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Contribuer à l'autonomisation des femmes en Tunisie : l'impact de la performativité féministe à travers les programmes de formation en entrepreneuriat et leadership pour les femmes entrepreneures

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Résumé

Cette étude offre une analyse de l'impact des approches féministes de la formation à l'entrepreneuriat et au leadership sur l'autonomisation des femmes entrepreneures en Tunisie. En fournissant un aperçu de la littérature existante sur la performativité critique, l'autonomisation des femmes et l'entrepreneuriat féminin, cette étude identifie les lacunes actuelles de connaissances. L'étude de cas présente le programme de formation LPWE, qui a été co-développé et dispensé par CFE et a mobilisé l'approche féministe pour relever les défis auxquels les femmes entrepreneures en Tunisie sont confrontées.

Cette étude met en évidence trois résultats significatifs liés à l'autonomisation des femmes entrepreneures en Tunisie. Tout d'abord, le contexte historique est influent dans le travail de performativité critique, qui peut aider à remettre en question les contextes institutionnels. Les applications pratiques de la performativité critique sont également essentielles pour comprendre l'efficacité des tactiques. Deuxièmement, la recherche empirique sur l'autonomisation des femmes entrepreneures en Tunisie peut contribuer à combler des lacunes importantes dans la littérature, et l'identification des meilleures pratiques pour la résolution des obstacles à l'entrepreneuriat féminin. Troisièmement, la mobilisation de l'approche féministe dans la formation à l'entrepreneuriat peut conduire à des changements dans l'autonomisation individuelle des femmes entrepreneures. Cette découverte est ensuite subdivisée en quatre sous-résultats. Les conditions personnelles des femmes entrepreneures ont un impact sur leur processus d'autonomisation. Les programmes de formation à l'entrepreneuriat pour les femmes entrepreneures doivent être culturellement intégrés. La collaboration avec des entités canadiennes aide à promouvoir l'agenda féministe dans les pays en développement. De plus, les femmes entrepreneures ont besoin d'un espace sûr pour échanger avec d'autres femmes entrepreneures et promouvoir le changement social.

Dans l'ensemble, cette étude offre des perspectives sur la dynamique complexe de l'autonomisation des femmes dans les pays en développement et offre un cadre pour concevoir et mettre en œuvre des initiatives d'autonomisation. Elle démontre le rôle des approches féministes dans la facilitation de l'expansion de l'autonomisation des femmes entrepreneures en Tunisie et reconnaît l'importance d'un contexte historique réceptif. Cette recherche a des implications pour les organisations de soutien à l'entrepreneuriat pour promouvoir l'autonomisation individuelle des femmes entrepreneures par des actions performatives et collaborer dans des partenariats multisectoriels pour renforcer des initiatives d'autonomisation.

Mots clés : autonomisation, entrepreneuriat féminin, performativité critique, leadership, genre, MENA, contexte institutionnel, Tunisie, innovation, impact social.

Abstract

This research offers an analysis of the impact of feminist approaches to entrepreneurship and leadership training on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Tunisia. By providing an overview of existing literature on critical performativity, women's empowerment, and women's entrepreneurship, this study identifies current gaps in knowledge. The case study presents the LPWE training program, which was co-developed and delivered by CFE and mobilized the feminist approach to address the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Tunisia.

This study highlights three findings related to the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Tunisia. First, the historical context is influential in critical performativity work, which can help challenge institutional contexts. Practical applications of critical performativity are also essential to understand the effectiveness of tactics. Second, empirical research on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Tunisia can contribute to important gaps in the literature, and identifying best practices in addressing barriers to women's entrepreneurship. Third, mobilizing the feminist approach in entrepreneurship training can lead to changes in individual empowerment among women entrepreneurs. This finding is further subdivided into four sub-findings. The personal conditions of women entrepreneurs have an impact on their empowerment process. Entrepreneurship training programs for women entrepreneurs must be embedded in the cultural context. Collaboration with Canadian entities helps push the feminist agenda in developing countries. Additionally, women entrepreneurs need a safe space to exchange with other women entrepreneurs to promote social change.

Overall, this study offers insights into the complex dynamics of women's empowerment in developing nations and provides a framework for designing and implementing empowerment initiatives. It demonstrates the role of feminist approaches in facilitating bottom-up expansion of women entrepreneurs' empowerment in Tunisia and recognizes the significance of a receptive historical milieu. This research holds implications for entrepreneurship support organizations to promote individual empowerment among women entrepreneurs through performative action and to collaborate in multi-sector partnerships to enhance empowerment initiatives.

Keywords : empowerment, women entrepreneurship, critical performativity, leadership, gender, MENA, institutional context, Tunisia, innovation, social impact.

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

AEL: Ask-Experiment-Learn model

AFTD: Democratic Association of Tunisian Women

AFTURD: Association of Tunisian Women for Research and Development

BMC: Business Model Canvas tool

CFE (or CFE Tunisie): *Centre financier aux entrepreneurs – Tunisie* (Entrepreneurial Finance Center – Tunisia)

CMS: Critical Management Studies

CP: Critical Performativity

CPS: Code of Personal Status

CT: Critical Theory

DID: Desjardins International Development (*Développement international Desjardins*)

DAAM (or DAAM Foundation): *Développement, Accompagnement, Appui aux Micro-entrepreneur Fondation (*Development, Accompaniment, Support for Micro-entrepreneurs Foundation)

FBO: Faith-based organizations

FIAP: Feminist International Assistance Policy

FT: Feminist Theory

GAC: Global Affairs Canada

GBV: Gender-based violence

LPWE: Leadership Program for Women Entrepreneurs (*Programme Leadership pour les femmes entrepreneurs*)

MENA: Middle East and North Africa

NCA: National Constituent Assembly

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

SEED (SEED Network): Scaling Entrepreneurship for Economic Development Network

SMEs: Small and medium-sized enterprises

SSHRC: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

TEA: Total Early Entrepreneurial Activity

TDMWE: Three-Dimensional Model of Women's Empowerment (TDMWE)

ToT: Training of trainers

UN: United Nations

UNFT: *Union Nationale de la Femme Tunisienne* (National Union of Tunisian Women)

WE: Women entrepreneurs

WEIRD: Western Educated Industrialized Rich Democratic

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Introduction

The correlation between the relative position of women in society and the level of economic development has been widely established across countries and time, suggesting a potential causal link from female empowerment to development (Doepke & Tertilt, 2019; Doepke et al., 2012; Duflo, 2012). With female empowerment as a central element of development policy, development organizations have implemented initiatives aimed at strengthening women's empowerment. However, much of the existing literature on defining empowerment is based on secondary data (Jayakarani et al., 2012), leaving a significant gap in understanding how those at the forefront of development practice in entrepreneurship implement programs to promote empowerment as a pathway to development and poverty reduction.

In complex contexts such as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), there are few studies to date aimed at understanding development practice in entrepreneurship to promote women's empowerment. Understanding the perspectives and approaches of development practitioners is fundamental in defining empowerment and identifying how initiatives can effectively strengthen empowerment strategies towards sustainable development practice in different regions. One strategy that has been employed more widely in different social sciences is critical performativity (CP), which can be understood as the "active and subversive intervention into managerial discourses and practices" (Spicer et al., 2009).

The feminist approach to performativity could be a valuable tool in creating transformational social change, but it has yet to be significantly explored. By applying critical performativity to women entrepreneurship using the feminist approach, scholars and practitioners could close the gap between theory and practice. In this regard, this dissertation seeks to answer the main research question: *How has the feminist approach been mobilized by an entrepreneurship support organization in Tunisia to influence the empowerment of women entrepreneurs?*

Through a case study of the entrepreneurship and leadership training program "*Programme Leadership pour les femmes entrepreneures*" (Leadership Program for Women Entrepreneurs) (LPWE)[1] for women entrepreneurs (WE) in Tunisia, co-developed and delivered by *Centre financier aux entrepreneurs – Tunisie* (CFE), *Développement, Accompagnement, Appui aux Micro-entrepreneur* Foundation (DAAM), and Scaling Entrepreneurship for Economic Development Network (SEED), in partnership with Desjardins International Development (DID), the dissertation aims to

[1] Throughout this dissertation, the Leadership Program for Women Entrepreneurs (LPWE) ("*Programme Leadership pour les femmes entrepreneures*") will also be denoted as the "training program".

understand the historical phases in which feminist discourse evolved in Tunisia, generating a receptive setting for feminist performativity. The research also explores the ways in which the feminist approach was performed by CFE in Tunisia, and the impact of feminist performativity, delivered through the training program, on the empowerment of Tunisian women entrepreneurs.

The research employs an interdisciplinary approach, integrating archival and historical data from Tunisia's unique past grounded in historical, political and socio-economic events and conditions, with the interview data of 48 different stakeholders of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Tunisia, as well as observation data, in an attempt to shed light on the principal research question.

The results of this study reveal 8 historical phases that contributed to the evolution of feminist discourse in Tunisia, as well as 6 performative elements mobilized by CFE to implement the feminist approach in the co-development and delivery of the LPWE. Additionally, the results provide evidence of the empowerment of women entrepreneurs who completed the training program for each of the performative elements mobilized.

The first set of findings highlights the influencial role of the historical context in critical performativity work, underscoring the significance of CP in challenging institutional contexts, and stressing the importance of practical application in CP to understand the effectiveness of tactics. The second set of findings emphasizes the significance of conducting empirical research on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Tunisia, in order to tackle gaps in the literature, and identify best practices in addressing barriers to women entrepreneurship. The third set of findings provides evidence that the feminist approach, when applied in entrepreneurship training, can result in changes in women entrepreneurs' individual empowerment. Several noteworthy sub-findings include the influence of women entrepreneurs' personal conditions on their empowerment process, the necessity for entrepreneurship training programs to be culturally embedded, the relevance of Canadian collaboration in advancing the feminist agenda in developing countries, and the importance of providing women entrepreneurs with a safe space to connect with each other to promote social change.

This study showcases the feminist approach's potential to promote women entrepreneurs' empowerment in Tunisia by underscoring the importance of a supportive historical context and presenting a unique methodology for understanding empowerment in Tunisia's context. It acknowledges the interrelatedness of critical performativity, empowerment, and female entrepreneurship, and suggests that performativity can effectively support women's individual empowerment. However, the study also reveals that the institutional context impacts women entrepreneurs' empowerment process in Tunisia, limiting their capacity to become more empowered. This highlights the relevance

for development organizations like CFE to establish multi-sector partnerships for the development of empowerment initiatives. Overall, this study offers insights into women's empowerment in developing nations and provides a framework for empowerment initiatives. Additionally, it presents a unique perspective on defining and operationalizing empowerment, contributing to the ongoing global dialogue on this topic in international development. The findings of this study have implications for future research, policy, and practice in the field of women's entrepreneurship and empowerment.

Chapter 1: Literature review

This chapter provides a literature review on the themes related to the research topic. It begins by introducing the concept of critical performativity, followed by an exploration of feminist theory and women's empowerment. It then delves into the role of entrepreneurship as a means of increasing women's empowerment and highlights the advantages associated with female entrepreneurship. The section further examines the current state of women's entrepreneurship worldwide, with a particular focus on developing countries, and highlights the case of MENA and Tunisia. Additionally, the section discusses the barriers in female entrepreneurship, shedding light on how these challenges can manifest in MENA. In conclusion, the section highlights the remaining gaps in the literature and addresses the central research question of the dissertation: *How has the feminist approach been mobilized by an entrepreneurship support organization in Tunisia to influence the empowerment of women entrepreneurs?*

Critical performativity

In 2009, Spicer, Alvesson and Kärreman, coined the term 'critical performativity' (CP) defined as the "active and subversive intervention into managerial discourses and practices" (Spicer et al., 2009). Critical performativity, which has gained traction in recent years, aims to use discourse to have impact, in terms of emancipatory effect and practical organizational work (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). Since it first appeared in scholastic jargon, critical performativity has become a promising notion for academics who desire to have a tangible impact on society (Leca & Barin Cruz, 2021).

A. The development of Critical Management Studies

The notion of CP stems from the larger field of Critical Management Studies (CMS) –a broad grouping of theoretically primed critiques of management, business, and organization (Fournier & Grey, 2000). CMS covers an extensive range of perspectives that are critical of traditional theories of management, as well as the business schools that generate and propagate these theories (Fournier & Grey, 2000).

i. The emergence of CMS

Since the appearance of management as a social practice in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Pollard, 1968), it has been subject to various types of criticism (Fournier & Grey, 2000). However, it was only in the 1990s that an effort to unify this analysis was made by grouping them under one label, *Critical Management Studies* (Fournier & Grey, 2000).

The development of CMS can be attributed in large part to critical theory (CT), one of its most prominent philosophical foundations (Scherer, 2008). The principal contributors of CT, a unique philosophical tradition with distinct paradigmatic characteristics (Rasmussen, 1999; Rush & Fred, 2004; Scherer, 2008), are equated with several generations of German philosophers and social theorists of the Frankfurt School, particularly the writings of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermas (Bohman, 2005; Scherer, 2008). The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy denotes the difference between: a) Critical Theory (capitalized), in the narrow sense, which designates the numerous generations of social theorists and philosophers of the Frankfurt School, and b) critical theory (CT) (without capitalization), in the broader sense, as any philosophical approach that seeks emancipation for human beings and actively works to change society in accordance with human needs (Bohman, 2005).

Influential scholar Max Horkheimer defined CT as a social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society, in contrast to traditional theory oriented only towards understanding or explaining it (Horkheimer, 1972). Horkheimer and his colleagues at the Frankfurt School advanced that a "critical" theory can be distinguished from a "traditional" theory according to a specific practical purpose: a theory is critical to the extent that it seeks "emancipation from slavery", acts as a "liberating … influence", and works "to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers of" human beings (Bohman, 2005; Horkheimer, 1972). In the words of political philosopher and scholar Raymond Geuss, "the very heart of the critical theory of society is its criticism of ideology. Their ideology is what prevents the agents in the society from correctly perceiving their true situation and real interests; if they are to free themselves from social repression, the agents must rid themselves of ideological illusion" (Geuss, 1981). Thus, CT aims to "explain and transform *all* circumstances that enslave human beings", provide descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry to decrease domination and increase freedom in all their forms (Bohman, 2005), and develop a more humane, rational and just society (Scherer, 2008).

As follows from Horkheimer's definition, a critical theory is adequate only if it meets three criteria: it must be "explanatory, practical, and normative, all at the same time" –it must explain "what is wrong with the current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation" (Bohman, 2005; Horkheimer, 1972). CT aims to challenge and dismantle traditional forms of theorizing, as well as problematize and dismantle entrenched forms of social life that constrain human freedom (Devetak, 2013).

Philosophical approaches within the broader definition of CT have emerged in connection with the many social movements that identify varied dimensions of the domination of

human beings in modern societies (Bohman, 2005; Devetak, 2013). Examples of such philosophical approaches are critical race theory, queer theory, anarchism, critical international theory, ecological philosophies, and of relevance to this dissertation – feminism.

i. First and second waves of CMS

According to Spicer, Alvesson and Kärreman, there have been three waves of CMS that have ultimately led to the current prominence of critical performativity (Spicer et al., 2016).

The first wave of CMS was inspired by labor process theory and focused on control and discipline as established in the workplace (Spicer et al., 2016). Largely the conception of scholars trained in industrial sociology that had relocated to the then emergent business schools in the UK; their formula was to study an office or factory to broadly confirm Marxist views on the labor process (Parker, 2015). Although, this first dive into understanding workplace dynamics created a relevant body of insights (Spicer et al., 2016), critics claimed it often overlooked issues vital to 'new' kinds of workplaces, such as more subtle forms of power and domination (Clegg, 1989; Knights & Willmott, 1989).

These shortcomings contributed to the rise of a second wave of CMS mainly inspired by the Frankfurt School critical theory, and particularly poststructuralist theory. According to Spicer et al. (2016), the typical formula for second wave critics was to "import a French philosopher or other 'exotic' thinkers and apply their ideas to a series of organizational issues" (Spicer et al., 2016). This approach provided some valuable insights into the workplace and organizations, yet it "yielded ever-decreasing returns" and offered progressively little that was "academically rigorous, intellectually interesting and practically relevant" (Spicer et al., 2016).

The second wave of CMS had become "increasingly moribund" and needed to be replaced –critical performativity provided a way of doing this (Spicer et al., 2016).

B. Understanding performativity

In order to properly grasp the notion of critical performativity, the concept of "performativity" must first be understood. Philosopher John Austin first introduced the notion of 'performative utterance' in his book *How to do things with words* published in 1962. The concept of performative language proposed by Austin postulated that there was a difference between *constative* language and *performative* language (Austin, 1962). On one hand, constative language describes the world and can be evaluated as true or false; on the other hand, performative language *does something* in the world (Austin, 1962). He

famously argued that performatives are illocutionary because they "do" an action as they are said or written (Austin, 1962).

Austin's description of performatives included the environment (or scene) of the utterance whereby the speakers and situation needed to match the intention of the performative in order for it to work (Rak, 2021). In other words, for an utterance to be 'performative', several felicity conditions must be met. For example, if said under the right circumstances, by the right speakers, with the right intentions, the exclamation "I do" transforms the speakers from being unmarried to married (Austin, 1962). Austin (1962) outlined numerous examples of performative language which included speech acts such performing a marriage ceremony, promising, swearing, and betting. Other examples of performative statements are declarations of ownership, baptisms, inaugurations, and legal sentences (Austin, 1962). For Austin, language does not merely describe the world but may instead (or also) function as a form of social action; therefore, performativity is the power of language to influence change in the world (Austin, 1962).

After Austin's initial propositions about performative language, other scholars explored the different ways in which language can *do things* in the world (Barker & Galasinski, 2001). Thenceforth, performatives became the subject of linguistics and speech act theory and were interpreted in numerous ways by social scientists, philosophers, and critical theorists, notably Shoshana Felman, Jean-François Lyotard, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michel Callon, Karen Barad, Jacques Derrida, and Judith Butler (Rak, 2021). They developed postmodern and poststructural approaches to language and representation which stated that performatives offered an alternative route to thinking about how meaning is produced (Rak, 2021). Poststructuralists interested in the work of language and politics found performatives helpful for thinking about the impact and force of statements (Rak, 2021). This has led to the co-existence of multiple foundational perspectives on performativity (Cabantous et al., 2015).

Particularly in the work of feminists and queer theorists, performativity has played an important role in discussions of social change (Oliver, 1999). Philosopher, and gender and feminist theorist Judith Butler offered a notable reading of the notion of performativity, which has been largely used in their analysis of gender development. They describe performative as "that reiterative power of discourse to produce phenomena that regulates and constrains" (Butler, 1993). For Butler (1993), performative acts are types of authoritative speech that can only happen and be enforced through the laws and norms of a society (Hall & Du Gay, 1996). These statements, just by speaking them, carry out a certain action and exhibit a certain level of power (Butler, 1993).

Furthermore, a key element of performativity for Butler is repetition (Halberstam, 2014). The performative statements are not singular in nature or use and must be used consistently in order to exert power (Hall & Du Gay, 1996). Thus, according to Butler (1988), performativity is the process of subject formation, which creates that which it intends to describe and occurs through linguistic means, as well as via other social practices (Butler, 1988). In this way, performativity has become a way to consider effects without thinking along the lines of classic causality (Butler, 2010).

Inspired by, but also departing from, Butler's analytical use of the term performativity, Spicer, Alvesson and Kärreman transform performativity into a programmatic concept through the concept of critical performativity (Alvesson et al., 2009; Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Spicer et al., 2009). They "do not want to *study* performativity; they want their own studies to be performative" (Knudsen, 2017).

C. Critical performativity: the third wave of CMS

According to Spicer, Alvesson and Kärreman (2016), we are currently witnessing the third wave of CMS (Spicer et al., 2016). This third wave, rather than being driven by the application of ideas from fashionable thinkers (as present in the second wave), starts from the point of addressing and critiquing organizational issues that are of greater public significance (Spicer, 2014). Although it is not completely evident how this third wave will eventually be labelled and understood, it is clear that much of the debate around the third wave is centered on the concept of critical performativity (Spicer et al., 2016).

The notion of CP is a "new take on a classical issue within critical theory", namely it is a novel attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Knudsen, 2017) which is regularly acknowledged to be a difficulty in CMS (Adler et al., 2006; Alvesson et al., 2009; Clegg et al., 2006; King, 2015; Knudsen, 2017; Voronov, 2008). CMS supports the enlightening of organizations by revealing problematic dynamics of power relations; however, while this gives rise to the awareness of a phenomenon on an intellectual level, progress is not always met with socially visible action (Huault et al., 2017). The result is that numerous relations of domination in business and organizations are seen, yet we remain entangled in them rather than being stimulated to act (Huault et al., 2017).

CP proposes a way of critically working with discourses of management as a way to reach progressive social change (Spicer et al., 2009). Spicer et al. (2009) advocate the idea of CP and make the argument that CMS needs to find a way to promote activism and embrace performativity in socially responsible and progressive ways (Spicer et al., 2009). CP is a means to support organizational scholarship as a form of activism by employing engaged research as a path to transformative change (Kieser & Leiner, 2012). Doing this would offer a way out of the "pervasive cynicism and studied impracticality" that typifies so much of critical thought (Huault et al., 2017).

An outcome of the turn toward performativity is to posit that CMS has the capacity to have performative effects on what it describes; thus, the argument is that CMS should seek to become *more* performative (Knudsen, 2017). The interventions of CMS can (and should) take a more affirmative and pragmatic approach to management practices and discourses (Knudsen, 2017).

D. Liberation through critical performativity

'Performativity' aims to explain why practices, devices and interactions have certain performative effects; in contrast, 'critical performativity' assumes that we are not stuck with the social world at hand (Huault et al., 2017). From the viewpoint of critical performativity, the social world is understood as shaped through social process and hence could have developed differently (Huault et al., 2017). 'Critical' in this framework signifies to problematize the current state of affairs in society at large and in relation to specific cases, e.g. inequality, freedom and opportunity (Huault et al., 2017). In this context, critical understanding is a reflection upon established ideas, ideologies and institutions, in order to inspire emancipation or at least diminish oppression (Huault et al., 2017).

Thus, the political and critical task is to *create* the conditions for performativity (Cabantous et al., 2016; Spicer et al., 2016). Spicer and al. (2016) express it in the following way: "In sum, critical ideas don't become performative on their own. They require a felicitous context. Often this needs to be constructed through a significant amount of mobilization work" (Spicer et al., 2016). Creating conditions for performativity involves "engaging disgruntled elites, bringing together slack resources, creating forums for micro-mobilization and framing ideas in a way that resonate with a broader public" (Spicer et al., 2016). Other tactics include making "fissures in the discourses and norms that govern the constitution of organizations and organizational practices, thus changing the conditions of possibility for being and becoming organizational subjects" (Cabantous et al., 2016).

These conditions of possibility, which make performatives work, can be constructed by a deliberate scientific (Cabantous et al., 2016) and social movement (Spicer et al., 2016). However, this effort cannot be prompted from some position outside society (Knudsen, 2017). Instead, the scientific attempt to be political, to establish new narratives, or to create movements for change, is always already embedded in society – that is, in pre-existing contexts or discourses (Knudsen, 2017). The idea of the "voluntarily created discourses/felicitous context should […] be supplemented with a more sociologically informed analysis of the pre-existing conditions for performativity" (Knudsen, 2017).

To date, the ideas of critical performativity have been applied to a range of issues such as leadership, human resources, marketing, cooperatives, academic conferences, and even online dating (Spicer et al., 2016). Nevertheless, there is a real need for "more, deeper and broader empirical studies of critical performativity: of the effectiveness of tactics, of relevant heterotopias, of the potentials and limits of interventions and the development of a rich repertoire of contextualized best practices and key learnings" (Huault et al., 2017).

E. Gender performativity and social transformation

According to Butler (1988), gender reality is performative meaning it is real only to the extent that it is performed (Butler, 1988). Certain kinds of acts are usually interpreted as expressive of a gender core or identity, and these acts either conform to an expected gender identity or contest that expectation in some way (Butler, 1988).

For Butler (1988), the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts (Butler, 1988). The body is an embodying of possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention, and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing a historical situation (Butler, 1988; De Beauvoir, 2014). For Butler (1988), "to be a woman is to have *become* a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of 'woman', to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to a historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project" (Butler, 1988). In this way, gender is an identity instituted through *stylized repetition of acts* and this repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation (Butler, 1988).

As a strategy of survival, gender is a performance with evidently punitive consequences (Butler, 1988). Indeed, those who fail to perform their gender correctly are regularly punished (Butler, 1988). Performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all (Butler, 1988). That culture so readily punishes or marginalizes those who fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism should be sign enough that on some level there is social knowledge that the truth and falsity of gender is only socially compelled and not ontologically necessitated (Butler, 1988). Genders then can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, and yet, one is compelled to live in a world in which genders constitute univocal signifiers, in which gender is made to comply with a model of truth and falsity which not only contradicts its own performative fluidity, but serves a social policy of gender regulation and control (Butler, 1988).

Although individual acts do work to maintain and reproduce systems of oppression, it doesn't follow that oppression is the sole consequence of such acts (Butler, 1988). One might argue that without human beings whose various acts, largely construed, produce

and maintain oppressive conditions, those conditions would fall away; but note that the relation between acts and conditions is neither unilateral nor unmediated. There are social contexts and conventions within which certain acts not only become possible but become conceivable as acts at all (Butler, 1988).

For Butler (1993), the fact that the subject is *constituted* by social discourse does not mean that the subject is *determined* by social discouse (Butler, 1993) The subject who is produced in and through discourse can act by articulating words in contexts that invest them with new meaning (Magnus, 2006). Through such linguistic performances, the subject can "resist" the preestablished social order that not only circumscribes her, but which penetrates her very being (Magnus, 2006). The transformation of social relations becomes a matter then of transforming hegemonic social conditions rather than the individual acts that are spawned by those conditions (Magnus, 2006). Indeed, according to Butler (1988), one runs the risk of addressing the merely indirect, if not epiphenomenal, reflection of those conditions if one remains restricted to a politics of acts (Butler, 1988).

In the years since the publication of Judith Butler's notion of performative subjectivity, it has demonstrated its emancipatory power and induced a social transformation (Magnus, 2006). However, it has also provoked severe criticism, notably by Seyla Benhabib who argued that Butler's understanding of the subject as produced through social discourse defeats the feminist goal of empowering women to determine their own lives (Benhabib, 1995; Magnus, 2006). As was suggested by Benhabib (1995), "the very project of female emancipation" cannot be conceived without certain "regulative" ideas –ideas that Butler would rather leave "permanently open, permanently contested, [and] permanently contingent" (Benhabib, 1995; Magnus, 2006). Yet, according to Fraser (1995), it is not necessary to "view these two positions as antithetical" (Fraser, 1995). We must "remain critical of regulative ideals, even as we continue to (re)formulate them" (Magnus, 2006). In other words, we must inscribe the need for revision into the very heart of our theories (Magnus, 2006), particularly in relation to the topic of feminism.

The following section will elaborate on the concepts of feminist theory and women's empowerment.

Main concepts
Critical Management Studies (CMS): CMS covers an extensive range of perspectives that are critical of traditional theories of management, as well as the business schools that generate and propagate these theories. **Critical theory (CT)**: CT is any philosophical approach that seeks emancipation for human beings and actively works to change society in accordance with human needs.

Performativity: The concept of performative language states that there is a difference between *constative* language (describes the world and can be evaluated as true or false) and *performative* language (*does something* in the world).

Critical performativity (CP): CP proposes a way of critically working with discourses of management as a way to reach progressive social change.

Gender performativity: Gender performativity is the theory that gender and gender roles are performances that one puts on in day-to-day life, the hegemonic versions which underlay popular conceptions of 'man'/'masculine' and 'woman'/'feminine'.

Feminist theory and women's empowerment

It is basic assumption of feminist literature that women are subject to oppression by men who have, through the ages, achieved domination through power (Lincoln et al., 2002). This power has been gained not only through individual characteristics of men (for example, through physical strength) but also through the long-established patriarchal society in which we live (for example, through the legal system) (Lincoln et al., 2002). Therefore, if women are to fight oppression, it must be attempted on both a personal and a wider social basis (Lincoln et al., 2002).

Feminist theory (FT) has worked to understand the manners in which systemic or pervasive political and cultural structures are enacted and reproduced through individual acts and practices, and how the analysis of ostensibly personal situations is clarified through situating the issues in a wider and shared cultural context (Butler, 1988). FT is rooted in and responsible to movements of equality, freedom, and justice, and aims "to trouble power relations, imagine better worlds and work to achieve them" (Ferguson, 2017). According to Ferguson (2017), FT is not only about women, it is about the world, engaged through critical intersectional perspectives, with the objective to improve the lives of women, but also men, children, all species, and the planet (Ferguson, 2017).

A. Gender inequality

Globally, women face significant limitations in terms of their freedoms, opportunities, and possibilities compared to men. Research indicates that women experience greater poverty and disadvantage on a global level, which can be attributed to various factors such as limited access to education and a lack of ability to exercise their property, economic, and political rights (Duflo, 2012; Korosteleva & Stępień-Baig, 2020).

Women have less opportunity to control their lives and make decisions in comparison to men (Revenga & Shetty, 2012). This remains true today, despite efforts deployed in the last decades by many international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank, to bridge the gender gap in access to opportunities (Sarfaraz & Faghih, 2011). Gender inequalities are still widely prevalent across the world, particularly in developing economies, where women continue to be politically, economically, and socially deprived of the same rights as men (Sarfaraz & Faghih, 2011).

An important action in the struggle to address gender inequalities globally has been the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on September 25, 2015, by the UN member states (Esquivel & Sweetman, 2016). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) identified gender inequality as a key contributor to the loss of human development and declared gender equality as a sustainable development goal (SDG) in the UN 2030 Agenda (Bastian et al., 2019). The 2030 Agenda, and proposed SDGs, (Figure 1), offer a global framework for advancing sustainable development in its three dimensions: economic, social and environmental (Esquivel & Sweetman, 2016). The SDGs are established in a commitment to realizing human rights and serve as targets that guide programs and initiatives around the world towards common aims (Esquivel & Sweetman, 2016).

Figure 1 : United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Source: https://sdgs.un.org/goals

SDG Goal 5 aims to promote gender equality and empower women and girls, recognizing their crucial role in building a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world (Kim, 2017). The SDGs prioritize education, employment, and full empowerment of women and girls as a key strategy to combat gender inequality and alleviate poverty (Kim, 2017). Therefore, empowering women is viewed as a significant concern in the journey towards sustainable development for numerous nations across the world (Co-operation & Development, 2012; Gates, 2015; Warth & Koparanova, 2012) and has become a frequently cited objective of development interventions (Mosedale, 2005). Governments and organizations around the globe strive to increase women's empowerment by implementing different interventions to promote sustainable development and human rights (Huis et al., 2017). The collective understanding about how empowered women are likely to behave has resulted in greater demand for international development funding dedicated to programs with the objective of empowering women (UNDP, 2008).

B. The concept of empowerment

In the 1990s, the term empowerment progressively appeared in the international vocabulary of experts and public policy, such as the UN and the World Bank (Bacqué & Biewener, 2015; Calvès, 2009). Empowerment also received increased scholarly attention as an avenue to enhance women's freedom, mobility, health, economic security, and participation in decision-making processes (Afrin et al., 2008). As such, various disciplines have contributed to empowerment research and assisted in shaping the concept of empowerment mainly concentrated on women (East, 2000; Mosedale, 2005). The increasingly widespread use of the concept by multiple actors with different ideologies (practitioners, states, institutions, academics) led to a multiplication of definitions and interpretations (Bacqué & Biewener, 2015). According to Mosedale (2005), "different people use empowerment to mean different things" (Mosedale, 2005). The different definitions present inherent contradictions, which are embedded in discourse and practice, making the practical implementation of empowerment challenging (Lincoln et al., 2002).

Although the term empowerment first stemmed from research in social work, it has been employed in the fields of health, public policy, and most notably international development (Calvès, 2009). Empowerment, as a central theme in international development (Calvès, 2009), is typically used to describe the main objective of improving the condition of women in their communities and societies, through increasing their economic, cognitive, social or political power (Bacqué & Biewener, 2015; Calvès, 2009; Oxaal & Baden, 1997). The expanded use of the concept of empowerment in this field is due to the reoccurring demands of different actors in the ecosystem, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and volunteers, for an alternative solution to top-down practices that often do not produce satisfactory results in terms of development, particularly for the emancipation of women (Bacqué & Biewener, 2015; Calvès, 2009).

Many empowerment theorists have argued that empowerment takes on multiple forms across people, is contextually embedded, and shifts over time (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 1990, 1995). According to Zimmerman (1995), empowerment is a "developemental construct" described as "a series of experiences in which individuals learn to see a closer correspondence between their goals and a sense of how to achieve them, gain greater access to and control over resources and where people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives" (Zimmerman, 1995). For Adams (2008), empowerment refers to the "capacity of individuals, groups and/or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives" (Adams, 2008). According to Huis et al. (2017), empowerment is a multifaceted process, which involves individual as well as collective awareness, beliefs, and behaviour embedded in a social structure in a specific cultural context (Huis et al., 2017).

i. Defining aspects of empowerment

Despite varied definitions and interpretations, the diverse literature seems to agree on several defining aspects of empowerment (Mosedale, 2005). Definitions of women empowerment highlight that it is a multifaceted concept that includes the following components: 1) To be empowered one must have been disempowered; 2) Empowerment is an ongoing process rather than a product or outcome; 3) Empowerment cannot be bestowed by a third party, rather it must be claimed; and 4) Empowerment corresponds to an expansion of *agency* (Mosedale, 2005).

From disempowered to empowered

If we want to see people empowered, we consider them to be currently disempowered – i.e. disadvantaged by the way power relations presently shape their choices, opportunities and well-being (Mosedale, 2005). In this way, empowerment can be understood as a process, from being unpowered to becoming empowered (Huis et al., 2017; Mosedale, 2005). Thus, individuals who become empowered must have been disempowered relative to others (Batliwala, 1993; Mosedale, 2005).

It is important to speak of empowering women because, as a group, they are disempowered relative to men (Mosedale, 2005). For Kabeer (1999), women empowerment can be understood as the process through which women acquire the ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them (Kabeer, 1999). It is the shift in the power structure or "a process of transition from a state of powerlessness to a state of relative control over one's life, destiny and environment" which brings about empowerment (Sadan, 1997).

According to Lincoln and al. (2002), certain techniques can be mobilized to transform those without power into equitable positions (Lincoln et al., 2002). This occurs when the oppressed recognize that there is an alternative way of living and that oppression does not have to be tolerated (Lincoln et al., 2002). Empowerment is about changing power relations (McGee & Pettit, 2019), and overcoming power asymmetries (Patrón, 2019), in favor of those who previously exercised little power over their own lives (Sen, 2001).

Many authors have noted in feminist literature that the empowerment of women does not involve the disempowerment of men. As noted by Hall (2013), "it is not women's purpose to take power from men; rather, the goal of women is to develop their own power while respecting men for who they are" (Hall, 2013). In this view, the fact that power can be mobilized in oppressive and empowering ways must be recognized to avoid the vicious circle of oppression (Lincoln et al., 2002).

Empowerment as an ongoing process

Some researchers claim that empowerment is a process, rather than an outcome (Akhter & Ward, 2009; Mosedale, 2005), while others define empowerment as both a process and an outcome (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010). Ultimately, the majority of authors interested in empowerment agree in presenting it as a process (Hofmann & Marius-Gnanou, 2003; Kabeer, 2001; Malhotra & Schuler, 2005; Oxaal & Baden, 1997; Rowlands, 1995).

Empowerment is considered an ongoing process (East, 2000; Kabeer, 2005; Mosedale, 2005; Stromquist, 1999) or a set of processes that expand a woman's agency, which applies directly to persons deficient in power because of social exclusion, marginalization, discrimination and/or social inequalities (Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2013). In this sense, empowerment is not an objective to be achieved, rather it is an evolution from one state (gender inequality) to another (gender equality) (Kabeer, 2001). Thus, there is not a final goal and one does not arrive at a stage of being empowered in some absolute sense (Mosedale, 2005). People are empowered, or disempowered, relative to others or, importantly, relative to themselves at a previous time (Mosedale, 2005).

The personal transformation of the individual who is becoming empowered is at the foundation of the process (Carr, 2003) meaning women are agents in the "continuous cycle of enhancing abilities to control choices, decisions and actions" (Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2013).

Empowerment cannot be bestowed, it must be claimed

Empowerment cannot be bestowed by a third party, rather those who would become empowered must claim it (Mosedale, 2005) –as individuals are active agents in this process (Sundaram et al., 2014). Empowerment cannot be granted or given, it requires a

process in which the individual's agency is pivotal (Mosedale, 2005; Narayan-Parker, 2005).

Accordingly, development agencies cannot empower women –the most they can achieve is to facilitate women empowering themselves (Mosedale, 2005). Self-empowerment ensures that the beneficiaries of development can determine and pursue their own interests and aspirations (Jakimow & Kilby, 2006). Consequently, development agencies may be able to create conditions favourable to empowerment as facilitators (Sardenberg, 2008), but they cannot make it happen (Mosedale, 2005).

Empowerment as an expansion of agency

Previous research proposes an approach to poverty reduction that builds on the ressources, assets, capabilities, and opportunities of individuals and communities themselves –a term commonly referred to as *agency*, which is seen as a critical component of empowerment (Sen, 2014). Agency can be understood as the ability or sense of ability to define one's goals, act upon them, and decide on their own strategic life outcomes (Kabeer, 1999). Agency refers to a woman's ability to use resources at her disposal in a way that allows her to make choices that affect her life and circumstances (Kabeer, 1999; Malhotra & Schuler, 2005).

Certain preconditions that characterise a woman's past and current environment, such as cultural constraints, asset ownership, parental education, and access to credit, are expected to facilitate processes that lead to an increase in her agency (Kabeer, 1999). Some examples of processes that affect a woman's agency are the processes surrounding the buying and selling of assets, the processes relating to the use of a woman's work time, and her ability to access credit (Garikipati, 2013).

Expanding a woman's agency is expected to affect her life outcomes or the fulfilment of her personal preferences, which can be understood as the goals that lead to her greater well-being (Kabeer, 1999). Some examples are having a greater say in household decisions, more access to personal money, and a lighter domestic burden (Kabeer, 1999). Empowerment can therefore be conceptualised as comprising both the processes that increase a woman's agency and the outcomes that embody this agency (Garikipati, 2013).

Many authors state that a clear understanding of empowerment must examine the relationship between the potential to build agency and the prevailing power structures which can support or hinder agency and hence empowerment (Friere, 1970; Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007; Luttrell et al., 2009; Samman & Santos, 2009). Sadan (1997) stated that "since the sources of powerlessness are rooted in empowerment processes that disempower entire populations, the empowerment process aims to influence the oppressed

human agency and the social structure within the limitations and possibilities in which this exists and reacts" (Sadan, 1997).

Empowerment definitions usually include a sense of people making decisions on matters which are important in their lives and being able to carry them out (Mosedale, 2005). Reflection, analysis and action are involved in this process which may happen on an invidual or collective level (Mosedale, 2005). There is some evidence that while women's own struggles for empowerment have tended to be collective efforts, empowerment-oriented development interventions often focus more on the level of the individual (Huis et al., 2017; Mosedale, 2005). As such, multiple dimensions of empowerment have been defined, as will be presented in the following section.

C. Dimensions of empowerment

Empowerment is a process that enables people to act on and improve issues that are important for their individual lives, their communities, and their society (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010; Maton, 2008). Definitions of empowerment stress the expansion of women's individual capacities and a free exercise of personal choice (Budgeon, 2015; Kurtiş et al., 2016). One might then conceptualize empowerment as both objective and subjective, and that the level of the individual is essential for personalizing the wider, objective issues (Lincoln et al., 2002). In this sense, empowerment is not only individual, as it can lead to social changes (e.g., changes in power structures within a family) (Calás et al., 2009; Sen, 1999).

The theorizing of empowerment has advanced several frameworks on the dimensions of empowerment. For some authors, there are two main perspectives: one more individualistic, namely through women's individual capacities and free exercise of personal choice (Kabeer, 1999) and one more collectivistic, namely through collective behavior and the adherence to cultural norms which emphasize collective growth (Budgeon, 2015). Other authors have advanced that the conceptual framework of empowerment can be shown to have three levels: individual, communal, and organisational (Jayakarani et al., 2012).

Huis and al. (2017) proposed a framework, the Three-Dimensional Model of Women's Empowerment (TDMWE) (Appendix 1), that posits that women's empowerment can be differentiated in three dimensions, namely personal, relational, and societal empowerment (Huis et al., 2017). This model assumes that empowerment can be understood at three distinct dimensions: (1) the micro-level, referring to individuals' personal beliefs as well as actions where personal empowerment can be observed, (2) the meso-level, referring to beliefs as well as actions in relation to relevant others relational empowerment can be observed, and (3) the macro-level, referring to outcomes in the broader, societal context where societal empowerment can be observed (Huis et al., 2017). From this model,

capturing women's self-confidence would be located at the micro-level, women feeling and acting confident in relation to their partner or social network would be located at the meso-level, and women's situation in society would be located at the macro level (Huis et al., 2017). Furthermore, Huis and al. (2017) also offer and explain two important moderators of empowerment –time and culture (Huis et al., 2017).

The TDMWE allows for a dynamic understanding of why some women may feel more empowered than others, why some women may express higher levels of personal but not relational empowerment, and why one specific intervention may show positive impacts on women empowerment in one but not another nation (Huis et al., 2017). Integrating all three dimensions of women's empowerment into one model provides theoretical insights into how women's empowerment may develop through access to services and offers practical implications for practitioners in the field (Huis et al., 2017).

i. Individual empowerment

Individual (or personal) empowerment can be described as a process of transformation that enables individuals to make independent decisions and take action on these decisions to make changes in their lives (Jayakarani et al., 2012). According to Zimmerman (1990), at the individual level, empowerment includes participatory behavior, motivations to exert control, and feelings of efficacy and control (Zimmerman, 1990).

According to Jayakarani and al. (2012), a core mechanism identified for individual empowerment is agency, which is comprised of three main components –(a) an individuals self-identity (i.e. self-confidence and self-efficacy to set and achieve goals); (b) their decision-making capacity (i.e. ability to make informed decisions that are recognised and respected); and (c) their ability to effect change (i.e. belief in own ability to take action to effect change based on own goals) (Jayakarani et al., 2012).

When the concept of confidence is limited within the boundary of one's self, it is called "self-confidence" (Oney & Oksuzoglu-Guven, 2015). Self-confidence is seen as "a reliance stemming from persuasion or accompanied by it" (Rotenstreich, 1972) of an individual's certainty about his or her abilities (Vealey, 1986). Since it is based on past experiences and can be updated via gained experience, self-confidence may not be stable over time (Vealey, 1986). Hence, as a dynamic concept, it manifests in different possible magnitudes (e.g. high, medium, and low) over time (Guennif, 2002).

Distinguishing self-confidence from self-efficacy is important as these two constructs are often used interchangeably (Oney & Oksuzoglu-Guven, 2015). Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as the "belief that one has the capabilities to execute the courses of actions required managing prospective situations" (Bandura, 1977). On one hand, self-confidence is related to the strength of a belief or conviction, it does not suggest a level of perceived

competence (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy, on the other hand, specifies the level of perceived competence but it does not indicate the confidence level in the outcome resulting from these competencies (Oney & Oksuzoglu-Guven, 2015).

For Jayakarani et al. (2012), individual empowerment is not achieved by agency alone, knowledge and the presence of an enabling environment for change were also identified as mechanisms (Jayakarani et al., 2012). Knowledge contributed to informed decision-making, self-confidence, and self-efficacy, which enabled individuals to recognise problems, understand potential solutions and identify sources for assistance (Jayakarani et al., 2012). The existence of an enabling environment of institutional structures and social norms was shown to facilitate or hinder individual empowerment, and the relationship between agency and an enabling environment was seen as the core to individual empowerment (Jayakarani et al., 2012).

ii. Relational empowerment

In the definitions of women's empowerment, the collective is also considered. Research on female empowerment has focused on women's position in relation to relevant others, such as their partner, family members, or social networks (Huis et al., 2017). Previous research has examined the relation between access to empowerment initiatives and women's relationship with their partner by assessing women's barganing power within the household (Duvendack et al., 2014; Holvoet, 2005; Upadhyay et al., 2014), their freedom of mobility to visit places such as grocery stores or relatives (Pitt et al., 2006; Swain & Wallentin, 2009), and also (the risk of) intimate partner violence (Kabeer, 1999; Naved & Persson, 2005; Rahman, 1999). Previous reseach also examined the relation between access to empowerment initiatives and women's membership in social groups (such as school groups, religious groups, women's groups) by measuring the number of social networks they are members of (Hansen, 2015; Pitt et al., 2006), seeking, receiving, or providing help in times of crises (Sanyal, 2009), and inclination to participate in collective action (Datta, 2015; Kim et al., 2007; Sanyal, 2009). Huis and al. (2017) refer to these as components of relational empowerment as they assess different aspects of women's position in relation to others (Huis et al., 2017).

Relational empowerment can be correlated to community empowerment, described by Jayakarani et al. (2012) as the process of enabling communities to mobilise towards change (Jayakarani et al., 2012). Community empowerment involves capacity building, whereby communities build networks or community groups, then mobilises these groups to take action on certain issues (Jayakarani et al., 2012). Resource provision is a mechanism of community empowerment, which involves direct provision of supplies or services to a community to facilitate capacity-building initiatives (Jayakarani et al., 2012). It is acknowledged that community empowerment requires an enabling environment that recognises community groups, is responsive to community advocacy, and is accountable

to the community itself (Jayakarani et al., 2012). The enabling environment is determined by the level of community agency, capacity building, and resource provision, highlighting the close interlinkages between these mechanisms (Jayakarani et al., 2012).

Many interventions aiming to empower women note the importance of creating opportunities for women to spend time with other women reflecting on their situation, recognizing the strengths they do possess and devising strategies to achieve positive change (Mosedale, 2005). Stromquist (1995) described empowerment as a multifaceted concept including different components ranging from women's understanding of the causes of their suppression to acting collectively as a group toward social change (Stromquist, 1999). In Reinelt's view (1994), women must take control of their own lives by talking to each other and transferring their program from one which is intrinsically personal to recognizing that other women are affected too (Reinelt, 1994). In this way, the problem is not the women, or indeed women as a whole, but the abuse of male gender structures (Reinelt, 1994). Once the problem is externalized, women can try to tackle it (Reinelt, 1994), therefore, participation in small groups with a collective agenda is an important step toward women empowerment (Stromquist, 2015).

For Evans (1980), the prerequisites for developping an "insurgent collective identity" are: (1) Social spaces where people can develop an independent sense of worth as opposed to their usual status as second-class or inferior citizens; (2) Role models –seeing people breaking out of patterns of passivity; (3) An ideology that explains the sources of oppression, justifies revolts, and imagines a qualitatively different future; (4) A threat to the newfound sense of self which forces the individual to confront inherited cultural definitions; and (5) A network through which a new interpretation can spread, activating a social movement (Evans, 1980).

iii. Societal empowerment

Huis et al. (2017) refer to women's position at the broader societal dimension as societal empowerment (Huis et al., 2017). Women empowerment in the societal dimension has so far been assessed with indices that map gender gaps in human development across nations such as the Gender Development Index or specific components such as the percentage of parliamentary seats held by women (Huis et al., 2017). To gain a deeper understanding of women's empowerment on the societal dimension, research should assess women's position in society in two ways: examine women's position by analyzing objective information about women's social conditions (i.e., status) and, more importantly, examine women's position relative to men (i.e., situation) (Huis et al., 2017).

Some scholars suggest that future research should follow participants of different empowerment initiatives over time to investigate how they achieve more opportunities and rights (e.g., voting) (Cueva Beteta, 2006; Dijkstra, 2002; Huis et al., 2017).

Additionally, future research should investigate how women can use different gains effectively to improve women's interests at large –for example, by striving toward improvements in women's position for future generations, such as more strongly supporting their daughters to successfully attend schooling (Banerjee et al., 2015; Kabeer, 1999) and following different career trajectories (Huis et al., 2017).

iv. Relationship between the dimensions of empowerment

Certain studies have shown that empowerment of the 'me' (individual), also synergistically contributes to empowerment of the 'we' (society) (Bastian, 2017).

The TDMWE suggests that women's empowerment can occur at three distinct but related dimensions: the personal, relational, and societal dimension (Huis et al., 2017). This model borrows the assumption from ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994) that people do not exist in a social vacuum but encounter different environments throughout their life that may influence their behavior (Huis et al., 2017). The ecological system theory proposes that individuals directly influence their own experiences and vice versa within specific microsystems (e.g., family, school) and between different microsystems (mesosystems) and that people's development can be influenced by settings that the individual is not directly part of (i.e., exosystem: e.g., school policy) (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994). Bronfenbrenner (1994) argues that these lower-order systems combined create consistencies fitting with relevant cultural ideologies, and that this cultural macrosystem is influenced by time, such that the past influences the present (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994). The TDMWE broadly adheres to the same general structure and highlights the importance of the interplay between individuals and their environment (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1994).

Access to different empowerment initiatives has been associated with higher levels of personal empowerment, such as increased personal control beliefs (Hansen, 2015). Likewise, female participants of different empowerment initiatives showed higher levels of relational empowerment on the level of social group memberships, such as larger social networks (Pitt et al., 2006). However, on the level of intimate relationships, mixed results were found, showing for example both increased as well as decreased decision-making power by female participants (Pitt et al., 2006). Moreover, it is important to note that research so far has not tapped into the understanding of societal empowerment in relation to women's situation relative to men in a broader societal dimension (Huis et al., 2017).

The TDMWE concurs with other research noting the importance of considering changes in the individual, the relational, and the communal level when examining processes related to social change for women (Grabe, 2012; Kabeer, 1999). Importantly, the TDMWE closely ties into the empowerment process described by Rowlands (1997) who stressed that women's empowerment occurs at three levels –the personal, close

relationships, and collective– and that these three levels have to be taken into account simultaneously when trying to investigate empowerment (Rowlands, 1997). Huis and al. (2017) agree with Rowlands (1997) claim and propose that full women's empowerment entails all three dimensions of empowerment. However, different from Rowlands (1997), Huis and al. (2017) suggest that it is possible to promote and examine empowerment at each dimension of empowerment independently, depending on one's research focus and the context in which it is embedded (Huis et al., 2017). In fact, Huis and al. (2017) stress that women's empowerment effects on multiple dimensions need to be differentiated and not combined (Huis et al., 2017). While it is common practice in program evaluations to use women's empowerment indices that aggregate results from several indicators across key areas (Alkire et al., 2013), Huis and al. (2017) believe that these aggregates don't do justice to the different dimensions at which empowerment can be observed (Huis et al., 2017).

Most significantly, Huis and al. (2017) stress that one should clearly specify on which dimension of empowerment an intervention focuses to offer more systematic insights on women's empowerment across studies (Huis et al., 2017). If research would only focus on the personal dimension of women's empowerment and use these insights to directly conclude that access to empowerment initiative services strengthens women's empowerment within her social environment, this could provide a skewed understanding and may have undesired policy implications (Huis et al., 2017). More specifically, when operationalizing women's empowerment in terms of women's personal control beliefs, it is possible that women feel personally more in control, but not in relation to their partner (Huis et al., 2017). In fact, previous research suggests that women's increased autonomy resulting from her participation in empowerment initiatives can destabilize the relationship between the female and her husband and thereby increase the risk of intimate partner violence (Goetz & Gupta, 1996). This may explain the mixed results at different dimensions of women's empowerment (i.e., personal and relational) and illustrates the importance of carefully and explicitly defining at which dimension(s) an intervention may have impacts.

D. Time and culture: influencial aspects in women's empowerment

While the reasons for any particular woman's powerlessness (or power) are many and varied, the common factor is that women are all constrained by "the norms, beliefs, customs and values through which societies differentiate between women and men" (Kabeer, 2002). Focusing on the empowerment of women as a group requires an analysis of gender relations –i.e. the ways in which power relations between the sexes are constructed and maintained (Mosedale, 2005). Since gender relations vary both over time and geographically, they always have to be investigated in context; it also follows that they are not immutable (Mosedale, 2005).

i. The role of time in women's empowerment

As mentioned, women empowerment is seen as a process rather than a fixed outcome (Kabeer, 1999; Malhotra et al., 2002; Maton, 2008) and described as the development from being un-empowered to becoming empowered (Kabeer, 1999; Swain & Wallentin, 2009). As such, the definition of women's empowerment underscores the importance of time in understanding it's development. However, we know surprisingly little on how women's empowerment may develop over time (Huis et al., 2017). The TDMWE stresses that the relation between access to interventions and the development of women's empowerment on the personal, relational, and societal dimensions may be time-dependent (Huis et al., 2017).

Firstly, if the example of training offered in the context of an empowerment initiative is considered (i.e. bottom-up development of women's empowerment), it can be expected that personal empowerment should develop within a relatively short time-span (Huis et al., 2017). Training in itself may increase people's self-efficacy and control beliefs, because people can experience their ability to perform certain tasks and increase their beliefs in their capacities through training (Bandura, 1997). Yet, changing relational dynamics may take more time (Inglehart et al., 2003). Empowerment on this dimension is dependent upon other actors and may require more structural transformations (Dixon et al., 2012). Therefore, Huis and al. (2017) suggest to only consider any impact of interventions on relational empowerment over a longer time-span of at least a few years (Huis et al., 2017). Moreover, societal empowerment is not likely to be instigated by any single intervention as it is highly related to cultural norms and traditions (Huis et al., 2017). Nonetheless, societal empowerment could possibly develop over time, though it may be that this dimension of empowerment can only be observed after years (e.g., new generation), which makes it complex to draw any conclusions about directionality or even causality (Huis et al., 2017). Thus, it is expected that time may determine whether or not any result can be expected and observed for each of the three dimensions of women's empowerment.

Additionally, Huis and al., (2017) propose that the three dimensions are related but that the directionality of the model is not fixed (Huis et al., 2017). Even though some sequences may be more probable then others, they stress that women empowerment can be instigated at any of the three dimensions or at multiple dimensions simultaneously (Huis et al., 2017). In the context of some empowerment initiatives, Huis and al. (2017) suggest that women's empowerment may be a bottom-up process instigated on the personal dimension (e.g., through increased personal agency by contributing to the household income), which may then instigate the experience of empowerment on the relational and/or societal dimension (Huis et al., 2017). Similarly, political scientists examining the cross-cultural development of gender equity argue that women must

experience personal change before relational power distributions can change (Inglehart et al., 2003).

In the context of development initiatives, women empowerment may be seen as a process typically starting with personal empowerment and resulting in empowerment at all three dimensions, with societal empowerment as the final aspect to develop (Huis et al., 2017; Kabeer, 2005). However, women empowerment might also be instigated on the relational dimension (i.e. small collectives) (Stromquist, 1999). Nonetheless, Huis and al. (2017) expect societal empowerment to develop last because societal power is deeply rooted in social systems and values (Huis et al., 2017). It is therefore unlikely that any single intervention will completely alter power and gender relations (King & Mason, 2001). Empowerment on the societal dimension may then best be compared with gradual social change where cultural characteristics such as norms and values change (De la Sablonniere, 2017; Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2004), which can bring about both cultural gains (i.e. more gender equity) and losses (i.e. less social belonging) (Greenfield, 2016).

Notably, such bottom-up development of women empowerment is not the only option. One example of a top-down approach to stimulate women empowerment starting on the societal dimension is setting gender quotas (e.g., percentage of leadership positions reserved for women) (Huis et al., 2017). Such an approach in politics aims to increase women's presence in legislature and to improve gender-related policy outcomes such as inheritance rights (Htun & Jones, 2002). This example illustrates another possible direction in the process of women empowerment in which an intervention is implemented at the societal level and should result in empowerment in the other two dimensions (Huis et al., 2017).

ii. The role of culture in women's empowerment

Previous research has highlighted that the act of choosing (e.g. through the expansion of women's individual capacities and a free exercise of personal choice) does not necessarily equate to progressive outcomes for women, because women's individual choices are historically and structurally conditioned (Huis et al., 2017). Gender relations vary both geographically and over time and therefore should always be investigated in specific contexts and pertain to the realities of women's lives rather than being based on generalized assumptions that they are oppressed (Kurtiş & Adams, 2015; Mosedale, 2005). Indeed, the focus on women's individual liberties and growth is often grounded in Western Educated Industrialized Rich Democratic (WEIRD) realities (Henrich et al., 2010) and may marginalize the experience of women in different societies (Bogazici, 1995; Kurtiş et al., 2016; Kurtiş & Adams, 2015).

Culture can be defined as the dynamic patterns of ideas, practices, institutions, products, and artifacts that are shared by certain groups of people (Markus & Kitayama, 2010).

While individual differences between people from the same cultural background are omnipresent, people within the same culture tend to hold similar values, beliefs, and practices (Smith et al., 2013). Across cultures, people may thus, for example, differ in how they construe their self-concept (independent or interdependent) (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), to what extent they tolerate deviant behavior, and how strongly they adhere to social norms (tight or loose cultures) (Gelfand et al., 2011). It may be crucial to consider these social norms in understanding and stimulating social change (Tankard & Paluck, 2016).

Due to the diversity in interventions and cultural differences, access to development initiatives cannot be expected to have one single consistent impact story (Garikipati et al., 2017). Instead, previous reseach underscores the importance of considering factors such as cultural norms and attitudes in the development of women empowerment (Mayoux, 1999; Sardenberg, 2010). In fact, it has been stressed that empowerment develops through the interaction between the individual and the cultural context (Narayan-Parker, 2005) and that failure to consider socio-political and cultural structures can reinforce existing power imbalances (Dutt et al., 2016). Previous research suggests that often-used indicators of women's empowerment reflect an understanding of women's empowerment based on culturally specific practices that may not apply in other cultures (Duvendack & Palmer-Jones, 2017; Heckert & Fabic, 2013).

Moreover, how people experience each of the three dimensions of empowerment may differ based on diverse understandings of the self and the society across cultures (Huis et al., 2017). In cultural contexts where the social world is perceived as a dense network of connections, characterized by obligations for care and support, women's experience of personal empowerment may be more relational than in cultural contexts where the social world is perceived as more independent (Kurtiş et al., 2016).

Indeed, psychological scholars highlight the necessity to draw upon local understandings to resonate with local realities and better serve local communities (Adams et al., 2015). Since women in local communites are best aware of what women empowerment means to them, it may therefore be crucial to allow them to set their own agenda in matters related to enhancing their own sense of empowerment (Kurtiş et al., 2016; Stromquist, 1999). Hence, members of local communities should be involved to facilitate culturally relevant social change withough marginalizing women's voices (Dutt et al., 2016). While the potential lack of generalizability and tendency to overlook problematic indigenous practices may need to be considered (Adams et al., 2015), this strategy allows to not only offer culturally adapted interventions but also reconsider often-used concepts (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2015). As argued in previous research, access to development services may only empower women if cultural norms and expectations are taken into account (Geleta, 2014). In line with this theorizing, Huis and al.(2017) expect that cultures influence how

women empowerment is defined, which aspects are important, and which components reflect women's empowerment on each of the three dimensions (Huis et al., 2017). Accordingly, they expect that one intervention can have diverse impacts on each of the three dimensions of women empowerment in different cultural contexts (Huis et al., 2017).

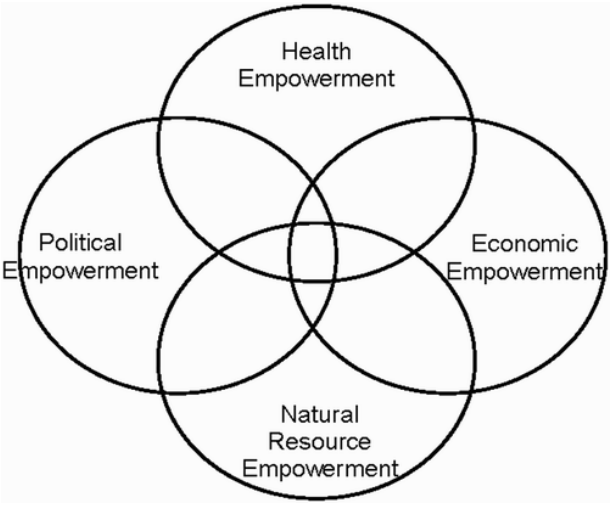
Furthermore, women empowerment is considered as a process in which women challenge the existing norms and culture of the society in which they live (Swain & Wallentin, 2009). Accordingly, it is crucial to be aware of the cultural context and the position of women in it (Huis et al., 2017). Previous research highlighted that culturally defined norms and practices should be considered for a transition away from classic patriarchy to develop (Kandiyoti, 1988). Some form of patriarchy is prevalent across almost all cultures (Stockard & Johnson, 1992), however, cultures differ in the extent to which they value gender equity (Hofstede et al., 2010) and the extent to which certain gender roles are subscribed to (McCrae & Terracciano, 2005). Importantly, these gendered norms and beliefs may mediate the relation between structural equity and female suppression (Archer, 2006) as the prevalence of gender inequity may obstruct possible structural societal changes resulting from access to development services (Guérin et al., 2015).

Thus, Huis and al. (2017) propose that it is important to understand the cultural context and position of women in society to understand the development of women's empowerment (Huis et al., 2017). Accordingly, when developing interventions, cultural norms should be identified and described when presenting impacts, thereby facilitating comparison between studies (Huis et al., 2017). To investigate at what interval access to an intervention impacts women's empowerment at each of the three different dimensions across cultures, they encourage future longitudinal and cross-cultural research to examine the development of women's empowerment on the personal, relational and societal dimension (Huis et al., 2017).

E. Domains of empowerment

Women seek different ways to conquer oppression and, therefore, empowerment methods vary (Lincoln et al., 2002). Jayakarani et al. (2012) identified a wide range of activities that contributed towards empowerment and these were categorized into five domains of empowerment: health, economic, political, natural resource, and spiritual (Jayakarani et al., 2012). Each of these domains is distinct, yet overlap, as shown in Figure 2. Full empowerment is not confined to any single domain but permeates through many aspects of life and thus lies at the intersection of all domains (i.e., the centre of Figure 2) (Jayakarani et al., 2012).

Figure 2 : Domains of empowerment



Source : Jayakarani et al., 2012

Although the domains of empowerment are distinct, they are interlinked and interdependent in contributing towards empowerment as many organizations have described that empowerment in one domain can augment, facilitate or be dependent upon empowerment in another domain (Jayakarani et al., 2012). For example, economic empowerment often enables health empowerment by providing the funds needed to access healthcare or by fostering advocacy for health, and economic empowerment programmes (e.g., microcredit) have been effective vehicles for disseminating health education messages, particularly regarding domestic violence (Jayakarani et al., 2012).

The interlinkages between domains may operate directly (e.g., economic empowerment facilitates health empowerment) or indirectly (e.g., economic empowerment influences health empowerment through political empowerment) (Jayakarani et al., 2012). For example, health and economic empowerment are interdependent with political empowerment, as access to health services (health empowerment) and developing income-generating activities (economic empowerment) require not only finance but also policies and service delivery protocols for equitable access to services and decision-making (political empowerment), particularly for women (Jayakarani et al., 2012). A futher aspect of such interdependence is the ability of an individual, or community, to be empowered in one domain and not in another (Jayakarani et al., 2012). Similarly,

disempowerment in one domain can stifle empowerment in other domains (Jayakarani et al., 2012).

i. Health

According to Wallerstein (1992), empowerment can be demonstrated as an important promoter of health (Wallerstein, 1992). Empowerment in the health domain refers to activities that enable people, both individually and collectively, to have control over their health in terms of knowledge, decision-making and access to health services (Jayakarani et al., 2012). Activites that promote health empowerment include: HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention; maternal and child health; sexual and proproductive health; nutrition and physical fitness; water and sanitation; and reducing gender-based violence (Jayakarani et al., 2012). Many programmes target specific sectors of communities, such as women, youth, rural communities, refugees, or ethnic minority groups.

The health domain is viewed as a key component of empowerment and one of the areas in which there is the most activity that is being conducted in international development (Jayakarani et al., 2012). From a development perspective, research shows that empowerment can be a genuine public health strategy, and if conceptualized and used effectively, it leads to improved community health outcomes and poverty reduction (Wallerstein, 2006).

ii. Economic

Until the early 1990s, the focus of international efforts to promote the advancement of poor and middle-income countries had been primarily on economic development (Ehrhardt et al., 2009). Empowerment in the economic domain refers to assisting individuals, communities, and local partner organizations to achieve economic security and sustainability (Jayakarani et al., 2012). Three types of activites can be highlighted to promote economic empowerment with different sectors of the community: facilitating individuals or households to participate in income generation; assisting communities to form cooperatives to increase profits on produce sold; and supporting local partner organizations to improve fiscal management and diversify funding to improve economic security and sustainability (Jayakarani et al., 2012).

Many organizations conduct economic empowerment activities for individuals and households that provide knowledge and skill development to conduct income-generating activities, fostering greater financial security (Jayakarani et al., 2012). Economic empowerment programs provide an enabling environment for empowerment, particularly for women, as such programmes cultivate agency by increasing an individual's self-efficacy and decision-making capacity (Jayakarani et al., 2012). Making economic contributions to one's family and community contributes to an individual's self-worth,

and training women increases their knowledge and empowers them to make decisions about their spending, savings, and household income (Jayakarani et al., 2012).

Economic empowerment and gender equality can have strong impacts on poverty eradication, growth and human development (Akram et al., 2015). Economic empowerment is an important way of contributing to women's overall empowerment and their ability to live their lives to the fullest (Jayakarani et al., 2012). Furthermore, women's economic participation can challenge social norms to allow women to make economic decisions and contributions, thereby contributing to their economic empowerment (Jayakarani et al., 2012).

iii. Political

According to Lincoln et al. (2002), "not only is the term empowerment politically loaded, used it pertains to the revolt of the oppressed, but also politics is itself an area in which 'empowerment' has taken effect" (Lincoln et al., 2002). Empowerment in the political domain refers to the ability of individuals, communities, and organizations, to have legal rights, hold the government accountable for protecting these rights, and have the freedom to advocate for political and legal change (Jayakarani et al., 2012).

Political empowerment is largely understood as being active in formal politics (Eyben & Napier-Moore, 2009). Both macro- and micro-level activities have been described that promote political empowerment. At a macro-level, activities that advocate for policy and legal change (e.g., legal reform in gender equity), and at a micro-level, activites that advocate for change in policy relating to service delivery of local government, and holding local government accountable for service provision (Jayakarani et al., 2012).

Expanding female presence in administration, political contribution and inclusion in casual groups can create an enabling environment for furthering women empowerment (Ostry et al., 2018). It has been highlighted by many international development organizations that a range of *a priori* conditions are needed for political empowerment to be achieved, such as legal rights, gender and caste equity, and religious freedom (Jayakarani et al., 2012). The most commonly mentioned was gender equity, which encompassed sexual and reproductive rights, and protection from domestic violence (Jayakarani et al., 2012).

iv. Natural resource

Empowerment in the natural resource domain refers to the ability of individuals and communities to access, use, and conserve natural resources towards sustainability (Jayakarani et al., 2012). During the early 1970s, interest particularly developed in agriculture, water management, and forestry, centering on promoting the participation and enhancement of the power and decision-making role of local communities (Little, 1993).

Three types of programmes contribute to natural resource empowerment: food security; safe water; and the conservation and rehabilitation of natural environments (Jayakarani et al., 2012). Most programmes focus on improving food security through increased food production, improved agricultural practices, and promoting small-scale household gardens, while others focus on promoting equitable and sustainable management of natural forest and water resources for communities (Jayakarani et al., 2012).

A range of mechanisms have been described as facilitating natural resource empowerment (Kellert et al., 2000; Surya et al., 2020). The most commonly mentioned were the provision of agricultural resources (such as seeds, fertiliser, and equipment for agricultural production), constructing agricultural infrastructure (such as wells and dams to expand water supply), and re-vegetating the environment for rehabilitation and long-term agricultural sustainability (Jayakarani et al., 2012). Another mechanism described was capacity building (in both knowledge and skills) (Kellert et al., 2000) and technical assistance in using new agricultural practices and technology (Jayakarani et al., 2012).

v. Spiritual

Empowerment in the spiritual domain is the development and strengthening of faith and the transformation of values within an individual or community (Jayakarani et al., 2012). Discussions of spiritual empowerment is limited almost exclusively to agencies that identify as faith-based organizations (FBOs) (Jayakarani et al., 2012). When non-FBOs do address it, they refer to religion and spirituality as an element of the local cultural context that needs to be considered in development work (Jayakarani et al., 2012). Some organizations suggest that spirituality is a necessary criterion for empowerment, whereas others include spiritual empowerment as part of their broader organizational mandate of community development, such as improving the health and economic conditions of a community (Jayakarani et al., 2012; Young et al., 2015).

Although spiritual empowerment is sometimes viewed as a trigger for individual empowerment, it is not viewed as interdependant with the other domains of empowerment (Jayakarani et al., 2012). Therefore, the spiritual domain of empowerment is not included in Figure 2 as its relationship to the other domains is not clear and requires further research (Jayakarani et al., 2012).

F. Complexity of measuring empowerment

Zimmerman (1995) raised an interesting methodological consideration, suggesting that because empowerment is a process, researchers should consider it as a “continuous variable” that defies ready scientific measurement (Bernstein et al., 1994; Zimmerman, 1995). Staples (1990) explained that “just as there is no final synthesis, there is no final state of empowerment. […] Rather the empowerment process strengthens the ongoing

capacity for successful action under changing circumstances" (Staples, 1990). Therefore, although the process of empowerment can result in the attainment of particular personal, social, and political goals, empowerment is inherently a dynamic, dialectal, and ongoing process (Staples, 1990).

While there is now a significant body of literature discussing how women empowerment has been or might be evaluated, there are still major difficulties in so doing (Mosedale, 2005). Despite having identified empowerment as a primary development assistance goal, neither the World Bank, nor any other major development agency, has developed a rigorous method for measuring and tracking changes in levels of empowerment (Malhotra et al., 2002). Furthermore, many projects and programmes which support women empowerment show little if any evidence of attempts to define what empowerment means in their context let alone to assess whether and to what extent they have succeeded (Mosedale, 2005). Instead traditional development goals, such as better health or increased income, are cited as evidence of empowerment; in such cases, it is not clear what is added in using the word 'empowerment' (Mosedale, 2005).

The difficulty is that empowerment is not only a multifaceted concept, but also it is particularly sensitive to the social and cultural context within which it is measured (Garikipati, 2013). Specifically, the prevalent gender relations play a crucial role in determining the context-specific indicators of empowerment (Garikipati, 2013). Huis and al. (2017) suggest that cultures may differ with respect to what are appropriate indicators of empowerment (Huis et al., 2017) as behaviors and attributes that signify empowerment in one context often have different meanings elsewhere (Malhotra et al., 2002). Some studies make an attempt to capture context-relevant empowerment outcomes by making use of participatory approaches to evaluation –these help to generate localised definitions of empowerment based on the views of local stakeholders (Holvoet, 2005).

Although achieving a consensus on measuring women empowerment may be impossible, some broad understanding of what it entails has emerged, mainly within the feminist literature (Garikipati, 2013). Largely, it is much easier to measure outcomes of empowerment than processes because outcomes can be measured using scales and checkboxes (Garikipati, 2013). However, understanding the set of processes that permitted a woman to expand her agency takes much more time and more detailed interactions with women who have gone through empowerment programs (Garikipati, 2013). Qualitative research endeavors to document the process of empowerment through detailed interviews and case studies that track the personal development of individual women through retrospective narratives (Malhotra et al., 2002). Kabeer's work (1997) posits that the assessement of the empowerment process is not only qualitative, but also subjective (Kabeer, 1997). Kabeer (1997 & 1998) argues that the assessment of the empowerment process should take into account women's own interpretation, instead of

relying solely on the evaluators' criteria (Kabeer, 1997, 1998). In other words, women should self-assess and validate their own empowerment process (Kabeer, 1997, 1998).

Longitudinal research experiments that are essential for understanding empowerment processes in international development have not been conducted in a significant manner in the past due to the requirement of substantial budgets and time (Malhotra et al., 2002). As a result, there is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding research on the processes of empowerment and the evaluation of the specific set of processes that contribute to empowerment.

In the upcoming section, we will explore the theme of entrepreneurship and its potential as a means to promote women's empowerment.

Main concepts
Feminist theory (FT): FT extends feminism into theoretical discourse to understand the systemic nature of gender inequality and how cultural structures are perpetuated through individual acts. It contextualizes personal situations within a wider cultural framework. **Gender inequality:** Gender inequality is the social phenomenon in which people are not treated equally on the basis of gender. Women worldwide face more poverty and disadvantage due to factors like limited education access and restrictions on their property, economic, and political rights. **Empowerment**: Empowerment is typically used to describe the main goal of improving the conditions of women in their communities and societies. Empowerment includes the following components: 1) To be empowered one must have been disempowered; 2) Empowerment is an ongoing process rather than a product or outcome; 3) Empowerment cannot be bestowed by a third party, rather it must be claimed; and 4) Empowerment corresponds to an expansion of agency. **Dimensions of empowerment:** Women empowerment can be differentiated in three dimensions, namely personal (or individual) empowerment, relational empowerment and societal empowerment. **Individual empowerment:** Individual (or personal) empowerment can be described as a process of transformation that enables individuals to make independent decisions and take action on these decisions to make changes in their lives. Agency, knowledge, and the presence of an enabling environment for change are identified as mechanisms of individual empowerment.

Domains of empowerment: A wide range of activities contribute towards empowerment that can be categorized into five domains of empowerment: health, economic, political, natural resource, and spiritual. Empowerment is not confined to any single domain but permeates through many aspects of life and thus lies at the intersection of all domains.

Complexity in measuring empowerment: Measuring empowerment outcomes is much simpler than measuring the processes that lead to empowerment, as outcomes can be quantified using scales and checkboxes. In contrast, comprehending the specific processes that contribute to increased empowerment in women requires more time and in-depth interactions with women who have participated in empowerment programs.

Entrepreneurship: A means to increase women's empowerment

Entrepreneurship has been identified as a powerful tool for promoting gender equality and female empowerment (Duflo, 2012; Kabeer & Natali, 2013). Scholars have highlighted the emancipatory dimensions of entrepreneurship, viewing it as a means for individual and groups to challenge and change their position in society (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2017; Rindova et al., 2009). Entrepreneurship is inherently empowering as it promotes human welfare by developing individuals' capabilities to practically achieve what they desire (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 2001). Viewing entrepreneurial projects as emancipatory efforts focuses on understanding the factors that cause individuals to seek to disrupt the status quo and change their position in the social order in which they are embedded –and, on occasion, the social order itself (Rindova et al., 2009). According to Bastian et al. (2019), entrepreneurship can be a "catalyst to female empowerment" and "a pivotal antecedent to gender equality and human development" (Bastian et al., 2019).

Entrepreneurial actions often involve overcoming environmental contraints and breaking free from authority and dominance to pursue individual and collective development (Rindova et al., 2009). The pursuit of entrepreneurship can provide women with financial and economic autonomy, which can enable women to liberate themselves from gendered constraints that have hindered the development of their potential (Bastian et al., 2019). Various studies have demonstrated that women entrepreneurs have stronger decision-making power, fewer mobility issues, more autonomy, more financial independence, and are more empowered (Noor et al., 2021). Moreover, entrepreneurial activities of individuals and groups have the potential to bring about lasting change within economic, social and institutional realms (Rindova et al., 2009).

A. Definition of entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is a multifaceted and complex social construct that is enacted in diverse contexts by a variety of actors (Leitch et al., 2010). Entrepreneurship can be defined as "efforts to bring about new economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments through the actions of an individual or groups of individuals" (Rindova et al., 2009). Various studies demonstrate that entrepreneurs, the individuals who start and run enterprises, shape the economy and contribute to economic development, job creation, new wealth, and a multitude of aspects related to well-being through new products, processes, and services (Jakhar & Krishna, 2020; Sarfaraz et al., 2014).

B. Central problem in entrepreneurship research

The study of entrepreneurs can be traced back to the 1900s, and since then, scholarly interest in the field has grown steadily, with many journals and periodicals devoted exclusively to entrepreneurship (Jennings & Brush, 2013). The availability of large secondary datasets has allowed for more sophisticated multivariate analysis and the reuse of previously established measures, facilitating further development of the field (Chandler & Lyon, 2001; Mullen et al., 2009). However, this has had the effect of making an analytical variable, such female/male binary, something that is simply measured, or just "is" or "is not", without any valid theoretical understanding (Ahl, 2006).

When interpreting the findings from such analyses, the inclination is to posit that women do not "measure up" to the norm, which is not surprising given that most measures were developed on samples of male entrepreneurs (Hurley, 1999; Stevenson, 1990). Research shows that men dominate as high-profile, normative, entrepreneurial role models (Marlow & Swail, 2014; Shaw et al., 2009) while women are "first assumed to be deficient, then 'proved' to be deficient and finally held accountable for their own deficiencies" (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). Consequently, the traditional implications drawn from such an interpretation is that women need to change in order to fit into the male-oriented entrepreneurial landscape by improving their education, aspirations and networking strategies (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). This is not to say that sophisticated analyses of large samples are inappropriate or should be discontinued; rather, such methods are likely to limit our understanding of how women engage in entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2006; Stevenson, 1990).

Studies have shown that "entrepreneurial activity occurs within -and is thus impacted by- systems of socially constructed and widely shared beliefs about the characteristics typically associated with women and men and the behaviours and roles deemed appropriate for members of each sex" (Jennings & Brush, 2013). As such, entrepreneurship tends to be perceived and portrayed as a stereotypically masculine endeavor (Jennings & Brush, 2013). This gendered perspective of entrepreneurship

underestimates, or even ignores, the diversity of female venturing and the empowering potential in differing gendered contexts (Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2013; Henry et al., 2016).

Research in the social sciences has historically been biased towards men, to the extent that its theorizing has limited relevance to women, and there is a greater focus on the life experiences of men (McHugh et al., 1986). Consequently, research projects in the social sciences have often neglected women and issues of concern to women (West & Zimmerman, 1991), resulting in a lack of understanding of women's lives and experiences through the traditional scientific lens (Campbell & Wasco, 2000).

C. The feminist approach in entrepreneurship research

Feminist scholars have argued that science is not neutral but rather reflects the values and interests of the dominant societal groups (Eichler, 1980; Harding, 1987; Keller & Scharff-Goldhaber, 1987; Riger, 2002; Stanley & Wise, 1983). This implies that traditional entrepreneurship research may overlook the experiences and perspectives of women entrepreneurs and perpetuate gender biases and stereotypes (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). To address these issues, feminist scholars have proposed a range of strategies that vary from minor modifications to the scientific method to paradigmatic shifts in research approaches (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Some scholars suggest that removing sexist bias, although fitting, is not sufficient; rather, to fully address the deficiencies in current practice, uniquely feminist approaches to science must be developed (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Feminist research, or feminist approaches in research, seeks to respect, understand, and empower women (Campbell & Wasco, 2000).

"Women's issues" –such as reproductive rights, and violence against women– are often examined from a feminist point of view, but more "traditional topics", such as entrepreneurship, can also be researched from a feminist perspective (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). The defining feature of feminist reseach is its guiding philosophy on the nature of knowledge (epistemology) and the process by which research is created (methodology) (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Feminist epistemologies prioritize the experiences and perspectives of women, recognizing them as valid sources of knowledge; feminist methodologies, on the other hand, prioritize empathy, care, and understanding throughout the research process, acknowledging the significance of sharing women's stories as a means of creating knowledge (Campbell & Wasco, 2000).

The study of gender and female entrepreneurship seeks to identify the factors that prevent women from contributing to socio-economic development (Sarfaraz et al., 2014). Women have the ability to play a significant role in the entrepreneurial phenomenon, however treating women as the "second gender" means discounting and underestimating enormous potential human resources (Sarfaraz et al., 2014). As more women enter the field of entrepreneurship globally, it is crucial to develop reseach approaches and theoretical

perspectives that can help us understand the role that women pay in the sector (De Bruin et al., 2007; Onyishi & Agbo, 2010). With the increasing participation and growth in numbers of women business owners, there is a rising consensus that more and better research is needed in the area of female entrepreneurship (Meyer, 2018).

D. Importance of research on women's entrepreneurship

Understanding the unique experiences of women is vital for comprehending how they create and run their ventures (Bastian, 2017). Women's entrepreneurship differs from men's in terms of practice, outcomes, and processes, highlighting the need for specific attention to be paid to women's experiences in entrepreneurship research (Jennings & Brush, 2013).

Studies on the topic of female entrepreneurs first appeared in the entrepreneurship literature more than 30 years ago in the U.S. and the U.K. (Jennings & Brush, 2013). Since then, the field has progressed, and numerous journal articles, literature reviews, and books have been published on the topic of women entrepreneurs, indicating that the field is currently in its adolescent stage (Yadav & Unni, 2016). Despite the growth of research on women's entrepreneurship within the entrepreneurship literature, there are relatively few university-based research centers that focus specifically on this area (Jennings & Brush, 2013). Additionally, financial support for research on female entrepreneurs is disproportionately small compared to the scale of the phenomenon (Jennings & Brush, 2013). This lack of resources and support can result in a lower dissemination of women's entrepreneurship research into mainstream scholarship, which ultimately creates further challenges for the field (Jennings & Brush, 2013). This can also make it difficult to attract promising graduate students to pursue research in this area (Jennings & Brush, 2013).

Brush and Cooper (2012) argue that female entreneurship is not well-documented and has been understudied (Brush & Cooper, 2012). Jiyane et al. (2012) highlight the major absence of high-quality empirical studies and a lack of statistical data on female entrepreneurs (Jiyane et al., 2012). According to Hugues et al. (2012), the apparent increase of scholarly interest in the field of women's entrepreneurship within recent years has made an impact to correct the historical inattention paid to female entrepreneurs and their initiatives (Hughes et al., 2012), however, despite more studies in this area being undertaken, there is still a gap in the available literature (Meyer, 2018).

The following section will explore some of the most notable advantages of women's entrepreneurship.

Main concepts
Women's entrepreneurship: Efforts to bring about new economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments through the actions of an individual or groups of individuals (in this case –women) through new products, processes, and services. Entrepreneurship can be used as tool for female empowerment and scholars have increasingly highlighted the emancipatory dimensions of entrepreneurship for individuals and groups. **Central problem in entrepreneurship research:** Entrepreneurship tends to be perceived and portrayed as a stereotypically masculine endeavor. This gendered perspective of entrepreneurship underestimates, or even ignores, the diversity of female venturing and the empowering potential in differing gendered contexts. **Feminist approach in entrepreneurship research:** Feminist research, or feminist approaches in research, seeks to respect, understand, and empower women. To overcome the shortcomings of existing practices in entrepreneurship research, it is imperative to create science methods that are uniquely feminist. **Importance of research on women's entrepreneurship:** Women's entrepreneurship differs from men's in terms of practice, outcomes, processes. Despite more studies in this area being undertaken, there is still an important gap in the available literature.

Advantages of women's entrepreneurship

As indicated by Bastian et al. (2019), entrepreneurial activities can be a catalyst for female empowerment (Bastian et al., 2019). Increasing the involvement of women in entrepreneurial activity has also been associated with the improved status of women, enhanced family and community well-being, and broader societal gains (Ardrey IV et al., 2006; Jamali, 2009; Scott et al., 2012). In this section, several advantages of women entrepreneurship will be presented.

A. Improved status of women and reduced inequalities

In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indian independence activist and later the first prime minister of India, "you can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women" (Jakhar & Krishna, 2020). Women entrepreneurship can contribute to the social and economic empowerment of women, which can lead to an improvement in their status within their communities and societies (Lerner & Almor, 2002).

Research suggests that women entrepreneurship can be an important tool in breaking the cycle of poverty and promoting social development (Kabeer et al., 2010). According to Duflo (2012), women who start their own businesses experience improvements in their income and status which may offer them the opportunity to break the circle of poverty (Duflo, 2012). Similarly, entrepreneurship can be understood as a tool for "social turn" (Al Khaled & Berglund, 2018), that can contribute to the creation of more equal and inclusive societies through job creation, increased economic independence, and the empowerment of women (Haugh & Talwar, 2016). Furthermore, research by Sutter et al. (2019) suggests that entrepreneurship can play an important role in poverty alleviation and human development, particularly in developing countries (Sutter et al., 2019).

Female entrepreneurship can help reduce gender-based inequalities by providing women with greater access to economic opportunities, resources, and networks (Brush et al., 2009). An extensive body of literature has focused on the roles of government support and charity institutions in the reduction of poverty, whereas entrepreneurship as a means for poverty reduction, and the impact of gender in shaping this relationship have been under-researched, particularly in the context of transition economies (Korosteleva & Stępień-Baig, 2020). Sarfaraz et al. (2014) suggest that achieving gender equality and providing unbiased support from institutions are essential factors in increasing women's contribution to economic and social development (Sarfaraz et al., 2014).

B. Enhanced family well-being

Women's entrepreneurship has been shown to have numerous positive effects on family well-being. According to Datta and Gailey (2012), entrepreneurship can improve the lives of women by providing a stable income, increased decision-making power, and help gain respect within their families and communities. These factors could potentially contribute to improved family well-being by reducing financial stress, increasing gender equality, and improving overall social and economic status (Datta & Gailey, 2012).

Women entrepreneurs may be more likely to invest in healthcare and education for their families which can have a positive impact on the health and schooling of their family members (Neneh, 2017). This is corroborated by other researchers who demonstrated that WE tend to spend their income on pro-social endeavors, such as healthcare and education for their family (Ardrey IV et al., 2006). Immunization, better nutrition and education, family planning, and household savings are generally areas where women allocate entrepreneurial income (Ardrey IV et al., 2006). Empowered women (e.g., through entrepreneurship initiatives), are considered to be more likely to bargain for better health and educational outcomes for their children, to rise against social and cultural asymmetries, and help build more equitable communities (Garikipati, 2013).

Women entrepreneurs can serve as role models for their children, particularly their daughters, by demonstrating that women can be successful in business (Acs et al., 2005). This can lead to increased self-esteem and confidence in their daughters, as well as a broader cultural shift towards gender equality (Minniti & Nardone, 2007). Moreover, women entrepreneurs may have greater flexibility in balancing work and family responsibilities, which enables them to spend more time with their families and provide emotional support (Brush et al., 2009).

C. Economic development

Scholars have recognized entrepreneurship as one of the effective means for achieving economic prosperity (Korosteleva & Stępień-Baig, 2020). In recent years, women entrepreneurship has been identified as an important unexploited source of economic growth (Georgeta, 2012). In fact, women are thought to be one of the most significant untapped resources in entrepreneurship (Jakhar & Krishna, 2020).

Female entrepreneurship has been recognized as a powerful tool for economic development as it can create new jobs and spur innovation (Kim et al., 2006). Women entrepreneurs often have a unique perspective on business that can lead to the creation of new products and services (Burgess & Tharenou, 2002). Additionally, female entrepreneurs can play a vital role in economic growth by increasing competitiveness and reducing gender-based inequalities, providing women with greater access to economic opportunities, resources, and networks (Sarfaraz et al., 2014). Research has shown that women-owned businesses can bring a more innovative environment and higher prospects of firm survival, leading to increased economic development (Weber & Zulehner, 2010).

Female entrepreneurship has gained more interest in recent years as one of the principal means to addressing women's underrepresentation in business ownership and in economic participation (Mukorera, 2020). Reseach supports the beneficial effects of women's involvement in business, particularly when they hold leadership positions (Weber & Zulehner, 2010). Research findings also demonstrate that women bring new ideas (Burgess & Tharenou, 2002), are more inclined to cooperation (Kuhn & Villeval, 2014) and engage in better information search and processing (Hillman et al., 2007), leading to improved decision-making (Amason, 1996). Women's participation in all aspects of life is essential for the economic development of a country, and female entrepreneurship has been acknowledged as a link to economic growth (Sarfaraz et al., 2014).

D. Sustainable communities and climate action

Women-led businesses are more likely to prioritize social and environmental responsibility, invest in local communities, and promote sustainable and resilient urban environments (Brush & Cooper, 2012). WE often believe in the importance of social and

sustainable impact in their communities, and are known to focus on innovation, leading to the development and implementation of sustainable practices and technologies (Brush et al., 2009). Moreover, female entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in stimulating economic growth and generating employment opportunities, both of which are integral components of building sustainable communities (Brush & Cooper, 2012).

In addition, women's diverse viewpoints on entrepreneurship and climate action enable them to recognize and tackle distinctive challenges and opportunities, often resulting in creative and original solutions (Gupta et al., 2009). Women-led businesses are more likely to prioritize sustainable business practices such as reducing waste, minimizing environmental impact, and investing in renewable energy, while also prioritizing social impact and community engagement (Brush & Cooper, 2012). Women in entrepreneurship understand that business success should not only be about profits, but also about responsible practices with an environmental conscience (Brush et al., 2009). Moreover, women in entrepreneurship are more inclined to give priority to climate concerns and understand the significant impact that these issues can have on communities (Hughes et al., 2012).

Finally, women entrepreneurs are more likely to create and run social enterprises and ventures than men (Brush et al., 2009). These types of businesses often prioritize social or environmental goals over maximizing profits (Austin et al., 2006). Women are more likely to be motivated by these goals and may view entrepreneurship as a means to create positive change in their societies (Gupta et al., 2009). The emphasis of WE on non-economic aspects and the triple-bottom-line approach contributes to the creation of social enterprises and ventures that prioritize profit, people, and the planet (Mair & Marti, 2006).

The upcoming section will delve into the current state of women's entrepreneurship on a global scale, with a subsequent focus on the MENA region and specifically Tunisia.

Main concepts
Advantages of women's entrepreneurship **Improved status of women and reduced inequalities:** Women's entrepreneurship can contribute to the social and economic empowerment of women, which can lead to an improvement in their status. WE experience improvements in their income and status which may offer them the opportunity to break the circle of poverty. **Enhanced family well-being:** Women entrepreneurs tend to spend their income on education and health for the family, serve as role models for their children, particularly

their daughters, and may have greater flexibility in balancing work and family responsibilities, which enables them to spend more time with their families.

Economic development: Women's entrepreneurship has been identified as an important unexploited source of economic growth. Women's participation in all aspects of life is essential for the economic development of a country, and female entrepreneurship has been acknowledged as a link to economic growth.

Sustainable communities and climate action: Women-led businesses are more likely to prioritize social and environmental responsibility, invest in local communities, and promote sustainable and resilient environments. WE are also more likely to create and run social enterprises and ventures than men.

Current state of women's entrepreneurship

A. Overview of women's entrepreneurship worldwide

Despite the literature demonstrating numerous advantages of women's entrepreneurship, globally, women remain less engaged in various forms of entrepreneurial activity than men (Bosma, 2013; Jennings & Brush, 2013). In light of such evidence, some authors concluded that an individual's sex "is one of the best predictors we have of who will be become an entrepreneur" (Jennings & Brush, 2013).

According to the GEM 2020-2021 Women's Entrepreneurship Report, women represent 42% of entrepreneurs globally, and of the 43 countries surveyed, 11% of women were involved in entrepreneurship compared to 14% of men (GEM, 2021). This corresponds to approximately 274 million women globally starting and running businesses (<42 months old) and 139 million women globally running established businesses (GEM, 2021). Furthermore, women represent 18% of businesses with >20 employee, and 1 in 3 growth-oriented entrepreneurs worldwide (GEM, 2021). This report also notes that negative stereotypes against women are reinforced by topline numbers driven largely by structural factors (GEM, 2021).

Research indicates that women tend to get less financing than men, have smaller businesses, less employees and seek less funding than their male counterparts (Jennings & Brush, 2013). Women's firms have lower levels of initial financial capital compared to men's and operate with lower overall levels of debt and equity (Jennings & Brush, 2013). Additionally, women's ventures are overrepresented in the retail and personal service sectors and underrepresented in manufacturing, extraction, and business services (Bosma,

2013). According to the GEM 2020-2021 Women's Entrepreneurship Report, business size and industry are two of the most important predictors of business performance (GEM, 2021). This report also notes that female entrepreneurs' firms are less likely to be based outside of the home and to focus on export markets; in fact, women represent only 20% of high export businesses worldwide (GEM, 2021).

Studies have shown that WE tend to have higher levels of education, run ventures in service industries, and are more motivated by noneconomic goals, while having lower growth expectations compared to men (Terjesen et al., 2016). Taken together, the differences between female and male entrepreneurial activity do not disadvantage women but reflect underlying economic participation and business growth in societies (Terjesen & Elam, 2009). That is, women are often at a disadvantage in accessing entrepreneurial roles and participating in the labor market compared to men (Terjesen et al., 2016).

B. Entrepreneurial motivators for women

Women entrepreneurs often have different motivations for starting businesses compared to men, which can be categorized as either "pull" (fostered by positive opportunities) or "push" (driven by negative circumstances) factors (Robinson, 2001). Pull factors relate to the desire for self-fulfillment, the need to help others, or the pursuit of achievement, independence, wealth, or power (Dechant & Lamky, 2005; Duchénaut, 1997). In contrast, push motives are linked to dissatisfaction with current employment (including glass ceiling effects), flexibility and family concerns, and income necessity (due to being a single parent or having a partner out of work) (Duchénaut, 1997). It is important to note that these motivations are not mutually exclusive, and women may be motivated by both pull and push factors (Dechant & Lamky, 2005). For example, a woman may seek to start a business because she wants more challenging work, but also because she needs a flexible work schedule to accommodate a growing family (Dechant & Lamky, 2005).

Some scholars have suggested that women are more likely than men to be pushed into entrepreneurship because of fewer alternative employment opportunities due to slightly lower levels of education, less work experience, or greater career interruptions (Kelley et al., 2011). Other reseach has shown that a "group of minority entrepreneurs –women– are motivated by both pull factors (market opportunities) and push factors (negative displacements)," depending on their family situation and context (Brush, 1990).

Pull and push motivators in entrepreneurship can be categorized into formal institutions, informal institutions, and family. Each element can act as a pull or push motive depending on the individual entrepreneur and circumstances.

i. Formal institutions

Formal insitutions, which include policy, laws, public government, and systemic formal elements, can impact women's entry into entrepreneurship (Al Khaled & Berglund, 2018). Examples of gender specific formal institutions include overall equal-opportunities constitution of the state with regard to its laws on gender equality in education, the labor market, family policies, and property rights (Al Khaled & Berglund, 2018).

Policymakers play a crucial role in either incentivizing or creating barriers for women's involvement in business ownership and entrepreneurship (Pandey & Amezcua, 2020). Research indicates that policy implications should focus on individual and environmental components that concern women's roles in their family, human capital, and social capital (Terjesen et al., 2016). For instance, favorable policies such as government subsidies for women-owned enterprises can act as "pull" factors, promoting women's participation in entrepreneurship (Terjesen et al., 2016). In contrast, policies that restrict women's access to property rights or resources by requiring a male benefactor can act as "push" factors, limiting women's abilities and discouraging them from entering entrepreneurship (Terjesen et al., 2016).

ii. Informal institutions

Informal institutions, consisting of cultural norms, attitudes and behaviors, make up the fabric of a geographic location and play a significant role in shaping women's participation in entrepreneurship (Welter & Smallbone, 2011). Informal institutions are culturally appropriate ways of behaving in certain contexts that will differ greatly in regard to what is appropriate, or not, culturally for women (Jennings & Brush, 2013). As such, women entrepreneurs can face cultural and social pressures and constraints that limit their access to resources, networks, and markets (Welter & Smallbone, 2008). For instance, religion and traditional gender norms can shape women's position in society and influence their economic function, acting to either support or constrain women's entrepreneurship (Welter & Smallbone, 2008). Reseach suggests that informal institutions can have significant impacts on women's entrepreneurship, with supportive informal institutions enabling women's participation in entrepreneurship, while unsupportive institutions hindering it (Acs & Szerb, 2007).

iii. Family

Family dynamics can play a critical role in women's entrepreneurship, acting as either push or pull factors depending on the circumstances (Bruni et al., 2004b; Kantis et al., 2002). Several familial factors, including the presence of children and the attitudes of partners and parents, can impact a woman's decision to engage in entrepreneurship and her motivations. Supportive family members can serve as a pull factor, encouraging women to pursue entrepreneurship as a career path, however, familial financial constraints

can act as a push factor, as women may need to enter entrepreneurship to generate income to support their family. These findings are supported by various studies, including Bruni et al. (2004) and Kantis et al. (2002) who argue that the involvement of women in entrepreneurship is significantly influenced by family dynamics (Bruni et al., 2004b; Kantis et al., 2002).

C. Formal vs informal entrepreneurship

Formal entrepreneurship refers to businesses that are registered, pay taxes, are recognized by their governing country, and have systems in place to track their business activities, expenses, and revenues (Bosma et al., 2011). This type of entrepreneurship is typically more accessible in places where formal institutions are in place that support women entrepreneurship (Elam et al., 2019). Likewise, entrepreneurship in the formal sector is more present in places where informal institutions support women entrepreneurs in their activities (Brush et al., 2009).

Oppositely, informal entrepreneurship refers to businesses that are not registered, and are not recognized as enterprises by their governing country (Williams & Martinez, 2014). Informal businesses tend to be less organized in terms of their business activities, expenses, and revenues (Welter, 2011). When formal and informal institutions are unsupportive, women often encounter challenges in navigating the paperwork and logistics required to formally register a business, leading them to gravitate towards informal entrepreneurship (Welter, 2011).

The push and pull factors in women's environment shape their capacity to initiate businesses, leading to the diversification of women's entrepreneurship across regions (Kargwell, 2012).

D. Women's entrepreneurship – Variation across regions

Research has attempted to explain the higher prevalence of female entrepreneurship in certain countries (Jennings & Brush, 2013). Typically, countries with high overall rates of entrepreneurial activity also have high levels of female entrepreneurial activity (Verheul et al., 2004). Gender inequality has been identified as a push factor for female entrepreneurship in developed and developing economies, leading some women to choose self-employment as a means of overcoming restricted opportunities, labor market discrimination, and career barriers (Aidis et al., 2007; Baughn et al., 2006). Self-employment is often viewed as a survival strategy, or as a way of achieving greater flexibility in work scheduling and balancing multiple roles (Baughn et al., 2006). The influence of the socio-economic context on entrepreneurial motivations suggests that the presence and strength of push/pull factors relative to WE varies between industrialized

countries and developing countries, as well as by individual countries within these two clusters (Dhaliwal, 1998).

i. Women's entrepreneurship in developed countries

In developed economies, the traditional models for both female and male entrepreneurship emphasize wealth creation and self-achievement as the main pull incentives for entrepreneurial activity (Sarfaraz et al., 2014). As per capita income increases, different measures of gender equality tend to improve (Dollar & Gatti, 1999). In developed countries, women typically benefit from formal institutional circumstances, such as policies, laws, governmental bodies, and other formal institutions, that support and motivate them to enter entrepreneurship as a career path (Sarfaraz et al., 2014). Informal institutions and familial dynamics in developed countries also tend to be more supportive of WE, with more gender-neutral attitudes, norms, and roles (Sarfaraz et al., 2014). However, some evidence shows that enjoying more gender equality and having access to various job opportunities appears to reduce women's motivations for entrepreneurship in more developed nations (Sarfaraz et al., 2014).

Although more advanced economies have fewer and more subtle barriers for WE than developing economies, obstacles still exist (Terjesen & Elam, 2009). Women entrepreneurship is influenced by several factors, including individual characteristics, cultural context, and institutional factors (Ahl & Nelson, 2015). Push factors for women's entrepreneurship in developed economies can include low family income, lack of career advancement opportunities, dissatisfaction with a current job, or the need for flexible work arrangements due to family obligations (Buttner & Moore, 1997). Research has also shown that the specific context of women's entrepreneurship differs between regions, and the reasons behind the pull/push into entrepreneurship vary by a nation's level of economic development (Dhaliwal, 1998).

ii. Women's entrepreneurship in developing countries

In recent years, the number of WE in emerging economies has increased dramatically, playing a crucial role in the modernization of these economies and the evolution of free enterprise (Lerner et al., 1997; Zhang & Zhou, 2021). While studies of female entrepreneurs in developed countries suggest that a need for achievement is a primary motivation, those in developing and transitional economies appear to be motivated by a combination of push and pull factors (Orhan & Scott, 2001). Women is less developed countries often become entrepreneurs out of necessity for survival, education, health care, or family reasons (Hisrich & Öztürk, 1999; Minniti, 2010). In developing countries, legal, institutional, cultural, and informational barriers continue to limit women's financial integration and impede their economic contribution (Makhkamova & Saidmurodov, 2019; Terjesen & Elam, 2012). Gender inequality remains a significant challenge in developing

countries, hindering women's economic contributions both in starting a business and becoming employed (Sarfaraz et al., 2014). Fostering female entrepreneurial activities seems more critical in developing countries with a high gender gap in employment (Sarfaraz et al., 2014).

Most of the existing models and theories about women-owned and operated businesses are grounded in the experiences of women in the developed nations of the West (Dechant & Lamky, 2005). Although some studies have been conducted on female entrepreneurship in developing and transition economies in various parts of the world, very little attention is paid to those in Arab countries (Dechant & Lamky, 2005). Culture plays a significant role in understanding entrepreneurship across countries (Stewart Jr et al., 2003), and WE face divisions and barriers in accessing resources or opportunities that vary by culture and can significantly impact their venture's success (Lerner et al., 1997).

iii. Women's entrepreneurship in the MENA region

Although women's entrepreneurial activity has been increasing globally in recent years, the distribution of female total entrepreneurial activity is not equivalent across all regions (Terjesen & Elam, 2009). While women constitute around one-third of new entrepreneurs and one-fourth of established business owners worldwide, these percentages vary considerably across nations, with the most prominent gender gaps existing in conservative Islamic countries (Terjesen & Elam, 2009). Despite worldwide growth, female entrepreneurship is less common in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)[2] region than other parts of the world (McIntosh, 2010). In fact, MENA has the lowest rate of female entrepreneurship compared to other regions, with only 4% of female entrepreneurs in the area (Sarfaraz et al., 2014). This difference is particularly striking given the significant progress by MENA women in education, social development, and labor force participation since 1970 (McIntosh, 2010). Interestingly, the MENA/Mid-Asia region also shows the greatest gender inequality in Total Early Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA), with men four times more likely to engage in entrepreneurship than women (Sarfaraz et al., 2014).

The cultural context of the MENA region plays a significant role in shaping women's entrepreneurial experiences (Dechant & Lamky, 2005). MENA societies share common religious, economic, social, political, and historical characteristics that differentiate them from societies in other parts of the world (Dechant & Lamky, 2005). Infused with Arab and Islamic values, the unique cultural context of the region plays a major role in shaping the entrepreneurial experiences of women in MENA (Dechant & Lamky, 2005). Overall, the gender gap in entrepreneurship in the MENA region highlights the need to understand

[2] Countries normally included in MENA: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Unites Arab Emirates, Palestine, and Yemen. Sudan and Turkey are sometimes included in MENA.

the specific cultural and societal norms that may hinder women's participation in entrepreneurial activities in the region.

Arab societies

Arab societies conform to traditional tribal patriarchy, where culture plays a dominant role, and relationships are hierarchical, situational, symbiotic, and based on allegiance (Rugh, 2007). The group members support each other in different ways, and the rules of what is acceptable or not have implications for the construction and reproduction of gendered relationships (Rugh, 2007).

Tribal allegiances remain at the core of Arab society, where allegiance is first and foremost to one's kin, including the extended family of cousins and other relations, but alliances can expand or contract depending on circumstances (Heard-Bey, 2001). Traditional gender roles are more common in MENA, which means women tend to stay at home more compared to other countries (GEM, 2021). Arab women also tend to socialize exclusively amongst themselves due to this tribal structure (Heard-Bey, 2001). Male family members hold a relatively important position in Arab women's support system, and cultural variations exhibit a distinction between supportive and unsupportive network members in relation to the "proper thing for women to do" (Rugh, 2007).

Women's opportunities towards entrepreneurial development and activity face cultural and structural challenges in the Arab context, including the MENA region, which constrain their progress (Erogul et al., 2019). Despite high entrepreneurial intentions among women in the MENA region, there is a lack of translation into early stage or established business ownership (GEM, 2021). A United Nations report stated that greater openness to private enterprise and the development of the small business sector can benefit the deep and complex social and econonomic problems faced by Arab countries (Abdel-Khalek, 2003).

Influence of Islam

MENA countries are largely influenced by Islamic teachings, with the Koran shaping the daily life of Muslims and Shari'a law (Islamic law) governing the legal and economic framework in which businesses operate (McIntosh, 2010). Although Islam promotes equality between men and women, many countries in MENA still face gender disparities (Dechant & Lamky, 2005). Women are encouraged to assert their political rights, work, earn money, own property, and manage their businesses as they please, however, there is often a gap between Islamic teachings and the treatment of women in MENA (Dechant & Lamky, 2005).

The Koran prescribes for women rights, responsibilities, and restrictions that differ greatly from non-Muslim countries (McIntosh, 2010). For instance, the percept *qiwama*,

stipulates patriarchal responsibility towards women along with their support and protection (Kavoossi, 2000). As a result, workplaces are sometimes segregated by gender and in conservative countries women require permission of a male family member to engage in activities outside the home (Kavoossi, 2000). Islam, while serving as a cultural unifying force, also accounts for significant variations in social norms and practices toward women (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002). For example, requiring women to cover their entire bodies, preventing a women from driving a car, and separating students by gender in school and universities, are not mandated by Qur'anic law but are culturally-driven practices in some parts of MENA (Ruff, 1998).

Religion in general, and Islam in particular, are largely under-researched themes in entrepreneurship and organization studies (Essers & Benschop, 2009) Yet, religion is not "left at home" for entrepreneurs, it infuses working life (Essers & Benschop, 2009). Evidence reflects that Muslim WE utilise their interpretations of Islam and its teachings to justify and make sense of their entrepreneurship endeavours within the context of adverse socio-cultural barriers and masculine stereotypes (Tlaiss & McAdam, 2021).

iv. Women's entrepreneurship in Tunisia

Some authors suggest that female entrepreneurship in each country has its own characteristics, and needs to be studied in its own socio-economic context (Sarfaraz et al., 2014). The Arab MENA region is diverse, encompassing countries rich in natural resources, such as Algeria, Libya and the Gulf states and those with resource scarcities, such as Yemen and Tunisia (Aljuwaiber, 2020).

Women entrepreneurship in Tunisia has been steadily growing in recent years (Ben Mohamed et al., 2022). According to the GEM 2020-2021 Women's Entrepreneurship Report, Tunisia is one of the top-performing countries in MENA in terms of female entrepreneurial activity, with women's TEA rate reaching 9.5% (GEM, 2021). However, WE in Tunisia still face various challenges, including limited access to finance, information, markets, and networks (Drine & Grach, 2012). Moreover, there is a significant gender gap in entrepreneurship in Tunisia, with male entrepreneurs being more prevalent than their female counterparts (GEM, 2021). Nonetheless, Tunisia has taken steps to address this issue by implementing policies and programs that support women's entrepreneurship (Nillesen et al., 2021). In fact, women's entrepreneurship in Tunisia is one of the dimensions of the Tunisian development plan (Ben Mohamed et al., 2022). The National Strategy for the Promotion of Women's Economic Empowerment 2018-2023, aims to increase women's access to finance and markets, and provide them with training and mentoring opportunities (Drine & Grach, 2012).

Research has shown that social and cultural factors play a significant role in shaping women's entrepreneurship in Tunisia. For instance, a study by Drine & Grach (2012)

found that cultural norms and expectations around gender roles and responsibilities can limit women's entrepreneurial aspirations and opportunities in Tunisia (Drine & Grach, 2012). Another study highlighted the importance of family support and social networks in facilitating women's entrepreneurship in Tunisia (Baranik et al., 2018).

Overall, while Tunisia has made progress in promoting women's entrepreneurship, there is still much work to be done to close the gender gap and address the various challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the country. Furthermore, it is important to note that there remains a lack of academic research on female entrepreneurship in Tunisia (Mokline, 2021). Existing research on entrepreneurship in Tunisia tends to focus on young entrepreneurs without taking a gender-specific approach (Halima & Majida, 2016).

This following section will provide insights into some of the main barriers faced by women in entrepreneurship, with a focus on their manifestation in the MENA region.

Main concepts
Entrepreneurial motivators for women: Women entrepreneurs often have different motivations for starting businesses compared to men. Pull (fostered by positive opportunities) and push (driven by negative circumstances) factors can be categorized into formal institutions, informal institutions, and family. **Formal institutions:** Formal institutions, which include policy, laws, public government, and systemic formal elements, are elements that can impact women's entry and participation in entrepreneurship. **Informal institutions:** Informal institutions, consisting of cultural norms, attitudes and behaviors, make up the fabric of a geographic location and play a significant role in shaping women's participation in entrepreneurship**.** **Formal vs informal entrepreneurship:** Formal entrepreneurship refers to businesses that are registered, pay taxes, are recognized by their governing country, and typically have systems in place to track their business activities, expenses, and revenues. Informal entrepreneurship refers to businesses that are not registered, and are not recognized as enterprises by their governing country. **Variation of women's entrepreneurship across regions:** Women's ability to start businesses is often influences by the push and pull factors in their environment. As a result, the nature of women's entrepreneurship varies across regions. The presence and strength of push/pull factors relative to WE varies between industrialized countries and developing countries, as well as by individual countries within these clusters.

Women's entrepreneurship in MENA: The cultural context of the MENA region plays a significant role in shaping women's entrepreneurial experiences. Infused with Arab and Islamic values, the cultural context of the region plays a major role in shaping the entrepreneurial experiences of women in MENA.

Women's entrepreneurship in Tunisia: Tunisia is one of the top-performing countries in MENA in terms of female entrepreneurial activity, with social and cultural factors playing a significant role in shaping women's entrepreneurship in the country. There remains a lack of academic research on female entrepreneurship in Tunisia.

Barriers in women's entrepreneurship

Women face numerous constraints at different stages of the entrepreneurial pathway (Fairlie & Robb, 2009). Some of the most prevalent obstacles for WE include work vs family demands, limited access to networks, difficulty with accessing different types of resources, and the persistence of gender stereotypes and biases. The barriers and challenges faced by WE can have significant impacts on their ability to start and grow successful businesses (Jennings & Brush, 2013).

Reseach indicates that WE in developing countries face multiple challenges, stemming from both internal and external factors (Panda, 2018). Internal constraints can be addressed by the entrepreneur's agency, whereas external challenges are beyond the scope of the entrepreneur (Panda, 2018). According to the GEM 2020-2021 Women's Entrepreneurship Report, some countries have highly supportive cultures and social context but not all; WE face cultural barriers, mainly in conservative systems, such as in MENA, where there are still gender restrictions on women (GEM, 2021). These market failures need to be better understood and addressed so that the economic potential of this group can be fully utilized (Jakhar & Krishna, 2020).

A. Work vs family demands

Entrepreneurial decisions, processes, and outcomes are influenced by, and also exert an impact upon, family-level factors (Jennings & Brush, 2013). Family and work are important domains for entrepreneurs (Zhang & Zhou, 2021), with family embeddedness playing a significant role in women's entrepreneurial activity and outcomes (Jennings & Brush, 2013). The impact of family on women's entrepreneurial activity varies across different institutional, societal, and cultural contexts (Jennings & Brush, 2013). Cultural norms, traditions, and religious practices influence the roles that men and women assume

in families (Chell & Baines, 1998; Welter et al., 2006) and either hider or facilitate entrepreneurial behaviour (Jennings & Brush, 2013).

On one hand, research has demonstrated that family-work relationships can pose obstacles to entrepreneurship for women (Shelton et al., 2008). It is habitually agreed that women have the extra burden of taking care of their children, and often chose to work from home or bring the children along while working, so the pursuit of balancing work and family responsibilities restricts women's entrepreneurial working hours and growth aspirations (Langevang et al., 2015; Minniti & Naudé, 2010). WE also face difficulty securing spousal support (McGowan et al., 2012), spend more time on household and family-related tasks (Jurik, 1998), and manage the work-family interface differently than male entrepreneurs (Jennings et al., 2010). Furthermore, due to childbirth and child-rearing, the work experience of women tends to be more discontinuous, signifying that the possibilities for the acquisition of information that lead to opportunity identification in entrepreneurship may be very different (DeTienne & Chandler, 2007). The effect of family demands on work performance is more salient for females than for males (Zhang & Zhou, 2021) and patriarchal and controlling husbands can limit women's empowerment and constrain their pursuit of entrepreneurship (Schuler et al., 2010). As a result, various studies establish that women entrepreneurs struggle to attain work-family balance in practice (Kirkwood & Tootell, 2008; Winn, 2004).

On the other hand, family factors that affect gender differences in entrepreneurial performance have been explored with research highlighting the positive role of family resources in entrepreneurial success (Bates, 2011; Powell & Eddleston, 2013; Sanders & Nee, 1996). Family ties can offer financial, physical, human, and other resources which are important to a new venture (Zhang & Zhou, 2021). Support from family members (Starr & MacMillan, 1990), family connections with potential investors (Steier & Greenwood, 2000), human capital from family members (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003), task-related social support from family members (Kim et al., 2013), and family cohesiveness in the entrepreneurial process (Edelman et al., 2016) can help to lay the groundwork for new ventures. Additionally, entrepreneurship can give women the flexibility to attend to domestic responsibilities at home, while also providing financial support for their family (Bertaux & Crable, 2007).

Recent research has shown that female entrepreneurs in Arab countries continue to face a lack of support, with women in developing countries relying more on their families for social support than men (Zhang & Zhou, 2021). The challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in MENA during start-up can be traced back to cultural practices, societal expectations, and personal and familial concerns. The nature of the barriers encountered is context-specific, and the strategies they adopt to overcome these challenges are similarly shaped by contextual factors. Researchers like Al-Dajani and Marlow (2010)

and Ahmad (2011) have drawn attention to these matters. Furthermore, family arrangements and religious beliefs can restrict women's freedom to work and travel in certain countries (Terjesen & Elam, 2009) which can hinder women's access to entrepreneurship opportunities (Greene et al., 2001). Some researchers have utilized "bounded empowerment" to describe women's entrepreneurial experience in Arab countries, whereby this term corresponds to the process of simultaneously experiencing empowerment and situational constraints leading to a limited or fluctuated form of empowerment in entrepreneurship (Al Khaled & Berglund, 2018).

Family-related issues play a critical role in women's entrepreneurship, and should be considered when designing policies and programs aimed at promoting female entrepreneurship (Terjesen & Elam, 2009). Higher levels of female entrepreneurship are related to greater provision of child care services and generous family leave, indicating that policies supporting women's operation within the family context can promote entrepreneurship (Terjesen & Elam, 2009).

B. Networking obstacles

The relevance of social networks for entrepreneurship is an area of increasing interest in the literature (Ozkazanc-Pan & Clark Muntean, 2018) with entrepreneurial networks defined as "the sum total of relationships in which an entrepreneur participates, and which provide an important resource for his, or her, activities" (Dodd & Patra, 2002). Social networks can provide entrepreneurs with various resources, such as opportunities, information, labor, skills, and contacts, which help build entrepreneurial social capital (Greve & Salaff, 2003). An entrepreneurs access to others and to the resources that they need are influenced by the nature of the networks in which they are embedded, the positions they occupy and the pattern of their relationships in those networks (McAdam et al., 2019). Social capital is accrued through networks of influence or support based on group membership, such as family, social, and professional networks (McAdam et al., 2019). Formal networks consist of professional relationships with accountants, banks, lawyers, and trade associations (Littunen, 2000), while informal networks include business contacts, family, and personal relationships (McAdam et al., 2019). Social networks are critical tools for entrepreneurs to amass social capital to launch and grow their businesses (Maurer & Ebers, 2006).

An essential aspect of a healthy inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem is it's connectivity which is reflected in the presence of deal making and other networks (McAdam et al., 2019). However, women are consistently underrepresented in successful entrepreneurial ecosystems, and in places where networks do exist, they are not gender inclusive and women do not participate (McAdam et al., 2019). Due to gender-based constraints on social exchange, women tend to have less social capital than men (Palgi & Moore, 2004). Women face important challenges in establishing efficient networks because reciprocity

(helping now to get help in the future) (Kaplan, 1984) is a fundamental principle of networking, and men view women as less attractive exchange partners (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Women often face limited access to networks and mentorship opportunities, which can make it difficult to find supportive communities and mentors who can provide guidance, advice, and connections (Brush et al., 2002). Likewise, WE are often excluded from trade and business associations and informal "old-boys" networks, which has a negative impact on their access to information, credit, training opportunities, business partners and new market entry (Winn, 2005). Furthermore, informal networks tend to be gender-segregated, with women predominantly in women-dominated networks and men in male-dominated networks (Moore, 1988). Thus, women have less legitimacy and influence in male-dominated networks (Klyver & Terjesen, 2007), which may limit their participation and benefit from participation (Moore, 1988). It has been suggested that greater access to networks can enhance women's participation and contribution to entrepreneurial ecosystems (McAdam et al., 2019).

Conservative Islamic cultures often impose restrictions on female mobility and social interaction, impeding their access to education and networks, thereby impacting their participation in paid work (Subramaniam, 2012). Arab businesswomen face challenges when seeking help from standard networking associations such as the Chamber of Commerce or local federations due to their male-dominated composition, which hinders networking opportunities for women (Eşim, 2000). As a result, female Muslim entrepreneurs in MENA often rely on family members to connect them with potential business partners and other entrepreneurs (Dechant & Lamky, 2005; Yetim, 2008). Family support is a crucial factor for Muslim women entrepreneurs in accessing business networks (McIntosh, 2010). As was noted by McIntosh (2010), family support and wearing the hijab[4] may help to counteract some of the cultural and social barriers that Muslim women face in accessing networks (McIntosh, 2010).

Overall, social networks are crucial for entrepreneurship, enabling entrepreneurs to access resources, opportunities, and contacts necessary for the success of their businesses (Greve & Salaff, 2003). The limitations on women's access to networks make it difficult for female entrepreneurs to establish and grow their businesses, hindering their potential for success (Brush et al., 2002).

C. Access to resources

WE can contribute significantly to economic development, but this can only be achieved if they have equal opportunity and access to resources (Sarfaraz et al., 2014). The

[4] 'Hijab' (Arabic), or veil, and headscarf, are used interchangeably in this dissertation to describe the same head covering typically worn in Tunisia by women. It is a head covering that is gently wrapped around the head and covering the hair, leaving the face visible.

availability of resources is a vital component for entrepreneurial success, and WE often face significant obstacles in accessing them (Brush et al., 2004). Women encounter various challenges in obtaining different types of resources, including financial support, training and education, and government assistance.

Firstly, access to financial resources is crucial for starting and running a successful business, and WE consistently experience barriers related to their gender when seeking finance (Marlow & Patton, 2005). One reason for the gender gap in entrepreneurial entry is the difficulty women face in accessing capital, compounded by the fact that the financial sector remains male-dominated (Alesina et al., 2013). Brush et al. (2001) found that female entrepreneurs often struggle to access credit and generate investor interest in their businesses. For example, the vast majority of venture capitalists are men, who, in turn, tend to favor male entrepreneurs (Greene et al., 2001). This gender bias in venture capital could perpetuate the gap in entrepreneurship opportunities between men and women (Greene et al., 2001). Moreover, Minniti and Arenius (2003) conducted a study on female entrepreneurship in 37 countries and found that women's participation in entrepreneurship varied significantly depending on their access to resources compared to men. The study revealed that women typically have smaller amounts of start-up capital, a smaller proportion of equities, and more bank loans than men (Minniti & Arenius, 2003). As a result, women tend to own fewer businesses than men, and their businesses grow more slowly (Minniti & Arenius, 2003).

According to Aguirre et al. (2012), one of the principal barriers to female entrepreneurship in developing countries is the lack of financial support (Aguirre et al., 2012). In MENA, WE seeking funding from banks often encounter significant obstacles hindering their possibilities to establish their own businsesses (De Vita et al., 2014). Furthermore, in some countries, women's property rights are severely constrained (Roberto et al., 2021). For example, certain countries in MENA have women-specific requirements in financial application procedures that frequently mandate co-signatures from male family members (husbands or fathers), thereby dissuading prospective female borrowers (De Vita et al., 2014). Brush et al. (2004) believe that the funding gap represents a major market failure and prevents women from attaining the highest level of entrepreneurial achievement.

Secondly, Brush et al. (2009) observed that women entrepreneurs have varying educational backgrounds and skill sets, which may affect their ability to establish and grow successful businesses. Moreover, women entrepreneurs may face limited access to training and education opportunities, further impacting their capacity to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills (Brush et al., 2009). According to Panda (2018), women entrepreneurs encounter challenges arising from their limited comprehension of business practices, such as managing finances, maintaining accurate records, engaging in effective marketing and sales, and recruiting and retaining skilled personnel. These entrepreneurs

often lack formal education and training in business and entrepreneurship, and they typically acquire knowledge and skills through hands-on experience (Panda, 2018). WE frequently face discrimination in education (Minniti & Naudé, 2010), and this holds true for countries at varying stages of development, including both developed and developing nations (Brush et al., 2009). In fact, according to Aguirre et al. (2012), education is the most significant obstacle to female entrepreneurship in MENA, apart from the scarcity of financial assistance.

Thirdly, according to Hugues et al. (2012), government support is a key factor in promoting women's entrepreneurship, and a lack of government support can hinder women entrepreneurs' success. Comparatively to men, WE may have limited access to government support programs and services that can provide assistance with funding, training, and other resources (Brush et al., 2009). Examples of government support for WE include targeted funding programs, tax incentives, incubation and mentorship programs, and policies that encourage gender equality in entrepreneurship (Henry et al., 2016). Despite many governments around the world recognizing the importance of promoting women's entrepreneurship and introducing policies and initiatives to support their growth, WE still face challenges and there is a significant gender gap in entrepreneurship (Brush et al., 2009). For example, the high start-up costs in developing nations are indicative of the challenging business environment caused by the absence of reliable institutional support and the complex and unstable regulatory framework (Naude et al., 2008). Furthemore, in developing countries such as in MENA, the advancement of women's entrepreneurship is impeded by various obstacles, including complicated regulations, convoluted business registration requirements, bureaucratic barriers, discriminatory practices, corruption, unclear compliance procedures, high tax rates, and inadequate support from government policies and programs (Panda, 2018).

D. Unconscious bias and stereotypes against women entrepreneurs

Gender bias and discrimination are prevalent barriers for WE in the business world (Jennings & Brush, 2013). Unconscious bias and stereotypes against WE can have negative effects such as limited access to resources and opportunities (Brush et al., 2009), difficulty building networks, stereotyping of women-led businesses, and internalized bias (Gupta et al., 2009). Stereotypes against women, which are defined as "social judgements of individual group members that lead people to judge group members consistently, and in an exaggerated way, with group expectations" unconsciously arise and are difficult to avoid (Blair, 2002). In fact, gender bias and stereotypes are more pronounced in male-dominated contexts like entrepreneurship (Bardasi et al., 2011) than in the labor market as a whole, with men continuing to have an advantage over women (Ughetto et al., 2020). This disparity is partly due to shared cultural beliefs that entrepreneurship is associated with masculine traits, which can discourage women from pursuing entrepreneurial

endeavors (Bruni et al., 2004a). These stereotypes can work against women long before they even begin their businesses (GEM, 2021), as men tend to perceive women as less competent (De Pater et al., 2010), more unpredictable, and less authoritative than men (Brescoll, 2016).

Subtle discrimination based on gender stereotypes can lead to an inefficient allocation of capital, which can be a critical issue, as undercapitalization can have detrimental effects on the scale of a business and the performance over its lifetime (Gicheva & Link, 2015; Verheul & Thurik, 2001). However, it would seem that discrimination does not occur in terms of approval or turndown rates; rather, women are often charged higher interest rates on their loans or required to provide greater collateral than men (Coleman, 2000). Gender stereotypes also create obstacles for WE, who face challenges in seeking support, and negotiating with stakeholders, suppliers, and consumers on matters such as prices, rents, and office locations (Panda, 2018). Similarly, women-led businesses may be stereotyped as being less competitive or innovative than male-led businesses, which can affect their ability to attract customers, partners, and investors (Brush & Cooper, 2012). WE themselves may also internalize biases and stereotypes about their own abilities, leading to self-doubt and reduced confidence in their ventures (Gupta et al., 2009).

In MENA, WE encounter obstacles in gaining credibility due to pervasive discrimination, including a wide wage gap between genders and societal undervaluation of independent women (Maden, 2015). Although hostile business environments, economic recessions, and unstable political conditions affect all entrepreneurs, WE are especially vulnerable due to gender discrimination, particularly in MENA societies where gender segregation is prevalent (Panda, 2018). In the Arab/Muslim case, there is much in terms of stereotypes, particularly of gender and family roles perpetuated through media and literature (Mastro, 2016). Women in this region are less likely to pursue entrepreneurship, as it goes against traditional (i.e. patriarchal) gender roles of mother and wife (Welter & Smallbone, 2017). The prevalent stereotypes that constitute gender-based biases in patriarchal contexts are that women make reluctant and underperforming entrepreneurs (Marlow & McAdam, 2012).

All the barriers discussed are not isolated or distinct in nature, but rather interconnected and mutually reinforcing constraints that can exacerbate each other (Panda, 2018). Each barrier can create additional obstacles that make it more difficult for WE to succeed (Brush et al., 2009).

The upcoming section will identify the gaps that still exist in the literature pertaining to the primary themes of interest, and it will culminate with the central research question of this dissertation.

Main concepts
Barriers in women's entrepreneurship
Work vs family demands: Cultural norms, traditions, and religious practices influence the roles that men and women assume in families, and either hider or facilitate entrepreneurial behaviour. Family-related issues play a critical role in women's entrepreneurship, and should be considered when designing policies and programs aimed at promoting female entrepreneurship.
Networking obstacles: Social networks are crucial for entrepreneurship, enabling entrepreneurs to access resources, opportunities, and contacts necessary for the success of their businesses. The limitations on women's access to networks make it difficult for female entrepreneurs to establish and grow their businesses, hindering their potential for success.
Access to resources: The availability of resources is a vital component for entrepreneurial success, and WE often face obstacles in accessing them. Women encounter various challenges in obtaining different types of resources, including financial support, training and education, and government assistance.
Unconsicous bias and stereotypes against women: Gender bias and discrimination are prevalent barriers for WE in the business world. Unconscious bias and stereotypes against WE can have negative effects such as limited access to resources and opportunities, difficulty building networks, stereotyping of women-led businesses, and internalized bias.

Research question

In light of the information presented in this chapter, there are important gaps that remain in the literature.

Critical performativity – CP has been suggested as a strategy to connect theory and practice in CMS and encourage social transformation through the critical and transformative use of management discourses. However, a challenge exists in promoting activism and embracing performativity in a socially responsible way. To address this challenge, it is necessary to conduct empirical studies that examine the effectiveness of tactics, relevant heterotopias, and potential limitations of interventions. CMS interventions must adopt a more affirmative and pragmatic approach to management

practices and discourses to encourage concrete action towards change. In order to establish a contextualized set of best practices and key learnings, the existing literature on CP requires more extensive and thorough empirical studies.

Empowerment – The concept of empowerment lacks a clear and universally accepted definition, posing difficulties in tracking and evaluating interventions aimed at promoting development. The multi-faceted and context-specific nature of empowerment, and the lack of research on its processes, further complicates this issue. While multi-sector partnerships can aid in overcoming these difficulties, it is crucial to consider the mechanisms and context of empowerment and how they interact in developing empowerment programs. While knowledge or skill training is a common intervention for fostering empowerment, it is also important to consider the opportunity structures that can facilitate or hinder individuals in applying that knowledge. However, there is a noticeable gap in the literature due to the limited conduct of longitudinal research experiments, which are essential for understanding the processes of empowerment in international development but require substantial budgets and time.

Women's Entrepreneurship – Entrepreneurship has been acknowledged as a tool for promoting empowerment, but the social sciences research often neglects women and their unique issues. The impact of entrepreneurial activities on different communities and groups lacks clarity, and further research is needed to examine the intricacies of entrepreneurship at the local level. While some studies have explored female entrepreneurship in developing and transition economies, there is a scarcity of research on entrepreneurship in Arab countries, including Tunisia. The gender gap in entrepreneurship in MENA highlights the importance of comprehending the specific cultural and societal norms that may impede women's involvement in entrepreneurial activities in the region. Consequently, there is a pressing need for more academic research on female entrepreneurship in MENA.

In addition, despite the efforts of development organizations to promote female empowerment, there is a lack of primary data in the existing literature. As a result, it is difficult to understand how entrepreneurship development practitioners implement programs to promote empowerment and achieve development. Furthermore, there is limited research on development practices for promoting women's empowerment in complex contexts, such as the MENA region. Therefore, it is critical to understand the perspectives and approaches of entrepreneurship development practitioners to define empowerment and implement effective initiatives to strengthen empowerment strategies for sustainable development. Further research is also required to explore the transformative potential of the feminist approach to performativity in effecting social change. Scholars and practitioners could work towards bridging the gap between theory

and practice by utilizing critical performativity in women's entrepreneurship to promote women's empowerment.

In light of these remaining gaps, the following research question is relevant to explore: *How has the feminist approach been mobilized by an entrepreneurship support organization in Tunisia to influence the empowerment of women entrepreneurs?*

To address the research question, the study employed an archival and historical review, in addition to conducting 46 semi-structured interviews with 48 stakeholders in Tunisia's entrepreneurial ecosystem. The upcoming chapter, Chapter 2, will provide a detailed account of the materials and methods, including the research design, data collection, and data analysis methods used in the study. Chapter 3 will present the results, with Part 1 showcasing the 8 historical phases that depict the evolution of feminist discourse in Tunisia, using archival and historical sources, and qualitative interview data. Part 2 of Chapter 3 will present the 6 performative elements mobilized by CFE in the LPWE training program that demonstrate the program's feminist approach, supported by interview data, observation data, and field notes. This section will also include evidence of empowerment among women entrepreneurs in Tunisia who completed the LPWE training program in relation to each of the performative elements mobilized by CFE. Finally, with Chapter 4, this dissertation will conclude with an analysis and discussion of the results and the presentation of the key findings, in an effort to answer the main research question.

Chapter 2: Materials and Methods

In this chapter, we will present the research design, data collection, and data analysis of the study.

Research Design

This case study was conducted in the context of a larger research project called SEED. SEED or Scaling Entrepreneurship for Economic Development is cross-sectoral partnership involving IDEOS – Social Impact Hub of HEC Montréal, Development international Desjardins (DID), international funding agencies, local partners and research teams from three partner universities: University of Navarra, University of Alberta, and Penn State University.

The goal of SEED is to create a network of international and local promoters of entrepreneurship programs, as well as international and local researchers with expertise in entrepreneurial scaling. The purpose of this cross-sectoral partnership is to lead and mobilize research using field experiments and business cases to create a validated methodology to develop the capacities of local promoters in addressing scaling barriers of micro-enterprises. The methodology developed in the context of these field experiments is shared with local promoters in different contexts in order to multiply the impact.

SEED is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and DID (funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC)). As one of the components of Desjardins Group, DID has been offering technical assistance and investment services in the inclusive finance sector for developing countries since 1970.

Tunisia was one of the countries in which SEED Network was mandated to create a field experiment to better understand and support women entrepreneurs. SEED Network reseach team for the project in Tunisia was composed of Professor Luciano Barin Cruz (HEC Montréal), Professor Charlene Zietsma (Penn State University), Professor Angelique Slade Shantz (University of Alberta), and Professor Desirée Pacheco (IESE Barcelona – University of Navarra), as well as doctoral candidate Kylie Heales (University of Alberta), and the author of this dissertation, Master's student Katherine Picone (HEC Montréal).

This project in Tunisia was undertaken with the above-mentioned research team of SEED Network in collaboration with DID (based in Lévis, Quebec), CFE-Tunisie (CFE) (*Centre financier aux entrepreneurs - Tunisie*) (based in Tunis, Tunisia) and DAAM Foundation

(*Développement Accompagnement Appui aux Micro-entrepreneurs*) (based in Tunis, Tunisia).

CFE is a micro-finance institution that offers micro-finance services to entrepreneurs in multiple regions of Tunisia. CFE commenced its activities in 2016 and services both women and men entrepreneurs in diverse business sectors at different stages of their entrepreneurial journeys. An insight recognized by CFE through their work with women entrepreneur clients was the demand for non-financial services that would be complimentary to the micro-finance services they were receiving. Thus, CFE, in collaboration with DID, created DAAM, a partner foundation mandated to spearhead non-financial services to CFE's female entrepreneurs, and as a tool for attracting new clients to CFE.

This project and the case in Tunisia represents a good setting to attempt to answer the main research question. It makes sense to study this project considering that Tunisia has a unique entrepreneurial setting that stands out, in comparison to other Arab-Muslim countries, due to the long-standing presence of feminist ideologies. Since Tunisia is strategically positioned in the MENA region as progressive in regard to the women's rights, it is pertinent to better understand the mobilization of the feminist approach by an entrepeneurship support organization in this particular context to influence the empowerment of women entrepreneurs.

The field experimentation project in Tunisia was conducted in four phases through the collaborative efforts of CFE, DAAM, SEED Network research team, and DID. We will describe the four phases below, in order to understand the full scope of the research project, however, it is important to note that this dissertation will focus on Phase 4 of the project.

Phase 1 was the exploratory research phase. This phase was undertaken in October and November 2020, and consisted of speaking with a total of 18 key informants to better comprehend the entrepreneurial ecosystem for WE in Tunisia. The totality of the interviews in Phase 1 were conducted online due to, among other factors, the sanitary restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic in Canada and in Tunisia, as well the limited financial budgets for international travel for the project. Specifically, the research team interviewed 7 informants from CFE and DAAM, consisting of members of the management team, experts in women's entrepreneurship, and training managers. SEED research team also spoke with 8 women entrepreneurs (clients of CFE) from an range of sectors including: transport (export) of goods, retail clothing, childcare, beauty, and sports services. The research team also interviewed 2 consultants from the World Bank with an expertise in women's entrepreneurship in the Tunisian context, and the greater Maghreb and MENA region. The last key informant from Phase 1 was a Professor from HEC

Carthage with an expertise in SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) and business scaling. The information gathered from Phase 1 aided in identifying the barriers and challenges that WE face in Tunisia. These preliminary insights were presented by SEED research team to the partner institutions involved in the project, namely CFE, DAAM, and DID.

Once all the partners involved in the project had a clear understanding of the challenges that needed to be addressed, **Phase 2** commenced, which consisted of the co-design of the LPWE entrepreneurship and leadership training program for WE in Tunisia. During this phase, from December 2020 to May 2021, SEED research team worked in collaboration with DAAM representatives, and with two of the trainers who would be responsible for the delivery of the training program. The collaboration between the partners in Phase 2 was done entirely online due to Covid-19 sanitary restrictions and the limited travel budget of the project. During this phase, two distinctive versions of the training program were created (Market and Community), both of which could hypothetically influence the different research variables according to the information collected in Phase 1. The objective of testing two training programs with the selected population was to compare and contrast the data collected quantitatively, from the delivery of the training program (Phase 3), and qualitatively, from data collected in semi-structured interviews post-delivery (Phase 4). The training of trainers (ToT) and pilot were also conducted during this phase. The ToT consisted of training the other two program trainers mandated with the delivery of the LPWE. The pilot was used to test the different training programs with a small group of WE to get final feedback before the delivery.

Phase 3 consisted of the delivery of the LPWE training program which was conducted in June and July of 2021, in the cities of Tunis, Sousse, and Sfax, in Tunisia. During this period, the two different training programs were delivered in Tunis, Sousse and Sfax by the program trainers to groups of WE. The WE and the program trainers were randomly distributed into groups. Throughout the delivery, the WE filled out different data collection forms. The data from these forms were then used for quantitative analysis in the context of the larger SEED-Tunisia research project. It is important to note that results and analysis from Phase 3 are not offered or used in the present dissertation.

Phase 4 involved conducting semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders of the entrepreneurial ecosystem several weeks after the delivery of the LPWE training program. The majority of the interviews took place in person in November 2021, in Tunis, Sousse, and Sfax, by two members of the research team in the field (doctoral candidate Kylie Heales, and author of this dissertation, Master's student Katherine Picone). However, because certain stakeholders were not available for in-person interviews during that time period, a number of the interviews were conducted online, in December 2021, and January 2022. A qualitative approach was employed to understand the effects of the

LPWE entrepreneurship and leadership training program on the empowerment of WE. Different stakeholders were interviewed –women entrepreneurs, organization representatives, program trainers, CFE credit officers, and key informants– in the context of this case study. We would like to highlight that in the context of the larger SEED-Tunisia research project, questions about empowerment as well as other variables of interest were asked in the qualitative interviews. Data was collected as spoken narratives from interviewees in response to open-ended questions via in-person and online interviews. This approach was used to allow an extensive range of stakeholders, with different roles in the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Tunisia, to share their viewpoints.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews

As mentioned, this dissertation is focused on Phase 4 of the field experiment in Tunisia. In Phase 4, a total of 46 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 48 interviewees. In general, interviews were conducted in person in the field with one interviewee, with a duration of approximately one hour for each meeting. Depending on the stakeholders language preference, interviews were conducted by one or two members of the SEED research team in a combination of English, and/or French and/or Tunisian Arabic with the support of local interpreters.

Interviewees included: 1) Women entrepreneurs who completed the LPWE entrepreneurship and leadership training program, 2) Representatives of DAAM who participated in the co-creation and coordination of the training program, 3) Trainers of the program, 4) Credit officers of CFE, and, 5) Key informants of the entrepreneurial ecosystem relevant to understanding women's entrepreneurship and empowerment in Tunisia. The types of stakeholders, number of interviewees, and profiles of interviewees are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Profiles of stakeholders interviewed for semi-structured interviews

Types of stakeholder	**Number of interviewees**	**Profiles of interviewees**
1) Women entrepreneurs	30	• 30 women entrepreneurs who completed the LPWE program.
2) DAAM representatives	2	• 2 DAAM representatives who participated in the program development.
3) Trainers	4	• 4 trainers who delivered the program.*
4) Credit officers of CFE	6	• 6 credit officers of CFE who work directly with women entrepreneurs for different credit services.
5) Key informants	6	• 2 prominent women entrepreneurs from the Tunisian entrepreneurial ecosystem (not participants of the training program). • 1 representative of an entrepreneurship support organization focused on social businesses in Tunisia. • 1 representative of an influencial state funded civil society union focused on supporting women's rights in Tunisia. • 1 key informant with important previous implication in civil society unions.** • 1 key informant with experience in directing state level financial services.**
Total	**48**	

*Two of the program trainers were interviewed together.

**These two key informants were interviewed together.

In Table 2, a detailed summary of the semi-structured interviews is shown, presenting the interview codes, the profiles of interviwees, the interview methods, and the lengths of interviews.

Table 2: Detailed summary of semi-structured interviews with stakeholders

	Interview code	Profile of interviwee	Interview method	Length of interview
1.	INT001	Entrepreneur	In person	64 minutes
2.	INT002	Entrepreneur	In person	70 minutes
3.	INT003	Entrepreneur	In person	71 minutes
4.	INT005	Entrepreneur	In person	67 minutes
5.	INT006	Entrepreneur	In person	56 minutes
6.	INT009	Entrepreneur	In person	60 minutes
7.	INT010	Entrepreneur	In person	84 minutes
8.	INT011	Entrepreneur	In person	61 minutes
9.	INT012	Entrepreneur	In person	49 minutes
10.	INT013	Entrepreneur	In person	78 minutes
11.	INT014	Entrepreneur	In person	77 minutes
12.	INT015	Entrepreneur	In person	99 minutes
13.	INT016	Entrepreneur	In person	64 minutes
14	INT017	Entrepreneur	In person	53 minutes
15.	INT018	Entrepreneur	In person	61 minutes
16.	INT020	Entrepreneur	In person	87 minutes
17.	INT021	Entrepreneur	In person	37 minutes
18.	INT022	Entrepreneur	In person	62 minutes
19.	INT023	Entrepreneur	In person	52 minutes
20.	INT024	Entrepreneur	In person	73 minutes
21.	INT025	Entrepreneur	In person	67 minutes
22.	INT027	Entrepreneur	In person	94 minutes
23.	INT028	Entrepreneur	In person	51 minutes
24.	INT029	Entrepreneur	In person	39 minutes
25.	INT031	Entrepreneur	In person	42 minutes
26.	INT032	Entrepreneur	In person	66 minutes
27.	INT035	Entrepreneur	In person	66 minutes
28.	INT039	Entrepreneur	In person	48 minutes
29.	INT041	Entrepreneur	In person	45 minutes
30.	INT042	Entrepreneur	In person	66 minutes
31.	INT101	Key informant 1	In person	41 minutes
32.	INT104	Key informant 2 & 3	In person	72 minutes
33.	INT105	Key informant 4	In person	54 minutes
34.	INT106	DAAM	In person	60 minutes
35.	INT107	DAAM	In person	63 minutes
36.	INT108	Credit officer of CFE	In person	53 minutes
37.	INT109	Credit officer of CFE	In person	62 minutes
38.	INT110	Credit officer of CFE	In person	50 minutes
39	INT111	Credit officer of CFE	In person	54 minutes

40.	INT112	Credit officer of CFE	In person	47 minutes
41.	INT113	Credit officer of CFE	In person	55 minutes
42.	INT114	Trainer 1	In person	109 minutes
43.	INT115	Trainer 2 & 3	In person	59 minutes
44.	INT116	Trainer 4	Videoconference	92 minutes
45.	INT117	Key informant 5	Videoconference	67 minutes
46.	INT118	Key informant 6	Videoconference	61 minutes
Average length of interview				62 minutes

1) **Women entrepreneurs:** A total of 30 interviews with women entrepreneurs were conducted over several weeks. They were conducted individually, sometimes with the support of an interpreter, with a duration of approximately one hour for each meeting. The WE interviewed were micro-entrepreneurs who completed the LPWE and stemmed from a range of sectors including: food preparation and transformation (traditional pastry making; fresh juices), various service industries (consulting; coaching; education; sewing and textiles; business training; etc.), and artisanal handicrafts. Entrepreneurs varied in their socio-demographic characteristics to have a heterogenous sample of entrepreneurs (i.e. variation of age of entrepreneur, size of business, age of business, sector, number of employees, region, etc.). Interviews were conducted with WE in the three cities in Tunisia where the program was delivered, Tunis, Sousse, and Sfax. Entrepreneurs were contacted for interviews based on the quantitative results obtained from data collection during Phase 3. Specifically, entrepreneurs that had surprising, and important changes in some of the research variables were selected for qualitative interviews. Entrepreneurs were recruited by CFE and DAAM, and asked to voluntarily participate in the interview portion of the study. An interview guide (Appendix 2) was developed for the qualitative interviews with WE. Semi-structured open-ended questions were generated around the theme of empowerment and other research variables of interest. With these interviews, it was sought to comprehend the experiences of the WE in the LPWE and to have a better understanding of their personal stories in entrepreneurship. As the interview process progressed, the interview guide was modified according to the information collected in previous interviews.

2) **DAAM representatives**: 2 representatives of DAAM were interviewed to better understand their experiences in the co-development and delivery of the training program, and their comprehension of the entrepreneurial ecosystem for WE in Tunisia. These interviews were conducted individually, with a duration of approximately one hour for each meeting. The representatives of DAAM that were interviewed were persons directly involved in the

development and delivery of the LPWE and who interacted significantly with the WE who participated in the program. These representatives also had important past experience working on issues related to women's rights and supporting feminist causes in Tunisia. As these interviews were more informal, no interview guide was developed for the interviews with DAAM representatives. Rather interview themes and guidelines for questions tailored to this type of stakeholder were discussed with the entire SEED research team in online meetings prior to field interviews.

3) **Trainers:** The 4 program trainers were interviewed to better understand their experiences in the co-development and delivery of the training program. It is essential to emphasize that all 4 trainers had a significant role in the co-creation of the content for the training program and were selected for this role due to their expertise in the field of women's entrepreneurship. Since the trainers were the persons who interacted the most with participants throughout the delivery of the program, they had a important influence on the manner in which the the program was delivered. Two of the trainers were interviewed individually and two of them were interviewed together. An interview guide (Appendix 3) was developed for the qualitative interviews with trainers.

4) **Credit officers of CFE:** For the interviews with the 6 credit officers of CFE, the objective was to obtain more information about WE in general in Tunisia, not exclusively the WE who participated in the LPWE. These interviews were conducted with CFE credit officers from the Tunis office who work with entrepreneurs (both women and men) from different neighborhoods in Tunis. Interviews with credit officers were conducted individually, and had a duration of approximately one hour in length for each meeting. No interview guide was developed for interviews with CFE credit officers. Rather interview themes and guidelines for questions tailored to this type of stakeholder were discussed with entire SEED research team in online meetings prior to field interviews.

5) **Key informants:** With these interviews, 6 key informants from the entrepreneurial ecosystem were interviewed to have a broader scope understanding of the challenges, barriers and opportunities faced by WE in Tunisia. These interviews were important to develop a better comprehension of the contextual aspects that influence WE in Tunisia. Four interviews were conducted individually, and one was conducted with two key informants, with a duration of approximately one hour for each meeting. Some of the key informants were contacts of the partners involved in the project, others were cold-called due to their reputation in the Tunisian entreprepreneurial ecosystem. The key informants interviewed included: 2 prominent women

entrepreneurs from the Tunisian entrepreneurial ecosystem (not participants of the training program); 1 representative of an entrepreneurship support organization focused on social businesses in Tunisia; 1 representative of an influencial state funded civil society union focused on supporting women's rights; 1 key informant with important previous implication in civil society unions; and 1 key informant with experience in directing state level financial services. Multiple interview guides (Appendix 4) were developed for the qualitative interviews with key informants adapted to the different profiles of the interviewees.

A rigorous process of transcription and translation of the 46 interviews was completed in order to produce the final documents which could be used for qualitative data analysis. Firstly, interviews were transcribed verbatim by native (or high proficiency) speakers of the original language(s) of the interviews (i.e., interviews in a combination of English, French and Tunisian Arabic, were transcribed by native Tunisian Arabic speakers, with high proficiency in English and French). For a portion of the interviews, the software Happy Scribe was used to assist in the transcription process.

Secondly, the transcriptions in the original language(s) were translated to English (if the original language was not English). In some cases, the software DeepL was used to assist in the translation process. It is important to note that translations to English were not done in a verbatim manner; instead, substantial attention was taken in the translation process to ensure that the sense of the phrases from the original language were taken into consideration. Therefore, it was imperative to work with native Tunisian Arabic speakers during the entire process to capture the intended meaning of the phrases from interviews.

Thirdly, the English translations were verified using a back-translation method to the original language (by native speakers), in order to confirm the validity of the English translations.

The final documents produced, which were validated documents in English of all 46 semi-structured interviews, consisted of the primary data sources used for the data set of this dissertation.

Observation

Observation data was obtained through primary data collection from the field experiment in Tunisia through observations of the behaviours and practices of the different stakeholders and entities involved in the SEED-Tunisia research project. A total of 65 items of observation data were recorded and stored in the form of text, audio, video, and other raw formats.

Archival and historical sources

Secondary data was amassed for this dissertation through an extensive review of archival and historical sources, whereby a total of 77 archival and historical secondary data items were collected. This data existed prior to the initiation of the current research project and was available through archives and other repositories such as published literature sources, documents and records, visual artifacts, and other materials. This secondary data collected pertained to the evolution of the feminist discourse in Tunisia.

Data Analysis

The primary interview data used comprised 46 transcripts of the written qualitative interviews. Data was analysed using ATLAS.ti, a computer package to assist in coding, searching, comparing, and managing textual data. ATLAS.ti is used to organize the information of each of the interviews and extract the analysis inputs. The process of data analysis followed inductive and deductive approaches to make themes emerge using coding of the data set (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Gioia et al., 2013). The analysis is based on a discourse analysis from the partipants of the sample. To understand topics less explicitly stated by the interviewees, the dialogues were analyzed through implicit analysis of quotations. Data analysis involved searching data, description and comparison of themes, categorizing core components of the main concepts identified, examining the relationships between these components, and developing an empirical model. This approach is well-suited for the present case study. The objective was to develop a conceptual framework that exposes evidence of historical factors having contributed to feminist discourse in Tunisia, performative elements mobilized by CFE, evidence of changes in empowerment among the WE, and other pertinent information relating to women's entrepreneurship in Tunisia.

The analysis of the present case study is divided into two parts in the Results: Part 1 and Part 2.

For Part 1 of the Results, data from secondary archival and historical sources is used to present the main historical phases (8 phases) in which we see the evolution of feminist discourse in Tunisia. In Part 1, exerpts from the primary data collected in qualitative interviews is used to substantiate the main historical phases outlined through the secondary sources.

For Part 2 of the Results, the performative elements (6 elements) in which we observe the mobilization of the feminist approach by CFE in the co-development and delivery of the LPWE training program are presented. This data is shown through primary observation data collected throughout the project in the form of field notes (in written documents and

audio notes). For example, at the end of each day during Phase 4, meetings with the research team were conducted to discuss observations and reflect about the day of qualitative interviews. The primary interview data collected in qualitative interviews is used to corroborate the performative elements mobilized. Additionally, in Part 2 of the Results, primary data from qualitative interviews is presented for each performative element that demonstrate evidence of empowerment among the WE who completed the LPWE training program.

Criteria for quality in qualitative research

Over the years, various criteria have become important in the development and consolidation of qualitative research to ensure the creation of a trustworthy study that meets standards of quality and rigor. To this end, Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

Credibility, also known as 'internal validity', is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Accordingly, multiple stategies were used to ensure the qualitative approach was as credible and suitable as possible (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

First, we adopted research methods well established in qualitative investigation in the field of study (Shenton, 2004). For example, in the preparation of interview guides and questions for different stakeholders, the line of questioning pursued was developed from those that have been successfully utilised in previous comparable projects (Shenton, 2004).

Secondly, triangulation was used to increase the accurateness of our results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Triangulation involved the use of multiple data sources to develop a comprenhensive understanding of the phenomena (Carter, 1969; Shenton, 2004). For example, we used interviews, observation (such as field notes), and secondary archival data (such as websites and journal articles), to verify multiple details (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of different data sources permitted to compensate for their individual limitations (Shenton, 2004).

Thirdly, we used strategies to ensure honesty of informants when contributing data (Shenton, 2004) as all stakeholders interviewed were given opportunities to refuse to participate in the project. This was done so as to ensure that the data collection sessions involved only those who were genuinely willing to take part and prepared to offer data freely (Shenton, 2004).

Fourthly, frequent debriefing sessions between the SEED research team were conducted which supported confidence in accurately recording the phenomena of the study (Shenton, 2004). Through discussion, the vision of the researchers involved was widened as others brought different experiences and perceptions (Shenton, 2004).

Fiftly, we adopted behaviors and attitudes to maximize our credibility as researchers with participants (Shenton, 2004). According to Patton (1990), the credibility of the researcher is particularly important in qualitative research as it is the person who is the principal instrument of data collection and analysis (Patton, 1990). The behaviours and attitude adopted by the researchers for this study included: being adaptive, empathetic (Doucouré, 2021), open (Patton, 2015), honest (Kvale, 1996), and thorough during interviews (Patton, 2015).

Sixly, "prolonged engagement" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), or the development of an early familiarity with the culture of participating organizations, is recommended before the first data collection dialogues take place (Shenton, 2004). In other words, it is recommended to have a prolonged engagement between the researchers and the other partners involved to establish a relationship of trust between the parties (Shenton, 2004). In the context of this study, the prolonged engagement between the participating organizations was developed several months prior to the first data collection dialogues.

Transferability

The second criteria for quality is transferability, also known as 'external validity' (Shenton, 2004) which concerns the aspect of applicability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). External validity examines whether the findings of a study can be generalized to other contexts by extracting transferable concepts and principles (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to address a larger audience (Gioia et al., 2013). Although it is impossible to guarantee that the results of a qualitative study are directly applicable to other populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), it may be possible to reveal the transferability of realities (Shenton, 2004).

A detailed 'thick description' of the study, and an amount of information related to the context in which the study was conducted, was provided which allows a potential reader interested in transferability to have the information necessary to do so in their own setting (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Likewise, as proposed by Shenton (2004), we provided the following eight elements of information in our methodology: the number of participants involved in the fieldwork, the number of organizations taking part in the study and where they are based, any restrictions on the type of people who provided data, the data collection methods that were employed, the number and length of data collection sessions, and the time period during which the data was collected (Shenton, 2004). As proposed by Korstjens and Moser (2018), we also

provided descriptive data such as the context in which the research was carried out and excerpts from the interview guides (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Dependability

The third criteria for quality provided by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is dependability which includes the aspect of consistency of data over similar conditions (Cope, 1969; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Here, in addressing the issue of reliability, the objective is to use techniques to show that, if the work were repeated, in the same context, with the same methods and the same participants, similar results would be obtained (Shenton, 2004). For this, the process within the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work (Shenton, 2004).

In order to maximize dependability and allow for replication of our research, three sections have been detailed: research design, data collection, and data analysis.

Confirmability

Also known as 'objectivity' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004), the fourth and final quality criterion is confirmability. According to Shenton (2004), the concept of confirmability is the qualitative researcher's comparable concern to objectivity (Shenton, 2004).) A key principle for confirmability is the extent to which the investigator admits his or her own predispositions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Indeed, certain "steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher" (Shenton, 2004). For this, detailed methodological description allows the reader to determine how far the data and constructs emerging from it may be accepted (Shenton, 2004).

To reduce researcher bias in this study, we used three techniques. We triangulated the data, described the methodology in detail, and used the collective judgment of the entire research team (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). This combination of techniques allowed us to strengthen the confirmability of our study.

A summary of the criteria for quality for the qualitative research approach used in this case study is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 : Summary of criteria for quality implemented for the qualitative research approach

Credibility	• Adoption of research methods well established in qualitative investigation. • Triangulation of data to increase the accurateness of results (comparison between interviews, observation, field notes, journal articles, websites). • Strategies to ensure honesty in informants when contributing data (i.e., all stakeholders were given opportunities to refuse to participate in the project). • Frequent debriefing sessions between the research team to promote confidence in accurately recording the phenomena of interest. • Adoption of behaviors and attitudes to maximize credibility of researchers with participants (such as: being adaptive, empathetic, open, honest, and thorough). • 'Prolonged engagement': development of an early familiarity with the participating organizations several months prior to the first data collection dialogues.
Transferability	• A detailed 'thick description' of the study, and information related to the context in which the study was conducted, including: number of participants involved, number of organizations in the study and where they are based, any restrictions on the type of people who provided data, data collection methods employed, number and length of data collection sessions, and time period during which the data was collected. • Descriptive data (e.g.: the context in which the research was carried out) and excerpts from the interview guides.
Dependability	• Detailed description of the methodology: research design, data collection, and data analysis.
Confirmability	• Triangulation of data. • Detailed description of the methodology. • Use of collective judgment of the research team.

(Sources: (Carter, 1969; Cope, 1969; Doucouré, 2021; Gioia et al., 2013; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Kvale, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990, 2015; Shenton, 2004)

Having explained the practices used to achieve the four criteria of quality, this chapter concludes with addressing research ethics.

Research Ethics

To conclude the Materials and Methods section, we would like to explain the particular attention to the research ethics and ethical codes that were applied throughout the qualitative process. As Punch (2013) explains, "social science researchers need to be alert to the various constraints around their research and to the ethical implications of any decisions they make. […] For researchers, it is important not just to achieve technical compliance (thus ethical 'approval' or 'clearance') of their projects with ethical codes and other procedural requirements, as stipulated in checklists, guidebooks, and forms, but also to develop their personal understanding of ethical principles and contexts, their commitment to ethical research, and the ability to act wisely in ethically complex situations" (Punch, 2013).

Because ethical issues can arise at any point of a study (Creswell, 2009), ethical codes were applied at each stage of the SEED-Tunisia project: at its inception, during data collection, during analysis, and when sharing results. Thus, ethical complications were, as much as possible, anticipated and addressed at several points, from the creation of the research plan to the sharing of results, with the help of the Research Director and the Research Ethics Board of HEC Montréal.

Firstly, before beginning our study, we consulted HEC Montréal Code of Ethics and Policy on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans in order to create a research plan that met the requirements. Subsequently, the Research Ethics Board of HEC Montréal reviewed and approved our research plan (Appendix 5).

According to Punch (2013), the obligation of the investigator is "to respect each participant as a person capable of making an informed decision regarding participation in the research study" (Punch, 2013). Thus, during the selection of stakeholders for semi-structures interviews, we communicated our independence as researchers, in addition to explaining to participants that they were volunteers in the study and free to participate or not in the interview.

In the data collection stage, we informed participants that they could consent, or not, to the recording of the interview, as well as leave the interview at any time. Participants were also informed that they could retract their completed interview, or part of their interview, up to 48 hours after the interview was conducted. Likewise, during this stage, we offered to share the results with the participants who wished us to do so (Creswell, 2009).

Finally, when sharing the data, we respected Punch's (2013) guidelines which state: "the obligation of investigators [is] to safeguard the information entrusted to them by participants in the research" (Punch, 2013). Consequently, in order to respect the personal and professional lives of our interviwees, we have, among other things, anonymized their first and last names, the names of the participating companies, the distinctive terms of their industry or company, and respected all other requests for non-disclosure.

In sum, we consider that we have met the criteria of Punch (2013), Creswell (2009), and those of the Research Ethics Board of HEC Montréal, while having respected each of our interviwees throughout our qualitative process.

Presentation of results

In the next chapter, we will present the results of our study. We begin, with Part 1, by presenting the 8 main historical phases in which we see the evolution of feminist discourse in Tunisia. Subsequently, in Part 2, we will present the 6 performative elements mobilized by CFE during the co-design and delivery of the LPWE training program that demonstrate the program's feminist approach. Additionally, we will present evidence of empowerment documented among the women entrepreneurs who completed the training program for each performative element mobilized by CFE.

Chapter 3: Results

In this chapter, we present the results of this dissertation that are divided into two parts: Part 1 and Part 2.

Results – Part 1: **-Historical phases demonstrating the evolution of feminist discourse in Tunisia**	*Historical phases* (8 phases) that have contributed to shaping the feminist discourse in Tunisia. - These phases have a cultural impact that is similar for all the women entrepreneurs, and thus do not differ according to individual entrepreneurs.

Results – Part 2: **-Performative elements demonstrating the mobilization of the feminist approach by CFE through the co-development and delivery of the LPWE training program** **-Evidence of empowerment among the women entrepreneurs for each performative element**	*Performative elements* (6 elements) that demonstrate the mobilization of the feminist approach by CFE through the co-development and delivery of the LPWE training program, and evidence of empowerment among women entrepreneurs for each performative element: 1) Focus on women entrepreneurs; 2) Collaboration with Canadian partners; 3) Themes of the training program modules; 4) Collaboration with female scholars; 5) Operational and delivery team composed of women; 6) Feminist approach in communications and visual identity of program.

Results – Part 1: Historical phases demonstrating the evolution of feminist discourse in Tunisia

In Results – Part 1, the main historical phases (8 phases) in which we see feminist discourse evolving in Tunisia are presented. These phases are presented using historical

and archival data, and corroborated by primary data collected from the qualitative interviews.

In Table 4, we present the 8 main historical phases in which we see the evolution of feminist discourse in Tunisia, showing the historical phase, the time frame, and the important figures for each phase. The subsequent sections following the table provide explanations that delve into each historical phase in detail. The sections incorporate evidence obtained from secondary archival and historical data, as well as primary data collected from qualitative interviews. The explanatory sections highlight the phase's period, main historical figures involved, and their actions that led to the realization of that particular phase.

Table 4: Chronology of historical phases in which feminist discourse evolved in Tunisia

	Historical phase	**Time frame**	**Important figures**
1.	Matriarchal culture of the Imazighen ('Berbers')	10 000 BC – 1 300 AD	• Kahina (Kahena; Keyhna; Dihya; Dhabba Kahena; Dahia-Kahena; Damya): Berber queen and military leader (died 702 AD).
2.	Founding of Carthage by Didon Elyssa	879 BC – 759 BC	• Didon Elyssa (Didon Elissa; Didon; Dido; Elyssa; Elissa; Alissa; Elishat): Founder and first Queen of Carthage.
3.	The rise of feminism and women's social and political implication	1900s – 1940s	• Early Tunisian women's rights activists: Bchira Ben Mrad; Manoubia Al-Wartani; Habiba Al-Minshari. • Tahar Haddad: Scholar and writer.
4.	Women's emancipation through the leadership of Habib Bourguiba	1935 – 1987	• Habib Bourguiba: Lawyer, nationalist, statesman, and first President of Tunisia (1957-1987). • Tahar Haddad: Scholar and writer.
5.	1987 Coup d'état and dictatorship of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali	1987 – 2011	• Zine El Abidine Ben Ali: Second President of Tunisia (1987-2011). • Leila Trabelsi: Wife of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.
6.	2011 Jasmine Revolution and the role of Tunisian women in the Arab Spring	2010 – 2011	• Mohamed Bouazizi: Street vendor. • Tunisian women involved in Jasmine Revolution: Lina Ben Mhenni; Raja Bin Salama; Saida Sadouni.

7.	A decade of women's resistance against Ennahda	2011 – 2021	• Rached Ghannouchi: President of Ennahda • Beji Caid Essebsi: Tunisia's first democratically elected President.
8.	The impact of Covid-19, the rise of authoritarianism under Kais Saied, and the appointment of Najla Bouden	2020/2021 – present	• Kais Saied: President of Tunisia (current). • Najla Bouden: Prime Minister of Tunisia (current).

1. Matriarchal culture of the Imazighen ('Berbers')

Time frame: 10 000 BC – 1 300 AD - The Imazighen (or Amazigh), commonly known as 'Berbers' in North Africa and 'Tuareg' in the Sahara and the Sahel, are the indigenous inhabitants of the region, their territory spanning accross Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania, as well as Siwa Oasis in Egypt, and parts of Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and the Canary Islands (Frawsen, 2003). The word 'Amazighité' (i.e., Berberism) is used to sum the qualities that Amazigh peoples share: speaking the Tamazight language, revering the national homeland (Tamazgha), and honouring the Amazigh people residing in the region (Frawsen, 2003).

Throughout their history, "women have played a vital role in the development of Amazigh society" (Frawsen, 2003). According to Becker (2009), the "Amazigh idealization of women is linked to the idea that prior to the arrival of the Arabs, Amazigh were largely matriarchal and the imposition of Islam resulted in female oppression. These beliefs are largely linked to popular accounts of Tuareg gender roles, as the Tuareg are believed to be the least Arabized of all the Imazighen" (Becker, 2009). This viewpoint is supported by Frawsen (2003) who stated that "pre-islamic desert Amazigh society has been described as almost entirely matriarchal in nature" (Frawsen, 2003). Amazigh women are thought to be the fabled Amazon female warriors recorded by Diodorus Siculus, who reported that they "led their men to war, mutilated their enemies, and hennaed cowardly men" (Frawsen, 2003). The matriarchal nature of the Imazighen culture was supported in the qualitative interviews:

> *"1400 years ago, a matriarchal society […] changed towards a patriarchal society. […] When Islam came, it was grafted onto an existing […] rather emancipated woman compared to the whole region." -INT106- (DAAM)*

Since the 13th century, most Imazighen "have professed the Islamic faith and Islam has penetrated deeply into their collective psyches" (Frawsen, 2003). Indeed, the territorial expansion of Muslims during the medieval period resulted in the spread of Islam and the Qur'an across North Africa (Tilmatine, 2015). According to Frawsen (2003), "women

played a very important role in Amazigh societies throughout the various phases of Amazigh subjugation" as there were "female rulers", "holy women" and "queens during the period of Islamization of North Africa" (Frawsen, 2003). Not only the Amazigh themselves, but also the conquering peoples of the region were "familiar with the tradition of strong female leadership role models" (Frawsen, 2003). In numerous qualitative interviews, it was confirmed that Tunisian women are "strong women" (INT002 - Entrepreneur) and that they are descendants of powerful female leaders who have been influencial in shaping the history of the country. As affirmed in the interview data:

> *"Historically, [the Tunisian woman] is quite emancipated compared to women in the region. In our ancient history, there were women who governed, who were queens in action and in operations, even women army leaders. […] Even during the whole history of Tunisia, there are women who have marked history."-INT106- (DAAM)*

Queen Dihya, also known as the Kahina (Kahena; Keyhna; Dihya; Dhabba Kahena; Dahia-Kahena; Damya), is widely recognized as one of the most celebrated Berber icons of the era for leading the resistance against Arab Muslim conquerors towards the close of the seventh century (Gray, 2013; Maddy-Weitzman, 2012). She was "a female Amazigh leader [who] put up a fierce resistance to the Arab conquerors of her time" (Frawsen, 2003). During the qualitative interviews, this figure was identified as one of the prominent female figures who made significant contributions to the history of Tunisia. For example, as stated by a key informant:

> *"Many historic figures are women warriors. Keyhna, for instance, was a warrior. Keyhna was really someone who won a lot of wars. […]You do have a lot of symbols of women […] that are very strong." -INT117- (Key informant 5)*

More specifically, the Kahina was acknowledged as the "Veiled Queen" by the Jerawa tribe of the Aures Mountains (Hendrickx, 2013), from where she supposedly hailed, and was "recognised as the most effective […] of the feminine enemies of Islamic expansionism in North Africa" (Frawsen, 2003). The fact that the Kahina was a queen (or, at the very least, a 'chief') of a Berber tribe and was regarded as a 'prophetess' is widely accepted (Hendrickx, 2013). By 682 AD, during the Islamic invasion of North Africa, the "legendary female leader […] and ruler of the Amazighs and Mauritanians, rallied and united her diverse subject people. Her forces challenged Arab/Islamic invaders […] and she was given credit for successfully preventing Islam's southward spread into Sudan" (Frawsen, 2003). The Kahina persevered in her resistance against the Arab/Islamic invasion until she was killed in battle in 702 AD (Frawsen, 2003; Hannoum, 1997).

The matriarchal culture of the Berbers, as well as the influence of the historic figure the Kahina, are understood to be relevant aspects that have contributed to shaping the feminist discourse in Tunisia. For feminists, the Kahina became the emblem of resistance to the paternalism of Islam (Colla, 2003) and she is still gratefully recognised as the 'Ancestral

Queen Mother' by the Amazigh people (Frawsen, 2003). The subsequent section describes another historical female figure who significantly impacted the evolution of feminist discourse in Tunisia: Didon Elyssa.

2. Founding of Carthage by Didon Elyssa

Time frame: 879 BC – 759 BC - Carthage, which is situated at a distance of 16 kilometers from the Tunisian capital city of Tunis, held significant importance in the history of North Africa due to its advantageous geographical and military location that facilitated easy exchanges with both the western and eastern world (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). Didon Elyssa, a Phoenician princess hailing from Tyre (present-day Lebanon), founded Carthage in 814 BC and went on to become its first queen (Frawsen, 2003; Odgers, 1925; Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). In the literature, it is possible to find references to this historical figure under multiple appellations such as Didon Elyssa, Didon Elissa, Didon, Dido, Elyssa, Elissa, Alissa, Elishat. As mentioned in the qualitative interviews:

> *"Going back in history, Carthage was built by a woman, […] founded by a woman. […] This is history." -INT114 (Trainer 1)*

According to archival records, following the demise of Mutgo, the Tyrian king and father of Dido, the people of Tyre entrusted the rule to his son, Pymalion, while Dido married her uncle, Acerbas (Odgers, 1925). Some time later, Elyssa's brother Pymalion, who was the king of Tyre, murdered Acerbas in order to seize his wealth (Friha, 2011). Following this, Elyssa fled to Africa and received the name Dido from her wanderings (Odgers, 1925). Elyssa had covertly enlisted some of her brother's servants, supporters, and discontented Tyrian nobles, who had then sailed away with her secretly (Friha, 2011; Odgers, 1925).

After Didon Elyssa arrived in Africa, there is the legendary purchase of the land with the hide of the bull (Scheid & Svenbro, 1985). The famous classical tale recounts how Dido seized control of the Byrsa hill overlooking the bay by fooling the native inhabitants into granting her a parcel of land equal in size to that covered by an ox hide (*bursa* in Greek) (Odgers, 1925). According to the renowned legend, Dido managed to cut the ox hide into one long strip to measure a much more sizeable area than her neighbors preferred (Gransden & Harrison, 2004). Dido bought the amount of land *"quantum possent circumdare tergo"* (meaning "as much as they could surround with a bull's hide") (Odgers, 1925); the place was called Byrsa (the hide of a bull), and as the colony prospered and grew, the town of Carthage was built (Scheid & Svenbro, 1985) This story was substantiated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"Carthage, the city of Tunisia […] was acquired by a woman. Her name is Alissa. And Alissa was very smart and [she] was the one who really […] aquired Carthage. So even in our history, it is often you see a lot of women that are inspiring." -INT117- (Key informant 5)*

According to many sources, this story is celebrated because it tells of the insight and cunning of Princess Elyssa of Tyre who came to the shores of North Africa to found a new city (Friha, 2011; Odgers, 1925; Scheid & Svenbro, 1985). Didon Elyssa became the first queen on Carthage and is recognized as an intelligent and shrewd leader who successfully defended Carthage against the forces of her brother who eventually sought to unseat her (Frawsen, 2003). In time, her people gained possession of practically the whole of Africa (Odgers, 1925). From the power they acquired, they raised a city (Carthage) to rival Rome and waged three great wars again the Roman empire (Bono, 2006; Odgers, 1925).

The founding of Carthage by Didon Elyssa, and the significance of this figure on feminist discourse in Tunisia, was referenced several times during the qualitative interviews. For instance, it was stated by one of the program trainers:

> *"[To understand the influences on the women entrepreneurs] I would go back more to the history of Tunisia, the Tunisian woman since all times. Since Queen Dido. […] Since the Carthaginian civilization in Tunisia, the woman always had her place and I want to say her leadership. The Tunisian woman is a very open woman, as, as Tunisia is geographically positioned on the Mediterranean. There is a certain openness, a culture of openness. So, I think that since all times, the Tunisian woman has marked the history. Eventually, the queen Dido." -INT116- (Trainer 4)*

As affirmed in the archival data, "as long as Carthage existed, Dido was worshipped there as a goddess" (Odgers, 1925).

3. The rise of feminism and women's social and political implication

Time frame: 1900s – 1940s - The roots of Tunisia's pioneering role in women's issues reach back to the beginning of the twentieth century (Marzouki, 1993). The women in Tunisia who launched the feminist movement showed great courage as society at that time was segregated into two distinct spheres: the domestic sphere for women and the public sphere for men (Arfaoui, 2007). Additionally, educational opportunities for women were limited to a fortunate minority who could afford private tutoring (Arfaoui, 2007). As noted by Arfaoui (2007), Tunisian women during this era faced both social isolation and the obligation to wear a veil.

According to feminist historian Ilhem Marzouki, it was in the 1920s that questions of the women's hijab first entered public debate (Marzouki, 1993). Tunisia had been under French rule since 1881 with the establishment of the French Protectorate, and the hijab was frequently criticized by the French as "unfair and a stumbling block in the way of social progress" (El-Sergany, 2009). The religious scholars at Al-Zaytuna University viewed their criticism of the hijab as an attack on Islam and actively sought to undermine the French public opinion (El-Sergany, 2009). This prompted some Tunisian women, many of whom later became the pioneer feminists of their generation, to align themselves

first to the nationalist cause, thus putting aside their feminist agenda (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). The nationalist movement presented a significant opportunity for women to engage in public life, and many seized it (Arfaoui, 2007).

Certain women, with the encouragement of their male relatives, established female branches of three major movements: nationalist, socialist, and religious (Arfaoui, 2007). These women were dependent on the support of their male relatives and thus refrained from pursuing any actions that could potentially be met with disapproval (Arfaoui, 2007). For example, one of the earliest feminists Bchira Ben Mrad was encouraged by her father to join in the struggle for independence and for women's liberation (Marzouki, 1993). This group of female (and male) activists used the hijab issue in their struggle for independence (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012).

In this period, a symposium titled 'Pro or Against the Feminist Movement' was organized by the secular cultural society Al-Taraqqui on January 14th, 1924 (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). During the symposium, Manoubia Al-Wartani, an early feminist with French cultural leanings, boldly took the stage unveiled (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). She advocated for the abandonment of the veil and fearlessly spoke out against the subordinate position of women in society (Arfaoui, 2007). Another symposium with the same title took place on January 8th, 1929 (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012) during which Habiba Al-Minshari delivered a speech entitled 'Muslim Women of the Future - For or Against the Veil' (El-Sergany, 2009). The unveiled Al-Minshari addressed the issue of Tunisian women's unequal treatment in terms of personal freedom and questioned its implications for the individual (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). As corroborated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"Before 1956, […] there were feminist movements and demands, and clear denunciations." - INT106- (DAAM)*

Another important historical figure of this phase was Tahar Haddad, a progressive Tunisian author, labor activist, reformer, and scholar of the Zitouna Great Mosque, who called for "freeing women from their traditional bonds" (Grami, 2008). Haddad's book entitled 'Our Women in Shari'a and Society', published in 1930, defended the concept of modernism and argued that there was a possibility of compatibility between Islam and modernity (Grami, 2008). He championed the liberation of women from restrictive customs and traditional beliefs that impeded their complete and active involvement in the public domain (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). Haddad also sought an end to polygamy and advocated for female access to education and employment outside the home (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). In addition, Haddad condemned any mistreatment of women and emphasized the crucial role of women in building a progressive and prosperous society (Grami, 2008).

Despite the ban of Haddad's book and the violent reaction of his colleagues from the religious institution Zitouna, he holds "an important position in Tunisian history as the inspiration for a new religious, social and political discourse that would influence development and assure success in those early decades" (Grami, 2008). Haddad's book sparked a discussion on the position of women in Tunisian society, laying the groundwork for subsequent women's movements (Daniele, 2014). This eventually led to the creation of the important first women's organization in 1936 (Grami, 2008), the Muslim Union of Tunisia's Women (Marzouki, 1993). Although Haddad's efforts eventually led him to self-imposed exile, his memory has long been identified as the first voice of liberation for a 'modern' Tunisia (Jelassi, 2007; Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012).

During this period, feminist dialogue gained prominence in Tunisian discourse, coinciding with discussions on the nationalist movement (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). Women's participation in the social and political spheres increased, reflecting a growing awareness of women's issues in Tunisia (Arfaoui, 2007). Moreover, according to Khedher (2017), many held the view that the subordination of women was a contributing factor to the socio-economic underdevelopment of Arab Muslim nations.

4. Women's emancipation through the leadership of Habib Bourguiba

Time frame: 1935 – 1987 - In 1935, the movement for women's rights was taken over by a young lawyer named Habib Bourguiba, and other supporters of the New Constitutional Liberal Party (also known as *Neo Destour*), who joined the larger national campaign against the French colonizers (Khedher, 2017). Bourguiba and his fellow *Neo Destour* members were part of an elite circle of emerging intellectuals who, owing to their humble origins, could relate to the general population, and their Western education allowed them to confront the French colonial power on its own terms (Khedher, 2017). Bourguiba's education and background helped him become a prominent leader and advocate for women's rights, as affirmed in the qualitative interviews:

> *"He [Bourguiba] studied law, he's a jurist, he's someone who went to France to study. He is a very intelligent person. […] He's a great talker. He has a lot of charisma and a lot of leadership. […] He was certainly a visionary. […] After his high school studies, he went to France for his university studies. That allowed him to see this European side as well. He was also married to a French woman." -INT116- (Trainer 4)*

From 1952 to 1956, Bourguiba led the Tunisian independence movement, which involved negotiations between France and the separatist movement (Silvera, 1958). Finally, on March 20, 1956, the Franco-Tunisian protocol was ratified, officially putting an end to 75 years of protectorate and conferring independence to Tunisia (Silvera, 1958).

Habib Bourguiba, who served as Tunisia's inaugural President from 1956 to 1987, was a major driving force behind the country's advancement and modernization, supporting that

“both men and women would be required to play an important role in its construction” (Grami, 2008). Throughout his 31-year term, Bourguiba championed gender parity and strove to create equal opportunities for women in all facets of society, frequently incorporating the arguments of Tahar Haddad's ‘Our Women in Shari'a and Society’ into his speeches (Grami, 2008).

In order to overcome the barriers to Tunisia's progress, including the enduring effects of colonialism, Bourguiba recognized that a shift in mindset was essential and thus instituted reforms in critical areas such as education, religion, and women's status (Khedher, 2017). Thus, in the wake of Tunisia’s independence, women enjoyed significant advancements almost immediately, thanks to their prominent role in the new nation’s politics, and perhaps most of all the visionary leadership of Habib Bourguiba (Grami, 2008). Bourguiba sought to dismantle the traditional religious establishment, which had long been the center of Islamic teaching and scholarship in the Maghreb, and proclaimed Tunisia to be “part of the Western world” (Wolf, 2017). This was supported in the qualitative interviews:

> *“Bourguiba changed people’s minds. And he is the one who modernized us. Westernized us, rather.” -INT106- (DAAM)*

For example, Bourguiba's stance on the veil worn by Tunisian women was emblematic of the nation's progress towards modernization and women's liberation (Marks, 2013). He saw the veil as a regressive symbol and called it an “odious rag,” urging women to remove it in the interest of national advancement (Marks, 2013). In a well-known act, he dramatically removed the headscarf from a young Tunisian woman, signifying her legal right to participate in public life (Williams, 2008). Bourguiba's advocacy for abandoning the veil prompted many women to do so (Arfaoui, 2007).

Despite ongoing efforts towards gender equality for several decades, it was only after Tunisia gained independence that Bourguiba introduced significant legal reforms through the groundbreaking Code of Personal Status (CPS) (Khedher, 2017). Tunisian women responded massively to this State feminism that was to transform their lives (Arfaoui, 2007). As indicated in the qualitative interviews:

> *“After independence, there was the Code of Personal Status which governs and gives the rights to women.” -INT106- (DAAM)*

The CPS was enacted just six months after Tunisia's independence on August 13, 1956 (Grami, 2008), and was widely viewed as a vital step towards the country's path to modernization (Khedher, 2017). A series of ten books make up the Code, with each book containing multiple articles that redefine the legal status of women and introduce a new set of laws for Tunisian family life (Sfeir, 1957). By granting women legal recognition, the CPS ensured that they were on equal footing with men in most family matters, thereby

securing additional rights for them (Khedher, 2017). The CPS was the first of its kind in the Arab-Muslim region, defining the rights and obligations of both genders in public interactions and private family matters such as marriage, divorce, and household management (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). Additionally, it ensured public education for all girls, granted women access to employment outside the home (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012), and addressed critical issues such as inheritance, alimony, and child custody (Khedher, 2017). The Code designated marriage and divorce as affairs of the state, established a minimum age for marriage, safeguarded wives from abuse by their husbands, prohibited forced marriages and unilateral divorce, granted equal divorce rights to both genders, and most notably, enforced the abolition of polygamy (Khedher, 2017). The CPS and its subsequent amendments gave Tunisian women a set of rights unparalleled in other Arab countries (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014). This was corroborated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"Tunisia is the first Arab Muslim country that does not allow polygamy. […] There are all these historical events that make that the Tunisian woman has always, is always compared to the Arab-Muslim woman." -INT116- (Trainer 4)*

The CPS was an example of top-down reform, as the Tunisian leadership in the 1950s made a political decision to implement it as a component of their broader state-building plan, which aimed to dismantle patriarchal networks, clans, tribal groups, and other forms of "kin-based solidarities" (Charrad, 2001). Although Islamic values influenced its creation, the CPS does not explicitly refer to Islam (Grami, 2008). The government aimed to establish a new era of Islamic interpretation that differed from the Islamic legal system observed in other Muslim nations (Sfeir, 1957). Bourguiba presented the newly drafted code as a 'fresh' return to the true spirit of Islam through the positive legal reforms of matters relating to personal status and women's rights (Khedher, 2017).

Convinced that the CPS was in advance of society, and aware of the resistance of people, Bourguiba decided to give many speeches to explain the reforms to Tunisians and to enforce their application (Grami, 2008). In these speeches, Bourguiba referred critically to "archaic" society, "retrograde" mentalities, and groups "hostile to change" (Grami, 2008). Enforcement of the reforms faced difficulties at times, particularly when they contradicted social convention and values (Grami, 2008). As specified in the qualitative interviews:

> *"[Bourguiba] knew what to say. He was a great orater and he was sincere in his patriotism, so he had quite a lot of confidence, because he was close to the people before announcing it [the CPS] and he went to all the villages to speak, to say it. And also, he made a gesture. He announced [the CPS] publicly in a big meeting where he invited women and the gesture he made the first time he [saw] his wife, he removed her veil and kissed her. […] He dared to kiss his wife, him in public, something that Arabs do not do." -INT106- (DAAM)*

Bourguiba's leadership during the 1950s and 60s facilitated the implementation of the social and political reforms that sidelined the religious establishment and modernized Tunisian society (Boulby, 1988). The new vision of society was widely disseminated and gradually adopted by the majority of the population (Grami, 2008). This is supported in the qualitative interviews:

> *"We had [a] rather imposing leader: Bourguiba. A very, very confirmed leader. We were lucky that Bourguiba was a feminist. […] And Bourguiba dared to [implement women's rights]. Tunisia [was] ready. Because you come to a society of men, you tell them: you will not longer have the right to have four wives, you will no longer have the right to repudiate your wives. Women will have the right to divorce, to ask for divorce. […] The one who beats his wife will go to jail. Women have the right to abortion. The woman had the right to refuse to have children. […] [It was accepted by the men in Tunisia because] there was a predisposition and also an adoration for Bourguiba." -INT106- (DAAM)*

In less than a year following the introduction of the CPS, Bourguiba played a significant role in granting women the right to vote in 1957, and subsequently, in 1959, women were able to seek office (Grami, 2008). As declared in the qualitative interviews:

> *"Tunisia is a country where women are quite strong. […] They have the possibility to vote before the French women." -INT117- (Key informant 5)*

Between 1956 and the mid-1970s, Tunisian women and girls increasingly embraced their new societal role (Arfaoui, 2007), as they pursued education and joined the workforce in large numbers, leading to a decline in birth rates and the emergence of a growing middle class (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). Education not only provided greater opportunities for women but also impacted their perception of themselves, their reproductive and sexual roles, and their expectations for social mobility (Grami, 2008). Moreover, Tunisia's ambitious family planning program was significant in reducing the fertility rate from 7.2 children per family in 1965 to 3.4 by 1991 (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). This was achieved through the liberalization of contraception in the mid-1960s and its legalization in 1973 (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). As indicated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"With the social status [of women] after independence, it helped and there were many advantages" -INT116- (Trainer 4)*

Overall, Tunisian women today cherish the rights gained through the Code, worry at the first indication that the rights may be curtailed in any way, and are prepared to fight to protect them (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014). However, despite the significant progress made in improving the status of Tunisian women and granting them various rights through the CPS, the issue of inheritance law remains a major challenge for women in Tunisia today. This subject was exposed in the qualitative interviews:

"There is just the law that no one has been able to put in place, or proposed: equality in inheritance. […] Inheritance means the boy gets twice the girl. And that's religious. […]. It's worse in the regions, especially in the interior. That's why women are poorer than men. It is the males who take everything, who take everything and give nothing to their sisters. Or even when they divide the land, they give them the dry land. […] The inheritance doesn't fit into [the property regime after marriage], [that's] earned after the wedding, after the contract is signed. […] The women, the wife, if her husband dies, she inherits 1/8. No, she has nothing. The law of inheritance is a catastrophe for the wife. The one eighth of her husband's estate if he dies, his parents inherit and she has the one eighth and the male son, the boy, the son rather: he inherits much more than her. Even if she is the one who made the patrimony if it is in the name of the husband." -INT106- (DAAM)

The process of state formation was also accompanied by a significant increase in feminist consciousness (Grami, 2008). This led to the emergence of new women's organizations that promoted equality of opportunity (Grami, 2008). The *Union Nationale de la Femme Tunisienne* (UNFT) played a particularly important role in this movement, while other women's organizations had less freedom to operate (Salzinger et al., 2022). As detailed in the qualitative interviews:

"Yes, it [UNFT] came the independence with Bourguiba. They worked with him especially on how to get women out for education, […] family planning, contraception. That's what UNFT [was] working on, education, especially because women don't go out. They [worked] on rights, teaching women their rights are, what their role is in social and economic development. It is that the woman should not just stay at home and work. She has to go out and do the political, and encourage her to do her electoral duties. That is, she must defend her rights. She, she must not be violated. It was the idea that the woman, she must be violated, she stays at home, she does not ask for the divorce. […] The UNFT has worked mainly on that. The independence of the woman with the independence of Tunisia. […] Social empowerment, economic empowerment, that's it." -INT118- (Key informant 6)

Tunisia's social revolution since the 1950s has made it a notable example for other Arab countries (Grami, 2008). According to Khedher (2017), the unique emancipation of Tunisian women in the Arab Muslim world can be attributed to a combination of historical, political, and social factors, including the country's "so-called" homogeneity, its distinct colonial experience, and above all, the modernization policy pursued by Bourguiba (Khedher, 2017). As corroborated in the qualitative interviews:

"Compared to other Arab countries, I think that we [Tunisians] are more autonomous, that we are more advanced, that we are more, we are looking for our rights. […] More open than other countries. […] It may be because of Bourguiba […] maybe it is because of him yes. […] Because he was open to France, he was open to French ideas. The woman must go out. The woman has to work, so that's really the case. A very French spirit. So it doesn't work with us anymore. We have a bit of a French spirit." -INT118- (Key informant 6)

Bourguiba's leadership and advocacy for women's rights were instrumental in transforming Tunisian society and serving as a model for other Arab countries. As stated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"Bourguiba is the father of the nation. […] He is the person who has put in place the rights and freedom for Tunisian women. […] He is the one who has modernized […] the re-boost, who has participated […] in the new modern Tunisia. […] He worked on two main aspects: education and health. This is at the level of the government and the freedom of Tunisian women. And today, […] this is what marks and this is what changed the deal compared to other Arab-Muslim countries. It is true that the status, […] the social status that was put in place just after independence in Tunisia and which has prohibited polygamy, which gives the same rights to education, etc. has made that today he has much recognition. […] This man has done a lot for the Tunisian woman" -INT116- (Trainer 4)*

Tunisians still commemorate Bourguiba's contributions as a feminist and advocate for women's rights to this day. This was supported in the qualitative interviews by multiple stakeholders:

> *"I am Bourguibiste , Bourguiba represents for me a big thing in my life despite the fact that I don't know him, [he] represents a very big thing. […] I love Bourguiba a lot. […] I love him because he did […] many things." -INT028- (Entrepreneur)*

> *"Bouguiba was the one who made the change, but we were, we still are, that's where the difference with Bourguiba happened. […] We don't go out, the woman doesn't know that she must work. […] We don't talk about culture, but wih Bourguiba, it has really changed. […] This is the evolution with him." -INT118- (Key informant 6)*

5. *1987 Coup d'état and dictatorship of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali*

Time frame: 1987 – 2011 - Due to illness, President Bourguiba's behavior became erratic and autocratic, ultimately leading to his removal from power on November 7th, 1987 (Moghadam, 2018). After the bloodless *coup d'état* that ended Bourguiba's long-standing leadership since the country's independence (Wolf, 2017), he was replaced by Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the then Prime Minister (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). Tunisia underwent significant changes on many levels after Ben Ali's ouster of his predecessor (Erdle, 2020). In particular, Ben Ali's regime undertook gender reform under the banner of state-feminism (Clark & Krichah, 2021).

The period of Ben Ali's rule in Tunisia, spanning from 1987 until 2011, was characterized by authoritarianism, corruption, and a lack of political freedoms (Cavatorta & Haugbølle, 2012). Despite this, Ben Ali did make efforts to promote women's rights, building on the work of Bourguiba, particularly in the areas of education and employment (Arfaoui & Moghadam, 2016). As affirmed in the qualitative interviews:

> *"Ben Ali […] worked well on the freedom of women. August 13 is a date, the national day of the woman. […] Especially the electoral duties, it was with him. He advanced. He did […] accentuate*

what Bourguiba did. [He changed] some things, for the independence of the woman, for the empowerment of the woman. It was with him too." -INT118- (Key informant 6)

For example, in 1956, when Tunisia gained independence from France, primary education was only accessible to a small percentage of children (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). However, by 2003, almost all girls and boys, about 98%, had access to primary education, partly due to the efforts of the Ben Ali government to increase access to education and eliminate gender disparities (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012).

Furthermore, Tunisia's government hosted the 2004 Arab League Summit in Tunis, and in an opening speech, Ben Ali called on the member states to "consider the promotion of the rights of Arab women as a fundamental axis of the process of development and modernization of arab societies" (Arfaoui & Moghadam, 2016). During Ben Ali's tenure, Tunisia enacted several laws aimed at promoting gender equality, including two significant laws in 1997 and 1998 that substantially improved women's rights regarding the patronymic name of natural or abandoned children and the joint estate regime of husband and wife (Grami, 2008). As upheld in the qualitative interviews:

"[The period of Ben Ali] strengthened the rights of women […] [with] the choice of marriage regimes, either community of property or separation of property. He also forbade marriage under the age of 17, and from the age of 17, with the authorization of the mother. The mother could also be the children's guardian […] who manages the property or makes legal decisions for her child. [Before that] the father did. [The mother] couldn't open a bank account in her son's or daughter's name before." -INT106- (DAAM)

Another crucial measure was the elimination of the notion of submission, which marked a significant departure from the previous system (Grami, 2008). Although Ben Ali did make attemps to advance women's rights, his regime's authoritarianism and lack of political freedoms often undermined these efforts (Cavatorta & Haugbølle, 2012). According to the qualitative interviews:

"[Ben Ali] is a patriot. He was someone who loved his country very much. You have to know he is a military man too. And during his 23 years of presidency, he kept giving more and more rights to women. Except […] because we have demonized the dictator side, we have demonized the other side. […] In terms of women's rights, on the contrary, he is someone who has always given more rights. Moreover, the Tunisian woman's day is August 13 and we knew that every year, he will give more rights to Tunisian women and he will give more space so that she can continue. He continued on the path of Bourguiba, but unfortunately, it was demonized. Moreover, for [an] anecdote, at certain times, men said: 'now, we will have no rights because Ben Ali gave everything to Tunisian women'." -INT116- (Trainer 4)

While the environment of state feminism helped to create favorable legal frameworks, social realities and cultural norms lagged behind (Arfaoui & Moghadam, 2016). Legal safeguards and structures were instituted to advance women's rights, however numerous Tunisian women continued to face important gender-based inequality and violence

(Arfaoui & Moghadam, 2016), particularly those from marginalized communities and rural areas (Cavatorta & Haugbølle, 2012). The political landscape in Tunisia under Ben Ali was complex and challenging for those seeking to express their political views (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014), and the regime failed to bring about substantial changes that would enable women to exercise their legal rights (Bellingreri, 2017).

Amidst the oppressive climate under the Ben Ali regime, independent social and feminist movements advocating for women's rights began to emerge during the 1990s and 2000s (Labidi, 2007). The relationship between feminists and the state was fraught with tension (Arfaoui & Moghadam, 2016), and women activists suffered censure and lacked freedom of expression (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014). In 1989, two autonomous women's organizations were established, the Democratic Association of Tunisian Women (ATFD) and the Association of Tunisian Women for Research and Development (AFTURD) (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). These groups criticized the state's approach to feminism, arguing that it was more focused on serving the government's interests than empowering women (Yacoubi, 2016). Despite their efforts to promote women's rights, raise awareness about women's issues, and advocate for legal and policy changes to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, these organizations faced significant challenges and restrictions in their work, including surveillance and harassment by Ben Ali's secret police (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014; Labidi, 2007).

Leila Trabelsi, the wife of former Tunisian President Ben Ali, was widely recognized as a dominant figure who wielded significant political power and had considerable influence over the country during her husband's reign (Schiller, 2011). She was accused of suppressing political opposition and free speech in Tunisia, with reports indicating that she directly funded compliant organizations for the state's interests in developing non-radical women's rights groups, thereby limiting the actions of non-governmental organizations due to tight state regulations (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014; Jebnoun, 2014). As substantiated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"Well, the civil society was very controlled. But that didn't prevent people from working, we could work in associations, providing support and so on, but you had to be careful not to […] go against the established regime. You always had to have good, good relations with the […] government. […] Because also, to do an action, everything was controlled." -INT107- (DAAM)*

Trabelsi went as far as taking credit for the advancement of women's rights, disregarding the efforts of other female advocates, including those from ATFD and AFTURD (Arfaoui, 2011). Trabelsi was also notorious for her lavish spending, luxurious lifestyle, and control over crucial sectors of the economy, such as tourism and real estate (Ibroscheva, 2013). Moreover, while her husband was in power, members of Trabelsi's family were blatantly enriching themselves and had direct or indirect control over important portions of the Tunisian economy, with no hesitation in engaging in criminal activities (Schiller, 2011).

During the 1980s and early 1990s, an Islamist movement emerged, taking the secular Tunisian population by surprise (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). The resurgence of the hijab in the public sphere was among the visible signs of a rise in conservative religious practices in Tunisia (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). While Tunisian feminists rejected the veil as a symbolic act of emancipation from religion and society in the early twentieth century, the growing popularity of the veil was viewed as a sign of resistance at the end of the century in Tunisia (Yacoubi, 2016). Women, after "tossing away their veils to the cactuses" started to appear in public wearing headscarves (Vincent, 2005), symbolizing their hostility toward the state and the Western liberalism it represented (Yacoubi, 2016).

According to Clark and Krichah (2021), state feminism under Ben Ali was used to combat Islamism. The objective was to reduce the significance and prominence of Islam in Tunisia, including public displays of religiosity like wearing the veil (Clark & Krichah, 2021). During Ben Ali's regime, the Islamist movement was severely repressed and persecuted, with the government regarding it as a menace to its power (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). For example, the Ennahda Party, which aimed to establish an Islamic state, was among the main Islamist groups in Tunisia during this period, and was banned by the Ben Ali regime in 1991, leading to the imprisonment of several of its leaders (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). The prohibition of Ennahda made a significant political statement, indicating that faith-based political parties were not welcome and had no place in Tunisian society (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012).

Despite facing repression and persecution, the Islamist movement in Tunisia continued to grow in popularity and gain momentum, particularly during the 1990s (Maddy-Weitzman, 2012). The repression of the Islamist movement under Ben Ali created an atmosphere of fear and distrust, with many Tunisians feeling that they were unable to express their political and religious beliefs freely (Wolf, 2017). This repression contributed to the discontent and opposition to the Ben Ali regime, which ultimately resulted in the popular uprising in Tunisia in late 2010 (Chomiak, 2011).

6. 2011 Jasmine Revolution and the role of Tunisian women in the Arab Spring

Time frame: 2010 – 2011 - The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi on December 17, 2010, in protest against the confiscation of his street vendor cart in Sidi Bouzid, served as a catalyst for Tunisian citizens to rise up against the autocratic regime of Ben Ali, which had long suppressed their personal freedoms (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). The incident sparked public outrage, causing protests that marked the most significant social and political unrest in Tunisia in thirty years (Ayari, 2015). The "Jasmine Revolution", which occurred in Tunisia from December 17, 2010 – January 14, 2011, resulted from a culmination of economic, social, and political factors that had built up under Ben Ali's regime (Chomiak, 2011). These factors included high rates of youth unemployment, economic inequality caused by inflation, corruption, a lack of political freedom, regional

disparities, and a repressive attitude towards oppositional or alternative political groups (Chomiak, 2011; Goldstone, 2011; Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). Despite the implementation of a harsh security crackdown, including the deployment of live rounds and arrests of demonstrators, Ben Ali and his family were forced to flee to Saudi Arabia on January 14, 2011 (Tamburini, 2022), effectively bringing an end to his 23-year reign (Cavatorta & Haugbølle, 2012). Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi was subsequently appointed as acting president of Tunisia (Tamburini, 2022).

The act of self-immolation by Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid had a profound impact, serving as an inspiration for uprisings throughout the MENA region (Tamburini, 2022), and marking the beginning of the "Arab Spring" in December 2010 (Campante & Chor, 2012). Protests against local authorities quickly spread, resulting in the ousting of dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014). In Tunisia, the Jasmine Revolution of 2011 presented the potential for an end to authoritarian governance for the first time since the country gained independence in 1956 (Cavatorta & Haugbølle, 2012).

Women, including Tunisians Lina Ben Mhenni, Raja Bin Salama, and Saida Sadouni, played a crucial role during the Arab Spring by expressing their discontent with authoritarian regimes and actively participating in protests (Gondorová, 2014). Women from various age groups, social classes, and ideological backgrounds in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya demonstrated the same level of readiness as men to participate in the anti-regime protests, voicing their discontentment with their governments' corruption and inefficiency (Johansson-Nogués, 2013). Despite facing violent efforts to suppress their protests, women demonstrated remarkable courage, especially considering the targeted attacks on their dignity and physical safety by security forces (Johansson-Nogués, 2013). The involvement of women during the Tunisian Jasmine Revolution was a peak of women's empowerment, cultivated by education and encouragement to engage in political, social, and economic matters during the regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali (Gondorová, 2014).

The emergence of a new form of civil society, which had been developing prior to the fall of the Ben Ali regime, but was fully realized during and after the Jasmine Revolution, is responsible for the dynamic nature of political discourse in Tunisia following the revolution (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014). Tunisian women, as a result of the Jasmine Revolution and other contributing factors, were expressing their needs and concerns with greater intensity and were eager to take a more active role in decision-making processes and leadership positions, demonstrating an increased political consciousness (Gondorová, 2014). The liberalization of registration for domestic and foreign organizations led to a doubling of the number of NGOs, resulting in greater diversity (Wolff, 2022). Several social and political organizations became active participants in the transitional process, and the participation of women activists was perhaps the clearest demonstration of this

(Daniele, 2014). The period following the Jasmine Revolution presented women activists with a novel environment of public discourse where they could openly articulate their perspectives for the first time (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). As stated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"And well since 2011, there was much more freedom and much more openness to make partnerships, associations and public ministry, public private. And there was no more this fear of being obliged to applaud the [Ben Ali] regime, to do an action, or to do a development activity and everything. […] There were […] more opportunities for development and for improving the […] living conditions of Tunisians." -INT107- (DAAM)*

However, the post-revolution era in Tunisia was also marked by a sense of impasse, confusion, fear, and disillusionment among its citizens (Daniele, 2014). After the regime's downfall in January 2011, political instability and social turmoil characterized the period that ensued (Saidi, 2014), making the transitional period arduous for many, as evidenced by the qualitative interviews:

> *"The Revolution had really negative impacts on my family. As I told you, my father used to be an agricultural engineer. He prays and works hard and he used to have a high salary. My mother is veiled but did not have any extremist religious background. In 1997, they gave my father a large agricultural land with olive trees and almond trees and all. The land was under his responsibility. After the Revolution, it was total chaos; the people who lived there got us out of the land and our home. An agricultural project worth thousands of dinars got destroyed. They destroyed the farm; they left us nothing. My father took us, 6 daughters, and we ran away.[…] Imagine how terrible it was for us to see our home, our farm and all the farm equipment destroyed before our eyes. […] That period has left a terrible impact. When I think of 2011, I don't think of the Revolution or happiness; we only got happy and excited at the beginning." -INT020- (Entrepreneur)*

The dramatic changes brought by the Jasmine Revolution presented new challenges to Tunisian society, and to women in particular (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). Despite decades of progress in women's rights and emancipation, most of these gains were now at risk (Daniele, 2014). The lifting of the ban on political parties and faith-based organizations in January 2011, coupled with the return of the exiled leaders of Ennahda to Tunis, allowed previously banned Islamic practices and movements to gain legitimacy and a more audible voice in public discourse (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012). After the fall of Ben Ali, the rise of Ennahda alongside the smaller and more conservative Salafi movement presented a stark contrast to Tunisia's long-standing reputation as a stronghold of secularism (Wolf, 2017). Feminists and NGOs expressed concerns about the growing conservative trend in Tunisia, fearing that women's legally protected right to actively participate in public and private life under the 1956 CPS could be jeopardized (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui, 2012).

After the regime's collapse in January 2011, preparations were swiftly made for National Constituent Assembly (NCA) elections scheduled for October of the same year (Charrad

& Zarrugh, 2014). The interim authorities, who took over following the government officials' departure from their posts, initiated a series of reforms to establish a 'road map' towards the elections (Arieff & Humud, 2014). In light of women's active participation in the protests as both organizers and demonstrators, gender equality became a key topic of discussion regarding women's participation in Tunisian politics post-Ben Ali (Beardsley, 2011). Although women were actively involved in demonstrations across the country, Ben Ali's ousting shifted the public discourse towards conversations about women's rights and their societal roles in Tunisia (Gondorová, 2014).

Initially, debates concerning the role of women in the new Tunisian state centered around their inclusion in politics through Tunisia's first elections (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014). In an effort to promote gender parity in political representation, an electoral law was implemented, mandating political parties to include women on their electoral lists (Dasgupta & Bangham, 2012). The law was a collective achievement by women's organizations like ATFD and AFTURD (d'Almeida, 2011). Despite the appreciation of women's participation in the revolution by all parties involved, the efforts to promote gender parity in the NCA were eventually thwarted by the election process, failing to realistically bring about equal representation of women in government (Gondorová, 2014). As supported in the qualitative interviews:

> *"[A] law that was passed after 2011 is parity in parliament, in the electoral lists. They voted a vertical parity and not a horizontal parity. […] Because if you have a political party that presents 24 lists in all the governorates, 24 electoral lists, then it is obliged to respect the vertical parity man/woman, man/woman, one by one. […] But from governorate to governorate it is not required. There can be in all the governorates the head of the list a male. It is not required to have 50 men and 50 women. That is what I call horizontal parity. So, it is true that there is vertical parity, but generally, it is the head of the list who wins, so it is the man. […] That is why there is not 50/50 in parliament and why there are more men than women. So, parity was just for show but in reality is is not parity because women are always given second place. And then, in the parties which are in the majority, like the Islamists and all the second women, they are mounted, all the women almost who are in the lists are the second ones, it is not the heads of list, who are in the Parliament. […] If they had imposed a horizontal parity we would have had more women." -INT106- (DAAM)*

In the October 2011 elections, the Tunisian political party Ennahda won the country's first free and fair elections (Grewal, 2020). Ennahda's win was significant, as it marked the first instance of a democratic political outcome resulting from the Arab Spring (Guazzone, 2013). After Ennahda's victory, its leaders initially demonstrated a firm commitment to safeguarding the pre-revolutionary rights of Tunisian women (Johansson-Nogués, 2013). Women's representation in the Constituent Assembly was seen as a positive development, with 61 out of 217 seats (27%) being secured by women (Johansson-Nogués, 2013). However, only three of the 41 ministers were women, and most political parties, including Ennahad, predominantly placed men at the top of their party lists (Johansson-Nogués, 2013).

7. *A decade of women's resistance against Ennahda*

Time frame: 2011 – 2021 - Since 2011, Tunisia has undergone significant changes in leadership through elections and has experienced lively debates within a diverse civil society, leading to the revision of foundational texts such as the state constitution (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014). The Ennahda Islamist Party, with Rached Ghannouchi at the helm, became a dominant political actor after their victory in the 2011 elections and served as the majority partner in successive coalition governments (Guazzone, 2013; Wolf, 2017). However, Ennahda's Islamic religious affiliation and past history raised concerns among secular Tunisians and foreign observers (Guazzone, 2013). The critical issue was whether Tunisia could maintain its democratic transition under a new Islamist-led government while addressing the socio-economic challenges that had instigated the revolution (Guazzone, 2013).

Following the 2011 elections, Ennahda became the most powerful force in the NCA, the legislative body responsible for developing Tunisia's new constitution (Scott, 2022). Ennahda led the coalition government, referred to as the "Troika", with a centrist party and a socialist party (Scott, 2022). However, Ennahda was unable to achieve its initial objective of establishing a new constitution and electoral laws within a one-year mandate (Ayari, 2015). Instead, Ennahda's discourse changed, and it became the antithesis of everything the government claimed to represent: modernisation, women's rights, stability, as well as Tunisia's supposedly 'reformist' tradition (Ayari, 2015; Wolf, 2017). Ennahda challenged prevailing secular, Arab nationalist, and socialist principles upheld by other parties, including advocating for a greater role for Islam in public life (Ayari, 2015).

The Troika coalition quickly became dysfunctional, failing to present a unified governmental approach to tackle the pressing security, economic, and political challenges faced by the nation (Boubekeur, 2018). In opposition to Ennahda, former interim prime minister Beji Caid Essebsi united secular parties under Nidaa Tounes in 2012 (Oztig, 2023). Nidaa Tounes consisted of a heterogeneous membership base 'without an explicit unifying call other than their fear of Islamism' and included former members of the Ben Ali regime, leftists, trade unionists, women's activists, and independents (Wolf, 2017).

Before October 2011, Ennahda showed sensitivity to the 1956 CPS and a willingness to operate within its framework (Sadiki, 2012). However, controversy arose regarding Article 28 of the first constitution draft in 2011, which characterized the roles of men and women as 'complementary within the family' (Sadiki, 2012). In fact, Ennahda suggested reconsidering some of the clauses of the Code that could be viewed as conflicting with Islamic principles (Daniele, 2014).

As a result of this political shift, Tunisian society engaged in extensive discussions on women's rights, including the possibility of embracing the principle of 'complementarity'

instead of ‘equality’ (Daniele, 2014). ‘Complimentarity’ means that women’s rights exist only in relation to men’s rights; in this circumstance, women would have lost their status of being full citizens (Daniele, 2014). Ennahda representatives and coalition partners debated intensely the role of religion, the substance of political and civil rights, and the role of women in the constitutional process (Oztig, 2023). Islamists put pressure on Ennahda to take a firmer stance, leading to fears among secularists that the party would eventually curtail freedoms and impose religious values on citizens (Oztig, 2023). The growing polarization between secularists and Islamists hindered the constitutional process, with Ennahda facing difficulties in satisfying its more extremist faction and appealing to the wider public (Gondorová, 2014). Opponents accused Ennahda of incompetence, greed for power, and double talk, and its inadequate performance in the coalition governments in areas such as the economy and security fell short of the population's post-revolutionary aspirations (Guazzone, 2013). As specified in the qualitative interviews:

> *“[In] the first two years, [Ennahda] realized that they could do it differently, gently. They tried to do it gently, but they couldn’t do it. Because, in addition to women, there are also men, who refuse to go back to the limitations of women’s rights.”-INT116- (Trainer 4)*

‘Women are complete, not complements!’ chanted Tunisian women in a September 2012 demonstration concerning the controversial article in the draft of the new Tunisian Constitution, which underwent intense debate for over a year (Ghacibeh, 2012). As stated in the qualitative interviews:

> *“It is thanks to the Tunisian woman that this country still holds. Because […] after the revolution, in 2011, the Islamist parties tried by all means to make, to take back the means on the rights of the woman.” -INT116- (Trainer 4)*

Whilst Ennahda became one of the biggest threats towards women’s lives in the transitional scenario, Tunisian women’s feminist and secular organizations remained vigilant, safeguarding their fundamental rights and freedoms (Daniele, 2014). As upheld in the qualitative interviews:

> *“Especially after the revolution, it became, a lot of associations. […] It is really the work of the associations to change everything to make the evolution. […] There is a big work with the associations.” -INT118- (Key informant 6)*

In Tunisia's burgeoning civil society, the “complementarity” clause became the focus of a heated public debate, and women's advocacy for reform ultimately led to the removal of the clause from the second and third drafts of the constitution (Daniele, 2014). As substantiated in the qualitative interviews:

> *“Under Ennahda, […] each time they tried to touch something with the regulation related to women, the society didn’t let them move. They wanted to change one of the first articles of our Constitution to*

say that women and men were complimentary. They nearly did. Everyone was outside, everyone, even men, to say we're not complimentary, we're equal. No change. And they had to step back". -INT117- (Key informant 5)

In 2014, after the consensus reached by secularists and Islamists, the constitution was approved by the Constituent Assembly (Oztig, 2023). The 2014 Tunisian constitution is a reflection of the people's will and echoes the Jasmine Revolution's calls for more democracy, transparency, accountability, and less corruption (Hitman, 2018). The role of women activists was seen as constituting an essential asset in the socio-political transformations during the post-revolutionary transition (Daniele, 2014). As indicated in the qualitative interviews:

"[Women] are looking for the law, […] it is more of a priority in Tunisia. […] Thanks to Bourguiba, […] we have the spirit to defend these rights. So that was the conflict with Ennahdha. [They wanted to take away women's rights] and it didn't work.." -INT118- (Key informant 6)

Ennahda's organizational and historical advantages decreased by the second election in 2014 due to criticism for delayed constitution drafting, high unemployment rates, contradictory discourse, and implementing an encroaching Islamizing agenda (McCarthy, 2018; Tamburini, 2022). As revealed in the qualitative interviews:

"Those who came after [Ben Ali], they did not know how to put in place mechanisms, a vision for the medium to long term. It was short term, no strategy." -INT107- (DAAM)

The political crisis worsened after the assassination of opposition leader Chokri Belaïd in February 2013 (McCarthy, 2018). This culminated in Ennahda's departure from the coalition government in January 2014 and the appointment of a technocratic interim government (Boubekeur, 2018) following months of street protests triggered by another assassination of an opposition politician, Mohamed Brahmi (McCarthy, 2018). As indicated in the qualitative interviews:

"With the elections of 2014, it was the woman, it was not the men, it was the women who gave this blow to the Islamist party in 2013, it was not the men at all. It was the women who were in the streets, it was the women who called for the vote, it was the women who voted, it was the women who said no. […] We felt danger of the Islamists, you know? And the Tunisian woman is a woman who is intangible on her assets, that is to say, 'don't touch my freedom, don't touch my assets, don't touch my life, don't touch anything'. […] There have been some very painful events in Tunisia. We had two political assassinations […] in 2013. In February and the second on July 25, the day of the Republic and […] it's 80% of the Tunisian society that rose up. […] It was the 25, then they were like […] over two million people who, that were out in the streets, that were protesting and over a million of women who were protesting against the Islamist party for the election in 2014. [...] So that was like very impactful 2013 period, 2014, because everyone was trying to get the Islamists out." -INT115- (Trainer 2)

Tunisia completed its transition to democracy with the second round of presidential elections on December 21, 2014 (Ayari, 2015). Nidaa Tounes won the 2014 parliamentary

elections, and Essebsi became Tunisia's first democratically elected president (Oztig, 2023). After the legislative elections, in which Nidaa Tounes won 85 seats and Ennahda 69, the two parties formed an alliance to ensure a stable governing majority (Boubekeur, 2018; Wolf, 2017). However, the Nidaa Tounes-Ennahda alliance was seen by some Islamists and secularists as an ideological betrayal (Marks, 2018). Despite representing opposing ends of the political spectrum, Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda formed a grand coalition government from 2015 to 2018 (Grewal, 2021; Oztig, 2023). During this period, Tunisian politicians were lauded for their willingness to compromise and reach agreement (Grewal, 2021). However, the emphasis on consensus within the coalition administration resulted in officials largely disregarding controversial yet vital demands such as transitional justice, security sector reform, and structural economic reforms (Grewal, 2021).

Tunisia's first democratically elected president, Beji Caid Essebsi, passed away in July 2019, triggering early presidential elections that were won by Kais Saied (Oztig, 2023; Tamburini, 2022). Saied, an expert on constitutional law, promised to build "a new Tunisia" while pledging to maintain the democratization process and uphold women's rights (Oztig, 2023).

In the 2019 elections, no political force managed to gain more than 20% of the votes, resulting in a fragmented legislature (Sebei & Fulco, 2022). Ennahda, the largest political party, controlled only 52 out of 217 seats (Steuer, 2022). After several unsuccessful attempts to form a government, Elyas Fakhfakh, a former minister in Troika, was appointed, but his coalition lacked a strong foundation (Sebei & Fulco, 2022). Although efforts were made by political parties to mitigate an imminent economic crisis, Covid-19 added an additional challenge to Fakhfakh's mandate (Sebei & Fulco, 2022). Corruption allegations against Fakhfakh resulted in calls for his resignation and heightened tension within the political scene (Sebei & Fulco, 2022). Hichem Mechichi, an independent political opponent who was strongly supported by Ennahda, then led the government from September 2020, but his cabinet struggled to pass bills and faced a looming fiscal crisis (Sebei & Fulco, 2022).

Thousands of strikes and sit-ins have taken place every year since 2011, showing people's disaffection for politics and the way democracy developed in Tunisia (Tamburini, 2022). The Tunisian public opinion, weakened by years of governmental inefficiency, political chaos, and corruption, blamed the Islamic party Ennahda to be solely responsible for the crisis (Tamburini, 2022). As mentioned in the qualitative interviews:

> *"The situation has become a bit complicated [in the last years], so the woman is looking for economic and social empowerment. Politically, it was with Ennahda, it was very complicated. It was a very difficult period […] it was really a disaster for Tunisia. […] Because before, it was just Ben Ali's family, that, there is this power, but after with Ennahdha it became everybody wants to have the power,*

[…] it's not concentrated on one family anymore, it became a lot of thieves, really, and who steal […] from the box of Tunisia, I see that it was really catastrophic with them." -INT118- (Key informant 6)

8. The impact of Covid-19, the rise of authoritarianism under Kais Saied, and the appointment of Najla Bouden

Time frame: 2020/2021 – present - Since the Arab Spring and the removal of former president Ben Ali, Tunisia has faced a tumultuous path towards achieving democratic stability (Ali, 2022). As revealed in the qualitative interviews:

> *"[Since the revolution] it isn't stable at all. […] There are people who have made plans and after a few months actually […] they have invested all their money, along with their families, all in this bankrupsy project. […] There are many causes […] covid […] politics […] above all, these are two main factors [...] A country that isn't stable at all." -INT110- (Credit officer)*

On March 11th, 2020, the World Health Organization officially declared the COVID-19 pandemic (Laffet et al., 2021). In response to this unprecedented health crisis and the rapid spread of the virus, each country implemented a unique policy that was influenced by various factors, including their level of development, socio-economic conditions, and political structure (Contreras & MEP, 2020). In Tunisia, the government declared a lockdown in March 2020, following the confirmation of horizontal transmission of COVID-19 (Sediri et al., 2020). This caused significant changes in the everyday life of Tunisians, such as travel restrictions, suspension of work and studies, and economic difficulties, turning the COVID-19 pandemic into a psychosocial crisis, in addition to a physical health concern (Sediri et al., 2020). As stated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"[The COVID period] was a difficult time. […] Especially with us, […] we work with restaurants, coffee shops, they're all closed, […] there are cases that are totally closed, […] it is very difficult. […] There are failures, abuses and even with us there are unpaid bills because of COVID." -INT110- (Credit officer)*

Tunisia's health system collapsed in 2021 due to the worst Covid-19 outbreak in Africa[6] (Radeck, 2022b). The country's management of the pandemic, including deficiencies in its vaccination strategy, brought to light long-standing issues (Radeck, 2022b).

In 2020, the global focus shifted from the health pandemic to addressing the worldwide economic crisis, which was accelerated by COVID-19 in Tunisia (Cherif et al., 2022; Oztig, 2023). The recession had an unprecedented impact on businesses' well-being and their ability to adapt to the crisis, leading to Tunisia's worst economic downturn since 1956 (Cherif et al., 2022; Oztig, 2023). Tunisia's socio-economic challenges were already compounded by the prolonged period of political instability and uncertainty following the

[6] As of 30 December 2021, Tunisia had lost 25,548 lives to COVID (Africa's worst death rate after South Africa, according to the World Health Organization data).

2011 revolution (Cherif et al., 2022). This situation had difficult consequences for many, as indicated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"Young leaders, young entrepreneurs are suffering a lot. There are a lot of projects, which are closing today, which are going out of business, because, quite simply, the tourism sector had been affected. Because, […] there are a lot of companies that are closing, so the reality of the economic situation is affecting everyone, women and men. […] And this is going to slow down investment enormously. So […] a woman […] is not going to invest today because the economic situation is very hard and very difficult in relation to what is happening in the country today. There is no visibility. We do not know where we are going. Politically at least, and certainly economically, it will follow. There was also the pandemic, which also hit a lot. So it is an accumulation, I would say, since 2019, it's an accumulation which makes it difficult." -INT116- (Trainer 4)*

The mishandling of the Covid-19 pandemic and economic decline in Tunisia caused a political crisis in July 2021, leading to widespread demonstrations calling for political reform (Ali, 2022; Radeck, 2022b). Ennahda, Tunisia's ruling party, faced growing disapproval due to allegations of conflicts of interest against its leader Ghannouchi and corruption charges against other party leaders (Sebei & Fulco, 2022; Wolf, 2021; Zayat, 2020). The institutional paralysis and Ennahda's alleged capitalization on the health crisis were widely criticized, with protesters targeting the party's offices and local headquarters (Sebei & Fulco, 2022). This escalated political tensions between President Kais Saied, Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi, and Parliament Speaker Rached Ghannouchi (Oztig, 2023).

Protests broke out nationwide on July 25, 2021, demanding the dissolution of Parliament and the dismissal of the government (Tamburini, 2022). The use of police violence to suppress the protests was seen as an escalation of the political and economic turmoil (Oztig, 2023). In response, President Saied declared a "state of exception" using Article 80 of the constitution, citing an "imminent danger threatening the integrity of the county and the country's security and independence" (Ridge, 2022). He froze parliamentary activities, revoked representatives' immunity, and dissolved the government led by Prime Minister Mechichi (Ridge, 2022; Tamburini, 2022).

President Saied's decision to assume all legislative and executive authority in Tunisia was politically risky, as democratic regression can lead to loss of support domestically and internationally (Ridge, 2022). The move shocked Western observers who believed Tunisia was transitioning towards democracy despite its socio-economic and political instability (Tamburini, 2022). Tunisia was seen as "different" due to Bourguiba's invention of "*Tunisianité*", which emphasized peaceful decolonization, Western-oriented diplomacy, middle-class centrality, secularism, and women's emancipation (Dakhlia, 2011; Hmed, 2016; Tamburini, 2022). While some feared complete authoritarianism, Saied's actions were supported by many outraged by the government's inaction during a disastrous economic crisis and a COVID-19 surge (Tamburini, 2022). Rather than a

complete authoritarian turn, Saied seemed to be promoting a liberal non-democratic structure (Ridge, 2022).

However, a few months later, the president abolished a body that monitored the constitutionality of laws (Oztig, 2023). The ensuing presidential decree 2021-117 on September 22, 2021, granted him legislative powers by decree, dismantling the 2014 Constitution, which was a fundamental outcome of the 2011 Jasmine Revolution (Tamburini, 2022).

Following the announcement of these decisions, President Saied appointed Najla Bouden as Tunisia's first female Prime Minister on September 29, 2021, despite not receiving parliamentary approval (Amar & McDowall, 2021; Ridge, 2022). Bouden is a prominent law professor and human rights activist who is recognized for her advocacy of gender equality and human rights in Tunisia (Ridge, 2022). According to the qualitative interviews:

> *"It is a very good thing [having a woman prime minister]. […] I was very happy [when they announced her election] because she is skillful, I am not minimizing the value of men, but she is skillful and trustworthy, there is a lot of things that women can achieve." -INT028- (Entrepreneur)*

In October 2021, Bouden formed a cabinet that included nine other women (Moghadam, 2022). As specified in the qualitative interviews:

> *"For women, it's the first time that a woman head of government had been appointed, and also that women take ministries of power. Because before they gave them two Ministries: the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Women and Family, but now, in Finance, it is a woman, and in the other very important ministries, it is women and there is almost a parity between men and women in government." -INT106- (DAAM)*

Najla Bouden is the first woman to serve as Prime Minister in the Arab world, but her powers were subordinated to the president, reducing her influence (Radeck, 2022a; Ridge, 2022). While President Saied framed Bouden's appointment as a move towards gender equality, some view his instrumentalization of women in Parliament as a potential threat to democracy (Ridge, 2022). According to the qualitative interviews:

> *"Work needs to be done. But see, in Parliament […] 50 percent are women, but I hate the way one of them said this, [that] describes [the situation]. Actually, it's almost humiliating to all of us women, but […] there was a guy who resigned from Ennahdha, he was on the radio and said, we don't have women in Parliament we have a button pusher. […] It insults us all. […] But then you think about this. I mean, [these women] accepted to do, to play the game. They don't realize they're hurting us all." -INT101- (Key informant 1)*

Saied has been steadily consolidating his authority in the country, with a series of autocratic measures that have included targeting the judiciary by removing judges and replacing the electoral commission (Radeck, 2022a). Despite his promise to address

political, economic, and Covid-related crises, recent developments suggest a negative outlook for the country, with potential authoritarianism on the rise (Radeck, 2022b). The president's governance by decree has not led to noticeable economic improvements or political stability, and the interdependent crises have arguably worsened (Radeck, 2022b). It appears that Saied aims to strengthen his one-man rule by dismantling democratic institutions, suppressing opposition and criticism, and centralizing power (Radeck, 2022a). As mentioned in the qualitative interviews:

> *"[The present situation] is too vague, it is vague with the president. […] Ennahdha is no longer there, but Saied is not clear. Unfortunately, it is not clear. […] [The appointment of a woman as Prime Minister] didn't change anything, unfortunately. […] If I compare the woman of Ben Ali and the woman today, unfortunately, this fanatic, no no, it's on paper, unfortunately." -INT118- (Key informant 6)*

Women's empowerment has been a key aspect of Tunisia's democratic transition since 2011, influenced by government-sponsored feminism and the Islamist/secularist divide (Wolff, 2022). Despite efforts to promote intersectionality and address factors like political and socioeconomic marginalization, traditional cultural norms, conservatism, racism, and socioeconomic inequalities continue to hinder progress (Wolff, 2022). According to the qualitative interviews:

> *"A lot of women are unseen women. Invisible women, are very difficult cases […] Widows, divorced, and they do all the work to support the families and their life is very tough. […] A lot of invisible women, but working so hard to raise their families and don't have time to even stop and thing and eat and enjoy life." -INT101- (Key informant 1)*

Challenges faced by vulnerable groups, particularly women, have been exposed as the Tunisian government's efforts to combat discrimination have been hindered by the socioeconomic crisis and fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic (Zsuzsanna, 2022). The pandemic has created new political and economic obstacles in Tunisia (Zsuzsanna, 2022), as stated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"We had the training in July [2021]. The Covid-19 pandemic was widespread then, and everthing was closed. We suffered financially. I faced many problems during the pandemic that devastated me then." -INT020- (Entrepreneur)*

Decision-makers had to reassess gender equality strategies during the pandemic, causing women's rights activists to withdraw from the public sphere (Zsuzsanna, 2022). Women faced challenges such as increased inequality in education and the labor market, with overrepresentation in the agricultural and domestic work sectors, as well as a surge in domestic violence due to socio-economic and political tensions (Zsuzsanna, 2022). Gender-based violence (GBV) emerged as the top concern for Tunisians regarding women's rights and equality, with other issues such as unequal opportunities and pay in the workplace, limited access to education, and inequitable property ownership and

inheritance rights lagging behind (Cherif et al., 2022). As identified in the qualitative interviews:

> *"Very few [women] have the courage to [fight back], but it also comes back to economics.[…] Can she free herself or not? […] Many are stuck you know. […] And if you divorce, will your brother accept you? Will your father accept you back? You don't just go live by yourself. […] In the capital, it is [more accepted] because its mix, people don't know each other and they come from everywhere […] but if you are in a [more rural area][…] and everybody knows everyone […] it's a conservative culture, then, you would want to go back live in with your father better. […] It's becoming a trend. […] This is why some divorce and they move to the capital […] and they try to make it work. […] Financials has become very difficult. […] Tunisia on paper, we have full rights […] but then society, you have to deal with society." -INT101- (Key informant 1)*

GBV not only has social implications but also political consequences, as it can discourage women from pursuing a career in politics (Cherif et al., 2022). While a significant majority of Tunisians (84%) believe that a woman and her family can gain higher social status by running for elective office, almost the same proportion (85%) believe that the female candidate is likely to face criticism, harassment, or verbal abuse from others in the community (Cherif et al., 2022). As corroborated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"It [must be] explained to women that we're not just there to fill this [space], […] we need to be there because of climate injustice, because of the pavement that is occupied by cafes, because of all those sports money that's going into football, because, in my city, […] the basketball fields for girls is the only activity for girls and women in my whole city. […] It breaks my heart every time I walk in because you walk in the soccer field and you walk in the girls [basketball courts] and you see the difference. They have no toilets, no place to change, the basket is broken, there's no lights at night. And the one one [soccer field] the green is perfect, the light, […] and I'm yelling and speaking […] to the members of our city council from Ennahdha […] and the other guys, they are almost threatening me, because we give them 60 000 […] to the soccer field, the football, and I beg for 10 000 for the girls and they don't even get it and at the end of the year, they say: no budget. And of course it frustrates me like hell and [these men] they are telling me no, it's a threat to your political career, if you don't defend football, it's better for you. […] In my last meeting, actually, I got really frustrated. […] We were setting up the budget for next year and they said no, we will not [write] what you said […] in the council meeting minutes. […] I said no no no, you write it. […] And then they said but it will threaten your political career, […] if people know that you don't want to support, you want to decrease the support for the soccer to give to the basketball, […] you might not be re-elected. […] They making it sound like they're making me a favor. [...] In my last municipal meeting, I was trying to defend, […] equal budgets for male and female sports […] and most of the people who were sitting in the meeting were elected. They were watching a ping pong game. They don't give a shit either way. […] With all their intentions, they don't mean to hurt anyone. And they, they are simple, nice people, but by watching with no opinion, they're doing evil. […] It's not because they're bad. They just decide to be nothing, […] and I think this, this is what makes our democracy very delicate." -INT101- (Key informant 1)*

Such forms of GBV can discourage some women from pursuing a career in politics (Cherif et al., 2022). According to the qualitative interviews:

"All the time, all the time [it is discouraging]. I can't tell you how many times I wanted to resign as a city councillor. Zillion times, every meeting, and then I say no. […] I want to achieve 100 things, I'm gonna achieve two. That's OK." -INT101- (Key informant 1)

In addition, over half (52%) of the respondents believe that a female candidate is likely to encounter familial issues (Cherif et al., 2022).

Moghadam (2016) highlighted that prioritizing women's needs in a democratic system demands social and economic changes from the government, and not merely the establishment of institutional frameworks and women's rights NGOs. The Covid-19 pandemic emphasized the significance of prioritizing women's requirements and redefining the future Tunisian woman in the face of new socioeconomic challenges (Zsuzsanna, 2022). As per the qualitative interviews:

"[The Tunisian woman is] trying to be independent today. Yes, I see that, that she tries to launch their own project, to do different trainings, whether it is in entrepreneurship, whether it is in the cultural field. Yes, I see that we have changed a little. The spirit of the woman. It has changed a lot. She seeks to launch their projects today, […] to make formations, yes. There is change yes, it is not like yesterday." -INT118- (Key informant 6)

Outcome of Results – Part 1

The 8 historical phases described in this section serve as a crucial foundation for entrepreneurship support organizations, such as CFE, to develop customized entrepreneurship and leadership training programs for WE in Tunisia. By examining the progression of feminist discourse throughout Tunisia's history, these phases provide a historical framework for creating and implementing a program that promotes women's empowerment and mobilizes feminist principles and approaches. As stated in the qualitative interviews:

"Already for the Tunisian woman, historically, she is quite emancipated compared to women in the region. In our ancient history, there were women who governed, who were queens in action and in operations, even women army leaders. That, historically […] in Tunisia, after, with the arrival of Islam, […] it remained and it was grafted to […] this emancipation of the woman. […] Even during the whole history of Tunisia, there are women who have […] marked history. And after independence, there was the Code of Personal Status which governs and gives rights to women. […] Yes and so we had a lot of achievements and the woman also proved herself. […] In the region, if you compare with […] the same culture, the countries of religious culture, you find the first woman doctor she is Tunisian, Arab Muslim. The first woman pilot, she is Tunisian. The first woman minister is Tunisian. We have always been pioneers in feminism and women's rights. […] It is the history of 3000 years, and 1400 years ago, of a matriarchal society, […] with Islam, […] changed towards a patriarchal society. And in Tunisia, […] we are a rather rich country culturally, all civilizations have passed through here. […] And so, there are many cultural aspects, from city to city, from region to region, although it's a small country. […] Among other things, yes, because of the woman, her role. Because when Islam came, it was grafted onto an existing one which was a rather emancipated woman compared to the whole region. So, although it imposed

religious laws that somewhat limited these freedoms. But many women have expressed as there have been many feminist movements. […] There was a predisposition [for women's emancipation]. -INT106- (DAAM)

For a significant period in its history, Tunisia, a state with a strong secular tradition in the MENA region, has showcased women's active participation and engagement in various domains. This historical context has provided a favorable platform for women and their allies, including the men involved in the development of the training program, to propose a project aimed at further improving the status of Tunisian women. By leveraging this rich history, CFE aimed to build upon the achievements of the past and empower women entrepreneurs through the LPWE training program, thereby contributing to the advancement of gender equality in Tunisia.

In the upcoming section, Results – Part 2, we will present the 6 performative elements that showcase CFE's mobilization of the feminist approach in the LPWE training program. Additionally, we will provide evidence of the empowerment of WE who completed the training program for each of these elements. It should be emphasized that the collaboration between CFE, DAAM, DID, and SEED research team, guided by the Global Affairs Canada policy, played a critical role in creating a program with the goal of promoting women's entrepreneurship and empowerment in Tunisia.

Results – Part 2: Performative elements demonstrating the mobilization of the feminist approach by CFE through the co-development and delivery of the LPWE training program, and evidence of empowerment among the women entrepreneurs for each performative element

The feminist approach to supporting women's entrepreneurship and empowerment requires a comprehensive examination of the root causes of gender inequality in entrepreneurship, as well as concrete steps to address these issues. This approach involves recognizing the systemic barriers and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Tunisia, such as cultural and societal norms, limited access to capital and markets, and a lack of support networks. To address these challenges, CFE and its partners recognized the need to take performative steps towards promoting gender equality in the entrepreneurship ecosystem in Tunisia.

In Part 2 of the Results – the performative elements (6 elements) in which we observe the mobilization of the feminist approach by CFE in the co-development and delivery of the LPWE training program are presented. This will be shown through primary observation data collected throughout the project in the form of field notes, with additional support

from qualitative interview data. Part 2 also provides primary data from the qualitative interviews for each performative element demonstrating the evidence of empowerment among the women entrepreneurs who took part in the LPWE training program.

Table 5: Performative elements demonstrating the mobilization of the feminist approach by CFE through the co-development and delivery of the LPWE training program

Performative elements mobilized demonstrating the feminist approach	Description of the performative elements (6 elements) that demonstrate the feminist approach mobilized by CFE through the co-development and delivery of the LPWE training program
1) Focus on women entrepreneurs	• CFE chose to exclusively focus on women entepreneurs for the co-development and delivery of the LPWE training program.
2) Collaboration with Canadian partners	• CFE worked in collaboration with Canadian entities for the co-development of the LPWE.
3) Themes of the training program modules	• In the co-development and delivery of the training program, a specific module was dedicated to women's leadership and empowerment, along with relevant examples in training materials.
4) Collaboration with female scholars	• The majority of the SEED research team that collaborated with CFE in the co-development of the LPWE were female scholars.
5) Operational and delivery team composed of women	• The operational team (CFE and DAAM) and the delivery team (Trainers) were exclusively composed of women.
6) Feminist approach in communications and visual identity of program	• Feminist approach employed in the communications and visual identity of the LPWE training program.

1. *Focus on women entrepreneurs*

CFE's mobilization of the feminist approach involved developing a customized support program intended specifically for women entrepreneurs in Tunisia. The program would be tailored to address their unique characteristics and needs, and provide them with valuable tools and resources to support their entrepreneurial projects.

The LPWE program was collaboratively developed by CFE, DAAM, DID, and SEED Network research team, guided by Global Affairs Canada policy. The goal of this initiative was to foster gender equality and women's empowerment in the entrepreneurship ecosystem by delivering customized entrepreneurship and leadership training to female entrepreneurs in Tunisia. Although CFE provides microfinance and entrepreneurship support services to entrepreneurs from various population segments who could have benefited from a tailor-made entrepreneurship and leadership training program, they opted to develop a program that would cater exclusively to women entrepreneurs in Tunisia. This decision exemplifies CFE's commitment to the feminist approach by specifically targeting WE. Furthermore, during the exploratory research phase (Phase 1) on the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Tunisia, no others programs were identified that provided the same type of support that was intended through the training program. By prioritizing WE, CFE sought to bridge the gender gap in entrepreneurship within Tunisia and create a more inclusive and fair ecosystem. As stated in the field notes:

> *"Providing training on soft skills would be crucial to enhance the abilities of female entrepreneurs. Additionally, conducting unconscious bias training is imperative. Moreover, since female entrepreneurs exhibit lower levels of confidence, there is a requirement for specialized training to address this issue." (Field notes, 2020-10-20)*

When creating the LPWE program, CFE and its partners considered the distinct caracteristics and obstacles that women entrepreneurs encounter in Tunisia.

Firstly, women from Tunisia are acknowledged in the MENA region for their outstanding performance in various women's indicators and their elevated education levels compared to other nations in the area. As evidenced in the field notes:

> *"Tunisia outperforms other regions in terms of women's indicators, and women in Tunisia have a higher level of education compared to anywhere else in MENA." (Field notes, 2020-10-20)*

The strength of Tunisian women is also well-known, as showed by their history of standing up for their rights and asserting their independence. As corroborated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"Generally, Tunisian women are well known for being strong compared to other Arab women. This is a general truth well agreed upon internationally and among other Arab countries. Tunisian women snatch respect if they are not given respect. They earn it thanks to their education and*

professionalism. […] That is why I am strong. It is because I am Tunisian." -INT018- (Entrepreneur)

Furthermore, Tunisian women are renowned for their boldness, courage in pursuing success, uniqueness in the Arab world, and their eagerness for growth. As declared in the qualitative interviews:

"The Tunisian woman has a lot of audacity. […] She has no fear of success. […] The Tunisian woman is not afraid to succeed. […] So especially, in the Arab world, Tunisian women are very particular… […] when I see that always, in the international spheres, there is always a Tunisian woman who succeeds. […] All Tunisian woman, even the one living in the rural area are always trying to be bigger." -INT114- (Trainer 1)

Moreover, the strong work ethic of Tunisian women is a key aspect of their reputation. As stated in the qualitative interviews:

"The Tunisian woman is a woman that is a hard worker." -INT107- (DAAM)

Finally, WE have distinctive qualities that make them stand out. As specified in the qualitative interviews:

"Women entrepreneurs in Tunisia are female kamikaze." *-INT106- (DAAM)*

Particularly, CFE recognized that WE typically ask for smaller loans than men, but are more likely to repay them on time. As indicated in the qualitative interviews:

"A lot of women have improved their turnover through funding. Like I said, there are women who are more concrete, results oriented actually. […] Yeah, so women pay back better. […] Even... women can be talked to; they are more flexible." -INT110- (Credit officer)

Conversely, WE in Tunisia encounter considerable obstacles resulting from formal and informal institutions that restrict their involvement in entrepreneurship. These institutions create discrimination in acquiring capital, markets, and networks, and expose women to the risk of gender-based harassment and violence. Furthermore, WE face other challenges, including discriminatory laws, a lack of entrepreneurial skills, insufficient business mentors, and inadequate business development services for WE. Additionally, societal expectations regarding gender roles and responsibilities can impede women's ability to balance business and family obligations. These factors cumulatively result in a substantial gender gap in entrepreneurship within Tunisia. As revealed in the field notes:

"There are various significant factors that pose challenges for women entrepreneurs in Tunisia. Access to financing is a major challenge that exists in many Muslim nations. Inheritance rights, which favor men, are also important factors. Other obstacles include a lack of skills (management, accounting, finance, etc.) and business development services tailored to women entrepreneurs. Women also face difficulties in networking due to time constraints and their greater responsibility

for family and domestic obligations. Lastly, there are few visible role models, mentors, or coaches available for women entrepreneurs in Tunisia." (Field notes, 2020-10-20)

Specifically, female entrepreneurs in Tunisia encounter important financial and training barriers, often facing significant challenges in obtaining funding and accessing markets. It was also identified that WE tend to require more non-financial support services than their male counterparts. As mentioned in the qualitative interviews:

"There is a certain caution on the part of women entrepreneurs in general, but there is also the question of the access to guarantees, because large amounts require more guarantees. So, there is an issue in relation to that and women also borrow, there is a demand for small amounts. So, concerning support, women are always asking for support, whether it's [in-class] support or […] other type of support. […] Also what interests them, it's the opportunity to network, to get to know each other, to discuss, and sometimes, even to go outside the work environment, to discuss and everything. […] [In terms of credit] the more the amount increases, the higher the guarantee required. And since women in fact, according to Tunisian legislation, they do not inherit, there is no parity in inheritance, so it depends. There are cases, it is case by case. It is true that there are some cases where women can inherit more than men. But it's really cases, cases... Most of the time, her share is less, for example, her share is less than that of her brother's, her children's or her husband's. […] [To mitigate this] there is the possibility of involving a guarantee fund and this is a project underway with the [DAAM] foundation. […] At our level, we have lightened the question of guarantees for women. So, for the amounts, they can either have a joint guarantee or a vehicle guarantee. So we try to lighten to the maximum." -INT107- (DAAM)

When it comes to networking, women have much fewer opportunities compared to men. As stated in the qualitative interviews:

"So family, we could say 70% [of women's time is] with their family, […] even 80%. […] Parents […] brothers, sisters, […] cousins, children." -INT110- Credit officer

In comparison, male entrepreneurs in Tunisia have *cafes*, locations that are exclusively an exchange space for men, both for business and leisure. *Cafes* are prevalent in Tunisian cities and men will reunite in these spaces to drink coffee, discuss with other men, watch sports and "you can find card games […] between men and other games, even shisha" (INT110 - Credit officer). Although women are not strickly banned from these spaces, informal norms tend to shun women who go to *cafes*. As corroborated in the interviews, "there are coffee shops only for men. […] [Women] can enter but […] without assistance" (INT110 - Credit officer).

Though there are spaces called *salons de thés,* which are "classier than coffee shops" (INT110 - Credit officer), that service both women and men, these spaces are not frequently used by WE for business purposes. Thus, in comparison to men, WE do not have spaces in which they can discuss business with other WE. As mentioned in the qualitative interviews:

"But you know what we miss us women? Here in Tunisia in general. Men have places where they can share. They can go to the cafes, they can go to... Us women don't have places. For example, women entrepreneurs. If we don't meet in a house or in a cafe. It's still bad interpreted to find women in cafes. Well tea rooms can be tolerated. We can't communicate and talk about all... The opportunities that might happen to us or talk business or something. Whereas men, they have that." -INT023- (Entrepreneur)

Furthermore, familial influences can impact the entrepreneurial activites of women entrepreneurs in different ways. As documented in the qualitative interviews:

"I have emotional support from my husband, my father and my sister. […] My father is the one who shaped my personality. He made me stronger, even after I got married, he has always been next to me whenever I faced any obstacle. He always used to show me the way to reach the solution and never gave me ready solutions. Now I am strong enough to stay still and not collapse. Now, I find the solutions by myself and get through it all by myself. […] He always tell me that 'I'm proud of you'." -INT020- (Entrepreneur)

"There is also the lady who [had her business] in Sfax and who, her husband and her family discouraged her a little, who gave her arguments like: the times are difficult, the pandemic, etc. And that it's no use taking out a loan, or it's no use investing right now, etc." -INT116- (Trainer 4)

"The last condition […] the most important one, is my life partner. […] He was the one who pushed me early and encouraged me to start my own business as an entrepreneur. […] It's because of my experience, the need to be accompanied by a man is very interesting to get started. […] [My life partner] brought a lot of things [in starting my business] but I will say two main ones, there was a 100 percent financial contribution and a moral contribution I will say." -INT010- (Entrepreneur)

"Sometimes, there are some men, some husbands who are a little jealous of their wives, of the success, of their wives, we find that yes. [...] At the beginning, it can slow her down. But it depends on her character, her personality. […] In the phase of the idea the husband can discourage her and make her feel a little afraid. […] He can tell her that there is a high risk that she won't be able to organise everything together." -INT003- (Entrepreneur)

"Even her husband, in their mentality, he lets her work and be an entrepreneur. He's the one who lets her. He's the one giving her the opportunity. He still has the power to tell her 'no'. So since he's giving her the opportunity to be an entrepreneur, she has to give him part of what she earns, many give to their husbands or take over most of the family expenses." -INT106- (DAAM)

"There is the environment, […] and the profile of the person. […] Education and the environment also in which we [live]. […] It's in the family you grow up in. […] There are other families that are like us, but in some families, […] it's the classic social model. […] My parent's, they went to college, […] already liberated, already at a young age, […] left-wing in politics. […] My mom is, she's a teacher too. […] So, in fact, we grew up in a very open family intellectually. […] In my family, and it can also exist in other families, […] male pressure in my family, it does not exist. […] You see, I was talking to my father, I was saying no. […] No, no, I don't agree, you explain, you have to convince me. […] I tell my friends sometimes too that one time, I didn't talk to my dad because he was the one at fault, he had to ask for forgiveness, and I said, no, no. I don't talk to you until you ask for forgiveness, you know? So we grew up, with that, it wasn't disrespect, […] it's another way of communicating actually. […] So, this is different." -INT115- (Trainer 2)

"Economic violence is in fact when he [the husband] is pressuring her for money. […] A lot of women, you know even women who participated in the training and who are entrepreneurs, kamikaze […] it's the man who runs the business and puts that in her head. She is conditioned, she cannot negotiate with the bank. She can't make payments." -INT106- (DAAM)

"The men [their husband, their brother, their father], they were there, very, very powerful and you could see that […] the women worked, they earned money […] and there were a lot of people who were taking their money. […] In the neighborhoods that are a little, a little disadvantaged it is that it is the women who work, it is not the men." -INT114 (Trainer 1)

"When my husband died I stayed [with his family]. My work place and my house are far so my father in law would give me money to go and come back. So one day he said your child is sick go take him to the doctor. I told him I can't because I have to open the school at 7 in the morning. He could have brought him you know. I [told] him I will bring him to the school with me and bring the doctor there. […] Just to make me incapable he said no you close the school and go. I told him I can, I will find a solution. He said if you leave don't come back. […] So I couldn't do it. I took my kids and I lived 2 years in my school, in a small room, […] a small bed for me and my kids for 2 years. It was an industrial place so sometimes it would rain and the window would open in the road, […] sometimes I hear fights and I would be afraid for my children. I wake up at 6 I wash myself and my children and no one would know I live there among the parents. Now, thank god I live alone, […] last year I moved thank god." -INT025- (Entrepreneur)

"One of the participants, […] fortunately for her, I can say that two years ago, she divorced because she discovered, she works and so she gives him [her husband] the money and everything, […] and so, he put everything under his name, the husband's name. She had nothing, after 15 years of work. She is a seamstress. […] Yeah, even the car they bought was in his name and everything. When she got divorced, she had nothing. She worked for 15 years to build up her husband's assets. And that is a very deep Tunisian problem." -INT106- (DAAM)

Women's entrepreneurial activities in Tunisia are also influenced by other environmental and institutional factors, such as geographic region, policy, gender norms, and access to information. This was indicated in the qualitative interviews:

"It depends on the environment. It depends on the cultural environment and the region as well. The coastal regions are not like the central regions of the country. It's a different mentality. The mentality in Tunisia differs from region to region." -INT106- (DAAM)

"Of course it's not the same in the North [Tunis and Sousse] as in Sfax, but in Sfax, there are more competent people. Even those who are well-known and skilled in Sousse or in Tunis are originally from Sfax." -INT020- (Entrepreneur)

"We had […], as expected in Sfax, a better attendance because Sfax, it is renowned as a region of workers, men and women, it is the economic capital of Tunisia. They are genetically hard workers. So we had a better attendance and more enthusiasm for training. Sousse too, but especially the regions of Sousse, the suburbs, the villages around Sousse, it was a great surprise." -INT106- (DAAM)

"I expected to have more comfort [among] women in Tunis, but really, that's not what I saw. I saw a lot of, a lot of fatique, a lot of burdens because they had to, they had to succeed. They had no

choice. […] They were from underpriviledged backgrounds as well, maybe the hot districts of Tunis. […] There was a lot more sadness in the eyes of the women in Tunis." -INT116- (Trainer)

"Since 1994, they have introduced a law on marriages, the choice between separation of property or community of property […] to protect women. So when you get married in Tunisia you have to choose, the regime separation of goods, or community of goods. Community of goods: everything that is bought after the signature of the marriage contract, even if it was in the name of the husband or the wife, it is considered as common property, fifty-fifty. Separation of property: so everyone buys in their own name. And this law was made to protect women because women work, they spend and contribute as much as the man and then it is the man who gets rich." -INT106- (DAAM)

"Look, in Tunisia, there are all the laws imaginable to protect women. But if she goes to the police, and the policeman beats her up […] that's the problem. On paper, there are all the laws to protect, all the structures to support abused women. […] Women's rights exist […] on paper, but it's still culturally a taboo subject […][to] talk about violence. Because generally, in these regions, women, from birth, are abused, the father who hits, the brother who hits. She is educated to serve the males of the family. -INT106- (DAAM)

"Awareness, the world is moving too. We have become citizens of the world with internet access and everything. So subconsciousy people are making comparisons. -INT106- (DAAM)

These different insights led CFE to design a program that would cater to the distinctive characteristics and needs of WE, encouraging them to develop and expand their businesses. The LPWE program was designed to provide WE with skills, knowledge and support to overcome the barriers in the ecosystem and prosper in their business endeavors. This was corroborated in the qualitative interviews:

"[The women entrepreneurs] want to have more support. […] Even in their life they need the coaching and one on one meeting. […] They all ask for support. That's important, because as time goes by, they can get tired or discouraged." -INT115- (Trainer 3)

By focusing specifically on women entrepreneurs and addressing the unique challenges they face, CFE demonstrated the performativity of the feminist approach in the co-development of the LPWE training program.

Evidence of empowerment among the women entrepreneurs

INT001 (Entrepreneur)	*"[After the training] I became stronger than before, I'm putting a lot of efforts, I'm always with my workbook where I fill everything, how much I still need to finish the shop, taking note of the clients. Because I'm going to need to increase my costumer base if I want to go further with my business. […] In the sessions of the training I noticed that the other entrepreneurs they didn't stop, they're always moving forward with their businesses, they manage very well."*
INT002 (Entrepreneur)	*"I had the opportunity to get to know some business women and get more into this world that I love.[…] Because, as we know, the entrepreneur is under a lot of stress. Yes, so, and the most difficult formula to achieve is to do business while being fulfilled with what you do. Now every woman wants to be a businessperson, when*

	women see other women growing their business and raising money, they want to do that too. "
INT012 (Entrepreneur)	*"I got to know a new group of people […]. I met many people who fell and did not have much progress. We talked to each other and listened to each other's experiences. We felt as if we were empowering each other. […] We were a group whose members complemented each other. When you sit and talk with the group, you easily feel that you are comfortable and want to talk and share your story with the others. […] I did not use to have any [network]. […] I was solitary and I only worked alone and interacted only with customers. But with the group now, l realized that we complement each other. […] We realized that we can all interact with each other. […] [This] motivates me to get to meet and know more people."*
INT015 (Entrepreneur)	*"I still miss the sharing and the gathering of people in the training. I always wish if we could spend one more week in the training to learn new things. […] I became more motivated. […] [I kept wanting to go back to the trainings] in order to learn many other new things from them [women entrepreneurs]."*
INT021 (Entrepreneur)	*"I made a lot of relationships, I had new friends who support me. […] Then I discovered that there are other women that have the same or even multiple troubles than me. So we felt close together."*
INT022 (Entrepreneur)	*"The training I did with CFE, we all had projects but the good thing is that we get to talk about our problems, and we learn from each other. She might have the same problem as me. And maybe the solution I found is better that hers, you know? The other one has a problem with another thing, for example a coworker. If I bring someone to work with me, I will take her story into account... You understand? I learn from the experience of other."*
INT027 (Entrepreneur)	*"I learned in the training... The best thing I learned are the relationships. […] It is very, very necessary. […] Network, you need a network to work and make relations. […] The inteligence is how you make relations. You can make. But how you improve them and stay in them."*
INT028 (Entrepreneur)	*"You can communicate, there are business women , you can talk to them, know them even if they are not from the same field, we can collaborate together. […] The people that I met are famous, it is good to know new people, […] there is a possibility to collaborate with them"*
INT106 (DAAM)	*"When I said it's cultural, it's also a bit religious. In Sousse, for example, one of the women dared to mention the religious brakes [to entrepreneurship]. And so we had a religious discussion, which we generally avoid. They spoke. They spoke openly […] they even quoted texts of religion, the Koran and discussions, different interpretations."*
INT114 (Trainer 1)	*"We saw that these women were working, but they could not find the networking and could not find people to discuss their successes and failures. There was no listening or appreciation in their environment for what they do. So, through the training, they had a valorization of their projects and a valorization of their actions,*

	and they felt they belonged to women entrepreneurs. […] Because they were micro-businesses, so they were happy. […] We could see their improvement." *"We felt a very big need for them to express themselves in relation to their project, in relation to their daily life. So, they had all this need to express themselves. […] Women, they need space to talk. […] Yeah, and they don't have any space."*
INT115 (Trainer 2)	*"There are people of the training, so during the sessions, there were [WhatsApp] groups that were formed. […] Networks, people who will work together. […] New products together. […] They are still talking. […] This is a Sfax group [for example]. […] Last discussion it was 15 of November. So, they are still discussion between them [since end of training in July]. […] She [one entrepreneur] makes, she has workshop that manufactures traditional clothes. […] So, she's going to collaborate with another one who is in sales."*
INT116 (Trainer 4)	*"For the Tunisia project, it would be great if it could continue. Well, we've seen the impact, so it would be a shame to stop at that level. […] [The entrepreneurs] came with a lot of doubts and a lot of fear and the fact that they realize that it is possible."* *"That aspect, to see other people too, not isolated, in her problems, in her situation, to see other women who, they continue, so I do too. They are women like me. I can continue too!"* *"When she [entrepreneur] is alone, she doubts. Because when she is alone, she has no role models in front of her. She thinks she won't be able to. When we are in a group, we encourage each other. We are not alone. Fears are dispelled. There are kind words between them. There is all that which makes that aspect of isolation and fear. […] When we are in a group, there is this motivation and this group impulse. […] They [entrepreneurs] continue to exchange news [on WhatsApp groups], wish each other well at the end of the year, etc. What is also interesting is that whenever there is an event that concerns women or entrepreneurship, they share on this group."*

2. *Collaboration with Canadian partners*

As the second performative element, CFE mobilized the feminist approach by collaborating with partners from Canada, a country with well-established feminist policies and norms.

After the Jasmine Revolution in 2011, the presence of NGOs and funders supporting the feminist cause in Tunisia has increased. Considering the historical and cultural context of feminism in Tunisia, it was a sensible decision for CFE to prioritize collaborating with Canadian partners to promote the feminist agenda in Tunisia. As mentioned in the qualitative interviews:

> *"After the revolution, there was the arrival of NGOs, of donors who also wanted to work on the gender aspect, to push women to take up a position. […] I think that the ground was still quite favorable for Tunisian women to be really entrepreneurs and […] she has always worked. After perhaps what is missing is the fact that she takes the initiative, that she has confidence in herself. That's it, that's the aspect here. But I think the arrival of donors has really worked on the gender aspect and has pushed […] the woman to have advantages that she didn't have before." -INT116-(Trainer 4)*

CFE, as a microfinance institution with operations in various regions of Tunisia and a varied customer base, had the option to collaborate with organizations or funding institutions from different nations to assist local entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, in developing the LPWE training program for women entrepreneurs, CFE elected to partner with Canadian entities, HEC Montréal and DID. As mentioned in the fieldnotes:

> *"Effective collaboration between CFE, DAAM, DID, and HEC Montréal requires a deep understanding of feminist principles and the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Tunisia. To achieve this, it is vital to engage in dialogue with women entrepreneurs to address social and cultural norms that restrict their participation in entrepreneurship." (Field notes, 2020-11-21)*

The decision to partner with Canadian entities was meaningful, as it exemplified CFE's willingness to collaborate with partners from a nation with robust feminist policies and a significant record of feminist activism dating back to the 19th century (Prentice et al., 1988). For example, Canada's present stance on gender equality is supported by two significant policy initiatives that embody and promote pro-gender norms, namely the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) and the Gender Equality Budget (Parisi, 2020). The FIAP, launched in June 2017, named Canada as the second country after Sweden to have a foreign policy explicitly labeled as feminist, and the domestic version, the Gender Equality Budget, was launched in 2018 (Parisi, 2020).

The FIAP vision for international aid aims to eliminate poverty and create a more peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous world by promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls (Parisi, 2020). A significant funding objective of the FIAP is to allocate a minimum of 95% of Canada's bilateral international aid expenditure towards gender equality (Parisi, 2020). This highlights the significance of CFE partnering with Canadian entities in promoting gender equality and empowering women in Tunisia. Collaborating with Canadian partners who are dedicated to promoting gender equality and empowering women aligns with CFE's feminist strategy of providing support to women entrepreneurs in Tunisia.

It's noteworthy to mention that the collaboration between CFE and its Canadian partners was a mutually beneficial arrangement. Tunisian partners were able to learn from the Canadian partners, and vice versa, as they shared their expertise and understanding of feminist principles. This resulted in a productive exchange of ideas, which promoted

communication and dialogue between partners from diverse cultural backgrounds. As stated in the field notes:

> *"The partners collaborated in a way that was beneficial for them and based on feminist beliefs. This was done by giving Canadian partners a chance to learn from Tunisian women entrepreneurs and local entrepreneurship experts, and promoting communication between the different cultures. Although exchanges were not always fluid, it seems like all parties involved learned and evolved through the process." (Field notes, 2021-11-23)*

The aim was to establish a cooperative and communicative atmosphere that valued and acknowledged the contributions of Canadian and Tunisian partners. This was done with the intention of leveraging their knowledge and expertise to enhance the training program and provide better support to WE. This was corroborated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"All the recommendations and improvements were requested as we went along. At each stage, we stopped to consult everyone, and everyone gave their comments. So, for me, there were adjustments that were requested, whether by the trainers or [other partners]. […] So it was well organized." - INT107- (DAAM)*

Collaborating with Canadian entities was also meaningful for the WE who participated in the LPWE training program. Many expressed pride and appreciation in being part of a project with esteemed Canadian partners and receiving a certificate of completion from HEC Montréal, a renowned Canadian university. As supported in the field notes:

> *"During the Closing Ceremony and interviews, the women entrepreneurs expressed great pride in participating in the project with Canadian partners. Some of them even expressed a desire to visit Canada and expand their businesses there. Additionally, receiving a program certificate from a Canadian university was a significant achievement for many of the entrepreneurs, especially those who had not pursued higher formal education." (Field notes, 2021-11-23)*

Collaborating with Canadian partners exemplified the performativity of CFE's feminist approach in co-developing the LPWE training program for women entrepreneurs.

Evidence of empowerment among the women entrepreneurs

INT106 (DAAM)	"*I remain on a very positive note in terms of the impact and results and also in terms of the collaboration with the entire team at HEC Montréal and elsewhere. Thank you for your contribution. It stalled sometimes, but it's positive when it comes to collaboration and cooperation, especially at a distance, everyone has their opinion, everyone has their point of view. The result was good. Only one recommendation, […] we can set the objectives and stay on the same path while trusting the local experts when they give their opinion or when they try to adapt to ensure a better success. Because I would advise, for future projects, to trust the local experts if they talk about the context of their country or the ecosystem they master. […] So that way, we can do this. It already facilitates communication and it gives a communication of partnership. Not from a requester to an executor, but from a partnership and*

	a positive win-win collaboration. So that's my recommendation. But otherwise, the impact is very positive."
INT107 (DAAM)	*"[DID] had the idea […] to make a [project with] HEC Montréal and that the training be focused on resiliency, on increasing the capacity of women entrepreneurs to deal and be resilient to the problems that they face. […] I liked that proposal when they presented it to us. It was interesting. Also, the methodology was interesting. […] I think the approach and the formulation of the information as proposed and delivered in the end succeeded in reconciling academic training, with valuable content and also the desire to strengthen the soft skills capacities of these women. […] We saw the testimonies [from the entrepreneurs] and we really felt that. […] The way they tell about their experience with this training, […] I myself was pleasantly surprised by the speed of the impact. […] HEC Montréal's brand, […] this is not insignificant. […] And the originality of the accompaniment, I think it's a whole."*
INT116 (Trainer 4)	*"Unfortunately, when we go to the regions, there are women who are subjected to violence or who are harmed, but who find it normal. And who are not alarmed, and for them, even if my husband is violent, but it's still my husband, it's his right, I also pushed him to do this. I have a share of responsibility. So all the events organized by the NGOs or by the donors helped some women to become aware and to refuse certain practices."* *"So, the moments of joy, it was clear when they finished the course, when they got the certificate [from HEC Montréal], the moments of joy too."*

3. *Themes of the training program modules and examples*

The integration of feminist themes and examples throughout the three modules of the training program demonstrates CFE's mobilization of the feminist approach in the co-development and delivery of the LPWE training program.

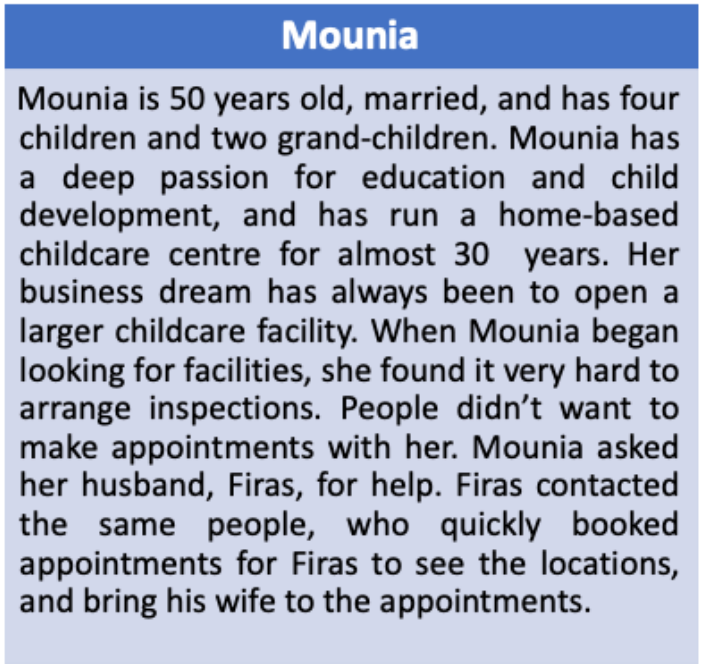
During the training program's design phase (Phase 2), the SEED research team and senior-level teams of CFE and DAAM engaged in discussions about the training program's content and structure. CFE's senior-level team members recognized the need to focus on women's leadership and empowerment based on their prior experience working with female entrepreneurs. DAAM's senior-level members emphasized the importance of developing soft skills, including leadership, alongside entrepreneurial 'hard skills'. After extensive deliberation among the the project partners, it was decided that Module 3 would exclusively focus on leadership and soft skills. The content of Module 3 would addess topics such as women's leadership role models, illustrations of unconscious bias in Tunisia, and ways to tackle various unconscious bias situations, including cultivating a growth mindset and overcoming limiting beliefs. By dedicating an entire

module to women's leadership and empowerment, CFE demonstrated its commitment to addressing gender inequality in entrepreneurship and took concrete steps to address the present issues. As corroborated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"Module C [3] was attached and is still attached to the 'EFH' [Égalité Femme-Homme / Equality Women-Men] strategy. […] The orientation was very interesting because following the COVID context, […] we wanted this training to be relevant, […] because it was a training for soft skills. So, we said, why not take advantage of this context and make this training […] adapted and not a classic classroom training. Something […] that helps to counter or to face the pandemic context." -INT107-(DAAM)*

In addition to allocating Module 3 to leadership and empowerment themes, the training program incorporated CFE's feminist approach in multiple ways, such as integrating examples featuring women entrepreneur protagonists throughout all three modules (e.g. Figure 3).

Figure 3: Example illustrating a hypothetical situation of unconscious bias faced by a women entrepreneur in Tunisia from Module 3 (English translation)



Source: LPWE program materials

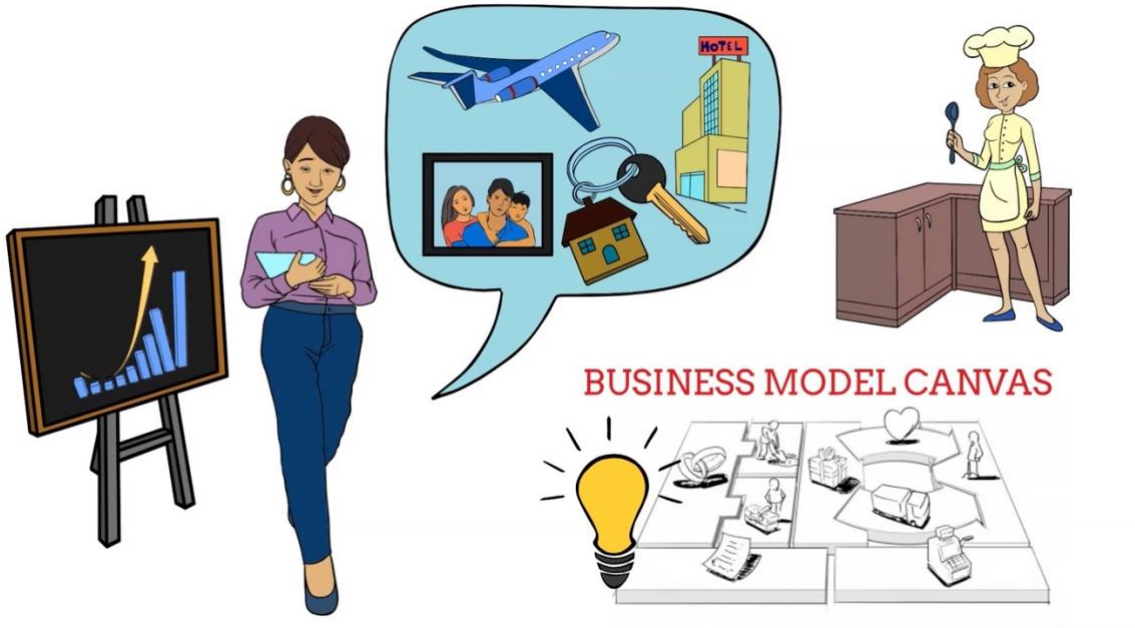
The decision to incorporate these types of examples was made during the project's design phase, and the project partners collaborated to create and validate the examples to ensure

their appropriateness for the Tunisian context. This approach emphasized the significance of cultural sensitivity and the local context. The aim was to make the training material interesting and pertinent to the target audience of WE. As mentioned in the field notes:

> *"To make the theory more practical, it is necessary to include additional examples of fictional women entrepreneurs across the different modules. In particular, there is a strong request for examples of Tunisian women entrepreneurs to explain the various components of the Business Model Canvas in Module 1. The focus should be on developing examples that align with the profiles of CFE's female clients. This means utilizing examples of entrepreneurs who are relevant to the target population and industries in which women operate, such as childcare, food processing, handicrafts, decorations, etc." (Field notes, 2021-04-20)*

For Modules 1 and 2, which focused on teaching entrepreneurial 'hard skills', the program used animated video examples featuring a context-specific Tunisian female entrepreneur protagonist and storyline to present content materials, such as the Business Model Canvas (BMC) tool (Figure 4) and the Ask-Experiment-Learn (AEL) model (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Image of animated video presenting the Business Model Canvas (BMC) tool from Module 1 of the LPWE training program



Source: LPWE program materials

Figure 5: Image of animated video presenting the Ask-Experiment-Learn (AEL) model from Module 2 of the LPWE training program

Source: LPWE program materials

By featuring a Tunisian woman entrepreneur protagonist in the animated video examples, the BMC tool and AEL model were presented in a more engaging and relatable manner for the WE. The scenarios in the videos were also recorded in the Tunisian Arabic dialect by Tunisian women. As stated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"And the fact of making a formation [training] in the Tunisian dialect, that brought a lot of happiness to them [entrepreneurs] to say that you are... You exist... […] And you can evolve from what you already know. […]. It was very, very exciting to speak their language. […] To bring theoretical things in their language and […] vulgarizing information, it was great." -INT114- (Trainer 1)*

Furthermore, the integration of women entrepreneurs as protagonists in the program's examples was a fundamental aspect of CFE's feminist approach, as it helped simplify the comprehension of complicated topics for participants with diverse educational backgrounds. For example, the training program emphasized the importance of innovation, which is a key concept exemplified through the AEL model, for achieving entrepreneurial success. Explaining this complex concept by showcasing examples of women entrepreneurs who are similar to CFE clients was important in the approach used. As mentioned in the qualitative interviews:

"Even in the training, for them [entrepreneurs], an innovation is something, innovation is something technical. […] They have never known all that is incremental innovation, all that is process innovation. […] For them innovation was something technical. […] So, for them, the fact of saying 'no, to innovate is to bring a little touch, to innovate is, to make the distribution in another way, to give the product in another way, it is an innovation'. […] They didn't […] understand that it was an innovation." -INT114- (Trainer 1)

CFE's decision to use feminist themes and examples featuring women entrepreneurs protagonists in Modules 1, 2 and 3, serve as a demonstration of its mobilization of the feminist approach in the co-development and delivery of the LPWE training program.

Evidence of empowerment among the women entrepreneurs

INT003 (Entrepreneur)	*"When they [women entrepreneurs] do the necessary training, they learn how to manage their project. They feel more proud of themselves. They know they can do better when they understand the process. […] The steps to follow. At the beginning, many women feel lost: How to do this? How to do that? How to find resources? […] Many questions are unclear, but when they are clearer, the woman can make a progress and makes herself better, such as the example of the beautician yesterday that she doubled her business after the training. […] Clear vision."* *"Yeah I understood that you created the content of the training for the others. […] Especially the translation between English and French then Tunisian. […] Some women are average. They don't understand French. […] Yes they liked the translation to Arabic. […] Especially with the Tunisian accent."*
INT010 (Entrepreneur)	*"Yes [I feel empowered], but not totally, because for me we always need to learn. […] I certainly see the progression in terms of the impact I am leaving on people."* *"And I know very well how to adopt solutions, it's true that we have solutions but sometimes we have to work on the solution so that it is well adapted to the person. This is what I do. […] [But] the Arab world already treats the woman differently to the man I personally respect it I don't have a problem with that because, I don't think to talk about the equality man woman ok we agree but for me, it is necessary that the man has his position, we can't be equal but we must respect each other and that has nothing to do for me for the professional career."*
INT012 (Entrepreneur)	*"Before the training, l simply used to work. But now, l've started to develop new things and even started to think of creating my own design. I want to share a story."* *"Now l always think of dealing with customers abroad, develop my business, do online marketing for my business and l never thought about this before. Now l am totally for starting to do this."*
INT013 (Entrepreneur)	*"[In the training, I learned that] you need to think out of the box. We need to have a new ideas and innovative ideas. The third thing you need to be courageous and brave. You should don't fear any step you want to make."*

INT015 (Entrepreneur)	*"We learned in the training how to develop ideas and propose them to whom they may concern. For example, I can sew a particular piece of clothing and show it to my friends, sisters, or my mother, and they would encourage me. This usually motivates me to do more thanks to what we learned in the training. […] Thanks to experience and to the training, I learned many things like progressing and becoming more self-confident. […] That's what I want: more ideas. I like applying what I learn; that's why I worked really hard at home. Sometimes, I have a look at the notes we studied in the training and apply the points that are relevant to the situation."* *"I [saw an example] on sewing. It was as if they were talking to me. I really identified with what was said. […] That further influenced me. I felt that seamstresses have an important role to play in society not similar to the role of female teachers or kindergarten directors. […] We saw it during the training. […] They were talking about how she started her own project, and then she got some help from assistants who would go to the drycleaner and deliver products. She started alone and then she gradually grew her business. I can do that too. That's what l would like to do because now I am still alone in this project. She made me feel motivated through her business. […] I know that other works are very important also, but after seeing the example of the woman that has developed her project, I have seen myself in her. So I know that now I'm alone. I'm beginning the project, but I'm looking forward to follow the same steps. Why couldn't I do like her?"*
INT020 (Entrepreneur)	*"During the training, l learned how to study a project idea. The training that I had with CFE during the summer put me on the right path."* *"The training was so helpful, and it really made me move forward. Will they hold other similar trainings?"* *"Working proceeds in a very organized and scientific way. We learned in the training how to plan a business project. BMC has enabled me to study market needs, enlarge my prospective client base and know how to act in different situations. I also learned about my resources and skills. At the same time, I got to know what l want and what my market expectations are. I learned how to enlarge my client base as well […] which make it makes me more ambitious about my future, my project. Why not? One day it will be an international."* *"I […] revisited traditional sweets that l posted on Facebook and started to work. I earned many new clients and created my own logo. […] New customers who were not from the place where l live. They were from a different far place."*
INT028 (Entrepreneur)	*"I liked the training, it is interesting, before I was making juice and now I am making juice and pasteries. I am improving step by step, the training [was] interesting. […] I feel more courage and I want to improve."*
INT107 (DAAM)	*"It's concrete because usually, it's more [in class] training and everything. But the approach was very, very special and very, very original... […]The approach was effective and efficient from what we can tell from the testimonies."*

INT114 (Trainer 1)	*"Through the models we have presented: […], the box model [BMC], and the […] AEL, […] we saw that these women projected themselves and described their daily life in the model. […] And they were very happy to see that in their daily life, their practice, which is based on theoretical things, is correct. […] So, they were happy and they wanted […] to move forward and dig deeper to innovate. [….] Because they found that what they were doing already in their kind of practice […] could be found within the theory. […] So then, it was kind of like they were reassured. […] And that they could continue developing inside of these like theoretical models. […] So, there was reinforcement of what they were doing."* *"So it was almost like they had to learn the fact that what they were doing was an innovation. […]Because then they are gonna want to talk about it and talk to other people about it. […]and communicate the fact that they are innovating. But it's almost like that's why they were so happy. […]Because then they realize that they were innovating, and they could talk about it with other people. […] She will translate that in her speech. […] In being proud of her product. […] So automatically people will perceive a difference. […] They will embrace this change. Let's say it's a change in their perception. […] So, the fact that she's aware that she's bringing something new, she's going to convey that. […] She's going to be happy so, she's going to transcend that around her. There might be people who say no, no, but for her, if she's conscious, it's going to project itself. […] It's just her confidence in herself and that she believes in herself and her product, that's the work that needs to be done."*
INT116 (Trainer 4)	*"So those were also moments of joy and confidence because they understood that through the exercises we gave them, they also gained confidence and knew that they were capable. So that was their moment of joy. And at the end, the third workshop, it was the joy of being surrounded. Not alone, so that was also a support for them to feel united, accompanied and not alone, especially in the fear of succeeding or not."* *"The AEL helped a lot, so they were happy. They were more hopeful anyway, because they saw the result of the exercise closely."* *"I didn't think [the entrepreneur] was going to be able to turn her business around in such a short period of time. The day I arrived, I saw the packaging, I saw the products. Because this woman is a great salesperson. But it was this effort and these fears that were, that were scattered. I want to say not well structured. The fact that she had a structure in a very short time, she was able to really get going and succeed with her project."*

4. *Collaboration with female scholars*

The SEED research team's predominantly female composition is a critical aspect that highlights CFE's mobilization of the feminist approach in co-developing the LPWE training program.

The SEED-Tunisia research team consisted of six primary members, including four university professors from Canada, the United States, and Europe, as well as a doctoral candidate and a Master's student (author of this dissertation) from Canadian universities. Five members of the team were women and one was a male professor. While CFE did not have control over the team's selection, their decision to collaborate with female scholars for a women's entrepreneurship and leadership training program demonstrates their commitment to feminist principles.

CFE's collaboration with a research team predominantly composed of female scholars was a strategic decision for the LPWE program to leverage their personal understanding of the challenges and obstacles faced by women. The SEED research team academics are renowned scholars in the field of entrepreneurship, with extensive experience in women entrepreneurship-related projects. This expertise allowed them to acquire transferable knowledge that was not only applicable to the program's content but also its context, making their contribution to the co-development of the LPWE training program invaluable. Although the scholars on the team were working on a project in Tunisia for the first time, they had prior experience in other developing economies in Africa and Asia. This enabled them to draw parallels to various Tunisian contextual realities that women entrepreneurs might face.

For example, the scholars provided valuable insights on delivering the LPWE program to WE, taking into account their personal responsibilities, such as childcare, that could hinder their participation. These insights were particularly important given the unique challenges faced by Tunisian WE in balancing work and personal responsibilities. As mentioned in the qualitative interviews:

> *"Family impact, especially [can be a barrier in entrepreneurship]. […] Especially since the woman had children and the children can be a barrier." -INT110- (Credit officer)*

The research team's expertise helped in addressing potential barriers to women's participation in the program and developing strategies to mitigate them. As detailed in the field notes:

> *"During the debrief with the research team following some of the Phase 1 exploratory reseach interviews, it is evident that having a research team primarily composed of female scholars for this project is highly beneficial. Not only do they possess a deep understanding of the subject matter, but their perspectives as women have also yielded interesting insights. For example, they have brought up relevant considerations related to the development of the program, such as aspects of care work. Likewise, there have been pertinent discussions about gender roles in different contexts, and how there seems to be a desire for women entrepreneurs in Tunisia to reconcile between traditional gender roles and modernity." (Field notes, 2020-11-06)*

Additionally, the knowledge and know-how of the scholars on the SEED research team were instrumental in integrating feminist themes and values into the training program.

The program addressed gender inequalities and unconscious biases that affect WE, thanks to the contributions of these scholars. The scholars also played a critical role in ensuring that the program was accessible and inclusive to WE in Tunisia from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and educational levels. The CFE and DAAM teams recognized the importance of having women scholars involved in the LPWE program, given their understanding of the realities, challenges, and struggles that women face. As stated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"All the recommendations and improvements were requested as we went along. At each stage, we stopped to consult everyone, and everyone gave their comments. So, for me, there were adjustments that were requested. […] So it was well organized.." -INT107- (DAAM)*

The collaboration and iterative creation process of the LPWE, involving various partners, including the female scholars, was highly valued by CFE and DAAM, as well as the trainers. As stated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"I loved when we worked together to prepare the classes. […] That was great. I loved this beautiful energy and this sharing, this state of mind, of sharing and benevolence. […] What I liked, […] of course, […] was the collaborative work." -INT116- (Trainer 4)*

In Phase 4 of the project, two of the female scholars played a crucial role in the qualitative data collection in Tunisia. Specifically, the doctoral candidate and the Master's student, who were part of the SEED research team and female scholars, conducted the qualitative interviews with WE and various stakeholders in Tunisia. Having two women scholars from the research team conduct interviews with the WE was advantageous as they had an in-depth understanding of the project's development from the beginning. The presence of these two female scholars in Tunisia for data collection was highly valued by many WE, as it allowed them to openly share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with members of the research team who had travelled from Canada to meet with them. As stated in the field notes:

> *"Since arriving in Tunisia, we have been heartened by the warm welcome we have received, particularly from the women entrepreneurs. At the program's Closing Ceremony, several of the entrepreneurs approached us to express their appreciation for the program and share what they had learned. During the interviews, many women conveyed their gratitude for having the opportunity to discuss their experiences and provide updates on their business since the training. It has been a moving experience to observe firsthand how much they value being heard, questioned, and respected in their entrepreneurial pursuits by our team." (Field notes, 2021-11-25)*

Similarly, the involvement of women interviewers proved to be beneficial as it prevented any potential influence on the information disclosed during the interviews. Whenever an interpreter was needed for interviews, CFE ensured that a female translator proficient in both English and Tunisian Arabic was available. Initially, CFE and DAAM did not acknowledge the importance of having a female interpreter, but later they endorsed the

idea once they realized that a male interpreter could have an impact on what the WE shared. CFE and DAAM came to the understanding that providing a female interpreter would make the WE feel more comfortable and enable them to provide more honest feedback. This exemplifies the feminist approach mobilized by CFE in the co-development of the LPWE. As mentioned in the field notes:

> *"Since many of the entrepreneurs we are interviewing do not speak English or French, we need an interpreter to assist us. However, when we informed CFE that we required a female interpreter, they initially opposed the idea. It wasn't until we explained that research has shown women may not be as forthcoming or candid when interviewed with men present that they understood the need for an all-female setting (female interviewers and female interpreter). Ultimately, they agreed to assist in finding a woman interpreter to work with us during our time in Tunisia." (Field notes, 2021-11-11)*

To conclude, the scholars on the SEED research team, with their expertise and experiences, played a crucial role in designing and delivering the LPWE training program. Their contributions ensured that the program was effective in addressing the unique challenges faced by WE in Tunisia. This collaboration with a predominantly female research team was a strategic decision and performative element that showcased CFE's mobilization of the feminist approach in the co-development of the LPWE.

Evidence of empowerment among the women entrepreneurs

INT009 (Entrepreneur)	*"It's always good that the woman's work is close to her house, because it's hard to leave them [her children]. […] Because the main role of the woman is to raise her children. […] We [my husband and I] help each other yes, he takes care of everything outside the house and I take care of everything inside. […] The training was very helpful, I learned a lot, like for example, before, I used to accept all kind of work, now I want to specialize. […] Now I want to specialize in bride's [couture] and grow my name in it. […] I earn money and it's beautiful how busy I am, I don't have free time. […] I thank them [researchers] for coming here, from their country to support us."*
INT021 (Entrepreneur)	*"I feel that being here, [in the interview with researchers], it's […] the fruit, it is the result of my success, and that would be the start of my future success. […] Thank you […] for welcoming me. […] I am really happy because I don't want to speak with my relatives because I don't want they feel sorry for me [about my health problems]. […] At least, you [researchers] listened to me. […] Thank you for listening to me."*
INT041 (Entrepreneur)	*"The women who already have the training with CFE are going to do interviews with the Canadian woman [researcher] […] to know the needs of these women [entrepreneurs]. What are the barriers! […] What tools are being missed? What needs are being missed? Is there improvement or not? Or if there is an opportunity to help these women? […] So I'm coming for it. […] That is to say that always a training experience is a good experience.[…] I have seen the mentality of*

	entrepreneurs who have already advanced and are still advancing. I also think that even with small details, we can advance."
INT116 (Trainer 4)	*"Well, we've seen the impact, so it would be a shame to stop at that level. […] It's a beautiful experience. I thank the whole team and I am really very grateful to [Farah[10]], to the whole HEC Montréal team, to [DID], to everyone, to everyone really, the DID team in Tunisia. […] It was a very very beautiful experience that made me aware of my responsibility towards this aspect of gender. So, whether it is with, with, with [DAAM] or otherwise, I will never again refuse a project where it gives value to Tunisian women."*

5. *Operational and delivery team composed of women*

The female gender composition of the operational and delivery teams is the fifth demonstration of CFE's performativity of the feminist approach in co-developing and implementing the LPWE training program.

Firstly, the project's operational team from CFE and DAAM was composed entirely of women. The decision to collaborate with an all-female team was significant as the members had considerable prior experience working with WE and a profound understanding of the program's target population's needs and concerns. This was shown by the prominent involvement of women in decision-making positions within CFE and DAAM. As mentioned in the field notes:

> *"During the discussions in Phase 1 of CFE's market strategy for the upcoming five years, various significant components were elaborated. One of these elements, brought forth by the CEO of CFE, emphasized the crucial role of promoting gender equality. Firstly, the internal promotion of gender equality has been deemed a priority by ensuring that women hold senior decision-making positions within the organization. Secondly, another aspect involves establishing DAAM, which will be led by women. The mission of this foundation is to offer non-financial services and support to develop women entrepreneurs who are clients of CFE." (Field notes, 2020-10-27)*

The operational team understood and recognized the unique strengths of WE in Tunisia and aimed to leverage these strengths through the LPWE training program. This was supported in the qualitative interviews by a member of the operations team:

> *"By the way, women are more persistent and tenacious; women in general in Tunisia. Women entrepreneurs? Yes, when it comes to their expertise in the projects they are setting up. They are kamikazes, they adapt to the context." -INT106- (DAAM)*

[10] To safeguard the privacy of an individual associated with the project who works for DAAM, a fictitious name was used in place of their actual name.

The female operational team was driven by a desire to enhance the conditions for WE in Tunisia by equipping them with the necessary theory and tools in entrepreneurship, as well as providing support in developing better soft skills. Moreover, their knowledge in feminist concerns extended beyond Tunisia, with several team members having prior experience working with multinational companies and organizations based outside the country. This enabled them to integrate global perspectives and knowledge, and apply them in the local context in Tunisia. As corroborated in the field notes:

> *"One of the team members has been with CFE since it was established in 2016, initially serving in a transversal role. Later, an opportunity arose for a gender equality advisor position. As she had a profound interest in gender issues and had previously worked at the British Council in international leadership and the American Islamic Congress, she applied for the role and was selected. Her goal is to make efforts to enhance CFE's offerings of products and services that are better suited to support women entrepreneurs." (Field notes, 2020-10-27)*

Secondly, the delivery team of the training program consisted of four highly qualified female trainers, whose selection was influenced by the SEED research team's requirement to avoid any potential research bias that could arise due to having male trainers. The SEED research team believed that having a mixed-gender team of trainers could affect the behavior of female participants during the training program, thereby impacting the research outcomes. When this potential risk was communicated to CFE and DAAM, they fully supported the idea of working exclusively with female trainers. As mentioned in the qualitative interviews:

> *"The staff, by the way, we dealt, not with contractors, but with women." -INT106- (DAAM)*

During Phase 2 of the project, the two trainers with the most experience played a more significant part in co-designing the training program, in addition to being involved in the ToT, pilot, and delivery of the LPWE. The other two trainers, who were more junior, were included in the project from the ToT, and also participated in the pilot and delivery of the training program. All four trainers were self-identified feminists and possessed considerable prior experience in entrepreneurship training programs, with a particular emphasis on working with WE. As mentioned in the qualitative interviews:

> *"To be honest, I do a lot of training, I travel a lot. It's not, I mean training women on leadership or communication, it's not something new to me." -INT116- (Trainer 4)*

Given the diverse socio-economic backgrounds of the participants, and the fact that many had no prior involvement with group training programs for WE, it was crucial for the trainers to be cognizant of these factors and provide the necessary support for the participants to successfully complete the program. As such, it was imperative for the trainers to be Tunisian and fulfill two critical requirements. Firstly, they needed to be proficient in the local Tunisian dialect to facilitate effective communication with the

participants. Secondly, they needed to possess a deep understanding of the local context to comprehend the entrepreneurial experiences of the participants and guide them through the multi-week program. Therefore, having women trainers who were rooted in the local context was a crucial aspect of the program. As described in the qualitative interviews:

> *"There are many cultural aspects, from city to city, from region to region, although it's a small country. But the behaviour is different, the way of doing things, the way of approaching people. Moreover, in the training courses, we have adapted, the attitude of the trainers is not the same in Sfax or in Sousse, or in Tunis. If we had gone to the south of the country, the approach would have been different. […] The trainers know the field and they adapt. It's not the technical part but the way of being." -INT106- (DAAM)*

The LPWE benefited from the dedication and collaboration of the team of female trainers who appreciated the benefits of working towards a shared objective. The collaborative training approach, involving delivery of training sessions in pairs, ensured that the LPWE program was comprehensive, incorporating diverse perspectives and experiences in each session. As mentioned in the qualitative interviews:

> *"At the level of the Training, when we worked in pairs and when we are friends with the pair […] these nice moments and humanly, I like to live them." -INT116- (Trainer 4)*

The women trainers played a critical role, not just as instructors, but also as role models and success stories for the WE participating in the program. The absence of female role models and mentors is a considerable challenge in Tunisia's entrepreneurial ecosystem, and the trainers, being the primary contact point with the participants, were able to address this gap. The female trainers' involvement and active participation in the LPWE program showcased to the participants that women can excel in entrepreneurship, providing them with a sense of inspiration and motivation. As highlighted in the qualitative interviews:

> *"I played the game of the successful woman entrepreneur. I put myself in the position of a success story to say that there is a model who succeeds. So it's great to see the model of a woman who started young, who started little by little, and who succeeds, who is satisfied today, and who is fulfilled in what she is doing. […] And who is a mother and who has been able to be a mother, who educates her children, etc. So in all aspects yes, it is somewhere. Yes, it is a beautiful model to follow and it is a successful model. So I think that this awareness, yes, we are capable of it. I am not alone. There are women like me who have the same fears and who continue to move forward. So I, myself, I will continue and I will do my best." -INT116- (Trainer 4)*

The female composition of the operational and delivery teams is a testament to the feminist approach adopted by CFE during the co-development and delivery of the LPWE training program.

Evidence of empowerment among the women entrepreneurs

INT005 (Entrepreneur)	*"They [the Trainers and CFE team] gave me a lot of energy to start and to go forward. Their training was very helpful, I really want to thank them for their effort. They did a very great job, all of them. […] I was satisfied."*
INT014 (Entrepreneur)	*"After the training, I felt that my ideas are more organized. […] I am more open to new ideas, and l know what to do to solve the problem without seeking help from anyone. […] [Nesrine[11]] taught us to keep our clients loyal to our products and to look for more clients. What matters is not to sell; it is rather to make your clients want to go back and buy your products. […] This is the most important thing that I kept in mind. […] I became more self-confident. […] I'm very, very happy with the training and even after the training, I have seen the results of the training on my career."*
INT012 (Entrepreneur)	*"My business is tailoring. I'm a tailoress. l've been dealing with CFE for a while now. I took out a loan. I bought my machines. Well, the Corona virus introduced some difficulties on the way. I wasn't feeling at ease and l felt that l was moving backwards and not making any progress, but thanks to the training that l had with [Farah] l felt relieved. I don't know how to describe it. I felt empowered. It's a whole new feeling. Sometimes some people push you backwards, but with [Farah], we felt we kept on going forward and progressing."* *"By nature l am not a sociable person. But with [Farah] it was a whole different story. […] She makes us think. […] One day, I went home happy and told my friends that l had a wonderful training. They weren't so encouraging. They said l was just a tailoress. And they even made me feel frustrated. I went the following day to [Farah's] training. She told me that it was true that l was a tailoress, but everyone needs me and that l can be really useful. She really made me feel empowered and willing to progress.[…] My dreams have no limits now. I feel that life has changed. I feel like l work now with a whole new vision of life. [Farah] taught us how to work, how to look for customers and how to seek and seize opportunities that will make us realize our dreams, and l have fortunately seized mine. […] l am realizing my dream, and thanks to [Farah's] training, I feel that l found myself. It is because when you are not self-confident, you would easily get afraid, but once you know yourself you would become invincible. […] I used to be less self-confident and I became even more self-confident now."*
INT017 (Entrepreneur)	*"Even with Ms [Farah], we learned that when you say that you will succeed, you must succeed and never have doubts about it. Besides, before the training, I only worked on sweets; after it, I added catering. The training gave me the opportunity to get a loan and realize my dream of having a park-themed house."*
INT020 (Entrepreneur)	*"The training made me emotionally stronger and pushed me to carry on. I felt that there were many other people like me. I felt that there were people who would*

[11] To safeguard the privacy of an individual associated with the project who was a trainer, a fictitious name was used in place of their actual name.

	supervise me. That's what got me out of all that stress. […] In the training, they [the trainers] give us some solutions and some ideas that helped me."
INT023 (Entrepreneur)	*"The training gave me a lot of self-confidence you know. There were a lot of tricks and some things I didn't know. [Farah] with [Amira[12]] who did the training […]. [Amira] who did the training, she was tbarkallah mashalah perfect. It motivated me, it gave me a lot of motivation. And I haven't stopped you know when we talk about women entrepreneurs and all that and as I am a woman entrepreneur and all that, so I wanted to give the best of myself and that encouraged me a lot to go forward and not to stagnate."*
INT114 (Trainer 1)	*"There were even women who called me [after the training] to say: 'I did this, what do you think' 'Excuse me, I'm calling you, but I was happy with this training that I wanted to share with you'. I say, no, no, no, I'm here for that. […] You need information, it's okay, call me, I can help and comfort you, […] with what you're doing, so keep going. So, we saw that we gave hope to micro-businesses and to these women, […] it was really a training, yes, but it was a human experience to give motivation to these women to hold on and to thrive."*
INT116 (Trainer 4)	*"I felt a great responsibility when I was in charge of the training. […] I often get great feedback […] but it's normal in a way that I get feedback like that. But from women who are sometimes even twice my age, it really impacted me and touched me. And I said to myself: There are things to do. I said to myself, this is one more responsibility and I will not hesitate for a second to do what I can do for a Tunisian woman. And there, I want to say that it has changed a side in my life, in a sense. Today, as soon as I see a woman entrepreneur, a woman who is going to launch her project […] I try to give her a little hope, a kind word, because I've see the impact of this motivation and this positive aspect for these women, so I try to reinforce this aspect and give more, even more for women."* *"It would be nice if it were face-to-face [sessions] so that these women could, could also [share]. Before […] arriving at the crying or the moment of awareness during the workshop. We would have already anticipated and taken charge of this emotional state and accompanied them individually. […] I am sure that there are many women who didn't want to share because they are ashamed to talk in front of others. If there were times, there are those who came on their own to talk to us at lunch, or to talk about their problems. But there are others who didn't want to bother us, maybe, or who didn't have the courage to come and talk about what's bothering them. I suppose that individual sessions would help these women enormously to talk, to get out the wounds that are bothering them today."*

[12] To safeguard the privacy of an individual associated with the project who was a trainer, a fictitious name was used in place of their actual name.

6. *Feminist approach in communications and visual identity of program*

The final performative element of the training program's co-development and delivery was the overt adoption of a feminist approach by CFE in the communications and visual identity of the LPWE. This was achieved through deliberate communications and design choices that effectively conveyed the program's feminist values and orientation.

The program's communication and visual identity strategy were collaboratively determined by the SEED research team, CFE, DAAM, and DID members who formed the program co-conception group. Although all partners agreed on the defining components, the actual development of the program's communication and visual identity materials was led by the female Communications Director from CFE. Her leadership in executing the program's vision effectively conveyed its feminist approach.

The CFE team first took the agreed-upon defining components and devised a concrete promotion and recruitment strategy for the training program. Their objective was to utilize appropriate channels and create compelling materials to attract WE to the LPWE. This involved reaching out to potential participants through effective communication channels, such as online marketing via Facebook, which is the most popular social media platform among WE. For the development of promotional materials and artifacts, the goal was to use language, imagery, colors, and incentives that would appeal to women's interests, values, and preferences, as well as embody the program's feminist orientation, with the aim of enticing them to register for the program. All project partners collaborated in approving and validating the promotional and recruitment materials for the program. As was corroborated in the field notes:

> *"To recruit participants for the training program, CFE plans to undertake a targeted promotion campaign on their Facebook page, aimed at both existing CFE clients and women entrepreneurs who are not yet clients. The target audience for this campaign will be women entrepreneurs residing in Tunis, Sfax, and Sousse. However, since two different program logos (one for each condition) will be used in the delivery, CFE cannot use a logo to promote the program. CFE will work on developing a comprehensive promotion, marketing, and communication strategy to effectively convey the program's information and appeal to women entrepreneurs." (Field notes, 2021-03-18)*

The Communications Director of CFE played a crucial role in designing the program's visual identity, which would effectively resonate with the target audience of WE in Tunisia. This involved taking into account not only the program's content but also the cultural and linguistic nuances of the audience. Additionally, recognizing that visual elements can play a significant role in shaping social norms and expectations, a feminist approach to visual identity was adopted. To embody this approach, the use of imagery and colors that resonated with WE was a critical design element. The training program materials, for example, incorporated bold and vivid colors such as red and blue, which

symbolize strength, energy, and courage. Moreover, images of WE were prominently featured, serving both as a representation of the target audience and a source of inspiration for program participants. Figures 6, 7, and 8 provide examples of the artifacts utilized in the program's delivery.

Figure 6: Program logo for Market condition of LPWE training program

Source: LPWE program materials

Figure 7: Program logo for Community condition of LPWE training program

Source: LPWE program materials

Figure 8: Photo of banner with program logos for Market and Community conditions from the LPWE Closing Ceremony

Source: CFE Tunisie Facebook page

Figures 6, 7, and 8 provide clear examples of the feminist symbolism and imagery incorporated into the program's visual identity. For instance, the logos prominently feature illustrations of female figures, indicating that the program is geared towards women. These figures were designed to have physical attributes and dress styles typically associated with Tunisian women, promoting positive representations of women and enabling WE to identify with the figures in the logos. Through intentional visual elements, gender stereotypes were challenged by portraying women in positions of power and leadership. Additionally, the use of the "♀" symbol, commonly used online or in texts to promote feminism and women's empowerment, was also included in the program's visual identity.

The feminist approach was also reflected in the communication vocabulary of the LPWE. The language used in program messaging aimed to emphasize its commitment to gender equality and encourage Tunisian women to pursue their entrepreneurial goals. However, it's important to note that language barriers posed a challenge as none of the research team

members were fluent in Tunisian Arabic. This created some ambiguity among the project partners, especially regarding the program slogans. There were extensive discussions regarding the original program slogans, which resulted in some friction among project partners. The CFE and DAAM teams pointed out that the originally proposed slogans did not make sense once translated from English into Tunisian Arabic. They then proposed new slogans that would be more appropriate for the Tunisian context. After several iterations and deliberations, final slogans that were deemed appropriate for the Tunisian context by CFE and DAAM were ultimately accepted. As supported in the qualitative interviews:

> *"We had long discussions on the cultural divergences […] of adaptation according to the Tunisian context, as […] with the case of the slogans which had a positive impact compared to the previous slogans which had almost no meaning." -INT106- (DAAM)*

The incorporation of a feminist approach in the communications and visual identity of the training program was a crucial performative factor in ensuring that the program reached its intended audience of WE in Tunisia. The program's promotion, recruitment, logos, and slogans all incorporated feminist aspects, signaling to participants that the program was specifically designed to train and support WE. The intentional design choices and communication strategies employed by the Communications Director of CFE and the larger program co-conception group aimed to create an inclusive environment, increase participation, and foster a sense of empowerment among WE in the LPWE program.

Evidence of empowerment among the women entrepreneurs

INT005 (Entrepreneur)	*"For me, when I started the training, I didn't have the idea of opening my own shop in the business center, the good thing that they helped me with this idea, of opening my own shop and then the other shops will come. […] It's a good idea, I won't wait until shops come to me, I'll start by myself. Especially the slogan […] motivated me. It meant a lot for me and it even made me cry. […] That is why I was perseverant. […] The slogan really represents what I'm doing, today I do my best and I try so that tomorrow I succeed, especially with the hard conditions in our country."*
INT106 (DAAM)	*"We had […], as expected in Sfax, a better attendance because Sfax, it is renowned as a region of workers, men and women, it is the economic capital of Tunisia. They are genetically hard workers. So we had a better attendance and more enthusiasm for training. Sousse too, but especially the regions of Sousse, the suburbs, the villages around Sousse, it was a great surprise. […] Because during the communication that we did and the recruitment, even the sponsorship of publications and everything we targeted this niche. A niche that didn't necessarily have access to training before. For many of the participants, it's the first time they've been accompanied. So that's where the difference and the impact comes from. So we did a fairly targeted recruitment for the communication side. We did a generalized communication to talk about the program in general and then, by social networks,*

	we targeted certain regions, so the people in those regions are the ones who see the publication." *"We could have expanded the final prizes a bit, more than 10. […] We could have also have had one big graduation ceremony. […] It would have had a bigger impact."*
INT116 (Trainer 4)	*"I noticed, that each group […] retained the slogan that was written on the roll up. And they repeated it and they said it. […] They retained the message and yes, yes, I think the slogan was retained and, […] the phrases were even repeated. […] The sentences were repeated, well they were used. […] And it was so strongly stated that I thought wow! […] It's a strong message."*

This brings an end to Part 2 of the Results, where we have discussed the 6 performative elements mobilized by CFE to integrate a feminist approach in the co-development and delivery of the LPWE training program. Moreover, Part 2 presented evidence of how the implementation of these performative elements contributed to the empowerment of the women entrepreneurs who completed the LPWE training program. The following section will delve into the Discussion chapter of this dissertation to elucidate the key findings that have been derived from the results.

Chapter 4: Discussion

In this chapter, the analysis and discussion of this dissertation will be presented. This chapter will give us the opportunity to analyze the results shown in the previous chapter, and interpret them building on the relevant notions brought forward in our literature review. As our method is one of discovery, we will attempt to highlight the main findings that can be inferred from our results.

Although this case study is insufficient to extract broad generalizable certitudes, it is useful for an original illustration of the mobilization of the feminist approach by an entrepreneurship support organization in Tunisia to influence the empowerment of women entrepreneurs.

Before beginning this exercise, we feel it is important to refresh our memory on some of the concepts outlined in the literature review that will be of importance in this chapter.

Important concepts from literature review

Critical performativity (CP): CP proposes a way of critically working with discourses of management as a way to reach progressive social change.

Individual empowerment: Individual (or personal) empowerment can be described as a process of transformation that enables individuals to make independent decisions and take action on these decisions to make changes in their lives. Agency, knowledge, and the presence of an enabling environment for change are identified as mechanisms of individual empowerment.

Women's entrepreneurship: Efforts to bring about new economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments through the actions of an individual or groups of individuals (in this case –women) through new products, processes, and services. Entrepreneurship can be used as tool for female empowerment and scholars have increasingly highlighted the emancipatory dimensions of entrepreneurship for individuals and groups.

The main question that guided our empirical research was:

> *How has the feminist approach been mobilized by an entrepreneurship support organization in Tunisia to influence the empowerment of women entrepreneurs?*

Keeping the important concepts from the literature review, as well as the main research question as central points, we will proceed to the analysis and present some major

findings. To provide an overview of the key findings of our case study, a brief summary is presented before delving into each finding in detail.

This study presents three central findings related to the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Tunisia. Finding 1 highlights the influential role of the historical context in critical performativity work, with sub-findings indicating the potential for critical performativity to challenge institutional contexts and the importance of practical applications to comprehend the effectiveness of tactics. Finding 2 emphasizes the significance of conducting empirical research on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Tunisia to address gaps in the literature, with a sub-finding highlighting the importance of empirical research to identify best practices in addressing barriers in women's entrepreneurship. Finding 3 highlights the positive impact of mobilizing the feminist approach in entrepreneurship training on the individual empowerment of women entrepreneurs, with sub-findings emphasizing the significance of the personal conditions of women entrepreneurs, cultural embeddedness of training programs, collaboration with Canadian entities to advance the feminist agenda, and safe spaces for women entrepreneurs to exchange ideas and promote social change.

Finding 1: The historical context is influential in critical performativity work

The first finding of our study posits that the historical context of an intervention is influential when conducting critical performativity work. Our study takes a historical perspective on critical performativity (Results – Part 1) highlighting that the historical context contributes to how performative work can arise. The argument brought forth is that CP can be achieved if the historical elements in place support its application. This finding aligns with Leca and Barin Cruz's (2021) literature, which emphasizes the importance of taking a historical perspective to trace the efforts made over the years to concretize critical scholarship.

Thus, describing the historical phases in which we see the evolution of feminist discourse in Tunisia is relevant. From the results, we can perceive that the growing and evolving feminist discourse in Tunisia over 8 historical phases ultimately favoured the development of the "*Programme Leadership pour les femmes entrepreneures*" (Leadership Program for Women Entrepreneurs) (LPWE) by entrepreneurship support organization CFE using the feminist approach. However, as apparent from the historical phases decribed, the evolution of feminist discourse in Tunisia has not been linear. In agreement with Leca and Barin Cruz (2021), there are lengthy, uncertain, nonlinear, and

open-ended historical processes that can influence how performative elements will be received in a particular context (Leca & Barin Cruz, 2021).

Firstly, the matriarchal nature of pre-Islamic Imazighen ('Berber') culture and the presence of strong historical female figures such as the Kahina and Queen Didon Elyssa positively influenced feminist discourse in Tunisia. Various stakeholders interviewed highlighted the matriarchal nature of Imazighen culture and the significant historical female figures as influential factors that have contributed to shaping the identity of modern Tunisian women. Furthermore, multiple stakeholders highlighted enduring characteristics of these historical female figures, such as leadership, intelligence, and strength, that continue to be present in Tunisian women today.

Secondly, in the period from the 1900s to the 1940s, there was significant progress in feminist discourse in Tunisia. Many pioneering feminists began openly advocating for the rights, obligations, and positions of women in the public sphere. Notable female activists of that era, including Bchira Ben Mrad, Manoubia Al-Wartani, and Habiba Al-Minshari, played an important role in the fight for women's emancipation and advocated for feminist causes, such as the abandonment of the traditional hijab. The publication of Tahar Haddad's influential book 'Our Women in Shari'a and Society' was a significant development during this period. Haddad, a scholar and pioneering thinker, prompted Tunisians to reconsider the role of women in society by presenting a novel interpretation of Islam. Additionally, women's involvement in the female branches of major movements (including nationalist, socialist, and religious) increased, although it was usually contingent on the consent of a male family member. Through these movements, women were able to break free from the confines of their homes and engage in public life, a domain that had previously been exclusively reserved for men.

The preceding phases, which saw a growing support for feminist discourse, reached a unprecedented apex under the leadership of Habib Bourguiba. Bourguiba assumed the helm of the *Neo Destour* party in 1935, which fought for Tunisia's independence from French colonial rule and ardently championed feminist causes. Following Tunisia's independence in 1956, Bourguiba became the country's first President and played a pivotal role in the creation of the Code of Personal Status. This document explicitly outlined the rights and obligations of both women and men in the newly formed nation, and granted women liberal rights that surpassed those of pre-independence Tunisia and other countries in the MENA region. The CPS further bolstered feminist discourse in Tunisia by advocating for the education of all girls, banning polygamy, and introducing divorce decrees for women. Bourguiba's actions during his tenure as President, which lasted until 1987, had an immensely positive impact on the feminist movement and discourse in Tunisia. As supported in the results, Bourguiba is regarded by many as the

most influential figure in the country's history in terms of transforming the status of women and his efforts to advance women's rights are still frequently cited today.

Following the bloodless *coup d'état* on November 7th, 1987, which removed Bourguiba from the presidency, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who was then Prime Minister, assumed the leadership of Tunisia. Ben Ali's impact on feminist discourse in Tunisia is more nuanced than that of Bourguiba. On the one hand, many consider that Ben Ali continued to advance the feminist cause within the country by enacting laws aimed at promoting gender equality, and building on the progress made by Bourguiba in education and employment. However, despite the state's efforts to establish a conducive legal framework for women, the cultural norms and social realities lagged behind. This period was also marked by authoritarianism, corruption, and a lack of political freedoms, which had varying effects on feminist discourse. The oppressive atmosphere resulted in the emergence of autonomous social and feminist movements that championed women's rights, but were subject to censorship and lacked freedom of expression. Leila Trabelsi, the spouse of former President Ben Ali, was specifically accused of limiting free speech in Tunisia by directly funding compliant organizations that promoted non-radical women's groups for the state's benefit. Amidst the deteriorating socio-economic situation and rampant corruption in Tunisia, Ben Ali's regime came to an end after a street vendor's self-immolation on December 17th, 2010, which sparked the Jasmine Revolution and pushed Ben Ali and his family into exile.

The Jasmine Revolution initially generated a positive impact and momentum for feminist discourse in Tunisia, and instilled a sense of optimism for the future of the country. During the revolution, women, such as Lina Ben Mhenni, Raja Bin Salama, and Saida Sadouni, played a crucial role in the protests, despite many facing violent attempts to suppress their demonstrations. Women demanded better socio-economic conditions and a democratic government that would propel the country into the 21st century. They expressed their needs and concerns with greater force and were eager to play a more active role in decision-making processes. Some viewed their involvement in the revolution as the pinnacle of women's empowerment, fostered by the education and encouragement to participate in political, social, and economic matters during the reigns of Bourguiba and Ben Ali.

However, the initial enthusiasm in feminist discourse and hope for societal progress sparked by the Jasmine Revolution waned under the 10-year rule of Ennahda from 2011 to 2021. During Ennahda's dominant political tenure and majority partnership in successive coalition governments, they created an environment of animosity and mistrust by attempting to limit women's rights and advocate for a greater role of Islam in public life. Ennahda's attempt to repeal several laws and rights for women established under Bourguiba had a negative impact on feminist discourse, particularly during their early

years in power after the revolution, leading some to view Ennahda as one of the biggest threats to women's lives during the transitional period. For instance, Ennahda proposed a constitutional change that would strip women of their position as ‘equal’ to men and instead redefine them as ‘complementary,’ thereby depriving them of their status as full citizens. The change was eventually rejected due to the protests and social uprisings that saw strong participation from women, as well as the efforts of Tunisian feminist and secular organizations. Despite Ennahda's continued attempts to undermine the rights of Tunisian women from for a decade, women continued to fight for the protection and preservation of the rights.

The current phase, which began to emerge in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, reached its apex on July 25th, 2021, when President Kais Saied enacted emergency measures and dissolved parliament. Prior to this, there were widespread protests in Tunisia calling for political reform, triggered by the mishandling of the pandemic and the country's economic decline. Although some were concerned about the potential for complete authoritarianism, many supported Saied's actions, and believed they were a step in the right direction for women's rights. One example of this is Saied's appointment of Najla Bouden as Tunisia's first female Prime Minister on September 29th, 2021, which had a generally positive impact on feminist discourse. Additionally, Bouden's cabinet included 9 other women. However, this move also had a negative impact on feminist discourse, as some perceived the women in Parliament as having no real responsibilities or duties and merely being ‘button pushers.’ In recent months, Saied has been consolidating his authority in Tunisia, and it remains unclear how this will affect women's rights and discourse in the country in the years to come.

The 8 historical phases, although nonlinear and sometimes open-ended in their effects on feminist discourse in Tunisia, created a largely favourable milieu in which entrepreneurship support organization CFE could co-develop and deliver the LPWE training program geared to women entrepreneurs mobilizing a feminist approach. This finding is pertinent to push the CP conversation further as it allows us to make a more comprehensive assessment of the conditions for performativity. The argument is that by adopting a historical perspective, we can identify the factors, historical figures, and actions that have contributed to the context in which performativity can eventually occur. Examining how feminist discourse developed in Tunisia's past through a historical lens contributes to the conversation on CP and the performativity debate.

Sub-finding 1A: Critical performativity can help challenge institutional contexts

Sub-finding 1A advances the potential of critical performativity to challenge institutional contexts. This finding suggests that CP work by an entrepreneurship support organization, such as CFE, can contribute to challenging institutional contexts, bringing about new perspectives on institutional aspects that influence women entrepreneurs. This finding aligns with Huault et al.'s (2017) viewpoint that social processes shape the social world, and thus, can be changed. Moreover, Mosedale's (2005) notion that group membership constrains possibilities and defines socially constructed boundaries is corroborated, indicating that these boundaries can be changed since they are socially constructed. This finding also concurs with Mosedale's (2005) claim that empowerment initiatives can redefine and expand the limits of what is possible for women.

By adopting a historical lens in our study, we observed that the various historical phases that have influenced the feminist discourse in Tunisia have shaped a unique institutional context –one that presents both support and opposition to WE. While CP has the potential to challenge both formal and informal institutions, our case study concentrates on utilizing CP to challenge informal institutions and foster transformative change.

Women entrepreneurs in Tunisia encounter gender biases that are influenced by traditional gender roles shaped by Arab and Muslim culture. These gendered identities can be disempowering for women in both public and domestic spheres and are often deeply ingrained and perpetuated by the women themselves, as observed in the qualitative interviews:

> *"[The] main role of the woman is to raise her children" -INT009- (Entrepreneur).*

> *"The Arab world already treats the woman differently to the man. I personally respect it, I don't have a problem with that because, I don't think to talk about the equality man-woman. […] For me, it is necessary that the man has his position, we can't be equal but we must respect each other. […] The woman also, for different reasons we agree but finally for me they can create already a complementarity." -INT010- (Entrepreneur)*

CFE aimed to promote changes in informal institutions, specifically in the mindset of women entrepreneurs, through the mobilization of the feminist approach in the LPWE. The performativity of the feminist approach intended to challenge the gender roles and identities of women entrepreneurs in Tunisia to contribute to the participants' empowerment. The training program's performative elements demonstrate evidence of the opposition of societal and cultural boundaries, creating the opportunity for the redefinition of the roles and responsibilities of WE in Tunisia.

Firstly, CFE's decision to have women in leadership positions (i.e., exclusively having a team of women in operational and delivery roles) in the LPWE helped to challenge traditional gender roles in Tunisia and provided WE with role models. As corroborated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"I played the game of the successful woman entrepreneur. I put myself in the position of a success story to say that there is a model who succeeds. So it's great to see the model of a woman who started young, who started little by little, and who succeeds, who is satisfied today, and who is fulfilled in what she is doing. […] And who is a mother and who has been able to be a mother, who educates her children, etc. So in all aspects yes, it is somewhere. Yes, it is a beautiful model to follow and it is a successful model. So I think that this awareness, yes, we are capable of it. I am not alone. There are women like me who have the same fears and who continue to move forward. So I, myself, I will continue and I will do my best." -INT116- (Trainer 4)*

A second way CFE challenged the gender roles of WE was through the examples used in the LPWE training content. By featuring Tunisian women entrepreneur protagonists, the participants were able to relate to these examples and project themselves, thereby challenging their gendered identities. A notable change was in the redefinition of their perceived abilities to innovate in their business. This was evidenced in the qualitative interviews:

> *"Through the models we have presented: […], the box model [BMC], and the […] AEL, […] we saw that these women projected themselves and described their daily life in the model. […] And they were very happy to see that in their daily life, their practice, which is based on theoretical things, is correct. […] So, they were happy and they wanted […] to move forward and dig deeper to innovate. […] Because they found that what they were doing already in their kind of practice […] could be found within the theory. […] So then, it was kind of like they were reassured. […] And that they could continue developing inside of these like theoretical models. […] So, there was reinforcement of what they were doing." -INT114- (Trainer 1)*

Thirdly, the use of the feminist approach by CFE in the LPWE's communications and visual identity, including program logos and slogans, was found to challenge the gender roles and identities of the WE. For example, the qualitative interviews suggest that the slogans used in the program had a significant impact on the mindset and self-perception of the women entrepreneurs:

> *"For me, when I started the training, I didn't have the idea of opening my own shop in the business center, the good thing that they helped me with this idea, of opening my own shop and then the other shops will come. […] It's a good idea, I won't wait until shops come to me, I'll start by myself. Especially the slogan […] motivated me. It meant a lot for me and it even made me cry. […] That is why I was perseverant. […] The slogan really represents what I'm doing, today I do my best and I try so that tomorrow I succeed, especially with the hard conditions in our country."*

Repetition was understood as a crucial aspect of CP's ability to bring about change. In order for CP to have an impact on challenging institutional contexts, it was recognized that the mechanisms involved must be repeated. For instance, in the case of the LPWE

program slogans, repetition helped to establish these new discourses that influenced the redefinition of the gendered identities of WE. This was substantiated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"I noticed, that each group […] retained the slogan that was written on the roll up. And they repeated it and they said it. […] They retained the message and yes, yes, I think the slogan was retained and, […] the phrases were even repeated. […] The sentences were repeated, well they were used. […] And it was so strongly stated that I thought wow! […] It's a strong message." - INT116- (Trainer 4)*

This finding suggests that critical performativity has the potential to challenge institutional contexts. CFE utilized the feminist approach throughout the LPWE to oppose societal and cultural boundaries, ultimately contributing to challenging the gender roles and identities of women entrepreneurs in Tunisia. By working with CP, socially constructed barriers and gender identities can be dismantled, paving the way for new roles and opportunities for women entrepreneurs, as highlighted in the case of the LPWE.

Sub-finding 1B: Practical applications of critical performativity are essential to understand effectiveness of tactics

Sub-finding 1B postulates that practical applications of critical performativity are essential to understand effectiveness of tactics. This sub-finding highlights the significance of practical application in understanding the efficiency of the performative elements mobilized by CFE in the LPWE. This finding concurs with Huault et al. (2017) who emphasize the importance of conducting additional, extensive, and diverse empirical research studies on CP, to examine the effectiveness of tactics, relevant heterotopias, and the potential and limitations of interventions, to develop a well-informed repertoire of contextualized best practices and key learnings. This finding also corroborates with Leca and Barin Cruz's (2021) critique that CP generates more theoretical debate than practical applications. Furthermore, this finding agrees with the literature by Adler et al. (2006), Alvesson et al. (2009), and Clegg et al. (2006) who recognize the challenge of bridging the gap between theory and practice in CMS, and Knudsen's (2017) claim that CP can be a novel approach to address this issue.

Our case study presents a practical application of CP using a feminist approach mobilized through entrepreneurship support organization CFE in Tunisia. CFE intended to influence the empowerment of women entrepreneurs using 6 performative elements, described in Part 2 of the Results. The tactics mobilized were experimental and based on a theoretical

understanding of their potential effectiveness on the empowerment of WE in Tunisia. However, the concrete impact of these strategies on WE was uncertain. The aim was for CFE to test these performative tactics in the LPWE to determine their effectiveness in increasing the empowerment of WE.

According to the Results – Part 2, the evidence suggests that all 6 performative elements mobilized by CFE were effective in increasing the empowerment of WE in Tunisia. Though all tactics mobilized indicate positive impacts on promoting empowerment among WE, the results suggest that certain performative elements were more effective than others. For instance, the program's focus on women entrepreneurs, and the feminist themes and examples used, provided more evidence of increased empowerment among the participants. On the other hand, tactics such as collaboration with Canadian partners, and collaboration with female scholars, display less evidence of increased empowerment among WE. The reason for this could be due to the direct or indirect nature of these performative elements on the participants. The training content directly exposed the WE to feminist themes and examples, which had a more direct impact on their empowerment. In contrast, female scholars had limited contact with the WE, resulting in a less direct influence on their empowerment. However, as the female scholars participated in co-creating the training content with feminist themes and examples, it can be inferred that they had a more indirect influence on the empowerment of the WE.

Additionally, it is important to consider the potential interactions between the different tactics employed when evaluating their effectiveness. As demonstrated in the qualitative interviews, some of the tactics mobilized by CFE may have had a combined impact on the empowerment of WE. As stated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"After the training, I felt that my ideas are more organized. […] I am more open to new ideas, and l know what to do to solve the problem without seeking help from anyone. […] [Nesrine] taught us to keep our clients loyal to our products and to look for more clients. What matters is not to sell; it is rather to make your clients want to go back and buy your products. […] This is the most important thing that I kept in mind. […] I became more self-confident. […] I'm very, very happy with the training and even after the training, I have seen the results of the training on my career."- INT014- (Entrepreneur)*

In this citation, one entrepreneur reported feeling more organized, open to new ideas, and confident in her abilities after the training. She implies that both the training materials and the operational and delivery team can be credited for this. Therefore, when assessing the effectiveness of tactics employed, it is pertinent to consider how they may interact with each other in the practical application of CP.

This study contributes to the advancement of CP work and the promotion of women's empowerment by addressing the gap in knowledge on the effectiveness of CP strategies. It provides initial insights into the tactics that can be utilized in CP and how organizations

can implement them to promote the empowerment of WE. While this study offers valuable insights, it is not without limitations. Although it sheds light on specific feminist CP tactics and their impact on the empowerment of WE in Tunisia, its ability to assess the individual influence of each tactic is limited. This is due to their direct or indirect influence on WE and the possible interactions between them. Thus, the mobilization of feminist performative elements by CFE in the LPWE should be considered as a comprehensive performative intervention. To gain a more precise understanding of the individual effects of each performative element, further practical applications of CP work are necessary to confirm and validate the effectiveness of the tactics mobilized by CFE.

Finding 2: Empirical research on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Tunisia contributes to important gaps in the literature

The second key finding of this study emphasizes the importance of empirical research on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Tunisia to address gaps in the literature. Our case study, which focuses on CFE's mobilization of the feminist approach to impact the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Tunisia, fills important gaps in the fields of women's entrepreneurship and women's empowerment. This finding aligns with previous research, including West & Zimmerman's (1991) claim that women and issues of concern to women have been neglected in social science research, resulting in a limited understanding of women's experiences. Additionally, our finding concurs with McHugh et al. (1986) who argued that research in the social sciences has historically been biased towards men and their experiences, limiting its relevance to women.

Firstly, our study addresses an important gap in the entrepreneurship literature by providing empirical evidence on the experiences of women entrepreneurs. This finding concurs with Jennings and Brush (2013) who noted that research on women entrepreneurship is still limited, despite the significant size of the phenomenon. Our case study contributes to filling this gap in the broader entrepreneurship literature by focusing on the challenges and opportunities women in entrepreneurship.

Our study also addresses gaps in the entrepreneurship literature by providing contextualized gendered data that is suitable for theorizing on women's entrepreneurship. This finding aligns with Ahl's (2006) observation that traditional methods of theorizing, which rely on multivariate analysis of secondary data sets that measure only the male/female binary, limit our understanding of how women engage in entrepreneurship. These traditional approaches to theorizing, as noted by Hurley (1999) and Stevenson

(1990), can result in biased interpretations of entrepreneurship findings and the false perception that women entrepreneurs do not “measure up” to the norm. Therefore, by offering contextualized gendered data from our empirical case study, we contribute to filling this gap, which can enable more appropriate theorizing on women's entrepreneurship.

Moreover, ur study contributes to important gaps in the literature regarding research on women’s entrepreneurship in developing countries. This finding is supported by Dechant & Lamky's (2005) assertion that most existing models and theories on women-owned businesses are based on experiences in developed Western nations. Women in developing countries may face different entrepreneurial motivators and legal, institutional, cultural, and informational barriers, as noted by Orhan & Scott (2001), Terjesen & Elam (2012), and Makhkamova & Saidmurodov (2019), making it essential to conduct research in these contexts. Additionally, gender inequality remains a significant challenge in developing countries, hindering women's economic contributions in starting businesses and finding employment, according to Sarfaraz et al. (2014). Our case study addresses this gap in the literature by providing insights on the entrepreneurial experiences of WE in a developing country.

Furthermore, our study addresses the gap in the literature on female entrepreneurship in the MENA region. This finding agrees with Dechant & Lamky (2005) who have noted that although some studies have been conducted on female entrepreneurship in developing and transition economies in various parts of the world, very little attention is paid to those in Arab countries. They further noted that the unique cultural context of the MENA region, infused with Arab and Islamic values, plays a major role in shaping the entrepreneurial experiences of women in MENA. The gender gap in entrepreneurship in MENA, and in Tunisia, was also noted by GEM (2021), highlighting the need to understand the specific cultural and societal norms that may hinder women’s participation in entrepreneurial activities in the region. Thus, our empirical case study in Tunisia contributes to this important gap in the literature pertaining to the entrepreneurial experiences of women in the MENA region.

Our study contributes to filling gaps in the literature on the definition of women's empowerment, as the concept lacks a clear and universally accepted definition, making it challenging to track and evaluate development interventions. The multi-faceted and context-specific nature of empowerment further adds to the difficulty. Our finding aligns with Bacqué & Biewener's (2015) claim that the use of empowerment by multiple actors with different ideologies has led to a multiplication of definitions and interpretations. It also concurs with Lincoln et al. (2002) who noted that the different definitions present inherent contradictions embedded in discourse and practice, making practical implementation challenging. Our finding harmonises with Mayoux (1999) and

Sardenberg (2010) in highlighting the importance of considering cultural norms and attitudes in women's empowerment development, as neglecting socio-political and cultural structures in empowerment initiatives can perpetuate existing power imbalances, as noted by Narayan-Parker (2005). The LPWE training program offers an innovative approach that provides insights into context-specific empowerment mechanisms in Tunisia, contributing to important gaps in the literature on the definition of empowerment.

Our study addresses the gaps in the literature concerning the processes of empowerment and the evaluation of the specific factors contributing to it. This finding is in line with Malhotra et al.'s (2002) assertion that longitudinal research experiments essential for understanding empowerment processes in international development have not been conducted adequately in the past due to the high budget and time requirements. This finding also aligns with Garikipati (2013) who highlighted that measuring empowerment outcomes through scales and checkboxes can be limiting, and understanding the process of expanding women's agency requires more time, detailed interactions, and larger budgets. Our case study provides an empirical research instance that contributes to addressing significant gaps in the literature regarding the processes of empowerment and the factors that can enable it.

Our case study contributes valuable insights and makes notable contributions to addressing prevalent literature gaps in the fields of women's empowerment and women's entrepreneurship through empirical research on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Tunisia.

Sub-finding 2A: Empirical research helps to identify best practices for addressing barriers faced by women entrepreneurs

Sub-finding 2A advances that empirical research helps to identify best practices in addressing barriers faced by women entrepreneurs. Our study provides an empirical research example of CFE's utilization of diverse strategies to address entrepreneurial hurdles faced by women entrepreneurs in Tunisia. Through empirical research, this study helps fill knowledge gaps on how to effectively address specific barriers that hinder the entrepreneurial progress of women entrepreneurs. Our finding harmonizes with Jennings & Brush's (2013) statement that entrepreneurial obstacles can significantly impede women's ability to establish and expand successful businesses. Moreover, our finding aligns with GEM's (2021) claim that entrepreneurial barriers manifest differently in the MENA region, where conservative systems impose gender restrictions on women.

Women entrepreneurs in Tunisia are confronted with several entrepreneurial obstacles, such as work vs family demands, networking obstacles, access to resources barriers, and unconscious bias and stereotypes against women entrepreneurs, that CFE attempted to tackle using multiple tactics in the LPWE.

Firstly, in terms work vs family demands, many WE had the added responsibility of caring for their children, which led them to work from home or bring their children with them to work. As a result, women's entrepreneurial working hours were limited by their need to manage both work and family responsibilities. As mentioned in the qualitative interviews:

> *"Family impact, especially [can be a barrier in entrepreneurship]. […] Especially since the woman had children and the children can be a barrier." -INT110- (Credit officer)*

To address the issue, the LPWE program was designed to accommodate the family responsibilities of WE. For example, the program schedule was planned with training sessions during school hours to accommodate the schedules of their children. Additionally, in certain cases, WE were permitted to bring their children with them to the training sessions. This approach was confirmed in the field notes:

> *"During the debrief with the research team following some of the Phase 1 exploratory reseach interviews, it is evident that having a research team primarily composed of female scholars for this project is highly beneficial. Not only do they possess a deep understanding of the subject matter, but their perspectives as women have also yielded interesting insights. For example, they have brought up relevant considerations related to the development of the program, such as aspects of care work. Likewise, there have been pertinent discussions about gender roles in different contexts, and how there seems to be a desire for women entrepreneurs in Tunisia to reconcile between traditional gender roles and modernity." (Field notes, 2020-11-06)*

Another major challenge encountered by WE in Tunisia is accessing and engaging with entrepreneurial networks. This is supported by a primary source:

> *"Women are always asking for support, whether it's [in-class] support or support via […] other type of support. […] Also what interests them, it's the opportunity to network, to get to know each other, to discuss, and sometimes, even to go outside the work environment, to discuss and everything." -INT107- (DAAM)*

To address this challenge, CFE implemented several strategies. One approach was to bring the women entrepreneurs together for in-person training sessions which had a positive outcome. As supported in the qualitative interviews:

> *"We saw that these women were working, but they could not find the networking and could not find people to discuss their successes and failures. There was no listening or appreciation in their environment for what they do. So, through the training, they had a valorization of their projects and a valorization of their actions, and they felt they belonged to women entrepreneurs. […] Because they were micro-businesses, so they were happy. […] We could see their improvement." -INT114- (Trainer 1)*

"I had the opportunity to get to know some business women and get more into this world that I love.[…] Because, as we know, the entrepreneur is under a lot of stress. Yes, so, and the most difficult formula to achieve is to do business while being fulfilled with what you do. Now every woman wants to be a businessperson, when women see other women growing their business and raising money, they want to do that too. " -INT002- (Entrepreneur)

In addition to physical networks, CFE also supported the formation of virtual social networks using platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, which remained active weeks after the training program ended. As confirmed in the qualitative interviews:

"When she [entrepreneur] is alone, she doubts. Because when she is alone, she has no role models in front of her. She thinks she won't be able to. When we are in a group, we encourage each other. We are not alone. Fears are dispelled. There are kind words between them. There is all that which makes that aspect of isolation and fear. […] When we are in a group, there is this motivation and this group impulse. […]They [entrepreneurs] continue to exchange news [on WhatsApp groups], wish each other well at the end of the year, etc. What is also interesting is that whenever there is an event that concerns women or entrepreneurship, they share on this group." -INT116- (Trainer 4)

A third entrepreneurial barrier encountered by WE in Tunisia is the limited access to resources. The challenge of accessing financial resources is particularly noteworthy for WE in Tunisia, as emphasized in the qualitative interviews:

"There is a certain caution on the part of women entrepreneurs in general, but there is also the question of the access to guarantees, because large amounts require more guarantees. So, there is an issue in relation to that and women also borrow, there is a demand for small amounts. […] The more the amount increases, the higher the guarantee required. And since women in fact, according to Tunisian legislation, they do not inherit, there is no parity in inheritance, so it depends. There are cases, it is case by case. It is true that there are some cases where women can inherit more than men. But […] most of the time, her share is less, for example, her share is less than that of her brother's, her children's or her husband's." -INT107- (DAAM)

To facilitate access to financial resources, a lottery was organized by CFE at the conclusion of the LPWE training program, offering a financial contribution as a prize to multiple entrepreneurs who completed the program. While the WE appreaciated this tactic, it could have been enhanced, as evidenced in the primary data:

"We could have expanded the final prizes a bit, more than 10. […] We could have also have had one big graduation ceremony. […] It would have had a bigger impact." -INT106- (DAAM)

Additionally, for WE who were not clients of CFE, the LPWE training program provided an introduction to a relevant microfinance institution in Tunisia that offers financial products customized to the needs of women entrepreneurs.

Subsequent to the delivery of the training program, CFE also initiated the implementation of a guarantee fund in collaboration with DAAM. The purpose of this fund is to assist women who lack the necessary collateral to obtain larger microfinance loans. As corroborated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"There is the possibility of involving a guarantee fund and this is a project underway with [DAAM] Foundation." -INT107- (DAAM)*

CFE also implemented reduced guarantee prerequisites for women who are seeking microfinance loans. As an illustration, women can "either have a joint guarantee or a vehicle guarantee. So we try to lighten to the maximum." (INT107 – DAAM)

Fourthly, WE in Tunisia face the challenge of unconscious bias and stereotypes in the business world, hindering their credibility. To address this obstacle, CFE offered a certificate of completion from HEC Montréal to WE who successfully completed the LPWE program. The certificate aimed to enhance their credibility not only in their business dealings but also in their personal relationships and communities. This was corroborated in the field notes and qualitative interviews:

> *"During the Closing Ceremony and interviews, the women entrepreneurs expressed great pride in participating in the project with Canadian partners. Some of them even expressed a desire to visit Canada and expand their businesses there. Additionally, receiving a program certificate from a Canadian university was a significant achievement for many of the entrepreneurs, especially those who had not pursued higher formal education." (Field notes, 2021-11-23).*

> *"So, the moments of joy, it was clear when they finished the course, when they got the certificate [from HEC Montréal], the moments of joy too." -INT116- (Trainer 4)*

CFE employed various tactics to tackle the entrepreneurial obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs in Tunisia, and the evidence shows that these strategies were effective. The empirical data highlighting the positive outcomes of these tactics is valuable in developing a repertoire of best practices to address the barriers faced by women entrepreneurs. This case study helps to fill crucial gaps in the literature on addressing barriers for women entrepreneurs.

Finding 3: Mobilizing the feminist approach in entrepreneurship training can influence changes in individual empowerment among women entrepreneurs

The third central finding of the study suggests that the mobilization of a feminist approach in entrepreneurship training can influence changes in individual empowerment among

women entrepreneurs. Specifically, this finding highlights that CFE's use of the feminist approach through the LPWE contributed to enhancing the individual empowerment of the women entrepreneurs who participated in the program. This aligns with the perspective put forth by Bandura (1997) and Huis et al. (2017), who suggest that personal empowerment should develop relatively quickly in entrepreneurship support initiatives. Additionally, this finding is consistent with the idea proposed by Huis et al. (2017) and Inglehart et al. (2003) that changing relational and societal dynamics may take more time. Moreover, the finding agrees with Jayakarani et al.'s (2012) argument that agency, knowledge, and an enabling environment are critical mechanisms for individual empowerment. Finally, our analysis highlights that the individual empowerment experienced by the WE in the LPWE was mainly economic in nature.

Results-Part 2 showcases that changes in agency were observed among numerous WE, leading to increased individual empowerment. Agency is considered a critical component of individual empowerment, and changes in agency were identified in the qualitative data for several of the performative element mobilized by CFE. The expansion of the women entrepreneurs' agency was reflected in various components, including increased self-confidence, higher levels of self-efficacy, improved capacity to make informed decisions, and a stronger belief in their own ability to take action. This is supported by quotes from the qualitative interviews, such as:

> *"[After the training] I became stronger than before, I'm putting a lot of efforts, I'm always with my workbook where I fill everything, how much I still need to finish the shop, taking note of the clients. Because I'm going to need to increase my costumer base if I want to go further with my business. […] In the sessions of the training I noticed that the other entrepreneurs they didn't stop, they're always moving forward with their businesses, they manage very well." -INT001- (Entrepreneur)*

> *"Before the training, l simply used to work. But now, l've started to develop new things and even started to think of creating my own design. I want to share a story. […] Now l always think of dealing with customers abroad, develop my business, do online marketing for my business and l never thought about this before. Now l am totally for starting to do this." -INT012- (Entrepreneur)*

> *"The training gave me a lot of self-confidence you know. There were a lot of tricks and some things I didn't know. [Farah] with [Amira] who did the training […]. [Amira] who did the training, she was tbarkallah mashalah perfect. It motivated me, it gave me a lot of motivation. And I haven't stopped you know when we talk about women entrepreneurs and all that and as I am a woman entrepreneur and all that, so I wanted to give the best of myself and that encouraged me a lot to go forward and not to stagnate." -INT023- (Entrepreneur)*

The program's emphasis on knowledge acquisition was found to contribute to increased self-confidence, self-efficacy, and informed decision-making among the WE who completed the program, ultimately leading to improvements in individual empowerment. Results presented in Part 2 highlight the changes in knowledge observed among several

WE and its impact on their empowerment levels. This is supported by the following quotes obtained from the interviews:

> *"During the training, l learned how to study a project idea. The training that I had with CFE during the summer put me on the right path. […] The training was so helpful, and it really made me move forward." -INT020- (Entrepreneur)*

> *"We learned in the training how to develop ideas and propose them to whom they may concern. For example, I can sew a particular piece of clothing and show it to my friends, sisters, or my mother, and they would encourage me. This usually motivates me to do more thanks to what we learned in the training. […] Thanks to experience and to the training, I learned many things like progressing and becoming more self-confident. […] That's what I want: more ideas. I like applying what I learn; that's why I worked really hard at home. Sometimes, I have a look at the notes we studied in the training and apply the points that are relevant to the situation." -INT015- (Entrepreneur)*

> *"I learned in the training... The best thing I learned are the relationships. […] It is very, very necessary. […] Network, you need a network to work and make relations. […] The intelligence is how you make relations. You can make. But how you improve them and stay in them." -INT027- (Entrepreneur)*

During the LPWE, the presence of an enabling environment for change of institutional structures and social norms facilitated the process of individual empowerment among the WE. The results presented in Part 2 provide evidence of changes in the enabling environment for WE, which had a positive impact on their level of individual empowerment. This finding is substantiated by the following quotes:

> *"I got to know a new group of people […]. I met many people who fell and did not have much progress. We talked to each other and listened to each other's experiences. We felt as if we were empowering each other. […] We were a group whose members complemented each other. When you sit and talk with the group, you easily feel that you are comfortable and want to talk and share your story with the others. […] I did not use to have any [network]. […] I was solitary and I only worked alone and interacted only with customers. But with the group now, l realized that we complement each other. […] We realized that we can all interact with each other. […] [This] motivates me to get to meet and know more people." -INT112- (Entrepreneur)*

> *"You can communicate, there are business women , you can talk to them, know them even if they are not from the same field, we can collaborate together. […] The people that I met are famous, it is good to know new people, […] there is a possibility to collaborate with them" -INT028- (Entrepreneur)*

> *"There are people of the training, so during the sessions, there were [WhatsApp] groups that were formed. […] Networks, people who will work together. […] New products together. […] They are still talking. […] This is a Sfax group [for example]. […] Last discussion it was 15 of November. So, they are still discussion between them [since end of training in July]. […] She [one entrepreneur] makes, she has workshop that manufactures traditional clothes. […] So, she's going to collaborate with another one who is in sales. " -INT115- (Trainer 2)*

According to Jayakarani (2012), empowerment can be classified into five domains: health, economic, political, natural resources, and spiritual, with economic empowerment being a crucial component of overall empowerment for women entrepreneurs. Our analysis highlights that the individual empowerment experienced by the WE in the LPWE was mainly in the economic domain. The results from Part 2 of the study demonstrate the economic nature of the individual empowerment experienced by the WE, as evidenced by the following quotations:

> *"The training was very helpful, I learned a lot, like for example, before, I used to accept all kind of work, now I want to specialize. […] Now I want to specialize in bride's [couture] and grow my name in it. […] I earn money and it's beautiful how busy I am, I don't have free time. […] I thank them [researchers] for coming here, from their country to support us." -INT009- (Entrepreneur)*

> *"When they [women entrepreneurs] do the necessary training, they learn how to manage their project. They feel more proud of themselves. They know they can do better when they understand the process. […] The steps to follow. At the beginning, many women feel lost: How to do this? How to do that? How to find resources? […] Many questions are unclear, but when they are clearer, the woman can make a progress and makes herself better, such as the example of the beautician yesterday that she doubled her business after the training. […] Clear vision." -INT003- (Entrepreneur)*

Although the LPWE intervention was effective in promoting individual empowerment among many of the WE, it is crucial to acknowledge that no single intervention can address all the factors that impact the empowerment process. While changes in individual empowerment were noted, the LPWE alone is not adequate. Further longitudinal studies are necessary to grasp the impacts on relational and societal empowerment, as these may require more time to manifest. Additionally, as the subsequent sub-finding will illustrate, there are external factors that are beyond the control of the intervention and can influence the success of an empowerment program, thereby affecting the participants' empowerment processes.

Sub-finding 3A: The personal conditions of women entrepreneurs impacts their empowerment process

Sub-finding 3A suggests that the personal conditions of women entrepreneurs impacts their empowerment process. This finding advances that the empowerment process of each woman entrepreneur involved in the LPWE, was influenced by their unique personal circumstances. Our finding concurs with Kabeer's (1999) notion that certain preconditions that characterise a woman's past and current environment, are expected to influence her empowerment process. This finding also corroborates with Jennings & Brush (2013), who claimed that family embeddedness can have a significant impact on

the entrepreneurial activities and outcomes of women. Finally, this finding agrees with Chell & Baines (1998) and Welter et al. (2006) who identified that cultural norms, traditions, and religious practices shape the roles that men and women assume within families, and that these factors can either facilitate or hinder entrepreneurial behavior, as per Jennings and Brush (2013).

Firstly, the geographic location of WE was found to be a significant factor influencing their empowerment process during the LPWE. Stakeholders noted that a WE's upbringing region and whether they were based in Tunis, Sousse, or Sfax influenced their empowerment process. This finding is supported by qualitative interviews:

> *"We had […], as expected in Sfax, a better attendance because Sfax, it is renowned as a region of workers, men and women, it is the economic capital of Tunisia. They are genetically hard workers. So we had a better attendance and more enthusiasm for training. Sousse too, but especially the regions of Sousse, the suburbs, the villages around Sousse, it was a great surprise." -INT106- (DAAM)*

> *"Of course it's not the same in the North [Tunis and Sousse] as in Sfax, but in Sfax, there are more competent people. Even those who are well-known and skilled in Sousse or in Tunis are originally from Sfax." -INT020- (Entrepreneur)*

> *"I expected to have more comfort [among] women in Tunis, but really, that's not what I saw. I saw a lot of, a lot of fatique, a lot of burdens because they had to, they had to succeed. They had no choice. […] They were from underpriviledged backgrounds as well, maybe the hot districts of Tunis. […] There was a lot more sadness in the eyes of the women in Tunis." -INT116- (Trainer)*

It was also noted that the family situation of WE can play a role in their empowerment process as familial dynamics can impact their business activities. Some entrepreneurs cited feeling strongly supported by their family members, which had a positive impact on their empowerment process, as exemplified by:

> *"I have emotional support from my husband, my father and my sister. […] My father is the one who shaped my personality. He made me stronger, even after I got married, he has always been next to me whenever I faced any obstacle. He always used to show me the way to reach the solution and never gave me ready solutions. Now I am strong enough to stay still and not collapse. Now, I find the solutions by myself and get through it all by myself. […] He always tell me that 'I'm proud of you'." -INT020- (Entrepreneur)*

> *"The last condition […] the most important one, is my life partner. […] He was the one who pushed me early and encouraged me to start my own business as an entrepreneur. […] It's because of my experience, the need to be accompanied by a man is very interesting to get started. […] [My life partner] brought a lot of things [in starting my business] but I will say two main ones, there was a 100 percent financial contribution and a moral contribution I will say." -INT010- (Entrepreneur)*

On the other hand, some WE do not receive the same level of support and encouragement from their families, which can have negative consequences on their empowerment process. This was highlighted in the qualitative interviews:

> *"There is also the lady who [had her business] in Sfax and who, her husband and her family discouraged her a little, who gave her arguments like: the times are difficult, the pandemic, etc. And that it's no use taking out a loan, or it's no use investing right now, etc." -INT116- (Trainer 4)*

> *"Sometimes, there are some men, some husbands who are a little jealous of their wives, of the success, of their wives, we find that yes. [...] At the beginning, it can slow her down. But it depends on her character, her personality. […] In the phase of the idea the husband can discourage her and make her feel a little afraid. […] He can tell her that there is a high risk that she won't be able to organise everything together." -INT003- (Entrepreneur)*

The qualitative data exposed that in some cases, husbands and other family members who appear to be supportive of WE, may have ulterior motives. This supposed support can actually reinforce gendered power dynamics and impede women's empowerment, as the interviews revealed:

> *"Even her husband, in their mentality, he lets her work and be an entrepreneur. He's the one who lets her. He's the one giving her the opportunity. He still has the power to tell her 'no'. So since he's giving her the opportunity to be an entrepreneur, she has to give him part of what she earns, many give to their husbands or take over most of the family expenses." -INT106- (DAAM)*

In certain cases, women may resist conforming to gender-based power dynamics, but this resistance is not always accepted by their fathers, husbands, or other relatives. The reasons for this can vary, depending on factors such as the individual's level of education, the social models they were exposed to, and the region in which they were raised. As mentioned in the primary data:

> *"It depends on the environment. It depends on the cultural environment and the region as well. The coastal regions are not like the central regions of the country. It's a different mentality. The mentality in Tunisia differs from region to region." -INT106- (DAAM)*

> *"There is the environment, […] and the profile of the person. […] Education and the environment also in which we [live]. […] It's in the family you grow up in. […] There are other families that are like us, but in some families, […] it's the classic social model. […] My parent's, they went to college, […] already liberated, already at a young age, […] left-wing in politics. […] My mom is, she's a teacher too. […] So, in fact, we grew up in a very open family intellectually. […] In my family, and it can also exist in other families, […] male pressure in my family, it does not exist. […] You see, I was talking to my father, I was saying no. […] No, no, I don't agree, you explain, you have to convince me. […] I tell my friends sometimes too that one time, I didn't talk to my dad because he was the one at fault, he had to ask for forgiveness, and I said, no, no. I don't talk to you until you ask for forgiveness, you know? So we grew up, with that, it wasn't disrespect, […] it's another way of communicating actually. […] So, this is different." -INT115- (Trainer 2)*

According to various stakeholders, WE may face challenging consequences in their personal, social, and business lives if their resistance against gender-based power dynamics is not accepted within their families. As noted by in the qualitative interviews:

> *"When my husband died I stayed [with his family]. My work place and my house are far so my father in law would give me money to go and come back. So one day he said your child is sick go take him to the doctor. I told him I can't because I have to open the school at 7 in the morning. He could have brought him you know. I [told] him I will bring him to the school with me and bring the doctor there. […] Just to make me incapable he said no you close the school and go. I told him I can, I will find a solution. He said if you leave don't come back. […] So I couldn't do it. I took my kids and I lived 2 years in my school, in a small room, […] a small bed for me and my kids for 2 years. It was an industrial place so sometimes it would rain and the window would open in the road, […] sometimes I hear fights and I would be afraid for my children. I wake up at 6 I wash myself and my children and no one would know I live there among the parents. Now, thank god I live alone, […] last year I moved thank god." -INT025- (Entrepreneur)*

The presence of laws in Tunisia to protect women from gender-based violence, such as the CPS policy that aims to protect wives from abuse by their husbands, has not eradicated the issue of violence against women. Male family members, including fathers, brothers, and husbands, continue to perpetrate GBV within families in Tunisia, particularly in certain regions where such treatment is considered normal. The issue of GBV remains a taboo topic in Tunisia, and women who report cases of violence to law enforcement may face further abuse from the system that is meant to protect them. As a result, laws often go unenforced, leaving women to endure abuse without adequate support from the structures that are supposed to assist them. As substantiated by the primary data:

> *"Unfortunately, when we go to the regions, there are women who are subjected to violence or who are harmed, but who find it normal. And who are not alarmed, and for them, even if my husband is violent, but it's still my husband, it's his right, I also pushed him to do this. I have a share of responsibility. So all the events organized by the NGOs or by the donors helped some women to become aware and to refuse certain practices." -INT116- (Trainer 4)*

> *"Look, in Tunisia, there are all the laws imaginable to protect women. But if she goes to the police, and the policeman beats her up […] that's the problem. On paper, there are all the laws to protect, all the structures to support abused women. […] Women's rights exist […] on paper, but it's still culturally a taboo subject […][to] talk about violence. Because generally, in these regions, women, from birth, are abused, the father who hits, the brother who hits. She is educated to serve the males of the family. -INT106- (DAAM)*

The qualitative interviews revealed that economic violence against WE in Tunisia is also prevalent alongside physical abuse and violence, which can impact the empowerment process of WE. Economic violence refers to actions taken by male family members to restrict, control, or undermine the economic empowerment of WE. This can take various forms, as mentioned in the interviews:

"Economic violence is in fact when he [the husband] is pressuring her for money. […] A lot of women, you know even women who participated in the training and who are entrepreneurs, kamikaze […] it's the man who runs the business and puts that in her head. She is conditioned, she cannot negotiate with the bank. She can't make payments." -INT106- (DAAM)

"The men [their husband, their brother, their father], they were there, very, very powerful and you could see that […] the women worked, they earned money […] and there were a lot of people who were taking their money. […] In the neighborhoods that are a little, a little disadvantaged it is that it is the women who work, it is not the men." -INT114 (Trainer 1)

The Tunisian government has implemented laws to protect women from economic violence perpetrated by family members. One such law is the 1994 marriage law that provides newlyweds with the option to choose between separation of property or community of property. This was elucidated in the qualitative interviews:

"Since 1994, they have introduced a law on marriages, the choice between separation of property or community of property […] to protect women. So when you get married in Tunisia you have to choose, the regime separation of goods, or community of goods. Community of goods: everything that is bought after the signature of the marriage contract, even if it was in the name of the husband or the wife, it is considered as common property, fifty-fifty. Separation of property: so everyone buys in their own name. And this law was made to protect women because women work, they spend and contribute as much as the man and then it is the man who gets rich." -INT106- (DAAM)

The persistence of economic violence within familial dynamics in Tunisia suggests that despite policies aimed at protecting women, implementation is often lacking. While laws have been enacted to uphold women's rights, social realities and cultural traditions often lag behind, which can hinder the empowerment process of WE. This was shown in the primary data:

"One of the participants, […] fortunately for her, I can say that two years ago, she divorced because she discovered, she works and so she gives him [her husband] the money and everything, […] and so, he put everything under his name, the husband's name. She had nothing, after 15 years of work. She is a seamstress. […] Yeah, even the car they bought was in his name and everything. When she got divorced, she had nothing. She worked for 15 years to build up her husband's assets. And that is a very deep Tunisian problem." -INT106- (DAAM)

The qualitative interviews revealed that some problematic gender-based family dynamics in Tunisia are changing, although progress is slow. This change is attributed to the increased exposure Tunisians have to other cultures and countries, which prompts reflection on their own situation and leads to greater awareness. As highlighted in the qualitative interviews:

"Awareness, the world is moving too. We have become citizens of the world with internet access and everything. So subconsciousy people are making comparisons. -INT106- (DAAM)

This sub-finding highlights that each woman's empowerment process is influenced by her individual circumstances. Certain personal conditions may contribute to empowerment, whereas others can be disempowering. While empowerment initiatives, such as the LPWE, can have a significant impact on the individual empowerment of WE in Tunisia, there are other external factors that must be taken into account. It is apparent that educating men is also necessary. Men, in their role as spouses, fathers, brothers, or sons of women entrepreneurs, have a significant influence on the entrepreneurial activities and empowerment processes of women entrepreneurs. Thus, understanding how power dynamics in these relationships can be changed is essential.

Sub-finding 3B: Entrepreneurship training programs for women entrepreneurs must be embedded in the cultural context

Sub-finding 3B posits that entrepreneurship training programs for women entrepreneurs must be culturally embedded. This finding suggests that the LPWE program, co-developed by CFE, was effective in influencing the empowerment of women entrepreneurs because it was embedded in the local cultural context. This finding aligns with Knudsen's (2017) claim that change efforts must be embedded in pre-existing contexts and discourses since new narratives and movements for change cannot come from outside of society. The viewpoints of the stakeholders interviewed support this argument, as presented in Results – Part 2, indicating that the LPWE effectively aligned with the cultural context and that the integration of cultural aspects played a significant role in the empowerment of WE.

Firstly, the LPWE delivery team was comprised entirely of Tunisian women who had extensive knowledge of the local context and could connect with the WE on a personal level. Additionally, each trainer had prior experience working with WE and an understanding of cultural specificities, which enabled them to deliver the program effectively. The trainers' understanding of the Tunisian context and the entrepreneurs' circumstances facilitated knowledge exchange and contributed to the empowerment process of WE. The relationships formed between the entrepreneurs and trainers were significant and continued even after the training was completed, as noted in the interviews:

> *"There were even women who called me [after the training] to say: 'I did this, what do you think' 'Excuse me, I'm calling you, but I was happy with this training that I wanted to share with you'. I say, no, no, no, I'm here for that. […] You need information, it's okay, call me, I can help and comfort you, […] with what you're doing, so keep going. So, we saw that we gave hope to micro-*

businesses and to these women, […] it was really a training, yes, but it was a human experience to give motivation to these women to hold on and to thrive." -INT114- (Trainer 1)

Secondly, the successful implementation of the LPWE training program in Tunisia was heavily reliant on the program being delivered entirely in the Tunisian Arabic dialect. This was because many of the WE who participated in the program came from various socio-economic and educational backgrounds, some of whom were not fluent in French or English. However, as the program materials had to be validated by the SEED research team, some of whom were unilingual anglophones, it was necessary to prepare all program materials in English and occasionally French (such as training slide decks, workbooks, multimedia content, etc.) and then have them translated into Tunisian Arabic once they had been approved. Although laborious, this approach helped to maximize the impact of the training content and the intervention on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs, as supported in the interviews:

"Yeah I understood that you created the content of the training for the others. […] Especially the translation between English and French then Tunisian. […] Some women are average. They don't understand French. […] Yes they liked the translation to Arabic. […] Especially with the Tunisian accent." -INT003- (Entrepreneur)

A third important aspect of the LPWE training program was to provide contextualized examples that the WE could relate to. This involved using women entrepreneur protagonist with typical Tunisian women's names and highlighting examples of WE in industries that participants could identify with. This was corroborated in the field notes:

"To make the theory more practical, it is necessary to include additional examples of fictional women entrepreneurs across the different modules. In particular, there is a strong request for examples of Tunisian women entrepreneurs to explain the various components of the Business Model Canvas in Module 1. The focus should be on developing examples that align with the profiles of CFE's female clients. This means utilizing examples of entrepreneurs who are relevant to the target population and industries in which women operate, such as childcare, food processing, handicrafts, decorations, etc." (Field notes, 2021-04-20)

The utilization of culturally relevant examples in the LPWE training materials proved to be a valuable approach that enhanced the empowerment of program participants. These examples provided practical illustrations that WE could relate to, enabling them to envision a similar path towards their own success. This motivated them and reduced feelings of isolation in their entrepreneurial projects. As noted in the qualitative interviews:

"I [saw an example] on sewing. It was as if they were talking to me. I really identified with what was said. […] That further influenced me. I felt that seamstresses have an important role to play in society not similar to the role of female teachers or kindergarten directors. […] We saw it during the training. […] They were talking about how she started her own project, and then she got some help from assistants who would go to the drycleaner and deliver products. She started alone and then she

gradually grew her business. I can do that too. That's what l would like to do because now I am still alone in this project. She made me feel motivated through her business. […] I know that other works are very important also, but after seeing the example of the woman that has developed her project, I have seen myself in her. So I know that now I'm alone. I'm beginning the project, but I'm looking forward to follow the same steps. Why couldn't I do like her?" -INT015- (Entrepreneur)

Lastly, to ensure cultural embeddedness of the LPWE program materials, the female Communications Director from CFE was involved in their preparation. This approach allowed for the cultural context to be considered and for the visual identity of the program materials to be more relevant for the WE. The program posters ('roll ups') used in the training sessions, which featured the LPWE logos and slogans, were culturally appropriate and impactful for the women entrepreneurs, contributing to their empowerment. This was supported in the qualitative interviews:

"I noticed, that each group […] retained the slogan that was written on the roll up. And they repeated it and they said it. […] They retained the message and yes, yes, I think the slogan was retained and, […] the phrases were even repeated. […] The sentences were repeated, well they were used. […] And it was so strongly stated that I thought wow! […] It's a strong message." -INT116- (Trainer 4)

These findings highlight the importance of considering the cultural context when designing entrepreneurship training programs for women entrepreneurs to promote their empowerment. The various approaches employed by CFE and other project partners to embed the training program in the local context proved to be effective, as the evidence suggests they contributed to the empowerment of the women entrepreneurs.

Sub-finding 3C: Collaboration with Canadian entities helps push the feminist agenda in developing countries

Sub-finding 3C advances that the collaboration with Canadian partners helps push the feminist agenda in developing countries. This finding suggests that CFE's collaboration with Canadian partners on the co-development and delivery of the training program was helpful in pushing the feminist agenda in Tunisia, which was impactful in the empowerment process of the WE. This finding concurs with Brush et al. (2009) who noted that women entrepreneurs often have limited access to training and educational opportunities, which affects their ability to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. This finding is also corroborated with Aguirre et al.'s (2012) statement that education is the most significant barrier to female entrepreneurship in the MENA region, apart from the shortage of financial assistance. The Canadian partners, HEC Montréal and DID, involved in the LPWE project with CFE contributed financially and in-kind to the feminist agenda in Tunisia, which had impacts on the empowerment process of the participants.

Firstly , the financial contributions made by the Canadian partners involved in the LPWE program had to align with Canada's feminist foreign policy, which places a strong emphasis on gender equality. The funders, and the projects they support, are required to adhere to Canada's current position on gender equality as reflected in policies like the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP). Since the FIAP aims to allocate at least 95% of Canada's bilateral international aid expenditure to gender equality initiatives, the collaboration between CFE and the Canadian entities came with a built-in obligation to address issues related to gender equality and women's issues. This obligation compelled CFE to incorporate several defining features for the training program, such as its focus on women entrepreneurs. The performative element of this obligation, mobilized by CFE in the LPWE, helped advance the feminist agenda in Tunisia and contributed to the empowerment of WE. This was highlighted in the qualitative interviews:

> *"Well, we've seen the impact, so it would be a shame to stop at that level. […] It's a beautiful experience. I thank the whole team and I am really very grateful to [Farah[16]], to the whole HEC Montréal team, to [DID], to everyone, to everyone really, the DID team in Tunisia. […] It was a very very beautiful experience that made me aware of my responsibility towards this aspect of gender. So, whether it is with, with, with [DAAM] or otherwise, I will never again refuse a project where it gives value to Tunisian women." -INT116- (Trainer 4)*

The importance of addressing gender-based issues by local partners was reinforced by the collaboration with Canadian partners, which demonstrates the advancement of the feminist agenda. The LPWE program experience highlighted the significance of working with WE for the Tunisian partners involved and increased their sense of responsibility towards gender-related matters. As mentioned in the qualitative interviews:

> *"I felt a great responsibility when I was in charge of the training. […] I often get great feedback […] but it's normal in a way that I get feedback like that. But from women who are sometimes even twice my age, it really impacted me and touched me. And I said to myself: There are things to do. I said to myself, this is one more responsibility and I will not hesitate for a second to do what I can do for a Tunisian woman. And there, I want to say that it has changed a side in my life, in a sense. Today, as soon as I see a woman entrepreneur, a woman who is going to launch her project […] I try to give her a little hope, a kind word, because I've see the impact of this motivation and this positive aspect for these women, so I try to reinforce this aspect and give more, even more for women." -INT116- (Trainer 4)*

Furthermore, the collaboration with Canadian partners facilitated the introduction of innovative approaches and methodologies in entrepreneurship education for Tunisian WE. Through the co-creation of the LPWE program, WE were able to acquire critical skills and knowledge in entrepreneurship by leveraging the expertise of Canadian partners and scholars. The Canadian partners presented novel approaches and methodologies that

[16] To safeguard the privacy of an individual associated with the project who works for DAAM, a fictitious name was used in place of their actual name.

integrated academic training, relevant content, and a focus on developing the soft skills of WE. The educational approach and methodology introduced by the Canadian partners played a significant role in enhancing the empowerment of WE. This was supported by the qualitative interviews:

> *"[DID] had the idea […] to make a [project with] HEC Montréal and that the training be focused on resiliency, on increasing the capacity of women entrepreneurs to deal and be resilient to the problems that they face. […] I liked that proposal when they presented it to us. It was interesting. Also, the methodology was interesting. […] I think the approach and the formulation of the information as proposed and delivered in the end succeeded in reconciling academic training, with valuable content and also the desire to strengthen the soft skills capacities of these women. […] We saw the testimonies [from the entrepreneurs] and we really felt that. […] The way they tell about their experience with this training, […] I myself was pleasantly surprised by the speed of the impact. […] HEC Montréal's brand, […] this is not insignificant. […] And the originality of the accompaniment, I think it's a whole." -INT107- (DAAM)*

In general, the Tunisian partners expressed positive feedback and appreciation for the collaboration with their Canadian counterparts in the LPWE. However, as is typical in multipart collaborations in international development, challenges arose between partners during the co-development of the LPWE, necessitating action from the partners involved to overcome them. The difficulties mentioned included working remotely, differing viewpoints, and trust in partners. As these challenges arose, steps were taken to resolve them, in order to deliver the LPWE in the best possible way. Although these challenges were reported as stumbling blocks in the project's advancement at certain times, the collaboration with the Canadian partners ultimately proved fruitful and produced positive impacts and results on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. This was confirmed in the qualitative interviews:

> "*I remain on a very positive note in terms of the impact and results and also in terms of the collaboration with the entire team at HEC Montréal and elsewhere. Thank you for your contribution. It stalled sometimes, but it's positive when it comes to collaboration and cooperation, especially at a distance, everyone has their opinion, everyone has their point of view. The result was good. Only one recommendation, […] we can set the objectives and stay on the same path while trusting the local experts when they give their opinion or when they try to adapt to ensure a better success. Because I would advise, for future projects, to trust the local experts if they talk about the context of their country or the ecosystem they master. […] So that way, we can do this. It already facilitates communication and it gives a communication of partnership. Not from a requester to an executor, but from a partnership and a positive win-win collaboration. So that's my recommendation. But otherwise, the impact is very positive." -INT106- (DAAM)*

Our case study in Tunisia suggests that collaboration with Canadian entities can contribute to advancing the feminist agenda in developing countries. This finding is supported by several factors. First, funding for programs aimed at addressing gender inequality prioritizes the focus on women's issues. Second, local partners are reinforced on the importance of addressing gender-based issues. Third, partnerships between Canadian

entities and local organizations introduce innovative approaches and methodologies in entrepreneurship education for women entrepreneurs. This type of collaboration can have positive impacts on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs who participate in entrepreneurship training initiatives, as demonstrated in our study.

Sub-finding 3D: Women entrepreneurs need a safe space to exchange with other women entrepreneurs

Sub-finding 3D postulates that women entrepreneurs need a safe space to exchange with other women entrepreneurs. This finding advances that it is necessary for women entrepreneurs to have a safe environment where they can openly discuss their experiences related to the female condition and their gender-based reality with other women entrepreneurs, as was perceived in the LPWE. This finding was unexpected but is in agreement with Campbell & Wasco (2000) and Sarachild (1978) who stated that understanding women's lives is best achieved in group settings and that discussing experiences with other women can help describe events in their own lives. This finding also concurs with Campbell and Wasco's (2000) claim that bringing women together to discuss their lives brings attention to the numerous ways gender oppression affects their day-to-day experiences of being female. The need for safe spaces for women entrepreneurs to openly discuss their struggles and personal experiences was revealed during the LPWE program, and the presence of these spaces significantly contributed to their empowerment processes.

Through qualitative data analysis and fieldwork observations, a noteworthy aspect that emerged was the need for a safe space for women entrepreneurs to express themselves and share their experiences, which was initially overlooked in the design of the training program by CFE and its partners. The creation of these safe spaces during the LPWE training sessions can be considered a major benefit of the program and a contributing factor to the empowerment of WE, as suggested in the qualitative interviews:

> *"We felt a very big need for them to express themselves in relation to their project, in relation to their daily life. So, they had all this need to express themselves. […] Women, they need space to talk. […] Yeah, and they don't have any space." -INT114- (Trainer 1)*

The qualitative interviews supported the notion that in Tunisia, WE tend to rely on social networks that are based on traditional kinship ties, with family members forming the majority of their social connections. As stated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"So family, we could say 70% [of women's time is] with their family, […] even 80%. […] Parents […] brothers, sisters, […] cousins, children." -INT110- Credit officer*

It is common for women in Tunisia to primarily operate within traditional kin-based social networks, and the physical spaces in which they typically navigate are mainly within their homes. Home-based businesses are common among WE in Tunisia, as they often take on the role of caregivers for their children. This further limits their opportunities for social interaction. In contrast to men, who can easily gather in public spaces such as *cafes* or *salons de thés* for both social and business purposes, women entrepreneurs have few opportunities to meet with other women entrepreneurs outside of their family network. This was corroborated in the interview data:

> *"But you know what we miss us women? Here in Tunisia in general. Men have places where they can share. They can go to the cafes, they can go to... Us women don't have places. For example, women entrepreneurs. If we don't meet in a house or in a cafe. It's still bad interpreted to find women in cafes. Well tea rooms can be tolerated. We can't communicate and talk about all... The opportunities that might happen to us or talk business or something. Whereas men, they have that." -INT023- (Entrepreneur)*

The safe space provided by the LPWE program training sessions proved to be an effective solution to this challenge faced by WE. This space allowed them to express themselves in ways that were not possible for them in their usual contexts, as confirmed in the qualitative interviews:

> *"I still miss the sharing and the gathering of people in the training. I always wish if we could spend one more week in the training to learn new things. […] I became more motivated. […] [I kept wanting to go back to the trainings] in order to learn many other new things from them [women entrepreneurs]." -INT015- (Entrepreneur)*

The qualitative interviews exposed that the safe space created by the LPWE program was not only conducive to the exchange of entrepreneurial experiences but also enabled women entrepreneurs to discuss sensitive topics that are often considered taboo in Tunisia, such as religious matters. As stated in the qualitative interviews:

> *"When I said it's cultural, it's also a bit religious. In Sousse, for example, one of the women dared to mention the religious brakes [to entrepreneurship]. And so we had a religious discussion, which we generally avoid. They spoke. They spoke openly […] they even quoted texts of religion, the Koran and discussions, different interpretations." -INT106- (DAAM)*

The provision of a safe space for WE to discuss issues pertaining to their gender-based reality had a positive impact on their empowerment. Participants reported feeling listened to and respected as they interacted with other WE in the LPWE program. Many of the WE reported feeling more empowered after taking part in the LPWE, citing the opportunity to share their experiences with other WE during group sessions as a key reason. Witnessing the determination of other WE, despite their difficulties, and exchanging experiences proved to be motivating for them. These views were validated in the qualitative interviews:

"[After the training] I became stronger than before, I'm putting a lot of efforts, I'm always with my workbook where I fill everything, how much I still need to finish the shop, taking note of the clients. Because I'm going to need to increase my costumer base if I want to go further with my business. […] In the sessions of the training I noticed that the other entrepreneurs they didn't stop, they're always moving forward with their businesses, they manage very well." -INT001- (Entrepreneur)

"That aspect, to see other people too, not isolated, in her problems, in her situation, to see other women who, they continue, so I do too. They are women like me. I can continue too!" -INT116- (Trainer 4)

"The training I did with CFE, we all had projects but the good thing is that we get to talk about our problems, and we learn from each other. She might have the same problem as me. And maybe the solution I found is better that hers, you know? The other one has a problem with another thing, for example a coworker. If I bring someone to work with me, I will take her story into account... You understand? I learn from the experience of other." -INT022- (Entrepreneur)

According to the qualitative data, although the majority of WE participating in the LPWE program appreciated the safe spaces provided for discussing their experiences related to the feminine condition, they were not effective for all the participants, as some felt uncomfortable sharing due to feelings of shame. These women preferred to speak privately with LPWE staff instead of participating in group discussions. In some cases, women may have opted not to share their experiences at all. As a recommendation, the LPWE program suggested offering one-on-one sessions to provide individual support, but this was beyond the scope of the project. Nevertheless, this highlighted the importance of providing safe spaces where WE can openly share their struggles and experiences. As stated in the qualitative interviews:

"It would be nice if it were face-to-face [sessions] so that these women could, could also [share]. Before […] arriving at the crying or the moment of awareness during the workshop. We would have already anticipated and taken charge of this emotional state and accompanied them individually. […] I am sure that there are many women who didn't want to share because they are ashamed to talk in front of others. If there were times, there are those who came on their own to talk to us at lunch, or to talk about their problems. But there are others who didn't want to bother us, maybe, or who didn't have the courage to come and talk about what's bothering them. I suppose that individual sessions would help these women enormously to talk, to get out the wounds that are bothering them today." -INT116- (Trainer 4)

Many of the WE interviewed expressed interest in continuing to have access to safe space exchange environments, like the ones offered in the LPWE, in the future. However, it is unknown if this came to fruition. Despite the contribution of these safe spaces to their empowerment, it is uncertain if the women entrepreneurs took the initiative to seek support from their fellow entrepreneurs and organize further exchanges. Additionally, the lack of physical spaces available for such meetings means that any future exchanges would have likely taken place in smaller groups.

Discussion: Closing remarks

In conclusion, the 'paradox of pride' framework offers valuable insights into how Tunisian women entrepreneurs perceive their own empowerment. This concept refers to the situation where entrepreneurs lack adequate reference points when comparing their situation to others, resulting in a limited or fluctuating form of empowerment. Tunisian women entrepreneurs tend to compare themselves to other women in the Arab-Muslim world, while disregarding the formal and informal institutional constraints they face in comparison to Western countries.

While Tunisia is known for having progressive policies and laws that favor women's rights, there remains a significant gap between the legal protections and the societal norms and customs. Tunisian women are often underprivileged, particularly in entrepreneurship, despite having legal protection. This phenomenon is also known as "bounded empowerment," where women experience empowerment within the confines of situational constraints.

To address this issue, there needs to be a conscious recognition of the societal oppression of women and open discussions of relevant feminist topics in Tunisia. Failure to acknowledge the constraints imposed by formal and informal institutions that restrict women entrepreneurs hinders progress towards structural change. The pride Tunisian women entrepreneurs take in being the most liberated country in the Arab-Muslim world leads to the continued societal oppression of women being ignored or not openly discussed.

To mitigate the effects of the paradox of pride, Tunisian women entrepreneurs must continue to engage in conscious dialogue on feminist topics, supported by appropriate facilitators when possible, to raise awareness and challenge existing institutional structures of oppression. This intervention can help address the limitations of bounded empowerment and advance the empowerment process of women entrepreneurs in Tunisia, leading to greater individual, relational, and societal empowerment. Furthermore, this approach can contribute to broader development outcomes for Tunisia, including improving the status of women, reducing inequalities, promoting economic development, enhancing family well-being, creating more sustainable communities, and addressing climate change. Although the LPWE training program contributed to the individual empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Tunisia, a more comprehensive and sustained approach is necessary to bring about societal change.

Figure 9: Summary of main findings

Finding 1: The historical context is influencial in critical performativity work

- **Sub-finding 1A**: Critical performativity can help challenge institutional contexts
- **Sub-finding 1B**: Practical applications of critical performativity are essential to understand effectiveness of tactics

Finding 2: Empirical research on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Tunisia contributes to important gaps in the literature

- **Sub-finding 2A**: Empirical research helps to identify best practices in addressing barriers in women's entrepreneurship

Finding 3: Mobilizing the feminist approach in entrepreneurship training can influence changes in individual empowerment among women entrepreneurs

- **Sub-finding 3A**: The personal conditions of women entrepreneurs impacts their empowerment process
- **Sub-finding 3B**: Entrepreneurship training programs for women entrepreneurs must be embedded in the cultural context
- **Sub-finding 3C:** Collaboration with Canadian entities helps push the feminist agenda in developing countries
- **Sub-finding 3D:** Women entrepreneurs need a safe space to exchange with other women entrepreneurs

Closing remarks: "Paradox of pride" in Tunisia

Source: Created by the author

Recapping the Issues

Our literature review exposed several gaps in the existing research regarding the central themes of this dissertation, namely critical performativity, women's empowerment, and women's entrepreneurship. In this section, we reflected on our results and presented various findings. Thus concludes our analysis, where we examined the different contributions of our case study in regards to the primary topics of interest.

The research question that we posed at the start of our investigation was: *How has the feminist approach been mobilized by an entrepreneurship support organization in Tunisia to influence the empowerment of women entrepreneurs?* As we have explored in this chapter, the answer to our research question is not a simple one. Analyzing and comprehending the multifaceted phenomena in our Tunisian case study required considering various factors. Our aim was to bring clarity to this experience by presenting relevant findings derived from our results, in an effort to answer the main research question.

Limits of the study

This study has potential limitations which will be addressed in this section.

The primary limitation of this dissertation is transferability or external validity, making it difficult to generalize the findings. Employing a case study approach allowed for an in-depth examination of critical performativity, women's empowerment, and entrepreneurship in Tunisia, a topic that had been previously under-researched. The case study facilitated the identification of how the feminist approach was mobilized by an entrepreneurship support organization in Tunisia to influence the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. However, since the analysis is specific to the context of one organization in Tunisia, the findings cannot be directly applicable to other organizations. Nonetheless, we have strived to describe the case study situation in significant detail. Thus, we believe that our findings can be applied to similar organizations in other contexts.

Having an adequate sample size is crucial in order to draw general conclusions. The second limitation of this study is that the program delivery and data collection were limited to only three cities in Tunisia (Tunis, Sousse, and Sfax). Although this provided the author with a suitable representation of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Tunisia, it is not comprehensive. Therefore, while generalizations from the collected data are possible, it should be noted that the sample of interviewees was limited due to time and resource constraints.

Avenues for future research

Several areas of research remain unexplored.

Firstly, while the study was able to identify an impact on individual empowerment among women entrepreneurs who participated in the LPWE training program, it is challenging to determine the effects on other dimensions of empowerment, namely relational and societal empowerment, as the interviews with stakeholders were conducted just a few

weeks after the training program's conclusion. Since the effects on these dimensions of empowerment typically become evident after a more extended period following an empowerment initiative, a possible avenue for future research would be to conduct a continuous longitudinal study with the same women entrepreneurs interviewed in this case study. Additional interviews could be conducted, for instance, two years after the training program's conclusion to determine the effects on the other dimensions of empowerment.

Secondly, an additional research avenue would be to broaden the sample of the present study to women entrepreneurs from other cities and regions in Tunisia. For instance, it would be relevant to gain a better understanding of the circumstances of rural women entrepreneurs as this group was noted to differ from urban entrepreneurs. According to the literature and interviews with stakeholders, women entrepreneurs in rural settings face more significant obstacles than those in urban settings. Therefore, by expanding the sample to incorporate women entrepreneurs from rural areas in Tunisia, it would be feasible to extract further insights and generalize the findings more broadly across the Tunisian landscape.

Thirdly, we recognize that many of the obstacles encountered by women entrepreneurs in Tunisia are comparable, to some extent, to those faced by women entrepreneurs in other countries in the MENA region. Nevertheless, the distinct characteristics of each country may warrant further studies to examine how the feminist approach, and performative elements mobilized, can be utilized by similar entrepreneurship support organizations to promote the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. Similar studies in other MENA countries employing the same methodology could expand on the findings presented in the Tunisia case study while incorporating the unique historical and cultural context of each country.

A fourth possible avenue for future research would be to conduct comparable case studies in different developing countries outside of MENA that have cultures distinct from Tunisia. Such research would be beneficial in evaluating whether the performative elements mobilized that were identified as effective in promoting women entrepreneurs' empowerment in Tunisia could also yield positive results in other developing countries with distinct cultural influences. This approach could lead to the development of a valuable set of best practices on a larger scale that could be applied by entrepreneurship support organizations involved in empowerment initiatives for women entrepreneurs across diverse cultural contexts.

Although there are still numerous areas related to critical performativity, women's empowerment, and women's entrepreneurship that require further investigation, we hope that this initial effort will have clarified the relevance in the reader's mind in this type of

research and made them aware of its importance in reaching fundamental development objectives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this case study offers a contribution to comprehending how feminist approaches to entrepreneurship training can impact the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the existing literature on critical performativity, women's empowerment, and women's entrepreneurship while identifying current gaps in knowledge. Chapter 2 describes the research design, data collection, and data analysis of the study. Chapter 3 reports the main results of this case study, including Part 1 that presents the 8 main historical phases that led to the evolution of the feminist discourse in Tunisia. Subsequently, Part 2 describes the 6 performative elements mobilized by CFE through the LPWE, along with the corresponding evidence of their impact on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs who completed the training program.

Chapter 4 of this study presents the analysis, discussion, and key findings of the research. The first set of findings reveals the influential role of the historical context in critical performativity (CP) work, the significance of CP in challenging institutional contexts, and the importance of practical application in CP to comprehend the effectiveness of tactics. The second set of findings highlights the importance of conducting empirical research on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Tunisia to address gaps in the literature, and identify best practices in addressing barriers to women's entrepreneurship. The third set of findings demonstrates that mobilizing the feminist approach in entrepreneurship training can lead to changes in individual empowerment among women entrepreneurs. Several related sub-findings are noteworthy, such as the impact of the personal conditions of women entrepreneurs on the empowerment process, the need for entrepreneurship training programs to be culturally embedded, the relevance of Canadian collaboration in advancing the feminist agenda in developing countries, and the importance of providing women entrepreneurs with a safe space to connect with each other and promote social change.

This study demonstrates how various performative elements of the feminist approach can be utilized in development initiatives to facilitate the bottom-up expansion of women entrepreneurs' empowerment in Tunisia, while emphasizing the crucial role of a receptive historical milieu. Furthermore, the case study highlights the intricate nature of empowerment and offers a methodology to comprehend the empowerment process in Tunisia's unique environment. A significant outcome of this research is recognizing the interconnectedness between critical performativity, empowerment, and female entrepreneurship, indicating that entrepreneurship support organizations' efforts to promote empowerment among women entrepreneurs through performative action can be fruitful. This has substantial implications for development organizations, such as

entrepreneurship support organizations akin to CFE, to collaborate in multi-sector partnerships to develop effective and sustainable empowerment initiatives. Overall, this study offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics of women's empowerment in developing nations and provides a framework for designing and implementing impactful empowerment initiatives.

In conclusion, this dissertation aims to be a catalyst for change in enhancing empowerment initiatives in developing countries, with a specific emphasis on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. The empowerment of women entrepreneurs can have significant transformative effects beyond personal benefits, extending to families, communities, and societies. Through the lens of critical performativity, this research underscores the crucial significance of empowering women entrepreneurs, which can lead to tangible, positive outcomes that benefit entire populations, the planet, and future generations. It is our hope that this study inspires readers to recognize the critical importance of empowering women entrepreneurs and to take action to advance this cause in developing countries and beyond, working collaboratively to create a brighter, more empowered future for all.

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Appendix 1

Three-Dimensional Model of Women's Empowerment (Huis et al., 2017)

Dimension	Construct	Measures	Reference
Personal	Locus of control	A scale ranging from 0 (no control) to 3 (a strong personal control belief) was constructed by the sum of three items (adapted from Rotter, 1966). For each item participants were asked to choose between two options the one that best reflected their own belief. One option represented having control over life outcomes (e.g., '*what happens to me is my own doing*') and one option representing having no control (e.g., '*sometimes I feel that I don't have enough control over the direction my life is taking*').	Morgan and Coombes, 2013; Hansen, 2015
	Self confidence	A scale was constructed based on a positive response to at least one of two questions. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate their confidence on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). *How confident are you that you could raise your opinion in public?* And, *neighbors often share similar problems—how confident do you feel about offering advice to your neighbor?*	Burra et al., 2005; Kim et al., 2007
	Self-esteem	Self-esteem was assessed as one of the seven indicators of self-empowerment. Participants were asked to indicate on a scale from 1 (worse than before) to 5 (very good impact) the change they'd experienced since becoming a member of the MFI. *Self-esteem.*	Stromquist, 1995; Basargekar, 2009; Kato and Kratzer, 2013
	Self-efficacy	A scale ranging from 0 (no self-efficacy) to 3 (strong self-efficacy) was constructed by the sum of three scores. For each item participants were asked to indicate how many of the suggested actions they are comfortable doing. *Who do you interact freely with (tick as appropriate) (a) with own family members (b) with husband's family (c) with neighbors (d) with personal friends outside family circle e) with local community leaders f) people in marketplace. At least four ticks = 1, otherwise = 0.*	Kato and Kratzer, 2013
Relational	Domestic violence	Data on violence was collected through structured interviews. Information on both physical violence (e.g., *slapping, beating, kicking, etc.*) and emotionally-abusive behavior (*e.g., not allowing the woman to visit her natal home*) was collected. Participants were asked to indicate whether any of the mentioned incidents had happened between herself and her husband in the preceding 4 months.	e.g., Goetz and Sen Gupta, 1996; Schuler et al., 1996; Rahman, 1999; Ahmed, 2005; Naved and Persson, 2005; Bali Swain and Wallentin, 2009
	Bargaining power	Bargaining power was assessed with 12 items assessing whether women were the primary decision-makers on 12 different expenditures or not. A distinction was made between total decisions (e.g., *food*), decisions on non-food expenditures (e.g., *home purchase and repair*), and decisions on loans (e.g., *investment*).	e.g., Duvendack et al., 2014; Banerjee et al., 2015; Datta, 2015
	Freedom of mobility	Participants were asked how they go to banks, markets, health centers, or places outside the village (except for their parents' place). Participants were asked to choose one of the four answer options: does not go (=0), goes with husband or son (=1), goes with women (= 2), or goes alone (=3).	Pitt et al., 2006; Bali Swain and Wallentin, 2009; Datta, 2015
	Social network size	Participants were asked to indicate their social networks size by naming groups that they are an active member of (e.g., *MFIs; funeral associations; religious groups*).	Pitt et al., 2006; Sanyal, 2009; Hansen, 2015
	Social capital	Data on social capital was collected through semi-structured interviews. Participants were asked to reflect on any changes – before and after group membership – in four domains, such as *seeking and receiving help from others in times of personal and domestic crises.*	Sanyal, 2009
	Collective action involvement	Collective action involvement was assessed with four items assessing whether women engage in problem solving at the community level. Participants were asked to indicate whether they would act if she faces certain problems (e.g., *some women being beaten up, problems with the elected chief*). Next, they were asked whether they would act by themselves, with other women, or not.	e.g., Kim et al., 2007; Sanyal, 2009; Datta, 2015
Societal	Percentage of female microfinance borrowers	Data for 435 microfinance institutions was obtained from MixMarket. The percentage of female borrowers was calculated based on the total loan portfolios of the microfinance institutions.	e.g., Hermes et al., 2011; D'Espallier et al., 2010
	Percentage of female borrowers with school-aged children in school	The percentage of female borrowers with school-aged children in school was calculated by dividing the number of female borrowers with school-aged children who state that all children are in school by the total number of female borrowers with school-aged children.	Women's World Banking, 2013
	Percentage female leadership in MFIs	Data for 329 microfinance institutions was obtained from MixMarket. The percentage of female leadership in microfinance institutions was based on three categories for female leadership: *CEO, chair, and director.*	Strøm et al., 2014
	Percentage female staff promotion and attrition	The percentage female staff promotion and attrition was calculated by dividing the number of women voluntarily leaving the institution or the number of women promoted by the total number of women.	Women's World Banking, 2013
	Average loan balance for female borrowers	The average loan balance for female borrowers was calculated by dividing female borrowers' gross loan portfolio by the total number of female borrowers.	Women's World Banking, 2013

Appendix 2

Interview guide for interviews with women entrepreneurs

Questions

1. Describe your business to us. What is your role in starting and managing the business?
    a. Probe 1: Tell us about a typical day or week in your business.

2. What industry are you in? Are there more men or women in your industry?

    a. Conditional probe: (If counter to what we have them classified as) Why is this a male (female) dominated industry?
    b. Probe 2: How does the industry being male- (female-) dominated affect your experience in that industry? Who do you go to for help in your business?
    c. How is it different for entrepreneurs in women versus male-dominated industries? Are there more growth opportunities in male dominated industries?
        i. How is networking for women entrepreneurs different from networking for female entrepreneurs in male- versus female-dominated industries?

3. We trained some people with an emphasis on how to innovate in order to improve the **competitiveness of their business in the market**. We trained others with an emphasis on how to innovate in order to **better support and be supported by their community**. We found that how people responded to the training depended on whether they were in a male versus a female dominated industry. So, people like you that work in a:

    a. MALE-dominated industry, and in the training, learned about how to innovate in business to enhance FINANCIAL and COMPETITIVE position, showed **LESS** positive energy to work on their business than those who were trained emphasizing SUPPORTIVE COMMMUNITY. Why do you think this is?

    b. MALE-dominated industry, and in the training learned how to innovate in business to enhance SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY showed **MORE** positive energy to work on their business than those who were trained emphasizing FINANCIAL and COMPETITIVE position. Why do you think this is?

    c. FEMALE-dominated industry, and in the training, learned about how to innovate in business to enhance FINANCIAL and COMPETITIVE position, showed **MORE** positive energy to work on their business than

those who were trained emphasizing SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY. Why do you think this is?

d. FEMALE-dominated industry, and in the training, learned about how to innovate in business to enhance SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY showed **LESS** positive energy to work on their business than those who were trained emphasizing FINANCIAL and COMPETITIVE position. Why do you think this is?

4. We also found that [the indirect effect of community logic on individual empowerment through emotional-relational energy is positive among entrepreneurs in MALE-dominated industries and relatively lower and negative among entrepreneurs in FEMALE-dominated industries].

5. In the training you did activities where you:
   [Market: worked alone and then shared with the table. About how you can innovate your business for profitable sustainable growth through the BMC.]
   [Community: Worked together with your table. About how we could innovate our businesses for community, employees, customers and self-benefit through the BMC].

   Thinking about these activities:
   a. Why would focusing on financial goals and competitiveness in the market make women feel more empowered than focusing on shared community goals and working together?
   b. Is this [working alone / working with others] typical for you in your business activities? Why / why not?
   c. Probe 1: Is it more typical for women entrepreneurs to be self- or others-oriented in their business? What does this look like in your business?
   d. Probe 2: Do women entrepreneurs run their businesses alone or give and receive help from other businesswomen? Other businessmen?
   e. Probe 3: How does this compare to how men run their business – do they work primarily alone or do they give and receive help from others?
   f. Probe 4: Do other women entrepreneurs typically run their businesses **to benefit** their community or **mostly to benefit** themselves?
   g. Probe 5: Do you see networking as valuable for women entrepreneurs? When is networking a good or bad thing? With whom do you network?

6. What does it mean to you to **grow** your business? Give us an example of growth in your business.
   1. Probe 1: What is business growth in Tunisia for women entrepreneurs? Can you describe what that means for your business?
   2. Probe 2: How is this different to male entrepreneurs?
   3. Why would an entrepreneur want to grow their business? What are the disadvantages of growing your business? Are there any special disadvantages for women versus men?

7. What does it mean to you to be empowered in business and make your own decisions in business activities – finances, customers, products?
    1. Probe 1: It's been 3 months since the leadership training, describe a specific time in which you felt more empowered in your business and like you could make better business decisions?
    2. Probe 2: Since the training, do you feel more empowered, less empowered or about the same in general in your business activities? Why and how? What are some examples of this?

       Probe 3: Think about your business interactions before and after the training program. Do people treat you the same or differently? How? What about your relationships with your family? How about in the community where you live?

8. We'll be speaking to many other women entrepreneurs during our time in Tunisia. What questions should we be asking them? What would you have liked to tell us that we didn't ask you? What questions do you have for us?

Additional questions

1. We've been looking at the results of the training surveys. There are some results we don't understand. Would you please help us?
    a. If entrepreneur is 35+ years: Women who are 35 years and older are more inspired to grow when they learn about using business to help their communities (their employees, local economy), but they're less inspired to grow when they learn about enhancing the profitability and competitiveness of their business. Why is this?
        i. Probe: is there something different about generations of women entrepreneurs? That is, do you think the Arab Spring and the political events which followed affected how younger women vs. older women think about their businesses?
    b. If an entrepreneur is new to business:
        i. Women who are new to business (i.e., their business is 2 years old or less) feel less **empowered** when they learned business as a tool for community enhancement versus business as a tool for individual financial growth. Why do you think this is?
        ii. Women who are new to business (i.e., their business is 2 years old or less) feel they have more **flexibility** (i.e., slack, room, space, opportunities) to try new or different things when they learn about business as part of the community rather than when they learn about business as competitive. Why do you think this is?

2. We're seeing differences among women entrepreneurs in Tunis versus Sousse and Sfax. How would you describe the differences between women entrepreneurs in these different places?
    a. Probe 1: Is it harder or easier (more/less acceptable) for women to be entrepreneurs in Tunis, Sousse or Sfax?

b. Probe 2: In which city would you say women are more competitive in their businesses? Why? In which city would you say women are more caring and sharing in their businesses? Why?
c. Probe 3: How do you run your business with other people? How do you run your business alone?

3. Can you describe the average life stages of women entrepreneurs in Tunisia?
    a. Probe 1: How old are women when they start their businesses? Do they have children? Are they married?
    b. Probe 2: When women get married in Tunisia, do they leave their parents to live with their husband's family?
    c. Probe 3: What are the expectations regarding business and family for women who are 25 years old? 35 years old? 45 years old?

Appendix 3

Interview guide for interviews with trainers

1. Thinking back to the training, what was your favourite thing about the training? What was the hardest thing about the training?

2. What worked / didn't work in the training? What do you remember about the content that was most helpful / least helpful?

3. What was surprising to you about the training?

4. How do you think the training impacted the women the most?

5. What was the emotional and relational energy like in the rooms? Were there different energies across the two conditions? Were there regional differences? Were there group differences? Did you pick-up any guilt, anger, jealousy amongst the women? What about relief, joy, excitement, or inspiration?

6. What is your perception of the impact of the training slogans? Did the entrepreneurs repeat them frequently? What were some other phrases/sentences that came up/were repeated during the training?

7. Before we did the training, did you have some expectations about what condition (competition or collaboration) would win? What do you think about the results?

8. Do you have one condition for which you think the entrepreneurs are more / less empowered? Why? Why not the other one?

9. In general, do you think women in Tunisia are empowered? Why / why not?

10. What does empowerment look like for women in Tunisia? How does empowerment display itself? For whom? Who is in(ex)cluded? Why?

11. What is the source of this empowerment?

12. How would you compare the women who took the training with women generally in Tunisia? Are these women different in some way? What was their general education levels? Are they more or less creative/innovative?

13. What are the regional differences between Tunis, Sousse and Sfax?

14. What historical events continue to shape the experience of women entrepreneurs today? What shaped their experiences in the past? How do you think historical events will shape women entrepreneurs' experiences in the future? What about the immediate situation in Tunisia?

15. To be a woman entrepreneur in Tunisia, do you need to be "a superstar"? Why / why not? Can you give me an example?

16. What does it mean for women to grow their businesses in Tunisia? We heard many reports of growth related to product innovation / new product launches, but not about employing people, increasing profits (finances) as an outcome. This is unusual. Why?

17. WhatsApp: What groups have a WhatsApp Chat? What is talked about more – business, personal, family, future training, etc.? How frequently are these women talking in the group chat? Are they still using the group chats? Did the trainers or CFE set-up the WhatsApp, or did the women?

Appendix 4

Interview guides for interviews with key informants

Interview guide 4A

1. Tell me about your work with entrepreneurs here in Tunisia. How long have you been in this field? What are your primary focuses now?

2. I understand your area of expertise to include social entrepreneurship. What does social enterprise / social entrepreneurship look like in Tunisia? How is it different from theory definitions of social entrepreneurship? (Is 'doing good' like charitable donations / feeding the poor a social enterprise?) How is it the same?

3. How are Tunisian women entrepreneurs perceived? What does it mean to be a woman entrepreneur in Tunisia? How do women entrepreneurs versus non-entrepreneurs (i.e., employed / unemployed) differ? What is unique about the reputations, social status, character traits of women entrepreneurs versus non-entrepreneurs in Tunisia?

4. How do these reputations / perceptions differ across social circles e.g., immediate family versus women generally? Can you give me an example?

5. What are the barriers for Tunisian women to fully participate in the entrepreneurial ecosystem?

6. How do religious beliefs shape behaviors / expectations / norms of women entrepreneurs in contrast to male entrepreneurs?

7. Do you think women in Tunisia are empowered? Why / why not?

8. What does empowerment look like for women in Tunisia? How does empowerment display itself? For whom? Who is in(ex)cluded? Why?

9. What is the source of this empowerment?

10. What historical events continue to shape the experience of women entrepreneurs today? What shaped their experiences in the past? How do you think historical events will shape women entrepreneurs' experiences in the future? What about the immediate situation in Tunisia?

11. How do women entrepreneurs perceive growth in Tunisia? How does this differ to male entrepreneurs? What institutions (formal / informal) facilitate or constrain growth for women versus male entrepreneurs?

12. What does it mean for women to grow their businesses in Tunisia? We heard many reports of growth related to product innovation / new product launches, but not about employing people, increasing profits (finances) as an outcome. This is unusual. Why?

Interview Guide 4B

1. Tell me about your organization. What is your history? What is your relevance? What were some important historical moments for your organization in the last 100 years?
    a. People.
    b. Literature (books, journals) / media.
    c. Social events.
    d. Policy.

2. How do you interact with government, society, and business today? What types of activities / services do you offer? How do you reflect Tunisian women today? How do you represent Tunisian women today? Thinking about an area of policy [or other] that you've engaged in recently, can you describe that area to me and what specific action your organization took?

3. What are your organization's most significant impacts on Tunisian society? Why are these significant?

4. What influence did Bourguiba have on the status and role of women in Tunisian society? What was your organization's relationship with Bourguiba? What about Ben Ali? [Do you have reportable figures to help us understand the impact you've had?]

5. Who were the pre-Bourguiba figures who influenced the role of women in Tunisian society? Why haven't we heard about this people from other women / women entrepreneurs?

6. What historical events continue to shape the experience of women in Tunisia today? What shaped their experiences in the past? How do you think historical events will shape women's experiences in the future? What about the immediate situation in Tunisia?

7. Since the Jasmine Revolution what has been the impact on the status and role of women in Tunisia over the last 10 years? What have been some notable changes? Who has been most affected by these changes? Can you give me an example?

8. In Tunisia, there seems to be an important culture and quantity of unions. What is the reason for this? What are activities that other unions typically do / perform? How does UNFT differ from other unions?

9. What are the main religious beliefs that shape expectations of women in Tunisia? How does this differ to expectations of men? How do these expectations affect Tunisian women's involvement in business? What about civic society? And community/non-kinship relationships? Can you give me an example?

10. Do you think women in Tunisia are empowered? Why / why not?

11. What does empowerment look like for women in Tunisia? How does empowerment display itself? For whom? Who is in(ex)cluded? Why?

12. What is the source of this empowerment?

13. How are women perceived as being entrepreneurs in Tunisia? How do women entrepreneurs versus non-entrepreneurs (i.e., employed / unemployed) differ? What is unique about the reputations, social status, character traits of women entrepreneurs versus non-entrepreneurs in Tunisia?

14. How do these reputations / perceptions differ across social circles e.g., immediate family versus women generally? Can you give me an example?

15. What are the barriers for Tunisian women to fully participate in the entrepreneurial ecosystem?

16. As a western woman from a different life experience, what are the most important things for me to know about women in Tunisia?

Appendix 5

Ethics approval for SEED research project

HEC MONTRÉAL

Comité d'éthique de la recherche

February 03, 2022

To the attention of :
Luciano Barin Cruz
Professeur titulaire, HEC Montréal

Project No. 2015-1367, 1361

Title:Diffusing social innovation : overcoming the challenge of contextual bridging

Funding source : CRSH Savoir R2112 + CRSH dév. partenariat R2554 + Mitacs R2655

Further to your request for renewal, the Ethics Approval Certificate for the above project has been renewed as at April 01, 2022. **This certificate is valid until April 01, 2023.**

In the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, you must ensure that you comply with the directives issued by the Government of Quebec, the Government of Canada and those of HEC Montréal in effect during the state of health emergency.

You must therefore request renewal of your ethics approval before that date using Form *F7 – Annual Renewal*. You will receive an automatic reminder by email a few weeks before your certificate expires.

When your project is completed, you must complete Form *F9 – Termination of Project.* (or *F9a – Termination of Student Project if certification is under the supervisor's name).* **All students must complete an F9 form to obtain the "Attestation d'approbation complétée" that is required to submit their thesis/master's thesis/supervised project.**

If any major changes are made to your project before the certificate expires, you must complete Form *F8 – Project Modification.*

Please note also that any new member of your research team must sign the Confidentiality Agreement, which must be sent to us prior to your request for renewal.

We wish you every success in your research work.

Yours very truly,

REB of HEC Montréal

HEC MONTRÉAL

Comité d'éthique de la recherche

RENOUVELLEMENT DE L'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE

La présente atteste que le projet de recherche décrit ci-dessous a fait l'objet d'une évaluation en matière d'éthique de la recherche avec des êtres humains et qu'il satisfait aux exigences de notre politique en cette matière.

Projet # : 2015-1367, 1361

Titre du projet de recherche : Diffusing social innovation : overcoming the challenge of contextual bridging

Chercheur principal :
Luciano Barin Cruz
Professeur titulaire, Département de management, HEC Montréal

Cochercheurs :
Charlene Zietsma; Bernard Leca; Alice Chipot; Jaehyun Choi; Geoff Kistruck; Angelique Slade Shantz; Isabelle Ouellet; Katherine Picone

Date d'approbation du projet : October 04, 2012

Date d'entrée en vigueur du certificat : April 01, 2022

Date d'échéance du certificat : April 01, 2023

Maurice Lemelin
Président
CER de HEC Montréal