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Identity is a matter of place: intersectional identities of Romanian women migrant entrepreneurs on the Eastern-Western European route.

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Identity is a matter of place: intersectional identities of Romanian women migrant entrepreneurs on the Eastern-Western European route

Abstract

Purpose: Female entrepreneurship is increasing. Romanian women migrant entrepreneurs (RWMEs) are among the largest EU migrant communities in the UK and make significant socioeconomic contributions to both their host and origin nations, but academic research and policy discussions have ignored them. Intersectionality raises complex contextual issues that require comprehensive examination and inclusive policies and programmes. This study was aimed at exploring how Romanian women migrant entrepreneurs experience their transnational intersectional journeys of belonging, as they create, negotiate and enact their intersectional identities of the country of origin, gender, and being entrepreneurs in the UK and Romania.

Study design/methodology/approach: This Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) draws on draws upon Crenshaw's (1991) intersectional and Social Identity theories (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) to investigate how nine interviewed RWMEs have experienced their transnational journeys of acculturative belonging in the UK and Romania.

Findings: The study findings show how RWMEs undo and negotiate their intersecting identities to adhere to socio-cultural standards in both their host and native nations. In the UK, they feel empowered as women entrepreneurs, but in patriarchal Romania, their entrepreneurial identity is revoked, contradicting the prescribed socio-cultural roles.

Originality/value: This study responds to the call regarding inequalities in entrepreneurship opportunities (Vershina *et al.*, 2022). By focusing on the understudied community of RWMEs and exploring new intersectional and transnational contextual insights, it contributes to the literature and practice of migrant entrepreneurship. These empirical findings are essential for the development of evidence-based, disaggregated entrepreneurship programmes and policies.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship; women; migration; intersectionality; transnationalism

Introduction

The prevalence of transnational migration has emerged as a significant phenomenon in contemporary society, leading recently to extensive discussion and scholarly discourse. Extensive inquiries have been carried out within the realm of migration research, focusing on the multifaceted phenomenon of transnationalism across various societal domains. However, research into transnational entrepreneurship has only recently gain momentum in academic circles (Vershina and Rodgers, 2020; Yamamura and Lassalle, 2019, 2022).

Transnationalism and super-diversity have been linked (Vertovec, 2007; 2020), and despite the growing number of women migrants globally (IOM, 2020), there is evidence suggesting that their potential for entrepreneurship and its diversity is overlooked by universalist perspectives and policies. These perspectives and policies are widely questioned across different socio-cultural contexts due to discriminatory patriarchal and masculine hegemonies (White, 2018; Vershinina *et al.*, 2021). As a result, women migrant entrepreneurs have often been portrayed as “trailing wives” or “silent contributors” (Lassalle and Shaw, 2021; Dhaliwal, 1998), reinforcing cultural and prescribed social roles. However, these women are increasingly expressing their gendered entrepreneurship experiences of belonging (Villares-Varela and Essers, 2019), where gender is seen as a way of conducting business, rather than just a way of being (Phillips and Knowles, 2012; Vershinina and Rodgers, 2019; Villares-Varela and Essers, 2019).

Recent studies suggest that aspects related to legitimacy regarding both their businesses and their entrepreneurship identity, that is, the embodiment of socially held practices expectations (Radu-Lefebvre *et al.*, 2021), remain understudied (Vershina *et al.*, 2020). There is increasing evidence that women migrant entrepreneurs usually face cultural disparities, network accessibility, and weak institutional support (Dheer *et al.*, 2021). Nevertheless, due to their intersecting identities, as women, migrants, and entrepreneurs, their challenges are not homogeneous (Dy, 2020), as current conviction-based policies imply (Vertovec, 2020). The importance of multiple and sometimes competing identities that people hold, interact with, and shape, as well as how they experience privilege and prejudice, is emphasised by intersectionality (Isaza Castro, 2021). That is, increasing evidence suggests that intersecting identities of race, ethnicity, and gender greatly impact on women migrant entrepreneurs’ journey of belonging (Abd Hamid, 2019; Chitac, 2021) equally shaping contextual discriminatory practices (Kheiravar and Maheshwari, 2021) and entrepreneurial opportunities (Gupta and Turban, 2019).

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3 Adding to this study's intersectional complexity is the transnational in-betweenness
4 experienced by these women entrepreneurs, operating businesses in both home and host
5 countries across dual socioeconomic contexts (Vershina and Rodgers, 2020). The
6 development of a transnational perspective on migrant entrepreneurs is achieved by combining
7 the fields of migration studies and entrepreneurship research. The intersection of
8 transnationalism, super-diversity, and entrepreneurship has been evidenced by studies
9 conducted by Sepulveda *et al.* (2011), Vershinina and Rodgers (2020), and Yamamura and
10 Lassalle (2019, 2022).

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12 Despite being among the largest EU immigrant group in the UK (ONS, 2021) and potentially
13 having a significant sociocultural and economic impact on both the host and native nations,
14 Romanian women immigrant entrepreneurs are often ignored in this heated debate, except for
15 a few studies (Chitac, 2021; Gurau *et al.*, 2020).

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17 Responding to the call for papers on inequalities and entrepreneurial opportunities (Vershina
18 *et al.*, 2022), this IPA paper draws upon Crenshaw's (1991) intersectional and Social Identity
19 Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) to fulfil its aim of exploring how Romanian women migrant
20 entrepreneurs experience their transnational intersectional journeys of belonging, as they
21 create, negotiate and enact their intersectional identities of country-of-origin, gender and being
22 entrepreneurs in the UK and Romania. Nine RWMEs were sampled using snowballing,
23 derived-rapport, and Facebook e-snowballing (Chitac and Knowles, 2019). They participated
24 in face-to-face semi-structured interviews as part of a larger study on London-based Romanian
25 migrant entrepreneurs' acculturation through entrepreneurship from 2017 to 2021.

26
27 This article advances the women's entrepreneurship literature and **understanding of** practices
28 by adopting a contextualised (Welter, 2011, 2020) feminist view of entrepreneurship (Ahl and
29 Marlow, 2017) that **prioritises** how women "do context" and "do business", rather than
30 **emphasising** the dyadic differences between men and women (Lassalle and Shaw, 2021). This
31 change, along with the well-documented male counterparts, supports the claim that
32 acknowledging the heterogeneity of entrepreneurs' diversity in the context of migration
33 supports future generations of immigrant entrepreneurs by enabling the creation of evidence-
34 based, disaggregated policies and **programmes** that could unlock underutilised socioeconomic
35 entrepreneurial talent that all could benefit from (Vertovec, 2020).

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37 Against this landscape, this IPA study **was aimed** at exploring how Romanian women migrant
38 entrepreneurs experience their transnational intersectional journeys of belonging, as they
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3 create, negotiate and enact their intersectional identities of country-of-origin, gender, and being
4 entrepreneurs in the UK and Romania.
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7 In support of this aim, the following research questions were formulated:
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10 RQ1. How do RWMEs experience their journeys of transnational belonging as Romanian
11 migrants, women, and entrepreneurs in the UK?
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14 RQ2. How do RWMEs experience their journeys of transnational belonging as Romanian
15 migrants, women, and entrepreneurs in Romania?
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18 The remainder of the article is organised as follows. First, this study's significance is framed
19 by reviewing the literature on women's migrant entrepreneurship, trans-contextual
20 intersectionality and belonging. Second, the methodology and methods are presented, with
21 qualitative IPA foundations and their applicability to support the study's aim and addressing
22 research questions being explained. Subsequently, the findings are presented in the section
23 that follows. They reveal the transnational journeys of belonging shared by Romanian women
24 migrant entrepreneurs in the UK and Romania as intersectional experiences as women,
25 migrants, and entrepreneurs. Finally, the contributions, limitations, and future research
26 directions are discussed, followed by the conclusion.
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34 **Theoretical and empirical background**

35 **Contextualising transnational women migrant entrepreneurship**

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37 Transnational entrepreneurship research is a nascent field of inquiry. The convergence of
38 interests in diverse domains makes the combination of approaches from entrepreneurial
39 research and transnational migration literature a promising interdisciplinary research area.
40 Migration study complements entrepreneurship studies by laying the groundwork for
41 transnational migrant entrepreneurship. It uncovers the contextual migrant
42 entrepreneurs' perspectives and experiences. Transnationalism and superdiversity are
43 examples of migration research principles being applied to entrepreneurship (Sepulveda *et al.*,
44 2011; Yamamura and Lassalle, 2022).
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54 Complementing Steyaert's perspective (2016, p. 33) that "context was invented to turn analysis
55 away from its universalistic ambitions and to overcome the problems of contingency theory",
56 this study steers towards "everyday entrepreneurship" (Welter *et al.*, 2017; Baker and Welter,
57 2020) to explore the social, underexplored potential for transnational belonging of women
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migrant entrepreneurs through entrepreneurship (Vershina and Rodgers, 2019; Villares-Varela and Essers, 2019).

Western host countries dominate migrant entrepreneurship research. Intra-EU circular migration, especially among **Eastern Europeans**, like Romanians, lacks contextualised transnationalism. Transnational two-way traffic creates complex socio-cultural journeys (Drori *et al.*, 2009; Vershinina and Rodgers, 2020). Transnational entrepreneurship among this generation of migrants, who feel in-between, has not been studied. This provides a chance to expand migrant entrepreneurial studies, particularly on women migrants. **For this study**, contextualised intersectionality **is used** to examine transnational belonging and entrepreneurship (Dabic *et al.*, 2020; Vershinina and Rodgers, 2020; Villares-Varela and Essers, 2019).

In the UK, migrant entrepreneurs are often seen as more entrepreneurial than British nationals (Hart *et al.*, 2016) and are considered a significant economic force (Kerr and Kerr, 2016). **Hence**, overlooking the untapped entrepreneurial potential of nearly 50% of women migrants globally (IOM, 2020) means disregarding their substantial socioeconomic impact (Dabic *et al.*, 2020) on the diverse society of the UK (Vertovec, 2020).

Contextualising research goes beyond identifying cross-cultural boundaries (Jones *et al.*, 2019). It entails understanding how entrepreneurs actively engage with their environment (Baker and Welter, 2018; 2020), overcoming obstacles, and capitalising on opportunities through intersecting identities (Lasalle and Shaw, 2021). The need for a contextualised and intersectional framework to understand migrant entrepreneurship is growing (Vershina and Rodgers, 2020; Lasalle and Shaw, 2021). This framework rejects the traditional and deterministic view of context and entrepreneurs coexisting passively. Instead, it embraces a dynamic perspective in which context and migrant entrepreneurs actively interact and influence each other, shaping their daily lives and experiences (Welter *et al.*, 2017; 2020). This contextualised intersectional approach promotes an exciting line of inquiry in entrepreneurship, helping to understand diverse and multiple identities and the emergence of situated entrepreneurship identities across transnational contexts (Welter *et al.*, 2017). This strengthens the long-standing and re-emerging view that entrepreneurship identity and by extension, the other intersectional identities that one assumes are not “a medium through which universality operates” (Laclau, 1992, pp. 84–85), but **rather** a space of coexisting optimally distinctive particularities.

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3 As aforementioned, this article is focused on the phenomenon of transnational Romanian
4 women migrant entrepreneurship, specifically examining the first wave of Romanian migrant
5 entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom, who are in the process of planning to establish their
6 enterprises in their country of origin or have already done so. Brzozowski *et al.* (2017) classify
7 these female migrant entrepreneurs as transnational rather than transnational diaspora
8 entrepreneurs due to their status as first-generation migrants and recent arrivals in the host
9 country. The latter refers to individuals who are second-generation migrants or beyond (Elo,
10 2016; Vershinina *et al.*, 2019).

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18 Despite being considered one of the largest communities of intra-EU migrants in the EU,
19 second only to the Polish (ONS, 2021) and the youngest cohort of migrant entrepreneurs,
20 starting their business at an average of 25 years, almost 20 years earlier than their British
21 counterparts (CER, 2015), these “new” migrants have been rarely included on the research
22 agenda (Barrett and Vershinina 2017), except for a handful of studies focused on Romanian
23 migrants more broadly (Andreouli and Harwarth, 2019; Chitac, 2021; Moroşanu and Fox,
24 2013; Moroşanu, Szilassy and Fox, 2015; Pantiru and Barley, 2014). In fact, just one study has
25 been Romanian migrant entrepreneurs in London (Chitac, 2021) and none, to date, have
26 investigated transnational Romanian migrant entrepreneurship specifically.

27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 **Women Migrant Entrepreneurs, Intersectionality and Belonging**

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37 Intersectionality, considered “the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies,
38 in conjunction with related fields, have made so far” (McCall, 2005, p. 1171), advanced
39 feminist debates (Ahl and Marlow, 2021; Martinez Dy *et al.*, 2017) by enabling the multiplicity
40 and complexity of identities to be articulated in understanding migrant entrepreneurship
41 behaviours and experiences (Magrelli *et al.*, 2020; Lassalle and Shaw, 2021), specifically of
42 those women migrant entrepreneurs portrayed in light of multiple disadvantages (Murzacheva
43 *et al.*, 2019).

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49 Despite its long-standing tradition of addressing social inequalities and discrimination (Harris
50 and Leonardo, 2018; Lassalle and Shaw, 2021) and that of questioning the hegemonic
51 masculinity hacking the disciplinary pledge for discourse neutrality replacing the starring
52 heterogeneity of the increasing diversity across all disciplinary fields (Marlow and Martinez
53 Dy, 2018; Ozasir *et al.*, 2019), Crenshaw’s intersectionality (1991) evolved into an
54 interdisciplinary concept that enabled the understanding of how multiple identities, negotiate
55 and enact to overcome contextual challenges and thus, bring opportunities (Lassalle and Shaw,

2021). Specifically, scholars have demonstrated that disadvantaged or stigmatised communities of migrants, on the grounds of their national identities, might reactively create and enact an empowering and agentic identity, such as entrepreneurship, to “cover up” their national identity, which they associate with stigmatised, devaluing otherness and thus, increase their chances of contextual belonging (Dey *et al.*, 2017).

Often squeezed in a web of dyadic and dualist cross-cultural social roles (Graeber, 2018; Munkejord, 2017; Verkuyten, 2016), transnational women migrant entrepreneurs might experience multiple identity contextual glass ceilings as they “fail” to meet prescribed, traditional roles, as mothers, “trailing wives” (Lassalle and Shaw, 2021) or “silent contributors” (Dhaliwal, 1998), before attempting to become entrepreneurs in their own right (Vershinina and Rogers, 2019). At the same time, intersectional identities have been presented as sources of empowerment, gender equality for Muslim women entrepreneurs (Essers and Benschop, 2009), a sense of belonging and legitimacy for Chinese entrepreneurs in the United States (James *et al.*, 2021), and financial and personal autonomy; a sign of resistance to prejudice and social inequalities (Banerjee, 2019; James *et al.*, 2021).

Scholars have showcased belonging as a dynamic, contextual process or journey, portraying it as experiences of contextual acceptance and inclusion (Bryer, 2019; Essers *et al.*, 2021; Solano *et al.*, 2020; Stead, 2017). For entrepreneurs, especially migrant entrepreneurs, belonging is important, because it refers to “an acceptable level of conformity” (De Clercq and Voronov, 2009, p. 801) and optimal distinctiveness (Abd Hamid *et al.*, 2019). This affects their access to resources, markets, and the necessary socio-cultural and economic support (Barrett and Vershinina, 2017; Gibb Dyer *et al.*, 2014). According to Radu-Lefebvre *et al.* (2019), identity and belonging dynamics, which bring together social representations and expectations, are connected with the dynamics of entrepreneurial legitimacy. This is an illustration of how women’s credibility, access to resources, and acceptance in society could all be enhanced (Vershinina *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, in migration, belonging is often associated with language proficiency and education top up the host country (Ryan, 2018).

Due to its relational and emotional nature and the enactment of socio-cultural and economic efficiencies associated with it, “belonging leads to a sense of ease in society” (Essers *et al.*, 2021, p. 1256). Stead (2017) showcased a processual view of belonging, employed as an “explanatory and mediatory concept through which to gain in-depth understandings of the relationship between gender, women entrepreneurs and their efforts to belong” (Stead, 2017, p. 73). As such, the author demonstrated that belonging is heterogeneous as the women migrant

entrepreneurs themselves enacted different belonging strategies, such as *belonging by proxy*, as they perform entrepreneurship in the shadow of their male counterparts; *belonging by concealment* of their femininity and entrepreneurship identity; *belonging by modelling* the norms and behaviours associated with the entrepreneurship identity; *belonging by tempered disruption* when women fulfil their traditional, gendered social roles; and *belonging by identity switching*, when women migrant entrepreneurs choose to enact different identities to suit situated norms and expectations (Hytti *et al.*, 2017). Nevertheless, the reality is that, despite the normalcy of super-diverse societies, migrants experience being “othered”. Their visible “liability of foreignness” often hinders their contextual opportunities for belonging (Essers *et al.*, 2021) and motivates them to negotiate and enact suitable intersectional identities, such as country-of-origin, gender and entrepreneurship ones.

Undertaking a contextualised approach to migrant entrepreneurship, alongside the intersectional theory, scholars have documented unique, situated privileges and challenges that migrants face, from being portrayed as homeland national heroes to being reduced to underdogs in the host country (Brzozowski *et al.*, 2014; Dabic *et al.*, 2020).

This study exploits intersectionality as a dynamic process, where agency and structured interplay (Lasalle and Shaw, 2021) support the understanding of how multiple and simultaneously socio-cultural identities, including country of origin (i.e. being Romanian in London), gender (i.e. being a women) and entrepreneurship identities (i.e. being entrepreneur), are experienced (Magrelli *et al.*, 2020; Murzacheva *et al.*, 2019) as part of women migrant entrepreneurs’ journeys of transnational belonging (Villares-Varela and Essers, 2019).

To understand the social meaning of these intersectional identities better, scholars have explored identity using the distinctive framework of the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), which has a dual character: a psychological identity, which includes the “sense of self” (Knights and Willmott, 1989), of “who one is” and sociological identity, which is “the collection of group memberships that define an individual” (Hogg and Terry, 2000), to be understood as “thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of individuals in groups” (Smith *et al.*, 2014). Fundamentally, this theory contends that people identify with particular social groups in order to feel more empowered (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013), to improve their social identity, recognition, and support (Moghaddam, 2008), to combat discrimination (Datta and Gailey, 2012), to avoid de-skilling (Munkejord, 2017), and to increase their chances for upward social mobility (Dannecker and Cakir, 2016). According to this theory, the identity-rejection model put forth by Branscombe *et al.*, 1999, (cited in Ramos *et al.*, 2012) encourages the idea

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3 that group-based social stigma and discrimination push minority members to isolate themselves
4 from the larger host society within their migrant community in the quest for social acceptance
5 and belonging.
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10 11 Country-of-origin identity (CoO): being Romanian in London

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13 In the European context of migration from East to West, from emerging towards developed
14 economies, such as the UK, country-of-origin becomes a visible, questioned, and questionable
15 social identity, which has sparked “anti-immigrant” public debates (Morosanu, 2018) that
16 irreversibly fuelled Brexit (Botterill and Hancock, 2018; Guma and Dafydd Jones, 2019).
17 Increasing empirical evidence suggests that, being “born in Romania” has an inherently
18 regional political negative connotation (Morosanu, 2018) that shapes how belonging and
19 distinctiveness in the host society are understood and experienced by migrants (Abd Hamid *et*
20 *al.*, 2019). But little is known if being Romanian in your homeland carries that peace of mind
21 as the migrant is considered a valuable member of the society, or rather a piece of the unfitted
22 puzzle that needs to be refitted to meet the homeland’s socio-cultural expectations. How does
23 the homeland context shape Romanian women migrant entrepreneurs’ intersectional identities
24 as they try to answer, “Who am I?” and “Where do I belong?” (Umana-Taylor *et al.*, 2014).
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35 Increasing evidence shows that Eastern European immigrants’ country of origin identity is
36 often portrayed as a “liability of foreignness” as these migrants’ socio-human capital seems out
37 of sync with the UK’s labour market expectations (Gurau *et al.*, 2020; Panibratov, 2015). This
38 might impose an assimilatory trajectory to their journeys of belonging as they try to overcome
39 the contextual stereotype of inferior capital and thus, CoO identity-related discrimination
40 (O’Flaherty, 2017). But today’s super-diverse societies like London, where over 37% of the
41 population belongs to different cultural backgrounds than the British, redefine belonging from
42 being an exchange of cultures to becoming multicultural co-existence. This new reality
43 challenges the necessity of descriptive acculturative belonging in a context where universal
44 belonging is expected (Moffitt *et al.*, 2020). It also critiques the static, dualistic distinction
45 between “us” and “them” (Lewicki, 2017), which remains prevalent in migration scholarship
46 (Anthias, 2013a).
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56 57 Gender identity

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59 Within entrepreneurship literature, gender evolved from being a static social block of
60 differentiating men and women and a source of otherness and discrimination, specifically for

women entrepreneurs against ideal entrepreneurial masculinity (Lassalle and Shaw, 2021; Villares-Varela and Essers, 2019), to becoming a way of doing business and not just to be (Phillips and Knowles, 2012; Vershinina and Rodgers, 2020).

Women entrepreneurs struggle due to weak institutional policies. The Global Women's Enterprise Policy Research Group (GWEP) and OECD (2021) found that few nations have policies that encourage female entrepreneurship. The feminist perspective has yet to stop prejudice against women entrepreneurs and achieve impartiality (Rugina and Ahl, 2023). However, by amplifying the voices of women migrant entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship scholars become key contributors to creating gendered knowledge systems and inclusive entrepreneurial regulations (Orser, 2022). Therefore, to reinforce entrepreneurship paradigm as a venue for social change, scholars should centre their voices on the "silent" (Vershinina and Rodgers, 2020), "missing" (European Commission, 2021), and "othered" (Lassalle and Shaw, 2021) women migrant entrepreneurs in policies through the contextualised lens of intersectionality. This debate has gained momentum in the global entrepreneurship debate during the last decade (European Commission, 2021). Entrepreneurial feminism views women entrepreneurs as social change agents, who challenge institutional and cultural male hegemony (Orser, 2022). This concept of entrepreneurship as a social change emphasises the importance of context in understanding how societal norms impact on female entrepreneurship and intersectional identities (Baker and Welter, 2018; Welter and Baker, 2020).

Research on how gender and other intersectional identities impact on belonging for women migrant entrepreneurs in transnational contexts has been scarce (Radu-Lefebvre *et al.*, 2019; Solano *et al.*, 2020), but relevant in demonstrating the significant role that gender plays as an overarching identity that supports the development of other intersectional identities (Vershinina and Rodgers, 2019; Villares-Varela and Essers, 2019). Additionally, most of these studies have focused on communicating the outcome and not the journey of gaining belonging through entrepreneurship. Consequently, the dichotomy between "us" and "them" in migrant entrepreneurship research has been a persistent topic of significant importance (Solano *et al.*, 2020).

However, to advance transnational women migrant entrepreneurship research, it is necessary to explore this phenomenon in all its contextual complexities and enriching diversity (Welter *et al.*, 2018; 2020). This requires a shift from the current focus on exceptional success stories and the stereotypical male entrepreneur (Vershinina and Rodgers, 2020). Instead, "everyday

entrepreneurs” should be studied not as outsiders, but rather, as relevant reflections of the broad terrain of entrepreneurship (Lehmann *et al.*, 2019; Welter *et al.*, 2019).

Entrepreneurship identity (EI)

“Being an entrepreneur” is a social identity “created through interactions amongst an individual, the enterprise and society” (Orser *et al.*, 2011:564; Bell *et al.*, 2018). Entrepreneurship identity is viewed as an “umbrella construct” (Radu-Lefebvre *et al.*, 2021). The building of this identity is performative, socially engaged, and profoundly embedded in societal structures (Anderson *et al.*, 2019).

Acknowledging the importance of entrepreneurial identity and its association with context is essential, yet this is underdeveloped, especially within the field of migrant and transnational entrepreneurship (Radu-Lefebvre *et al.*, 2021; Jones *et al.*, 2019). Understanding entrepreneurial activity requires an investigation of how the entrepreneurial identity is taking shape within host, home, and transnational contexts (Elo *et al.*, 2022).

However, given that the “ideal” entrepreneurship identity persists around masculinity (Ahl and Marlow, 2017), an ideal that transgresses multiple socio-cultural borders (Villares-Varela and Essers, 2019), women’s migrant entrepreneurship seems unfit for contextual belonging since there is no social block to which to conform to, but to become “acceptable others” or rather optimally distinctive through their entrepreneurship identity (Hamid *et al.*, 2019; Brewer, 1991; 2003). Increasing empirical evidence suggests that many migrants use their entrepreneurship identity to seek upwards social mobility (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013; Villares-Varela and Essers, 2019) and overcome negative connotations of other social identities, such as country-of-origin identity. This can often trigger practices of discrimination and social inequalities for migrants as well as fuelling a costly anti-immigrant public opinion, as seems to happen with the Romanian migrants in the UK (Andreouli and Harwarth, 2019; Moroşanu, 2018).

Within this context, the interlink between belonging and identity is critical in migrant entrepreneurship, as this transgresses everyday conformity and social ease. Their entrepreneurial identity impacts on contextual entrepreneurial engagement and opportunity, to the point of disengagement, as belonging as women entrepreneurs can be deemed unfit and misaligned with the contextual socio-cultural normativity (Chin, 2019).

As Radu-Lefebvre *et al.* (2019) suggested, EI should be seen as being a process, acknowledging its fluidity and dynamic, contextual complexity, which feeds into the perspective of this study. This perspective enables socio-cultural agentic becoming to be undertaken, thus providing the

women migrant entrepreneurs with the opportunity for belonging. Therefore, either reactively, driven by the desire to overcome discrimination and social inequalities (Refai *et al.*, 2018; Shepherd *et al.*, 2019) or proactively, motivated by opportunities (Lewis *et al.*, 2016), the inquiry into entrepreneurship identity should extend beyond the advanced geographies, to include underexplored, but rich, contexts of emerging economies, like Romania (Anderson *et al.*, 2019; Katila *et al.*, 2019), where this study resides.

According to a recent study, there is a disconnect between people's social identities—what they do in a specific context—and their entrepreneurship identities, which paints a normally predicted, but challenging, picture of socially disadvantageous identities impeding enterprise (James *et al.*, 2021). The impact of entrepreneurship identity on social affiliation must, therefore, be given more consideration (Stead, 2017), specifically in transnational and emerging contexts (Anderson and Ojediran, 2022). It is within this socio-cultural “in-betweenness”, that the process of belonging overlaps with achieving legitimacy and it is focused on creating or acquiring a “fitting” identity (Fisher *et al.*, 2017). The entrepreneur's pursuit of “suited” identities as a manifestation of contextual belonging would then seem to be a plausible assumption. Such criticisms are pertinent because, as Radu-Lefebvre *et al.*, (2021) note, women have multiple socially constructed identities that are both stable and flexible. This is because entrepreneurship is moving in the direction of entrepreneurship identity being fluid, shaped by competing contextual socio-cultural dynamics (Leitch and Harrison, 2016; Ojediran *et al.*, 2022).

Against this theoretical and empirical landscape, understanding belonging through the lens of contextual intersectionality requires capturing these women migrant entrepreneurs' journeys where cross-cultural values, norms, behaviours, and strategies seem to overlap (Jones *et al.*, 2019). This will allow for uncovering how “entrepreneurs (...) actively construct their identity through what is and is not available to them (i.e., capitals) and what is and is not possible or can be done in the context in which it operates (i.e., habitus)” (Barrett and Vershinina, 2017, p. 440).

Against this landscape, claiming that women migrant entrepreneurs' missing status is a “false image of simplicity” is avoided here and thus criticise the apparent gender neutrality or androcentric for most of the 20 years that anchored entrepreneurship as a discipline in its rights (Baker *et al.*, 1997; Baker and Welter, 2020), and thus it engages with a refreshed scholarly and policymakers commitment to dig deeper into the diversity migrant entrepreneurship reservoir (Baker and Welter, 2017; Lassalle and Shaw, 2021). As such, it responds to the call

on inequality in entrepreneurial opportunities (Vershina *et al.*, 2022) and by doing so, this IPA study reveals how Romanian women migrant entrepreneurs experience their transnational intersectional journeys of belonging, as they create, negotiate and enact their intersectional identities of country-of-origin, gender and being entrepreneurs in the UK and Romania.

In support of this aim, the following research questions have been formulated:

RQ1. How do RWMEs experience their journeys of transnational belonging as Romanian migrants, women and entrepreneurs in the UK?

RQ2. How do RWMEs experience their journeys of transnational belonging as Romanian migrants, women and entrepreneurs in Romania?

Methodological choices

As aforementioned, an interpretative phenomenological approach was adopted (IPA), which allows for insightful and meaningful lived experiences of women migrant entrepreneurs, who “experience and enact certain phenomena or situations” (Berglund, 2015, p. 480), as part of their journeys of belonging through transnational entrepreneurship (Abd Hamid *et al.*, 2019) to be captured.

In line with the IPA methodology, inductive reasoning (Gioia *et al.*, 2013) was utilised to obtain theoretical insights into the mechanisms that support the research framework, rather than generalising the findings to the whole population (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Similar to earlier research, this approach supported the understanding of more complex and in-depth insights into the contextualised lived experiences of migrant entrepreneurs, particularly women migrant entrepreneurs (Dabi *et al.*, 2020; Vershinina and Cruz, 2020; Vorobeveva, 2022), by zooming in on situated experiences to reveal subjective, in-depth experiences of transnational belonging through the lens of intersectional identities (Van Burg *et al.*, 2022; Vorobeveva, 2022).

Sampling and data collection

Despite the researcher being a cultural insider to the researched community, access proved to be difficult and time-consuming, due to the highly stigmatised and publicised image, which has driven it to avoid public attention in the host society (Fox *et al.*, 2015), thus earning it the

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3 reputation of being a “hard-to-reach” community (Ellard-Gray *et al.*, 2015). To meet this
4 challenge, the researcher blended various sampling strategies, including snowballing, time
5 event, derived rapport, and e-sampling via Facebook (Chitac and Knowles, 2019), to locate and
6 select nine “right” research participants (Rockcliffe *et al.*, 2018). E-sampling using Facebook is
7 a creative sampling method, constituting the electronic equivalent of the traditional
8 snowballing sampling method. It works by using public access to Facebook profiles and
9 contacting potential research participants via private messenger to inform and invite them to
10 participate in the study. (Chitac and Knowles, 2019). Consequently, the researcher was able
11 to collect the required research data ethically and mitigate the risk of selection bias and
12 dependency on gatekeepers by combining multiple sampling strategies (Chitac and Knowles,
13 2019; Chitac *et al.*, 2020).

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23 In line with the definition of migrant entrepreneurship, the inclusionary criteria were (1) being
24 born Romanian, (2) being first generation of migrants, having their permanent residence in the
25 UK at the time of the interview (3) being entrepreneurs with a business legally registered in the
26 UK and (4) being entrepreneurs in Romania in the past or present, which framed the
27 transnational context of this inquiry. The terms “migrant” and “immigrant” are utilised
28 interchangeably in keeping with standard disciplinary practice (Sinkovics and Reuber, 2021).
29 The phrase “migrant entrepreneurs” is defined as “foreign-born persons who develop a firm in
30 the host country, regardless of the length of their presence in that country” (Sinkovics and
31 Reuber, 2021, p. 2). The term was deemed suitable and consistent with the goal of this study,
32 which was to examine RWMEs’ experiences of transnational intersectional belonging in the
33 UK and in Romania, despite these RWMEs’ previously noted positionality as transnational
34 entrepreneurs, conducting their businesses their host and home countries (Brzozowski *et al.*,
35 2017).

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As abovementioned, a total of nine female migrant entrepreneurs from Romania were selected
for in-person interviews conducted between June 2018 and January 2019. The duration of these
interviews averaged 55 minutes per session. By the ninth interview, the empirical data from
these interviews had reached empirical saturation (Saunders *et al.*, 2018), indicating that
“additional data (did) not lead to any new emergent themes” pertinent to this study (Given,
2016, p. 135). The IPA approach of giving priority to in-depth, lived-in experiences is reflected
in the small number of study participants (Alase, 2017; Lassalle and Shaw, 2021).

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

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3 Based on the participants' demographic profiles detailed in the table above, the majority of the
4 RWMEs included in this study were highly educated, having completed their undergraduate or
5 master level studies; divorced with one or multiple children; and more importantly, sole
6 proprietors of a business in the consumer goods and services sector, which had served the ethnic
7 niche in the UK for an average of 4.6 years. Most of these women entrepreneurs had followed
8 a similar, but considerably shorter, entrepreneurship journey in Romania, lasting on average
9 of less than two years, according to their accounts (1.8 years). Three shared their unsuccessful
10 attempts to open their businesses in Romania, due to discriminatory practices, which motivated
11 them to give up and migrate instead. Similar to their enterprises in the UK, the majority of the
12 interviewees opened businesses in the consumer goods and services sector in Romania.

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21 The study's major research questions shaped the interview guide. RWEs' transnational
22 intersectional experiences were explored through open-ended interview questions. These
23 questions explored their personal experiences and viewpoints as female entrepreneurs in the
24 UK and Romania and as Romanian migrants in the UK.

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Narratives and practices were analysed conceptually and empirically using the IPA lens
(Neergaard and Leitch, 2015). This allowed for investigation of the social processes that shape
intersectional identities (Barrett and Vershinina, 2017; Lassale and Shaw, 2021). To avoid
confirmation bias in data analysis, the researcher asked the respondents to explain their
responses, specifically the "why" and "how" of their transnational belonging in the UK and
Romania. This approach revealed transnational belonging and supported this study's
methodological goal of unsilencing the voices of these women migrant entrepreneurs (Alase,
2017).

Data analysis

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The data collected during the face-to-face interviews have been analysed following Smith and
Osborn (2008) and Smith *et al.*' (2009) IPA principles and the Gioia *et al.* (2013) process.
Specifically, unique themes and patterns of convergent and divergent themes were identified
across the interviews, which allowed for a deeper understanding to stem from the data analysis
(Van Burg *et al.*, 2020). All the themes identified from coding using NVivo 12 software
displayed in Table 2 are addressed in the next section: "Research findings and analysis".

Specifically, following Gioia *et al.*' (2013) theorisation and utilising the software NVivo 12,
the interview data was read to identify using open codes to identify and organise key emergent

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3 themes into first order codes (i.e. intersectional identities: EI, gender and CoO). At this point,
4 the interview data was organised into as many relevant codes or themes without condensing or
5 combining codes into more general categories. Specifically, in NVivo 12, extracts of interviews
6 are assigned to parent nodes, as the researcher iteratively engages with the data and identifies
7 patterns and categories within the data (Gioia *et al.*, 1994). These first-order codes will play a
8 critical role in analysis, either serving as measures for constructs or even (potentially) as single-
9 item constructs. During the next step of analysis, the researcher transitioned from open coding
10 to more abstract coding. Specifically, theoretical concepts were identified and organised as 2nd
11 order codes (i.e., transnational belonging, in the UK and Romania). This made it possible to
12 find potential connections between the important ideas that are present in the data. Finding
13 aggregated dimensions—which highlight the bigger, overarching themes—is the final stage in
14 organising the interview data (i.e., belonging in the UK). To further highlight the themes
15 discovered, all of these themes and codes were connected to interview extracts and organised
16 into convergent and divergent patterns (Gioia *et al.*, 2013).
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28 **Research findings and analysis**

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30 This section's findings present the transnational context and the experiences of the focal
31 migrant women entrepreneurs in the UK and Romania. This IPA study specifically
32 demonstrates the importance of the socio-cultural context in determining how these migrant
33 women entrepreneurs enact, live, or leave, their intersectional identities to achieve
34 transnational belonging as they become agentic makers or doers of context.
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40 Perhaps surprisingly, most of the RWMEs interviewed shared feelings of belonging in the UK,
41 the host nation, as a result of the empowerment that was ingrained in their entrepreneurship
42 identity. It is in this context that their identity as entrepreneurs evolved into their protective
43 identity, enabling them to become rather than just be. As a result, their
44 entrepreneurship identity, which served as their public persona, increased their chances of
45 feeling like they belonged and shielded them from the xenophobic and “anti-immigrant”
46 discourse.
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52 In contrast, in Romania, their native country, most of these women entrepreneurs experienced
53 (un)belonging, as they were often challenged to the point of socio-cultural exhaustion for being
54 so. Their expected socio-cultural roles as “trailing wives” (Lassalle and Shaw, 2021), mothers
55 and lovers, with the expectation of their concealing themselves behind their man, the
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entrepreneur, conflicted with their entrepreneurship identity and the patriarchal and masculine hegemonies in their native country.

Emergent themes from this study and a selection of interview quotes that illustrate them are highlighted in Table 2 to support the findings.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Romanian women migrant entrepreneurs' experiences of belonging in the UK

Most of the Romanian women migrant entrepreneurs interviewed shared experiences of belonging as entrepreneurs in the UK. Their journeys of belonging as so were anchored in a repertoire of situated emotions, which enabled them to associate their entrepreneurship identity with a sense of being “empowered” (*“feeling no need to have someone (a man) to back me up.”- Elisa*), *“an opportunity (...) for women’s emancipation” (Maria)* and *“the power to rise” (Erica)*.

Their feelings of empowerment as entrepreneurs are described using a plethora of personal emotional terms, including “fulfilment”, “emancipation”, and “power” to more pragmatic business-mindset feelings of “being role models”. According to these accounts, the entrepreneurship identity creates the opportunity to overcome otherness *“in a well-developed country” (Erica)*. These dyadic feelings of struggle yet profound achievement mark the blurred line between their empowering entrepreneurship identity they have created and their inherited Romanian identity, which for many remains a questioned and questionable identity residing at the heart of the “anti-immigrant” British public discourse (Morosanu, 2018).

However, occasionally they seem to contradict themselves, dueling between feeling empowered as entrepreneurs and acknowledging their dynamic path toward becoming “true entrepreneurs.”: *“I do not consider myself (...) a true businesswoman. Not yet... and although the label of businesswomen seems an exaggeration, I am often praised for my services” (Mara)*. These internalised tensions and discourse contradictions are the results of the bicultural identity and their struggle for transnational belonging, where being an entrepreneur has divergent contextual meanings, which for them translate into manifestations of low self-efficacies, which seem to contradict the objective reality, but not their culturally-bound reality. As they share, *“I do not see myself as an entrepreneur, because my business is limited to my*

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3 *shop. Technically, I know that I am, but I don't see myself as such. Because it seems to me that*
4 *my business is too small for me to be considered a true entrepreneur" (Lara).*

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7 Similarly, Ela shares her identity doubts, **emphasising** her competing, hybrid social views: *"I*
8 *don't see myself as an entrepreneur. This is because my business is small and because this*
9 *label of entrepreneur or businesswoman doesn't necessarily help me. I think this label is*
10 *associated with a certain turnover (aha) (.) Probably more men than women achieve that.*
11 *Sadly! (...) Or are we just made to believe that?"*

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16 Even though these women are well educated, the fact that their low self-efficacy appears to
17 contradict studies that have discovered a favourable correlation between education,
18 entrepreneurial perceptions, and self-efficacy (Pfeifer *et al.*, 2016) **should not be overlooked.**
19 Yet, this is congruent with the intersectionality lens, **whereby their feelings of unfair societal**
20 **stigmatisation as Romanians in the UK get in the way, thus diminishing their excitement for**
21 **being entrepreneurs.** They attempt to reconcile a dual system of opposing socio-cultural values,
22 namely Romanian and British, which results in the blurriness invoked when asked to share
23 what it means for them to be entrepreneurs. Particularly in Romania, the image of the
24 entrepreneur is linked to the middle class, financial prosperity, and medium-sized to large firms
25 (Voda and Florea, 2019). In contrast, the pro-entrepreneurial British system encourages the
26 establishment of a wide range of businesses by entrepreneurs with various financial capacities.

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Being a woman and an entrepreneur in the UK is an opportunity for personal and professional
growth and a manifestation of rights, according to Elisa, **who explains:** *"experience in England*
was that a woman can be a woman and develop and grow personally and professionally
without a man's help, because (...) her results are recognised and so you get due credit and due
recognition. (...) I have to say, as a woman, in this country, I have rights (...). Meritocracy has
no gender and more importantly, it is not male-exclusive!" (Elisa).

Even though their entrepreneurship identity is still underdeveloped and even under siege, these
women migrant entrepreneurs **do not surrender** to the expectations of the ideal entrepreneur
and its widespread hegemonic masculinity, **but rather,** nurture its empowering potential of
belonging in the host country (Ahl and Marlow, 2017; Villares-Varela and Essers, 2019).

In contrast, the portrayal of being Romanian is depicted as a socio-cultural disadvantage, or
liability (Gurau *et al.*, 2020). As such, these women entrepreneurs have shared how they pro-
actively conceal their Romanian identity: *"Thanks to my blonde hair colour, I pass as being*
Nordic, instead of Romanian and thus, I do not have to explain any further my identity" (Lara).

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3 Similarly, *Mara* embraces her detachment from her overt Romanian cultural heritage as a result
4 of her experiences, as she emphasises that her “*skin and hair complexity (are) not being*
5 *specifically Romanian*”.

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9 Therefore, their journeys of belonging are experienced as contextual intersectionality and a
10 dynamic hierarchic process of belonging, which they perceive as an opportunity for exercising
11 their agency to change their status quo and thus, overcome feeling “inferior other” as
12 Romanians and by becoming “acceptable other” as women migrant entrepreneurs (Anthias,
13 2016). Furthermore, these women migrant entrepreneurs reveal the importance of belonging in
14 the UK. They have become actively engaged in addressing their “otherness” through constant
15 practices of “*story sharing*” (Lara) and as “*power to rise*” (Erica). They are conscious of their
16 journey and active participants in their journeys of belonging. They have become the creators of
17 their emotional bridge towards belonging that connects the individual self “I” with the broader
18 society presented as “they” emerge within it. Their journeys of belonging as entrepreneurs pave
19 the way for future generations of women migrant entrepreneurs as they mark the first
20 generation of role models as Romanian migrant entrepreneurs: “*I believe that women need to*
21 *accept themselves (...) I encourage the women in my network to open businesses independent*
22 *of their husbands (...)*” (*Mara*).

33 34 **Romanian women entrepreneurs’ experiences of belonging in Romania**

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37 **Similarly** to their experiences of belonging in the UK, their journeys of belonging in Romania,
38 their homeland, reveal that their intersectional identities do not follow a socio-cultural
39 consensus. Instead, they are organised as an informal hierarchy of identities, varying in their
40 situated centrality and complementarity, as they coexist in a bicultural tension and dualism of
41 meanings and enactments (Abd Hamid *et al.*, 2019; Shepherd *et al.*, 2019).

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46 As a result, they make an effort to import the recently acquired entrepreneurship identity as
47 well as the empowerment and liberation that go along with it into their place of origin.
48 Specifically, in this case, being women entrepreneurs in Romania proves to be a source of
49 (dis)empowerment, gender-driven discriminatory practices and oppressive socio-cultural
50 behaviour anchored in the contextual patriarchal and masculine hegemonies. **As one of these**
51 women shared: “*In Romania....(...) I’ve always had to depend on a man’s image or at least*
52 *pretend that I had a man behind my business. And it wasn’t easy, because I considered myself*
53 *strong enough to have my business without a man’s help. But this created barriers for me and*
54 *my business. When I was going to buy leather and buckles from my suppliers, who are men, I*
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3 *had to behave more boyish and manly to be taken seriously. And not once did I feel like I was*
4 *taken for a ride with jokes that weren't exactly welcoming. For example, prices are easier to*
5 *negotiate as a man. Still, when they have a female customer, the prices are higher, often*
6 *unnegotiable. They usually try to intimidate you, or they don't even listen to what you say (...)*
7 *and don't consider you their equal" (Elisa).*
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12 Romanian women entrepreneurs' mockery illustrates gender-based discrimination and biases
13 in culture and business. Elisa's experience reveals how society's perception of male presence
14 affects her sense of legitimacy and autonomy. Unwelcoming comments about unjustified, ad-
15 hoc price rises, limited bargaining power, and restrictive interactions with male suppliers
16 reflect a negative socio-cultural and economic climate for women entrepreneurs. Mocking
17 **delegitimises women entrepreneurs**, thus making them feel marginalised. This suggests
18 Romanian women entrepreneurs are less capable, intelligent, or deserving.
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25 Elisa's experience of having to behave more masculine to be taken seriously illustrates
26 Romanian society's expectations of women entrepreneurs. Romanian gender prejudices force
27 women to disguise their entrepreneurial identities. Thus, these women are discouraged from
28 careers other than wives and mothers. Gender discrimination perpetuates socioeconomic
29 inequality and limits these women's entrepreneurial potential.
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34 By acting out their entrepreneurship identities, which conflict with their pre-scribed social roles
35 **as mums**, spouses, and lovers, these women are agentic in fighting the prevailing patriarchy
36 and the masculine predominance that is ingrained in the entrepreneurship identity they enact
37 (Lassalle and Shaw, 2021). Specifically, their EI seems to lose its "British" praised
38 empowerment and opportunity for women's emancipation and in exchange, it becomes a
39 source of negative emotions and cultural contradictions (Muhr *et al.*, 2019), to the point of
40 disintegrative belonging, when these women entrepreneurs refuse to give up or give in. **They**
41 **fight back** when their entrepreneurship identity seems to be socio-culturally revoked, rendering
42 them invisible and powerless, in the absence of a man, as Ela experienced: *"In 2012, I opened*
43 *in my hometown in Romania a pub and after that, I opened an international recruitment firm*
44 *and because of this, I had problems with the Romanian authorities, who were expecting bribes*
45 *(...). There I experienced the discrimination of being a woman in all possible forms. In the UK,*
46 *I can say that I learned to be an entrepreneur (identity), which Romania denied me....."* (Ela).
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57 This finding, which is rarely documented (Barragan *et al.*, 2018; Foley *et al.*, 2018), offers a
58 significant, novel perspective on how women entrepreneurs lost their EI in their native country,
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3 because their EI was deemed socio-culturally unfit in contrast to the patriarchal and masculine
4 hegemonic sociocultural expectations of Romania, which contradict their bicultural
5 expectations and gained agency, as emphasised in their narratives: *“in Romania, the woman is*
6 *still not equal with a man and the same recognition or support” (Elisa) and “to open a business*
7 *there (...) is impossible without a man’s help. (...) It is that belief that a woman entrepreneur*
8 *should be someone’s wife or lover” (Ana).*

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14 Notably, their “strategic, emancipatory disobedience” (Barragan *et al.*, 2018) defies Romanian
15 socio-cultural expectations. It excludes any opportunities for reconciliation as these women
16 become custodians of contrasting bicultural values they try to reconcile and enact.
17 Nevertheless, they feel empowered as the first generation of Romanian migrant entrepreneurs
18 to bring agentic, positive change in their home country, demonstrating that women should be
19 equal to men, as all of them emphasise: *“my experience in England was that a woman could*
20 *be a woman and develop and grow personally and professionally without a man’s help,*
21 *because (...) her results are recognised, and so you get due credit and due recognition. (...) I*
22 *have to say, as a woman, in this country, I have rights” (Elisa).*

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30 Paradoxically, these women are far from achieving belonging in their homeland, where they
31 see their EI being socially revoked. Therefore, as a direct consequence of their disintegrative
32 belonging, they return to the UK as their adoptive country, where they can exercise their right
33 to become women migrant entrepreneurs and thus, resume their transnational journeys of
34 belonging.

40 Discussion

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43 Recently, migrant entrepreneurship research has shifted from being portrayed as a purely
44 economic activity towards being acknowledged as a socio-cultural, everyday dynamic process,
45 at the heart of which resides gender alongside other intersectional identities. This manifests
46 itself in terms of ways of doing context (Baker and Welter, 2020; Webster and Kontkanen,
47 2021) and contextual belonging (Lassalle and Shaw, 2021; Vershinina *et al.*, 2019).

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51 In line with the call for contextualised intersectionality (Jones, 2019; Lassalle and Shaw, 2021),
52 the findings have shown that these women migrant entrepreneurs “actively construct their
53 identity through what is and is not available to them (i.e. capitals) and what is and is not possible
54 or can be done in the context in which it operates (i.e. habitus)” (Barrett and Vershinina, 2017,
55 p. 440). Their journeys of belonging are shaped by differing contextual socio-cultural norms,
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3 social interactions, and entrepreneurial behaviours, showing opportunities and constraints to
4 implementing their agency through the intersectionality lens (Van Burg *et al.*, 2020).

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6 Resonating with previous studies (Anthias, 2013a), **insight has been gained** into how these
7 Romanian migrant entrepreneurs enact their gendered entrepreneurial identity, alongside their
8 CoO and gender identities to enable them to become “acceptable others” in a context where
9 their Eastern European cultural differences are broadly stigmatised.

10
11 In line with Villares-Varela (2018), **who researched** Latin American migrant women
12 entrepreneurs in Spain, these women migrant entrepreneurs reactively and proactively engage
13 in their journeys of belonging by creating an informal hierarchy of intersectional identities,
14 placing at its top their entrepreneurship identity, which provides them with the craved
15 empowerment and **emancipation, rather than being** “trailing wives” (Lassalle and Shaw, 2021)
16 and “silent contributors” (Dhaliwal, 1998). As a result, they make an effort to import the
17 recently acquired entrepreneurship identity as well as the empowerment and liberation that go
18 along with it into their place of origin. **However**, in patriarchal cultures (Barragan *et al.*, 2018),
19 **as is the case in Romania**, these ideas have not received much attention from academics and
20 practitioners.

21
22 **This study has demonstrated** that Romanian women migrant entrepreneurs shared experiencing
23 their transnational belonging as non-linear, heterogeneous and dyadic journeys. Their
24 intersectional identities embedded contextual, nested and hierarchical acculturative belonging
25 opportunities and challenges, **reinforced** the acknowledged need for “a shift from a holistic
26 approach... to a disaggregated approach that discards the notion of assimilation as a single
27 process, considers multiple reference populations and envisions distinct processes occurring in
28 different domains” (Brubaker 2001: 543–4). In this regard, when these women migrant
29 entrepreneurs differentiate between taking on the role of “makers of context” and “doers of
30 context”, **they create** differentiated, contextualised trails of belonging in the host and home
31 countries.

32
33 To construct an agentic entrepreneurship identity that offers the promised chance for personal
34 and professional empowerment they aspire to, these Romanian women migrant entrepreneurs
35 in the UK overwrite the imported hierarchy of mandated intersectional identities of their place
36 of origin. **Resonating** with prior empirical research, these women turn to their entrepreneurship
37 identities for comfort and recognition. This identity serves as a manifestation of their agentic
38 creation and serves as a shield against prejudice and social injustices brought on by their
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3 obvious “liability of foreignness” as Romanians in the UK (Irastorza and Pena- Legazcue,
4 2014). Also, the empirical data indicates that entrepreneurship identity-anchored agency
5 is frequently linked to empowerment and upward social mobility (Al-Dajani and Marlow,
6 2013; Villares-Varela and Essers, 2019).
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10 By contrast, in Romania, their homeland, their journeys as women entrepreneurs are received
11 with resistance from the cultural patriarchal and masculine hegemonies. Contrasting previous
12 empirical evidence that demonstrated that Turkish and Latin American women migrant
13 entrepreneurs in the Netherlands and Spain and their home countries experienced transnational
14 belonging (Villares-Varela and Eseeers, 2019), the Romanian women migrant entrepreneurs
15 interviewed resist and fight back against the prospect of having their empowering
16 entrepreneurship identity “socially revoked” or “masked” by masculinity on the grounds of
17 being unfit against their homeland’s socio-cultural expectations of hegemonic masculinity.
18 This, unexpectedly, creates socio-cultural tensions and hierarchies of intersectional belonging.
19 Their empowering and agentic entrepreneurship identity created and negotiated in the UK
20 cannot be imported into Romania across cultural borders and thus loses its agency, in the face
21 of their homeland’s normative cultural roles as mothers, wives, and lovers. Similarly, in the
22 UK, they choose to silence their Romanian identity to avoid the risk of social stigma grounded
23 in the anti-immigrant British public discourse.
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35 Ultimately, the fact that they choose to preserve their entrepreneurship identity and its
36 embedded empowerment motivate them to close their enterprises in Romania or give up
37 opening ones, thus demonstrating a fresh perspective that suggests that they prioritise positive
38 social change (Kearins and Schaefer, 2017), negotiating identities outside their normative
39 social roles as they pursue belonging (Hou *et al.*, 2018), even if this means sacrificing their
40 opportunity to return to their own country.
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46 When negotiating the two contexts, they find themselves at a crossroads, commuting between
47 living and leaving their intersectional identities, thus creating different cross-cultural journeys
48 of belonging by enacting hierarchies of contextual intersectionality. Overall, these findings
49 demonstrate that identity and belonging are complex and dynamic processes of becoming,
50 instead of being and thus, “practical belonging means that a hierarchy characterises it, a set of
51 symbols and attributes that constitute the national ideal of what it is to belong” (Chin, 2019, p.
52 720). These Romanian women migrant entrepreneurs’ journeys invite us to become witnesses
53 to their struggles for multicultural belonging as they “overlap, interaction and continuous
54 renegotiation and transformation of cultures”, creating trails of belonging (Kymlicka, 2015;
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3 Tully, 2002: 104) and smoothing cross-cultural contradictions by becoming traders of
4 identities.
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8 **Contribution, limitations and future research agenda**

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10 By fulfilling its aim of investigating how RWMEs experience transnational belonging in the
11 UK, this study makes the following contributions, to the literature on women migrant
12 entrepreneurship and contextual intersectionality **in relation to practice and policy**.
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16 First, this article contributes to women migrant entrepreneurship scholarship. Specifically, it
17 responds to the call on **inequality and entrepreneurship opportunities** (Vershina *et al.*, 2021),
18 by demonstrating fresh and deep insights into how an under researched community of
19 Romanian women migrant entrepreneurs experience transnational belonging in the UK and in
20 Romania.
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25 Second, by examining women's entrepreneurship through an intersectional lens, this article
26 contributes to discussions about the advancement of feminist theories in the field of
27 entrepreneurship (Martinez Dy *et al.*, 2014, 2017), **specifically, the** development of
28 intersectionality theory in **women's** entrepreneurship (Ahl and Marlow, 2021; Barrett and
29 Vershinina, 2017; Lasalle and Shaw, 2021). **It reveals** fresh contextual experiences of
30 disintegrative belonging of the women entrepreneurs, where it is least expected and rarely
31 documented (Barragan *et al.*, 2018; Foley *et al.*, 2018; Radu-Lefevre *et al.*, 2021), i.e. in their
32 home country, where paradoxically, their EI is socially revoked, being silenced under the
33 patriarchal and masculine hegemonic oppressive, discriminatory practices. Despite their
34 strategic disobedience and bicultural argument, the risk of losing the empowerment and
35 emancipation they gained and experienced as women migrant entrepreneurs in the UK, leaves
36 them no choice but to return to their to pursue belonging as entrepreneurs.
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46 Furthermore, by highlighting the influence of transnational contexts and their impact on the
47 intersectional identities of Romanian immigrant women entrepreneurs, this study contributes
48 to the discussion about the importance of contextualising women's entrepreneurship (Van Burg
49 *et al.*, 2020; Baker and Welter, 2018; 2020). **This study makes an important contribution to the**
50 **field of transnational women migrant entrepreneurship, as it is the first to bring Romanian**
51 **women into this research agenda. In accordance with its use of the IPA and intersectional**
52 **frameworks, the current study places significant importance on the exploration of distinctively**
53 **complex and real-life experiences that are intricately intertwined with specific historical and**
54 **context-sensitive situations, thereby discouraging generalisations (Alase, 2017; Smith, 2019).**
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3 Finally, this study contributes to the shift from conviction-based policies to evidence-based
4 ones that support the heterogeneity of migrant entrepreneurs, allowing them to become active
5 participants and use their untapped entrepreneurial potential, which benefits home and host
6 economies (Vertovec, 2020). It shows that transnational belonging is neither static,
7 meaningless, nor cross-culturally fluid. The study findings reinforce the heterogeneous
8 diversity perspective of belonging (Kymlicka and Banting, 2017), which embraces contextual
9 intersectionality, and has been gaining momentum in migrant entrepreneurial studies (Lassale
10 and Shaw, 2021). This diversity matrix seems to reinforce the paradox of co-habiting,
11 contextual limitations and empowerment (Dobbernack and Modood, 2015).
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19 Thus, policymakers should establish inclusive gender-sensitive policies and entrepreneurship
20 programmes that meet transnational female entrepreneurs' contextual needs. These initiatives
21 should also provide valuable support for the heterogeneous communities of entrepreneurs.
22 Reasoning with previous scholars (Lassale and Shaw, 2021), this study invites three areas for
23 policy response: cross-cultural mentoring, inclusive skill development opportunities, and
24 knowledge sharing between support agencies on intersectional practices.
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30 The valuable findings need to be considered in light of the study's limitations and future
31 research suggestions. For a more inclusive view, this feminist, intersectional, and contextual
32 line of IPA inquiry could be extended to include Romanian migrant entrepreneurs and their
33 experiences of transnational belonging or other communities of migrant entrepreneurs. Also,
34 from a methodological standpoint, it would be beneficial to revisit these women entrepreneurs
35 in the future to explore how their journeys of belonging have further evolved.
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44 Conclusion

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47 The aim of this study was to investigate the experiences of Romanian women migrant
48 entrepreneurs in their transnational intersectional journeys of belonging in Romania, their
49 home country and in the UK, their host country. The findings of the study have revealed that
50 these women undo and negotiate their intersecting identities to conform to socio-cultural norms
51 in both their host and native countries. Specifically, in the United Kingdom, they
52 shared experiencing a sense of empowerment as women entrepreneurs, whilst the liability
53 embedded in their Romanian identity motivated them to silence or mask this identity, preferring
54 to portray themselves as members of acceptable ethnic communities, such as Nordic countries.
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3 By contrast, in patriarchal Romania, their entrepreneurial identity is mocked and
4 undermined, given the treat it poses to the established sociocultural norms, sometimes to the
5 point of being denied this identity, which in turn, has forced them to give up on pursuing
6 entrepreneurship.
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10 These findings reinforce the importance of deepening our understanding of inequalities and
11 entrepreneurial opportunities experienced by women migrant entrepreneurs (Vershinina *et al.*,
12 2021) and the need for a more inclusive research agenda and policies to represent the enriching
13 diversity residing outside Western Europe. This study responds to Baker and Welter's (2020)
14 call for contextualising entrepreneurship, demonstrating that Romanian migrant women
15 entrepreneurship and their intersectional identities exist, are shaped and shape the transnational
16 context. These perspectives are crucial not only in furthering the research on women migrant
17 entrepreneurship, but also, in facilitating the development of evidence-based policies and
18 entrepreneurship programmes that can unlock the untapped socioeconomic potential and
19 diversity of female entrepreneurship.
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Table 1. Research participants

| Participant's code | Age | Level of education | Industry in the UK | Primary market | Industry in Romania | Marital status | Business in the UK /years | Business in Ro/Years |
|--------------------|-----|--------------------|---|----------------|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Erica | 45 | Master Degree | Consumer goods & services (Accountancy) | Ethnic Market | Consumer goods & services (Accountancy) | Divorced with one child | 5 years | 4 years |
| Mara | 45 | Bachelor Degree | Consumer goods & services (Romanian Primary School) | Ethnic Market | Marketing consultancy | Divorced, with one child | 8 years | 3 years |
| Maria | 34 | Master Degree | Manufacturing & Heavy industry (Fashion Designer) | British Market | Manufacturing & Heavy industry (Fashion Designer) | Single | 4 years | 1 years |
| Elisa | 37 | High School | Manufacturing & Heavy industry (Designing Handbags) | British Market | Manufacturing & Heavy industry (Designing handbags) | Married, without children | 2 years | 1 years |
| Lara | 37 | Master Degree | Consumer goods & services (Baker) | British Market | Marketing Consultancy/none | Divorced, with one child | 2 years | Unsuccessful attempt |
| Ela | 36 | High School | Construction & Real estate (Construction Certifications) | Ethnic Market | Consumer goods & services (Pub) | Single | 8 years | 1 years |
| Ana | 51 | High School | Consumer goods & services (Restaurant) | Ethnic Market | Consumer goods & services (Restaurant) | Divorced, with children | 6 years | 5 years |
| Vero | 41 | Bachelor degree | Consumer goods & services (Wedding dresses & Accessories) | British Market | Medical field/None | Married, with one child | 3 years | Unsuccessful attempt |
| Ina | 27 | Master Degree | Consumer goods & services (Consultancy on Migration) | Ethnic Market | Consumer goods & services (Consultancy on Migration/none) | Single | 1 years | Unsuccessful attempt |

Table 2: Coding structure and illustrative interview extracts

| Illustrative interview examples | 1st order themes/codes Summary of key responses | 2nd order themes/codes | Aggregated themes |
|--|---|---------------------------------|--|
| <p>"in the UK I don't!...I don't feel the need to have someone (a man) to back me up. Here your supplier and other business partners take negotiations seriously." (Elisa)</p> <p>"It's not unusual for me to be a businesswoman. I think this is due to this socio-economic context, which presents entrepreneurship as an opportunity for women's economic emancipation." (Maria)</p> <p>"(...) a businessman told me that I am too strong for a businesswoman." (Mara)</p> <p>"Having my business means a lot to me especially as a woman, and I never forget that I am a woman and that I chose not to become a mother, not to become a wife, but to focus on my business (...)" (Ela)</p> <p>"(...) here, if you want to develop professionally, nobody will stop you, as long as following the law (...) this context gives me the power to rise." (Erica)</p> | Belonging experienced as personal empowerment | <i>Entrepreneurial identity</i> | |
| <p>"My passion for helping women has led me to set up the business "Businesswomen in the UK" and I believe that women need to accept themselves (...) I encourage the women in my network to open businesses independent of their husbands (...)" (Mara)</p> <p>"Opening the business here meant realizing a dream that I've never gave up on (...). I became a role model for young people as well as for women who understood me and my Romanian restaurant business." (Ana)</p> <p>"Despite being the same individual, in Romania, I did not succeed in my business as I did here. So the context has helped me tremendously." (Ana)</p> | Belonging as community role models | | Belonging in the UK, the host country |
| <p>"But...yes my experience in England was that a woman can be a woman and develop and grow personally and professionally without a man's help, because (...) her results are recognised and so you get due credit and due recognition. ((...) I have to say, as a woman, in this country, I have rights." (Elisa)</p> <p>"I think from the beginning the perception was that I do this business as a hobby while my husband brings a lot of money home. At one point someone mentioned something like this." (Lara)</p> <p>"I don't consider myself a successful businesswoman yet, but I consider myself a lucky woman (...)" (Mara)</p> | Belonging experienced as freedom from CoO masculine and patriarchal hegemonies | <i>Gender Identity</i> | |
| <p>"Meritocracy has no gender and more importantly, it is not male exclusive!" (Elisa)</p> | Belonging in an androgenic entrepreneurial socio-cultural system | | |
| <p>"Thanks to my blonde hair colour, I pass as being Nordic, instead of Romanian and thus I do not have to explain any further my identity." (Lara)</p> <p>"The complexity of my skin and my hair is not specifically Romanian and I keep it that way." (Mara)</p> | Belonging only as women entrepreneurs , but not as Romanians | <i>Romanian identity</i> | |
| <p>"(...) in Romania, the woman is still not equal with a man and the same recognition or support" (Elisa)</p> <p>"I've also experienced discrimination and intimidation (...) which would not have happened if I were a man." (Ela)</p> <p>"I opened a business as an authorized accountant in Romania (...). However, I had men clients who would not pay me on time and avoid me on the streets, so they don't have to pay me for my accounting services." (Erica)</p> <p>"The possibility of returning to Romania exists only if I can open a business there, but I know this is impossible without a man's help. (...) It is that belief that a woman should be someone's wife or lover." (Ana)</p> | Belonging experienced as fulfilling the prescribed roles of mothers, wives and lovers | <i>Gender identity</i> | |
| <p>"In Romania...(...) I've always had to depend on a man's image or at least look like I had a man behind my business there. And it wasn't easy, because I considered myself strong enough to have my business without a man's help. But this created barriers for me and my business. When I was buying leather and buckles from my suppliers, who are men, I had to behave more boyish and manly to be served. And not once did I feel like I was taken for a ride with jokes that weren't exactly welcoming. For example, when their customer is a man, prices are easier to negotiate, but when they have a women customer, the prices are high, most often negotiable, they often shut you down or they don't even listen to what you say (...) and don't consider you their equal." (Elisa)</p> | | | Belonging in Romania, the home country |
| <p>"For me, the image of a businesswoman is the one dressed in a suit and high heels. But this is the image I have about the Romanian businesswoman. (...) The father's first reaction was (disappointment) rebelling by saying that I had wasted 18 years of education to become a baker. (...) Being a woman entrepreneur here is a process of learning and personal discovery of who I really am and who I can be outside the cultural constraints (...)" (Lara)</p> | Belonging as only Romanian women , but not as entrepreneurs | <i>Entrepreneurial identity</i> | |
| <p>"In 2012 I opened in my hometown in Romania, a pub and after that I opened an international recruitment firm and because of this, I had problems with the Romanian authorities who were expecting bribes (...). There I experienced the discrimination of being a woman in all possible forms. In the UK, I can say, that I learned to be an entrepreneur, (identity) which Romania denied me....." (Ela)</p> | | | |
| <p>"Although my name is on all the business documents, on many occasions, I was asked (...) if they can speak to the boss (...) even after I assured them that I am the decision maker. But mostly men insist to meet the Mr. Boss." (Ina)</p> | | | |

The manuscript with the Manuscript ID IJEER-10-2022-0897.R2 titled "Identity is a matter of place: intersectional identities of women migrant entrepreneurs on the Eastern-Western European route," has been submitted to the International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research in response to the call for papers initiated by Vershinina et al. (2022) on the topic of "Inequalities in Entrepreneurship Opportunities: the intersectionality of contexts, situatedness, positionalities and identities."

The manuscript has undergone a comprehensive review process, and all recommendations provided by the reviewer have been properly considered and incorporated. The present review focuses on the modifications made to the previous version of the study, which have been visually highlighted in green.

Improvements Reviewer One

Thank you, Reviewer Three, for your feedforward comments, generosity, and professional kindness in guiding the authors of this paper through the arduous process of revising this paper to meet the requirements for publication in the Special Issue of the International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research. Your professionalism gave me optimism! Your comprehensive feedback has been instrumental in enhancing my article!

| <i>Reviewer's comments</i> | <i>Author's response</i> | <i>The section</i> |
|---|---|---------------------------|
| <p><i>This is a very exciting manuscript that specifically looks at the experiences of Western European, particularly Romanian female entrepreneurs focussing on how the identity of these women is linked to the places from which they draw their identity markers.</i></p> <p><i>For me, whilst the paper has been revised well, as a guest editor, I feel that there there is</i></p> | <p>Thank you for your professional support!</p> <p>As advised, a professional and native English speaker proofread the whole article to ensure correct grammar and academic language use to meet publishing requirements.</p> <p>Therefore, over 300 revision points, highlighted in green were addressed.</p> <p>It is my hope that this article meets the requirements to be published in this Special Issue.</p> <p>I am appreciative of this chance and the expert advice from each reviewer who graciously</p> | <p>The whole article.</p> |

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|--|---|--|
| <p><i>a need for the paper to be proof read by an English native speaker. Some of the phrases including the first sentence, that female entrepreneurship is increasing is really not grammatically and stylistically, nicely written which means the paper requires. As a guest editor, I will be happy to accept the paper in the new format once it has been read by a professional copy editor.</i></p> | <p>dedicated time and shared their knowledge to guide me through the process.</p> | |
|--|---|--|