Check for updates

Received: 29 April 2021 | Revised: 18 August 2022 | Accepted: 6 September 2022

DOI: 10.1111/gwao.12931

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

WILEY

# A postcolonial and pan-African feminist reading of *Zimbabwean women entrepreneurs*

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## Abstract

This paper challenges the Eurocentric entrepreneurship narrative from postcolonial and pan-African feminist perspectives. Based on interview research conducted with 24 Zimbabwean women entrepreneurs, we narrate their *microstorias* in order to expose the legacy of entrepreneurial colonialism and patriarchy in Africa. The *microstorias* reveal the colonial past as well as the patriarchal norms that disenfranchise women entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe. Yet, they also reveal their struggle, resilience, resistance and their ongoing fight to construct their own identities as entrepreneurs. The paper contributes to enhance and advance further postcolonial, decolonial and critical voices in entrepreneurship and organization studies by challenging the prevailing western discourse of entrepreneurship from the introduction of necroentrepreneurism; giving support to intersectional postcolonial and Pan-African feminist perspectives that voice global South women entrepreneurship and, by decolonizing and decentring the theoretical debates on entrepreneurship and organization.

KEYWORDS

Africa, colonialism, decolonialism, entrepreneurship, hustler, microstorias, necroentrepreneurship, pan-African feminism, postcolonialism, Zimbabwe

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

> …I'm tired of this idea that African women can only be objects of pity. I'm tired of the notion that African women can or should only interact on select topics.
>
> (Ms. Afropolitan, in Machirori, 2013, p. 89)

Entrepreneurship remains a field dominated by Eurocentric narratives (e.g., Drucker, 2014). These narratives privilege and preserve the voice of the "white male" hero in their writing (Cornelissen, 2013). This hero promotes a managerial-imperialist neo-colonial discourse and practice (Cooke, 2004) concealed under the notion of business creation (Sternberg & Wennekers, 2005), organization (Tracey et al., 2011) and innovation (Drucker, 2002). This entrepreneurial narrative hides the colonial past upon which European enterprises were created through slavery (Cooke, 2003b) and oppression of the global South (Ibarra-Colado, 2006). Entire communities suffer from business and capital opportunism that brought the exploitation of the *other* for the benefit of the western dream. These practices still prevail today masquerading under "social" entrepreneurial (Mair & Martí, 2006) initiatives that encourage "white" panaceas for tackling development, poverty and economic downturns (e.g., Bruton et al., 2013). In Africa, for instance, entrepreneurship is seen as a tool to eradicate poverty and solve all societal malaise, preserving a neo-colonial agenda sponsored by Eurocentric institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Naudé & Havenga, 2005). Epistemologically, this continues to ignore, suppress and silence local histories such as those of women.

African women have struggled against a colonial past that preserves patriarchal norms, disenfranchising them from opportunities to create, innovate and organize their own initiatives. This past deprives them of their voices to assert their own identities as entrepreneurs. In this study we re-claim their entrepreneurial histories, focusing on narratives of Zimbabwean women entrepreneurs. We do so to unmask their colonial past, contributing to decolonize and emancipate the notion of entrepreneurship in line with other critical voices on the subject (Essers et al., 2017; Storr & Butkevich, 2007; Özkazanç-Pan, 2012).

Our study is based on 24 interviews (Manning, 2016a) conducted with Shona women in Zimbabwe. Shona women suffered from white discrimination in the old Rhodesia (Jacobs, 1983) as well as patriarchy that endures after their war of independence (Parpart, 1995). From the interviews we co-constructed three entrepreneurial *microstorias* (Boje, 2001) that reflect these oppressive practices.

We adopt postcolonial (Mignolo, 2011) and Pan-African feminist approaches (Abbas & Mama, 2014; Cruz, 2015) to write these *microstorias*. These theoretical approaches contest the coloniality and patriarchy that define what western entrepreneurism is and represents in Zimbabwe and, by extension, other marginalized communities of the global South (Jack, 2015). These approaches expand the dialogue with critical voices in organization studies (e.g., Frenkel & Shenhav, 2006; Jack et al., 2011; Nkomo, 2011; Prasad, 2003), seeking justice and visibility for those whose lives have been affected by colonial and neo-colonial organizational practices.

The paper is organized as follows. First, we discuss the conceptual ideas that underpin our understanding of entrepreneurship in this study. Then we present the postcolonial methodological approach and the *microstorias* we derived from the women. We close with a discussion on the importance of advancing more decolonial/postcolonial *microstorias* of entrepreneurship.

## 2 | EXPOSING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS NECROENTREPRENEURISM

> I contend that we are the first race in the world, and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race.
>
> (Cecil J. Rhodes, 1877: Confession of Faith)

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We sustain in this paper that entrepreneurship is an ideological theoretical construct driven by colonialist and imperialist ideas that requires de-colonization to un-constrain the entrepreneurship that the *subaltern* practices in the global South. The notion of entrepreneurship, as it is the case with most of the literature in management and organization, has been and remain dominated by Eurocentric views (Seth, 2014). This can be found summarized in the work produced by Kuratko (2011) who points out the roadmap of entrepreneurship from its early roots to our present century. In it, the emphasis is on the theory, process and practice as a result of a "western dominant view" that serves a market driven economy. Beresford (2020) considers this glorification of entrepreneurship a burden imposition in global South countries such as South Africa. These views imposed a narrative, history and identity of entrepreneurship that colonize the way in which entrepreneurship is represented in global South locations. This is a view sustain by Imas et al. (2012) whereby entrepreneurship is an extension and representation of neoliberal and neocolonial economic principles that keep people in the global South oppressed. Similarly, we find in Baker and Welter (2020) the need to "re-contextualize" and challenge entrepreneurship "western" assumptions and diversify further the field. Contesting entrepreneurship as a colonialist practice does follow a path to include approaches that examine the colonialist past of entrepreneurship.

We understand colonialism, following Cèsaire (2000), as the destruction of the *other's* way of life, under the pretext to "civilize" those who have no *reason* and knowledge (Manji & O'Coill, 2002). Cèsaire expands his views following Renan's philosophy of the providential right Europeans have to impose their superior sense of humanity over those seen as inferiors (Cèsaire, 2000). Fanon (1952, 1963), similarly, understood colonialism as an act of violence against the "primitive" *other*. For Fanon it depicts segregation and management of the *subaltern* world, such as in Apartheid South Africa (Clark & Worger, 2011). In colonialism, following Ahrendt (1962), we find a totalitarian ideology of a superior race that oppresses and destroys the *other's* culture, expropriating both their, human (Bulhan, 2015) and natural (Maxted, 2006) resources. We can re-think then entrepreneurship as a necroentrepreneurial practice underpinned by Necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003) and necrocapitalism (Banerjee, 2008).

Necropolitics refers to the subjugation of life under what Mbembe calls the forces of death. Following Agamben's (1998) discussion on sovereign power and Foucault's (1990) biopolitics, he explains how the horrors of torture, slavery and war are employed as instruments of power by a master race against those dispossessed of any sense of humanity (Martí & Fernández, 2013). Nineteenth century European entrepreneurs (Dumett, 2009) like Cecil John Rhodes (1853–1902), exemplify this point. Rhodes saw African natives as inferior with lives of no "value" except for benefit and exploitation of white colonialists.

> Africa is still lying ready for us, it is our duty to take it.
>
> (Rhodes, 1877, p. 2).

Rhodes epitomizes the despotism and brutalization of the *other* in his brand of imperial entrepreneurship characterized under necropolitics. Here entrepreneurship sanctions death against those seen as inferior (Davies et al., 2017) and who do not serve the colonizer. Child labor (Aufseeser et al., 2018) and extractivism (Bond, 2017) are two modern examples of necropolitical entrepreneurship. It is also present in the benign arena of social entrepreneurship, that is, the idea that entrepreneurship is a force for good and social change (Roberts & Woods, 2005). For instance, Zahra et al. (2008) discuss how western corporations promote the alleviation of poverty in developing countries through social entrepreneurial practices. However, Dey and Steyaert (2010) suggest, doing good through the creation of non-profit businesses masks a utopian western hegemonic belief in neoliberal economic principles that underpin entrepreneurship (Harvey, 1989). It acts as a *proxy* for the oppression of the *other*, forcing them to accept hegemonic "sovereign" belief as the cure of their malaise (Banerjee, 2011).

Necropolitics underpins van Praag's (1999) assertion that entrepreneurship exhibits the opportunism of a thief who makes pecuniary gains from robbing and dispossessing *others* of wealth and their livelihood. Entrepreneurship, hence, can be understood as a practice of necroentrepreneurism where risk-taking behavior (Knight, 1921) and innovation through "creative" destruction (Schumpeter, 1934) can be re-interpreted as an ideology that promotes

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the destruction of the *other* for the benefit of western profiteering and domination. That is, necroentrepreneurism emerges as a colonial and neo-colonial practice where the *other* is subjugated, marginalized and exploited in order to sustain the western entrepreneurial narrative of wealth creation.

Banerjee's (2008) necrocapitalism expands this creative destructive discourse. Building on Mbembe's Necropolitical thinking, Banerjee defines necrocapitalism as the result of (post)colonial (capital) accumulation that produces the destruction of livelihood and the general management of violence. Banerjee (2011) contextualizes necrocapitalist modes of accumulation as "internal" colonialist practices exercised by governments and global corporations that oppress local populations. Here imperialism is replaced by local elites that manage and organize local populations, coercing them to accept the rules and principles of the market where enterprises thrive. This ideological imposition perpetuates the "white" entrepreneurial panacea that, it assumes, will deliver wealth and innovation in the globalized South (Ogbor, 2000).

For example, Imas (2010) describes how Chile's military coup and Argentina's Menem government introduced aggressive neoliberal measures, creating conditions for torture (in Chile) and repression and bankruptcy (in Argentina). In this toxic environment an entrepreneurial elite flourished, like 19th century colonialists in Africa, taking advantage of this system of exploitation. Khan et al.'s (2007) study on institutional entrepreneurship exemplifies necrocapitalism by exposing how, managing by exclusion of local community interest (Banerjee, 2011), a local (colonized) elite advance their evangelical entrepreneurial crusade (Sørensen, 2008) under neo-colonial and neoliberal rules. Like in colonial times, these communities are banned from re-creating their own entrepreneurial working lives.

We see entrepreneurship rooted in these necrocapitalist practices that are both colonial and neocolonial in principle and practice. Entrepreneurship does not seek the creation of wealth through the promotion of talent (Ensign & Farlow, 2016), opportunity (Davidsson, 2015), innovation (Foss & Saebi, 2017) and creativity (Hjorth et al., 2018) as it is conceived in the Eurocentric centers of power. We find an ideology that is instead epistemologically colonialist like most organization and management concepts (Banerjee & Linstead, 2004), producing and re-producing *the other as* theoretically "inferior" through categories that underline this tendency such as *indigenous* entrepreneurship (Hindle & Moroz, 2010). Indigenous entrepreneurship models silence the colonial oppressive past of these communities, from aboriginal policies against Aborigines in Australia (Ivory, 1999) to Apartheid in South Africa (Özler, 2007). The idea of an "indigenous model" reflects necroentrepreneurial tendencies against the *other*, henceforth, acknowledging the hegemonic nature of entrepreneurship invites us to dismantle and de-colonize its assumptions, and start talking to those who inhabit the margins (Wanderley & Faria, 2012).

## 3 | PAN-AFRICAN FEMINISM

> Our feminist identity is not qualified with "ifs", "buts" or "howevers". We are Feminists. Full stop.
>
> (African Feminist Forum, 2006, p. 4)

The second theoretical idea upon which we build our research is Pan-African feminism (Ampofo & Arnfred, 2010). To speak of African feminism is problematic and considered by some to be "un-African" (Gaidzanwa, 2011). The critique points out to both, a "western-inspired" feminist dependency and an "essentialist" view that defines "Africanity" as representative of an entire continent (Atanga, 2013).

Indeed, this critique can be understood in the way scholars write about women entrepreneurs in the continent. For example, women are portrayed as backward, inferior, mediocre and subordinate, requiring emancipation under western feminist views (Parpart, 1993). Western institutions, like International Labour Organization (ILO) claim African women lack entrepreneurial skills (ILO, 2008). African business women are also seen as operating at "subsistence" levels (Chinomona & Maziriri, 2015) unable to lead or manage their own business organizations due to suppressive patriarchal practices (Akhalwaya & Havenga, 2012).

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Considering these examples, intersectionality theory appears to offer a framework to address Zimbabwean women entrepreneurs, that is, acknowledging oppression experienced by minority women from postcolonialism and patriarchy (Crenshaw, 1991). Critical entrepreneurship scholars have been drawn to this framework to address issues including ethnicity, religion and gender (Essers et al., 2010); and self-employment among ethnic immigrant minorities (Valdez, 2011). Others, like Schurr and Segebart (2012) praise its methodological strength. However, despite its strength the focus of these studies is primarily with "minority" women in the European and American contexts (Ram et al., 2017). This renders the theory problematic when applied outside the global North. Also, we agree with Dosekun's (2007) and Naidu's (2013) views that there is sufficient research by African feminist scholars that can support women entrepreneurs' experiences in Zimbabwe. It is more appropriate to underpin our research within the Pan-African discussion before engaging intersectionality and other feminist approaches in entrepreneurship.

African feminism emerges out of women's struggle against western hegemony, distinctively separating them from western bourgeois individualism and essentialism (Mikell, 1997). Ahikire (2014) adds that it is more than cultural and historical difference but a complex, diverse set of theoretical perspectives. Table 1 summarizes some of these perspectives that contribute to assert an African feminist discourse.

These perspectives may suggest a fragmentary view of African Feminism (Nnolim, 2009). Yet this plurality may also invite researchers to reflect on the different positions to address and represent the complexity of struggles faced by women. These include a rejection of patriarchal orthodoxy and the cultural imperatives, historical trajectories and local realities lived and experience by African women (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003). We cannot disassociate and implant then western theoretical constructs to understand women lives in Africa. As Morrell (2016) suggests, the oppression and colonialism suffer by women in parts of Africa are best characterized by referring to local understanding that best reflect their practices and experiences. A similar point recently raised Bayu (2019) who contrasting African with western feminism suggests that the latter tends to [neo]colonized African women agencies and subjectivities.

This plurality highlights three key points in African feminism. First, the moral imperative of dismantling patriarchy in Africa (Africa Feminist Forum, 2006), since patriarchal dimensions are at the core of most African feminist analysis. For example, Pillay (2010) discusses the effect of male violence against women in South Africa. Uchem and Ngwa (2014) debate the political, and socio-economic subordination of women to men. Kameri-Mbote (2009) discusses women's dependency on men for land distribution and subsistence in Kenya. Patriarchy undermines

TABLE 1 Pan-African feminist perspectives

| Pan-African feminist theoretical perspectives | Exponents | Brief description |
|---|---|---|
| Feminist southern theory | Morrell (2016) | Focus on developing a "local" scientific/ sociological language to address and represent local women experiences and histories in Africa |
| Womanism | Ogunyemi (1985) | Womanism asserts a black roots philosophy that focuses on black women lives in the African continent. |
| Nego-feminism | Nnaemeka (2003) | Challenges and questions western feminists' views, insisting that women lived experiences in Africa should not be (necessarily informed) on how (western) feminism should be applied in other parts of the world. |
| Stiwanism | Ogundipe-Leslie (2011) | It calls for an indigenous African approach to study women, reflecting on their history, gender, politics, race, economics and social dynamics. |
| Zimbabwe's feminism (She-Murenga) | Essof (2013) | Examines post-colonially the role of women activism in Zimbabwe's women struggle for independence and emancipation against violence and their fight for equality. |

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women's entrepreneurial potential and forces them to accept male authority to achieve their independence (Bruni et al. (2005).

The second point acknowledges the detrimental effect of colonialism on women since it silences and "domesticates" them to serve the colonialist class (Roy-Campbell, 1996). Lugones (2008) considers this a process of disempowerment and objectification where women's bodies become "property" of the colonizer. Mohanty (1988) critiques the constructed view of African womanhood, categorizing women as fragile, uneducated, primitive victims. Entrepreneurship research partly reflects these images. Vossenberg (2013) explains that women from developing countries lack skills and confidence to create businesses. Singh and Belwal (2008) explain that women lack skills and accessibility to government support and resources. Grant (2013) studying women entrepreneurs in Soweto described how colonial segregation marginalized women from mainstream cities and business networks, depriving them of their freedom and emancipation.

The third point builds from the previous two, focusing on "agency" and women's right to voice their (entrepreneurial) identities in empowering and autonomous ways. Agency and identity reflect a complex and fluid African womanhood, not a western dichotomy of being (Oyĕwùmí, 2002). Mama (2002) explains that western "identity" has no meaning in Africa as it is "communal". Coetzee (2018) suggests that agency/identity in Africa is subjective, plural and relational, that is, "*I am because we are and since we are therefore I am*" (Mbiti, 1969, p. 108). Coetzee remarks that challenging the epistemic notion of agency/identity upon which colonial and patriarchal oppression is built requires a critical re-embodiment of womanhood with performative (Butler, 1988) acts where relational pluralities are conceived within woman's voices and narratives, and not in others mimicking (Bhabha, 1994) their acts.

Agency implies unveiling women's own histories and trajectories derived from their experiences to reclaim and re-appropriate womanhood under Essof's (2013) notion of *She-Murengas*. *She-murenga* refers to the Shona uprising against colonial power (Beach, 1983) and postcolonial minority white rule (Brownell, 2011) in Zimbabwe. It recognizes the valuable contribution of African women asserting their plural, political struggle in multiple "tongues" (Essof, 2013).

Pan-African feminism underpins our postcolonial stance to entrepreneurship in line with other postcolonial approaches that tackle Eurocentric entrepreneurism (e.g., Özkazanç-Pan, 2012, 2017). It deepens understanding of entrepreneurship from the cultural ideological and historical fabric of African women lives. Thus, through decolonization of entrepreneurial practices under necroentrepreneurism and adoption of Pan-African feminism we suggest a more humane and culturally located entrepreneurial [hi]story and practices of women in Zimbabwe.

## 4 | WRITING *MICROSTORIAS*: A POSTCOLONIAL METHODOLOGY

Following our theoretical discussion, we position this research within postcolonial and feminist epistemology and ontology (Lugones, 2010; Weston & Imas, 2018). We embrace the right of the *other*, absent from Eurocentric epistemological discussions, to assert her voice in entrepreneurship. Western hegemony imposes a regime of truth upon which most knowledge in entrepreneurship is constructed or compared to (Özkazanç-Pan, 2008). We acknowledge this asymmetrical power relationship and recognize our position of privilege. We authors write from the global North, with *others*, to challenge western theoretical assumptions on entrepreneurship and also our own. We break from [neo]-colonial dogma that imposes a truth on the narratives of *others* (Wynter, 2003). We must be alert and be epistemologically humble to recognize this aspect of the research process when engaging with marginalized communities (Manning, 2016b).

We conducted 24 unstructured interviews (Manning, 2016a; Zavala, 2013) with Zimbabwean Shona women entrepreneur over 6 months in Harare. We contacted these women through our network connection in the country. They accepted to participate, and we conducted the interviews in their homes organized by local researcher. Their background reflected a diversity of businesses, including produce-crafts, fashion, food, consultancy, trading, start-up business support, and medicine. We intentionally operated in an unstructured way in order to avoid imposing our western conceptual bias on them. It was important to overcome the colonial sensitivities that could provoke mistrust.

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This facilitated a dialogue of mutual understanding and respect, where we acknowledge our state of privilege as western researchers and theirs as subaltern.

We adopted the philosophy of "*Unhu*", that is, the Shona practice of mutual acceptance, unselfishness and caring (Mandova & Chingombe, 2013), to create a conversation of mutual respect and co-operation during the interviews. It was equally relevant to acknowledge the unstable socio-political situation in Zimbabwe (Southall, 2017). Working in a "hazard" landscape imposes restrictions for both participants and researchers. We avoided conflictive issues that could jeopardize their and our participation and changed participant's names to protect their privacy and identities.

The interviews were conducted conversationally in English, though they felt more comfortable speaking Shona. They help us to understand their narratives when they expressed themselves in their native tongue. This enabled us to "listen" (Forsey, 2010) to their *stories*. We recorded the interviews with their permission. From the interviews we constructed three *microstorias* (Boje, 2001; Canham & Langa, 2017) to reflect on their lives and experiences as entrepreneurs. The writing of these micro*storias* implies a co-constructed narration (Tuck et al., 2014) that could encapsulate the postcolonial and African feminist history of the women participants as part of a dialogue, rather than a translation (Fine, 2017). Following Imas et al. (2012), *microstorias* is an analytical method that challenges the hegemony of western grand narratives such as entrepreneurship. Microstorias refers to stories of "little" people (minorities, indigenous women, etc.) ignored by grand western theoretical constructs (Boje, 2001). In microstorias, following Imas et al. (2012), an original view emerges alongside reflection and assessment that analyses the lived/living conditions of those deprived of a voice as their stories are disregarded as odd, improper and therefore ignored (Blackman & Imas, 2011). This invites to disrupt the "master" narrative of entrepreneurship, resisting its ideological Eurocentric impositions. Reflecting further on this process and considering Majefe's (2001) view, we try to disentangle their stories rather than imposing analytical frameworks that presuppose who they were as entrepreneurs, avoiding any western categorization of their lives. Their stories were theirs written within our reflections. This collaboration *decenters* the colonial center of power where the narrative of entrepreneurship lies, allowing the *voices* of the women to emerge in conjunction with ours. Next, we present the co-written *microstorias*.

## 5 | NECROENTREPRENEURISM AT THE HEART OF ZIMBABWE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Women's Entrepreneurial *microstorias* are entrenched in the colonial past (Sheldon, 2018). Colonization sets conditions of depravity, poverty, dependency and inequality where entrepreneurship becomes a struggle for survival. Zimbabwe is a reflection of necroentrepreneurial existence where women suffer significantly as they contest colonial oppression and patriarchal rules that suppress their capabilities as entrepreneurial beings.

> …after Christianity… women were confused on what they were and what they weren't allowed to do.
>
> (Tadiwa)

Colonization (and patriarchy) determine *subaltern* women's entrepreneurial histories (Ojo-Ade, 2001). It disrupted their culture, displacing them from their homelands. Entire communities were moved to reservations, while white settlers took control of their fertile land (McKenna, 2011). The displacement forced them to seek opportunities at the periphery of the new empire.

> My grandfather decided to come to Salisbury in 1931 with his wife and children after being displaced off their farm. Our ancestral land is Chishawasha, Highlands, Borrowdale, Domboshava but he refused to be resettled in any other place and he said I will instead go to where the white man is going so I can give my children the best opportunities.
>
> (Vimbiso)

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Salisbury (Harare's name under colonial Rhodesia), presented women with nothing to do in the townships created under apartheid (segregation) laws (Goldberg, 1994). Women struggled with no purpose and sense of belonginess.

> When they came to Mbare women didn't have any work to do. The township was built for men who were providing labour and women were not even supposed to come there wasn't even housing for them.
>
> (Chipiwo)

Women's invisibility from the colonizer compelled them to find creative ways to survive. The entrepreneurial narrative does talk about adversity, and creativity from scarce resources and opportunities. In Europe this entrepreneurship is described under necessity, implying a liminal space upon which people re-construct their identities and lives (e.g., Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018). In marginal contexts, it reflects barefoot entrepreneurism, that is, survival tactics that poor communities enact (Imas et al., 2012).

For Zimbabwean women, *subaltern* and marginal entrepreneurial practices they enacted depict servitude (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2005). One such practice was washing colonizers' clothes.

> She collected dirty laundry from white people from at that time exclusively white areas only. We call that washing, I wrote an article one day about her collecting laundry and everyone corrected me and said no we call it washing!
>
> (Tamira)

Washing became an entrepreneurial tactic which sustained their lives, creating further activities to generate income to support their families.

> My grandmother, she realised that you can collect laundry from white people because it's easier then just working for one white person and you can earn more. You look for what is needed, and you provide it!
>
> (Wadzanai)

This entrepreneurial activity out of necessity became an escape route from poverty and deprivation.

Rhodesian apartheid policies hampered women's identities and potential to freely create in the same ways enjoyed by western women (Austin, 1975), reducing them to servitude, abuse and invisibility. Women were not only blacks but also “women” and as such they grew up with a sense of fear and dispossession of their true selves.

> … fear it definitely feels there's also society that says women should be I don't know if it's true of white woman but in but with black woman there's this thing that you must be mediocre not too ambitious…
>
> (Anokosha)

Fear (Carotenuto and Shadle, 2012) condemned women to mediocrity, where ambition was suppressed. Zimbabwean women had limited access to education or opportunities that white women enjoyed. Colonial rule defined their “silent” experience of harassment, discrimination and abuse (Lessing, 2013); it made them powerless.

> it's interesting because a lot of this is also colonial this wasn't happening not that it wasn't happening that men institutionalised their power, but it wasn't the same…
>
> (Chido)

Colonization divided and destroyed indigenous populations. It created fear, repression and submission since natives were enslaved and exploited by European settlers. In this context, Zimbabwean women entrepreneurs struggled to resist.

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> I mean we are taught to not look in people's eyes and when I went to college I struggled because I would always put my hand up and wait for my turn. But I think that's one thing we could improve is teaching African women how to express their ideas it's not that the thoughts aren't there its only how to express them clearly and assertively.
>
> (Kudzanai)

Coloniality destroyed their right to co-exist in their own society. It imposed a status of subservience and slavery, silencing and segregating them at the periphery of their land. Zimbabwean women's entrepreneurship is born in this historical struggle.

## 6 | *SHE-MURENGA* ENTREPRENEURS

> Women don't have time to document their history.
>
> (Tsitsi)

Danai Mupotsa (2008) points out the inequalities experienced by Zimbabwean women entrepreneurs, where women are not treated equally and suffer from "paradoxical" colonization. On the one hand, women are forced to accept roles and identities socially engineered under colonization, that strengthen patriarchal rule. On the other, since independence, women who identified themselves as feminist are accused of being anti-nationalist and pro "imperialism" (Essof, 2013). In this environment, women face injustice and prejudice that restricts their entrepreneurial opportunities.

> So, Zim is still a very male dominated society, its extremely male dominated… there's this general idea that females are sort of suppose take a back seat, they shouldn't be very vocal…
>
> (Rudo)

Women are stigmatized from a young age, pushing them to fulfill stereotypical, subordinate roles as inferior beings. Uchem and Ngwa (2014) define this subordination as an oppressive practice that exposes women to physical abuse, citing the large number of Nigerian girls offered by traffickers to the sex industry in western Europe. In Zimbabwe, the subordination is experienced by threats and harassment from male counterparts.

> I had a man write me a letter threatening he was going to beat me up because how dare an old woman write such things…
>
> (Aneni)

It is also experienced as obstruction against them achieving independent jobs and recognition.

> My grandmother… was not provided with a job but my grandmother was so enterprising she did a lot of farming and she harvested bags of rice and maize
>
> (Vimbainashe)

Women are suppressed and not allowed time to pursue their desires and dreams.

> women are failing to do what they want because they have no personal time. They are always busy with other people but they are not busy with themselves they cannot develop themselves.
>
> (Aneni)

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They are stigmatised and stagnated (Gwakwa & Chikukutu, 2015), preventing them access to education that can enable their independence and emancipation.

> When you're working as a woman you are told as long as you remain a woman it's ok. But what they are saying is that you don't have space and you don't have time or the education. That's what they mean.
>
> (Makanaka)

Access to education could allow them to acknowledge their inequalities, challenge patriarchal rule and their stereotypical positions as "childbearers", "wives" or "cooks" (Venganai, 2016) that limit and obstruct entrepreneurial freedom. Instead, women face humiliation and derogatory attitudes for becoming business owners.

> because I'm a woman and I know how patriarchal the society is, and running it myself on, at first glance, people tend to judge… I know how women are perceived so I needed a male figure.
>
> (Mawanda)

Entrepreneurship is a fight against the ideological script that positions men above women in all aspects of economic and cultural development (Nani, 2011). Men create businesses and receive institutional support, while women struggle for recognition. Men sit freely with others to discuss business, while women fight to be heard (Hungwe, 2006). They are aware of this unfair practice, aware that male counterparts create obstacles to success.

> I think there's always been this ideology and possibly truth and the fact that business is very male dominated. And it's very difficult to penetrate. I mean they're having drinks together. They are friends. They own golf courses and whatever…
>
> (Onai)

> And I don't know if it's just a Zim thing or maybe an Africa thing that people really want to see a male face or a dominant face.
>
> (Kunache)

Prejudice, and discrimination is entrenched within culture (Mungwini, 2008). For instance, to get bank loans, women required their husbands' or fathers' signature.

> the banks, they don't really consider giving us loans, they want what they call 'collateral security', and you know, most of us as women in Africa and Zimbabwe, it's either you're married, but everything belongs to your husband…
>
> (Tatenda)

Zimbabwean women entrepreneurs struggle to assert their feminist values and equal treatment to men (Kambarami, 2006). This struggle defines their engagement as entrepreneurs.

> We need to write about our achievements and our problems as human beings… we need male to respect me for my mind and of my gender.
>
> (Zviedzo)

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## 7 | THE HUSTLER-ENTREPRENEUR

> Dreams combined with appetite for risk combined with action, with a side of hustle…. That's entrepreneurship.

Out of struggle against colonial rule and patriarchy, the independent entrepreneurial identity and agency these women forged for themselves is of a *hustler*. In our third *microstoria*, we focus on the *hustler* entrepreneur to illustrate how women struggle to write their entrepreneurial tales and explain how they resist negative colonial representations of the *hustler* (Gatwiri & McLaren, 2016).

> … you have to be a hustler… Do it. Make it work. Sell it to the world. Let them believe you, and then, you know. Yeah hustle!
>
> (Wadzanai)

A *hustler* in the western neo-colonialist imaginary attracts negative connotations, especially toward African people. Wacquant (1998) describes the *hustler* as a ghetto character, who is deceiving, manipulative and criminal in behavior (the emphasis is in black masculinity). Shelby (2007) argues that hustling depicts African-Americans as deviant. In Africa we found similar interpretations of a *hustler*. To Thieme (2015), these undocumented individuals, living in slums, operate outside legal structures.

Women do not escape negative connotation. They are portrayed as deceitful and immoral with "sexual" innuendos that accentuate fetishized images constructed during colonization (Veissière, 2009). The *hustler* image does not flatter Zimbabwean women entrepreneurs as they are exposed to discrimination and humiliation.

> Even women politicians stand down because people say they slept with 1000 men!
>
> (Dambudzo)

Andrain (1962) sustains that such characterization is predominantly the product of a Eurocentric world view, in which black people are negatively stigmatized and stereotyped. Collins (2004) sustains that representations of black women reflect the colonial image of "freak", that is, commodified *objects* of uncivilized and primitive behavior. The *hustler* entrepreneur is thus a product of colonization. Reclaiming and re-appropriating *hustling* enables women to reconstruct entrepreneurial agency and identities.

> But hustler has this bad connotation of doing it. So, it's like a nice hustler or a clean hustler.
>
> (Saruzdai)

The *hustler* woman entrepreneur is not unprincipled, immoral or unethical. Neither is she a "sexual" being, subordinated to wishes of imperialist and patriarchal discourses (Kambarami, 2006). The *hustler* is enterprising, resilient, creative and pro-active (Ogone, 2014), within an economic and political environment that is harsh and difficult like the one Zimbabwean women entrepreneurs face (Gwakwa & Chikukutu, 2015).

> But at present we are facing challenges, we don't have market anymore and things are getting harder and harder and harder for us…
>
> (Ruveneko)

The Zimbabwean woman *hustler* navigates an adverse, corrupted, bureaucratic and discriminatory setting (Mauchi et al., 2014). In this context, *hustling* becomes an advantageous strategic practice that denotes resilience and

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creativity. Thieme (2017) describes how young Kenyans construct agency through everyday *hustling* by adopting a go-getter approach to mobilize despite precarity.

> I had to stop the dress design 'cause I had no money. But a friend of mine has taught me how to make samosas… I thought if wake up early and make samosas sell them in the morning and then for the rest of the day I can do my research. So I started funding my (music) research through samosas.
>
> (Namatayi)

*Hustling* is empowering. Through *hustling* Zimbabwean women construct independent, emboldened selves. *Hustling* allows them to show their capabilities as women in dignified and respectful ways, further challenging the invisibility determined by the colonialist past and patriarchy.

> I am a woman in a tech industry who is black and young. All of the factors are against me. Every single one of them is against me and I love to see women come up. I just love to see women doing it and just feeling like you know what despite all of this I am still going to make it.
>
> (Isheanopa)

Being an entrepreneurial *hustler* defines their character, integrity and resilience. To succeed as African women entrepreneurs whose voices are not concealed under male societal arrangements, these women must *hustle*, make noise and push for change to open opportunities for themselves and other women. *Hustling* gives them hope to pursue a more meaningful existence so they can enjoy the benefits of male counterparts.

> But its also going to encourage a lot of the young people to say "There's hope" which is something I think that Zim and just the continent in general struggle with, the young people are feeling very sort of dejected they don't really know what to expect or whether the future is meaningful at all.
>
> (Mutsa)

A Zimbabwean entrepreneurial *hustler* must be willing to resist colonial and patriarchal images of women and lead the struggle for emancipation that inspires other women to succeed.

> if I can inspire just one girl to get up and do something… I think I would be like, I think I am good now… That has been a massive motivating factor I think. Just making a way for other women to do stuff.
>
> (Anotida)

## 8 | DISCUSSION

Gartner (1988) asked who the entrepreneur was, suggesting, it was the wrong question. Yet, in the context of Zimbabwean entrepreneurs' *microstorias*, this might be the right question. First, because the micro*storias* expose the ideological and epistemological hegemony of entrepreneurship (Ramoglou, 2013) anchored in Eurocentric principles and norms (Verduyn & Essers, 2017). Secondly, because it supports Verdujin et al.'s (2014) thesis that it acts as both, an emancipatory and oppressive practice that moves from a utopic to a paratopic understanding that affects the interpretation and representation of the subaltern *other*. The micro*storias* here reflect this tension, they show how necroentrepreneurism and patriarchy suppress and oppress women while also conveying the struggle, resistance and desire for emancipation, giving agency and legitimacy to their narratives as entrepreneurs.

The first micro*storia* reveals the imperialist and Eurocentric hegemony of entrepreneurship, where necroentrepreneurism is at the core of these women histories. Necroentrepreneurism depicts entrepreneurship as a violent

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and repressive practice that historically has been "masked" in management and organization. Cooke (2003a) argues that slavery has been "absent" from management or entrepreneurial research. Necroentrepreneurship unmasked this cruel tale (Williams & Nadin, 2013), where the "colonized" indigenous *other* suffers from the opportunism and exploitation resulting from western entrepreneurship (Tedmanson et al., 2015). It presents a struggle for survival re-lived today inside and outside the kukiya-favela organization of the dispossessed (Imas & Weston, 2012). The struggle of these women entrepreneurs is against this segregation, against what Jones and Murtola (2012) define as the expropriation of their resources and their [well]-beings. The micro*storia* unveils this dehumanizing past where entrepreneurship is born as a result of a brutal form of organization. Opie and Roberts (2017) equally describe that historically black people have been poorly treated by Eurocentric organizations and institutions.

There is nothing heroic in this organizational Apartheid. Women's capacity for creative action is triggered by their desire to survive, reflecting, in their *microstorias*, a creative precarious resistance (Berglund, 2017) and agonistic stance (Mouffe, 2013) against their colonial oppressor. Their micro*storia* is their struggle to subvert entrepreneurship by opposing the necroentrepreneurial forces of white, ethnocentric capitalism. Zimbabwean women's entrepreneurship is born in this necroentrepreneurial landscape of violence, segregation and destruction of the *other's* way of life. Unveiling this history, invites further decolonization of the utopian entrepreneurial tale.

The second micro*storia* addresses the other oppressive practice experienced by Zimbabwean women entrepreneurs, patriarchy. Their micro*storia* reflects on the institutionalized patriarchy that persists in suppressing their voices. Gwakwa and Chikukutu (2015) sustain that this is one of the main barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in the country. Mapuva (2013) states that government practices, despite legislation introduced after the war of independence, are detrimentally biased against women. Management and entrepreneurship reflect a masculinity that wallows in the language of hegemonic dominance of the female *other* (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Essers & Tedmanson, 2014; Fotaki & Harding, 2017). This bias and enforcement of hegemonic patriarchal power is what enacts women entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe. It is inherently adopted from pre-colonial times (Cheater, 1986) and fostered by colonial institutions like the church (Gaidzanwa, 2019) and local government (Parpart, 1995). In the micro*storia* we see how their subordinated status of "domesticated" women restrains them from opportunities they might create as entrepreneurs. As Vossenberg (2014) specifies, most entrepreneurial policies in the global South exclude women.

Zimbabwean women entrepreneurs struggle against this depiction and subordination of their selves. Their micro*storia* is precisely an attempt to change the circumstances of this marginalization, where Christianity plays an important part in their patriarchal oppression. Christianity did not promote positive entrepreneurial values (Carswell & Rolland, 2004; Rietveld and van Burg, 2014) among local populations. Christianity sustained the patriarchy, suppressing and silencing women entrepreneurs (Kambarami, 2006). Hence, a counter feminist narrative is needed to challenge religious and political beliefs on the role women entrepreneurs play in Zimbabwe.

The third and final micro*storia* breaks from the past, challenging the patriarchy and colonization that has governed Zimbabwean women's entrepreneurial lives. It re-positions their identities as *hustler* entrepreneurs, assigning agency and new meaning to their practice of entrepreneurship (e.g., Martinez Dy et al., 2017). The *hustler* re-examines their struggle for emancipation, autonomy and control over their lives. This is in agreement with Mekgwe's (2008) idea of women becoming active "participants" in outlining their own historical trajectory rather than remaining within their traditional depiction of subaltern and victims. As Muntean and Özkazanç-Pan (2015) stress, "engendering" entrepreneurship is a way of challenging the male historical and political tenants of the theory. *Hustler* entrepreneurship is a resistance toward a representation that further segregates and marginalizes women from pursuing entrepreneurial activities. It is, their own way of transgressing their (organizational) shadows (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2010) and asserting an alternative view of who they are as entrepreneurs, even if being a *hustler* is not a flattering concept. The self-assigned independence resists the three pillars of subordination: coloniality, religion and patriarchy, enabling them to reclaim feminist identities.

In these micro*storias*, entrepreneurship is a struggle for acceptance and equality. It is a struggle to break from the chains of despotism and tyranny of the sex (Czarniawska, 2013), where women re-claim their identities and re-position themselves as autonomous, capable and creative. They identify with *hustling* rather than the *hustler* which

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empowers them to assert their feminist collective right to narrate who they are and who they want to become. Their *hustling* history helps them to resist the misogynistic attitudes against them. *Hustling* then is what they know and through it they challenge the male prejudice that coerces and restricts their lives, so they can create their own feminist re-presentation and version of the woman entrepreneur.

## 9 | CONCLUSION

> … but seeds do grow…. Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bringing me to this time when I can set down this story.
>
> (Dangarembga, 2004, p. 208)

In this paper we examined woman's entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe. Adopting postcolonial and Pan-African feminist frameworks, we have re-presented the violence, segregation and repression at the root of women's entrepreneurial experiences. We have discussed necroentrepreneurial practices that suppressed women. Their entrepreneurial tales exemplify the struggle, humiliation and resistance suffered by women entrepreneurs due to colonialism and patriarchy (Pio, 2007). Making visible these experiences open up the debate on how entrepreneurship is enacted as a western practice outside the Eurocentric domain. It questions the meaning of an entrepreneur rather than imposing a western epistemological view on how entrepreneurship should be understood, interpreted and conducted.

We see our contribution to critical entrepreneurship and organization as threefold. First, our study supports the drive to further decolonize the field (e.g., Murphy & Zhu, 2012). The paper questions the prevailing Eurocentrism in entrepreneurship, re-historicizing the subaltern narrative of organization and entrepreneurship under the notion of necroentrepreneurism. Theoretically, it expands the critical examination of this idea in organization studies. Second, our research supports intersectional postcolonial and feminist research in organization and entrepreneurship studies (e.g., Holvino, 2010). It supports what others have critically begun to interrogate in western settings with minority women in the global North (e.g., Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010) and across the global South (e.g., Brah & Phoenix, 2004). Our Pan-African feminist and postcolonial approaches add to this fruitful dialogue and advance *the others'* female voice in debates. Thirdly, from these debates we can enhance further the promotion of local African voices, who, as the mocrostorias demonstrate, do have an important role to play in de-colonizing and decentering these debates. Finally, our paper celebrates women's narratives as a way of exercising their right to voice the kind of entrepreneurship they want to practice and enact in their stories.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding authors on reasonable request.

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**How to cite this article:** Imas, J. Miguel, and Lucia Garcia-Lorenzo. 2022. "A Postcolonial and Pan-African Feminist Reading of *Zimbabwean Women Entrepreneurs*." *Gender, Work & Organization* 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12931.

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