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Revisiting Entrepreneurship as Emancipation

Learning from subalternized women in post-revolutionary Tunisia

Benali, Amira; Villeseche, Florence

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Revisiting Entrepreneurship as Emancipation: Learning from subalternized women in post-revolutionary Tunisia

Amira Benali, Aalborg University, Denmark

ORCID 0000-0002-2162-9612

Florence Villesèche, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark

ORCID 0000-0002-3199-8219

Abstract

In this article, we investigate how women beneficiaries in a social enterprise in post-revolutionary Tunisia are agents in their emancipation, including through infrapolitical tactics. We conceptualize their position as beneficiaries as a form of subalternity induced from social, economic and political injustice. We deploy the extended case method in a Tunisian ecotourism social enterprise, connecting the micro-level experiences of the women beneficiaries to the macro-level context. Our findings show how beneficiaries engage in three forms of emancipation: Affirming their dreams; Navigating gender relations; and Defending their interests. We thus contribute to existing research by theoretically extending the emancipation–entrepreneurship locus beyond the lead entrepreneur. We also contribute by extending our understanding of subalternized people's resistance repertoire beyond the hidden vs public resistance dichotomy. Finally, we challenge the representation of 'subalterns' as a homogenous and passive category by showing the intersectional differences that affect these women's agentic possibilities and, thus, their pathways to emancipation.

Keywords

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Entrepreneurship as emancipation, subalternity, beneficiaries, infrapolitics, gender, intersectionality, Global South.

Corresponding Author: Amira Benali, Department of Culture and Learning, Aalborg University, Kroghstræde, 9220 Aalborg, Denmark. **Email:** amirab@ikl.aau.dk

2

Introduction

On December 17th, 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old street vendor in Tunisia, set himself on fire following the confiscation of his merchandise and a police officer slapping his face to silence him. This event sparked protests across the country to end President Ben Ali's 23-year dictatorship. This was the first popular struggle in what became known as the Arab Spring. Over a decade later, the country is still facing a major economic, social and political crisis while losing its skilled workforce. According to a study by the National Institute of statistics (INS) and the National Observatory for Migration (ONM) in 2021, 39,000 engineers and 3,300 doctors left the country between 2015 and 2020. Thousands more attempt to cross the Mediterranean every day, hoping for a better future. In this context of crisis, a social and solidarity economy (SSE)[1] has emerged as a solution for creating jobs, solving social and economic problems and empowering marginalized populations. Tunisian women play an essential role in these developments and are the icons of emancipation in the Arab world. However, those visible in the media are often elite women rather than rural or working-class women - those who wear the veil, work hard during the olive harvest season and do all the household chores. At the same time, the latter are the main targets of "women's empowerment" SSE initiatives. In this article, we examine the experiences of women beneficiaries in a social enterprise in the Tunisian post-revolutionary context, and seek to understand their forms of emancipation.

Entrepreneurship can be understood as an emancipatory process with freedom and autonomy at its heart; that is to say, as emancipatory entrepreneuring (Rindova, Barry, & Ketchen, 2009). The entrepreneurship as emancipation (EE) perspective developed from the

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[1] According to the International Labour Organization, SSE is "a concept designating enterprises and organizations, in particular cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations, foundations and social enterprises, which have the specific feature of producing goods, services and knowledge while pursuing both economic and social aims and fostering solidarity" https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/---coop/documents/publication/wcms_175515.pdf).

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early work of Rindova and colleagues and suggests that beyond financial profit-seeking, entrepreneurship may also entail gaining flexibility and independence for oneself and concurrently advancing a cause (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011). However, most EE work concentrates on how a venture's leader engages in emancipatory entrepreneuring to 'break free' from—and potentially 'break up'—constraints in the world around them (Rindova et al., 2022). We argue that if beneficiaries are understood as the objects rather than the subjects of emancipation, the promised bounties of emancipatory entrepreneuring remain limited to individuals matching the trope of the heroic entrepreneur (Rindova et al., 2009). We investigate the experiences of women beneficiaries in a social enterprise in an institutionally unstable, post-revolutionary and postcolonial setting where social entrepreneurship is deployed, notably as a way to alleviate poverty (Verduijn, Dey, Tedmanson, & Essers, 2014).

To frame the experiences of such beneficiaries, we engage with the concepts of subalternity (Spivak, 1988) and infrapolitics (Scott, 1990). Subalternity denotes a 'position without identity'; that is, a social category assigned to people considered by dominant social groups as devoid of agency. Spivak more specifically called for closer attention to the issues faced by women living in subalternity to discern how they engage with oppression to emancipate. We thus understand subalternity as a condition induced by social, economic and political injustice. We approach the women beneficiaries in our fieldwork as subalternized women whose agency and emancipation is deferred to the lead, heroic entrepreneur. In this study, we investigate their forms of emancipation and thus pay attention to words and deeds that may appear mundane, subtle or veiled. Such practices have been referred to as infrapolitics (Scott, 1990), and have been studied contrasted to more explicit forms of resistance in organisation studies (Böhm, Spicer, & Fleming, 2008; Mumby, Thomas, Martí, & Seidl, 2017).

On this conceptual basis, we deploy the extended case method (ECM) (Burawoy, 1998; 2009) to explore the experiences of subalternized women in a Tunisian ecotourism social

4

enterprise. The extended case method (ECM), entails connecting the micro-level experiences of the women beneficiaries and situating those within the macro-level, socio-economic, political and historical context that shape them. The ECM approach aligns with the view of (social) entrepreneuring as being embedded in context and history rather than as a solely future-oriented endeavour (Hjorth & Reay, 2022; Chandra & Kerlin, 2021). Our findings show how beneficiaries engage in three forms of emancipation: Affirming their dreams; Navigating gender relations; and Defending their interests. We thus contribute to existing research by theoretically extending the emancipation–entrepreneurship locus beyond the lead entrepreneur. We also contribute by extending our understanding of subalternized people's resistance repertoire beyond the hidden vs public resistance dichotomy. Finally, we challenge the representation of 'subalterns' as a homogenous and passive category by showing the intersectional differences that affect these women's agentic possibilities and, thus, their pathways to emancipation.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. First, we present our theoretical framework, in which we connect entrepreneurship as emancipation, subalternity and infrapolitical resistance scholarship. We then proceed to detailing our research design following the ECM, including a presentation of the case and its broader setting, and reflexions on researching marginalized groups. After presenting our findings, we discuss our contributions and outline future avenues related to these and to the limitations of the present study.

Theoretical framework

Entrepreneuring, emancipation and the beneficiary position

Rindova et al. (2009, p. 477) define entrepreneuring as 'efforts to bring about new economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments through the actions of an individual or groups

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of individuals' that constitute an 'emancipatory process with broad change potential'. Entrepreneurs engage in such a process by authoring organizational arrangements that reflect change intentions and by making declarations about the intended changes (Rindova et al., 2009). A growing body of work investigates how emancipatory entrepreneurship is deployed, not least by women and other minority groups in business (see e.g. Goss, Jones, Betta, & Latham, 2011; Rindova et al., 2022; Sharma, 2022). More broadly, the interest in entrepreneuring and its actors echoes recent efforts to connect entrepreneurship to organization studies (Goss et al., 2011; Hjorth & Reay, 2022). However, the EE literature tends to focus on venture leaders: heroic entrepreneurs who free themselves from constraints with bold, vocal moves and make changes for the better for those around them (Goss et al., 2011). In their recent article taking stock of the EE perspective, Rindova et al. (2022) further conceded that emancipatory efforts tend to be conceived of and studied in terms of market participation and transaction-making, and that emancipation is chiefly understood as individual liberation from economic constraints and breaking free from personal dependence on the community.

Because of this centring of lead entrepreneurs in EE, little research engages with the experience of those supposedly benefitting from the changes the entrepreneurs make in the world around them, such as people customarily identified as the beneficiaries in socially-oriented entrepreneurial ventures. Beneficiaries tend to be depicted as needing help to escape poverty and gain economic and perhaps even moral agency (see e.g. Mair, Martí, & Ventresca, 2012), and are thus not centred in most studies of (social) entrepreneurial action. Building on previous work, we argue that calling a group of people 'beneficiaries' positions venture founders as benefactors and helpers, creating a saviour–victim, active-passive dichotomy, and imposing a hierarchy between them and those who are lifted out of their precarious living conditions (McMullen & Bergman, 2017; Wettermark & Berglund, 2022). This state of affairs echoes Dey and Steyaert's statement that 'The idea of (social) entrepreneurship cannot be

6

thought of without its other, its inferior supplement' (Dey & Steyaert, 2012, p. 96). While more solidarity and mutuality are called for (Wettermark & Berglund, 2022), such outcomes remain largely aspirational, and we know little about how intended beneficiaries can be agents in their emancipation.

We found a handful of studies that pave the way to better understand beneficiary experiences and how this may recast our view of how they can emancipate via their participation in entrepreneurial ventures. Al-Dajani, Carter, Shaw and Marlow (2015) studied the case of displaced, Palestinian women working through an intermediary to sell the artefacts they produce. Such intermediaries constitute a constraint, limiting women's opportunity to emancipate, and drive them to deploy tactics of resistance including covert collaboration, which the authors link back to the processes of emancipatory entrepreneuring. Trivedi and Petkova (2022) explored the experiences of women living in poverty in India and found that engaging in entrepreneurship enables economic, cultural and personal empowerment and change socio-cultural norms concerning women's entrepreneurship. However, in both studies the focus was chiefly on poverty as the core issue to be resolved, with limited attention to other constraints that beneficiaries may face in emancipating themselves. Chandra (2017) studied how social entrepreneurship can emancipate former members of organizations linked to terrorism in Indonesia. However, only one beneficiary was interviewed about their experience and the findings therefore chiefly reflect the perceptions of the venture managers *about* the beneficiaries' emancipation.

Moreover, in such studies the local context tends to be a backdrop rather than an explanatory dimension. The beneficiary communities themselves constitute a passive context: in their recent review paper, Bacq, Hertel and Lumpkin (2022) find it is only in about 2% of the studies that communities have agentic roles rather than being mere recipients of social venture's bounties. Relatedly, Laine and Kibler (2020) argue that the opportunity to engage in

emancipatory entrepreneuring is defined by the context in which it occurs and hence unfolds in a bounded social imagination. They call for critical engagement with EE in studies that consider context-bound, social aspirations of the diverse range of people who may engage in emancipatory entrepreneuring. That also means recognizing the 'different rationalities and rhythms concerning the communities' material life,' notably in non-western contexts (dos Santos & Banerjee, 2019, p. 18). In a similar vein, Verduijn et al. (2014) called for a more nuanced, less utopian and romanticized approach to the emancipatory potential of entrepreneurship, notably ones that centre localized experiences of entrepreneuring and how these can both reproduce oppression and lead to emancipation.

Subalternity, agency and infrapolitics

To respond to such calls and frame the experiences of beneficiaries, we conceptualize their position as a form of subalternity (Spivak, 1988). Subalternity encompasses not only the socio-economic but the historical and political roots of oppression that render the agentic behaviour of groups of people invisible and inaudible to dominant social groups. Spivak contested the idea that a subaltern class can be identified as a group of people with essential, shared demographic characteristics, which she argued confines the members of such a group to a static-object status and sustains the dominant and intellectual classes' assumption that they need to speak for and represent them. Instead, for Spivak, 'subalternity is where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognizable basis of action' (2012, p. 431) and the agency of a group of people to overcome their oppression is neither recognized nor recognizable. Such people are, in effect, subalternized: they are denied agency and silenced by dominant others.

Moreover, Spivak placed a particular emphasis on women: if the subaltern 'has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow' (Spivak,

8

1988, p. 83). She discusses how some Indian women were trapped between colonial and Hindu discourses about the ritual of burning their deceased spouses, and how this diluted their subjectivity and agency. She proceeds to ask whether we can hear them, whether we are listening. "Can the Subaltern speak" is thus a rhetorical question for Spivak, but she interrogates the legibility of their language. Therefore, Spivak denounces the politics of invisibilization and silencing of women assigned to subalternity. She also reaffirmed the value of the subaltern as a theoretical–analytical concept in our contemporary times: the world has changed, yet women living in subalternity still appear in rural, indigenous settings (Spivak, 2014).

That new configuration goes beyond a binary opposition between the Global North and the Global South, instead reminding us that we 'must pay attention to the inner frontiers occurring within the space(s) on subalternity' (De Jong & Mascat, 2016, p. 724). Beyond the intersection of gender and post-colonial settings, we thus need to consider the complex ways in which some people become subalternized yet may have different experiences when trying to overcome constraints. Social positionality and factors such as culture, gender, class and age play a major role in shaping the experiences of entrepreneurs and enabling their success or decline (see e.g. Martinez, Martin, & Marlow, 2018; Meliou, Mallett, & Rosenberg, 2019; Powell & Eddleston, 2013; Venkatesh, Shaw, Sykes, Wamba, & Macharia, 2017). In turn, the intersectionality of such factors shapes the experience of resistance and emancipation. For instance, Nazzal, Stringfellow and Maclean (2023) studied how Palestinian women activists experience relative oppression and privilege, depending on how their social positioning and the broader context interact.

However, theoretically acknowledging novel, intersectional ways in which women experience subalternity is not sufficient to learn from such situations. To account for subalternized women's experiences in their complexity, to hear their voices, to understand their

9

forms of emancipation, we need to find ways to translate 'subaltern language' to a non-subaltern audience. This is a challenging and controversial exercise since translation is also an act of appropriation, even when the researcher is an 'outsider from within' (Collins, 1986). Nonetheless, Spivak argued that 'subalternity is […] a space where the intellectual instrumentalizes himself or herself to go into learning from below' (Spivak, 2014, p. 10).

While Spivak relies chiefly on literature, novels and fiction to retrieve subaltern consciousness (Ray, 2009), social science scholars have offered alternative ways to study the agency of subalternized people. Notably, Scott (1985) argued that people living in subalternity, who are aware of their powerlessness, can use a hidden transcript or infrapolitics to express their disagreement and opposition (Scott, 1985). That is, they adopt veiled tactics of resistance in everyday social interaction (Scott, 1990). Such hidden tactics can be found in 'rumours, gossip, folks, songs, gestures, jokes and theatre of the powerless […] by which, among other things, they insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity or behind innocuous understandings of their conduct' (Scott, 1990, p. 311). Building on Scott's work, Marche (2012) provided the example of graffiti against the 'war on terror' as a type of infrapolitical oppositional speech act. Silence may also be a way of expressing disagreement (Van Engelenhoven, 2023; Wagner, 2012). Also, Kandiyoti (1988) argued that women's coping mechanisms against gender-based oppression, which she calls bargaining with patriarchy, are shaped by constraints that are specific to a cultural and historical context. That means that, in certain contexts, women's passivity or accommodation with the status quo can be considered a veiled tactic, in that it is a form of resistance to maintain gains achieved over time instead of opting for overt confrontation.

Such approaches to studying and making sense of agency and 'everyday resistance' (Scott, 1985) have also been adopted in organization studies. Mumby et al. (2017) discuss both hidden and public forms of resistance, and further distinguish between individual and collective

10

infrapolitics. Böhm et al. (2008) consider formal and informal forms of resistance from a Neo-Gramscian perspective and highlighting the concept of 'war of position' to convey that infrapolitics are a long-term strategy when frontal assault is not a viable option. Other theoretical work considered the articulation between infrapolitics and more organized forms of resistance in the Global South and beyond (Lilja, Baaz, Schulz, & Vinthagen, 2017; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013).

Studying such phenomena in practice, Fernández, Martí and Farchi (2017) show how disenfranchised, long-term unemployed people in a poor district of Buenos Aires deploy infrapolitics as well as other forms of mundane, everyday politics to resist political domination and emphasized the difficulty in tracing practices that tend to be hidden and ambiguous. Elsewhere, Ybema and Horvers (2017) explored how resistance can be performed infrapolitically through compliance. Further studies on resistance have also investigated non-confrontational, affective tactics (Marsh & Sliwa, 2022) and how everyday practices link forces of alienation and emancipation (Courpasson, 2017). Inspired by such work, in this study we investigate how women beneficiaries in a social enterprise in post-revolutionary Tunisia are agents in their emancipation, including through veiled, infrapolitical tactics.

Methods

In this study, we investigate the forms of emancipation deployed by women beneficiaries in the Tunisian ecotourism social enterprise DEA. To do so, we adopted the extend case method (ECM) (Burawoy, 1998, 2009). Management and organization studies scholars have used the ECM (Bjerregaard & Klitmøller; 2016; Siciliano, 2016) and have called for its greater adoption towards multilevel and historically grounded studies (Delbridge & Edwards, 2013; Nguyen & Tull, 2022; Wadham & Warren, 2014). The ECM has three main principles: connecting micro-level phenomena (the case level) to the macro-level context that shapes them; integrating

11

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empirical anomalies to extend existing theories; and centring reflexivity about positionality and the power dynamics at play in fieldwork. Such principles align with Spivak's call to learn from below and Scott's take that non-elites must be listened to and heard rather than commented upon (Fernández et al., 2017; Scott, 2012).

Case setting and data collection

DEA is a social ecotourism enterprise located in north-west Tunisia, founded in 2017 and led by a local woman, Arij, and her partner. Aiming to develop women's ancestral know-how, local heritage and the region's cultural specificities, DEA offers business training to local women, sells their handicrafts or creates other opportunities for them, such as cooking for tourist groups. Arij invites relatives or other women she meets while searching for relevant products or tourist experiences to work with her in DEA. The lead author followed the development of DEA for over three years, including local visits, interviews with the founder and beneficiaries and sustained informal contact. She was particularly keen on developing a close, trusted relationship with the three women featured in this study to access, understand and convey their stories as faithfully as possible. As detailed below, that was achieved through home visits, semi-structured interviews, field notes and informal conversations via messaging apps.

The lead author collected data about DEA as part of a broader project about social entrepreneurship and post-revolutionary socio-economic change in Tunisia. In addition to the in-depth study of DEA as an exemplary case of social entrepreneurship in Tunisia, the lead author conducted 20 interviews with stakeholders such as social entrepreneurs, activists and national and international organizations. She collected observations in a range of events and locations related to the social entrepreneurship in Tunisia (as panellist, teacher or simply as observer or participant). Archival data such as historical documents, reports published by

12

organizations and other public government documents were compiled as well. The data collected for the larger project constitute the materials for extending the case, in line with the ECM method.

To balance the need for depth (understanding micro-level phenomena) and breadth (connecting the micro-level with the macro-level) in deploying the ECM approach, a researcher needs to arbitrate on the use and analysis of data (Burawoy, Burton, Ferguson, & Fox, 1991). We thus anchored our work for this paper in the stories of three women beneficiaries at DEA, featured here under the pseudonyms of Fatma, Khadija and Beya, so we might render rich and contextualized insights about their emancipatory practices in relation to both their work with DEA and the Tunisian context. Moreover, Khadija, Fatma and Beya differed in terms of age, education and economic standing, providing variability beyond the focus on economic precarity often seen in previous work. We also connected their narratives, where relevant, to the perspective of DEA's owner Arij, while centring the beneficiary experience.

In January 2018, the first author participated in a weekend trip for tourists organized by DEA to explore the rural entrepreneurial environment in north-west Tunisia, during which initial contact was made with the women beneficiaries. The first author subsequently kept in contact with the DEA venture leader and the women beneficiaries via social media apps, sharing news and exchanging greetings. She also had deeper interactions with them—especially with Fatma—about life struggles and work. Indeed, the use of digital technologies allowed for a co-presence with the participants that enriched the study (Akemu & Abdelnour, 2020).

In April 2019, the researcher took a further four-day trip to the same location to immerse herself in the beneficiaries' everyday environment and conduct in-depth interviews. The trip involved travelling to remote locations, reconnecting with the research participants and witnessing their everyday activities (see field notes in Appendix 1). Semi-structured interviews

13

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were also conducted in a conversational style to allow for spontaneous reflections and conversations, while making sure relevant topics were discussed (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). Research participants were prompted to introduce themselves in their preferred way to get a deeper understanding of how they saw their own stories (Riessman, 2008). Follow-up questions concerned their families, in particular their husbands, and their experience working with DEA and other organizations. Spending time with the research participants and interviewing them in their houses was intended to make them feel comfortable and in control (Kusenbach, 2003). Moreover, Burawoy (1998) emphasizes the importance of being aware of the political implications of our research. Issues of domination, silence and objectification need to be considered, that is to say, we need to reflect on positionality and the power dynamics that shape the researcher–informant relationship, not least in the context of crisis (Yousfi & Abdallah, 2020). In such contexts, Abdelnour & Abu Moghli (2021) call for a political reflexivity during the fieldwork and while producing knowledge to avoid harming marginalized populations.

Positionality

The author who collected the data was born and raised in Tunisia and now lives in Europe. She was living in Tunisia during the revolution in 2011 and was volunteering for the Tunisian Red Crescent before, during and after the revolution. Moreover, she has been involved in the social-solidarity economy environment for many years, allowing her to better understand DEA and the post-revolutionary context. The lead researcher's proximity to the women was crucial in accessing the sphere of the 'hidden transcripts' notably through informal talk and gossip (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007). Nevertheless, power dynamics still pervaded her interactions with them. In the case of Fatma, the older woman, there was a constant negotiation between a mother–daughter versus expert–learner relationship. Fatma regularly checked on the researcher

14

via messaging apps, praying for her due to concerns about her being a younger woman alone and abroad. Concurrently, Fatma looked up to the researcher, asking her for business advice and ideas. Thus, the researcher held intellectual, economic and cultural privilege, and while that privilege was one of the ways into the field, it was a challenge to avoid creating expectations that could not be met.

Another fieldwork risk is normative critique (Dey & Steyaert, 2012), i.e. reflecting our views rather than those of study subjects. Dey and Steyaert however stress the importance of engagement, echoing the recommendation of Vijay, Gupta, and Kaushiva (2021) for researchers studying subaltern people to seek 'solidaristic transgression' of predefined truths, reflecting on privilege, and critically engaging with the local context. To refine initial interpretations, the lead author therefore attempted to take a step back and share her thoughts with the participants, her mother or her parents' neighbours. To understand participants' (in)actions, she also relied on memories of her mother sharing tales about ruses and tactics used by women to overcome day-to-day hardships. For a long time, the author had considered such behaviours that her mother defined as 'smart' to be a form of passivity. However, these 'lessons in womanhood' proved highly relevant when reading about and trying to identify infrapolitics in the field.

Data analysis

In line with the ECM approach, we analysed individual stories, and then went back and forth to situate them in the macro the context. First, to make sense of the experiences of women beneficiaries in DEA we used narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008). We analysed each individual story (Riessman, 2008) that was (re)constructed from the recorded interviews, informal interactions and virtual conversations in Tunisian dialect to ensure we did not miss important details (Floersch, 2000). We considered how research participants talked about their

15

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life trajectories, what they emphasized, how they positioned themselves in their environment including towards family and friends, how they perceived opportunities and constraints offered by DEA, and what broader forms of oppression they perceived. We then considered such elements across the three life narratives, identifying similar forms of oppression and the varied ways research participants responded to those constraints. The outcomes of that step included their alertness to oppressive labour and gender relations that constrained their agency and how those oppressions affected them in navigating their relations in DEA, their families and the socio-economic landscape.

Second, we sought to understand how the women beneficiaries addressed such oppression in relation to their cultural, political, historical and socio-economic context. That is a key step in the ECM as the aim is not to directly theorize from what research participants say but to first understand 'what they are responding to and why' (Nguyen & Tull, 2022, p. 7). That step allowed us to understand the role context plays in shaping the women's stories and reveal the intersectional dimension to their experiences. Finally, based on that contextualized understanding, we re-examined the women's narratives paying close attention to the tactics that subalterns deploy, in particular veiled ones (Kandiyoti, 1988; Scott, 1990). Following the ECM, we here aimed to identify anomalies or irregularities between our findings and the theoretical framework we have formed. These anomalies are presented in the next sections as three forms of emancipation, namely Affirming their dreams, Navigating gender relations and Defending their interests.

Findings

Affirming their dreams

To start with, Beya, Fatma and Khadija narrated how, despite constraints and precarious conditions, they persevered and fought to realize their dreams. They told us how being part of

16

DEA was not only a source of income and a possible ticket out of economic precarity but a way of pursuing a pre-existing professional ambition and a work project they were passionate about. For instance, Beya told us about her passion for clay and how she saw her workshop—previously run by her father-in-law, which she re-established when she got married—as a piece of national heritage to be preserved for her children and future generations. The workshop is located in an isolated location on a mountain top, in the heart of a forest. She encountered many problems; it was a struggle financially and many discouraged her from pursuing the project because she was a woman. However, as Beya recalls, things improved:

> Sometimes, people came in without warning. I closed both the workshop door and the door to the room where I work. I won't lie, I was scared, honestly, I wasn't scared of wolves or wild boars but of humans—men. Working alone there, I was risking being attacked and raped. Fortunately, God helped me. As the saying goes, you have to work hard and God will reward you, and slowly things started getting better. I persevered; I guess my passion for the ceramics and this workshop was stronger than prejudice and fear.[2]

Beya has a higher education degree from the fine arts institute in Tunis, but never achieved her ambition of a tenured teaching position in the public education system. In Tunisia, 30.1% of higher education graduates are unemployed, of which 40.7% are women (Tunisian National Institute of Statistics, 2020). Moreover, Beya wears the hijab, which is a traditional head covering for Muslim women. Although Tunisia is a Muslim-majority country, under Ben Ali's dictatorship (1987–2011) the veil was not welcome in schools and public administration buildings. The lead author studied in Tunisia and recalls a time when some women were

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[2] Direct quotes were translated from the Tunisian Arabic dialect into English by the first author.

expelled from the classroom or prevented from taking their exams because they were veiled. It was common knowledge that women wearing the hijab would not be hired in the public administration sector and large parts of the private sector. Indeed, Beya confided that she had left Tunisia to live in the Gulf region so she could practise her faith, wear her hijab and pursue a career as an arts teacher. Homesick, she returned after some years and now exhibits her ceramics and teaches a ceramics workshop with DEA.

Similar learnings emerged in Fatma's story. In her late fifties and a mother of five, she is married to an officer from the presidential security team. She quickly discovered she would need to work because her husband's salary was modest, especially considering that, as tradition demands, they hosted and financially supported her husband's siblings who were students in Tunis. She is what Tunisians call *Mra hora*, or a free woman; that is, a woman who takes good care of her house and family and masters a craft. Although she left school at 12, she never stopped learning. She has a diploma in tailoring and has had her small workshop for some years. Fatma works on developing her homemade food products, inspired by ancestral know-how, and combines plants from the region to make traditional recipes, dreaming that one day she will open a restaurant.

After the revolution, many national and international organizations invested in projects focused on making a social impact, notably in terms of women's empowerment. However, Fatma found that financial support was hard to obtain: 'I am old; they said they only help younger people.' Indeed, such funds tend to be reserved for younger people starting their careers, candidates must write a pitch in English or French and present their ideas to a panel. Thus, Fatma is not the right age, does not have the appropriate education and has no financial assets. Despite those constraints, Fatma never gave up. She regularly attends events about the social economy and regional development. For several years, she has been cold calling associations she hears about on the radio, but mainly receives negative responses or recalls

18

experiences of being exploited or conned. Yet, she says: 'Even though now I am disillusioned with these associations, I keep calling because with each promise I live in the moment until I get disappointed again.' Fatma does not give up because she strongly believes in her venture and the contribution it will make to those around her:

I am going to focus on the traditional food. I want to preserve the know-how... Why don't we go back to natural and organic food, you know? On the one hand I can familiarize people with the regional products and on the other hand I can do my own work and give a job to other people!

Overall, it can be seen how, to pursue their passion, our research participants display a high capacity for resilience, which can be viewed as a form of resistance (Bourbeau, 2015). The driving force behind their perseverance is not economic survival, but passion. Such experiences correspond to what has been described in Rindova's EE framework as 'seeking autonomy', both in terms of breaking free and breaking up (Rindova et al., 2009). However, our research participants must face constraints that limit their autonomy and their ability to break free. Notably, Fatma does not appear to match the ideal of the local, young woman who can be empowered—and emancipated—through entrepreneurship. Instead, she fits the image of a beneficiary who needs to be lifted out of precarity by others. While Fatma's assignation to subalternity derives from her economic situation, ageism also plays a major role in her exclusion from the market (Martinez et al., 2018). Beya, in turn, faces constraints around engaging in entrepreneurial activity in a rural area and her life trajectory has been affected by stigma attached to her religiosity.

Navigating gender relations

19

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Our analysis of the women's narratives identified patriarchy as a crucial form of oppression from which they seek to break free. Kandiyoti (1988) explained that women's coping mechanisms are shaped by a set of concrete constraints in a particular cultural and temporal context. Culture, age, race, caste and class are all variables that inform women's strategies of resistance, as witnessed in Fatma's narrative:

I give my husband money to buy us groceries, so to my family it looks like he's the one taking care of the household. It is my money, I worked hard for it and stay up at night while he is sleeping. I thought my husband would support my work and confess that I am helping him taking care of our family and sacrificing, but he instead says all problems come from women and 'We are not saving because of you woman'! He thinks that TND20 (€6) pay the kids' bills and their education… How can 20 dinars be pocket money of a girl at the university? Doesn't she need pads? Perfume? [Other things], I don't know?

Patriarchy in Tunisia is disparate and depends on class, region and age. Although the legislation regarding women's rights is considered the most advanced among Arab countries, the patriarchal system still prevails, especially in terms of personal and family rights. For example, the Code of Personal Status (CPS) implemented following independence from France in 1956 abolished polygamy and gave women and men equal rights concerning marriage, divorce and property. However, men are still considered to be the heads of the household and family, while women spend eight times longer doing household chores than men (Amnesty, 2016).

Arij, the founder and owner of DEA, contended that patriarchy undermines her entrepreneurial project: half of the beneficiaries she engaged with have given up due to

20

pressures from their husbands and families. For her, the issue is not that women work but the nature of their work. Engaging in entrepreneurial ventures exposes women to the outside world, where they encounter men including foreign clients, sign contracts and may host tourists:

> Here, especially in the north-west region, it is the women who work; the women are hardworking while the men are shepherds or farmers with seasonal activities; you usually find them at home or at the café. So, for him, the fact that his wife is waiting for people to come to her house, to welcome them, or to do an activity with them, having strangers in their house, eating at their house, going into their kitchen, going into their bathroom, it's a bit shocking.

That can also be seen in Khadija's story. After getting married, she and her husband struggled to find a place to live. They decided to stay in the forest, become shepherds and build a small house where she now makes food and hosts tourists. As the forest belongs to the government, the municipality regularly threatens to demolish their house. Khadija proudly recounted how the police once came to evict them while her husband was away and she started throwing stones at them from the roof until they left. She adds: 'They called me *El farssa* [the mare] because I am free, beautiful, strong and capable of fighting even the police.'

During the first encounter with Khadija in January 2018, her husband was not at home. At that time, he would not allow her to host people and believed that such business would create problems in the household. When asked how her husband felt about having lunch guests in the house, she laughed and said, 'I send him herding the sheep on the mountain!' So, the same woman who confronted the police to defend her house was using infrapolitical tactics to deal with patriarchy in her everyday life, reminding the lead author of a proverb quoted by her mother to describe such veiled tactics: 'Women kill the snake with their buttocks'. In other

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words, they do so discreetly and calmly with no fear. Moreover, field notes suggest that Khadija gauges men's jealousy as "contradictory":

> I had an interesting conversation with her about men's jealousy. She said 'They don't want their wives to talk or meet with men but then, in the buses, women find themselves stuck to men, more intimacy you die! Ha ha.' I thought that she has a humorous way to evoke patriarchy and sexual harassment even without naming them as such.

Even among the younger, more highly educated generation that accepts a more balanced and equal relationship between men and women, the mindset of *hzara*—meaning jealous or macho—prevails, especially in rural and marginalized regions of Tunisia. Many men feel the need to demonstrate a certain attitude towards their wives, sisters and daughters to show their masculinity in front of their friends and family. Beya admits she made accommodations to ensure her safety and maintain her (and her husband's) reputation:

> So far, it is difficult to work with men alone in the workshop. You know, in the north-west of Tunisia, here the mindset is very conservative. For example, the man I brought to help me, my husband doesn't want me to stay alone with him because he knows the mentality here. The guys from the neighbourhood would gossip about him and me in the café and maybe spread rumours about me to dishonour the family. On the other hand, my male friends [from the capital] [...] visit me here in the workshop without any problem!

Overall, this section shows that our research participants acknowledge the severe constraints that patriarchy imposes on them in relation to their work. Women such as Khadija and Fatma are aware of their hierarchical position in the family and evaluate that they would

22

achieve nothing through overt arguments that may lead to violence, divorce or life on the streets. According to the Tunisian Ministry of Ministry of Family, Women, Childhood and Seniors, 47% of women have suffered domestic violence in their lifetime (Guellali, 2021); thus, they avoid conflict and instead use veiled tactics of resistance to get what they want. In a similar vein, hooks (2000) explains that despite the violence and sexism that Black men inflict on women, Black women have compassion for them emanating from a shared history of common struggle, in recognition of another layer of subjugation that ties them beyond patriarchy. Similarly, in the Tunisian context, subalternized women and men have struggled together and continue to do so, fighting for their daily bread, for dignity and to ensure a better life for their children. Women therefore sometimes choose to comply with and protect the status of their partners, not out of weakness but compassion. We also observed that our research participants were reflective about how they try to break free (Rindova et al., 2009) from patriarchy through veiled tactics and compromises between what they seek to achieve and what is possible. In other words, the women in our study found spaces to deploy agency towards their emancipation in their everyday lives but had to do so within the limits of their cultural and social context. Thus, such freedom gains do not necessarily translate into observable structural change (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018).

Defending their interests

We find that labour relations are both enablers and constraints for the women in our study, and that skilful efforts thus need to be deployed in these relations. For women living in subalternity, working has always been part of their lives; however, their work is still very much devalued, rooted in power dynamics and exploitation by their employers (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019). Fatma has been selling her preserved foods and cooking for DEA tourists and elsewhere. Her statement illustrates how subalternized women seek to break free from this dynamic of exploitation and testifies to her efforts to preserve her dignity and affirm her self-worth:

> I don't accept working for this wage, TND70 [€20], for three days of cooking training. Why should I? I was very angry and I asked to see the head of the organization, who was sick. I ended up having what I wanted but they never called me back.

She was angry not only because the wage was small but because the organization 'underestimated [her]'. Furthermore, Fatma shed light on the exploitative nature of such relationships:

> Everybody is profiting, nobody is really helping, they eat the fruit and deplete the tree— that is exactly what happens with the associations. They all go crazy [for] my product and ask that whenever I come, I must bring some with me […]. Support me and buy it from me! I've been doing this for years and I am known for [my products] in this area.

The same aspect of under-valuation and exploitation is also evident in Beya's narrative. She recalls that on starting work as a ceramist, her father-in-law sold her items for a very low price to compete with Chinese products:

> When I started, if I sold for TND10 [€3.5] I was super happy. You can't imagine my happiness: this money was solving problems, I could buy milk for my kids, or diapers. Then things got better and I start selling [for] TND40 and more.

Today, Beya not only sets her own prices but chooses who she works with:

24

There are many organizations that want to profit from you, and you must be aware and smart. Some come and ask you for your products to exhibit them—I say 'No, but you are welcome to buy!' I'm trying to be selective because I'm aware of the value of my work, *Walah* [I swear by God], not only the economic value, but it is also a lot of work, and this workshop has a long history, it is a local heritage.

However, not all beneficiaries have the resourcefulness to openly negotiate their pay and get a fair valuation of their work. Khadija disclosed she becomes irritated by Arij, DEA's founder, when the latter pays for fewer people than the actual number she brings for lunch: 'She is offering special treatments on my back!', which means Khadija is losing money. Khadija also confided that she is trying to start her own business and break away from her dependency on Arij.

Arij doesn't want to help me. If she wanted to help me, she would have done it. *Walah*, she would benefit even more than me, we have space here to build a cottage. Last time we talked about this, in the summer, she brought a guy and I saw her showing him around, then he left. I don't know how much it will cost.

While such claims remain in the infrapolitical, gossip-based sphere (Scott, 1990), they illustrate how Khadija is becoming aware of the value of her work.

At the same time, Arij finds that Khadija and the other women in DEA are not always on the 'right path' to emancipation:

The Ministry of Women stated that craftswomen have the right to take a loan of TND5000 [€1700] for five years without interest to become associates in a cooperative.

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> The craftswomen did not accept! […] I see that the organization will always be dependent on [me getting] external funding because the mentality couldn't be changed...

While not directly mentioning that loan opportunity in our conversations, Fatma explained why she prefers to sell her product through Arij:

> Why do I sell my products through Arij and let her take 20%? It's because I don't have a tax number. You understand? I am not interested in having one, then I would have to pay the health insurance, and I don't really get paid well.

Thus, staying in the beneficiary position is resented but also seen as less risky.

Finally, we found that interests are defended individually rather than collectively and that the women in our study do not collaborate, compared with the findings of previous research (Al-Dajani et al., 2015). For example, Khadija talked about an association where the coordinator wanted to help her by providing her with ceramic dishes from Nabeul (280 km away), but she never mentioned the possibility of collaborating with Beya whose ceramic workshop is just 500 metres away. The lead author also asked if the women would consider working together at some point as they have complementary skills. In response, Fatma stated that she does not trust anyone, prefers to work alone and wishes to open her own business. Khadija likewise frowned at the idea of working with other women: 'People envy each other, you understand? You know, this woman, there they call her Yamina, she told me, "Oh you took everybody [all the tourists and business]" and she is [already] rich!'

Overall, this section shows how the women beneficiaries in DEA are making remarkable efforts to uphold the value of their labour towards their families, the owner of the

26

enterprise and other stakeholders. They are, thereby, asserting themselves as entrepreneurs, learning to deploy entrepreneurial behaviour in and around the DEA and without the direct involvement of the venture leader. That finding is in line with the definition by Rindova and colleagues (2009) of 'entrepreneurial authoring', i.e. the ability to define the relationship and rules of engagement. Here, however, the women's attempt to emancipate from their subalternized position as beneficiaries in DEA are not entirely realized, which can be related to recent work pointing to the difficulty for subalternized people to escape the saviour–victim dichotomy in socially oriented entrepreneurial ventures (Wetterman & Berglund, 2022).

Discussion: Can the subaltern dream?

In this article, we investigated how women beneficiaries in a social enterprise in post-revolutionary Tunisia are agents in their emancipation, including through veiled, infrapolitical tactics. Following the ECM (Burawoy, 1998, 2009), we connected the stories of women beneficiaries in a social enterprise to the macro context of post-revolutionary Tunisia while unpacking their social positionality (Yousfi & Abdallah, 2020; Abdelnour & Abu Moghli, 2021). Our findings show how women's assignation to subalternity and the efforts they deploy to get out of it are tied to complex and contextual ties between social, economic, and political constraints (Nazzal et al., 2023). First, we see how the research participants are Affirming their dreams, i.e. they narrate a professional aspiration and personal passion they seek to fulfil not only in but through DEA. Second, we witness the context-specific ways in which the research participants engage with patriarchy daily and find themselves Navigating gender relations to pursue their work. Finally, they are Defending their interests: asserting themselves as entrepreneurs, notably by claiming the value of their work vis-à-vis different stakeholders even though not all are equally assertive and that these efforts remain individual rather than collective or solidary.

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Overall, our study contributes to the emerging conversation on the interplay of precarity, organizing and intersectionality (Durbin et al. 2017; Choi, 2018), not least in this special issue. First, by extending the EE literature to the so-called beneficiary and centring their lived experience, we show how beneficiaries are agents in their emancipation and display entrepreneurial acumen. Second, by exploring the explicit and veiled tactics through which subalternized women deploy their agency we contribute to the ongoing conversation in organization studies on forms of resistance beyond the hidden versus public resistance dichotomy. And third, we challenge the representation of 'subalterns' as a homogenous and passive category by showing how intersectional differences such as religiosity, gender, or education affect the agentic possibilities of the women beneficiaries we studied and, thus, their pathways to emancipation. We discuss these contributions and their implications in the following developments.

Emancipation beyond the heroic entrepreneur–beneficiary dichotomy

To start with, we offer new insights on emancipation via entrepreneurship by centring women beneficiaries' experiences. We thus go beyond a focus on the idealized, heroic figure of the venture leader who emancipate themselves and save others that is still predominant in the EE literature (Chandra, 2017; Wetterman & Berglund, 2022; Goss et al., 2011). Our study shows how women beneficiaries enter the social enterprise with dreams they wish to actualize and a desire to affect the world around them, to contribute to their society. Although the beneficiaries' declared aspirations may appear modest, they fight to fulfil dreams that, due to the constraints they face, were barely achievable at the onset. Beya wants to revive and pass on the craft of ceramics as an element of national heritage, while Fatma wants to reconnect people with the local foods they may otherwise forget. By doing so they display a remarkable capacity for social imagination (Laine & Kibler, 2020) and reveal aspirations to become agents of

28

change: we see these women aspiring not only to emancipation *from* their precarious livelihoods but emancipation *to* help shape a different future. Thus, they aptly fit the metaphor of entrepreneurs as 'midwives of the possible' (Ramoglou & McMullen, 2022) who seek to realize their dreams within the conditions afforded by their context – with the caveat that their vision of what is possible (Laine & Kibler, 2020) eventually both differs from and extends beyond what has been imagined for them by the lead entrepreneur.

Our study also shows how women beneficiaries can, still, face exploitation from ventures claiming to get them out of poverty or other precarious conditions. Beya, Fatma and Khadija talk about experiencing being underpaid or even having to offer their product or service for free. Those stories reflect the type of relationship between venture leader and the so-called beneficiaries that still very much governed by a charity and development mindset. In this this type of relationship, the rules and conditions of work are set up by the organization. Moreover, such unfair compensation reflects the implicit assumption in social entrepreneurship that beneficiaries should be grateful for being able to participate and be helped at all (McMullen & Bergman, 2017). By defending their interest and claiming the worth of their work, Beya, Fatma and Khadija show a willingness to "define the relationship and rules of engagement" (Rindova et al., 2009). They thus also show a desire to "break free" not from the community (Rindova et al., 2009) but first from the beneficiary position in the social enterprise. Such efforts further reveal the transactional nature of relations between beneficiaries and lead entrepreneurs, mirroring the "solicitous" element of entrepreneurship (McMullen & Ramoglou, 2023, p. 1).

However, only attending to the economic dimension of women's empowerment is unlikely to be sufficient, as we would fail to address how patriarchy is affecting their participation in the work sphere (Moghadam, 2007; Shohel, Niner, & Gunawardana, 2021). Our study show that the women beneficiaries face constraints in relation to their families,

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notably their husbands, and which prevent them from realizing their dreams. While other research shows how women may benefit from family relations to succeed as entrepreneurs when they lack other forms of capital (Powell & Eddleston, 2013; Venkatesh et al., 2017), we see from our analysis that this comes with a necessity to navigate patriarchy using various tactics of resistance. This ambivalent experience with kin relations under patriarchy is also at play in the study of Nazzal et al. (2023), where Palestinian activist women fighting for liberation still have to navigate patriarchy but also benefit from social protection through their husbands, fathers or brothers. Further research into the interaction between the economic, social and political dimensions affecting emancipation would be important to further unpack women beneficiaries' experiences, and the experiences of subalternized people more broadly.

Resistance repertoire of the subalternized

Second, by being attentive to localized, banal and veiled practices (Verduijn et al., 2014; Fernández et al., 2017), across the three forms of emancipation we contribute to the conversation in organization studies that considers the multiple ways resistance is manifested by moving beyond the dichotomy of hidden versus public (Fernández et al., 2017; Courpasson, 2017; Marsh & Sliwa, 2021). Indeed, some of the tactics employed are veiled or indirect, such as when Khadija sends her husband to herd in the mountains, in a form of bargaining with patriarchy (Kandiyoti, 1988). When Fatma gossips about Arij to the researcher, it is because she knows she needs to continue to work at DEA to generate an income, as occupying the beneficiary role addresses constraints that appear too difficult for her to overcome, such as finding clients, accessing seed funding or dealing with the implications of having a tax number.

Moreover, our analysis reveals that the subalternized women in our study do not limit themselves to the infra-political register used when one is powerless (Scott, 1990) but that are also vocal and explicit when narrating their dreams or fighting for fair wages. For example, we

30

see this when the beneficiaries negotiate the price of their products and over time become more selective and strategic with their work relations. They develop other professional ties and make sales outside DEA while juggling the constraints attached to those new and, still often, patriarchal relations. Our findings thus complement those of the study by Fernández, Martí, and Farchi (2017) set in Argentina, where they argue that marginalised people use both mundane and everyday ways of resistance that allow for small scale, local transformation in their neighbourhood, and that evade the dichotomy between infrapolitics and public, highly visible social movement practices.

In addition, our findings suggest that the beneficiaries in DEA approach emancipatory work through individual rather than collective efforts (Cumbers, McMaster, Cabaço, & White, 2020). That contrasts with Al-Dajani et al.'s (2015) findings, where the Palestinian refugees develop collective strategies to overcome the constraints created by the business broker, the work of Fernández and colleagues (2017) showing a collective action located in the neighbourhood, or work showing how communities can, albeit rarely, be more equal partners or even generators of entrepreneurial opportunities (Bacq et al., 2022). In our case, there are, instead, indications of a lack of trust and a prevailing competitive spirit in the relationships between the women in DEA, similar to the conclusions of Verduijn and Essers (2013) in their study of minority Muslim women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands. Spivak (2012) emphasized that while individual expressions of agency are necessary for political action, they do not automatically come together to form a collective basis for change. Further research could thus play closer attention to the individual and collective dimensions of infrapolitics (Mumby et al., 2017) when it comes to beneficiaries' efforts to emancipate.

Subalternity and intersectionality

31

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One might wonder: can a woman who is fighting for her dreams, standing up against patriarchy and defending her interest really be seen - and studied - as a subaltern? Provoking such puzzlement would mirror our aims with this paper, which was to unpack the condition of subalternity and understand the experience of subalternized women in entrepreneurship. Subalternity is first and foremost an act of dehumanization (Fanon, 1961), articulated around oppression and struggle, and suggesting that subaltern people should only fight for their survival. By fighting for their passion, subalternized women assert their dignity and thus their humanity (Ajari, 2019), reclaiming to be treated on more equal and fair terms.

Our findings indicate that the forms of emancipation we identified are tied to intersectional differences in a supposedly homogeneous group of beneficiaries. In turn this affects what forms of emancipation they can engage with and to what extent. While Fatma and Khadija come from rather modest backgrounds, Beya has a university education and comes from the middle-class. However, Beya has experienced oppression for practising her religion and being a woman running a ceramics workshop in an isolated location. Age is a particular concern for Fatma, excluding her from access to funding. Being a beneficiary is thus not tied to a particular set of oppressions and certainly not to a single, economic one (i.e., precarity as poverty), further showing how there is a diversity of experiences for those designated as beneficiaries.

We thus extend findings from previous studies about marginalized or stigmatized social identity groups such as migrants or refugees that show they tend to be approached as homogeneous groups, suppressing people's particular and situated experience (Adeeko & Treanor, 2022). In the current context of "multi-crisis", the precarisation of the population is exponential in both in the Global South and the Global North, with a rise in the politics of austerity (Jørgensen & Schierup, 2022). Confining subalternized people to a homogeneous category – the poor, the miserable, the uneducated and the submissive – is not only an act of

32

dehumanisation but also obfuscation of a more complex and intersectional reality. Instead, in line with Spivak (1988), our analysis following an ECM approach exhibits how subalternity is fundamentally rooted in social, economic and political inequality, and that it is not an identity. The 'extending out' prescribed by the ECM thus allowed us to be attuned to the importance of social positionality in shaping the experience of women entrepreneurs (Martinez et al., 2018), not least in relation to patriarchy (Kandiyoti, 1988).

We note that the intersectionality lens is still little used in relation to entrepreneurship (Heizmann & Liu, 2020) and few researchers have adopted a gender or intersectional perspective in studies of social enterprising and emancipation (Guérin, Hersent, & Fraisse, 2011). Our study thus strengthens the relevance of adopting such a lens to study the diverse experiences of women facing oppression (Nazzal et al., 2023) in future studies, including but not limited to those of beneficiaries in social enterprises. Researchers could also further unpack the performativity of calling a group of people beneficiaries, versus using other, less subduing labels such as co-entrepreneurs or partners, in order for (social) entrepreneurial ventures "to create value that is not at someone else's expense" (McMullen & Ramoglou, 2023, p. 2).

Nonetheless, in contexts such as post-revolution Tunisia, social entrepreneurship (Hjorth, 2013) and SSE more broadly (Eynaud et al., 2019) still has great potential to help realize emancipation. Further studies could explore, as Rindova and colleagues (2022) suggest, how emancipatory entrepreneurship may be grounded in other moral frames, such as a civic framework with collective action and solidarity at its core. However, such aspirations and efforts are to no avail if current mechanisms and structures of oppression remain. As Paulo Freire argued, "The truth is . . . that the oppressed are not 'marginals,' are not people living 'outside' society. They have always been 'inside' – inside the structure which made them 'beings for others.' The solution is not to 'integrate' them into the structure of oppression, but

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to transform that structure so that they can become 'beings for themselves'" (Freire, 1970, p. 62).

Conclusion

For decades, governments, humanitarian organizations and (social) enterprises have addressed precarity with a charity approach where the beneficiaries tend be depicted as a homogeneous group devoid of agency. Concurrently, in a broad range of disciplines including organization studies, researchers have engaged with how to support, empower or emancipate subalternized women and extricate them from precarity. In this article, centring women beneficiaries' experiences, we offered new insights on emancipation via entrepreneurship. Our findings show how subalternized women in Tunisia engage in forms of emancipation combining explicit and infrapolitical tactics, and which vary based on intersectional differences. Our results furthermore highlight how these women's relegation to subalternity and their attempts to overcome it are intricately linked to the historical interplay of societal, economical, and political pressures. The back-and-forth between the women's personal histories and the macro system that shapes them, as prescribed by the ECM, allowed us to better understand their experiences of subalternity and systemically point to explanations for these. In this sense, the ECM commits the researcher to addressing structural problems behind individual-level experiences subalternity and denouncing systems of oppression.

In *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Freire (1970) advocates for the unity of practice and theory that can only be achieved by having what he calls 'epistemological curiosity', that is, engaging in a dialogue with the oppressed. Similarly, Spivak (2014) urges us to 'learn from below' when engaging with the subalternized. Accordingly, we tried to be as faithful as possible to the women beneficiaries' narratives and centre their voices. However, the exercise of translating, interpreting and writing is in itself always an act of appropriation (Collins, 1986),

34

and our work is not exempt of such limitations. Alternative approaches involving visual or sensory methods (Bell & Sengupta, 2021) may allow for enhanced ways to convey and learn from the subalternized. We thus hope to see future work enrich the conversation with insights from other subalternized groups and contexts, and with research designs through which researchers can uphold concerns for solidarity and emancipation.

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39

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41

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Appendix 1. Excerpt from field notes

It was hard to reach Beya's workshop and Khadija house since they are in the forest. Overlooking a cliff with barely standing safety barriers, the road […] was scary. The locals and the media called it "the death road" because of the frequency of accidents. I drove from Tunis with two friends. It was also challenging; beyond the dangerous road, my main obstacle was and still is my father. He never approved of my lifestyle; he thinks I travel a lot and I am too free. He also doesn´t like the idea of me driving far from home. Neither my 10 years abroad, nor my age (mid-thirties), changed his mindset. The moment I come home, he would like to impose his rules. So often, I must fight. This time, I chose to lie (or rather hide my trip) to avoid fights. It is ridiculous, I feel inconsistent with my feminism, but I love him and I don´t want to ruin my visit.

On the way to Beya´s workshop, we got lost in the forest. Luckily, a man who was passing with his sheep accompanied us, but we had to abandon the car and walk to the workshop. We spend the afternoon with Beya talking about her work and experience while wrapping the products in newspapers with her to prepare a delivery. We agreed to meet again to record an interview […]. I didn´t have Khadija's phone number and didn´t manage to reach Arij. I assumed I will find the house. Luckily, I ended up meeting her on our way back to the car. She was waiting near the car wondering who those strangers were. Once she recognized me, she invited us for a cup of tea in her house. She then suggested to prepare a traditional couscous for us the day after. So, we came back in the morning and spent the day with her and her family. We laughed a lot […]. Meeting Fatma was easier since she lives in a town. She was busy inventorying products. So, we spend the day there, tasting delicious food, helping her taking photos of her products for social media and chatting.

Author biographies

Amira Benali is Assistant Professor at the Department of Culture and Learning at Aalborg University in Denmark. She holds a PhD in socioeconomics from the University of Geneva in Switzerland. Her work focus on gender, social justice, poverty and alternative economies in the context of tourism and management. Her current project focuses on the experiences of subalternized women with social entrepreneurship in Tunisia.

42

Florence Villesèche is Associate Professor at Copenhagen Business School. Her main research interests are gender, diversity, identity, networks, corporate elites, and feminist theory. Her published works include books and book chapters such as the *Routledge Companion to Organizational Diversity Research* and contributions to recognised outlets such as *Human Relations*, *Work, Employment and Society*, and *Business Ethics Quarterly*.