Muslim Feminists and Entrepreneurship at Times and in Contexts of Crises

Abstract

This paper explores the coping strategies utilised by Muslim women entrepreneurs in the country-specific context of crises-laden Lebanon. In so doing, we follow a qualitative interpretative methodology, drawing upon in-depth, semi-structured interviews with women entrepreneurs based in Lebanon. Accordingly, we present empirical evidence detailing how Muslim women entrepreneurs utilise Muslim feminism and various Islamic practices and values as a means of coping with crises situations and contexts. We also provide insights into how the doing of gender unfolds as a coping strategy enabled by Muslim feminism in the advent of adversities. Hence, we underscore the importance of approaching religion as a social construct which is performed, as opposed to treating religion as something located outside the spheres of gender and economics.

Keywords: Islam; Women entrepreneurs; Muslim feminism; Crises; Lebanon.

Introduction

Although it is acknowledged that religion "shape(s) entrepreneurship" (Dana, 2009, p. 87) and is intertwined into entrepreneurs' entrepreneurial activities (Gümüsay, 2015), it continues to be overlooked (Khan & Koshul, 2011) and neglected in entrepreneurship research (Jaim, 2021; Tlaiss & McAdam, 2021a, 2021b), especially in crises-laden national contexts (Althalathini et al., 2022; Kamla, 2019). Entrepreneurship research related to crises is scarce, fragmented, and primarily focused on a narrow range of topics such as crisis management (Doern et al., 2019), entrepreneurship at times of war and conflict (Bullough et al., 2014; Kwong et al., 2019; Sabella & El Far, 2019), and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic (Jaim, 2021; Safdar & Yasmin, 2020). While this neglect may be due to the perception of religion as a "repressive disciplinary force" (Khan & Koshul, 2011, p. 320) that is "too far removed from the commercial organisation" (Tracey, 2012, p. 87), it nevertheless illustrates how research has overlooked one of the most pervasive driving forces of entrepreneurship (Gümüsay, 2015; Jaim, 2021) and an important driver of individual entrepreneurial action in modern life (Smith et al., 2019, p. 2).

This neglect is further heightened in the case of Islam (Beekun & Badawi, 2005; Tlaiss, 2015) which is not only perceived as the religion "least conducive to capitalism" (Zingales, 2006, p. 228) but is also frequently associated with male imperialism, chauvinist and repressive practices (Ahmed, 1992; Mernissi, 1996), and patriarchal Islamic norms (Kamla, 2019; Priola & Chaudhry, 2021) that eradicate women's rights and is hostile to their participation in economic affairs. However, against this backdrop, where Muslim women are frequently portrayed as submissive, passive, and dominated by a confluence of Islamic values within a patriarchal society, a nascent body of knowledge challenging mainstream positioning of Islam as the reason underlying Muslim women's suppression (Priola & Chaudhry, 2021; Syed & Pio, 2010), is emerging. Despite its partial focus on the experiences of immigrant Muslim women living in the Western world (Essers et al., 2010; Essers & Tedmanson, 2014), this emerging body of knowledge, nevertheless, emphasises the positive impact of Islam on women entrepreneurs and how Muslim women are negotiating, resisting, and navigating inequalities within an Islamic framework and an Islamic feminist approach (see Priola & Chaudhry, 2021; Safdar & Yasmin, 2020; Tlaiss & McAdam, 2021b for more examples). This emerging stream of research also highlights the need to consider

indigenous theoretical and empirical perspectives in order to not only give Muslim women a voice and learn from them as the "other" (Kamla, 2019, p. 53), but also to better understand their agentic potential and how it unfolds locally, in their own national crises-laden, turbulent contexts, away from Western contexts.

A case in point is Lebanon; an Arab country that is suffering compounded crises including currency devaluation, high levels of inflation, unprecedented levels of unemployment and poverty, widespread COVID-19, and the tragic explosion (and its aftermath) in Beirut's port. Despite studies that show the toll of oppression, discrimination, and socio-economic challenges that Arab women entrepreneurs experience in crises-laden national contexts (Althalanthini et al., 2022; Sabella & El Far, 2019), to date, few studies (if any) have critically and empirically explored the intersection of Islam, women's entrepreneurship, and Arab national contexts characterised by turbulent economic and political conditions. Hence, there is a significant gap in understanding with regards to how Muslim women entrepreneurs experience Islam and Islamic teachings in relation to their entrepreneurship, at times and in contexts of compounded political, economic, financial, health-related, and social crises.

Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to explore the coping strategies utilised by Muslim women entrepreneurs in the country-specific context of crises-laden Lebanon. To achieve our aim, we follow a qualitative interpretative methodology, drawing upon in-depth, semi-structured interviews with women entrepreneurs based in Lebanon. In conducting this exploratory investigation, we approach Islam as a social construct. In other words, cognisant of the tensions between Islam and its varied interpretations (Özkazanç-Pan, 2015), "we do not seek to understand the objective truth" but rather Islam's influence on the lives and experiences of Muslim women entrepreneurs in Lebanon while realising that "Islam is but one of many intersecting structural features of Lebanese society" which impact their lives and businesses (Tlaiss & McAdam, 2021a, p. 254). Our focus on the narratives of self-declared Muslim feminists, and their analysis from a Muslim feminist perspective, responds to calls for more innovative feminist viewpoints that explore the interrelation between gender and the varied local contexts (Jaim, 2021; Özkazanç-Pan, 2015; Safdar & Yasmin, 2020). We acknowledge that within the field of entrepreneurship, the construct of gender tends to "stick to women" (Kelan, 2009, p. 490), with gender a proxy for femininity. Rather than being a biological categorisation (e.g., genes, hormones, physicality) that an individual belongs to, or a property of an individual, gender is "a relationship which brings about redefinitions of subjectivities and subject positions over time, both as products and as producers of social context" (Calàs & Smirich, 1996, p. 241). We thus view gender as a fluid and changeable phenomenon that is "extraordinarily relational, with a chameleon-like flexibility, shifting in importance, value and effects from context to context" (Adkins, 2004, p. 6).

This study makes three key theoretical contributions. First, we contribute to research on the influence of religion on entrepreneurship (Althalanthini et al., 2022; Dana, 2009, 2010; Safdar & Yasmin, 2020; Smith et al., 2019) as a result of our focus on how Muslim women experience Islam and Islamic teachings as a means of coping with crises situations and contexts. As we reveal how a Muslim feminism lens helps Muslim women entrepreneurs rediscover Islam, renew their faith, and utilise Islamic teachings and practices as coping strategies, we provide an alternative approach to Islam, away from the widespread perception of it as a repressive force for women (Khan & Koshul, 2011). Second, by introducing Muslim feminist discourses related to Lebanese women entrepreneur's coping strategies, we advance feminist studies and respond to calls for more innovative feminist perspectives (Branicki, 2020; Meliou, 2020; Özkazanç-Pan, 2015), whilst also highlighting the importance of approaching gender as a performative (Adkins, 2004; Butler, 1993;

Kelan, 2009) and how the doing of gender unfolds as a coping strategy enabled by Muslim feminism in the advent of adversities. We also demonstrate the importance of approaching religion, Islam in this situation, as a social construct that the women perform at a personal level as per their own preferences, education, and experience; something which influences their lives, their doing of gender, and as a coping strategy as opposed to treating religion as something located outside the spheres of gender and economics. Third, we contribute to research on entrepreneurship in crises (Bullough & Renko, 2013; Kwong et al., 2019), through our extension of its current focus on COVID 19 (Jaim, 2021; Safdar & Yasmin, 2020) and crisis management (Doern et al., 2019), and its geographic focus on non-Arab countries (Bullough et al., 2014; Langevang & Namatovu, 2019).

The paper is organized as follows. First, we discuss the literature on entrepreneurship in crises contexts. Second, we describe the compounded crises occurring in Lebanon. Third, we provide an overview of the different streams of feminism in the Arab world, with special attention paid to Muslim feminism. Fourth, we discuss the methodological approach used to collect and analyse our empirical data. Fifth, we present our analysis of the experiences of Lebanese women entrepreneurs. Sixth, we discuss our findings from a Muslim feminist perspective. Finally, we conclude by outlining the contributions and the implications of the present study.

Entrepreneurship in Crises Contexts

Ranging from the global financial crisis (2007-2008), acts of terrorism, conflicts in Syria (Kamla, 2019), Palestine (Sabella & El Far, 2019), Iraq (Althalathini et al., 2022) to natural disasters such as Hurricane Sally (2020), multiple wildfires in Greece and Turkey (2021), and the recent COVID-19 pandemic, crises relevant to entrepreneurial activity are on the rise. Nevertheless, entrepreneurship research specifically related to crises is sparse and scattered across a narrow range of topics. For example, Bullough and colleagues (2014) explored the influence of entrepreneurial efficacy and resilience on entrepreneurial intentions in Afghanistan, whilst Kwong et al. (2019) explored the responses of displaced entrepreneurs to adversity in Pakistan. Relevant studies have also been concerned with refugee entrepreneurship (De La Chaux & Haugh, 2021; Harima et al., 2021) and the recent COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on small businesses and self-employed individuals (Jaim, 2021).

Furthermore, research focusing on entrepreneurship in crises contexts has primarily focused on post war or conflict national settings such as Afghanistan (Bullough et al., 2014; Bullough & Renko, 2013) and Tanzania (Langevang & Namatovu, 2019), with minimal attention paid to women's entrepreneurship in crises contexts (Al Althalanthini et al., 2022; Sabella & El Far, 2019). Notwithstanding a few exceptions (Cowling et al., 2020), research on women's entrepreneurship and crises approaches gender as a variable (Bullough et al., 2014), and not as a set of normalising practices that are discursively made or constructed performatively (Butler, 1993). This scarcity is further pronounced in the context of Arab women entrepreneurs, as entrepreneurship research to date has been primarily focused on documenting how the socio-cultural norms, that are rooted in patriarchal values and gendered power relations, subjugate Arab women and negatively impact their entrepreneurial activities (McAdam et al., 2020; Tlaiss, 2019). Despite the ongoing conflicts and crises across the Arab world, research focusing on the effect of compounded crises on Muslim women's entrepreneurship is fragmented, primarily in the form of reports prepared by the United Nations (UN Women et al., 2020) and by other NGOs, with minimal scientific research (albeit few exceptions such as Althalanthini et al., 2022 in Iraq and Sabella & El Far, 2019 in Palestine). This scarcity perseveres despite studies confirming that women are strongly impacted in economically and politically unstable countries (Bullough et al., 2014). The

marginalisation of the role of Islam in the lives of Arab Muslim women entrepreneurs in crisis contexts is also surprising, given that Islam not only provides "a foundation and a framework" to entrepreneurship (Gümüsay 2015, p. 199) but also "a way of life" (Beekun & Badawi, 2005, p. 143) that provides guidance in all aspects of human life, including business transactions, value systems, and suggestions on how to overcome challenges and difficulties.

Lebanon

Lebanon was chosen as our research setting for a number of reasons. First, Lebanon today is the host of the world's "most severe crises episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century" (UNESCWA, 2021). After years of civil war, followed by widespread corruption, sectarianism, and political dispute, high unemployment levels, and absence of public services (United Nations, 2021), anti-government protestors took to the streets in October 2019 (Arab News, 2020). The resulting violence and protests eroded international confidence in the Lebanese authorities and confirmed the erosion of the state's authority (Arab News, 2020). International investors withdrew their money from Lebanese banks and cancelled their investments in Lebanon which resulted in a severe liquidity crux, the further deterioration of the economic situation, and ultimately the default of the Lebanese government on its international debt (Lebanon Economic Monitor, 2021). These compounded financial and economic crises destroyed several businesses, increased unemployment levels, and further contributed to the local currency depreciation and inflation, which soared to 281% between 2019 and 2021 (UNESCWA, 2021). The economic adversities were further aggravated with the wide spread of COVID 19 and its consequences on businesses and the economy. Lockdown and quarantine measures resulted in a drop in aggregate demand and economic activities. Real GDP growth contracted by 20.3% in 2020, on the back of a 6.7% contraction in 2019 (UNESCWA, 2020). As Lebanese citizens were grappling with these multiple crises, the port of Beirut and several neighbourhoods were destroyed by a massive explosion on the 4th of August 2020. The explosion resulted in the displacement of at least 300,000 individuals, the injury of 6,500, and death of 191 people (Salti & Mezher, 2020). With reports confirming that women in crises and conflict contexts are more prone to negligence, violence, and neglect, the outlook for Lebanese women may be less than favourable as they continue to be more vulnerable than men to the devastating effects of the compounded crises (Salti & Mezher, 2020). Yet, research exploring the coping experiences of women entrepreneurs in such a turbulent context and the influence of Islam on their lives and coping experiences in Lebanon is not readily available.

Second, Lebanon hosts one of the world's highest overall gender gaps as it ranks 145th out of 153 countries as per the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index (2019), which documents patriarchal influences. The participation rate of women in the labour market is at 29% "among the lowest globally" (Tlaiss & McAdam, 2021b) and is rooted in the Lebanese patriarchal culture which is characterised by masculine values that favour traditional gender roles that confine women to domestic chores (Tlaiss, 2019). Accordingly, women's suitability for entrepreneurial activities is questioned as entrepreneurship continues to be viewed as a male-typed task (Tlaiss, 2019).

Third, despite the perseverance of a patriarchal, masculine culture, the treatment of (Muslim) women (in Lebanon) is often perceived as considerably more secular than that of Muslims in neighbouring Arab countries, with Lebanese Muslim women enjoying more freedoms in terms of publicly interacting with men and wearing headscarves (Sidani, 2005). These freedoms could be attributed to the fact that Lebanon is neither an Islamic nation (like Egypt) nor is it governed by Islamic law (such as Saudi Arabia), given its religious diversity and status as home

to several Muslim (54%) and Christian (40.5%) denominations. They could also be attributed to the more secular nature of Lebanon in comparison to its neighbouring Arab countries as religion is relegated to the private sphere and the state is governed by secular laws. Building on Asad's (1986) argument, one might be inclined to assume that Lebanese Muslim women might, if at all, wear their Islamic beliefs lightly given the secular nature of their country. However, as Özkazanç-Pan (2015) notes, even in the actively secular contexts such as Turkey, Islam can take a leading role in influencing Muslim women's lives through Islamic organizations that enhance their employment, create initiatives to address their challenges, and urge them to take part in the public sphere.

It is therefore within this controversial patriarchal, crises-laden, and somewhat secular context that this study explores the coping strategies of Muslim women entrepreneurs. While so doing, we agree with Mahmood (2006) that secularism is not to be perceived as real-life emancipation from the restrictions of religion. We also contend that the secular description of a society does not mean the banishing of religion from all forms of association (Mahmood, 2006) given that, for example, Islam is admitted to the private sphere in secular society of Turkey (Özkazanç-Pan, 2015). This, along with the absence of a central authority validating the various interpretations of Islamic texts (Eger, 2021), facilitate the emergence of heterogeneous Islamic philosophies and forms of Islam. Given the differences in the way Islam is practiced in different countries (Özkazanç-Pan, 2015; Tlaiss and McAdam, 2021b) with all the different forms considered "equally real" (Asad, 1986, p. 2) and the "impossibility of applying the Islamic denomination in a universal sense" (Eger, 2021, p. 212), we explore how Islam unfolds, for Muslim women entrepreneurs, as a lived experience that is embedded in the culture and national context of Lebanon.

Feminism in the Arab World

For Muslims, the Quran acts as a main source of guidance (Priola & Chaudhry, 2021) as it outlines the principles that govern their private and public lives as well as their entrepreneurial activities (Gümüsay, 2015). Its authenticity is not questioned or challenged by Muslims but accepted as "the word of the Divine" (Priola & Chaudhry, 2021, p. 308) as it is considered to be the direct revelation from God to the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) (Wadud, 2006). Besides the Quran, Muslims also look to the Hadeeth, "second-hand reports of Prophet Mohammed's personal traditions and lifestyle" (Syed & Pio, 2010, p. 120) as well as actions and sayings (Wadud, 2006) for advice and support. The Hadeeth also provides guidance in translating Islamic texts into practice (Badran, 2009), albeit some scholarly concern about the credibility of some Hadeeth (Mernissi, 1991). However, in the absence of one official institution entitled with the validation of interpretation of Islamic texts (Eger, 2021) and the confinement of the interpretations of the Quran and Hadeeth to an "all-male Islamic clergy (faqihs, imams, muftis, mullahs, ulamas)" (Syed & Pio, 2010, p. 120; Sidani, 2005), the role of Islam in women's emancipation in the Arab world continues to be an area of heated debate between feminist groups and Muslim clergymen (Badran, 2009; El Saadawi and Ra'uf, 2000; Mernissi, 1991; Wadud, 2006).

Feminist theory is deeply rooted in the Arab world, albeit heavily criticised and rejected as a tool that has been mobilised by colonial powers to promote their Western cultures (Karam, 1998; Mahmood, 2006, 2011; Rauf, 1995). While feminism in the Western world is primarily concerned and ultimately categorised based on specific conceptualisations of gender (Calás, Smircich & Bourne, 2009), feminism in the Arab world is concerned with finding ways for Arab women to resist discrimination. Feminism therefore unfolds as activism promoting gender equality and

women's rights and is categorised based on its approach to the role of Islam in governing women's lives. To further explain, feminist theory in the Western world falls into three main categories, liberal, radical, and poststructural (Calás et al., 2009). Liberal feminist theory argues that while equal opportunities exist for both genders, differences between men and women are created by structural inequalities (Diaz-Garcia & Welter, 2013) which ultimately push women to adopting the normalised masculine discourse to succeed (Lewis, 2013, 2016). However, radical feminist theories argue that men and women are different but equal. They essentialise gender which increases the risk of blaming women for their subordination (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). As for poststructural feminism, it focuses on perceiving gender as an influence (Calás et al., 2009), rejects assumptions of masculine dominance, and highlights the social construction of gender (Lewis, 2013).

As far as the Arab world is concerned, it has witnessed three types of feminist movements (Secular, Islamist, and Muslim) that, despite having some commonalities, have major differences not only in explaining the reasons underlying oppression of Arab women and ways of resisting it but also the role of religion in liberating women. The different forms of feminism, according to Badran (2005), represent varying modes of identification and characteristics with respect to women, the state, and gender relations (Özkazanç-Pan, 2015). Accordingly, secular feminism in the Arab world rejects the inclusion of religion, Christianity or Islam, in their discourse which is focused on Arab women's emancipation (Sidani, 2005). Secular feminists, such as Nawal El Sadawi, consider religion as a private matter and thus are often accused of being non-believers and clones of the West. They also argue that the only path to women's liberation is through "separation from religion" (El Saadawi and Ra'uf, 2000, p. 99). Hence, they ground their discourse on Arab women's resistance in multiple discourses, including the international human rights discourse, democracy, and secular nationalism (Badran, 2005).

According to Karam (1998), the non-secular types of feminism in the Arab world, namely *Islamic feminism* and *Muslim feminism*, both seek to integrate Islam into their discourse on Arab women's emancipation and gender relations but differ in their overall approach to Islam. To further explain, *Islamic feminism* is grounded in the contemporary Islamic movement (Hatem, 2002) which aims at the creation of an Islamic state that would function on the premises of Islamic laws and customs (Keddie, 1988). Accordingly, Islamist feminists, such as Heba Rauf and Saba Mahmood, consider radically Islamising the Arab societies as their main mission and believe that Arab women should resist oppression through their return to Islamic principles (Rauf, 1995). They argue that the advancement of Arab women requires a "revival of Islamic thought and a renewal within Islamic jurisprudence" (Sidani, 2005, p. 507). They also promote a division of labour that considers men as guardians, leaders, and authorities and women as guarded, led, and obedient (McLarney, 2010). While so doing, Islamic feminists reject the term feminist as a Western irrelevant concept (Kamla, 2019; Rauf, 1995) and secular feminism, which they argue is the result of a profound misunderstanding of past and contemporary Islamic practices (Mahmood, 2011).

Unlike their *secular* counterparts, *Muslim feminists* question the possibility of separating Arab Muslim women's issues from religion, given that the cultures, the values about gender roles and gendered expectations, as well as the "laws that regulate gender relations and the rights of men and women" (Mir-Hosseini, 2006, p. 629) have undoubtedly been influenced, in varying degrees, by Islamic teachings. Unlike their *Islamic feminists'* counterparts, *Muslim feminists* do not seek to Islamize the masses but rather question the male bias in the historic interpretation of Islam and call for a new, independent interpretation of all Islamic texts (Badran, 2009; Barlas, 2002; Mir-Hosseini, 1996).

Championed by the likes of Morocco's Fatima Mernissi, Egypt's Leila Ahmed, and America's Amina Wadud, Muslim feminists draw a clear distinction between the divine message of God, and political Islam which refers to the practice of Islam by those who have vested interests in blocking women's rights in Muslim societies (Mernissi, 1991). They do not critique Islam per se because they believe that gender equality is grounded in the Quran and that the principles of Islam are fundamentally egalitarian (Ahmed, 1992; Badran, 2009; Mernissi, 1991; Wadud, 2006). They also believe that because the Quran is polysemous and open to multiple interpretations (Badran, 2005), it has been decontextualised from its literary and historical context, and recontextualised differently in different cultures (Barlas, 2002; Mernissi, 1991; Mir-Hosseini, 1996, 2006). Accordingly, they question the almost exclusive male voice in the interpretations of Islamic texts as self-serving for men and for cementing the patriarchy that predated Islam in Muslim theology (Ahmed, 1992; Eger, 2021; Mir-Hosseini, 1996; Wadud, 2006). Muslim feminists therefore believe that the widespread gender-unequal interpretation of Islamic texts (Badran, 2009; Eger, 2021) and gender discrimination in Muslim cultures (Mernissi, 1991), are the result of the prevalence of male clergymen in Muslim theology and the traditional interpretations of Islamic texts, that are not only focused on preserving the submissive position of women in the pre-Islamic era (Ahmed, 2012), but have little relevance in today's world (Sidani, 2005).

To that end, Muslim feminism challenges the male religious authorities (Safdar & Yasmin, 2020; Tlaiss & McAdam, 2021a) as they seek to debunk the notion that patriarchy is justified and upheld by Islam (Mir-Hosseini, 2006). They question the widespread traditional exegesis of Hadeeth and the Quran as misogynist (Badran, 2009; Mir-Hosseini, 2006) and refuse the hermeneutical methods that are commonly used to derive and legitimise Islamic norms (Wadud, 1999). Ultimately, Muslim feminists call for alternative critical readings, analyses, and reinterpretations of the Quran and religious texts with a gender-sensitive lens (Badran, 2009; Mernissi, 1991; Mir-Hosseini, 1996; Wadud, 2006). While so doing, Muslim feminists' focus is on the contextualisation of their interpretations in a manner that liberates women from the widespread gender inequality and their exclusion in Muslim societies (Ahmed, 1992; Mernissi, 1991). They seek to advance the egalitarian principles of Islam through the independent interpretation of Islamic texts (Mir-Hosseini, 1996; Wadud, 2006) so Muslim women can realise gender equality within these interpretations.

Analytical Summary

The preceding discussions highlight how the narratives of Arab, Muslim women entrepreneurs and their experience in crises contexts have been silenced in mainstream literature. In particular, there is a lack of empirically textured narrative portraits of women's experiences of the intersection of Islam and their entrepreneurship, in light of the compounded political, economic, financial, and social crises, and contradictory socio-cultural values. For these reasons, albeit the country's relative secular nature, Lebanon was chosen as a rich research site in which to explore the influence of Islam on the lives and experiences of Muslim women entrepreneurs in times and in context of crises. Considering Lebanon's relative secular nature, recent studies (Tlaiss & McAdam, 2021a, 2021b) exploring the experiences of Lebanese women entrepreneurs have begun to question the existence and impact of the alleged freedoms Lebanese women have as they continue to struggle in building their enterprises and their identity as successful entrepreneurs in the context of Lebanese conservative, patriarchal culture. To that effect, Tlaiss and McAdam (2021a, 2021b), along with others in different Arab countries (Althalathini et al., 2022), have been

documenting the use of a Muslim feminist approach, by Muslim Arab women entrepreneurs, as a means to challenge the patriarchal biases deeply entrenched in societies as they engage in entrepreneurship. We argue that such an approach is apposite as Muslim feminist readings and analyses of Islam "subtly shift established discourses on women in Islam" (Kamla, 2019, p. 66). In giving voice to those marginalised Muslim Arab women, our study is primarily interested in gaining a nuanced understanding of how these women experience Islam and their crisis contexts while emphasising the embeddedness of their experiences in their local contexts.

Methodology and Method

To achieve our aim, we follow a qualitative interpretative methodology which is based on a "life–world ontology which argues that all observation is theory and value-laden and that investigation of the social world is not, and cannot, be the pursuit of detached objective truth" (Leitch, Hill & Harrison, 2010, p. 69). This approach is primarily concerned with understanding human behaviour and is sensitive to the situatedness of the lived experiences of the women in our study. Interpretivism therefore allowed us to explore the experiences of the Muslim women entrepreneurs in Lebanon holistically and in so doing capture the dynamic interaction between their coping strategies and Islam. To better understand the coping strategies, we capitalised on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 21 Muslim women entrepreneurs based in Lebanon. These interviews allowed for the collection of real time and retrospective accounts (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013) and facilitated the generation of thick descriptions and details of the lived experiences of our interviewees. In the collection of our interview data, we adopted a form of narrative inquiry, which was driven by an "interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them" (Chase, 2005, 651). Our approach resulted in freely narrated responses, which prioritised and honoured the voices and stories of our interviewees (Leavy & Harris, 2019). According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998, p. 204), giving voice is "empowering people to be heard who might otherwise remain silent".

The interviewees were not only willing to talk but were eager and desperate to do so (Averett, 2021), given the compounded crises they were experiencing and the years of gender discrimination. The interviews were therefore emotionally intense as the interviewees used them as a safe space and an outlet to express their anger, stress, and frustration with their overall situation. To that effect, we argue that by giving the Lebanese Muslim women entrepreneurs the opportunity to speak about their lives and actively listening to their stories, we were not only giving 'voice' to their lived experiences (Tlaiss & McAdam, 2021b) but also bearing to their suffering, keeping record of their experience, and doing care work for them (Averett, 2021). The ensuing transcriptions were then returned to participants for review, amendments, deletions or additions. Returning the transcripts in this manner facilitates reflexivity, enabling the researchers to give women entrepreneurs their voice (Leavy & Harris, 2019).

The Lebanese Muslim women entrepreneurs were flattered with our interest in their experiences, grateful for the invitation to be interviewed, and seemed comfortable talking about their stress, frustration, and coping strategies. Nevertheless, we were cognisant of the dynamics between the interviewer and the women entrepreneurs in our analysis. In other words, we were sensitive to the differences in the identity between the women entrepreneurs as interviewees and the first author as the interviewer, which can result in power relations in the interview setting (Phoenix, 1994). As such, self-reflexivity was adopted to address any potential bias or assumptions (McDonald, 2013; Sprague, 2016). Given that the first author was the one who initiated the interviews, the interviewees might have felt pressured to respond or give appropriate or suitable

answers (Essers & Tedmanson, 2014). Nevertheless, the decision to cooperate and be interviewed was ultimately theirs and they had the power to withdraw at any time.

Purposive sampling (Patton, 1990) was used to recruit interviewees who were experienced in the phenomenon under study and were willing and interested in sharing their experiences. The interviewees were identified through network sampling which focused on the first author's personal networks, snowballing, and chain referrals (Patton, 1990). After conducting 17 interviews, it was clear that additional data collection was unlikely to uncover new themes. Nevertheless, four more interviews were conducted, and no new themes emerged, thus achieving theoretical saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The interviewees were from different regions in Lebanon, with the majority married, with at least two children, and with enterprises in a wide range of economic sectors. They were all well-educated, with at least a university degree. Although the high level of education of the interviewees might suggest that this is a privileged sample, we were not able to use it to determine the socio-economic status of the women in this study. The high level of education of the Lebanese Muslim women entrepreneurs is rather to be expected for a number of reasons including: a) the availability of free public universities alongside a wide range of universities that attend to the educational needs of people from all economic levels; b) the importance that the Lebanese society attributes to education and the respect it grants for highly educated people; c) the challenging living conditions in Lebanon and the absence of local employment opportunities which drives Lebanese youth to earn a university degree to secure employment in the neighbouring wealthy Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia or United Arab Emirates. Nevertheless, we argue that the high level of education of these women, along with the more secular nature of Lebanon in comparison to neighbouring Arab countries, enabled the women not only to deepen their knowledge of Muslim feminism but also to freely self-identify as Muslim feminists at various stages of the interviews. See Tables 1 and 2 for the characteristics of the interviewees and their enterprises.

Insert Table 1

Insert Table 2

The interviews were conducted between December 2020 and September 2021 and lasted between 90 to 180 minutes. During that period of time, the suffering of the Lebanese population was immense. In addition to the high levels of unemployment, deterioration of local currency and loss of purchasing power, the Lebanese population was still in shock and a large number of families were grieving the loss of their loved ones and rebuilding their lives and homes, after living through the explosion of the port of Beirut in August 2020. In addition, COVID-19 was claiming hundreds of lives per day. Lebanese people were dying in the emergency rooms of local hospitals because they were ill-equipped, understaffed and operating beyond full capacity. Furthermore, patients who could not afford treatment were not administered into private hospitals as a result of the failure of local government to handle the pandemic.

The interviews were conducted in Arabic, English or French, with frequent code-switching which entailed the need to translate and back translate to increase the validity of the translation process (Tlaiss & McAdam, 2021a, 2021b). To establish trust with the interviewees, the interviewer confirmed the confidentiality of the subject matter discussed, and the anonymity of the data collected with pseudonyms. The interview protocol included some questions about the

interviewees' personal demographics such as age, marital status and number of children and questions about their enterprises such as industrial sector, age of the enterprise, and number of employees. Then, the interviewees were asked to reflect on their entrepreneurial experience and activities during the past several months in Lebanon in general and the influence of Islam on their entrepreneurship during those turbulent times.

In analysing the interviews, Gioia et al.'s (2013) thematic analysis protocol was employed. In the first stage of data analysis, the research team re-familiarised themselves with the interviews through iterative readings of the transcripts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This process involved open coding of the data to allow for the identification of codes which were clustered together to form a priori categories, and the comparing of codes across individual participants as we developed a list of generic codes grounded in the language of the interviewees. In the second stage of data analysis, in attempting to conceptualise these codes into concepts, we collapsed them into second order categories. These were informed by the literature on Muslim Feminism (Ahmed, 1992; Badran, 2009; Mernissi, 1991; Mir-Hosseini, 1991, 1996; Wadud, 2006) as well as work more broadly on Arab Muslim women entrepreneurs (Althalathini et al., 2022; Tlaiss & McAdam, 2021a, 2021b). Rather than any one of our second order codes being original or significant in isolation, the value of our findings lies in its holistic fit between the empirical and theoretical elements of our study (Gehman et al., 2018; Klag & Langley, 2013).The third stage led to the development of emergent themes, derived from the first and second order codes that allowed us to understand the coping strategies employed by women entrepreneurs. Three main coping strategies emerged as relevant to our research aim. In the fourth stage, we developed our aggregate theoretical dimensions which are detailed in our data structure table that is presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3

Findings

The aggregate theoretical dimensions are explored in detail and illustrated with power quotes which constitute the most insightful evidence and proof quotes to demonstrate the prevalence of key findings (Pratt, 2009). Please refer to Table 4 for proof quotes.

Insert Table 4

Compounded Crises and Multiple Concerns

All the Lebanese women entrepreneurs used the interviews as a platform to express their frustration, anger, sadness, and anxiety with the catastrophic situation in Lebanon, which was negatively affecting multiple aspects of their lives and entrepreneurial activities. These concerns were evident in the narratives of Hawraa and Noor respectively:

> *"The situation here is inhumane… My savings are gone, my whole life work vanished… my business is barely surviving… we are living in the darkness (no electricity) … I am sad and depressed…I feel hopeless and helpless…"*

> *"I am always stressed out and in fear for my parents catching Covid-19 because hospitals are full, and people are dying before being admitted…"*

In the face of compounded crises, the women felt weak and vulnerable. Despite acknowledging the emotional support that they were receiving from spouses, families, and friends,

they still felt lost and angry. The women entrepreneurs, as per Saddika, resorted to their religion as they sought guidance and strength: "*I feel overwhelmed, anxious, unhappy…. My husband consoles me …but I continued to feel bad…So I resort to my faith... Islam is my rescue really; it is the only thing that comforts me and helps me survive…it brings me peace and comforts me in ways that I cannot describe".*

When confronted with the compounded crises that were negatively influencing their lives, their businesses, and their families, the Lebanese women entrepreneurs sought solace in Islam and Islamic teachings and in this solace, three key coping strategies emerged.

Muslim Feminism Principles

The first coping strategy was rooted in a Muslim feminist approach to Islam, its influence on the Lebanese Muslim women entrepreneurs' overall confidence as Muslim women, and its influence on their internal resilience. To further explain, the slowing down of business and the quarantines resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, granted the women relatively more free time which they used to develop and advance their knowledge about Islam. As they delved deeper into their faith, the interviewees explained their discontentment with the widespread approach to Islam, particularly the acclaimed privilege it grants to men in relation to women as explained by Zahraa: *"I appreciate a lot of things in Islam but I always had issues with the superiority it granted men…so for example, men get more than women in inheritance and men get the final say in the divorce…all of these things created issues with my confidence or my faith in Islam…this preference to men always bothered me".* Ayya also described her dissatisfaction with the conservative patriarchal analysis of Islamic texts that stress the superiority of men to women: "*As I was reading more about Islam and women in Islam, I felt uncomfortable with some of the explanations…the treatment of women was not fair and not right and ultimately it did not make sense given that Islam is a religion of peace and equality…men were always glorified…. so, I started digging deeper*".

Equipped with high levels of education and accustomed to living in a relatively secular national context with religious diversity, all the women demonstrated an in-depth knowledge of Muslim feminism's approach to the emancipation of Arab Muslim women and self-identified as Muslim feminists. As they sought to divert their attention from the crises of their country through deepening their understanding of Islam, the women spoke about how they found answers and succour in Muslim feminism. First, Muslim feminism helped them attend to their doubts about the fairness of Islam to women, as per Samah: *"I was always uncomfortable about the preference Islam gave men over women and this made me feel angry at times….After reading Mernissi's work I now know that the problem is not with Islam as Islam is pro women and all about the equality between men and women".* Second, Muslim feminism helped them address their questions about gender inequality in Islamic texts and laws by emphasising the biases inherent in the male interpretations and the integration of pre-Islamic patriarchy in the interpretations. This was articulated by Wedyan: "*I was not always happy with the fact that Islam grants men more than women in terms of inheritance but as I read through Leila Ahmed's book, I started to understand the underlying social causes and understand that Islam is fair to women…the more I read, the stronger grew my faith in Islam as a religion that respects women and grants them their rights…and the more angry I got with the male interpretations of the Quran".*

By helping the Lebanese Muslim women entrepreneurs better understand how equality is grounded in the Quran, Muslim feminism helped the women to perceive Islam as a fair religion as per an egalitarian lens. This was clearly articulated by Zaina: *"The more I read about Muslim*

feminists and how they explained how Islam treated women and men as equals, and the more I knew about how the traditions and the culture of the Arab world and the clergy men impacted their interpretations, the more comfortable I was about Islam and my faith…Really, I learned to appreciate Islam…". A gender-sensitive reading of Islam and the Muslim feminists' focus on egalitarian principles of Islam not only gave the Lebanese Muslim women entrepreneurs in this study the long-awaited exegesis that helped them resolve their issues with Islam, but it also granted them an alternative form of Islam that pays them respect as women, grants them gender equality, and helped them get rid of their doubts and appreciate Islam. This is nicely articulated by Fatima: *"I always had issues with the interpretations of the Quran, particularly in matters related to women and men…The interpretations did not make sense to me ……. that it empowered women and that there are examples of strong women in Islam…so the Muslim feminists approach helped me see that I was right…helped me rediscover Islam and even love it more…as it confirmed that Islam is fundamentally good to women but that the practices and the interpretations are not Islamic in nature but traditional and favouring men…".*

Muslim feminism also gave the Lebanese women the confidence to behave in a way that aligned more with their ascribed femininity. To further explain, all the Muslim women in this study, regardless of age or educational background, described the challenges associated with navigating the male dominated entrepreneurial environment. To overcome these challenges, the women explained how they adapted some masculine behaviours and gestures, such as being decisive, objective, and authoritarian, in order to blend in and to be deemed legitimate. According to Sidra: *"Twenty years ago, when I started this business… my family was against me, and my competitors, all male … fought me and did everything they could to get me out of businesses…to them drug(medicine) distribution is not a woman's place…so I started speaking their language…being tough, aggressive…loud and sometimes impolite…".* However, exposure to Muslim feminism principles gave the women a newfound confidence and a deeper appreciation of their religion which in principle granted women respect, fairness, and equality. Referring back to Sidra: *"Now I feel that my faith is stronger in Islam and Islamic teachings…Sobanal Lah (Praise be to God) my readings helped me be true to myself…Now I act the way I want to regardless of how my competitors or others see me…this really helped me deal with all the problems that I am facing as a mother and a business owner and even as a person living in all this stress and uncertainty".* Similarly, Doaa reflected on how Muslim feminism helped her regain confidence in behaving in a manner more aligned with her ascribed femininity. "*When I was younger, I was all smiles and pleasant and soft…but that made clients and competitors think that I am weak so I changed…I started acting in a very serious manner, stopped speaking softly and tried to be more aggressive…now, I feel more comfortable with who I am…in a way my readings (of Muslim feminism) gave me the strengths to be a woman and to act the way I really am and stop pretending to be aggressive…this new me is really making me feel confident with who I am and stronger and more confident in facing my circumstances".*

The Lebanese Muslim women entrepreneurs' in-depth engagement with Muslim feminists' writings and teachings, not only diverted their attention away from the compounded crises but provided them with a deeper understanding of the extreme interpretations of Islam in their historical context. It ultimately provided them with a new lens that was better aligned with their expectations of their religion and that attended to their long-lasting questions and doubts about gender equality in Islam. By helping them understand that problems with women's rights in the Arab world are not because of the Quran or the teachings of the Prophet but "because those rights conflict with the interests of a male elite" (Mernissi, 1991, ix), the Lebanese Muslim women

entrepreneurs felt more appreciated and respected. Muslim feminism also increased the women's confidence and encouraged them to be true to themselves, which allowed them to do their gender and demonstrate their femininity rather than mask it as they were previously doing. By granting them security and reassurance, Muslim feminism unfolded as an indirect coping strategy in that it granted the Lebanese Muslim women entrepreneurs the much-needed internal resilience to persevere amidst the compounded crises. Fadia's statement reflects this notion: *"The deeper I went into feminists' writings, the stronger and more confident I felt as a Muslim woman…I felt recharged and had more confidence…I felt stronger despite these challenging times…".*

Increased religiosity

The second strategy used by the Lebanese Muslim women entrepreneurs entailed increasing their religiosity, in terms of increasing their commitment to their Islamic practices and deepening their knowledge of the foundations of Islam. In theory, Muslims are expected to pray five times a day and fast during the month of Ramadan. Frustrated with quarantines and reduction of their economic activities but enriched with a different perspective to Islam, the women performed Islam in a novel manner through embracing the various obligatory and optional practices. These optional practices included additional prayers, fasting outside Ramadan, and more frequent reading of the Quran as a means of coping, with some variations depending on personal preferences. In other words, while some interviewees resorted mainly to extra prayers, others focused on fasting or reading of the Quran, whilst others resorted to different combinations. To empirically explain, some of the interviewees reflected on how they used the additional free time to devote more time to saying their obligatory prayers and in doing other optional forms of prayers. As Aehsa explains: "*While my friends started watching more TV or trying new recipes in the kitchen, I focused on my relationship with God. In the past, I used to feel prayers as heavy and would do them really fast…but lately, I have started taking my time in my prayers and focusing on what I am saying while doing them…and this has been very helpful in helping me calm my nerves".*

Some women resorted to fasting outside Ramadan and in a more frequent manner as a means to feeling closer to God and as an instrument to relieve stress. For Maryam, fasting helped her to seek God's guidance, "*I never liked fasting, it was always a chore for me but lately I look forward to it, I started fasting once a week and now I fast at least three days a week…it gives me peace in all this chaos that we are living…it makes me feel closer to God and this makes me feel safe and secure".* Before the compounded crises, most of the interviewees read the Quran only during Ramadan and a few pages only. However, during these crises period, some started dedicating more time to reading the Quran while focusing on understanding its meaning and the various messages within. This approach was illustrated by Rokkayya: *"The Quran says:* آلا بذكر الله تطمئن القلوب" *(Indeed, by 'always' remembering Allah, the hearts reach 'peace and' tranquillity)…this is exactly how things feel to me…the only thing that calms me these days and helps me continue to believe in God is the Quran…It gives me peace and tranquillity…lately, I start my day with at least 30 minutes of the Quran and do the same before going to sleep…this is how I stay strong and sane*".

As these women looked up to the Prophet as a role model, they sought his advice and guidance through indulging themselves with the Hadeeth (the words, actions and behaviours of Mohammed PBUH, Tlaiss & McAdam, 2021a, 255). According to Taliyya, deepening her understanding of Hadeeth provided her with a helpful distraction away from the crises she was living and guidance in how to handle her current situation: *"The people in Lebanon are struggling and each one is trying to survive in the best way they can…I went to my Prophet…I started reading*

more about his life, how he acted and what he said in different occasions as I was looking for guidance and inspiration on how to survive this disaster of a country".

The increased religiosity coping strategy thus helped the Lebanese women entrepreneurs gain a sense of peace, renewed their faith, and strengthened their resilience to endure and persevere amidst the compounded crises. Departing from their original concern with the obligatory practices, these findings also demonstrate how, when equipped with Muslim feminism principles and the alternative approach it promotes to Islam, the women performed Islam differently through increased optional religious practices as a coping strategy.

Islamic values

The third copying strategy entailed the mobilisation of Islamic values motivated by the rediscovery of Islam via a Muslim feminism interpretation. They explained that although Islam encourages its followers to demonstrate certain ethical values such as kindness, forgiveness, and compassion, the Lebanese Muslim women entrepreneurs, in an attempt to portray an image of a legitimate entrepreneur (one endowed with aggressiveness and decisiveness), avoided the outward demonstration of such values. Interestingly, their newly founded confidence, as a result of their Muslim feminist approach, spilled over into their entrepreneurial activities. The interviewees were more committed to integrating the previously neglected Islamic values into their daily practices and used them as the basis for governing their interactions with various stakeholders. To that effect, the Lebanese Muslim women entrepreneurs now "did" Islam differently through embracing a range of Islamic values (albeit some variations depending on previous experiences) that were previously considered unsuitable as they contradict their focus on demonstrating legitimacy.

To that effect, some women spoke about exercising compassion with self and others, as per Walaa: *"if my suppliers were late, I would always make a big fuss…Now I feel I understand the suffering of people … I am softer and more compassionate…. even my employees tell me that I am kinder to them, and I do not get upset as quickly"*. Other women spoke of coping through tolerance and forgiveness of others as per Islamic teachings, without feeling weak or taken advantage of, as per Hidayya: "*Throughout the Quran, there are multiple verses about the importance of forgiveness such as {فَاصْفَحِ الصَّفْحَ الْجَمِيلَ} … I am now easier on myself for example, so I do not blame myself as much as I used to…with my employees, I am more forgiving…not only because this situation requires forgiveness because everyone is going through difficulties but also it makes me feel good as a person, business owner and a Muslim…"*.

Some women spoke about the importance of patience and how it helped them cope as per Sajida: "*Although I was very impatient with this whole situation, now I am not…The Quran says: { إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ } which means that God is with those who are patient…so I resort to patience knowing that God is with me and will help me overcome this challenge"*. Others emphasised the importance of trusting God as per Islamic teachings, as a coping strategy. This was clearly expressed by Zaina: "*A lot of people around me are angry and upset and some even lost their faith…I did not, I think this crises strengthened me and my trust in God…I feel I am comfortable with talking about my problems and my weaknesses…I used to hide my feelings and always pretend to be strong but now I am not afraid of crying in front of others"*.

Other participants coped by demonstrating generosity and being more charitable to others, which also increased their sense of well-being and feeling closer to God. According to Gofran: *"I always gave money to the poor and charities…I always knew that generosity is good and encouraged by Islam…Now, despite the financial stress we are going through, I am more generous with those around me…I give the poor more and I am confident that God will not leave me and*

that the money I give will not make me poor". Maryam also spoke about coping through generosity: "*Although business is down, I find myself generous with the people around me…also doing and giving more to charities…The prophet says ''He who removes a distress, God blesses in this world and the hereafter''…this makes me feel closer to God and also good and this way I feel stronger to keep standing up on my feet for my child and my family".* Finally, despite all the adversities that they faced, they all exercised appreciation and thankfulness to God for what they had, which ultimately helped them to cope with their current surroundings. This was illustrated by Samah: *"Before these crises, I was always complaining to God and rarely thankful because I wanted to do more and make more money…Now, I am grateful to God…".*

Albeit realising the importance of living by the teachings of Islam and applying Islamic values in their lives, the Lebanese Muslim women entrepreneurs were not in full compliance. Nevertheless, equipped with Muslim feminism and the alternative lens it granted them, the interviewees felt closer to God and resorted to integrating a wide range of Islamic values into their lives and entrepreneurship as a means that helped them cope and endure the compounded crises.

Discussion

This paper attends to the neglect of religion in entrepreneurship research (Jaim, 2021; Smith et al., 2019; Tlaiss & McAdam, 2021) by exploring the influence of Islam on the lives, experiences, and coping strategies of Arab Muslim women entrepreneurs in the country-specific context of Lebanon, characterised by compounded crises. The findings provide insight into how Muslim women's coping strategies unfolded over the course of their resistance to the patriarchally driven, gender inequalities in the widespread interpretation of Islamic texts and their individual pursuits to rediscover Islam through a Muslim feminism lens, as increased religiosity, and the mobilization of Islamic values.

Taken holistically, our empirical evidence emphasises the multitude and the magnitude of the challenges that the Lebanese women entrepreneurs face in their everyday lives. As they endured a shortage in what are commonly perceived as the necessities for a decent human life, the women were undergoing a "dehumanisation process" whereby they felt lacking as humans in their basic rights. Stifled with the compounded economic, humanitarian, and political crises (United Nations, 2021), the women resorted to their Muslim faith as they sought comfort and relief. Although reliance on religion for comfort as a reaction to conflict, poverty, and institutional corruption has been reported in previous studies (Althalathini et al., 2022; Kamla, 2019), our findings advance our understanding by empirically demonstrating how Islam was not only a source of reassurance but also instrumental in devising coping strategies to deal with the compounded crises in Lebanon. Although Islam's influence on women's entrepreneurship may have been previously described as marginal or even negative, given the predominant salience of the conservative interpretations of Islam worldwide (Syed & Pio, 2010), its influence in the context of turbulent Lebanon was experienced by the women as an enabler to perseverance and coping with the compounded crises they were experiencing.

The first coping strategy was the adoption of a Muslim feminist approach in order to make sense of the crisis conditions they were experiencing. Equipped with a high level of education and free time resulting from the slowing down of business and lockdowns, the women embarked on a personal journey of self-discovery to explore alternative approaches to Islam which ultimately led them to self-identify as Muslim feminists and Muslim feminism. Their adoption of Muslim feminism helped them recognise that the unfair treatment of women in Muslim societies is the result of the frequent mixing of traditions and Islamic teachings, the fusing of cultural and Islamic

norms, and the authoritative male figures who have been responsible for interpretations of Islamic texts (Ahmed, 1992; Badran, 2009; Barlas, 2002; Mernissi, 1991; Mir-Hosseini, 1996, 2006; Wadud, 2006). Muslim feminism abolished the Lebanese women's doubts with regards to gender-inequality inherent in Islam, granted them a sense of security, and strengthened their confidence in themselves as Muslim women and in Islam. It also gave them an increased appreciation of Islam. This renovation of faith strengthened their internal resilience which enabled them to cope and persevere with the compounded crises they faced. In other words, Muslim feminism, as an alternative lens and ideology to the interpretation of Islamic texts, helped the Lebanese Muslim women entrepreneurs feel stronger and more resilient to their circumstances which indirectly helped them to cope and persevere.

Although others (Althalathini et al., 2022; Kamla, 2019; McAdam et al., 2020) have reflected on how some Arab women entrepreneurs adhere to Muslim feminist writings to resist the societal hostility towards their entrepreneurial activities, this study advances knowledge by demonstrating how Muslim feminism gave the Muslim women entrepreneurs the opportunity not only to rediscover Islam, but also to better understand the respect Islam granted them as women and to appreciate their status as Muslim women. To further explain, the women explained how entrepreneurship in Lebanon is largely dominated by men and how it continues to be perceived as a male domain. They also reflected upon how they previously (before their rediscovery of Islam via Muslim feminism) believed that they had to adopt masculine behaviours such as assertiveness, aggression and competitiveness (Marlow and Swail, 2014), to fit into the highly masculine entrepreneurship environment and to legitimise themselves and their businesses. Our findings, therefore, portray that even when operating in traditional feminine sectors (See Table 3), the Lebanese Muslim women entrepreneurs have to demonstrate masculine characteristics, thus confirming the normalisation of entrepreneurship as masculine in the Arab countries (McAdam et al., 2020). However, the Lebanese women's exposure to Muslim feminism gave them the confidence to resist compliance to the adoption of masculine behaviours and ultimately the confidence to do gender and femininity as they deemed appropriate.

The novelty of our findings therefore lies in their demonstration of how the women's renewed faith granted them the strength to be true to themselves, strengthened their internal resilience, and their doing of gender as a process of reflective accommodation and a coping strategy. Hence, our findings demonstrate how the doing of gender unfolds as a coping strategy enabled by Muslim feminism in the advent of adversities. Furthermore, their economic undertakings did not seem to influence their approach to Muslim feminism and the ways in which they did gender after being exposed to Muslim feminist ideas. Hence, we argue that our findings support previous studies in terms of the importance of approaching gender as a performative (Calàs & Smirich, 1996; Kelan, 2009) and a fluid phenomenon.

The second coping strategy unfolded in the form of greater engagement with the Muslim religious practices and thus increased religiosity. Prior to their adoption of Muslim feminism, some women had issues with accepting the widespread, masculine interpretations of Islamic teachings, while others were not keen on observing their religious responsibilities, and if and when observed, they performed the minimum tasks. However, their newly acquired understanding of Islam changed their overall attitude and inspired them to increase their religious practices beyond the minimum required in order to get closer to God and as a means of coping. The novelty of our findings is therefore grounded in the emergence of an overall positive attitude to Islam and its teachings, which allowed the Muslim women to perform Islam in a different manner, as a coping mechanism through additional optional practices. Previous studies have focused on exploring the

influence of Muslim feminism on women entrepreneurs (Tlaiss & McAdam, 2021a) or how Muslim women resort to increased religiosity for comfort in stressful situations (Althalathini et al., 2022). Our findings build on these studies by demonstrating how, when equipped with Muslim feminism, Muslim women entrepreneurs willingly resort to religiosity or additional optional religious practices. We therefore demonstrate the link or the connection between Muslim feminism and increased religiosity. We also underscore the socially constructive nature of religion in that it provided the women with a framework centred upon individual personal circumstances (i.e., education, traditions, and gender roles) that they used to make sense of the situations they were enduring. As such, when Islam is socially and individually constructed, religiosity ends up as a coping strategy stemming from the women entrepreneurs' reconciliation with their faith rather than being the only available coping mechanism. In addition, despite previous studies questioning Prophet Mohammed's behaviour and virtuousness (Gordon, 1989; Willis, 1985), the findings of this study support the emerging literature on how the Prophet has been emerging as a role model for Muslims in various countries (Beekun & Badawi, 2005; Tlaiss, 2015) and the role of Hadeeth in building resilience. These findings therefore demonstrate how the Muslim feminist approach to Islam paved the way for the women in this study to take a more involved approach to Islam which helped them to build resilience whilst navigating compounded financial and social crises.

The third coping strategy was based on Islamic values. For example, the women sought comfort amidst challenging situations through forgiveness of others, tolerance and by demonstrating kindness to self and to others. Although previous studies have reflected on how Muslim entrepreneurs are expected to conduct their business dealings according to Islamic values (Beekun & Badawi, 2005) such as honesty, fairness, and justice (Tlaiss, 2015), the findings demonstrate how the women's adherence to Muslim feminism principles was a key component that allowed them to mobilise different Islamic values, namely tolerance and forgiveness, as personal coping strategies. Here as well, we demonstrate how Muslim feminism allowed the Muslim women entrepreneurs to perform Islam differently through adherence to a set of Islamic values, which were previously avoided given their soft, feminine nature and misalignment with the masculine entrepreneurial traits. These findings demonstrate the interconnection between Muslim feminism and the reliance on specific Islamic values in pursuit of coping. Our findings also extend the connection between Islam and resilience (Althalathini et al., 2022) by demonstrating that the women entrepreneurs sought the Islamic value of *yakeen* (certainty in the goodness of God) to strengthen their resilience to the compounded crises as it encouraged them to appreciate and be grateful to God for their current situation. These findings optimally demonstrate how different Islamic values enabled the women to cope effectively with the crises and equipped them with the means to accept and adapt to changes. The findings also demonstrate how, when Islam is approached as a social structure, it unfolds not only as a religion but also as a way of life, helping the women cope with adverse conditions in crises countries.

Conclusion

In this paper, we explored the coping strategies utilised by Muslim women entrepreneurs in the country-specific context of crises-laden Lebanon. Accordingly, we present empirical evidence of how the Muslim women entrepreneurs crafted their agency, through adopting a Muslim feminism approach, not only to rewrite their understanding and experiences of Islam, but also their lives, in order to cope with the compounded crises. Within this paper, we make the following theoretical contributions.

First, we contribute to research on the influence of religion, (Dana, 2009, 2010; Smith et al., 2019), namely Islam (Gümüsay, 2015; Jaim, 2021; Khan & Koshul, 2011; Safdar & Yasmin, 2020), on entrepreneurship as a result of our focus on the Muslim women entrepreneurs' approach to Islam as a means of coping with crises situations and contexts. In particular, we demonstrate how an egalitarian religious lens, namely, Muslim feminism, grants women the means to rediscover Islam and achieve religious maturity through the deconstruction of their internalised religious beliefs and the construction of an individualised version of Islam that is more compatible with the women's own backgrounds, needs and issues with traditional interpretations of Islam, and contemporary approach to life and traditions. Enabled by Muslim feminism, Islam unfolded as a social construct that is performed by Muslim women at a personal level as per their own preferences, education, and experience. We therefore extend previous studies on religion as a social structure by revealing how individualised models of Islam were socially constructed by the Lebanese Muslim women entrepreneurs, as opposed to treating Islam as a rigid set of rules with no tolerance for alternative approaches. Furthermore, as Arab Muslim women's entrepreneurship experiences remain largely unexplored, we also extend research on religion and entrepreneurship away from the current literature that focuses mainly on immigrant Muslim women in economically and political stable countries (Essers et al., 2010; Essers & Tedmanson, 2014). We also support an emerging body of literature (e.g., Priola & Chaudhry, 2021) that presents an alternative perspective of Islam away from being repressive of women (Ahmed, 1992) and Muslim women as weak and passive (Syed & Pio, 2010).

Second, by introducing Muslim feminist discourses related to Arab-Lebanese women's coping strategies, we advance feminist studies and respond to calls for more innovative feminist perspectives (Jaim, 2021; Kamla, 2019). We also illustrate how feminist voices can challenge the masculine, rational approach to crises (Branicki, 2020) towards an alternative approach that is grounded in individual agency. In particular, we demonstrate the connection between Muslim feminism and the doing of gender as a performative. Previous studies on Muslim feminism in the Arab world (Ahmed, 1992; Badran, 2005, 2009; Barlas, 2022; Mernissi, 1991; Wadud, 1999, 2006) have been predominately focused on understanding how the misinterpretation of Islam and its decontextualisation have contributed to Muslim women's oppression and how Islam should be approached to liberate Muslim women. Hence, minimal, if any, attention has been paid to how gender is performed. We attend to this gap through our findings as we demonstrate how Muslim feminism, through helping the women understand the status and respect that Islam granted them, allowed them to experience freedom and choice in performing gender as they deemed appropriate. Accordingly, we not only underscore the importance of approaching gender as a performative (Adkins, 2004; Butler, 1993; Kelan, 2009) but also expand this understanding by illustrating the relationship between Muslim feminism and gender as a performative. We also reveal how Muslim feminism creates space for Muslim women to experience gender as a performative that is neither fixed nor stable but is continually under construction by the women entrepreneurs through their daily interactions with others.

We also expand Muslim feminists thought beyond its focus on the egalitarian reinterpretations of Islamic texts by explicitly demonstrating the link between a gender-sensitive reinterpretation of religious texts, agency, rediscovery of self and faith beyond the dominant masculine approaches to Islam, and ultimately coping. Muslim feminism, through the gender-sensitive approach to Islam that it promotes, helped the women entrepreneurs in this study resolve their issues with Islam, their appetite for Islamic religious practices, and adoption of Islamic values which in turn unfolded as coping strategies. In other words, the women entrepreneurs in this study

would not have resorted to coping through increased religiosity and Islamic values if they did not adopt a Muslim feminist approach to Islam. Accordingly, we demonstrate the connections between Muslim feminism and the unfolding of religiosity as a consciously chosen coping mechanism and not as a result of absence of other coping strategies. We also demonstrate how the choice of doing gender that was facilitated by Muslim feminism helped the Muslim women entrepreneurs lean on the more feminine Islamic values as coping strategies.

To that end, we argue that Muslim feminism in this study unfolded as a movement that helped the Lebanese Muslim women entrepreneurs experience liberation from gender inequality and exclusion, through granting them alternative readings of Islam and its teachings, and as a coping strategy. However, Muslim feminism did not manifest as a stand-alone copying strategy, but rather as a strong influencer and a source of inspiration that paved the way for a complex web of coping strategies that influenced, and were influenced, by each other. Furthermore, Muslim feminism for the women entrepreneurs in this study was enabled by their relatively high levels of education and the secular nature of the country, which collectively enabled them to seek alternative explanations. To that effect, we wonder as to whether there is only one version of Muslim feminism practiced by Muslim women, or various versions, influenced by factors such as women's education, family situation and the overall approach to Islam at a national level. Accordingly, we emphasise the heterogeneity of Islam (Asad, 1986; Eger, 2021; Tlaiss & McAdam, 2021a) and how it unfolds at the intersection of the many structural features of the society as a social construct that is personal and individualised.

Third, we contribute to research on entrepreneurship in crises (De La Chaux & Haugh, 2021; Harima et al., 2021; Kwong et al., 2019), beyond its current focus on COVID (Branicki, 2020), resilience and crisis management (Doern et al., 2019), and geographic focus on non-Arab countries (Bullough et al., 2014; Bullough & Renko, 2013; Langevang & Namatovu, 2019). While doing so, we highlight the importance of the contextualisation of women's entrepreneurship (McAdam et al., 2020; Welter et al., 2019), by not just using religion but also context as a frame which shapes and impacts women's attitudes and behaviours. We thus provide insights into how women's entrepreneurial activities are embedded within socio-economic, political, market and institutional crises which serve to shape their entrepreneurial behaviour, coping strategies, and the embeddedness of their approach to Islam in their daily practices of coping. Our findings extend conversations around the adverse effects of COVID-19 on women entrepreneurs (Branicki, 2020; Meliou, 2020), and addresses the calls for informed and nuanced investigations using a feminist sensitive methodology (Jaim, 2021; Priola & Chaudry, 2021) of crisis events.

Our study suggests a number of avenues for future research. First, although the main aim of this study is to explore the influence of Islam on the lives, experiences, and coping strategies utilised by Muslim women entrepreneurs in Lebanon, we realise that some of the themes also relate to identity formation and identity aspects of entrepreneurship. Hence, we encourage future studies to unpack this topic by exploring how Muslim feminism shapes the entrepreneurial identity of Muslim women entrepreneurs in Lebanon and other Arab countries. Second, we are conscious that our sample centres on a qualitative study of women of a certain socio-economic status and as such we could not determine if and how their backgrounds might have influenced their coping strategies. To that effect, we encourage future studies to engage more diverse samples to explore if and how the coping strategies of Muslim women entrepreneurs differ, based on their socio-economic status and class. This will not only give voice to women entrepreneurs from various socio-economic backgrounds but also help us understand the individual factors that influence coping strategies. Third, to further develop feminist theory, it is important for future studies to

explore if there are different versions of Muslim feminism, the similarities and differences between the different versions, and finally the individual and national variables that contribute or explain the different versions.

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