

**EMANCIPATORY ENTREPRENEURING WITHIN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY:
THE EMPOWERMENT EXPERIENCES OF DISPLACED HOME-WORKERS**

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies have introduced the concept of emancipatory entrepreneuring to describe how individuals or groups of individuals can bring about change through a process comprising three core elements: seeking autonomy, authoring, and making declarations. This study explores the emancipatory entrepreneuring experiences of displaced women in a developing country context characterized by socio-political turbulence and patriarchal cultural norms. Prohibited from mainstream markets, they develop home-based enterprises within the informal economy. The study reveals how these female entrepreneurs actively engage in emancipatory entrepreneuring, *seeking autonomy* through circumventing contractual prohibitions imposed by commissioning organizations and *authoring* by creating secret networks of pooled labour and peer support. However, they are constrained from *making declarations* by the need to maintain secrecy; networks are hidden not only from commissioning NGOs and government agencies, but also from husbands and families. The findings suggest that the ability to engage in emancipatory entrepreneuring is context dependent and gendered. Despite their inability to openly declare their actions, emancipatory entrepreneuring brings substantial positive effects to the women and their communities, building a sense of individual and collective identity and empowering participants socially and economically through collective action.

KEY WORDS

Emancipatory entrepreneuring, Informal economy, Networks, Gender, Jordan, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

DEBATING POINTS

1. To what extent is informality a feature of the SME/ entrepreneurship sector?
2. The view that business ownership brings ‘liberating’ qualities is well rehearsed in the research literature, but is the ‘entrepreneuring’ reported here really emancipatory?
3. The study reveals the existence of underground networks – to what extent are these specific to the population studied here or are they likely to be a (invisible) feature across developed and developing economies?

INTRODUCTION

The context of informal, home-based enterprises is distinctly different to the conditions that have informed much of the entrepreneurship discourse (Baker and Nelson, 2005; Alvarez and Barney, 2007). Within this context, entrepreneurial action has been viewed as a form of individual and community empowerment (Authors, 2010a). Notions of empowerment are central to Rindova, Barry and Ketchen's (2009:478) thesis which highlights the 'emancipatory aspects of entrepreneuring', or as Calás, Smircich and Bourne (2009:553) proposed, 'entrepreneuring as fundamentally a process of social change'. Emancipatory entrepreneuring consists of three core elements: seeking autonomy by 'breaking free from the authority of another' (Rindova et al, 2009: 480); authoring, described as 'inscribing and authorizing not only him/herself but also others in the exchange relationships required to pursue change' (p.483); and making declarations through 'unambiguous discursive and rhetorical acts regarding the actor's intentions to create change – as an important part of the change creation process' (p.485). Related to emancipatory entrepreneuring is the concept of collective identity (Portes and Haller, 2005), whereby displaced and marginalised individuals create and share meaning, interdependence, attachments, values, rules and entrepreneurial processes that help to overcome their stifling social exclusion and develop a sense of personal autonomy. In applying Rindova et al's (2009) theory of emancipatory entrepreneuring, we respond to their call for studying entrepreneurship within 'fluid institutional environments such as developing economies where entrepreneuring activities may help shift the boundaries set by legal structures and norms' (p.487).

Among the emerging critiques of the mainstream entrepreneurship discourse is a growing recognition of entrepreneurship as both a societal and economic phenomenon and the suggestion that entrepreneurship can be found across many sites and locations (Steyaert and

Katz, 2004; Welter, 2011). Developing this, Calás et al (2009: 553) ask ‘what would happen, theoretically and analytically, if the focus of the literature were reframed from entrepreneurship as an economic activity with possible social change outcomes to entrepreneurship as a social change activity with a variety of possible outcomes? What kind of outcomes might these be?’ This study addresses these questions by exploring the experiences of emancipatory entrepreneuring among displaced women and their collective resistance to patriarchal social norms and contractual restrictions.

The study draws upon the experiences of displaced Palestinian women engaged in home-based enterprises within the informal economy of Amman. Contracted by non-profit, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to produce traditional craft products, self-employment provides a means of increasing household income and preserving traditional skills. By focusing on women’s participation within the informal economy (Webb, Tihanyi, Ireland and Sirmon, 2009), the study demonstrates how entrepreneurial activities can help improve the lives of the deeply impoverished through a process of ‘emancipatory entrepreneuring’ (Rindova et al, 2009). However, far from being a story of unalloyed success, the study draws attention to the constraints faced by legally unprotected self-employed women. Despite purporting to help impoverished women, NGOs impose restrictive contracts which prohibit engagement with other clients or producers, yet successful production and enhanced returns can only be achieved through multiple contracts and collaboration with other producers.

Following this introduction, the paper examines the size and scale of the informal economy, and the role of women-led, home-based enterprises in the Middle East. This is followed by a detailed explanation of the methodological context and approach adopted in this longitudinal study. The subsequent analysis examines how the search for autonomy by displaced women

led to the creation of prohibited networks of pooled labour and mutual support enabling them to circumvent restrictive contracts. However, the severe social and economic consequences of discovery ensure that these activities are kept hidden from both contracting organizations and their own families. The study concludes by considering the impact of these actions on the women's lives and communities, the implications for the management practices of NGOs and for developing theories of emancipatory entrepreneuring.

ENREPRENEURSHIP IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

First defined by Hart (1973) who coined the term to distinguish between the formality of waged employment and the informality of self-employment, the informal economy is rife in developing countries and continues to grow rapidly (Charmes, 2002; ILO, 2002; Portes and Haller, 2005). Estimates of the contribution of informal sector income to total household income suggest it is considerable, accounting for 48% and 65% respectively of non-agricultural employment in North Africa and Asia (ILO, 2002); however, official statistics most likely underestimate the size and economic contribution of the sector (Portes and Haller, 2005). Distinctly different from illegal, unreported or unrecorded economies, the informal economy consists of economic actions that are excluded from both the protection and the costs of legal and administrative regulations covering "property relationships, commercial licensing, labor contracts, torts, financial credit, and social security systems" (Feige, 1990: 992). The informal economy is typified by unregulated and unrecorded work, unrecognized by local governments, and consisting of independent, very small scale units of self-employed producers employing mainly family labour (Castells and Portes, 1989). While the goods produced within the informal economy are often entirely licit, typically clothing and shoes, food or computer circuit boards (Portes and Haller, 2005), production arrangements bypass

official rules and state regulation. With little access to organized markets, formal credit institutions or training, informal economic activities tend to operate with low levels of capital, technology and skills. The financial rewards of the informal sector are precarious, while working conditions are often unhealthy, hazardous and lacking in basic sanitary facilities (ILO, 1991, 2002).

While it is tempting to consider the informal and formal sectors as wholly distinctive, in so far as they are governed by differing conditions and regulations of work, they are often interdependent, operating within but controlling different aspects of the same market. Studies examining relationships between the informal and formal sectors have concentrated on two aspects; backward linkages whereby the formal sector supplies raw materials or intermediate products to the informal sector and forward linkages whereby the informal sector supplies output to the formal sector (Mhone, 1996). Not only is the informal economy a source of economic efficiency, it is also often politically expedient. As Portes and Haller (2005: 419) report, one of the paradoxes of the informal economy is that its existence provides several positive outcomes for the state, “the very institution charged with its suppression.” The informal economy provides employment and income to a large population segment that have few alternative opportunities, while the goods and services produced by the informal economy lower the costs of consumption, production and distribution for formal firms (Portes and Haller, 2005). Recognition of the importance of the informal economy, particularly in developing economies, has underpinned calls for further research that focuses on “the poor as producers and entrepreneurs, rather than only as customers” (Hall, Matos, Sheehan and Silvestre, 2012: 788).

Estimates suggest that about 70% of the informal economy is made up of home-based enterprises (ILO, 2002), and a large proportion of these are owned and operated by women, often assisted by their children undertaking a range of predominantly manufacturing activities including making clothes, preparing food for sale, and traditional crafts (Snyder, 1995). India provides a startling example of the scale of female participation in the informal economy through their home-based enterprises. According to the Indian Commission on Self-employed Women (SEWA), the informal sector includes 108 million women, equivalent to 97% of all women workers in India alone (Bhatt, 2006; Mather, 2012). Studies from other parts of the world similarly point towards the high levels of female participation in informal, often home-based, enterprises. Reports indicate that in sub-Saharan Africa 84% of women operate within the informal economy compared to 63% of men (Meagher, 2010), while across the developing world, it is believed that more than 60% of self-employed women operate within localised, informal non-farm sectors (Chen, Vanek and Carr, 2004; Chant, 2008). Despite the scale of this activity, home-based enterprises tend to be invisible to the 'outside' world (Chen, Lund, Heintz et al, 2005; Mather 2012). In a series of studies conducted by the ILO in Latin America, reliable and precise data about the extent and characteristics of home based enterprises were unavailable, a situation replicated in many other regions of the world (Tomei, 2000; Chant 2008).

Home Based Enterprises in the Arab Middle East

The Middle East region hosts the highest number of displaced, refugee and asylum-seeker populations in the world (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2010). In Jordan, from a total population of six million, approximately 43% are of Palestinian origin, with major influxes of Palestinian refugees occurring after the 1948 and 1967 wars (Fisk, 2010). Of this large Palestinian minority, it is estimated that 1.95 million

hold full Jordanian citizenship and a further one million live legally in Jordan, but without citizenship rights and hence are formally classified as ‘displaced persons’ (UNRWA, 2010; Perez, 2011). The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2009:2) defines displaced persons as those ‘who have been unable to return to the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967’. Displaced Palestinians are acutely aware of the precarious legality of their situation, manifested in limited employment opportunities, social marginality and relative poverty (Chatty, 2010; Mowafi, 2011). While no specific incomes data are available for the displaced Palestinian population, between 15% and 30% of Jordanians live below the poverty line set at 500 Jordanian dinars (equivalent to US\$700 or UK£430) per household per month (Department of Statistics, 2011; USAID, 2011). However, displaced Palestinians reside in some of the most impoverished neighbourhoods, originally refugee camps, in the eastern suburbs of the capital city Amman and their average household income is considerably lower than for the Jordanian population as a whole. Given the legal restrictions on their employment, participation in informal enterprise constitutes one of the few available opportunities for remunerated work for displaced Palestinians (Muzi, Ahmed and Chamlou, 2008; Tabbaa, 2010).

The majority of home-based enterprises in the Arab Middle East are female-owned and operated, often assisted by other female family members or friends (Authors, 2007). While both middle-class Jordanians and displaced Palestinians engage in home-based enterprises, their motivations and experiences are rather different. Professionally qualified women often resort to home-based self-employment due to a combination of family demands, social pressures, and the practical difficulties associated with gender segregated employment practices within the region (Authors, 2007). Displaced Palestinian women in Jordan similarly resort to home-based production out of economic and social necessity. In their case,

employment opportunities beyond their immediate communities are prohibited by their political status, while patriarchal cultural norms within their communities require women to remain within the home (Authors, 2010b). Among this group, home-based enterprises are principally associated with low-productivity manual activities, engaging non-organized labour in situations of over-exploitation and poverty (Chen et al, 2005; Chamlou, 2008; Authors, 2010b).

In this context, therefore, the home has become a primarily female economic arena, where traditional skills are learnt within the feminized domain and passed down through generations from mothers to daughters. Traditional craft production undertaken within the home by displaced women was selected as the focus for this study as it is the sector targeted for poverty alleviation programmes by several Amman-based non-profit, non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Typically, these NGOs aim to address poverty by focusing on the production and sale of traditional crafts produced by displaced women within home-based enterprises. The objective is to enable the women to generate income and maintain their traditional heritage skills. Given the cultural norms and the gender segregated economy evident within the displaced population and across the wider Arab region, NGOs focusing on female poverty are usually women-led. NGOs subcontract work to displaced women, providing them with designs and necessary materials. A piece rate is paid for the finished items, which are sold in the NGOs' galleries and showrooms in central Amman.

While this type of development model has been criticised for sustaining dependency (Fernando, 2003; Meagher, 2010), one advantage is that it provides a channel for reaching an otherwise difficult to reach group of displaced and impoverished women. Indeed, this development model is typical of women-led NGOs operating with disadvantaged

communities of women throughout the developing world (Prahalad, 2005; Kantor, 2009). Similarly, while we acknowledge the analytic critiques assuming that traditional craft production, such as the embroidery work undertaken by our study participants, reproduces a gendered division of labour that limits women's development and empowerment (Snyder, 1995; Jena, 2007; Vallianatos and Raine, 2007), we argue that traditional craft production is often the only link between displaced women and their lost cultural heritage (Ramussen, 2005). Further, this type of craft-work has the potential to enhance social identities and can lead to a growing sense of empowerment and control over domestic and community resources (Authors, 2007). Interestingly, as we observe within this study, the same type of approach is now also being utilised by a number of female entrepreneurs seeking traditional crafts, such as embroidery, for their retail outlets in Amman.

Contractual Constraints within the Informal Economy

A pertinent feature of the contractual relationships between the NGOs and home-based embroiders observed in this study is the degree of constraint placed upon the producer with regard to the terms and conditions of production. Not only are home-based producers prohibited by the NGOs from either sharing or sub-contracting production with other embroiderers, they are also prohibited from undertaking embroidery work for other NGOs or private retailers. The traditional handicraft sector in Amman is highly feminized, saturated and intensely competitive. As embroidery designs are not protected by copyright laws and the copying of designs and products is common, there is a well-founded concern that designs will end up with competitor NGOs if embroiderers work together or if they undertake work for more than one contractor. The NGOs' insistence upon an exclusive relationship with individual producers is also a consequence of their investment in training and skills

development of embroiderers, and competition between the NGOs whose success is measured by number of beneficiaries they can claim to support. However, individualized production also brings significant managerial benefits to the NGOs, as producers are denied knowledge of potentially higher piece rates and additional benefits offered by competing NGOs, as well as the possibility of collective self-organization. Paradoxically, while the NGOs' mission is to empower home-based producers, their competitive operations, insistence on individualised contracts, and payment of piece-rates rather than hourly rates, reinforces the dependency experienced by their beneficiaries. While the informal economy is often defined by the absence of regulation, in this case the contractual requirements of NGOs illustrates that highly regulated contracted production exists within informal sectors, albeit without the protective mechanisms usually built into workplace regulatory systems. In a further paradox of informality (Portes and Haller, 2005), it is possible that the entry of private sector retailers into this arena may help change the established practices of NGOs. Of the four privately owned contractors interviewed in the course of this study, three chose not to impose the types of restrictive conditions regarding individualized production and exclusivity of relationships commonly demanded by NGOs, while the fourth imposed restrictive conditions but, unlike the NGOs, paid producers an hourly rather than piece rate.

Within this context, home-based women entrepreneurs are acutely aware of the suffocating contractual conditions that both accompany and constrain their attempts to generate income. While their entrepreneurial efforts are motivated by a deep-seated desire to escape impoverishment and improve their position in society (Ansari, Munir and Gregg, 2012; Bradley, McMullen, Artz and Simiyu, 2012), their only means of accomplishing this contains constraints that prevent them from achieving anything other than the most basic provision. Keen to escape the privations of their situation and caught between the twin authorities of

NGO contractual constraints and patriarchal social norms that prevent them from working and socialising outside of their home, their situation typifies the conditions in which emancipatory entrepreneuring may unfold.

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

Given its focus on displaced and impoverished women, this study adopts a feminist epistemology. An epistemological stance establishes not only what constitutes knowledge but who can be a 'knower' in terms of legitimising beliefs as knowledge (Harding, 1986). Focusing upon women and their life experiences from an interpretivist perspective avoids the inherent masculinity embedded in the generation and authorisation of knowledge, offers voice and visibility to women's subject position, and draws upon a feminist epistemology recognising five constituent and associated principles outlined by Wylie (2007) and Allen, Lloyd and Few (2009).

The first principle requires a continuous focus on gender as a basic component of all social life. This denotes conducting research where women and their experiences are the focus of inquiry (Letherby, 2011), and considers women through a female prism "devoted to a description, analysis, explanation, and interpretation of the female world" (Bernard, 1979: 274). Research occurs within a sphere defined as personal and where the subjective dimension is not denied. The focus is to validate the private, emotional and invisible intimate worlds of women (Kozma, 2003; Shpungin, Allen, Loomis and DelloStritto, 2012). The second principle concerns raising awareness. This is a specific methodological tool applicable in all feminist research (Hird, 2003; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2010), and incorporated into feminist methodology in several ways: the feminist consciousness of the researcher and the

researched, the use of consciousness-raising techniques as a research method, and the consciousness raising potential of the research act. This principle is rooted in Freire's (1973) work on consciousness and social oppression. The third principle challenges the objectivity norm within social research. Epistemologically, feminist methodology rejects the assumption that maintaining a strict separation between the researcher and participants produces a more valid, objective account (Hughes and Cohen, 2010; Jenkins, Jones and Dixon, 2003). Rather, it encourages a reflexive approach (Bansal and Corley, 2011; Letherby, 2011). The fourth principle recognizes the exploitation of women in research. This implies avoiding the use of language as a means of subordination, not intervening in participants' lives and withholding information from women subjects, and recognising the fairness of gate-keeping practices (Kozma, 2003; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2010). The final principle emphasizes women's empowerment through research. It is assumed that knowledge must be collected and analysed in ways that can be used by women to alter exploitative and oppressive conditions in their communities (Letherby, 2011). Methodologically, this implies utilising techniques that analyse and record the historical processes of change and ultimately transferring them to participants who may then confront their oppression and formulate their own plans of action (Hall, 2004; Shpungin et al, 2012).

Through adherence to these principles and the adoption of a longitudinal qualitative approach, the methodology permitted a valid exploration into participants' entrepreneurship activities within the private sphere of their homes. The focus of attention was the overlap between the private arena where entrepreneurship competes with family responsibilities and expectations and the public arena where engagement with immediate localities, business associates and customers is initiated and managed.

Three consecutive phases of qualitative data collection were undertaken over an eight year period between 1999 and 2007. Data collection consisted of semi-structured in-depth interviews with forty three displaced women operating informal home-based embroidery enterprises in Amman. All interviews were undertaken in Arabic and completed within the participants' homes. Qualitative methodologies are well suited to exploratory research (Miles and Huberman, 1994), and the approach was apposite in several ways. It acknowledged the extent to which Arab culture is both private and oral, whereby locals have a general preference for interviews rather than completing questionnaires (Tzanntos and Kaur, 2003; Authors, 2010a, 2010b). It also allowed for a trust-based relationship with participants to be established and maintained. In-depth semi-structured interviews actioned as guided conversations were undertaken in all three phases of data collection and focused on critical issues related to home-based entrepreneurship, gender and empowerment. Using broad based issues within a semi-structured format was useful in informing the longitudinal research as it enabled an identifiable thread over time and a reflexive flexibility to accommodate arising contextual change as the case narratives unfolded. Thus, participants' own voices and experiences informed and shaped the research process while dialogues remained focused upon the critical research topic. All participants were initially interviewed at length (between 1.5 - 3 hours) with follow up interviews at regular intervals over the eight year study period. Interview conversations were framed around women's experiences of home-based enterprise as we sought to explore the 'everydayness of entrepreneurship' (Steyaert and Katz, 2004) to gain an understanding of how these women negotiated, interpreted and addressed the reality which confronted them on a daily basis in terms of social exclusion, poverty and patriarchal subjugation. Patriarchal subjugation greatly impacted the participants as it limited their entrepreneurial activity beyond their homes and local communities and forced the women to create innovative feminized strategies to overcome imposed limitations.

Sampling Considerations

A theory driven, multiple-case sampling framework was applied as the selection of participants was driven by ‘a conceptual question, not by a concern for representativeness’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 29). The sample of 43 women came from a population of 691, initially identified via eight organizations that subcontracted work from home-based entrepreneurs. These contracting organizations constituted four women-led NGOs and four women-owned private businesses operating within the affluent West Amman district. Five of the eight contracting organizations (4 NGOs, 1 private enterprise) demanded exclusive relationships, prohibiting subcontracted home-based entrepreneurs from engaging with other customers, clients, businesses or other home-based entrepreneurs.

Selection criteria for sample inclusion were driven by conceptual considerations. The first criterion was that participants had to be displaced Palestinians. This ensured that all participants were drawn from the same socially and economically marginalized group. Secondly, participants had to be residents of the deprived wards of East Amman which housed the initial refugee populations in camps in 1967 and is now characterized by overcrowded and dilapidated buildings and poor infrastructure and services. The third criterion focused on age and marriage to ensure that the family-enterprise interface could be explored within the home-based enterprise context and permitted a gender-analysis perspective. Thus, at the beginning of the study, participants were expected to be married and aged between 16 and 60. Although girls aged under-16 engage in home-based work, especially during school holidays, they were excluded as their employment and marriage are illegal in Jordan (UNIFEM, 2004). Fourthly, participants were expected to be supplying one of the eight organizations through which the participants were identified. This provided

comparative data between participants regarding their contracting organization. Finally, to explore the social and economic role and impact of home-based enterprise, participants were expected to undertake and complete all paid work within their homes and their home-based enterprises had to be a minimum of two years old at the beginning of the study in 1999. To avoid bias in the sampling, the Arabic speaking researcher spent one day at each of the eight organizations waiting for the home-based entrepreneurs to arrive and deliver their products. She then approached these women, informed them of the research and invited them to participate in the study, assuring them of anonymity, confidentiality and total separation from the contracting organization. This approach was very effective in securing participant commitment and contact details for follow-up independent of the contracting organization.

Of the sample of 43 participants, most were married (only three were divorced) and their ages in 2007 ranged between 26-64 years. The majority (75%) completed secondary education and the rest were primary educated only. There were no university graduates within this sample. On average, participants had three or four children which corresponds with the national Jordanian average of four per family (UNIFEM, 2004). The overall sample in 2007 had engaged in home-based enterprise for over ten years, and on average had been supplying the contracting organization for approximately 15 years.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was undertaken manually since computer-based software such as NVivo is unreliable when used in right-to-left languages such as Arabic (QSR, 2008). Content analysis was undertaken through the use of open and thematic codes. To ensure accurate translation of the interview transcripts, translation from Arabic to English and back to Arabic was implemented by two native Arabic speakers fluent in English. This process validated the

English translation of quotations. Finally, the resultant themes and outcomes from the data analysis were shared with the participants for confirmation and approval.

Initially, the sample was split into two comparative groups (Miles and Huberman, 1994), those supplying NGOs and those supplying private enterprises. Since all four participating NGOs and one private enterprise prohibited their suppliers from engaging with other clients or organizations, the next level of analysis split the cases into two further categories exploring whether or not the home-based women entrepreneurs broke the terms of their contract and engaged with multiple clients (*seeking autonomy*). Finally, when the hidden network (*authoring*) phenomenon emerged in the later stages of data collection, two further categories for analysis were introduced; based on those declaring their engagement within hidden networks and those that did not do so. The analysis chart used in this study is shown in Figure 1 where numbers in brackets within each category signify the number of participants. The analysis presented here focuses on data obtained from the 28 women supplying organizations that prohibit the suppliers' interactions with other clients, rather than the participants of the overall sample. This allows an exploration of the experiences of the displaced women in the process of emancipatory entrepreneuring which enabled them to overcome the limitations imposed by their contracting organizations.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

The study presented several ethical considerations that could only be resolved effectively through a longitudinal approach. These included researcher entry into the hidden networks by

developing trust relationships with their members, maintaining a low profile within participants' localities and ensuring anonymity and confidentiality among network members' families, business associates and customers, as well as within any publications about this phenomenon. Hence, any potentially identifying characteristics and variables have been eliminated from this paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table I presents details of the subsample of 28 participants contracted by the five organizations (4 NGOs, 1 private enterprise) that prohibited engagement with other clients. This table provides information of each organization's contracted home-based entrepreneurs, their demographic characteristics, the number of years supplying the contractor, monthly income from contractor, declared engagement with multiple clients (autonomy) and declared participation in a hidden network (authoring). Fourteen of the 28 women revealed they belonged to hidden networks, and over time they implicated a further eight women who had not disclosed their engagement with multiple clients, nor their participation in hidden networks (Maysa, Riham, Nur, Hidaya, Manal, Rana, Lamis and Sara).

INSERT TABLE I ABOUT HERE

The use of hidden networks first emerged during interviews with Jalila, Lubna, Muna, Ghalia and Sundos, the founders and leaders of these networks, but over time fourteen home-based entrepreneurs confessed to breaking terms of contract with their contracting organization and

reported active engagement in hidden networks. Laila explained the consequences of their actions: *“If the organization finds out, not only will they never give me work again, but no other organization will ever give me work ... it is very serious”*. Given the severe consequences of breaking their terms of contract, the analyses and relevant discussion focus only data obtained from these fourteen participants. Although NGOs have traditionally been considered vehicles for empowerment, social change and poverty alleviation (Heyzer, 2006), the responses of these women suggest they were ineffective in achieving these aims, and instead drove their ‘beneficiaries’ to create alternative independent means to address their own situation. The hidden networks were formed by women living within close proximity of each other and sharing established social relationships. Within these networks, women subcontracted work to each other, pooled their labour, shared child care and domestic chores, and deliberately hid these activities from contracting organizations, non-trusted competitor producers, husbands, families and other members of the wider community.

Although one of the benefits of the hidden networks was the availability of shared childcare and domestic chores, shared domestic work also helped camouflage their collective economic activities.

“Sharing childcare, cooking, cleaning and making or mending clothes and so on is a perfect cover for our real work in the group. No one doubts what we are getting up to so no-one asks either ... As long as we are in the community and not spending what others think we don’t have, no-one bothers us” (Juhaina).

“We don’t have any childcare facilities here so we have to rely on each other. We take it in turn to look after each other’s children and sometimes, I might look after six or eight children while their mothers get on with the work” (Fatima).

Figure 2 illustrates the three hidden networks revealed by the participants, labelled as the Beit Dajan, Bethlehem and Ramallah networks (referring to the most lavish traditional Palestinian embroidery styles and techniques.) These three networks operated independently, but were integrated into a single over-arching network comprising the five network founders (Figure 3). The Beit Dajan network comprised all six participants contracted by one organization, all of whom lived within walking distance of each other and shared family ties, and appeared to be led by Sundos, one of the five founders. The Beit Dajan network was brought into contact with the Bethlehem and the Ramallah networks through key individuals, Jalila, Lubna and Muna and their relationships with Ghalia. The Bethlehem network comprised three women subcontracted by another organization and with ties to other home-based women entrepreneurs not included in this study. Muna was instrumental in facilitating commissions and further subcontracting from organizations to other home-based women entrepreneurs. Three of this network’s members did not reveal their participation (Maysa, Riham and Nur). The Ramallah network was predominantly facilitated by the Beit Dajan network, whereby work was commissioned and subcontracted to other home-based entrepreneurs not included in this study. The analysis therefore, revealed three overlapping networks clustered around the five leaders (network brokers) who took a leading role in organizing contracts and labour and ‘networked the networks’. In Figure 2 the five network leaders appear in bold type and a description of all network members can be found in Table I.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Seeking Autonomy and Authoring Exchange Relationships

The relationships of the five network founders and leaders (Jalila, Lubna, Muna, Ghalia and Sundos) predated their engagement in home-based enterprise, through school, family and friends. Three of the five founders (Jalila, Lubna and Muna) were divorced. In a society where divorce is both rare and frowned upon (UNIFEM, 2004), these women faced marginalization within their own communities. As Lubna explained, *“My participation in this circle is not a choice, I have to ... as a divorcee where else can I get support from? How will I feed my children if I don’t embroider?”* Figure 3 shows that Jalila and Muna were close friends with the sisters of Ghalia and Lubna, and Sundos is a first cousin of Lubna (network leaders names appear in bold type). From this initial group, the founders managed *“to organize the women who were in our neighbourhoods...we wanted to help and support the women and ourselves because no one else cares”* (Jalila). Although the primary aim of the network was to create a system of peer support, prompted further about their intended goals, the founders revealed that they grew their network for solidarity and to overcome community patriarchal limitations and the restrictions imposed by their subcontracting agencies.

“No-one can understand how separate we are from the rest of the world unless they are part of our community. There are so many barriers that determine what we can and can’t do, where we can and can’t go, what we can and can’t say. No one will change that for us, we have to change it for ourselves, us women I mean. That’s what this circle does - it

removes the barriers, but if others outside the circle find out about it, they will destroy everything we have built” (Sundos).

“When you have no choices available to you to improve your life and your children’s lives, you have to take action and be resilient to the obstacles. That resilience makes you creative, so we identified where our lives needed to be improved and designed ways in which we could achieve that [improvement] ... For example, we didn’t want to remain poor and we didn’t want to see our children grow up poor ... The only way forward was through our embroidery, but working on your own you only have two hands and 24 hours in a day. We had to work together, even if our organizations wouldn’t allow it” (Ghalia).

Implicit within these quotations is the search for greater personal autonomy and legitimization of their entrepreneurial efforts; however, there is also a clear recognition that others are threatened by the aims, influence and illegal status of the network and hence the need to keep the network hidden. Networks offered social and economic support to the members by providing unavailable services such as childcare and the opportunity to take on additional clients by circumventing contractual prohibitions, easier to achieve within a group setting than as an individual. These results illustrate Calás et al’s (2009) theory of emancipatory entrepreneuring as a process of social change within a context of poverty and social marginalization, and lend support to Steyaert and Katz’s (2004) proposal that entrepreneurship can occur across different spaces for both societal and economic purposes. The extent to which the hidden networks contributed to poverty alleviation can be measured by exploring the outcomes experienced by the members. These illustrate how the women created and shared a collective identity (Portes and Haller, 2005).

INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

The advantages of operating within a network, rather than as an individual supplier can be seen in the following quotations that illustrate both efficiency gains from collective working and the enjoyment of the social interaction.

“If we did not work collectively on our commissions, firstly we would never get the work finished on time as we are given very unrealistic deadlines and secondly, we would get very lonely” (Sundos).

“Sharing the work makes it more fun and a great excuse to get out of the house to visit the others” (Jalila).

However, sharing production and clients *“has to be done very discreetly... The client must only see the woman she commissioned, not the whole army of us behind her and the same is true for the contractors’ representatives. They will kill us otherwise!” (Alia).*

While the women were aware of the competition between their contracting organizations, this did not affect the strong loyalty shared by hidden network members with whom they secretly shared production and clients.

“At the end of the day, all the organization cares about is the product I make and give them, not about me. Even after all these years of giving them my best work, they still

threaten that I can be replaced tomorrow – just like that. ... So I have developed a very thick skin now and I really don't care if they replace me tomorrow ... now I know they need me more than I need them. ... But the other embroiderers and I, we do care about each other. We live in the same neighbourhood. Our children go to school together. We are one community. Our lives affect each other every day. If something happened to any of us, we all help each other ... we only have each other” (Fatima).

The women's rivals and competitors comprised other home-based entrepreneurs outside their own network. Generally, this competition lay beyond the boundaries of their communities as their mobility beyond the immediate vicinity was limited due to poor public transport, associated costs and cultural norms determining women's independent travel. These conditions contributed to the creation of a collective identity within the hidden networks; as members worked together within the prohibited network, their bonds and sense of community grew. These bonds and their growing sense of a collective identity helped to keep networks hidden and exclusive, known only to the existing members.

“The organizations giving us work have big cars and their representatives travel all over the country collecting products from women like us. But we can't and don't want to do that. We have a strong circle [of embroiderers] here and we produce the best embroidery in the country. ... We also don't want any embroiderers from anywhere joining our circle. It doesn't work like that” (Nafisa).

Although participants were initially reluctant to discuss their earnings and expenses, over time sufficient trust was gained to reduce their earlier inhibitions in discussing their overall monthly earnings. Dalal reported the highest monthly earnings, equivalent to £300, an

amount still below the Jordanian poverty line, and Maryam the lowest monthly earnings, equivalent to £40. Their reported monthly earnings from the contracting organizations can be viewed in Table I. Women subcontracted to SME1 (a non-NGO private enterprise) earned substantially higher amounts than other participants, a feature which might explain why they refused to disclose their participation in hidden networks. Muna, who implicated three suppliers of this organization as members of a hidden network, explained that *“They are too afraid that the owner will find out. She is ruthless”*. Clearly, the women had been able to substantially increase their earnings through their hidden network despite the contractors’ prohibitions, rather than relying solely on remuneration derived from a single NGO. Further illustrating Rindova et al’s (2009) view of autonomy and authoring as key elements of emancipatory entrepreneuring, one network member asked, *“Do you know anyone who can live on 60, 70, 80, 90 even 100 dinars a month, let alone support a family with that? I’m sure you see then that we have to supplement this income even if the organizations don’t allow it.”* (Khadija).

Evidently, contracting organizations were either genuinely unaware or chose to ignore the existence of these networks and their effect on increasing women’s earnings as they engaged with additional clients and producers. Given the sensitivities surrounding the existence of these networks, ethical considerations prevented discussion with the managers of the contracting organizations. However, one of the managers of a contracting organization confirmed that *“All suppliers and their families are living under the Jordanian poverty line and that is why we are working with them to help them improve their circumstances”* (Manager of NGO2).

As the women in each network came from the same wider community, they were interconnected through family ties and friendships. This is illustrated by the relationships between network founders depicted in Figure 3. Because of these ties, hidden networks could strengthen or weaken family relations as it merged the private (domestic) and enterprise (public) domains of the women's lives. This became apparent when participants discussed their husbands who were generally aware of their wives' home-based enterprise activity, but not their membership of the hidden network. Many shared the view that,

“We don't need any man in our circle, they don't understand about our work, or the way we do things. If my husband knew about me participating in this circle, he would stop me because he thinks other women will be a bad influence on me, of course unless it is his mother or his sisters” (Maha).

By deliberately excluding men and other members of the community, these women have created among themselves a legitimating exclusivity and a private space for their collective identity. While doing so may facilitate their emancipatory entrepreneuring, they cower from publicly declaring their intentions to create social change. However, as successful entrepreneurs, they have considered and calculated the risks associated with their actions and have deliberately chosen to remain hidden during politically, socially and economically turbulent times.

CONCLUSIONS

Although research on the informal economy (Williams and Nadin, 2010), home-based production (Thompson, Jones-Evans and Kwong, 2009) and networking (Sorenson, Folker

and Brigham, 2008) is well established, the phenomenon of hidden feminized networks does not feature within academic discourses. Nevertheless, these networks are unlikely to be a new phenomenon; nor are they likely to be culturally or geographically unique. Indeed, the hidden networks revealed in this study have much in common with the textile and apparel networks in New York reported by Uzzi (1996) and the ceramic tile networks found in Italy (Piore and Sabel 1984). However, the networks reported in this study are distinguished by their prohibition, the necessity for them to remain hidden, and the fact that they are initiated and maintained by impoverished, dispossessed women. It is probable that they have not been previously reported within the entrepreneurship literature as their concealment restricts external observation (Rowbotham and Mitter, 1994; Barrientos, Kabeer and Hossain, 2004; Kabeer, 2004) and their accidental discovery in this study depended on high levels of trust acquired over several years of research inquiry.

The study revealed hidden feminized networks as a key mechanism facilitating emancipatory entrepreneuring among displaced and marginalized women. These networks provide women with peer support and are kept hidden from authorities as their existence is prohibited by the restrictive conditions imposed by contracting organizations. Keeping such networks hidden appears inherent to their continued productivity as they provide members with elements of control denied by their families, communities and contracting organizations. In concealing their earnings from commissions made through hidden networks, husbands can neither claim nor control that income. Hiding the network and its resulting commissions ensures that women maintain contracts with their main organizations, especially when commissions through the network slow down. Similarly, declaring only their direct income from contracting organizations maintains their entitlement to UNRWA financed social transfers.

In a community where success is rare, the leaders and members of hidden networks mask their relative success. Their invisibility erases the social, cultural and organizational barriers that shape and define women's roles and activity within this society (Mosedale, 2005). Their actions illustrate Calás et al's (2009) theory of entrepreneuring as a process of social change, albeit hidden from the wider community, and exemplify Rindova et al's (2009) descriptions of the autonomy seeking and authoring elements of emancipatory entrepreneuring. As the vulnerability of their community endures, women persist in undercover entrepreneuring as exposure will not lead to its wider acceptance, but rather its termination. These hidden practices enhance their collective identity which, in turn, influences their emancipatory entrepreneuring and their ability to alleviate their family's poverty. Hence, hidden networks can be seen to play a significant role in legitimising entrepreneuring within informal economies. Revealing the characteristics, aims and outcomes of these feminized hidden networks extends Calás et al's (2009) theory of entrepreneuring as a process of social change, and Rindova et al's (2009) theory of emancipatory entrepreneuring. The relevance of prior theorising is enhanced by establishing value and meaning to the interface between women's entrepreneuring, hidden networks and poverty alleviation in a developing economy context.

Rising political and economic instability in the Middle East region has contributed to increased poverty, a rapidly growing informal economy and home-based entrepreneurship. This has a direct impact on poverty alleviation especially in light of the gender segregated market phenomenon within the region. Paradoxically, recent political and social events, characterized as the Arab Spring, may further alienate marginalized groups since reformists and political establishments focus on unifying mainstream populations. As a result, women in these socially marginalized populations who are confined within the boundaries of their homes and communities have become more invisible, since they remain socially,

economically and politically excluded from the mainstream in their host societies. However, as this study has revealed, feminized emancipatory entrepreneuring with effective social change processes is evident within hidden networks.

From a policy perspective, there is no doubt that emancipatory entrepreneuring within hidden networks contributes to poverty alleviation and social change. Embracing a collective rather than individualistic approach to poverty alleviation programmes may provide opportunities for new models of social and economic development for poor and marginalized groups. Certainly, it is evident that NGOs need to reconsider their subcontracting models to ensure they facilitate rather than impede women's entrepreneurial actions. While this is easily said, its practice is challenging as it requires NGOs to move away from familiar frameworks of development.

This study indicates a number of fruitful avenues for further research. The findings add weight to growing critiques of mainstream entrepreneurship and support calls for future researchers to engage in feminist critiques of entrepreneurship (Hughes, Jennings, Brush, et al, 2012), to explore the societal purposes and benefits of entrepreneurship (Steyaert and Katz, 2004), and to consider entrepreneurship as a collective rather than individual activity (Drakopoulou-Dodd and Anderson, 2007; Zahra, 2007). The findings also suggest the value in further analysing the research data collected during this longitudinal study from the perspectives of embeddedness and social capital. Such analysis is likely to contribute to a broader understanding of these concepts and their operationalization within research settings not typically considered by entrepreneurship scholars, particularly those who turn to entrepreneurship as a route out of poverty and alienation.

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4. Table 1: Characteristics of Women Entrepreneurs Supplying Restrictive Organizations

Participant	Age	Education level	No. of children	Years supplying organization	Monthly earnings (£) from contracting organization	Declared engagement with multiple clients	Declared participation in hidden networks
Non-Governmental Organization 1							
<i>Jaila</i> +	44	Secondary	1	17	68	No	No
Manal	47	Secondary	5	17	69	No	No
Rana	42	Secondary	1	14	65	No	No
Noura	34	Secondary	1	10	60	Yes	Yes
Madiha	36	Secondary	3	12	57	No	No
Non-Governmental Organization 2							
<i>Laila</i>	61	Primary	5	16	75	Yes	Yes
Hana	38	Secondary	1	13	40	No	No
<i>Lubna</i> +	31	Primary	2	13	68	Yes	Yes
<i>Alia</i>	29	Secondary	1	11	50	Yes	Yes
<i>Nafisa</i>	34	Secondary	2	16	70	Yes	Yes
Marwa	37	Secondary	3	15	73	No	No
Non-Governmental Organization 3							
<i>Muna</i> +	42	Secondary	3	18	60	Yes	Yes
<i>Khadija</i>	64	Primary	8	19	90	Yes	Yes
<i>Maha</i>	62	Primary	7	27	85	Yes	Yes
Lamis	36	Secondary	3	17	68	No	No
Sara	40	Secondary	3	21	70	No	No
Non-Governmental Organization 4							
Maryam	26	Secondary	1	10	40	No	Yes
<i>Fatima</i>	48	Secondary	3	12	55	No	Yes
Adila	29	Secondary	1	12	52	No	Yes
Majida	30	Secondary	1	13	64	No	Yes
<i>Sundos</i>	45	Primary	4	13	70	Yes	Yes
<i>Juhaina</i>	51	Primary	4	13	68	No	Yes
SME 1							
Hidaya	30	Secondary	2	10	75	No	No
Dalal	55	Primary	5	32	300	No	No
<i>Ghalia</i>	34	Secondary	3	11	80	Yes	No
Maysa	39	Secondary	4	17	130	No	No
Riham	36	Secondary	4	10	190	No	No
Nur	38	Secondary	3	15	250	No	No

+ divorced participant

Names appearing in **BOLD** represent the hidden network founders / leaders

Names appearing in *italics* quoted within the paper

Figure 1: Analysis Chart

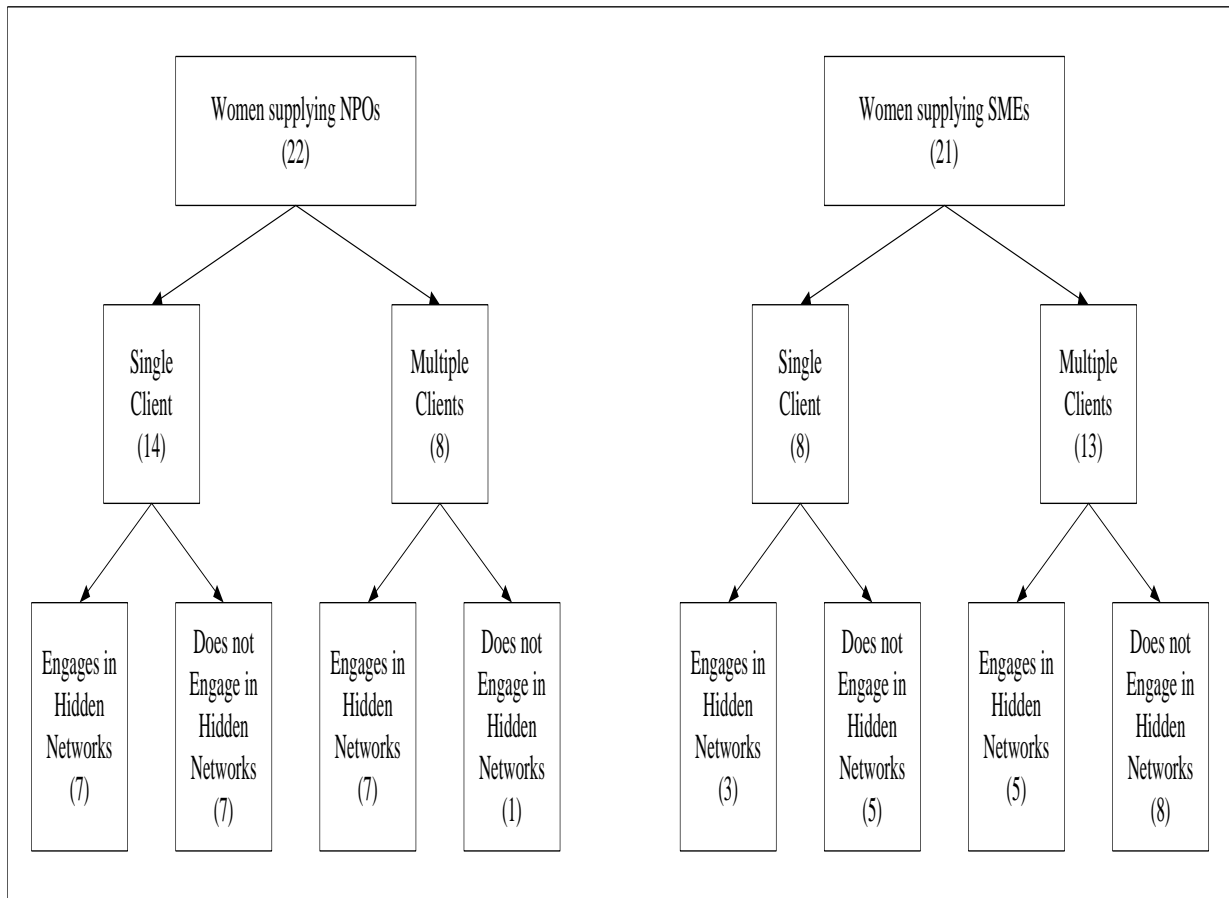


Figure 2: The Revealed Relationships within the Hidden Networks

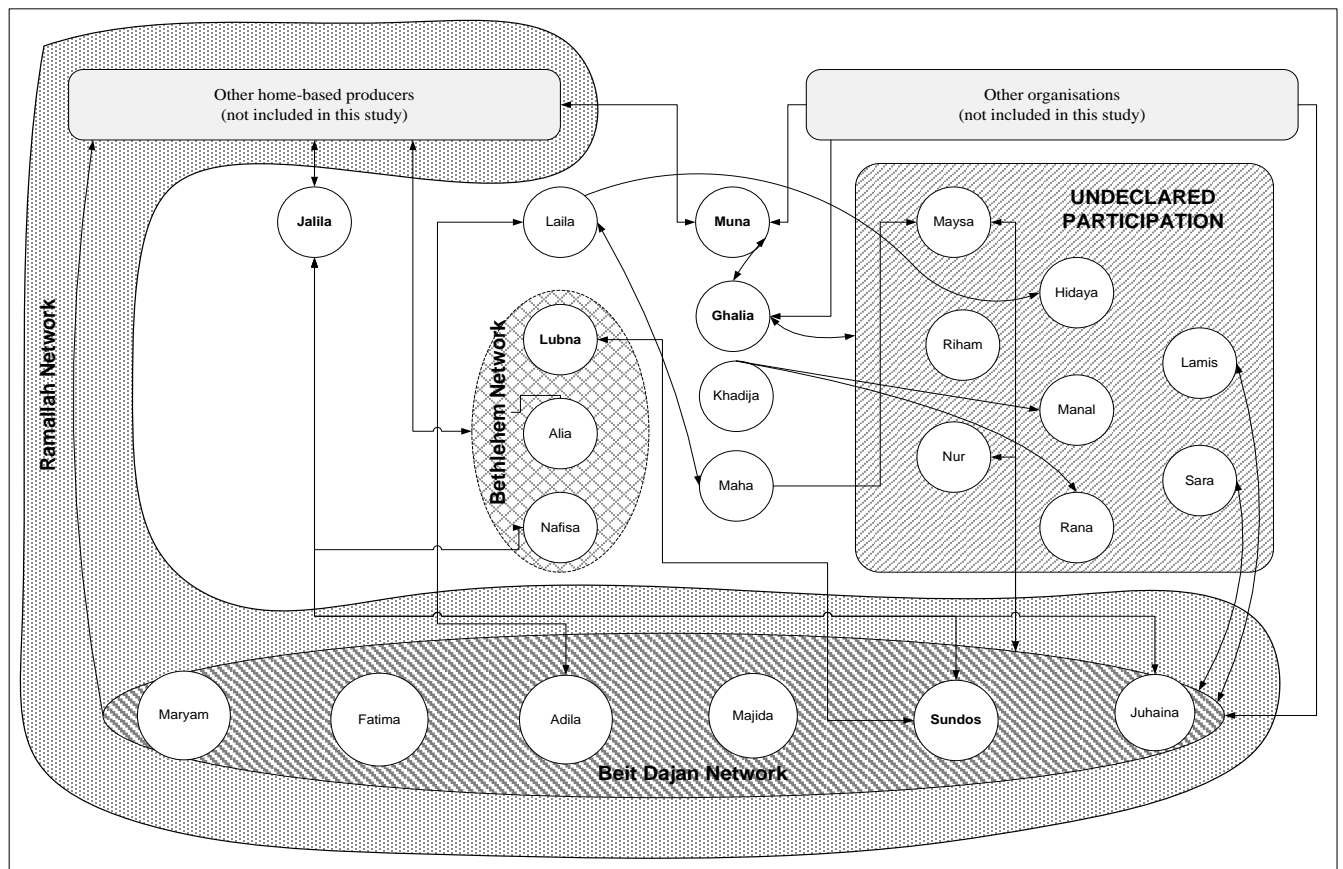


Figure 3: The Hidden Network Founders/Leaders

