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Book Review: Women and Entrepreneurship: Female Durability, Persistence and Intuition at Work

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Women and Entrepreneurship: Female Durability, Persistence and Intuition at Work; Radovic-Markovic, M., & Alecchi, B. E. A.; Gower Publishing, Ltd.; Surrey; 182; £54.

Reviewed by Caitlin Blaser¹

This recent work by Avolio Alecchi and Radović-Marković provides a solid introduction to why women become entrepreneurs, and what implications this has for them and their work. An accessible account of the unique position of women in the workplace, this book seems targeted towards policy makers and people working in the entrepreneurship sector with a particular interest in gender. It would still make an accessible read for women entrepreneurs themselves, or people interested in a better understanding of gender in a range of nontraditional workplaces. It is useful in both understanding the drivers of entrepreneurialism, as well as gendered attitudes and opportunities in the workplace.

The book is divided into two sections, the first of which presents a theoretical background to women in the workplace across the developing world (Latin America and Eastern Europe specifically), spelling out why women become entrepreneurs, what kinds of women become entrepreneurs, and what some of the specific opportunities and challenges women face as entrepreneurs. Unsurprisingly, most women entrepreneurs have a strong support system around them of friends and family who have run their own businesses. The importance of a support system, whether for business development or care work, appeared throughout the book as a key factor to women's ability to succeed as entrepreneurs.

Over seven chapters, the first section covers definitions of female entrepreneurs, motivations for becoming an entrepreneur, and characteristics of women entrepreneurs. While this section focuses more heavily than many studies on women working in the developing world, it does not locate the subject in broader discourse around economic development. While a reader may assume there are many reasons why women entrepreneurs in developing countries may be unique, or why a disaggregated understanding of them may be important, this section could bring the discussion out more explicitly. What the section did well was introduce the topic of women entrepreneurs, and present a range of angles through which this career path could be understood. It framed the issue of women's entrepreneurship through lenses of inequality, management styles, and obstacles. The section presented an accessible discussion of motivations and implications of entrepreneurialism among women.

While this section is somewhat academic in tone, it makes only a cursory attempt at situating the discussion in existing literature. In the first chapter, a map of existing literature is presented, which points to trends in the understanding of women entrepreneurs. However, much of the research the authors engage with is over 20 years old; the most recent piece of research cited was from 2005, which gives the section a slightly dated feel. Still, it does a good job of bringing forward trends in the literature, and connecting discussions from the global south that may not necessarily have been brought together before.

The second part of the book takes a sectoral approach, looking at specific fields that are particularly shaped by women's entrepreneurship, ranging from African women farmers to home

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based businesses. This section includes key factors in the success or failure of a home business, as well as some of the implications working in each sector has for women. The tone of this section diverges somewhat from the first, and instead of engaging with an academic audience, it presents a 'how to guide' for women on the cusp of various career paths. This section discusses the various backgrounds, skills, experiences, etc. that women seem to have in particular areas of work, as well as what characteristics seem to determine success in various fields. It also discusses key considerations for women working in these fields, whether it is greater availability for childcare, flexibility in time commitment, less income stability, etc. Some of the discussions would likely seem self evident to women who have worked in the fields discussed, but would be useful for those hoping to get a better understanding of gender in the workplace, or considering a new career path.

One strength of the book is that the two authors clearly demonstrated both significant knowledge and experience on the topic. The chapters were varied enough in nature that it seemed to have the breadth in scope of a multi-author, edited volume. However, as it reads, the authors maintain a consistent tone throughout, making the book readable. The book is also peppered with useful facts and information about female entrepreneurs. However, this is somewhat offset by an inconsistency in contextualizing and analyzing the data. The significance is often left to the reader to infer, and the book would have been strengthened with stronger connections to existing literature on gender and development. As it stands, the depth of analysis falls short in certain areas. However, over all, this book does a good job of introducing the topic of female entrepreneurship to the reader, in a way that is readable and engaging. The book is situated in between an academic discussion and popular advice, and while this occasionally feels awkward, on the whole, the authors did a good job of balancing both arenas. This should allow the book to appeal to a wide readership.