



## Recontextualising gender in entrepreneurial leadership

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 17 April 2020

Received in revised form 27 January 2021

Accepted 12 February 2021

Available online xxxx

Associate editor: Stroma Cole

#### Keywords:

Entrepreneurial leadership

Entrepreneurial performance

Gender

Negotiation

Poststructural feminism

West Africa

### ABSTRACT

Drawing on the literature examining the nexus between gender, entrepreneurial leadership and entrepreneurial performance, this article critically explores a framework for analysing the role of gender in shaping entrepreneurial performance and leadership in tourism firms in a non-western context. Utilising a poststructural feminist lens that challenges normative accounts of entrepreneurial leadership practices, a qualitative analysis of interview data from tourism entrepreneurs in Ghana and Nigeria provides evidence of how entrepreneurial performances and leadership are gendered, fluid and constantly being negotiated. The article extends current discussions within tourism entrepreneurship to engage more meaningfully with gender, thereby assisting in deconstructing homogenous, fixed conceptualisation of entrepreneurial leadership - often evident within the broader leadership and entrepreneurship literature dominated by Anglo-Western approaches.

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### Introduction

Government initiatives and entrepreneurship research has taken concern with the gendered barriers and challenges experienced when leading a business (OECD/European Union, 2017; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2019). This is because whilst the number's engaging in entrepreneurship has increased, the number of women owned businesses has not. An outcome that has been narrowly attributed to women owning less economically sustainable businesses, compared to men (Figueroa-Domecq, Kimbu, de Jong, & Williams, 2020a; Patterson et al., 2012a). Such an assumption stems from the consistent privileging of masculine norms within entrepreneurship studies (Ahl & Marlow, 2012) and reinforces the implicit assumption that there is a singular (masculine) model of successful performance (based on economic growth and rationality), through which all entrepreneurial leaders should be judged (Dean & Ford, 2017). Despite these claims, there are limited insights into the complex and multiple ways individuals actually lead enterprises, across a range of locations and business types.

Such assumptions remain, despite turns within the broader management literature towards the recognition of gender within entrepreneurial leadership (cf. Hmieleski & Sheppard, 2019). Suggesting, however, that literature covering the broad business management spectrum is sufficient to understanding entrepreneurial leadership overlooks the unique challenges associated

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with certain industries (Fu et al., 2019). We argue that entrepreneurial leadership is particular within tourism because the majority of businesses are micro, small to medium size enterprises (MSMEs), and there is an overwhelming lack of institutional processes that tourism entrepreneurs can draw on for assistance (Benson & Blackman, 2011). Paradoxically, tourism is a key employment and revenue generator for many low- and middle-income countries and there is a constant search for novel ways of increasing community participation in tourism activities, ensuring that a greater share of benefits reaches the most marginalised communities (Ngoasong & Kimbu, 2016). And yet, though there is much focus on entrepreneurship within tourism policy and scholarship, very limited attention has been given to leadership, despite the extant business literature increasingly recognising its significance when attempting to understand entrepreneurial performance. We ergo concur with claims by Fu et al. (2019) and (Zhang, Kimbu, Lin, & Ngoasong, 2020) that tourism serves as an exceptional case when examining the influence of gender on both entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial leadership and call for a research agenda that seeks to examine the heterogeneous ways through which gender informs leadership performance.

Consequently, the study aims to explore the meaning entrepreneurial leaders ascribe to gender, including the multiple ways gender informs accounts of entrepreneurial leadership and influences entrepreneurial leadership performance within the specific tourism contexts of Ghana and Nigeria. We take a feminist poststructuralist perspective, that highlights the fluidity and multiplicity of entrepreneurial leadership – questioning the assumptions regarding what it means to lead within entrepreneurship in non-western contexts. Much of Africa including Ghana and Nigeria has strong gendered socio-cultural norms that define and assign leadership as a feature of masculine identity (Anambane & Adom, 2018), a prejudice that has been found to make women doubt their own leadership capabilities (Ngoasong & Kimbu, 2019). This gendered conception has been used to gauge women's constructed entrepreneurial leadership, often resulting in unfounded assumptions that women entrepreneurial leadership is less successful (Anambane & Adom, 2018; Ngoasong & Kimbu, 2019; Nwoye, 2007).

The next section reviews the relevant literature and presents the theoretical framework for contextualising the role of gender in entrepreneurial leadership in tourism. This is followed by a description of the study context and method, findings and discussion respectively. Finally, conclusions and future research opportunities are presented.

## Literature review

### *Locating gender, entrepreneurship and leadership*

Even though the relationships between entrepreneurship and leadership have long been recognised, entrepreneurial leadership research lacks clarity (Leitch & Volery, 2017). In making sense of the role of leadership within entrepreneurship, there has been a range of theorisations regarding how the two concepts relate. For some, there is nothing unique regarding leadership within an entrepreneurial context (Vecchio, 2003). For this reason, it is thought that insights from the broader leadership scholarship can be extended to that of the entrepreneurial domain. Others, however, claim that there is something distinct with how leadership is performed within entrepreneurial contexts – whereby certain behaviours and outlooks differ (Kuratko, 2007). Whilst shifts towards understanding entrepreneurial leadership have been productive, research from both of these perspectives has been found to be either lacking in analysis and explanatory capabilities, or has remained overly concerned in identifying perceived innate behavioural traits and characteristics associated with entrepreneurial leadership (Vecchio, 2003); which Harrison et al. (2015) claim has limited the ability for research to account for the complex, heterogeneous ways entrepreneurial leadership unfolds.

Recognising the limitations in these former approaches, Harrison et al. (2015) have rejected the absolutism of these dichotomous positions, suggesting that entrepreneurship and leadership are positioned at a nexus – ensuring that there are broader influences of leadership style within entrepreneurship, yet there is still something particular regarding entrepreneurial leadership because of the distinct context in which it is located.

A gendered bias has been found to persist, further influencing conceptualisation of entrepreneurial leadership (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2019). Such persistence of a gendered bias is a legacy of the masculine dominance that is particularly endemic within the entrepreneurship scholarship (Galloway et al., 2015). Within entrepreneurship research, women and entrepreneurship have often been depicted as conflicting (Kakabadse et al., 2018), and as a result, characteristics pertaining to successful entrepreneurship have tended to be aligned with masculine performance (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). “Women entrepreneurial leaders”, in consequence, came to be viewed as subordinate and positioned as ‘lacking’, within a dichotomous framework when compared to “omniscient (male) exemplars” (Harrison et al., 2015, p.706). This framework engendered a tendency within the literature whereby all individuals were compared to this established masculine norm (Ahl & Marlow, 2012).

Such narrow perceptions ignored many of the factors contributing to the flourishing of entrepreneurial activity, and variation in entrepreneurial leadership styles. It also stunted understandings regarding the ways individuals actually make sense of their entrepreneurial performances, beyond the masculine norm (Harrison et al., 2015; Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020a). The discerned ‘lack’ associated with women's entrepreneurial performance was found to have further resulted in a series of research and policy agendas, which sought to rectify this perceived failure of women (Ahl & Marlow, 2012).

However, greater engagement with feminist theory, and the recognition of entrepreneurial leadership as socially constructed, has enabled some scholars to reveal the essentialist and universalist claims endemic within these dominant perspectives (Kakabadse et al., 2018). What has resulted is the identification of the need to understand the various aspects of performance in more detail – and in part, a heightened focus on the intersections between entrepreneurship and leadership has resulted (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2019). Rather than a predetermined set of essentialised skills, entrepreneurial leadership, for the most part, has come to be recognised as a nuanced, cultural and geographically dependent performance, that individuals consistently negotiate.

Developing a research agenda for entrepreneurial leadership that recognises context, has been further claimed to allow attention to how uneven patterns of development and opportunity occur across place (Harrison et al., 2015). Paradoxically, however, what prevails within entrepreneurial leadership scholarship is an identified dominance of Anglo-Western approaches (Yousafzai et al., 2015), and an identified preference for research contexts located in the Global North (Figueroa-Domecq, de Jong, & Williams, 2020b). Although there has been growing interest in examining gender, leadership and entrepreneurship beyond the Global North (see, for example, *Tlaiss & Kauser's (2019)* for a critical feminist analysis of women entrepreneurial leaders in Lebanon and *Kakabadse et al.'s (2018)* gendered perspective of women entrepreneurial leaders in Kazakhstan). Particularly pertinent to the current paper is research that has examined gender and entrepreneurship in Ghana (*Adom & Anambane, 2019; Anambane & Adom, 2018; Buame et al., 2013*) and Nigeria (*Ademiluyi, 2019; Garba & Kraemer-Mbula, 2018; Halkias et al., 2011; Nwoye, 2007*).

These studies have highlighted the contextual specificities of gendered entrepreneurial leadership in Ghana and Nigeria. By way of example, women's entrepreneurship in Ghana is undervalued because it is perceived as an avenue for less educated women. At the same time, women who do undertake entrepreneurship often attempt to uphold strict familial practices and traditions – limiting their ability to grow and expand their enterprises (*Adom & Anambane, 2019*). These elements illustrate how cultural and political structures, rather than managerial inability, influence women's lower economic entrepreneurial performance (*Anambane & Adom, 2018*). Along similar lines, *Nwoye's (2007)* work in Nigeria has drawn attention to the constraints encountered by women entrepreneurial leaders, particularly in relation to access to resources, services, networks and cultural practices – all of which work to produce negative implications for the types and size of enterprises Nigerian women own/manage.

Recent feminist scholars working in this area have warned that despite shifts towards complexity, there appears to be a feminization of entrepreneurship and leadership, whereby alternative performances have become associated with 'women' – a tendency that serves to reemphasise gendered dichotomies, limits the potential to deconstruct the established masculine norm (*Patterson et al., 2012a*), and ignores the multiplicity of masculinity (*Dean & Ford, 2017*). This is partially a result of a continued positioning of women as a proxy for gender and the lack of research taking into consideration a broader range of gendered experiences beyond 'women' (*Kakabadse et al., 2018*).

#### *Tourism, entrepreneurial leadership and gender*

Entrepreneurship has long been associated with tourism; whilst the low barriers to entry and the predominance of small firms within tourism have been identified as particularly promising for women's entrepreneurship (*Li, 2008*). Such conceptions have, however, been cautioned by feminist tourism scholars who highlight that despite tourism's depiction as flexible, diverse and dynamic, it remains a highly gendered activity that reinforces traditional gendered performances through temporary and part-time employment in normatively gendered skills (*Martinez Caparros, 2018*).

Gender is increasingly recognised within tourism entrepreneurship literature, with tourism scholars making important contributions to the gendered perceptions associated with women entrepreneurs. And yet, critical inquiry of gender has remained disjointed and marginalised. This is, in part, a result of research predominantly remaining within certain macro regions (predominately the Global North), as well as with a prioritisation on the experiences of women, rather than recognition of gender as multiple, fluid and thus inclusive of a broad range of identities (*Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020a*). Leading to the recent call by *Figueroa-Domecq, de Jong, & Williams (2020b)*, within the pages of this journal, for the need for more research to take place in the Global South, to capture a broader range of entrepreneurial gendered experiences.

More specifically, focus on leadership has been slow to emerge within tourism entrepreneurship research, when compared to the broader entrepreneurship and leadership literature (*Benson & Blackman, 2011*). And when early tourism discussions were undertaken, they have aligned with the extant scholarship in their focus on the personality traits of individual entrepreneurs (*Fu et al., 2019*); with two predominant lines of inquiry taking place. The first, concerned with attempts to make sense of entrepreneurial performance broadly, whereby leadership forms one aspect of a range of characteristics determining an entrepreneur's management capacity; whilst the second, relates to research taking a more specific focus with the traits and behaviours of 'entrepreneurial leaders'. In consequence to the latter, there has been a swath of research concerned with the categorisation of leadership styles within tourism, including, for example, transformational (*Zapalska et al., 2015*), transactional (*Zapalska et al., 2015*), wisdom (*Elbaz & Haddoud, 2017*), servant (*Koyuncu et al., 2014*) and ethical (*Dhar, 2016*).

With tourism scholarship influenced by the broader literature, it is not unexpected that the limitations identified within the broader entrepreneurial leadership literature can likewise be mirrored within tourism scholarship. Specifically, fixation in seeking to identify the traits of the most 'successful' leadership styles has led to a focus on masculine performances (*Ahl & Marlow, 2012*), with just a handful of scholars taking concern with a gendered perspective (*Yousafzai et al., 2015; Zapalska et al., 2015*). When a gendered perspective has been taken, research has tended to utilise structuralist, quantitative approaches that do not always capture the complexity of experience within specific contexts. For instance, *Zapalska et al. (2015)* sought to determine the entrepreneurial characteristics that affect the success of female entrepreneurial leaders in Poland, through the utilisation of a survey tool that identified predetermined characteristics of success as evidenced within the literature. Whilst many key factors may have been represented in the survey, the research approach did not allow the space nor depth for participants to share their own valuation of success and how it might be understood within the cultural context of Poland. This example illustrates how entrepreneurs are consistently discussed outside of the context through which entrepreneurial performance unfolds; with results being utilised as typological generalisations in order to determine best practice and success determinants beyond study contexts.

We suggest that a more nuanced understanding of entrepreneurial leadership would emerge if tourism scholars were to move past ontologies that assume entrepreneurship to be properties of just the individual. To do so, we follow Galloway et al. (2015), in turning to a feminist post-structuralist approach.

### *Poststructural feminism and entrepreneurial leadership*

The study's poststructuralist feminist lens enables an understanding of how entrepreneurs construct their identities in relation to the choices they make in their journey to becoming an entrepreneurial leader; and takes a distinct interest in how gendered subjectivities are socially created (Patterson et al., 2012b). Concern with the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership styles and leader's background has held great interest within business management, indicative of long held engagement with upper echelons theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984); a theory that in some ways aligns with poststructural feminism, in its focus on the relationship between one's subjectivity and performance. Yet, in taking a particular interest in the constructions of such subjectivities, we felt that a poststructuralist approach was best suited to the current study.

Whilst there is no unifying understanding of poststructuralist thinking, in broad terms this approach implies focusing on the instability of meaning, whereby caution is given to accounts which seek to fix ideas (by constructing truths) within particular categories. Such an approach responds directly to structuralist thinking, a way of thought that hopes to reveal defining structures within society, language and the mind – and thus constructs essentialised ideas regarding what it is to be an entrepreneurial leader. Poststructuralists' consider that structuralist accounts that seek to fix typological categories (such as, 'women entrepreneurs', or the 'wise leader') lack insights into the complex, everyday ways that subjectivities are performed, and which cannot be captured through categorisation. Relatedly, structuralist approaches have been found to further render hierarchical divisions between fixed categories that place value with certain subjects, at the expense of others – perpetuating unequal power relations within society (Dean & Ford, 2017).

Within poststructuralist thinking, gender is understood to be socially constructed, produced through historic, social and cultural meanings (Patterson et al., 2012b). Through construction, socially produced distinctions have asserted hierarchical binaries between the categories - men and women, masculine and feminine. Whilst attention to gender as a variable has emerged in recent years within research located at the intersection of tourism, entrepreneurship and leadership, strict, traditional, binary stereotypes relating to women and men's leadership styles prevail (Harrison et al., 2015). Poststructuralist thinking is useful in making sense of and critiquing such essentialist, singular and fixed positioning of subjects by drawing attention to the shifting, complex and paradoxical ways we perform our identities, as well as attending to the multiple ways through which we come to make sense of our selves.

It is for this reason that geographical context is key within poststructuralist approaches, for the ways through which entrepreneurial leadership unfolds is "inextricably intertwined with context and with the situations in which they are performed, as well as the historic and political discourses and culturally shaped narrative conventions" (Kondo, 1990, p. 307), that are emergent within particular cultural contexts. From individuals' narratives provided through interviews, we can begin to make sense of the leadership experiences of entrepreneurs and how these experiences are subjectively experienced and contextually specific (Dean & Ford, 2017).

### **Research context and method**

The empirical contexts for this study were Ghana and Nigeria; emerging but under-researched tourism destinations considered to be male dominated by global standards with high World Economic Forum (WEF) Gender Gap Indices (GGI) 0.695 and 0.689 respectively (WEF, 2017). At the same time, however, in Ghana, it is estimated that about 46.4% of businesses are owned by women, operating primarily in agriculture, retailing and service provision (Mastercard, 2018). Whilst, in Nigeria, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2020) notes that 41% of Nigerian women are entrepreneurs owning/managing a range of MSMEs, making Nigeria the country with the highest number of women entrepreneurs in the world.

Within and between Ghana and Nigeria there is significant diversity. At the same time, however, there are shared values and norms within and between both countries, influencing gendered entrepreneurial performance. Perhaps the most significant difference between the two countries is population. In Ghana, the population is 30.42 million, relatively low compared to Nigeria's population of 201 million (World Bank, 2021), although both countries are similar in regard to their high urban population, 56.71% in Ghana and 51.16% in Nigeria (World Bank, 2021). In Ghana, tourism contributes 6.2% to national Gross Domestic Product, with 1.3 million international tourist visits in 2017 (Oxford Business Group, 2021). Tourism is a recognised priority sector, with particular focus given to tourism infrastructure and skills development. Employment in tourism is, however, highly variable – fluctuating from 2.26% in 2012 to 1.76% in 2018 (Statista, 2021). In Nigeria, tourism contributes 5.2% to Gross Domestic Product (Knoema, 2021), whilst international tourist arrivals reached 5.2 million in 2016 (WTO, 2019). This is significantly more than Ghana, and corresponds to a much higher number of individuals working within the tourism sector within Nigeria, (9.6% in 2016 (WTO, 2019)).

In both Ghana and Nigeria there are strong cultural values relating to the role of the family and cultural expectations that place pressure on women to remain focused on facilitating quality familial relationships. Women are further less likely to possess assets (such as property) because labour and inheritance in most contexts favour men, leading to challenges in accessing start-up capital or credit (Adom & Anambane, 2019; Stevenson & St-Onge, 2011). Ghanaian and Nigerian culture is further noted for their collectivism, whereby individuals are expected to adjust personal goals to align with those of the community; rendering challenges for those seeking to enact leadership performances (Anlesinya et al., 2019; Stevenson & St-Onge, 2011).

Ghana and Nigeria ergo present important contexts worth investigating, whereby opportunities appear to exist for all genders to undertake entrepreneurial leadership. Yet, within these two contexts, gender continues to play an important role in influencing everyday lived experiences.

In undertaking the method, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 entrepreneurs in Accra and Cape Coast, Ghana (2 women and 5 men) and 16 entrepreneurs in Lagos, Nigeria (10 women, 6 men). The entrepreneurs owned a range of tourism businesses of varied sizes (micro, small and medium) and operational age, including those engaged in the provision of accommodation services (home stay, budget, starred hotels), travel and tour operations, souvenir trade, transportation (taxi drivers and coach owners), food and beverage (chop bars – locally styled eateries and western styled restaurants) and travel consultancy services. (Interviewees' socio-demographics can be found in the Supplementary Material section - Table 1). Given that recruitment took place in urban centres, we thus here explore the narratives of *urban-based* women. As we will highlight, whilst significant differences influence variations in experience between the study locations – the urban context ensures that there are also a number of shared challenges and opportunities. It is for this reason that Ghana and Nigeria are presented together, with just small differences identified within the participants' narratives. At the same time, however, in this paper we seek to highlight individualised experiences and do not attempt to claim generalisability for women's entrepreneurial leadership performances in either Ghana or Nigeria.

Participants were recruited through purposive snowball sampling. In all instances, care was taken to select respondents from micro, small and medium enterprises, varied tourism sub-sectors and entrepreneurs that have a wide range of experiences. This was to ensure a wide range of entrepreneurial leadership experiences and thereby help to contextualise the performances and narratives. In recruiting participants, the first participant was identified through engagement with local business representatives, whilst the identification of the subsequent participants was based on referrals from previously interviewed participants. Entrepreneurs from the same sub-sector and scale of business were asked to identify other entrepreneurs within the same grade.

Semi-structured interviews offered multiplicity in narratives, challenging normative accounts of entrepreneurial leadership practice that consistently privileges a singular hegemonic masculine discourse, and thereby marginalises and devalues the experiences of those who do not align with such discourses (Dean & Ford, 2017). The interviews focused on the entrepreneurs' leadership styles, the role of gender in shaping/defining leadership and its influence on their entrepreneurial performance. The interviews were conducted between March and August 2019. Each interview lasted for about one-hour, and was digitally recorded, following the permission of the participant. All participants were given a pseudonym.

Each interview was transcribed and analysed utilising thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach composed of six phases of coding and theme development. Thematic analysis is not constrained by inbuilt theoretical assumptions, however, it is important to identify the relationship between the theoretical framework and data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis grounded in a poststructuralist feminist approach sought to identify the ways through which participants constructed and negotiated entrepreneurial leadership, and the ways gender was present, or not, within these constructions. Undertaking thematic analysis, through a poststructuralist framework enabled the simultaneous identification of major themes and multiple perspectives – an approach that acknowledged the differences and similarities *between* and *within* participants' constructions.

In practice, this required first reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to gain familiarity (Phase 1). Before undertaking a process of coding to identify themes – informed through acknowledgement of the transcripts and research aim, then reviewing themes to determine major themes and how the major themes aligned with participants' narratives (Phase 2). Phase three was crucial in making sense of the ways major themes related to participant's lived experience and subjectivities – and how this differed within each participant's transcript and across the participants' transcripts. Finally, identified major themes were reviewed and refined to ensure that they were representative of the data, and answered the research question (Phase 4), before themes were defined and named formally by the research team (Phase 5). Finally, the themes were presented through an analytic narrative (Phase 6), as displayed below.

All members of the research team were involved in the thematic analysis, in the hope that this would minimise idiosyncrasies in the interpretation of themes. We recognise, however, that researchers have influenced the research process. More specifically, the research team consisted of seven researchers, four women and three men. Three of the researchers reside within West Africa, two in Ghana and one in Nigeria. Two further members of the research team are originally from West Africa, however, now reside and work within the UK. The final two members of the research team are Spanish and Australian, although both were working within the UK at the time of the research. All members of the research team had previously undertaken research examining gender and entrepreneurship. Moreover, in undertaking the research, we were driven by identifying the gendered dimensions of entrepreneurial performance within Ghana and Nigeria, having received research funding to enact this research agenda. The team was thus sensitive to the role of gender within entrepreneurial leadership during the analysis; whilst the UK based academics were particularly alert to how their own Westernised constructions of gender influenced interpretation. Reflexive of our positionality, we have sought to enhance rigour in the research process through regular meetings amongst members of the research team, centring the interpretation of narratives from members of the research team currently residing within the research contexts and attempting to provide thick description of the research contexts; whilst the *semi* structured interview approach further ensured that participants were able to construct narratives and present their subjectivities in ways that was meaningful and reflective of their individualised lived experience. Research rigour was further enhanced through prolonged engagement and observation, enacted by the three members of the research team residing and working as tourism management academics in the fieldwork contexts.

Our findings, supported by selected illustrative quotes, are presented and discussed hereafter (with further supporting quotes available in Table 2, of the Supplementary Material section) through the three most significant themes: *Negotiating gender in entrepreneurial performances*, *Recontextualising gendered leadership styles* and *Gendered entrepreneurial performances*.

## Findings and discussion

### *Negotiating gender in entrepreneurial performance*

Asked whether gender influenced entrepreneurial performance and enterprise success, many were quick to note that gender did not strongly determine either, within the context of Ghana and Nigeria. Such responses align with narratives within the broader entrepreneurial leadership scholarship, whereby women have been found to prefer to draw on discourses of meritocracy and equal access, so as not to become interpreted as non-entrepreneurial or incapable (Patterson et al., 2012b). However, normative cultural expectations concerning what it means to be a female or male entrepreneur were drawn on by participants, highlighting how gender influenced their entrepreneurial and leadership journeys over time whilst detailing responses to the stereotypical expectations placed on them. Whilst the researchers did not equate gender with that of 'women' in framing the questions, in most cases interviewees predominantly aligned gender with issues influencing women's entrepreneurial experiences. For some, a requirement to negotiate gendered expectations occurred right from the outset of their entrepreneurial journey, serving as impetus in establishing their enterprise:

Before marrying, I was working at a guest house... but after marrying and having children, I realized that I had to make time for them. Working in the guesthouse was tedious. You went early in the morning and came back late. I was responsible for cooking and cleaning the guestrooms.... So I decided to quit and start my own business, enabling me to find time for my family and make money as well (Adjoa, Ghana, Female, Chop Bar [traditional eatery serving local dishes]).

Entrepreneurship affords opportunities to manage work and family, in ways not available through more formalized structures of employment. This was particularly important for women within heterosexual monogamous relationships with children, because there were cultural expectations around being a 'good' wife and mother, determined by the requirements in managing the home-space. Entrepreneurship presents a way to negotiate these norms and practices, with the outcomes of such negotiation indicated as a form of business success. Adjoa's performances extend the boundaries of what it means to be a wife and mother (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2019), questioning Westernised hegemonic economic discourses that identify entrepreneurship as about individualism (Dean & Ford, 2017; Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2016). Adjoa further assists in rethinking the role of work/life balance, whereby it is often positioned as a hindrance to normative measures of achievement, such as increasing economic revenue. These insights are not limited to Ghana, aspects of gendered entrepreneurship have been similarly identified in contexts across the Global North and South (cf. Dean & Ford, 2017; Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2016; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2019).

Perceptions of gendered norms in Ghana and Nigeria, however, were multiple and complex. Whilst for some the opportunities afforded through the ease in managing work/life balance served as the impetus for engaging in entrepreneurial endeavours, other female entrepreneurs did align with the more normative discourses in perceiving the demands placed on wives and mothers to negotiate work/life balance as a potential constrain to enterprise success:

If I were married with many children, I would have said they are a bit of a barrier to the business, but I am not, I am fully committed to the business (Adaku, Nigeria, Female, Food & Beverage).

Last year, I was in a course with a particular friend, who also wants to have her own organization. The course was not actually in the country, it was outside the country but she had to go. She lost her marriage to that because it became an issue of choice between this [the course] and the husband, she was like, what is this, that I will choose the course, I will go for my course. So that was it, that was how that marriage went (Buki, Nigeria, Female, Youth Development Initiative).

Gendered norms were particularly conspicuous within hospitality businesses. This was because there were hegemonic discourses determining what it means to be a woman attempting to maintain a heterosexual monogamous relationship, whilst employed within these spaces – rendering challenges for women seeking to uphold heteronormative living arrangements to also maintain a position of hotel 'employee':

You know people have their own mindsets about women working in hotels and here was I, a married woman working in the hotel (Adjoa, Ghana, Female, Chop Bar).

The association of hotels with prostitution has a long history in Africa (Fischer, 2018), presenting challenges in the potential of these spaces as a form of employment for women in heteronormative familial relationships. In Nigeria and Ghana entrepreneurship offers independence to either move away from such spaces, or to negotiate such spaces differently, in ways that aligned with gendered norms. Within the specific context of hotels and hospitality, entrepreneurship becomes a way for women to maintain work in the hospitality sector as attachment to the entrepreneurial leadership identity allows adherence to a desexualised work script and a distinction from subservient, dishonourable work (Fischer, 2018). This enables familial commitments to be simultaneously upheld, whilst also ensuring respectability and societal conformity (Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2016).

*Recontextualising gendered leadership styles*

Normative perceptions that aim to position men and women as innately different types of leaders were constantly contested through the ways entrepreneurs blurred masculine and feminine performances. Whilst at times participants' leadership performances did adhere to the gendered performances identified within the entrepreneurial leadership scholarship, that associates women with a transformational (Zapalska et al., 2015) or co-developing leadership style (Kakabadse et al., 2018), and men with an autocratic style (Cliff et al., 2005) - multiple and disparate approaches, however, were far more common and tended to result from the complex social contexts within the assemblage of a number of complex and contradictory elements that evolved over time. For Adjoa, Abena and Tunde, by way of example, perceived value in the uniqueness of their offering and fear of competition led to the perception that control over all aspects of their businesses, was required:

I often take all the major decisions. It is my business... I don't involve my employees when developing recipes because I don't want them to copy the unique things I do with my food that makes it distinct from others. If you open yourself up too much, before you realize people will be doing the same thing that you are doing (Adjoa, Ghana, Female, Chop Bar).

My leadership approach is top-down because ladies of today they don't want to learn. Young people do not want to learn (Abena, Ghana, Female, Souvenir Producer and Dealer).

I do most of the work because I want my work to be of good quality; so I only engage the other people to do petty work (Tunde, Nigeria, Male, Tour Company).

The specificities of service work in Nigeria and Ghana, such as low barriers to entry and increased popularity of certain services led Adjoa, Abena and Tunde to maintain tight control over their business and a perceived lack of trust towards employees; a form of autocratic leadership often regarded as a masculine style (Dean & Ford, 2017). These performances contrast with findings in the broader entrepreneurial leadership literature that suggests women are more likely to enact participatory and co-developing leadership styles because it is more common that their enterprises are smaller and more informal (Mersha & Sriram, 2019). Moreover, there is a sense within the entrepreneurial leadership literature that autocratic leadership styles are not as 'successful' as transformational leadership styles. Such assumptions not only construct artificially fixed and essentialised ideas regarding leadership performance and success, but they also overlook the complex ways through which entrepreneurial leaders themselves define success. As noted, for instance, in the first empirical section, Adjoa's Chop Bar facilitates the potential for her to perform as both a 'good' wife and mother, whilst upholding work. It is the ability to maintain these multiple subject positions that renders her enterprise successful. Suggesting that the Chop Bar might be more economically successful if it were to acquire a more transformational leadership style, overlooks Adjoa's achievement of work/life balance and devalues the complex meanings individuals hold regarding entrepreneurship.

For others, the reality of conducting one form of leadership style was not realistic, with the reality being far more nuanced and complex. Chisom, for example, recognised that 'there is always an organigram', however, the realities of working within tourism media ensured that it was essential that she was not the sole decision maker but through delegation, her staff were able to enact authority:

I taught my staff to be independent when negotiating with customers. They don't have to wait for me because they might not have that chance again... We have regular training meetings which empowers and enables them to take decisions even in my absence... They have to be equipped to act when needed (Chisom, Nigeria, Female, Tourism Media Business).

Recognition of the cultural context and business type was key, with some participants noting that despite desiring to enact a certain leadership performance, that was not necessarily the most suitable for the context in which they operated. Aisha, for example, was reflexive and aware of her leadership performances, having held other leadership positions in the United Kingdom. The contextual requirements of entrepreneurial leadership within Nigeria, thus noticeably contrasted with her prior experience:

My preference is to lead by delegation, allowing employees to do their work, but I found that this is impossible within hospitality in Nigeria. I've been pushed to become more authoritative and involved, because you can only be laissez-faire successfully if your employees are knowledgeable and skilled. Hospitality has about 75% of semi-skilled workers... so it's really difficult to delegate on a top level and consider it done. (Aisha, Nigeria, Female, Hotelier).

Adom, likewise, spoke of valuing more co-developing leadership styles. Yet not having had time to develop a team that he perceived to be as invested in the business as he was himself, chose to enact a more autocratic approach:

Currently I'm running the business as a one man show... I decide and implement all decisions... I only share my business ideas and aspirations with people I work with... I don't see them as owning the aspirations as I feel passionate about it... but I will review this as time goes on (Adom, Ghana, Male, Hospitality Management Company).

The flux and fluidity of gendered discourses and performances associated with entrepreneurial leadership is highlighted in Aisha and Adom's narratives, as is the notion that leadership is a social process, challenging constructions of leadership styles as stable, fixed and individualised typologies. Aisha's narrative, further, contradicts the 'feminisation of management' discourse

that has been emergent within the leadership literature in recent years (Harrison et al., 2015), whereby all leaders, no matter their gender, have been claimed to be taking on more feminine leadership styles (such as, two-way, network centric, participatory and collaborative performances) in response to broader changing cultural contexts (Cliff et al., 2005).

Whilst this may be true in certain contexts, this is perhaps an Anglo-centric perspective dependent on the dominance of Eurocentric and North American empirical investigations, which fail to recognise cultural specificities and requirements beyond the Global North (Leitch & Volery, 2017). The specificities of the tourism industry, for example, render perceptions from some participants that autocratic styles of leadership are more effective within certain contexts (such as in Ghana and Nigeria or during the start-up phase of a business). These insights highlight the importance to shift empirical focus beyond the Global North, to understand what it means to lead as an entrepreneur within different geographical locations, and from multiple intersectional subject positions. Interestingly though, whilst there were large variations in leadership styles between participants, we did find similar themes between the urban contexts of Ghana and Nigeria (for example, challenges with competition and 'unskilled' employees) – suggesting that the tourism context and construction of the tourism work force in these locations has led to similar negotiations on behalf of entrepreneurial leaders.

### *Gendered entrepreneurial performances*

*Leadership:* Whilst the entrepreneurs consistently contested normative gendered leadership expectations, this is not to say that gendered norms and practices did not extend to, nor influence, entrepreneurial performance. Conversely, dimensions pivotal to entrepreneurial leadership performance were strongly determined by gendered expectations. The requirements of networking (often premised as an essential component of entrepreneurial leadership) (Huang & Aaltio, 2014), such as the need to be assertive and the ability to build fluid social relations with others, presented challenges for women:

In Ghana, our culture does not help us.... if a woman is trying to network, we [men] perceive her as trying to get attention. Men too want to be the ones who should make the move not the women (Kofi, Ghana, Male, Hospitality Management).

In Nigeria, I have to be very careful, because they'll say, "oh! I saw her having dinner here with this person... This makes it very difficult because my male friends have drinks at the club, with for example Aliko Dangote [Male Nigerian billionaire entrepreneur], they're on his yacht, they're on his plane, they even sleep in his house, but I can't. So, networking's easier for men here... these are some of the things that can hamper me (Aisha, Nigeria, Female, Hotelier).

Importantly, however, some participants were quick to highlight that whilst they were aware of such constructions, they were invested in contesting them through their leadership performance:

If it was a man that was giving the instruction, they would respect him more, but for me power is about authority... I am not afraid..., they have to respect me because I have the full authority to manage the hotel and make all important decisions e.g. finance, hiring, firing. If I start to think they won't respect me because I'm a lady without a Margaret Thatcher personality, it changes me and it shouldn't..., I'm very much the opposite, I'm just wholly and entirely myself (Aisha, Nigeria, Female, Hotelier).

Aisha's assertiveness is somewhat masculine, yet it is important that her leadership performance is read by others as feminine. This challenges the gendered power structure through reflective negotiation of both feminine and masculine performances, thereby reconceptualising what it means to be an entrepreneurial leader.

*Trust:* Gendered expectations went both ways, at times inhibiting the potential for male entrepreneurs to effectively perform as leaders. Trust, for example, was often perceived as a trait attached to feminine performances because of the gendered expectations associated with women's perceived prioritisation of care and familial responsibilities over that of economic income; even within the context of entrepreneurship:

When you entrust a business to a woman, she will work and have her family's wellbeing at the back of her mind... but for the men, they will only think about their pockets and sometimes use the money on other women (Adjoa, Ghana, Female, Chop Bar).

If someone sees a man, they will say "this guy is fraudulent, who knows where he is coming from, who knows the angle he is coming from?" (Ezinne, Nigeria, Female, Event Management and Catering).

Whilst the women entrepreneurial leaders were at times ambivalent to the gendering of entrepreneurial performance, they did embrace the perceived advantages and power afforded from the construction of 'trust' as feminine:

I think women are trusted more in this environment. When I was raising funds for my social enterprise, a million [US]dollars, I talked about how I wanted to make a difference through my project involving underprivileged marginalised children... I think an investor looking at me and hearing my story is kind of more moved than a guy saying it... Most women generally have that motherly appeal, that caring nature, that look and feel. I think it's something that we can definitely play to our strengths (Aisha, Nigeria, Female, Hotelier).

Both men and women perceived the association of trust with women to have several advantages central to entrepreneurial success, leading some male leaders to highlight the importance in having female employees:

I like having women in my team because it brings about trust...they make the team balanced; so, I will always want to have women on it (Adom, Ghana, Male, Hospitality Management Company).

Trust is often discussed within the extant entrepreneurial leadership literature, with higher levels of trust thought to result in higher levels of business performance (Miao et al., 2019). Trust is mostly understood as either an innate individualised trait or something attached to the institution. Both approaches have a tendency to conceptualise trust as a concept that can be 'generated' or 'engendered' between two parties, given certain preconditions (Kroeger, 2011, p.744). Trust thus is generally discussed outside of its cultural construction and is not normally recognised as being gendered. The Ghanaian and Nigerian contexts enables us to start questioning hegemonic constructions regarding what it means to be a successful entrepreneurial leader. Utilising feminine performances to gain trust is, paradoxically, viewed as a highly valuable, commodified performance used by entrepreneurs of all genders to develop and grow their business (Patterson et al., 2012b). The construction of trust as feminine thus allows women entrepreneurial leaders to navigate external funding in certain contexts with greater ease and leads male leaders to actively seek out women to be involved in the management of their enterprises.

Age: Age was also crucial here – intersecting with gender, leadership and entrepreneurship, to influence the ways both men and women were perceived as 'leaders'. Age is culturally constructed and determined. Within Ghana and Nigeria, respecting those who are older is central, whilst social discourse places pressure on individuals to conform to the normative practices associated with their 'age'. An older age, within Ghana and Nigeria, is aligned with wisdom, respect and maturity; attributes that cannot be obtained through other means (Forson et al., 2017). Undertaking a leadership performance by those perceived to be 'younger' was thus, at times, met with resistance:

I started this job when I was very young, so I had to join two others who were older in order to get some credibility before hotel owners. The eldest person on my team was about fifty... Others may try to bully you because of your age or because you do not have grey hair. Sometimes they comment that you have given the hotel to a small boy to manage... this could create conflicts between you and the property owners (Anto, Ghana, Male, Hospitality Management).

The main challenge has been people not believing in you, people looking down at you and some people want big names. They want a known name and if you don't have a name, you will struggle in the industry. I overcame this challenge through hardwork and referrals, you just have to be good at what you are doing. Merging with other women that are a bit higher [established/experienced] than us has really helped us a lot (Ola, Female, Nigeria, Event Management and Catering).

In Nigeria, I've struggled in terms of [age] discrimination... people stereotype even more when you're young. They don't necessarily mind if it's a lady or a man, but they expect an older person. So as CEO, when I come in, I'm 35, but I probably look 23, these people see a young woman slim lady coming up to them and they are thinking, so where is the CEO? And I'm like, hi, I'm the CEO, then you see the look on their faces..., there's a lot of focus on gender discrimination but a lot of people still don't want to promote younger people into positions of power (Aisha, Nigeria, Female, Hotelier).

The younger entrepreneur interviewees utilise their agency to respond to age discrimination in very different ways. For Aisha, age intersects with gender, to produce the identity of the 'slim woman', exacerbating discrimination. And yet, despite experiencing both age and gender discrimination, Aisha persists in her enactment of the 'entrepreneurial leader', reconfiguring the power that comes with that position to contest cultural norms determining who can perform as an entrepreneurial leader. This is perhaps possible for Aisha because she has already acquired the power that comes through obtaining a leadership position within the hospitality sector in the UK, and thus possesses the social and cultural capital required to enact this performance successfully. Anto and Ola, by contrast, seek out 'older' or more experienced business partners, that allow an association with the wisdom and maturity required to be taken seriously as an entrepreneurial leader in Ghana and Nigeria. Key to Aisha, Anto and Ola's leadership is their ability to draw on networks and experience to navigate the cultural norms associated with age.

These experiences make important contributions to our understanding of entrepreneurial leadership because considerations of age, within the entrepreneurship and leadership literature, have tended to prioritise the experiences of 'older' entrepreneurs (Stirzaker et al., 2019). This is not unexpected, especially when considering the aging workforce in many Western nations. And yet, this has meant that less attention has been given to 'younger' individuals and in consequence, there is little empirical evidence regarding how young people navigate requirements for entrepreneurial leadership skills (McGowen, Cooper, Durkin & O'Kane, 2015).

More specifically, these insights are important within the context of Ghana and Nigeria because concerns have been rising over the socio-economic situation of young people, who make up more than 50% of the population in the study countries (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020), with large sections of young people becoming 'marginalised' through unemployment and/or underemployment, inhibiting access to the status of 'adulthood'. This is particularly evident in Nigeria, where it is estimated that there are 150 million youths (individuals aged 15–35 years), 37% of which are unemployed (National Bureau of Statistics from Nigeria, 2020). Whilst in Ghana, 16.9% of youth are unemployed (Ghana Statistical Service, 2016). Responding to this challenge, both

the Ghanaian and Nigerian governments have turned to youth entrepreneurship activities, in the hope of generating employment for younger demographics (United Nations, 2019; Youth Employment Agency, 2020). These activities primarily focus on the development of skills of potential entrepreneurs, with the aim that entrepreneurship will become a livelihood strategy for young people. Yet these activities have not tended to identify or account for the broader cultural perceptions that discriminate against age, which brings into question the very possibility of entrepreneurship as a strategy for young people's social-economic marginalization. Moreover, within Nigeria, youth entrepreneurship has tended to occur within the informal economy – meaning that those who do find work, continue to experience underemployment challenges especially in relation to job (dis)satisfaction, reliable and sufficient income (Awogbenle & Iwuamadi, 2010).

## Conclusion

This study explored entrepreneurial leadership, by introducing the concept of 'leadership' into discussions on tourism entrepreneurship; suggesting that there are important dimensions to the leadership performances of entrepreneurs, yet to be considered within the context of tourism. We further proposed that extending current discussions within tourism entrepreneurship to engage more meaningfully with gender, assists in deconstructing homogenous, fixed conceptualisation of entrepreneurial leadership. Finally, we drew on a feminist poststructuralist approach that challenged normative accounts of entrepreneurial leadership practices, by attending to the everyday and multiple ways through which entrepreneurs negotiated leadership performance. In doing so, we brought attention to the ways both women and men negotiate gender.

We do recognise, however, that in focusing on the experiences of only 'men' and 'women' we fail to trouble hegemonic constructions of gender as dualistic. Moreover, whilst providing insights into the contexts of Nigeria and Ghana, we acknowledge that there will be many gendered entrepreneurial leadership experiences within these two locations not captured within our accounts. The narratives presented here are also limited in their focus on the experiences of those located in the urban centres of Accra, Cape Coast and Lagos. Locations that are different in many ways, and yet arguably have strong similarities in relation to their tourism entrepreneurial environment. Moving beyond the urban context, to explore entrepreneurial leadership experiences within either country would arguably present much more complexity and variation. Nevertheless, in taking these approaches together, the paper makes three important contributions.

First, attending to the gendered aspects of entrepreneurial leadership, and how performances unfold in complex ways, brings to question the fixed typologies often drawn on to explain entrepreneurship and leadership. Whilst fixed categories, such as the transformational or autocratic leader, are helpful in making sense of the broad ways entrepreneurial leadership might be enacted, they fail to account for everyday realities. Here we have recognised the complex ways the entrepreneurs chose to negotiate leadership, alongside cultural expectations and the enterprise context, questioning static typologies that categorise entrepreneurs as certain types of leaders; and, highlighting how, at times everyday entrepreneurial leadership performance pushed the perceived boundaries of what can be achieved within the cultural contexts of Ghana and Nigeria.

In questioning static conceptions, we further identified how trust – counter to Western conceptualisations – is a fluid and gendered concept within both Ghana and Nigeria and is essential to entrepreneurial success. We argue that more investigation is required to understand the complexities of key entrepreneurial concepts, such as trust, to bring to question narrow Westernised understandings that configure entrepreneurial performance in specific ways.

Second, we query narrow conceptualisations of entrepreneurial leadership success emergent in the Global North, that prioritises economic revenue. Attending to the ways entrepreneurial leaders themselves identified success – through measures such as, achieving work/life balance, highlighted how success works differently across context; bringing to question taken for granted assumptions around the fixed meaning of 'success'. Without questioning the multiple ways entrepreneurial success might be defined, we will continue to reinstate Westernised, economic constructions that consistently devalue entrepreneurial leadership performances that do not align with hegemonic expectations. And in consequence, governance and policy will continue in its failure to recognise and support values that exceed well beyond an enterprise's size and income.

Moreover, there is potential for further inquiry into the ways gender and trust intersect within the context of investments, especially in the light of effects of the current COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry. Current literature suggests that men are more successful in acquiring external funding, when compared to women. It may be that such universally, gendered assumptions do not hold, under certain contexts, whereby trust is both feminized and recognised as favorable for such entrepreneurial activities.

Third, and further to the consequent point, much policy within Ghana and Nigeria, and more broadly, is prefaced on the potentials of entrepreneurship. With policy focus often remaining with the individual entrepreneurs, identifying ways they might obtain skills, training and knowledge so as to successfully enact entrepreneurial leadership performances. And yet, paradoxically, we have identified cultural norms relating to age and gender that inform who can be perceived as an entrepreneurial leader. Such insights underscore the need for policy and research to also consider the ways through which normative expectations might be identified and deconstructed within specific place-based contexts, so as to broaden cultural expectations concerning who can enact entrepreneurial leadership, and what entrepreneurial leadership performances might look like.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Acknowledgements

We thank the UK Research and Innovation who through the QR-Global Challenges Research Fund provided funding for this research. Our gratitude also goes to the tourism entrepreneurs in Ghana and Nigeria who participated in the interviews.

## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2021.103176>.

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**Anna de Jong.** Inequality in tourism, event planning and development.

**Issahaku Adam.** Accessibility, ICT applications, and gender representations in tourism.

**Manuel A. Ribeiro.** Political economy, trust, and women entrepreneurship in tourism

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**Cristina Figueroa Domecq.** Gender and entrepreneurship management in tourism.