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Submitted 11-29-2022. Approved 09-04-2023

Evaluated through a double-anonymized peer review. Associate Editor: Anastacia Mamabola

Reviewers: Vania Nassif , Universidade Nove de Julho, São Paulo, SP, Brazil. Caren Scheepers , University of Pretoria, Gordon Institute of Business Science, Pretoria, South Africa. Two other reviewers did not authorize disclosure of their identity and peer review report.

The Peer Review Report is available at this [link](#).

Original version | DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0034-759020240101>

IN SEARCH OF AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR FEMALE IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Em busca de um modelo integrativo para o empreendedorismo feminino imigrante

En busca de un marco integrador para el emprendimiento femenino inmigrante

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ABSTRACT

Female entrepreneurship (FENT) has long been presented as primarily driven by necessity, encompassing gendered social processes that push women into venturing to find independence, self-assurance, financial relief, or a more balanced lifestyle. Extant research also identified differences in motivations and barriers to female self-employment in developing versus developed countries. Thus, the article proposes an integrative framework combining Mixed Embeddedness and Institutional Theory to analyze immigrant women's entrepreneurial process, adopting a multi-theoretical lens to deepen the understanding of women's entrepreneurial practices, addressing Granovetter's embeddedness' inconsistencies.

KEYWORDS: Women's entrepreneurship, immigrants, institutional theory, mixed embeddedness, framework.

RESUMO

O empreendedorismo feminino (EFEM) vem sendo apresentado como impulsionado principalmente pela necessidade, abrangendo processos sociais de gênero que levam as mulheres a empreender como meio de encontrar independência, autoconfiança, alívio financeiro ou um estilo de vida mais equilibrado. Pesquisas existentes também identificaram diferenças nas motivações e barreiras ao autoemprego feminino em países em desenvolvimento versus países desenvolvidos. Assim, o artigo propõe um quadro integrador combinando a Imersão Mista e a Teoria Institucional para analisar o processo empreendedor das mulheres imigrantes, adotando uma lente multiteórica para aprofundar a compreensão das práticas empreendedoras das mulheres no exterior e sanar as inconsistências da imersão de Granovetter.

Palavras-Chave: Empreendedorismo de mulheres, imigrantes, teoria institucional, imersão mista, modelo analítico.

RESUMEN

El espíritu empresarial femenino (EEFEM) se ha presentado durante mucho tiempo como impulsado principalmente por la necesidad que abarca los procesos sociales de género que empujan a las mujeres a aventurarse como un medio para encontrar la independencia, la seguridad en sí mismas, el alivio financiero o un estilo de vida más equilibrado. La investigación existente también identificó diferencias en las motivaciones y barreras para el autoempleo femenino en países en desarrollo frente a países desarrollados. Por lo tanto, el artículo propone un marco integrador que combina el arraigo mixto y la teoría institucional para analizar el proceso empresarial de las mujeres inmigrantes, adoptando una lente multiteórica para profundizar la comprensión de las prácticas empresariales de las mujeres en el extranjero, abordando las inconsistencias del arraigo de Granovetter.

Palabras Clave: Emprendimiento de mujeres, imigrantes, teoría institucional, arraigo mixto, marco.

INTRODUCTION

Female entrepreneurship (FENT) has long been presented as primarily driven by necessity, outlining the fragilities and gendered social processes that push women into venturing to find independence, self-assurance, financial relief, or even a more balanced lifestyle (Cardella et al., 2020). Extant research also identified differences in motivations and barriers to female self-employment in developing versus developed countries (Vita et al., 2014).

Although many scholars have examined various institutional elements that influence FENT (Brush et al., 2009; Langevang et al., 2018; Welsh et al., 2018; Xie et al., 2021), only a few have shed light on the factors influencing immigrant women businesses' establishment in foreign environments (Chreim et al., 2018; Dabić et al., 2020), especially regarding issues of cultural assimilation and integration among pre-existent native citizens networks, co-national first-generation, second and third generations immigrants, and other ethnic communities in multicultural cities.

In addition, the extant empirical literature on immigrant female entrepreneurship is primarily comprised of descriptive studies, lacking a multilevel model to investigate the drivers behind women's motivation to migrate, their process of starting a business in another country, and the perceived causes that most contribute to the longevity and success of their enterprises (Dabić et al., 2020). Moreover, only a few papers cover the spatial dimension (Munkejord, 2017) and the role of both formal and informal institutions in the existing literature on FENT (Bisignano & El-Anis, 2019).

Based on the evidence, these factors differ when compared to their male immigrant counterparts and other native-born women in the country of settlement (Chreim et al., 2018), and given that “no single theoretical framework provides a comprehensive view of female entrepreneurs' businesses endeavors” (Chreim et al., 2018, p. 2), this paper aims to propose an integrative framework between Mixed Embeddedness and Institutional Theory to analyze immigrant women's entrepreneurial process.

The justification for combining these two theories relates to the fact that both migration and entrepreneurship are motivated by complex and multilayered factors, especially among female migrant entrepreneurs, who are said to suffer from a ‘double disadvantage’ for being tied-movers, i.e., dependent on their relatives' decisions and conditions for migrating, and subject to gender bias in male-dominated markets (Murzacheva et al., 2020). Such bias helps to foster a negative view of female migrant entrepreneurship as the single alternative to migrant women's exclusion from the foreign labor market (Murzacheva et al., 2020). Thus, combining these two different theories might be necessary to unveil the agency these subjects still possess to carry out their business decisions in the foreign environment and how they build on existing networks (i.e., their social embeddedness) to do so. Arguably, this conceptual paper is in line with several other migration theories that have been developed by encompassing a special focus on the economic, sociological, cultural, and geographical aspects of migrants, even though coming from more than one field of study (Kloosterman et al., 1999; Kloosterman, 2010; Kloosterman & Rath, 2018; Yamamura & Lassalle, 2022).

Despite the existing knowledge, migration entrepreneurship theories are not as consolidated as other branches of international entrepreneurship, especially regarding intersectional issues such as gender (Dabić et al., 2020). Therefore, we adopt a multi-theoretical lens to deepen the understanding of women's entrepreneurial practices (see Chreim et al., 2018), following the argument of Corrêa et al. (2020) that the broad entrepreneurship scholarly is yet to devise a model to solve Granovetter's (1985) embeddedness' inconsistencies. Our contribution lies in recognizing that these inconsistencies stem from a lack of synergy between Institutional Theory and Mixed Embeddedness (ME), as they are complementary in several aspects concerning organizational or meso-level categories of interest to entrepreneurship scholarship (Langevang et al., 2015; Solano, 2020; Wang & Warn, 2018; Yousafzai et al., 2015).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Mixed Embeddedness' principles

Embeddedness is a theoretical concept originally devised by Polanyi (2018) to understand how social interactions impact behavior and institutions. However, Granovetter (1985) was responsible for introducing it to entrepreneurship scholarship (Corrêa et al., 2020). Granovetter (1985) saw the entrepreneur as an individual who connects and interacts with different groups in their social networks. Hence, the author conceives two types of ties capable of uniting individuals: (a) strong ties, found in closer, cohesive, and united social groups that generate solidarity and promote trust; and (b) weak ties, found in more fragmented and porous social structures, capable of connecting an individual to different realities, allowing access to differentiated information (Granovetter, 1985).

The concept of embeddedness is consequently based on two distinctive principles: relational and structural embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985). Whilst the former involves a given social actor's personal relations, the latter relates to the broader social structure in which they are embedded (Granovetter, 1985). Hence, to understand network behavior thoroughly, one should acknowledge entrepreneurs' personal relationship structures and how these fit into a broader institutional structure simultaneously.

Based on that, Kloosterman et al. (1999) argued that the word 'mixed' in the term 'Mixed Embeddedness' approach refers to integrating the foreign market opportunity structure in a broader societal context, i.e., conceiving migrant entrepreneurs' social networks in an overarching model that considers both the migrant's individual entrepreneurial potential (e.g., their human, social, and financial capital are treated as strategic resources) and the shifts in the opportunity structure within a given market, which determines migrant entrepreneurs' business entry in terms of (a) access to technological innovations; (b) social and cultural practices toward their 'ethnic way' of doing business; (c) competition with native entrepreneurs; (d) shifts in global trade.

For Jones et al. (2014), ME's popularity is grounded in European scholars' avid interest in going beyond US-dominated models exclusively reliant on the so-called 'ethnic resources' of

migrant entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, despite its current prominence and recurrence in the migrant entrepreneurship field, ME has undergone updates to encompass a wide array of new questions regarding ethnic entrepreneurial rearrangements in the face of the last economic crises and gender-related entrepreneurial processes (Jones et al., 2014; Kloosterman & Rath, 2018; Ram et al., 2017). Ram et al. (2017), for example, have reframed ME in relation to (1) the role of regulation, (2) the incorporation of racist exclusion, (3) gendered structures of migration and labor market processes, (4) market ghettoization, and (5) greater sensitivity to its historical context.

Ram et al. (2017) justify such a renewal of ME's original model given that "the intersection of ethnicity, gender, and other core axes of difference (class, religion, disability) tends to be overlooked" (p. 7) due to the dominant ethnic entrepreneurship paradigm, i.e., a tendency to analyze entrepreneurship mainly at the meso level, implying that the entrepreneurial action is largely an outcome of ethnic group-based attributes and features (Romero & Valdez, 2016). This results in entrepreneurship research investigating ethnic minority entrepreneurs and women as two groups that deviate from the idealization of the mainstream entrepreneur (white, male, middle-class), almost as if in isolation from each other (Romero & Valdez, 2016). Intersectional approaches are essential in taking a broader view of an entrepreneur's social representation, acknowledging distinct yet interdependent identities, such as gender, race, and social class (Romero & Valdez, 2016).

Gaps in the Mixed Embeddedness approach

Recent studies using Mixed Embeddedness manage at a certain level to bridge with Institutional Theory. For example, Wang and Warn (2018) define mixed embeddedness as the "interaction and interplay of wider institutional regulatory constraints (macro), market factors (meso), and the individual resources of the entrepreneur (micro)" (p. 133). Similarly, Brieger and Gielnik (2020) discovered that the lack of a supportive institutional entrepreneurial environment through policymaking targeted at forced female immigrants is one of the primary drivers and contextual factors that explain the gender gap in immigrant entrepreneurship. Complementary to this, Solano (2020) shows how institutional embeddedness occurs differently depending on entrepreneurs' characteristics, market opportunities, and the outer regulatory environment. More importantly, in his work on the mixed embeddedness of Moroccans in Amsterdam and Milan, he demonstrates how transnational entrepreneurs take advantage of their heterogeneous network of contacts in their business activities (Solano, 2020).

Works such as these emphasize ME has tried to encompass the many-layered yet contextual aspects concerning business venturing into migration settings through its institutional (macro) dimension. Although such an amendment has successfully advanced this approach's theoretical development, it still partially incorporates everything Neo-Institutional Theory entails as an established theory focusing on entrepreneurs' agency and institutional change capacity. In fact, as will be debated later in this paper, such a dimension within ME only accounts for one of Scott's (2014) three institutional pillars, i.e., the regulatory pillar. This highlights ME still

has gaps to be addressed by scholars in both theoretical and empirical terms (Barberis & Solano, 2018; Kloosterman & Rath, 2018; Zubair & Brzozowski, 2018).

Zubair and Brzozowski (2018), demonstrated that migrant entrepreneurs from poorly developed ethnic economies, their business sustainability depends on the embeddedness of migrants beyond their co-ethnic networks, but rather in an expanded network involving other migrant communities, which leads us wondering which factors other than the ones pertaining to either relational or structural embeddedness could help explain such networking process among distant ties.

When defining ME's institutional dimension, Kloosterman and Rath (2018) posit that changes in economic conditions and policy shifts, such as deregulation programs and reregulation or law enforcement, impact migrant entrepreneurs differently. In addition, entrepreneurs are increasingly embedded in social networks, which straddle different countries and often different continents. Therefore, the mixed embeddedness approach should consider these changes, requiring a longitudinal approach for monitoring the effects of crises and including the transnational networks of migrant entrepreneurs (Kloosterman & Rath, 2018; Solano, 2020).

Similarly, Barberis and Solano (2018) believe that anyone using ME ought to take into consideration complex combinations of economic practices as assemblages formed by social actors via their networks, emphasizing the long-duration processes that have been reframing migrant entrepreneurship in consonance with modern societies' general transformations. Hence, in line with Granovetter (1985), the authors propose a reconciliation of action, networks, norms, culture, and institutions, which is closely related to Neoinstitutionalism. According to the authors, migrant entrepreneurship scholars ought to prevent the consequent accumulation of knowledge surrounding ME, turning it into a dominant paradigm within such a specific field of research with so many promising paths to explore (Barberis & Solano, 2018).

Mixed Embeddedness in female immigrant entrepreneurship studies

Turning our attention now to the empirical papers that have explored the ME of female migrants, one salient aspect covered in the extant literature is the higher levels of xenophobia emanating against skin color and religion, which have been listed among the interfering conditions to foreign women's acceptance into another country's environment (Brzozowski, 2017). Such bias may contribute to a "feeling of inferiority" (Gurău et al., 2020), for many women from developing countries are deemed as illiterate and male dependent (Vita et al., 2014), which eventually prevents female immigrant entrepreneurs from networking with local business owners, further constraining them from individual development and venture growth (Brzozowski, 2017).

Worse still, the "double disadvantage" of ethnicity and gender intensifies financial institutions' skepticism about immigrant women's entrepreneurial capabilities (Murzacheva et al., 2020), and it is not infrequent that male or local guarantors are required in bank loan applications made by female immigrants (Yamamura & Lassalle, 2022). Host country policies related to women's entrance into business venturing after immigration thus play a vital role in determining what

they will be able to do with the human and financial capital they possess, which ultimately influences their entrepreneurial progress (Chreim et al., 2018).

In this sense, the capacity to communicate in both home and host country languages and cultures is seen as a significant source of human capital and a competitive advantage in business because it enables relationships with varied supply sources (e.g., labor) and market segments (Brzozowski, 2017). Likewise, a longer stay in the host country may allow immigrants to get more business experience and build a greater capacity to access financial and social resources (Chreim et al., 2018).

In parallel, female immigrant entrepreneurs may not be able to get co-ethnic community support and hence experience restrictions to their venture's growth if they do not conform to the indigenous community's views of gender roles (Yamamura & Lassalle, 2022). Alternatively, they tend to locate in geographical proximity to other ethnic minorities with similar backgrounds, forming enclaves that provide clustered and unique resources not available to native female entrepreneurs (Yamamura & Lassalle, 2022).

On this spatial dimension of embeddedness, Munkejord (2017) identified some motivations for migrant women starting their businesses in Norwegian rural areas, including finding a way out of unemployment, a way out of underemployment, and a means to live in a region of perceived economic attraction. Female entrepreneurship in a migratory context may be related to a fourth motivation pointed out by the author, which is contrary to that vision of women as mere "tied movers." For the author, these women may prefer entrepreneurship instead of satisfactory wage labor to gain independence and social status. Family support and a prior feeling of belonging to the new settlement region have thus proven to be central to such decision-making (Munkejord, 2017).

One last element related to relational embeddedness is having a business family background, as this offers women entrepreneurs role models, mentors, a close network in the management domain, and a specific set of business experiences that adds to their entrepreneurial competencies (Bisignano & El-Anis, 2019). Conversely, the family context has been pointed out as a hindrance to female entrepreneurship in numerous ways, despite motherhood being indicated as a contributing factor to stimulating women's entrepreneurial endeavors in an attempt to provide better material conditions to their offspring (Langevang et al., 2015).

Neo-Institutional Theory's (Neo-IT) premises

The sociological stream of Institutional Theory emerged with Berger and Luckmann's (1927/2016) seminal work "The Social Construction of Reality". For this stream, institutions are not mere external entities exerting formal or informal power over the decisions of social actors and nations, but rather, "meaning systems that are passed on from generation to generation" until they become the external reality itself (Sandhu, 2018, p. 1). In this sense, reality is deemed to be created by negotiation among each actor's level of legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), for individuals,

organizations, and nations alike are deeply affected by the constraints and expectations of their environment, comprised of the so-called institutions (Sandhu, 2018).

This shift, comparatively to other preceding streams in institutional thought, such as historical and political, moved the object of inquiry from the institutions themselves and their role in the broad systemic logic to the institutionalization process that happens in similar organizational fields (Tolbert et al., 2011), i.e., to how organizations operating in geographically distant but similar markets complied with common regulations, norms, and societal demands—Scott’s (2014) three institutional pillars—instead of simply complying with major cost-effective objectives.

There was a subliminal cultural and cognitive mechanism leading them to establish common patterns of behavior among one another; a mechanism institutional sociologists became particularly interested in under the name of isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983 /2005). As such, to gain legitimacy, organizations tended to emulate their competitors’ structure, processes, and strategies, and the whole process ended up making up the rules of the game that defined the possible actions of other players in the same field (Sandhu, 2018).

This theorization might be very deterministic when it comes to predicting individuals’ behavior more subjectively, not very different from ME. It has been revisited to what is currently referred to as Neo-Institutional Theory (Alvesson & Spicer, 2018). In this new version, institutionalists admit that specific social actors can make changes in that set of similar patterns, which ultimately lead to a new macro institutionalization process, i.e., when novelty becomes the norm again.

For Neo-IT, such actors are entrepreneurs, or rather, institutional entrepreneurs (Eisenstadt, 1980), who impersonate an ideal, visionary, or disruptive type of social actor that deviates from the homo economicus so prevalent in the economic strand of entrepreneurship theory (Weber, 2004). In our proposition, we attribute such intrinsic aptitude for making a change to the marginalization some ethnic minority groups suffer when arriving in a foreign country (Sombart, 1913/2002), especially in the case of migratory flows coming from the Global South to the North (Cruz et al., 2020). In this sense, entrepreneurship comes in the form of a migrant reaction to exclusion (Simmel, 1971) and, in most cases, the only way out of it.

Gaps in female immigrant entrepreneurship studies using Neo-Institutional Theory

To the best of our knowledge, no papers use “Institutional Theory” or “Neo-Institutional Theory” while dealing specifically with female immigrant entrepreneurship. Contrastingly, papers on female entrepreneurship (among exclusively female nationals) using the very same theory in both the national and international spheres abound (e.g., Brush et al., 2009; Langevang et al., 2018; Welsh et al., 2018; Xie et al., 2021).

As Dabić’s et al. (2020) literature review evidenced, this may be due to the massive use of the New Institutional Economics strand in immigrant entrepreneurship scholarship. Such a strand “closely mirrors scholarly literature on entrepreneurship in general” (p. 32) and fails to include the

unique characteristics migrants offer to host society's entrepreneurial settings while these subjects try to bridge unique contextual advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, the extant general migrant entrepreneurship literature using Institutional Theory has explored, at best, how institutional factors impact male and female migrant entrepreneurs differently (see Adom & Ackom, 2023).

Thus, it is the perfect opportunity to consolidate both Neo-IT and ME into an integrative framework, for either one alone would only partially cover gendered themes that cut across female entrepreneurs as presumably 'triple disadvantaged' migrants. As Dabić et al. (2020) also pointed out, intersectional themes tend to be covered in the extant literature only through intersectionality and feminist theory, which deviates from the economic and business-related issues concerning entrepreneurship literature. These theories privilege other complex processes, such as female ethnic minority entrepreneurs' identity construction (Dabić et al., 2020).

In the same way, although ME has been largely employed in the study of female migrant entrepreneurship, it does not account for migrant women's agency and ability to provoke institutional changes in entrepreneurial settings that have been established prior to their arrival in the host country—one thing Neo-IT does, as defended by Tolbert et al. (2011). This may be occur because this approach's premises aim at unveiling the many factors of relational and structural embeddedness that migrants in general are subject to when work in their business or cultural adaptation.

Neo-Institutional Theory in FENT studies

Regarding Female Entrepreneurship (FENT) scholarship, in particular, we identified a similar pattern in the topics covered with ME. For instance, Xie et al. (2021) used IT to explore how combinations of multiple institutional conditions hold sway on female businesses' creation and growth. She discovered that the cognitive pillar is decisive for prompting FENT in times of scarce financial resources, confirming previous studies that showed women were more likely to keep their entrepreneurial intentions in the presence of a supportive and welcoming external culture. She added that female entrepreneurs' expectations of growth were susceptible to sociocultural forces that could influence women's recognition of the legitimacy of entrepreneurship as a way to improve their financial status and social prestige, even though their businesses' growth could not be effectively achieved without strong external regulatory and normative environments (Xie et al., 2021).

Aligned with that, Langevang et al. (2018) have attested that female entrepreneurs in the Tanzanian food processing industry must employ several active response strategies through their business venturing activities to overcome institutional barriers present in that environment. In their analysis, women entrepreneurs' agency, especially in the form of women's business associations, became evident through strategies such as advocacy, entrepreneurial passion, networking, semi-informal operations, co-location of home and business, and downplay of gender identity (Langevang et al., 2018).

Similarly, Welsh et al. (2018) have expanded Brush's et al. (2009) seminal 5M framework for an institutional gender-aware approach to understanding the entrepreneurial phenomenon from a resource-based view that acknowledges females' human and social capital. In their quantitative analysis of Egyptian women entrepreneurs' firm performance, they found human capital had a positive relationship with business results, whereas social and cultural capital did not (Welsh et al., 2018).

According to Scott (2014), the institutionalization process of established social practices is ascribed to three pillars: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive. In this sense, examples of the regulative pillar in the current female entrepreneurship scholarship generally consist of specific legislation regulating new business formation by women or access to strategic resources (Langevang et al., 2018; Xie et al., 2021), i.e., the same elements we see in the institutional dimension of ME. Migrant agents, despite their "poorly integrated or excluded status," are believed to either comply with or deviate from such principles since "agents can have their own agenda and seek to evade or even disrupt the rule systems and authorities in place" (Scott, 2014, p. 101).

Conversely, the normative pillar stands for norms, values, and belief systems especially present in gendered labor market conditions that inevitably result in (un)equal access to formal employment positions and poor role negotiation within family structures that specify household responsibilities and provisions (Langevang et al., 2015; Welsh et al., 2018). These often come in the form of market segments typically considered masculine and in how women collectively react to it through organized movements and involvement in targeted professional associations (Langevang et al., 2018).

The cultural-cognitive pillar, in turn, includes more informal and subtle social sensemaking mechanisms, such as businesswomen stereotyping, the emergence of role models which may influence migrants' attitudes toward/away from entrepreneurship, knowledge, skills, and competencies construction to start/run businesses, as well as risks, fears, or rewards women often associate with entrepreneurship (Xie et al., 2021). A key factor that influences cultural-cognitive institutions, for instance, is having access to education and training in business management (Langevang et al., 2018).

AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK BETWEEN ME AND NEO-IT

The need for an integrative overview combining ME and Neo-IT: A detailed look at female entrepreneurial processes

Based on Moore's (1986) seminal work on entrepreneurial behavior - shaped by both individual traits and the environment - Bygrave (2004) expanded the analysis to approach entrepreneurial processes as a set of stages and events that follow one another, starting with the business idea and triggering events that facilitate business operationalization, implementation, and growth. By and large, Bygrave's approach continued to reckon entrepreneurial processes as social phenomena

intertwined with individual capabilities of running a business. Thus, the entrepreneur as an individual remained the focus of the analysis, and later reinterpretations of his model perpetuated such emphasis (e.g., Nassif et al., 2010).

Gradually, scholarship advanced to look at firm-level behavior to unveil the gendered side of organizational dynamics; yet, to this date, literature on the results of female entrepreneurial processes is still scarce, partially because even when integrative models have been proposed (see e.g. Langevang et al., 2015; Yousafzai et al., 2015), these could not avoid a predominantly dualist perspective that may only capture women's entrepreneurial processes through their enablers and deterrents (Chreim et al., 2018). According to Corrêa et al. (2020), this is not an issue exclusive to women's entrepreneurship studies since it is grounded in the fact that reciprocity and redistribution mechanisms within social relations have been poorly explored in the broad entrepreneurship literature, one thing an integration between ME and Neo-IT is meant to address.

Corrêa et al. (2020) have commented that a detailed look at these repercussions of social embeddedness is essential to solving Granovetter's (1985) famous 'problem of embeddedness,' which tried to avoid a deterministic view of individual behavior but kept on overlooking social dimensions present in an individual's relationship with their strong and weak ties because Granovetter (1985) ended up privileging economic structures as much as his contemporary economic scholars did (Corrêa et al., 2020)—a trend that has perpetuated in ME despite the inclusion of spatial and relational embeddedness in the model.

In our theoretical triangulation between ME and Neo-IT, we argue reciprocity refers to how close ties establish similar patterns of behavior (Corrêa et al., 2020), i.e., the entrepreneur tries to mimic business strategies seen elsewhere in the organizational field s/he operates, recurring to their personal relations to shape their behavior in the enterprise setting. Therefore, in our model, we align ME's concept of reciprocity to Neo-IT's isomorphism.

In turn, ME's redistribution recalls Neo-IT's legitimacy principle to the extent that it refers to how the entrepreneur is able to disseminate new or old entrepreneurial behavioral patterns among their weak and strong ties (Corrêa et al., 2020), meaning their entrepreneurial behavior may affect the organizational field to the same degree as it is affected by their close networking connections. Such a refreshed perspective on the 'good-old' entrepreneurial process may provide new understandings of how women's agency—or, in fact, any type of entrepreneur—can change their environment by using it as a source of change through the people around them, the people whom they reach either because of their business or their personal relations. This becomes even more complex and problematic in migratory contexts due to their transnational nature (Solano, 2020), which expands migrant entrepreneurs' networks through cross-bordering and international cooperation, let alone the specific intersectional cultural norms that regulate female insertion in entrepreneurial ecosystems in both the home and host country.

Such a networking process happens because relational embeddedness is dependent on the legitimation granted by the existing actors within a given network (aka incumbents) upon the evaluation of a candidate's (outsiders of a given institutional field) suitability to enter that network (Stoyanov, 2018). This implies that embeddedness is a contingent phenomenon related

to an individual's gradual tendency to adopt a socially expected behavior, i.e., a candidate's ability to operate in an established system of social norms and expectations (Scott, 2014).

Then, our integrative approach extends such a construct in that it does not stop at an analysis of how capital assets are deployed against a hostile structural environment; by contrast, it recognizes that forms of capital are not purely inherent in the social agents but are rather “properties ... in many respects conditioned by the structure itself” (Ram et al., 2017, p. 432). This dialogical relationship between the functionalist epistemology found in Neo-IT and the structuralist epistemology found in ME is what most enriches an integrative framework among these two theories.

Interestingly, although the inventors of ME have tried to evolve their framework to incorporate actors' agency upon the mobilization of established economic, social, cultural, and regulatory structures (Stoyanov, 2018), they have failed to reproduce or map the process by which individuals function differently when they carry out such mobilization. In other words, the outcomes of their intervention in institutional fields, and consequently, individuals' change capacity in foreign environments is still lost, as agency in ME relates merely to “a battery of resources under the agents' ownership to be brought to bear on the structure” (Stoyanov, 2018, pp. 3-4).

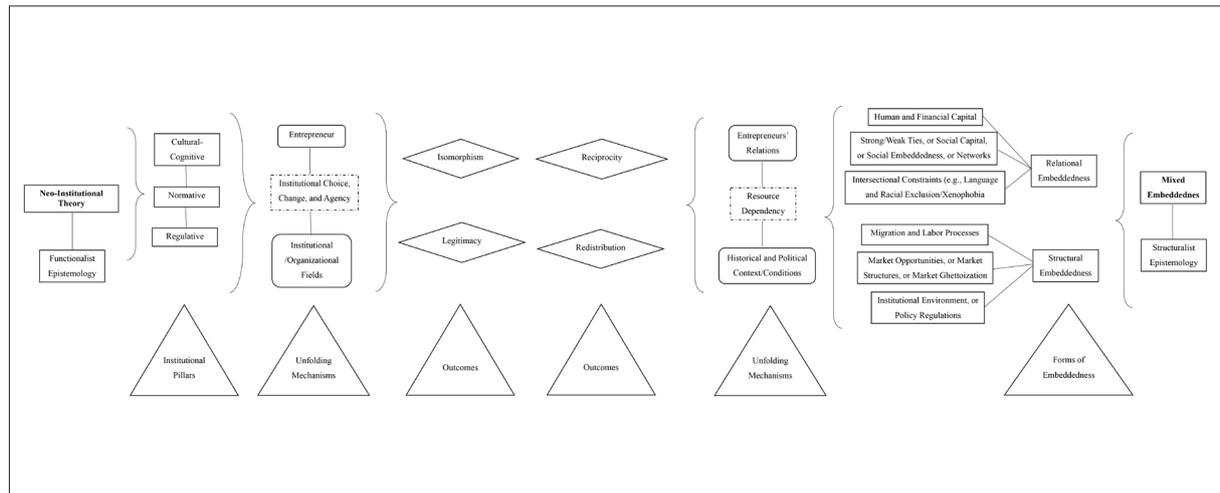
Neo-IT then adds to the theoretical model of ME by providing a clearer understanding of how institutionalized social practices, the institutions themselves, and the phenomenon of isomorphism and legitimacy, both in the country of origin (e.g., in the case of transnational enterprises) and in the country of destination, influence the three dimensions of ME, namely economic embeddedness (resource-dependency issues), social embeddedness (relations and networking among close and distant ties) and institutional embeddedness (creation, development, and consolidation of 'migrant entrepreneurship institutional fields' overseas, which are admittedly formed in relation to the entrepreneurial ecosystems present in the country of settlement). In fact, it cannot be stated that institutional embeddedness has been covered so far in the extant literature using ME as a framework, provided that only regulatory elements have been investigated under a top-down view, i.e., regulatory structures impinging barriers or advantages on migrant entrepreneurs. Arguably, these subjects may navigate through such structures to rearrange the regulations, norms, and cultural values they will disseminate through their entrepreneurial processes abroad, i.e., they undertake critical decision-making while performing their institutionalization processes overseas.

More importantly, studying institutional embeddedness through these lenses allows unraveling how the female genre engages in categorization and comparison of social codes for constructing candidates' legitimacy in the female immigrant entrepreneurship institutional fields in terms of in-groups (i.e. incumbents) and out-groups (i.e. candidates) networking selection and negotiation of self-representation, reactivity, relatedness, reflexivity, integration, and proactiveness (Stoyanov, 2018). In other words, by engaging in these processes, it is possible to understand how migrant women entrepreneurs form perceptions and define others and themselves within the social context to which they learn to belong, meaning the outcomes of

their entrepreneurial processes serve as a medium to operate within institutional fields through isomorphism/reciprocity and legitimacy/redistribution.

Figure 1 shows a theoretical schema of the propositions discussed in this section to clarify the interconnections evidenced between ME and Neo-IT. Next, we head to the final framework that has been devised based on the institutional and mixed embeddedness factors of relevance to the institutionalization of female migrant entrepreneurial processes.

Figure 1. Intersections of Mixed Embeddedness and Neo-institutionalism Revisited



Source: own elaboration

A final framework for studying female entrepreneurial processes in migratory contexts

Micro or individual level of analysis

The current literature on female immigrant entrepreneurship informs us that there are individual structures that influence the reasons behind emigration decision-making among females and, drawing on Nassif's et al. (2010, p. 219) dynamic framework to explain the entrepreneurial process, this could be deemed as how entrepreneurs learn “how to be” in the face of migration and their entrepreneurial inception overseas (Brzozowski, 2017; Chreim et al., 2018). This happens because the manifold forms of capital (e.g., human, social, financial, and cultural capital) and the household division of labor are determinant to female business venturing conditions and results overseas (Chreim et al., 2018; Vita et al., 2014; Welsh et al., 2018).

Human and cultural capital, for example, equip female entrepreneurs with the skills and cultural awareness needed to cognitively engage in the foreign business landscape (Welsh et al., 2018; Gurău et al., 2020). Social capital, in turn, provides access to networks, mentorship, and collaboration opportunities, enhancing their normative position in the business community (Welsh

et al., 2018). Financial capital enables investment and expansion, contributing to compliance with economic and social regulative demands (Langevang et al., 2015; Yousafzai et al., 2015). Also, the household division of labor normatively influences the time and resources they can allocate to their business endeavors (Langevang et al., 2015; Langevang et al., 2018). This shows embedding structures are seen in an institutional top-down logic that, in earlier stages of these subjects' entrepreneurial processes, may determine their forms of being entrepreneurs in the host country until females use their own individual entrepreneurial outcomes to contest them. Accordingly, we formulate the following proposition:

P1: Females' relational capabilities and personal-related attributes help shape their individual entrepreneurial outcomes in the host country's organizational field.

Some of these well-known outcomes may include i) awareness of individual value and financial independence as opposed to greater dependency on the husband serving as a primary reason for immigration (Munkejord, 2017; Xie et al., 2021); ii) work-life balance as opposed to a work-intensive culture in the country of origin (Munkejord, 2017; Zubair & Brzozowski, 2018); iii) skill development and cultural integration amidst an immediate belief that the immigrant has inferior professional qualifications (Bisignano & El-Anis, 2019; Jones et al., 2014); iv) improved family and social status regarding social upward mobility and ethnic representativeness in the country of destination (Murzacheva et al., 2020; Solano, 2020).

Hence, while social embeddedness is created through the institutionalization of a "mix" of cross-bordering capitals and household division of labor, female immigrant entrepreneurs may use the individual outcomes of their entrepreneurial processes to legitimize new forms of social embeddedness among their co-ethnic gendered network. As a result, we establish this second proposition:

P2: New forms of social embeddedness are disseminated through the individual outcomes of immigrant women's enterprises.

Hence, future empirical studies focusing on this micro-level of analysis should bring to light what the new forms of social embeddedness emerging from immigrant women's entrepreneurial outcomes are and how these forms are institutionalized from the individual elements pointed out in this subsection.

Meso or organizational level of analysis

Moving toward environmental and market conditions of the female immigrant entrepreneurial process, we find that opportunity structures, racist exclusion, gendered labor processes, gender-based business strategies, and relationships with competitors and suppliers have also a special influence on how female immigrants learn "how to do" (Nassif et al., 2010, p. 219) entrepreneurship

abroad. Since market structures “may favor products or services oriented to the co-ethnic niche or situations in which a wider, non-ethnic market is served” (Aldrich & Waldinger, 1990, p. 114), they may normatively and cognitively determine the ease or difficulty with which females access business opportunities.

Therefore, in the configuration of their economic embeddedness, racist exclusion is often related to how the market normatively conditions the potential of migrant entrepreneurs by compelling them to operate in “under-rewarded sectors unwanted by native firms” (Ram et al., 2017, p. 9) due to xenophobic practices, racial and gender bias, and labor market discrimination (Bisignano & El-Anis, 2019; Jones et al., 2014). As a consequence, it is not uncommon to see mimetic isomorphism pushing immigrant female entrepreneurs to service industries particularly shaped by gendered labor processes, such as the beauty and care industry or even the food industry (Cruz et al., 2020). In the cognitive formation of assumptions about work and professional experiences within patriarchal societies, more powerful actors (often men, with the support of employers) exclude women in order to monopolize desired jobs (Brieger & Gielnik, 2020; Murzacheva et al., 2020), and this tends to be perpetuated unless immigrant females develop gender-based business strategies, where they employ new forms of leadership, managerial and communication styles to combat the status quo (Langevang et al., 2018; Xie et al., 2021).

Their relationship with competitors and suppliers also involves an essential dimension in their economic embeddedness insofar as it enables them to expand their initially bounded social capital—centered as it is in their close ties—to access strategic informal information coming from co-ethnic or native networks, which may also add to their business by providing specialized business services (Solano, 2020; Stoyanov, 2018). The same applies to the process of cognitively establishing trust and emotional support among ethnic or native professional connections within the foreign market (Chrysostome, 2010). Therefore, considering there are top-down institutional market embedding structures shaping the implementation and growth of the migrant female enterprise, our third proposition is as follows:

P3: Females’ market capabilities and managerial-related attributes nurture their firm-oriented outcomes in the host country’s organizational field.

Firm-oriented outcomes correspond to the results originating from the survival capacity and long-term resilience of immigrant women-owned businesses in the foreign market (Chreim et al., 2018; Chrysostome, 2010). Some of them may include i) increased income and revenue stemming from accelerated business growth (Vita et al., 2014); ii) brand value creation focused on their foreignness being explored as a commercial asset (Gurău et al., 2020); iii) employment of co-ethnic, other minority, or native women, since females are more likely to hire other females, helping rebalance power structures over gender in the labor market (Zubair & Brzozowski, 2018); iv) risk propensity, in that they help cognitively disseminate a risk-taking culture among other co-ethnic females wishing to start a business (Chrysostome, 2010); v) fairer market share distribution on the proportion of native versus migrant firms operating in the host environment (Chrysostome, 2010;

Kloosterman, 2010); vi) competitive business performance linked to new connections grown out of their business activities (Welsh et al., 2018); vii) facilitated internationalization process due to the formation of co-ethnic transnational corridor (Solano, 2020; Yamamura & Lassalle, 2022); viii) normative support of tax compliance “informality bias” surrounding the immigrant enterprise (Adom & Ackom, 2023; Bisignano & El-Anis, 2019). Given the wide scope of organizational outcomes to transform the very opportunity structures from which they emerge, we formulate the fourth proposition:

P4: New forms of economic embeddedness are disseminated through the firm-oriented outcomes of immigrant women’s enterprises.

As such, novel empirical studies directed at this meso level of analysis should illuminate what these new forms of economic embeddedness might be and how they become institutionalized through/in immigrant women’s entrepreneurial processes with the aid of (or in spite of) the environmental and market embedding elements discussed in this subsection.

Macro or institutional level of analysis

Finally, transitioning to the macro level of analysis of the female immigrant entrepreneurial process, we speculate that regulation (e.g. in the form of migration policies, gender-oriented policies, or entrepreneurship policies) and the migratory historical context offers a unique configuration to what became known as “institutional embeddedness” (Ram et al., 2017, p. 9) or even “contextual embeddedness” (Brieger & Gielnik, 2020, p. 1010). In line with Nassif’s et al. (2010, p. 219) dynamic framework, this would be where female migrants learn “how to act” so that the outcomes of their entrepreneurial processes may be introduced as innovative societal patterns in the country of settlement.

Overall, although regulation entails a “country of operation’s migration policy on both the drivers and outcomes of migrant entrepreneurship” (Ram et al., 2017, p. 9), such regulative influence often represents knock-on effects that, in practice, limit female immigrants’ occupational choice (Brieger & Gielnik, 2020; Ram et al., 2017). Historical context, in turn, constantly evolves in terms of the cultural, social, political, and macroeconomic conditions affecting migrants’ and native-borns’ livelihoods (Jones et al., 2014; Ram et al., 2017).

Besides these top-down institutional embeddedness elements, Szkudlarek and Wu (2018) reveal that entrepreneurs may not necessarily comply with local institutions in their country of destination due to cultural conflicts. In this case, new forms of sensemaking toward formal regulative elements, such as bureaucratic processes for business opening and citizenship regularization, may come up (Brieger & Gielnik, 2020; Szkudlarek & Wu, 2018; Webster, 2020). Szkudlarek and Wu (2018) exemplified this phenomenon using a phenomenography with Chinese entrepreneurs in Germany, showcasing how this group keeps privileging entrepreneurial models typically associated with their Wenzhou ascendance’s institutional background (e.g., entrepreneurship

targeted at communal, survival, and hierarchical control of co-ethnic relationships) despite the new cultural input stemming from the individualistic and allegedly gender-neutral Dutch environment.

Under the incorporation of such a bottom-up perspective, female migrant entrepreneurs' encounters—and, in fact, any type of migrant entrepreneurs' encounters with such regulative and contextual institutions, as evidenced by *Szkudlarek and Wu (2018)*—may represent a collective system ingrained in their country of origin's institutional roots giving support to other co-ethnic entrepreneurs living within the same geographical area or transnational borders (*Yamamura & Lassalle, 2022*). Specifically, this happens when “encounters are made for enacting and enabling (positive) impacts” within these subjects' entrepreneurial processes (*Webster, 2020, p. 2*). Hence, we suggest that:

P5: Women become institutionally embedded in the context of immigrant entrepreneurship through the societal outcomes they disseminate with their enterprises, particularly within co-ethnic enclaves and transnational networks.

Societal outcomes imply that female immigrants may indirectly act upon the country of settlement's wider society. This may be in the form of newcomers' assistance with their integration into the host society (*Brieger & Gielnik, 2020; Jones et al., 2014; Stoyanov, 2018*). Additionally, literature pointed to the fact that i) migrant firms tend to normatively and cognitively stimulate higher employability rates within the same ethnic enclave (*Adom & Ackom, 2023; Chreim et al., 2028*); ii) migrant female firms disseminate businesswomen role models, cognitively acting as successful role models for other aspiring migrant entrepreneurs (*Chrysostome, 2010; Langevang et al., 2018*); iii) female entrepreneurs are more community-centered and thus engaged with the development of occupational skills among minority groups (*Cardella et al., 2020; Langevang et al., 2015*); and iv) female migrant entrepreneurs privilege visa compliance, even though they may grow different views toward their citizenship status in their country of residence (*Webster, 2020*).

Consequently, institutional entrepreneurs may be deemed entry points that, through their “learning how to act” in a foreign organizational field, may introduce positive or negative changes, reshaping pre-existing policy fields. While this often occurs when they present highly divergent behaviors comparably to those institutionalized in their new country of residence, it should not be indicative of their levels of entrepreneurial success and achievement in the host society, for they may create novel embedding structures with key individuals, norms, rituals deriving from within their local expatriate community. Therefore, we formulate our sixth proposition:

P6.: New forms of institutional embeddedness are disseminated through the societal outcomes of female immigrants' enterprises.

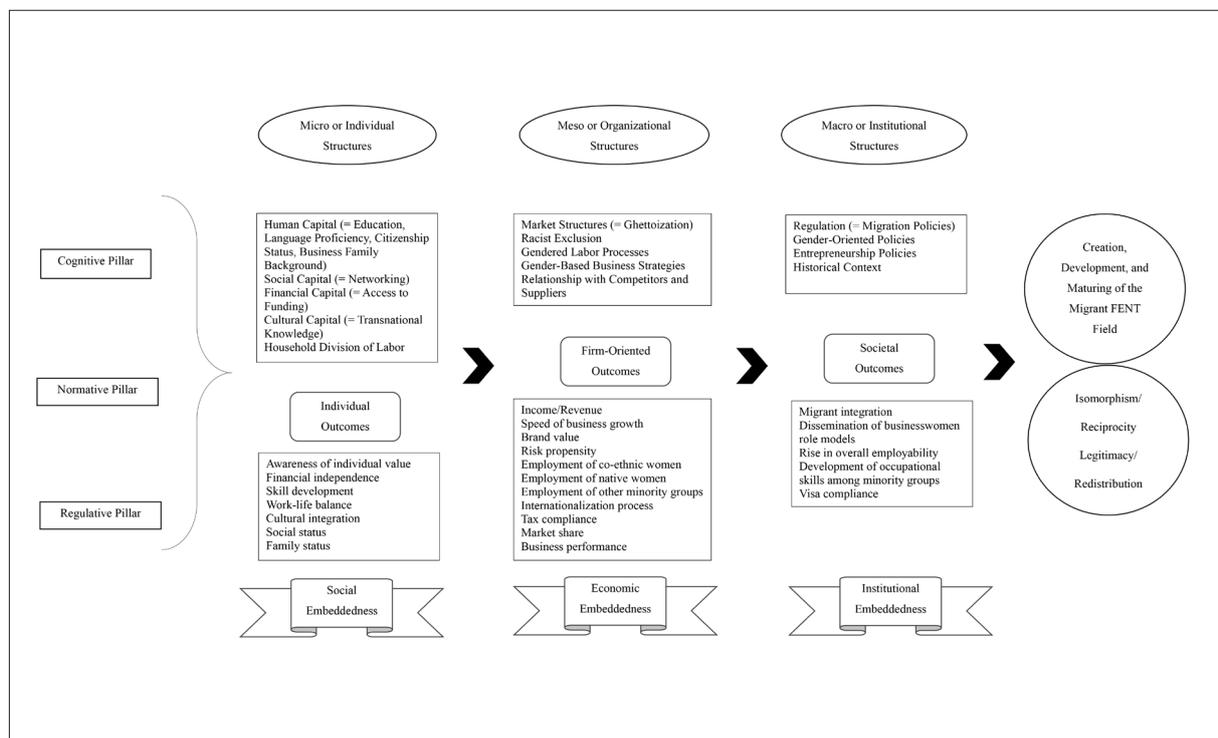
Considering that “studying encounters in spaces and places of policy fields may offer new insights to the complex processes of entrepreneurship” (*Webster, 2020, p. 2*), future empirical

studies directed at this macro level of analysis ought to dig deeper into these new forms of institutional embeddedness, particularly unveiling how they come to be institutionalized through immigrant women’s entrepreneurial processes in either transnational or contingent phenomena marked by the elements brought up in this subsection.

Tridimensional framework of the female immigrant entrepreneurial process

Acknowledging all three analytical levels discussed herein, we now present the conceptual model designed for this work in Figure 2. It expands the frameworks currently found in the literature in that it sheds light on the outcomes of the female immigrant entrepreneurial processes, centered on the aspects of reciprocity/isomorphism and redistribution/legitimacy that institutionalize them on either a foreign or transnational organizational field. As a result of this institutionalization process, a nascent gender-oriented migrant entrepreneurship field can only be fully uncovered when we intertwine the seminal works of Neo-IT to provide a fresh revised outlook for the ME approach.

Figure 2. Conceptual Model for Investigating Immigrant Female Entrepreneurial Processes



Source: own elaboration

The fact that we represent our conceptual model in stages and not dynamically, as Nassif et al. (2010) do, does not imply that there cannot be a relationship between the structuring elements of the various forms of embeddedness at each level and the entrepreneurial outcomes observed at other levels. Welsh et al. (2018), for example, found that firm performance (i.e., a meso-level outcome) relies much more on human capital (i.e., a micro-level embedding element) than on social capital (i.e., another micro-level embedding element) when it comes to female entrepreneurship. It should be noted, therefore, that the processual mindset outlined herein only implies that there are stages of legitimization within embedding structures and that these stages' configuration may vary according to entrepreneurs' gender. In this sense, some elements appear at different stages when considering the immigrant entrepreneurial process undergone by either male or female business owners.

Another point to stress relates to the institutional pillars that influence the institutionalization of both embedding structures and entrepreneurial outcomes. Although there are elements of a recognizably regulatory, cognitive, or normative nature already mapped in the literature, attention must also be paid to the particularities of each context in identifying other institutional nuances that may interfere with the occurrence of the same phenomenon. This means that the institutional bases of legitimation should not be taken as absolute to support a more immediate type of isomorphism.

For example, to the same extent financial capital may be influenced by government controls and regulations on the availability of resources for immigrant women enterprises' inception (i.e., coercive isomorphism) (Cardella et al., 2020; Vita et al., 2014), cognitive norms can also prevent women from having access to formal credit options in the migrant context due to language bias or an excessively masculine culture toward credit concession (i.e., mimetic isomorphism) (Chreim et al., 2018; Langevang et al., 2015). Likewise, gender equality and gender-oriented entrepreneurial policies can help re-balance the patriarchal division of labor in a regulative perspective (i.e., coercive isomorphism) (Brieger & Gielnik, 2020; Vita et al., 2014), though societal norms might also shape the roles immigrant women are to play in the host society (i.e., normative isomorphism) (Langevang et al., 2018; Xie et al., 2021), which often pushes them to entrepreneurship as a means to reconcile expectations linked to raising children and their own professional goals (Brush et al., 2009; Langevang et al., 2015; Langevang et al., 2018).

Finally, we conclude that entrepreneurship may be analyzed beyond its market dimension (Corrêa et al., 2020) once Neo-institutionalism serves as a consolidated guiding principle for the understanding of the isomorphism phenomenon (i.e., the reproduction of hegemonic social practices) and legitimacy in each organizational field. Complementarily, ME is applied to investigate how these processes occur from moving from a top-down logic to a bottom-up one centered on the figure of the institutional entrepreneur—an individual who is capable of navigating through pre-existing structures on the micro, meso, and macro levels (Eisenstadt, 1980), to showcase agency and the many forms of embeddedness are interconnected phenomena always at play in entrepreneurial processes.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This paper provides an integrative framework to analyze immigrant women's entrepreneurial process, given the gap in the extant literature on immigrant entrepreneurship, to encompass the specificities and uniqueness that surround the entrepreneurial process undertaken by this group without limiting itself to a dualist perspective that merely lists the constraints and drivers affecting immigrant women's entrepreneurial activity.

It is argued that what prevented such an integrative model from being consolidated was that ME alone as a theoretical lens was unable to capture “the redistributive and reciprocity behaviors that exist alongside market behaviors in modern society” (Barber, 1995, p. 406). Therefore, the integrative logic pursued herein occurs “when mutuality between individuals in symmetrical groupings is frequent” (i.e., reciprocity/isomorphism) and when “sharing among individuals is common” (i.e., redistribution/legitimacy) (Polanyi, 2018, p. 35). These two mechanisms suggest there is a mutual interaction between levels of analysis since society's macrostructures are bridged by organizational fields as much as there are microstructures dependent on individual actors within organizations (Scott, 2014), which accounts for the true ‘institutional embeddedness’ dimension in ME.

In trying to uncover the relational nature of entrepreneurs embedded in macro social contexts, Corrêa et al. (2020) recommended analyzing how repercussions (i.e., outcomes) of the reciprocity-and-redistribution dynamics affected the entrepreneurial trajectory (i.e., process) of different social actors, one thing that can only be done by the structuralist dimension of ME in combination with the functionalist epistemological dimension of Neo-IT. Using the former alone would reflect a similar conflict between agents' decisions and sensemaking, shaped by structures and not necessarily by reciprocity and redistribution principles, which becomes evident in Corrêa et al.'s (2020) criticism of the unsolved problem left in the traditional analytical perspective of embeddedness.

In this sense, adopting such an integrative, multilevel framework of analysis helps understand the gendered social factors underneath migration movements and ethnic businesses whereby female immigrants' functions within structures are (re)shaped and (re)negotiated in a dialogical sensemaking that cut across the institutional norms, regulations, and cultures they were used to in their country of origin and those they got used to and resignified in their country(ies) of destination(s). Additionally, it helps tackle a stagnant evaluation of the dynamics between individual agency and structure (Kloosterman & Rath, 2018) in the immigrant entrepreneurship scholarship, in which individual aspects are still prioritized in a reductionist fashion, despite the ‘mixed’ added to Granovetter's (1985) embeddedness, representing a step forward to the advance of the extant scholarly on the subject.

In terms of the puzzles for further research on female immigrant entrepreneurship using the integrative framework devised in this paper, at least three issues need to be addressed. First, the clear limitation of the current analysis is the lack of further debate on the types of institutional fields female migrant entrepreneurs may develop. As Machado-da-Silva et al. (2006, p. 34) reveal,

there are at least six institutional field types in the seminal Institutional Theory literature and, though we assume our framework would be situated under the labels of “fields as a structured network of relationships” and/or “fields as the totality of relevant actors,” empirical testing and validation would be required to advance such a theoretical proposition.

Second, the type of business or ‘mode of working’ female migrant entrepreneurs are likely to engage with overseas may also impact the rules they establish in the institutional fields they help to create. For example, the many intervening conditions of females working as digital nomads (transnational mobility in evidence), digital entrepreneurs (the gendered side of digital work in evidence), home-based entrepreneurs (household power relations in female work in evidence), on-site business activities (spatial dimension in evidence), etc., may or may not be determinant in the way female migrant entrepreneurs perceive and select candidates to enter their institutional fields, or even disseminate entrepreneurial practices to be followed or avoided by other peers based on their entrepreneurial outcomes. In this respect, we advocate that technology is to be studied as a source of agency in female migrant entrepreneurship scholarship, especially in regard to the allegedly very small number of migrant women who may take part in innovation hubs or innovative entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Overall, it is expected that the discussion raised by the present paper allows an in-depth reflection of how models uncovering the specificities of female entrepreneurship are still scarce in the broad entrepreneurship literature and how new ones may emerge, be expanded, or even reframed through consistent theoretical triangulation, to enrich the current perspectives of analysis that position the female entrepreneur as a true network creator.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Victoria Barboza de Castro Cunha: Conceptualization, formal analysis, Visualization; Writing – original draft; Writing – proofreading and editing.

Thiago Cavalcante Nascimento: Project administration; Supervision; Validation.

Roberto Pessoa de Queiroz Falcão: Supervision; Validation; Writing – proofreading and editing.