: Zimbabwean women successfully managed the interaction between their different social roles and identities to balance domestic obligations with income generation to better the lives of their families.

Introduction

There is an increased focus on female entrepreneurship globally in light of tangible evidence of the significance of new business creation for economic growth and development (Bergmann, Müller & Schrettle 2014; Jamali 2009; Langowitz & Minniti 2007; Lock & Lawton-Smith 2016). Besides the contribution to economic growth and job creation, female entrepreneurs augment the diversity of entrepreneurship of any economy (Huarng, Mas-Tur & Yu 2012; Reed, Storrud-Barnes & Jessup 2012) in addition to making inroads into female expression, fulfilment (Bahmani, Sotos & García 2012; Huarng *et al.* 2012), agency, emancipation and empowerment (Goss *et al.* 2011; Ramadani, Hisrich & Gërguri-Rashiti 2015). As female entrepreneurship talent and potential remain poorly tapped in many contexts, there remains a great deal of benefit to be leveraged (Baughn, Chua & Neupert 2006; Ramadani *et al.* 2015).

Studies of female entrepreneurs in developing countries (particularly black female entrepreneurs) are still relatively few compared to those in developed countries (Brush & Cooper 2012; Link & Strong 2016). This is possibly because, historically, most entrepreneurs in the formal sector have been male (Saridakis, Marlow & Storey 2014), and an awareness of the importance of female entrepreneurship has only relatively recently been highlighted (Moses *et al.* 2016). This lack of visibility is of concern, as female entrepreneurs in developing countries may follow an entrepreneurial path that differs from that of the developed countries because of sociocultural factors (Baah, Amani & Abass 2015; Mboko & Smith-Hunter 2009). For example, in Pakistan, a patriarchal society like Zimbabwe, many women choose entrepreneurship over formal employment for flexibility as a coping mechanism to meet family and community obligations in addition to being economically active (Rehman & Azam-Roomi 2012). In many countries,

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sociocultural factors do not act in favour of women, where their traditional role is subordination to men, often in patronising relationships in which the woman's place is in the home rather than the workplace (Hechavarria & Ingram 2016; Yusuf 2013).

Approximately 52% of the population of Zimbabwe are women (ZimStat 2012). They are therefore potentially major participants in Zimbabwe's economy by virtue of their number. Whilst some studies on female entrepreneurs have been completed in Zimbabwe (Chitsike 2000; Mboko & Smith-Hunter 2009; Nani 2013; Nyamwanza *et al.* 2012; Van Eerdewijk & Mugadza 2015), there is limited knowledge about the role of culture and social structure on female entrepreneurs and female entrepreneurship in this particular context. In this study, it has been assumed that studies conducted in other parts of Southern Africa may have some relevance. Zimbabwean women had an especially torrid time during the 2007–2009 period of hyperinflation (Siziba 2010) and many of them elected the daily income of the entrepreneurial option, as it was impossible to survive with inflation at 231 million percent and price increases at least three times per day. Thus, the primary entrepreneurial motivation relates to 'push factors' as articulated by Ramadani *et al.* (2015), and therefore fits into necessity, rather than opportunity, entrepreneurship. This is in line with other reports about transitioning and developing economies (Maden 2015).

Furthermore, studies on how the challenges experienced by female entrepreneurs could be overcome, worked around or turned into enablers are under-researched in Zimbabwe. The aim of this paper is to contribute to an understanding of how female entrepreneurs in a patriarchal African society can work within cultural constraints to achieve success within their own terms of reference.

The Zimbabwean context for female entrepreneurship

Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society, with men having more (social) rights to ownership of resources and decision-making authority (Matondi 2013). This is despite a great deal of legislation around women's rights having been embedded into the 2013 Constitution (Gaidzanwa 2016), which has resulted in a female representation in parliament of 33%. Thus, many of the determinants of female entrepreneurship lie in the interaction of micro-individual, meso- and macro-level factors (Baughn *et al.* 2006; De Bruin, Brush & Welter 2007; Henry *et al.* 2015; Lock & Lawton-Smith 2016). The interconnectedness of these factors can be detected even in making distinctions between these levels (De Bruin *et al.* 2007). The way that the embeddedness and context specificity shape the experience of female entrepreneurship (Langevang *et al.* 2015) appears to have been underestimated (Van Eerdewijk & Mugadza 2015). Fayolle *et al.* (2015) reached a similar conclusion to De Bruin *et al.* (2007), who suggested that existing theoretical debates overlook possible gender

disparities in entrepreneurship, which points to the value of harmonising diverse views on female entrepreneurship in different contexts.

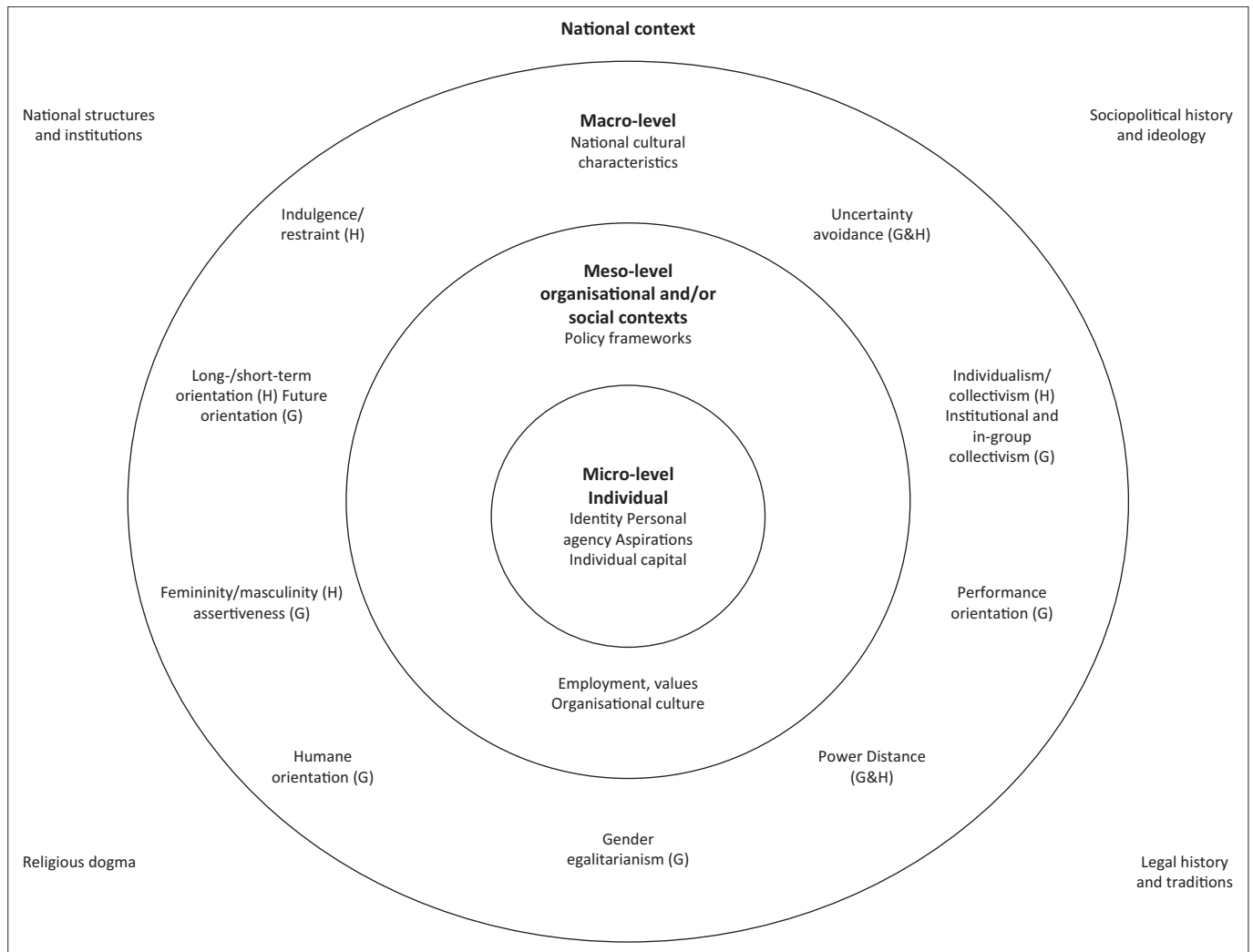
As Mboko and Smith-Hunter (2009) note, some entrepreneurial behaviour can be attributed to environmental factors. An integrated approach that is sensitive to the differential effect of micro-, meso- and macro-level factors will facilitate the study of female entrepreneurs (ILO 2009). An adaptation of the relational framework suggested by Syed and Ozbilgin (2009) and reinforced by Henry *et al.* (2015) is proposed as the basic theoretical framework for this study, with the incorporation of Hofstede's six and the nine GLOBE (Ozgen 2012) dimensions of culture (Figure 1).

The national context includes structural and institutional conditions, including social ideologies, education, socio-political factors, legal frameworks and religious dogma; it is the all-inclusive area inside which all others exist (Henry *et al.* 2015; Syed & Ozbilgin 2009). For this study, the outer circle represents a single component of Syed and Ozbilgin's model, that of national cultural dimensions. The meso-level involves both organisational and social practices that intercede between employment opportunities based on individual capabilities and contextual circumstances (Bullough, Renko & Abdelzaher 2014; Syed & Ozbilgin 2009). This level, which includes policy frameworks, has been very favourable towards women in Zimbabwe in the past 10 years or so, at least in leadership and management positions because of legislation specifically geared towards getting women (particularly black women) into senior positions in organisations (Booyesen & Nkomo 2010; Gaidzanwa 2016). However, this does not necessarily translate into favourable entrepreneurial conditions because of societal influences and micro-level gendered behavioural expectations; Vossenbergh (2013:2) surmised that:

Women's entrepreneurship promotion undoubtedly benefits individual women, but when the main problem for the persistence of the gender gap is left unchallenged – which is that entrepreneurs, men and women alike, operate in patriarchal, gender-biased economies and societies, efforts remain in vain and without any significant macroeconomic and social change.

The micro-individual domain includes factors like individual agency, motivation, and identity, and influences individual capabilities and opportunities. At this level, family (nuclear and extended) plays a significant role, together with other social contacts.

The characterisation of different levels of analysis as interdependent and inter-related implies that entrepreneurship is socially (meso-level) and historically (macro-level) embedded, but also at the micro-level, individually constructed and negotiated (Jamali 2009). It is in this context that the research explores female entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe, using an adapted relational multilevel framework design.



H, Hofstede; G, GLOBE.

Source: Adapted from Syed, J. & Ozbilgin, M., 2009, 'A relational framework for international transfer of diversity management practices', *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 20(12), 2435–2453. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09585190903363755>; Hofstede, G., 2011, 'Dimensionalizing cultures: The Hofstede model in context', *Online readings in Psychology and Culture* 2(1), 1–26. <http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014>; Ozgen, E., 2012, 'The effect of the national culture on female entrepreneurial activities in emerging countries: An application of the GLOBE project cultural dimensions', *International Journal of Entrepreneurship* 16(Special), 69–92.

FIGURE 1: A narrowed adaptation of Syed and Ozbilgin's framework with Hofstede's six dimensions and the nine GLOBE dimensions incorporated.

Cultural influences and traditional roles

Research suggests that cultural context can shape entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions (Shinnar, Giacomini & Janssen 2012), particularly in the early stages (Zhao, Li & Rauch 2012) and less so in established ventures. This implies that knowing how culture shapes entrepreneurial intentions could be useful to understanding the gender gap in entrepreneurship and possibly for identifying strategies to reduce it. A definition of what constitutes culture is necessary at this juncture. A UNESCO declaration (2001:4) states that:

culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

This definition is not dissimilar to that of Hofstede (2011:3), who offers, 'culture is the collective programming of the

mind that distinguishes members of one group or society from those of another'.

Accordingly, culture is, therefore, a combination of social practices, traditions and beliefs that influence the mindset of individuals, groups and nations (Baah *et al.* 2015; Hofstede 2011; Liyanage, Dale & Dulaimi 2016). A culture informed by the underlying value systems that are unique to a group or society and that motivate individuals to behave in certain ways, such as when starting a new business (Stephan & Pathak 2016).

Concerning gender relations, cultural and social traditions help influence who becomes an entrepreneur (Espíritu-Olmos & Sastre-Castillo 2012). For instance, social circumstances in some countries restrain women from starting their own businesses (World Bank 2014) and shape social gender roles and stereotypes in terms of occupations considered suitable for women (Azmat & Fujimoto 2016; Maden 2015), such as personal services (e.g. beauty salons and child care), web design, education and retail.

In Zimbabwe, the prevalence of gender-based discrimination is still a predicament for female entrepreneurs (Mutanana & Bukaliya 2015). Before 1980, females were considered to be minors, with no acknowledgement of their role in the overall development of the country. This situation changed in 1982, with the inception of the Legal Age of Majority Act (1982). Whilst the law (at the meso-level) now recognises women as adults, cultural barriers still exist, and these negate the intended use of this law (Chitsike 2000). Traditionally and informally, in Zimbabwe, women are perceived as inferior to men irrespective of their age or educational status (Booyesen & Nkomo 2010). Evidence from other patriarchal countries (Azmat 2013; Maden 2015) also suggests that women are expected to be subservient, supportive and submissive. It is easy to see that these conventional feminine qualities are in direct conflict with the more masculine cultural indicators required for a traditionally defined entrepreneur and required to succeed in business (Hechavarria & Ingram 2016).

In addition, for traditional patriarchal reasons, women are not readily accepted as entrepreneurs running and managing an enterprise (Van Eerdewijk & Mugadza 2015). The patriarchal system of social structures and practices allows men to dominate, oppress and exploit women (Hechavarria & Ingram 2016; Shinnar *et al.* 2012), negatively affecting women's self-assurance and achievement motivation, and contributing to barriers to female entrepreneurial success. A woman is typically not expected to make economic decisions such as opening a business of her own. Those who make it find it difficult to circumvent cultural barriers (Ewoh 2014). In a way, women's subconscious resistance to taking opportunities is embedded in their upbringing (Brush, De Bruin & Welter 2009; Fayolle *et al.* 2015).

Amoako-Kwakye (2012) and Azmat (2013) suggest that the patriarchal society expects women to be both producers and reproducers, carrying a double load of full-time work and domestic responsibilities. Social structures rather than individuals are made responsible for this systematic oppression. The indications of this systematic censorship can be observed in women's unequal opportunities to enjoy rights, goods, and resources (Rubio-Bañón & Esteban-Lloret 2016; Shinnar *et al.* 2012).

The greatest barrier for female entrepreneurs in developing countries is to overcome resistance from family (Sätre 2016) and prevailing cultural conditions (McKay 2001; Shinnar *et al.* 2012). According to Amoako-Kwakye (2012), women usually rely upon family support to get time for the business, but that the needs of extended family and the robust tradition of co-operation and reciprocity place an enormous burden on women to help relatives. McGowan *et al.* (2012) found that firms owned by women were at a commercial disadvantage because of pressures on them to prioritise family responsibilities over their entrepreneurial career. As a result, they were often discriminated against when applying for finance, seeking resources or getting permissions (Amin 2016). Nyamwanza *et al.* (2012) had observed that female

entrepreneurs' businesses in Gweru, Zimbabwe, were both smaller and grew much more slowly than those of their male counterparts, possibly attributable to cultural barriers.

Women have shown that they can overcome challenges arising from cultural context, and they should therefore not be seen as 'victims' in an inflexible system with little or no power over their lives (Ezzedeen & Zikic 2015). Female entrepreneurs are drawing on their cultural attributes such as the importance of family and community, hard work, thriftiness, religious beliefs and conformity to social ethics in their entrepreneurial activities (Dhaliwal, Scott & Hussain 2010; Leung 2011).

The cultural dimensions, proposed by Hofstede (2011) and extended in the GLOBE study (Ozgen 2012), have been analysed and studied further by various authors, including in the GEM research, which is updated annually (Bosma 2013). A note of caution is that questions have been raised about the validity of Hofstede's VSM94 questionnaire in South Africa (Kruger & Roodt 2003), which may apply to other Southern African nations such as Zimbabwe. In addition, Zhao *et al.* (2012) have pointed out that various empirical results investigating the relationship between culture and entrepreneurship are contradictory (as seen in the points below), which they posit may be at least partly due to GDP as a moderating factor, and that the effects of culture on female entrepreneurship differs whether the venture is early stage or established. Thus, it is quite difficult to draw definitive conclusions from the literature about the cultural dimensions in Zimbabwe.

In the section below, the descriptions of each dimension are drawn from Ozgen (2012). Based on these studies, the following outline of the dimensions as they apply to entrepreneurs in various developing countries is given, although still inconclusive because of paucity of data about individual African countries, particularly split by gender:

- Uncertainty avoidance (UAI). A high UAI means low tolerance for risk, ambiguity, and unpredictability, which is managed by having a great number of rules in place, and is not considered 'good' for entrepreneurship. In South Africa, white managers scored low and black managers scored high on this dimension (Thomas & Bendixen 2000). Low UAI is favourable only for early stage female entrepreneurship (Zhao *et al.* 2012).
- Collectivism (IDV). In-group and institutional collectivism, split out in the GLOBE study, are discussed together here to reduce complexity; it reflects the degree to which groups are loyal, collective and cohesive. Where collectivism is low, higher barriers to business can be expected for female entrepreneurs (Ozgen 2012), and high in-group collectivism leads to more entrepreneurial activity (Zhao *et al.* 2012), but only in low to medium GDP countries. The concept of *Ubuntu*, prevalent in sub-Saharan African countries (including Zimbabwe) typically has 'high in-group solidarity, paternalistic leadership and humane orientation' (Wanasika *et al.* 2011:234).

Bullough *et al.* (2014) have shown that in-group collectivism is particularly important for women entrepreneurship, although her sample only included one African country: South Africa.

- Gender egalitarianism (GE) is the extent to which men and women are seen to have equal stature, with minimal gender differences. Sub-Saharan Africa, including Zimbabwe, shows low GE (Ozgen 2012), which would tend to reduce entrepreneurial activity amongst women. However, Zhao *et al.* (2012) found that low GE encourages female entrepreneurship in low GDP countries, which they suspect could be because formal employment opportunities are limited. Zimbabwe has a low GDP (ZimStat 2012).
- Performance orientation (PO) is the extent to which a society measures and rewards good performance. It has been suggested (Ozgen 2012) that where there is a low PO, female entrepreneurs are less likely to flourish due to low levels of support.
- Power distance (PDI), in which high PDI indicates hierarchies and inequality. Zimbabwe has been described as hierarchical (Mutanana & Bukaliya 2015), although the contrary was found in other Southern African states such as Swaziland ((Dlamini & Migiyo 2014) and South Africa (Thomas & Bendixen 2000). Zhao *et al.* (2012) report that, in low-medium GDP countries, high PDI encourages female entrepreneurship and the reverse in high GDP countries.
- Assertiveness (AS) is the extent to which people face up to and challenge one another; it is associated with the masculinity dimension (Hofstede 2011). Low-assertive countries tend to be more cooperative, with relationships being more important than competitiveness (Ozgen 2012), and women fitting in with gender stereotypes. Zhao *et al.* (2012) found that increasing assertiveness encouraged female entrepreneurship only in high GDP countries, not in low-medium GDP countries.
- Humane orientation (HO) is the degree to which fairness and generosity are rewarded. It has been postulated that high scores on this dimension are associated with greater entrepreneurial activity (Zhao *et al.* 2012) and that there is more community support for entrepreneurs in such cultures.
- Femininity/masculinity (MAS) included assertiveness and willingness to confront in Hofstede's original dimensions, but the two characteristics were split out separately in the GLOBE study (Hofstede 2011). In less assertive societies, women may take fewer entrepreneurial opportunities (Ozgen 2012).
- Long-term (future) orientation (LTO) is the extent to which people plan and invest, rather than 'live for today' only. Zimbabwean female entrepreneurs show 'short-term focus and situational reactivity' (Nyamwanza *et al.* 2012:100), although future orientation is associated with intensified entrepreneurial activity. Figures directly from Hofstede's website, (Hofstede & Hofstede 2015) report LTO for Zimbabwe to be 15 on a scale of 0–100, which appears inconsequential.

- Indulgence/restraint (IR): Hofstede (2011) only added this dimension recently, so it has not yet been investigated in this context. He refers to it as the extent to which a society allows or restricts gratification of fundamental human desires; for example, having fun. Figures directly from Hofstede's website (Hofstede & Hofstede 2015) report IR for Zimbabwe to be 28 on a scale of 0–100, which is low, suggesting restraint.

Hechavarria and Ingram (2016) recently pointed out that the cultural dimensions of high power distance, high assertiveness and high inequality are strongly associated with gender issues in entrepreneurship, so it is difficult to discuss the dimensions as being fully independent of one another.

Methodology

An interpretive, qualitative research design was chosen to facilitate understanding of culture and its effects on female entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe. The philosophical worldview used to guide this study is social constructivism, which highlights the distinctiveness of situational and contextual depth (Hay 2016).

The backdrop against which this study was carried out was turbulent for Zimbabwean women seeking emancipation. In the decade after independence in Zimbabwe (1980), the government appeared to be working towards formulating policies to address discrimination against women, but the many women's groups that had formed for support, empowerment and development (Van Eerdewijk & Mugadza 2015) became frustrated with the direction and pace of change. Although policies have become more liberal in terms of women's rights, there is still much change needed in day-to-day exchanges that reveal the cultural inequality plaguing Zimbabwean women. The economic situation in Zimbabwe has continued to worsen since independence, and today the country ranks 125 out of 140 countries on the Global Competitiveness Index (Schwab 2015) and ranks last in the world in the availability of basic requirements.

Population and sampling

The field work was conducted in Harare and Bulawayo, the capital and second major cities, respectively, in Zimbabwe. Bulawayo was once the backbone of the economy housing major companies that have since relocated to Harare because of the deteriorating economic situation in the country. These two cities, by virtue of their size and stature, provide a base for the female entrepreneurs and their entrepreneurial endeavours. An exploration of the tribal variations between the two regions is beyond the scope of this study, although this could be an area for future research.

A sample of 43 female entrepreneurs was purposively selected (Bluhm *et al.* 2011) and interviewed in-depth, in face-to-face encounters. All respondents were black people, as there is scant research reporting on this particular group – gender

research is very seldom split by race, although there are reports of different cultural orientations in some sub-Saharan African (SSA) communities; for example, Afrocentric versus Eurocentric (Booyesen 2001; Shrivastava *et al.* 2014). All of the women were running their own businesses and had started their entrepreneurial activities in the informal sector, then formalised, or were in the process of formalising their businesses. Ten interviews took place in Bulawayo and the rest in Harare. The respondents were selected on the basis that they owned a minimum of 50% of the company, were involved in the set-up of the organisation and managed the entrepreneurial endeavour themselves.

Data collection and analysis

Very open-ended questions and requests were asked, such as 'please tell me about your entrepreneurial journey', 'how do you manage both your business and home responsibilities?' and 'who do you turn to for advice or help?' with prompts like 'and what happened then?' or 'how did you deal with that?'. These centred on each woman's unique situation and her experiences in the context of transitioning from the informal to the formal economy. Guidance was given only to keep the dialogue on track, and the conversations flowed naturally. Guarantees of respondent anonymity facilitated open discussion.

Almost all of the interviews took place in the participants' offices, workplaces or homes. The interviews were recorded with prior approval from the respondents, and verbatim transcripts were created and analysed using ATLAS.ti® software. The analysis process involved several readings of each transcript for familiarisation, which was accompanied by memo writing to extract meaning and the main themes. After that, codes were extracted (line by line) using the software, and constant comparison within and between transcripts took place to refine the codes and develop categories for discussion.

Ethical consideration

Ethics approval was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand Non-medical Ethics Committee #R14/49.

Findings and discussion

Whilst the research is on the female entrepreneurs' experiences as they transitioned to the formal economy, an issue that came to the fore was the historical and cultural context in which they were embedded.

The foremost cultural factors that emerged from the analysis were: dedication to work, (to deliver a 'double workload' (Azmat & Fujimoto 2016:19), conformity to social value patterns, dependability, thrift and reliance on family values, which helped to explain their priorities, choices and behaviour (Watts *et al.* 2007). Perceptions of the role of cultural factors in moderating their values and behaviour determined whether these factors acted as enablers or barriers to success (Azmat 2013; Dhaliwal *et al.* 2010).

Strong work ethic

In all of the conversations with the female entrepreneurs, the cultural attribute of 'hard work' was evident, and this was embedded in their upbringing and learned mainly from their mothers. This point is illustrated in the following verbatim quotes from three of the respondents:

'... as a woman it is important to use the gift that God gave you 'sebenza nemaokoako' (put your hands to good use) so that you can get something for yourself in life.' [Participant 1, female]

'... I find inspiration from my late mother ... She instilled in us that you have to wake up and work hard especially as a girl child.' [Participant 2, female]

'As women, we must appreciate to 'work with our hands' so that we avoid being people with a dependency syndrome. You see problems when women are dependent, but if we come out of that, everything will work out.' [Participant 3, female]

Hard work and industriousness have been highlighted elsewhere (Amin 2016) as being important characteristics for success amongst female entrepreneurs in developing countries. The trait of 'hard work' is typically associated with a high LTO (Ozgen 2012). This is on the basis that hard work is for the purpose of investing for future gains, although the literature (Nyamwanza *et al.* 2012) has reported that some female Zimbabwean entrepreneurs spend their business earnings on family and community needs rather than investing it. This was certainly found to be the case amongst the respondents in this study, and may represent a balancing mechanism to justify their participation in an essentially masculine activity, by directing it for an essentially feminine purpose. Additionally, Fang (2003) reminds us that respect for tradition, certainly evident in this study, is typical of low LTO and that Zimbabwe was found to have a low LTO.

In the minds of the women, a strong work ethic was associated with being entrepreneurial, as described by Beugelsdijk and Noorderhaven (2005) and that working hard is more than a woman's duty; it is her prerogative. This view allowed the women to be the personal custodian of their destiny, an important and empowering mental shift. One woman reported that working hard also helped to overcome obstacles such as poor access to capital:

'In most cases, business requires capital, but other things do not require capital. You just keep working hard so that you can attain your goals and reach your destination.' [Participant 4, female]

This woman continued to seek creative ways to raise capital whilst continuing to work hard. This approach implies both 'hard work' (persistence and physical intensity) and 'smart work', encompassing mental intensity and choice (Coad 1996). It has been reported that the main reason for individuals who want to be self-employed and who are not is a lack of capital (Blanchflower, Oswald & Stutzer 2001); therefore, the fact that this woman was not deterred shows a character that finds ways to succeed. Godsell (1991), Dia (1996) and Steel and Webster (1991) all found that ingenuity and initiative on the part of the entrepreneur can compensate for the need for additional capital.

Working hard is part of the core value system of these women, and rather than being a burden it becomes an enabler of entrepreneurship, as suggested by Leung (2011) and confirmed by Amin (2016). Henry *et al.* (2015) describe and refute the suggestion that one reason for women's poor success rate in obtaining finance is that they are perceived to 'not take business as seriously as men' (p. 581); similarly, this study also found that women entrepreneurs take both of their responsibilities very seriously.

Family and community

For female entrepreneurs, their domestic role in the family is not negotiable. It is something that they do without hesitation or thought. Leung (2011), reinforced by the findings of Ettl and Welter (2012), presents the view that women can draw from the values and knowledge embedded in their normative gender roles when they embark on entrepreneurial endeavours.

The female entrepreneurs interviewed did not contest the assumption that, as women, they were expected to carry a full load of domestic responsibility, with its associated cultural concepts of sacrifice and duty to family. Their traditional gender roles have been built around the stereotype of submissive wife and nurturing mother. For example:

'... family comes first, and their issues have to be attended to first, be it nuclear or extended family. You cannot tell the family that you are busy with work when your services or your presence is required ...' [Participant 5, female]

and,

'... Because, if the woman is clever enough and takes the lead, the whole family will be uplifted. ... when you can provide for your children, there will be peace at home and fewer squabbles.' [Participant 3, female]

Family commitment (in-group support) was also an enabler of female entrepreneurship. Dhaliwal *et al.* (2010) established that, besides providing support for start-ups of their female relatives' entrepreneurial endeavours, the family could also provide monetary assistance to enable them to take necessary, considered business risks. One of the women shared:

'My husband is my business partner; he was the one who had the cash. So into the business he brought the cash, and I brought the know-how. Then, in terms of management, we work together. He does the accounts for the business. I could not have found myself a better partner. He is very helpful and supportive, and it is an advantage to have him in the business.' [Participant 6, female]

Unfortunately, this was not true in all cases, as the husbands of most of the women interviewed rather looked down on their wives' entrepreneurial activities. As Amoako-Kwakye (2012) and Chitsike (2000) suggested, one of the women's roles in society is to foster peace, and these women realise that fighting the patriarchal system would not get them anywhere. In their quest to keep the family intact as well as continue to run their entrepreneurial endeavours,

the female entrepreneurs were willing to bow to patriarchy. In this way they balance the visibility/invisibility dichotomy described by Harrison, Leitch and McAdam (2015) in which female entrepreneurs switch between their dual roles. The Zimbabwean women showed a deeply embedded acceptance of a high masculinity, low GE and high power distance culture as described by Hofstede (2011) and in the GLOBE studies (Ozgen 2012).

Institutional and social factors

At the meso-level, Zimbabwe's institutional environment affects the endeavours of the female entrepreneurs, as, despite many laws designed to emancipate women, culturally linked behaviours and practices often override them. For example, Zimbabwean law requires that any business entity having two or more directors needs to be registered, and it is a common practice for a married woman to designate her spouse as the other director. Thus, it would appear to the outside world that the male is dominant (a culturally rooted assumption), and the cultural *status quo* is maintained. So, although the company is owned by both parties, in reality, the woman runs and manages the business, as well as being responsible for all family and household duties. Thus cultural patriarchy (the macro-level illustrated in Figure 1) strongly influences practices (micro-level), despite policies (meso-level) favouring gender equity. None of the women expressly admitted to the breadwinner versus subordinate anomaly in their dual roles, and would turn a blind eye to 'save face', as described by Nguyen and Frederick (2014).

Perhaps female entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe are fortunate, as in many developing countries there are still policy frameworks that inhibit business activity amongst women (Brush & Cooper 2012; Dlamini & Migiro 2014; Oya & Sender 2009; Syed & Ozbilgin 2009).

Sense of identity

The dual sense of identity that the women had developed was the main reason that they were able to reconcile the contradictory expectations from the two roles that they played. An important aspect was that, unlike women in other patriarchal societies such as India (Azmat & Fujimoto 2016), they were not under the same cultural pressures of inferiority, weakness and in need of protection. There was no evidence in this study to suggest that the women were perceived as being incapable of running their own business, so it was easier for them to develop self-confidence in their own abilities and actually deliver on the double workload expectation. They were proud of their ability to deliver in both life spheres.

Zimbabwean women entrepreneurs' ability to apparently switch seamlessly between roles is an important coping factor. In a manner similar to that described by Hechavarria and Ingram (2016), the women portrayed their 'emphasized femininity' (p. 246) in their home role, and took on the leadership role in a more traditionally 'hegemonic masculine'

(p. 246) way when running their business ventures. Current laws in Zimbabwe favour female emancipation (Mutanana & Bukaliya 2015), so, at the meso-level, doors are open for women to participate in the more masculine and individualistic endeavour of commercial entrepreneurship (Hechavarria & Ingram 2016), without losing the integrity of maintaining their traditionally feminine, collectivistic responsibilities. This idea of balance between collectivism and individualism amongst women entrepreneurs is well illustrated by Bullough *et al.* (2014), where it is explained to optimise women's business ownership because they can pursue their personal goals (individualistic) and still serve their in-group (collectivistic).

Conclusion

Gender-differentiated cultural studies focusing on black female entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe are scarce, although there are some reports. It is evident that the cultural dimensions, described by Hofstede (2011) and expanded in the GLOBE studies (Ozgen 2012), do play a role in female entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe, although it would be beneficial to conduct research into the cultural profiles of a greater number of specific African countries, taking gender into account. It is evident from the literature that, although there are some commonalities between African countries and between developing countries, specific contexts vary considerably, and these affect the ways in which cultural variables are perceived and handled.

Women entrepreneurs' identities were initially disenfranchised as they were shackled by patriarchy, inequality and high power distance. This identity is not static and changed with changing circumstances, that is, it is constantly being reconstructed. Identities are linked with the different social roles (e.g. public vs. private) that women entrepreneurs must play, and these identities interact with one another. Public identities incorporate the entrepreneurial identity, including those linked with previous occupational experiences, with entrepreneurial activity of the enterprise, community roles and occupational gender related issues. Private identities include childhood experiences and family roles such as those of mother and wife. It is also evident that, although the vast majority of the women willingly demonstrate adherence to the cultural expectations of a patriarchal society, they nonetheless can display characteristics of assertiveness, PO and long-term orientation when running their businesses; however, they do this in such a way as to never emasculate their male partner. In this way, they work around the barriers to entrepreneurship of the cultural norms and use them to their advantage where possible, for example, to raise funding (Azmat 2013), in addition to demonstrating (even covertly) atypical cultural attributes.

Thus, despite the attempts to empower Zimbabwean women at the meso-level in terms of policies, the cultural norms at the macro-level still influence behaviours at the micro-level. However, Zimbabwean women have balanced their dual roles by shifting identity roles as required, enabling them to reconcile the inherent contradictions therein.

Importantly, these women view entrepreneurship as self-fulfilling, allowing them the flexibility and freedom to balance work and family obligations, whilst earning an income to better the lives of their families and the community.

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Competing interests

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Authors' contributions

N.B.M. prepared the proposal and conducted the research under T.C.'s supervision. N.B.M. did all the fieldwork herself, in Zimbabwe. N.B.M. wrote the early drafts of the paper, and T.C. did the majority of the article after that, including conceptualising and constructing the consolidated culture model in Figure 1.

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