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Women entrepreneurship and vulnerability in Baja California (Mexico)

Entrepreneurship, a form of social organization within the field of small and medium-sized enterprises, has been considered an appropriate strategy for several Latin American countries to mitigate structural economic problems related to unemployment, labour poverty, feminization of poverty and labour exploitation.

Baja California is located in northern Mexico and is highly influenced by United States' (US) dynamics. The Tijuana-San Diego binational region (on the Pacific coast) has been described as a zone with strong contrasts, while Mexicali-Calexico has been a border space where multiple forms of social interaction are also generated. In both cases, the border dynamics impinge on women's businesses in several ways, such as attracting Californian clientele, offering a wider range of products, but also by developing agricultural areas (in Mexicali Valley) that provide forms of employment for residents of Mexicali and cheap labour for US farmers.

Women's entrepreneurship is also a core strategy to empower women, usually in masculinised spaces. For example, the rural areas in Mexicali have been a space where women have had a strong role as "ejidatarias", women with ownership rights of an individual parcel of an area or communal land, and more recently as entrepreneurs of small and medium-sized businesses. In Tijuana, local en-

trepreneurs have also carved out space in businesses traditionally assigned to men.

Baja California is also a space characterised by migration and the character of this space has implications for the activities carried on by migrant women. The possibility to become an entrepreneur became a strategy in contrast to male migration in Baja California; in the case of migrant women, this strategy is valued as a survival alternative for those who can´t emigrate to the US. Tijuana and Mexicali are recipient border cities of migrants who cannot reach the US. Generally speaking, migrants use entrepreneurial activities, both for survival and to improve strategies in these border zones.

In this newsletter, we explore the main aspects of vulnerability faced by women entrepreneurs from Tijuana and Mexicali in order to apprehend vulnerability in its different facets and the impacts caused by the Covid-19 pandemic; as well as their responses to risk and resiliency in facing those vulnerabilities.

Economic Vulnerability

The coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) has substantially affected women's busi-nesses in Latin America. Several international reports have emphasised how the pandemic is opening new fronts and increasing structural inequalities that increase women's vulnerability. For example, it has been pointed out that women's entrepreneurship is highly concentrated in micro and small businesses, which experience more financial constraints and are overrepresented in informal employment, making them particularly at risk. In addition, the restrictions and closures caused by the pandemic have reinforced the domestic and care work traditionally assigned to women.

In the case of Central American and Caribbean migrant women who have arrived at these border spaces, the available forms of entrepreneurship are closely related to traditional roles. Compared to their male counterparts, these migrants and women entrepreneurs experience larger economic instability and are trapped in a cycle of informality that also promotes a lack of financial stability.

Entrepreneurs also face an economic vulnerability regarding their access to financial support. Some women interviewed have pointed out the prevalence

La dueña del restaurante.

Volviendo del banco.

of gender stereotypes and the enormous cost of bank credit. Public loan programs are also difficult to access, especially in Mexicali rural areas where women face a lack of assets to be inherited mainly from male siblings. It is also not unusual that women face gender stereotypes in work environments masculinised rural and urban work that highly circumscribe women to the domestic sphere; this is a bigger limitation to all women entrepreneurs but especially to those engaged in masculinised activities such as spare part stores or as a "cervecera" (craft brewer).

These financial limitations have several effects on women´s businesses, particularly because they generally start from scratch by using personal savings or informal loans from friends or family and might also be limiting the kind and size of ventures they can pursue. Economic limitations interact with other political and legal issues to boost the vulnerability experienced.

Political Vulnerability

We consider that this type of vulnerability is especially relevant to migrant women who have to face the absence of public policies regarding their social inclusion.

Some researchers have highlighted a disconnect between the institutions that directly and indirectly relate to migrant entrepreneurship, such as Comisión Nacional de Ayuda a Refugiados, Instituto Nacional de Migración, Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, Servicio de Administración Tributaria, among others. One consequence of this disconnect generates legal vacuums. Another is the lack of assistance mechanisms or even protection from human rights abuses that increase women's vulnerability. For example, migrant entrepreneurs complain about the bureaucratic processes to obtain legal papers and the impact of that situation on their entrepreneurial efforts.

Also related to this political vulnerability is the lack of appropriate mechanisms to access training processes. Both migrant and Mexican entrepreneurs are affected by this, but the migrants also experience language and cultural gaps. A lack of operational regulations about support to entrepreneurship and wide dissemination of it interact with other socio-cultural dimensions to add one more turn of the screw of vulnerability.

Legal Vulnerability

Mexican and migrant women also experience impediments and gaps in the legal system while becoming entrepreneurs. In the case of the Mexicans, who are supposedly more familiarised with procedures and paperwork, to start a venture is, in their own words, "obstacle and more obstacle". Sometimes they have to look for advice to be sure that their business will operate in the legal framework. In the case of migrant entrepreneurs, the process is still more complicated, due to the aforementioned cultural differences.

This legal vulnerability interacts with generational differences. For example, senior women used to have less education and training levels compared to young entrepreneurs who hold a university degree. As a result, senior women entrepreneurs are concentrated in informal ventures which limits their incomes and access to other social benefits, as well as on traditional activities and their businesses are less innovative and competitive.

Regarding migrant entrepreneurship, they face a lack of knowledge of the legal framework and the interaction of all other forms of vulnerability. For example, professional migrant women comment on the impediments and immense amount of bureaucratic procedures that are required of them to be able to generate forms of entrepreneurship. They experience a vicious cycle with the legalisation of their academic degrees, which limits their ability to obtain financial support and bank loans to promote their entrepreneurial activities.

Somehow, this situation is also experienced by Mexican Indigenous women who are unfamiliar with procedures, and like Haitian women may not speak Spanish fluently. For example, one of our interviewees told us about meeting an indigenous Mexican woman who was not able to communicate with public servants and about the lack of empathy shown by them.

Both cases exemplify the way vulnerabilities experienced by women entrepreneurs intersect among them and with other forms of discrimination beyond gender (such as age, educational level, place of origin, language, access to the media).

La més fuerte.

Socio-cultural Vulnerability

Finally, yet importantly, socio-cultural vulnerability seems to be the most painful form of vulnerability. We have discussed that prior forms of vulnerability are anchored in structural processes that slow down their participation as active social subjects; however, at the same time, the vulnerabilities discussed have a common origin: a traditionally patriarchal culture that places several restrictions on women entrepreneurs.

Come y trabaja.

Being mainly considered as care providers, women are still primarily responsible for care work in Mexico and other Latin American societies, and their participation as entrepreneurs generates double burdens and the need to adapt working hours to care workloads.

Women entrepreneurs also experience gender stereotypes. Our interviewees have experienced constant questioning about their ability to run a business. Sometimes women's businesses enter masculinised environments and they are considered culprits and experienced delegitimization by both guilds and their partners. Some women from the Mexicali Valley, who have started their businesses in agricultural or spare parts, reported being constantly examined and being seen as opportunistic and with a lack of character and ability to succeed. For example, those women involved in the agricultural sector have to interact with spaces "of men and for men" (such as Asambleas Ejidales, Ejido Assemblies), a situation that has generated significant conflicts in those women who try to undertake work in this type of guild, facing direct insults and constant discrediting.

In a similar way, women entrepreneurs in the field of spare parts have to demonstrate impeccable skills as businesswomen and entrepreneurs, dealing with stereotypes, negative comments, and distrust on the part of their male peers. This constant questioning has also been experienced by young women from Tijuana, especially by those who have reached the Californian market.

Women interviewed have reported having suffered sexual violence in their interaction with clientele, partners or suppliers. Some migrant entrepreneurs also pointed out the exoticization, and hypersexualization; a situation that in their cases interacts with the social discrediting of their academic degrees or their skills as entrepreneurs. The general understanding is that the foreigner is always cheap labour, which comes to a large extent from how the Mexican migrant population is treated in the United States, an attitude that has also permeated the Baja California border culture.

Facing vulnerabilities

Women entrepreneurs try to overcome all different forms of vulnerability discussed.

To negotiate them, women follow diverse strategies. Some common strategies are support networks to confront restrictions as caregivers but also as entrepreneurs. This networking has been reported by the literature as elemental, and even if some interviewees have pointed out some lack of support from other women, most of them recognise the relevance of having the support of other women to negotiate the dynamics that generate vulnerabilities.

Entrepreneurs from the Mexicali Valley rely on this support network for child and family care and remunerate other women for performing those activities.

Líder poderosa.

Some entrepreneurs from Tijuana are starting to demand that their partners participate more actively in care activities, and by doing so they might be also promoting less macho masculinities.

However, as a consequence of traditional societies, more women are seeking professional therapeutic help to deal with the psychological and emotional burdens of being a "mamá" and an "emprendedora". We consider this as a relevant resilient strategy to face the complex subjectivities experienced by women who confront constant criticism.

Entrepreneurs also promote sororal actions to support other women not only in their businesses but also by caring for their personal opportunities (some entrepreneurs promote younger entrepreneurs or training and educational opportunities). Those who have become "coin" entrepreneurs also create new role models for women, and promote social impacts by "earning a place in the community".

In consideration of migrant entrepreneurs, it is possible to identify more complex strategies due to their experience of political and legal vulnerability. Regard-

Belleza financiera.

less of this situation, they have also been able to establish support networks although they are tipically circumscribed to their own migrant community; for example, Haitian women have created a community encapsulated in their culture that has been able to impact both Tijuana and Mexicali´s urban dynamics.

Concluding remarks

To conclude we highlight the need to consider several characteristics that intersect women entrepreneurs and their multiple impacts to generate and/or promote vul-

Meetings sin bra.

nerabilities. By doing so, we are able to grasp their specific systemic vulnerabilities, and other forms of vulnerability. Being a woman does still represent relevant handicaps in Mexico, and other sociodemographic characteristics are interwoven with their entrepreneurial status in northern border Mexican cities.

But intersectionality also interacts with diverse forms of vulnerability. For example, economic, political, and legal vulnerabilities are highly interrelated because one generates the other in both migrant and local women who start and try to carry out forms of entrepreneurship. However, we recognised that in the case of migrant women, their vulnerability is greater than that of local women, as they experience discrimination and vulnerability based on a social distinctiveness related to their origins and being considered "foreigners".

In addition, sociocultural vulnerabilities appear to be heavily grounded in the collective social imaginaries and the subjectivities and social representations about entrepreneurship and women. Entrepreneurs negotiate these vulnerabilities through their own network of social relations and sometimes this increases their social capital; however, the price they pay is still high.

To avoid some pessimistic gaze, we have to recognise that feminism and social struggle have been necessary to gain improvements over the last decades. However, those advances do not eliminate discrimination and vulnerability. Therefore, Mexican women entrepreneurs experience discrimination in their everyday life; migrant women experience, in addition, "de jure" discrimination (discrimination by the law, as foreigners).

As a result, a deeper cultural change is needed to reduce the forms of vulnerabilities that women continue to face and, in particular, the local women and migrants who reside in the border area of Baja California.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Her recent publications include Mexican women's emotions to resist gender stereotypes in rural tourism work in *Tourism Geographies*; Emotional embodiment to face street harassment during the practice of adventure activities in Mexico in *Annals of Leisure Research* and Embodying Gender and Risk: Mountain Bike Tourism in Mexico in *Tourism and Gender-Based Violence.*
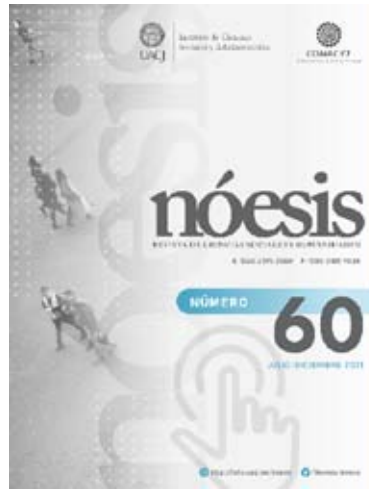
Hugo Gaggiotti

He is Professor at the University of the West of England, UK. He has a PhD in Anthropology and a PhD in Management. He was a foreigner at birth and has remained displaced all his life. The focus of his writing is on the intersections between rhetoric, rituals, liminality and the symbolic construction of the meaning of work in mobile transnational workers. He conducted his fieldwork for many years in the borderlands industrial regions of Pindamonhangaba (Brazil), Ciudad Juarez (Mexico), Almaty (Kazakhstan) and currently in the US-Mexican borderlands of Baja California (British Council-Newton Fund Grant-Conacyt) and in UK (British Academy-Leverhulme). His work has appeared in a range of interdisciplinary journals including Culture and Organization, International Journal of Management Reviews, Journal of Organizational Change Management, Journal of Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management, Leadership and Scripta Nova. His latest book is (2021, forthcoming) Organizational Ethnography: An Experiential and Practical Guide. London: Routledge (with Pandeli and Sutherland). His own passions are the uses of abductive reasoning (Peirce) to DIY improvisations and spontaneous cooking.

FURTHER READING

Cejas, M. I. (Coord.) (2020)
Feminismo, cultura y política: el contexto como acertijo
Mexico: UAM

Palacios Duarte, P. D. et al. (2021) Rendimientos económicos de las mujeres mexicanas jefas de familia, como asalariadas y empresarias
Nóesis, Revista de Ciencias Sociales, 30(60), 45–67.

This book is an invitation to think about context in research in a different way, based on the theoretical and methodological keys offered by feminist thought and cultural studies as sites of political intervention and theoretical imagination. It is also an expression of the model of feminist cultural critique that drives the authors: to defend fantasy as an articulation of the possible in the midst of a struggle for meanings and a way of redressing the dangers of the "single story".

The objective of this research was to compare the performance of the economic activities of Mexican women heads-of-household, to determine whether there are differences in the performance of the source of work, whether subordinate (salaried) or independent (entrepreneur), as well as what drives them to become entrepreneurs. The main findings demonstrate the existence of such differences. And, in relation to motivation, it was found that what mainly drives them is trying to balance childcare and the low income they receive as employees, as a consequence of the low level of education they have; however, their priority is not economic wealth.

FURTHER VIEWING

Archivo nacional de Chile, dinam, CN TV (Producers) (2015)
Relatos de mujer: Mujer Emprendedora
[Documentary]
Chile, 14 min

Relatos de mujer [Women's stories] is a documentary series that brings together diverse experiences about the lives of women committed to their socio-cultural environment, which translates into having assumed conditions of leadership and/or commitment to social promotion and cultural development activities despite the gender limitations that exist and have existed in our society.

ACNUR, ACAI (Executive producers) (2011)
Refugio: Un documental sobre mujeres emprendedoras
Costa Rica, 27 min

What does it mean to be a refugee? Las Águilas Emprendedoras, an association of refugee women in Costa Rica, answer this question through theatre, direct testimonies and interviews with refugees, ordinary citizens and representatives of institutions.

FURTHER VIEWING

Reijnen, A. & Tobias, R. (Directors) (2020)
Junax Hilo por Hilo
[Documentary]
Mexico, 87 min

Coixet, I. (Director) (2017)
The bookshop
Spain, 115 min

Victoria is a young indigenous woman facing various problems to survive in a disadvantaged Mayan community in Chiapas, Mexico, where misogynistic beliefs are normalised. She defies stereotypes by leading an all-female collective that enables women to build economic resources around old traditions. (FILMAFFINITY).

In a small town in England in 1959, a young woman decides, against polite but implacable neighbourly opposition, to open the first bookshop ever in the area. (FILMAFFINITY).

AFIN NEWS

Special issue on reproductive governance

The 61st issue of Horizontes Antropológicos has recently been published, dedicated to the theme of reproductive governance, coordinated by Diana Marre, senior researcher at AFIN, together with Fernanda Rifiotis and Claudia Fonseca who, in turn, has just been appointed member of the Academia Brasileira de Ciências. Together they have coordinated this issue entitled "Reproductive Governance: An issue of great political relevance" with more than a dozen excellent authors whose works in Portuguese and Spanish make up this special issue, in which they analyse the complexity of contexts, as is the case in Latin America, characterised by socio-economic inequalities, and in which it becomes clear how reproduction, far from being a merely biological fact, is also a political issue and in which reproductive governance is presented as a tool to connect "intimate dynamics, national policies and global economic logics". The publication is open access through this link.

Exchange with the Netherlands

On November 25th, AFIN hosted a day of exchange of projects with students of the Master Social Policy for Development Studies of the International Institute of Social Studies (The Netherlands). Members of the AFIN and ISS students shared their research about childhood, youth, family, sexuality, and reproductive health.

Perinatal mental health

Together with colleagues from the United States, Lynne McIntyre, a doctoral student in the AFIN Center, has published an article entitled "Perinatal Mental Health Care in The United States: An Overview of Policies and Programs" in a special issue of *Health Affairs* dedicated to the current state of perinatal mental health in that country. The article, one of two to anchor the special issue, focuses on both recent advances in the field, as well as the challenges that remain in addressing these illnesses that include postpartum depression, perinatal obsessive-compulsive disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder. The authors demonstrated that, although positive change has happened in recent years, much remains to be done. Most pregnant and postpartum people in the U.S. are not screened for mental health concerns, despite the fact that these conditions are the most common complications of pregnancy. The article concludes with specific recommendations for improving identification and intervention, including working to reduce the stigma that surrounds these illnesses and increasing the number of professionals with specialized training in perinatal mental health. You can view the article via this link.

Free course
"Building solidarities - Feminist and anti-racist practices in Higher Education"

Assuming the role of the university as a key institution in the training of future professionals and citizenship, the Erasmus+ BRIDGES project publicly launches the course "Building solidarities - Feminist and anti-racist practices in Higher Education", designed and developed from Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodologies and in collaboration with academics and activists from HE and civil society organisations actively working for the defence of the rights and equality of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.
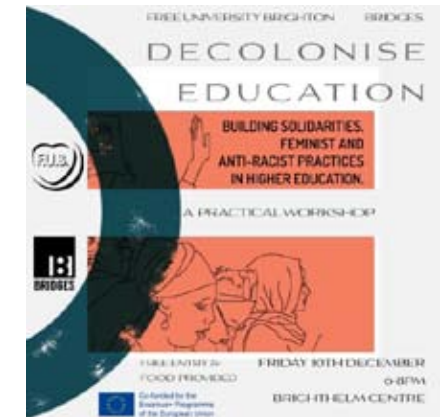
The purpose of the course is to bring into play and promote the use of feminist and anti-racist pedagogies to transform learning spaces in Higher Education Institutions. The BRIDGES course is conceived as a resource that crosses disciplinary boundaries and is applicable across different subject areas.

For this reason, it is aimed at professionals in higher education as well as in other educational, social and policy sectors, adult education and vocational education and training, and social intervention professionals working in awareness-raising and/or with groups experiencing discrimination.

The content of the course is divided into three blocks, each developed by one of the groups that make up the BRIDGES consortium (in Athens, Barcelona and Giessen), and a series of activities whose logic is transversal to these. With this structure, the course aims to offer useful diagnostic tools and concepts to identify structural racism in Higher Education Institutions (Block A); to delve into theoretical tools by asking precisely what we mean by theory, its possible effects and how it can be used for emancipatory purposes (Block B); and to provide a series of pedagogical tools that help to question the hierarchisation of knowledge that reinforces the primacy of academic knowledge over others, as well as to value and underline the importance of embodied knowledge (Block C).

The course can be consulted and completed completely online, through the project's Virtual Laboratory (https://buildingbridges.space/course), or downloaded and printed in the four languages of the project: English, Spanish, German and Greek. On 10 December, from 18h to 20h, the official public presentation took place in Brighton (UK), through a free and open access workshop that addressed the question of "how to decolonise education".

To register for the workshop, please click on the following link: https://freeuniversitybrighton.org/events/decolonise-education-workshop.

The southern cone states and the search for origins

On 5 November, Irene Salvo Agoglia moderated and presented the workshop "Fortaleciendo el acompañamiento de los Estados en los procesos de búsquedas de orígenes en el cono sur", in the framework of the Regional Meeting "La adopción dentro del sistema de protección integral de la niñez", organised by the French Embassy in Chile and the Regional Delegation of Cooperation for South America, together with the French Central Authority called Misión Adopción Internacional, RELAF, International Social Service, UNICEF Chile and the Alberto Hurtado University. This seminar recognised the progress made in the construction of protection systems and the persistent knots that affect the guarantee of the right to live in a family and community for hundreds of thousands of children and adolescents in the region. The meeting brought together a multiplicity of actors with different levels of responsibility in decision-making, in order to continue advancing in the processes of transformation and adaptation of policies and practices for the protection of rights, from a comprehensive and intersectoral perspective.

Obstetric violence on Flores Island

Last June 2020, AFIN member Alicia Paramita Rebuelta Cho defended her thesis entitled: Madres y matronas: Prácticas y políticas reproductivas en el distrito Sikka de la isla Flores, Indonesia. As a result of this work, she has just published an article entitled "Give her the Baby's Hat so She Can Bite it": Obstetrical Violence in Flores, Indonesia, in the journal *Moussons*.

This article discusses the changes that the medicalisation of childbirth is bringing about in local practices in the Sikka district, an ethnolinguistic group on this island, specifically since the ban on home births in 2009. However, despite this ban, many still occur at home and this is concerns to the biomedical sector. Health workers suspect that some women give birth at home for reasons they prefer not to reveal. This study exposes that, although these people express the desire to give birth in medical facilities hoping to benefit from a combination of biomedical and local treatments, their expectations are dashed by the different forms of obstetric violence that occur in delivery rooms: long exposure of the genitals, the imposition of the supine posture, the systematisation of episiotomies, painful sutures and the taboo of local practices. Thus, this article delves into the consequences and choices that local women make for their childbirth.