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Women Entrepreneurship: Spiritual Bricolage, Family Well-being, and Escalation of Commitment

By

Tigist Tesfaye Abebe

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By

Tigist Tesfaye Abebe

Main Supervisor:

Professor Lucia Naldi

Business Administration, Internationella Handelshogskolan, Jönköping, Sweden & Halmstad University, Sweden

Co-supervisors:

Dr Magdalena Markowska

Umeå School of Business, Economics, & Statistics, Umeå Universitet, Umeå, Sweden & King's Business School, King's College London, London, United Kingdom

Dr Ethiopia L. Segaro

Management, Addis Ababa University College of Business and Economics, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

DEDICATION

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my husband, Yared, whose unwavering support, patience, and encouragement have carried me through every step of this journey. Your belief in me has been my strength.

To my daughters—Misha, Linta, Nina, and Amen—you are my greatest inspiration. Your love, joy, and resilience have given me the energy to continue even on the hardest days. I hope this work reminds you that with faith, determination, and discipline, anything is possible.

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This accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine.

APPROVAL SHEET

This is to confirm that the dissertation prepared by **Tigist Tesfaye Abebe**, entitled: ***"Women Entrepreneurship: Spiritual Bricolage, Family Well-being, and Escalation of Commitment"***, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Management, complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Approved by the Board of Examiners

DR LUCIA NAUDI		10/12/2025
Main Supervisor	**Signature**	**Date**
DR MAGDALENA MARKOWSKA		10/12/2025
Co-supervisor	**Signature**	**Date**
Dr. Ethiopia Tegegne	Ethiopia Tegegne	10/12/2025
Co-supervisor	**Signature**	**Date**
Dr. Quang Evansluong		29/12/2025
External Examiner	**Signature**	**Date**
Internal Examiner	**Signature**	**Date**
Chair, board of examiners	**Signature**	**Date**

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation, entitled ***"Women Entrepreneurship: Spiritual Bricolage, Family Well-being, and Escalation of Commitment,*** "is my original work and has not been submitted to any other institutions anywhere to award any degree or certificates. All sources of information, ideas, and views used in this dissertation are duly acknowledged.

Mrs. Tigist Tesfaye Abebe		11 December 2025
Name of the candidate	Signature	Date

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EoC	Escalation of Commitment
EWB	Entrepreneurial well-being
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
JIBS	Jönköping International Business School

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ABSTRACT

The overarching aim of this dissertation is to understand how women entrepreneurs operating in the resource-constrained context of Ethiopia navigate the intertwined complexities of entrepreneurial life. This objective is addressed through three empirical research papers, all situated within the Ethiopian context. By examining the dynamic interplay between spiritual bricolage, family well-being, and escalation of commitment, the dissertation advances an integrated understanding of how women sustain entrepreneurial engagement under persistent structural and economic constraints. Drawing on life-story interviews and employing the Gioia method, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, and narrative inquiry, the research provides a rich, grounded account of women's meaning-making, decision processes, and adaptive strategies. The dissertation contributes to the field of women's entrepreneurship and to the theoretical lenses it adopts in several ways. First, it examines spiritual bricolage as a mechanism through which women mobilize spiritual practices and beliefs to reinterpret risk, respond to resource scarcity, and maintain legitimacy. Three strategies—adventurous sourcing, diligent embedding, and relational anchoring—are identified, demonstrating how spiritual resources shape entrepreneurial motivation, persistence, and everyday action in environments marked by uncertainty. Second, the dissertation explores how women construct family well-being as a collective and relational outcome of their entrepreneurial engagement. Rather than viewing well-being as an individual psychological state, women articulate it as a multidimensional process embedded in household needs and intergenerational aspirations. Four interconnected dimensions—family growth, family potential, family goals, and family commitment—show how entrepreneurship becomes a critical pathway for securing stability, enabling children's futures, and advancing family continuity. Third, the dissertation extends Escalation of Commitment theory by examining commitment processes within contexts of resource scarcity. Contrary to traditional interpretations that emphasize persistence in failing ventures, the findings reveal that women often direct their commitment toward sustaining key resources—financial capital, social networks, legitimacy, and entrepreneurial knowledge—rather than toward any single enterprise. Strategic exits, reconfigurations, and re-entries reflect deliberate resource management and adaptive decision-making. The concept of resource-flow escalation is introduced to capture this resource-centered logic of persistence. Last but not least, this dissertation contributes to scholarship on entrepreneurial bricolage, well-being, and commitment by showing how women entrepreneurs actively mobilize spiritual grounding, family relationships, and resource configurations to maintain agency, meaning, and

continuity in their entrepreneurial journeys. Overall, the dissertation offers practical implications for strengthening entrepreneurship support mechanisms by recognizing the interdependent spiritual, familial, and resource-related dimensions that shape women's entrepreneurial lives in resource-constrained environments such as Ethiopia.

CHAPTER 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background, Problematization, and Overarching Purpose

Entrepreneurship is widely acknowledged as a key driver of economic development, innovation, and social transformation. However, the experiences of women entrepreneurs, particularly those operating in resource-constrained environments, remain underexplored in mainstream research. These women often navigate multiple layers of disadvantage, including traditional gender norms, limited access to financial and human capital, and institutional voids that exacerbate the challenges of venture creation and growth (GEM, 2020; Guzman & Kacperczyk, 2019; Khanna & Palepu, 1997). Women entrepreneurs face significant barriers in accessing essential resources such as education, financial capital, and social networks, which are crucial for their entrepreneurial success. These challenges are deeply rooted in gendered structures and societal norms that limit women's opportunities (Markowska & Abebe, 2021). Understanding how women navigate these enduring challenges requires a broad and multidimensional perspective.

Moreover, most of what we know about women entrepreneurship comes from WEIRD contexts—Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic societies (Shepherd et al., 2015). This has created a significant imbalance in our understanding, limiting the relevance of existing theories for women who navigate entrepreneurial life in resource-constrained environments. Entrepreneurship scholarship urgently needs richer empirical insights from the Global South to illuminate how individuals in these contexts create, sustain, and make meaning out of their ventures under uncertainty, institutional complexity, and persistent scarcity, and we need to understand more about the lived experience of women entrepreneurs. We know that access to resources is one key element for entrepreneurship, and in this context, women face more challenges in accessing resources, so it is important to explore how they manage resource scarcity and why they engage in entrepreneurial actions.

Yet, much of the existing entrepreneurship literature continues to approach women’s ventures in such settings through relatively narrow lenses. Studies of women’s entrepreneurship in the Global South have predominantly emphasized access to finance, skills, and markets, often treating spiritual life, family relations, and patterns of resource use as background conditions rather than as central aspects of entrepreneurial practice. This is problematic for at least three

reasons. *First*, in highly spiritual societies such as Ethiopia, spiritual beliefs, faith practices, and religious communities are not peripheral but deeply woven into everyday life. They shape how women interpret adversity, evaluate risk, and make sense of their entrepreneurial efforts, yet their role as active resources for coping, motivation, and meaning-making remains underexplored. *Second*, women's entrepreneurship is embedded in dense family obligations and aspirations. Business activities are closely linked to caring for children and relatives, meeting immediate household needs, and pursuing intergenerational hopes, but research has rarely examined how women understand and pursue well-being not only for themselves, but for their families as a collective unit through entrepreneurship. *Third*, prevailing theories of entrepreneurial persistence and escalation of commitment tend to conceptualize commitment as attachment to a single venture, and to frame exit primarily as failure. These approaches do not fully capture how women in resource-constrained environments may strategically move in and out of different ventures, reallocate their limited time and capital, and continuously reconfigure resource flows to preserve access to financial, social, and symbolic resources over time.

Taken together, these limitations point to the need for a more multidimensional and contextually grounded understanding of women's entrepreneurship in Ethiopia—one that takes seriously the spiritual, relational, and resource-strategic dimensions of their entrepreneurial lives. Accordingly, the overarching purpose of this dissertation is to explore how women entrepreneurs mobilize intangible resources and sustain family well-being within and across ventures in a resource-constrained context.

1.2 Concise Literature Review

Women's Entrepreneurship in Resource-Constrained Contexts

Women's entrepreneurship encompasses the creation, management, and growth of ventures by women who navigate economic activities while balancing social, cultural, and household responsibilities (Brush et al., 2019; Jennings & Brush, 2013). Extensive research shows that entrepreneurial environments are inherently gendered, with women often facing limited access to finance, restricted mobility, and socio-cultural expectations that shape and constrain their entrepreneurial opportunities (Elam et al., 2019; Guzman & Kacperczyk, 2019). These barriers are amplified in resource-constrained settings where institutional thinness, weak market structures, and economic instability pose persistent challenges (Hailemariam et al., 2019;

Welter, 2011). As a result, women entrepreneurs must continually adapt, negotiate, and creatively problem-solve as part of their everyday entrepreneurial practice.

A prominent lens for understanding entrepreneurial action in such contexts is *bricolage*. Originating from Lévi-Strauss's (1962) notion of "making do with what is at hand," entrepreneurial bricolage captures how entrepreneurs creatively recombine and repurpose available resources to address constraints and pursue opportunities (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Fisher, 2012). Beyond material resources, recent scholarship highlights the role of symbolic, cultural, and identity-based resources in this process. Individuals frequently draw upon belief systems, relational norms, and locally accepted practices to generate meaning, legitimacy, and direction in their entrepreneurial journeys (Carstensen, 2011; Cleaver, 2002). Within this broader landscape, spirituality emerges as a significant intangible resource that shapes sensemaking, motivation, and coping under adversity (Balog et al., 2014; Rashid & Ratten, 2022).

Another stream of growing interest concerns entrepreneurial well-being (EWB), which reflects how entrepreneurs evaluate their lives through both hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions (Wiklund et al., 2019; Shir et al., 2019). While much early research conceptualized well-being as an individual psychological state, more recent work emphasizes its relational nature, particularly for women. Women's entrepreneurial activities are often deeply intertwined with family responsibilities, relational obligations, and intergenerational aspirations (Barkema et al., 2024; Hailemariam & Kroon, 2018). Persistence under uncertainty constitutes another critical area of inquiry. Escalation of Commitment—defined as continuing to invest in a course of action despite deteriorating outcomes—has long been recognized within entrepreneurship and decision-making research (Staw, 1981; Brockner, 1992). While traditionally portrayed as a cognitive bias, emerging work suggests that in resource-scarce environments, entrepreneurs may escalate to preserve crucial assets such as legitimacy, reputation, social capital, or accumulated knowledge (McCarthy et al., 1993; Foo et al., 2006). This broader conceptualization of persistence is particularly salient for women, whose entrepreneurial paths often involve strategic shifts, reconfigurations, or re-entry into new ventures as they respond to fluctuating family needs, market dynamics, and institutional fragility. Taken together, existing scholarship underscores that women's entrepreneurship in resource-constrained environments is deeply relational, adaptive, and embedded within broader socio-cultural and institutional contexts. Ethiopian women entrepreneurs, in particular, contend with limited access to financial capital, weak institutional supports, and entrenched gender norms (Bekele & Worku, 2008;

Gudeta & van Engen, 2018; Markowska & Abebe, 2021). Yet, they mobilize a rich blend of material, symbolic, and relational resources to sustain their ventures. Entrepreneurship becomes not only a means of economic participation but also a strategy for enhancing household stability, fulfilling social responsibilities, and pursuing intergenerational progress (Jennings, Breitkreuz, & James, 2013).

By examining the interplay of spiritual bricolage, family well-being, and resource-centered commitment across women's entrepreneurial trajectories, this dissertation provides an integrated and context-sensitive understanding of women's entrepreneurship in Ethiopia context. By doing so, we can gain insight into how and why women in such contexts engage in entrepreneurship. Although centering the voices of these women entrepreneurs contributes not only to more inclusive and contextually grounded entrepreneurship research but also advances theoretical understanding within the field and beyond (Alkhaled, 2021; Baker & Welter, 2017).

1.3. Statements of the Problem

Traditional entrepreneurship scholarship has largely focused on tangible resources—financial, human, or physical assets—as the primary determinants of venture success. However, in contexts characterized by scarcity and social constraints, intangible and symbolic resources often play a crucial role in enabling entrepreneurial engagement (Cleaver, 2002; Carstensen, 2011). Among these, spiritual resources—encompassing personal beliefs, faith practices, and transcendent experiences—provide women entrepreneurs with framework to navigate uncertainty, sustain motivation, and interpret challenges as opportunities (Neubert, Bradley, Ardianti, & Simiyu, 2017). Spirituality provides meaning, legitimacy, and resilience, allowing entrepreneurs to maintain persistence even when facing setbacks or systemic barriers (Rashid & Ratten, 2022; Astrachan et al., 2020). Yet, the role of such symbolic resources in shaping entrepreneurial action in the Global South remains insufficiently theorized.

At the same time, although women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained contexts often shoulder significant family responsibilities alongside their business activities, traditional entrepreneurship research continues to frame well-being in predominantly individualistic and hedonic terms—centered on personal satisfaction or individual achievement—thereby overlooking relational and collective dimensions of well-being (De Clercq et al., 2022; Pergelova et al., 2025). This perspective overlooks relational and collective dimensions of well-

being that are central to women's lived realities in family-oriented cultures. For many women in Ethiopia and similar settings, entrepreneurship is not merely an economic pursuit, but a relational endeavor embedded in caregiving, social obligations, and intergenerational aspirations (Ahl & Nelson, 2015; Hailemariam & Kroon, 2018). Understanding how well-being is co-constructed within the family unit—and how entrepreneurship becomes a vehicle for advancing family stability, continuity, and purpose—remains an important gap in the literature.

Furthermore, entrepreneurial persistence has long been conceptualized as unwavering commitment to a specific venture, with exit framed as failure and continued investment viewed as dedication (Staw, 1976, 1981; Brockner, 1992; McCarthy et al., 1993). However, such venture-centric perspectives inadequately capture the realities of women entrepreneurs operating under resource scarcity. In these contexts, persistence is often less about psychological attachment to a single venture and more about sustaining access to critical resource flows—financial capital, social networks, legitimacy, and knowledge—that enable ongoing entrepreneurial engagement. The notion of resource-centered escalation of commitment, therefore, remains conceptually underdeveloped and empirically underexplored, particularly in Global South settings where discontinuity, venture shifts, and strategic re-entry are common adaptive responses rather than markers of failure.

Hence, how women in resource-constrained contexts creatively mobilize intangible resources, co-construct family well-being, and strategically sustain access to critical resource flows across their entrepreneurial trajectories remains an emergent and underexplored area of inquiry. By focusing on Ethiopian women entrepreneurs, this dissertation offers contextually grounded insights that speak to global debates on gender, entrepreneurship, and development. It contributes to a deeper understanding of entrepreneurial behavior in environments marked by scarcity, institutional complexity, and strong family embeddedness—insights that are broadly applicable across other resource-constrained settings in the Global South.

Accordingly, this dissertation explores how women entrepreneurs mobilize intangible and symbolic resources, construct and sustain family well-being, and maintain entrepreneurial engagement through resource-centered forms of persistence within and across ventures in a resource-constrained context.

1.4. Research Questions

The overall research question is: *how do women entrepreneurs mobilize intangible resources and sustain family well-being within and across ventures in a resource-constrained context?*

Specifically, this dissertation answers the following basic research questions

- How do women entrepreneurs use spiritual resources to sustain their entrepreneurial engagement, and h*ow does spiritual bricolage support women's entrepreneurial engagement*?
- How do women entrepreneurs perceive and enact family well-being through their ventures?
- How do women entrepreneurs escalate commitment to resources flow that sustain their entrepreneurial activity?

1.5. Objectives of the Study

1.5.1. General Objectives of the Study

The general aim of this dissertation is to explore how women entrepreneurs mobilize intangible resources and sustain family well-being within and across ventures in a resource-constrained context. Grounded in the lived experiences of Ethiopian women entrepreneurs, the study seeks to advance a more contextually grounded understanding of entrepreneurial engagement by illuminating how symbolic practices, relational responsibilities, and resource-flow dynamics shape their entrepreneurial sustainability.

1.5.2. Specific Objectives

Specifically, the study addresses the following objectives through the three papers included in this dissertation:

The *first paper* focuses on the use of spiritual resources by women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments, such as Ethiopia, to sustain their entrepreneurial engagement. Specifically, the study

explore how women entrepreneurs use spiritual resources to sustain their entrepreneurial engagement and how spiritual bricolage supports their ongoing participation in entrepreneurial activities.

The second paper explores how women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia perceive and enact family well-being through their ventures. Specifically, the paper aims to:

- understand how women entrepreneurs perceive, construct, and enact family well-being through their ventures, highlighting the relational and intergenerational dimensions of entrepreneurial decision-making.

The third paper examines how women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments escalate commitment to the resource flow in sustaining their entrepreneurial activity. Specifically, the study aims to:

- understand how women entrepreneurs escalate and manage commitment to critical resource flows that sustain their entrepreneurial activity, emphasizing persistence beyond individual ventures.

1.6. Significance of the Study

This dissertation focuses on women's entrepreneurship in resource-constrained environments, with particular emphasis on Ethiopia. It examines how women entrepreneurs mobilize spiritual, relational, and material resources to sustain engagement, achieve family well-being, and strategically manage critical resource flows across ventures. By exploring these interrelated dimensions, this dissertation contributes to both theoretical and practical understandings of women's entrepreneurship in Global South contexts.

The study makes several theoretical contributions. First, it advances scholarship on entrepreneurial bricolage by demonstrating how women engage in spiritual bricolage to reframe constraints, expand resource pools, and sustain motivation over time. By highlighting the symbolic and culturally embedded dimensions of spirituality, the research extends the conceptual boundaries of bricolage and shows that not only the type of resource matters but also how it is utilized. This contribution enriches the understanding of the theological and symbolic turn in entrepreneurship studies and underscores spirituality as a culturally embedded and integral element of entrepreneurial action.

Second, the dissertation provides a contextually grounded perspective on entrepreneurial well-being . It challenges dominant individualistic models by showing that well-being is relational, embedded in family care, moral responsibility, and intergenerational aspirations. By foregrounding women lived experiences, this research advances gender-sensitive and culturally attuned entrepreneurship scholarship, illustrating how entrepreneurial purpose extends beyond profit or autonomy to include sustaining family life and relational flourishing.

Third, this research contributes to understanding persistence and escalation of commitment in resource-limited contexts. It demonstrates that women entrepreneurs' persistence is often resource-flow-centric rather than venture-centric, reflecting strategic allocation and reallocation of resources in response to environmental constraints. This insight provides a nuanced perspective on entrepreneurial decision-making, highlighting rational and adaptive forms of commitment that sustain entrepreneurial engagement without depleting critical resources.

From a **practical perspective**, the dissertation offers valuable implications for supporting women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained settings. It provides guidance on leveraging spiritual and symbolic resources, balancing family responsibilities with business objectives, and strategically managing resource flows across ventures. Policymakers, practitioners, and support organizations can use these findings to design culturally and contextually relevant interventions that recognize the social, relational, and moral dimensions of women's entrepreneurship. For instance, programs that integrate mentorship, family-inclusive support, and access to community or faith-based networks to strengthen entrepreneurial resilience and sustain engagement.

Finally, the research highlights broader socio-economic contributions of women's entrepreneurship. By showing how entrepreneurial activities advance family well-being, enhance household resilience, and generate community impact, the study demonstrates that women's entrepreneurship extends beyond individual economic gains to foster collective, intergenerational, and societal benefits. Overall, the dissertation provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how women sustain agency, purpose, and entrepreneurial engagement under conditions of scarcity, offering insights that are relevant for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to support inclusive and resilient entrepreneurial ecosystems the Global South.

1.7. Scope of the Study

This dissertation is to explore how women entrepreneurs mobilize intangible resources and sustain family well-being within and across ventures in a resource-constrained context, such as Ethiopia serving as the primary empirical setting. Women's entrepreneurship plays a vital role in economic development and social stability, particularly in environments where institutional support is limited and socio-cultural expectations strongly shape entrepreneurial activities. Understanding how women navigate these challenges provides valuable insights for fostering inclusive and resilient entrepreneurial ecosystems.

The scope of this dissertation encompasses three interrelated dimensions of women's entrepreneurial experience. First, it investigates how women draw on intangible and symbolic resources, particularly spiritual practices, to maintain engagement and interpret constraints in meaningful ways. Second, it explores how women construct and pursue family well-being through their entrepreneurial activities, highlighting the relational, caregiving, and intergenerational commitments that shape their decisions. Third, the study examines how women manage and sustain critical resource flows across their entrepreneurial journeys, illuminating adaptive forms of persistence and strategic commitment under conditions of scarcity.

Geographically, the dissertation is situated in Ethiopia—a Global South context marked by institutional fragility, gendered norms, and structural resource limitations that shape women's opportunities and entrepreneurial trajectories. Methodologically, it draws on rich qualitative data from life-story interviews with 25 women entrepreneurs, offering deep, contextualized insights into how entrepreneurship unfolds over time. This focused scope enables a nuanced understanding of how women create, sustain, and adapt their ventures within an environment of persistent uncertainty and constraint.

1.8. Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the study, including the background, a concise literature review, research questions, objectives, significance, scope, and limitations of the study.

The second chapter (Paper 1) explores how women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments, such as Ethiopia, utilize spiritual resources to sustain their entrepreneurial

engagement. Using qualitative life-story interviews, this paper examines how spiritual bricolage shapes entrepreneurial cognition, motivation, and legitimacy. The findings highlight the symbolic and practical dimensions of spirituality as a resource that supports sustained entrepreneurial behavior in resource-limited contexts.

The third chapter (Paper 2) investigates how women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia perceive and enact family well-being through their ventures. This paper emphasizes the relational and multidimensional nature of well-being, focusing on how entrepreneurial activities intersect with family responsibilities, intergenerational aspirations, and moral obligations. The study provides a contextually grounded understanding of eudaimonic well-being as a relational process rather than an individual achievement.

The fourth chapter (Paper 3) examines how women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments escalate commitment to the resource flow. This paper explores strategic persistence, resource reallocation, and decision-making under uncertainty, highlighting how women entrepreneurs actively manage and reconfigure resources to maintain engagement, navigate constraints, and support family and social responsibilities.

The final chapter summarizes the key findings across all three papers, integrates the contributions to theory and practice, and discusses the implications for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers. It also reflects on the limitations of the study and provides directions for future research, offering a comprehensive understanding of women's entrepreneurship in resource-constrained contexts such as Ethiopia.

The three studies comprising this dissertation collectively are:

Paper-1: Spiritual Bricolage and Entrepreneurial Reframing: Women mobilize spiritual resources to reinterpret constraints, sustain motivation, and reframe risk and opportunity, demonstrating the cognitive and symbolic mechanisms underpinning entrepreneurial engagement in resource-limited settings.

Paper-2: Family Well-Being and Relational Entrepreneurship: Women entrepreneurs construct well-being as a collective and relational endeavor embedded in family life, revealing how entrepreneurship serves as a vehicle for nurturing intergenerational progress and relational continuity.

Paper-3: Escalation of Commitment *Among Women Entrepreneurs:* Women entrepreneurs strategically manage critical resources across ventures, with exit and re-entry reflecting

deliberate resource management rather than failure. Persistence is resource-centered, adaptive, and rational, illustrating a context-specific form of EoC.

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CHAPTER 2: SPIRITUAL BRICOLAGE AMONG WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS: REFRAMING ADVERSITY

Authors: Tigist Tesfaye, Magdalena Markowska, Ethiopia L. Segaro & Lucia Naldi

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Abstract

This study explores how women entrepreneurs within a resource-constrained context of Ethiopia utilize spiritual resources and spiritual bricolage in their entrepreneurial endeavors. Drawing on 52 life-story interviews, we find that by engaging in spiritual bricolage, women entrepreneurs reconstruct the meanings of risk, resources, constraints, and legitimacy, thereby maintaining persistence in the face of adversity. We demonstrate that this entrepreneurial reframing operates as a critical connecting mechanism between spiritual bricolage and sustained entrepreneurial motivation. Further, we identify three strategies for engaging with spiritual resources that can either facilitate or hinder entrepreneurial reframing: adventurous sourcing, diligent embedding, and relational anchoring. This study advances the bricolage and entrepreneurial motivation literatures and offers practical insights for supporting women entrepreneurs in economically constrained settings.

Key Words: Entrepreneurial Reframing, Spirituality, Spiritual Bricolage, Religion, Women entrepreneurs, Ethiopia

"When it is no longer possible to derive actors' motivations from a set of ideas that are identifiable in society, we must instead look to how ideas are actively and oftentimes creatively used by actors." (Carstener, 2011, p. 163)

2.1 Introduction

Women entrepreneurs, particularly within contexts marked by disadvantageous traditional norms, often confront significant challenges in accessing resources essential for venture creation and growth (GEM, 2020; Guzman & Kacperczyk, 2019). One such context is East Africa, where deeply rooted gender norms and institutional voids exacerbate women's difficulties in accessing critical entrepreneurial resources (Khanna & Palepu, 1997). For example, in Ethiopia, women entrepreneurs frequently encounter significant barriers, including restricted access to capital, education, and networks (Digan et al., 2019). Such resource constraints can severely impede women's ability to launch and sustain successful businesses and even lead to a depletion of their entrepreneurial motivation in the long run. However, understanding how women entrepreneurs manage these persistent constraints requires looking beyond the material dimension of resources.

While entrepreneurship research has traditionally focused on resources in tangible terms—such as financial, human, or physical assets—it has more recently begun to recognize the importance of intangible and symbolic resources in sustaining entrepreneurs under adversity. In particular, spiritual resources, defined as 'the set of personal, intangible, and transcendent resources' (Neubert, Bradley, Ardianti, & Simiyu, 2017, p. 622)—have started to receive attention. Symbolic resources can be equally, if not more, essential in resource-constrained settings (Carstensen, 2011; Cleaver, 2002). As argued by Cleaver (2002), beliefs and ideas can be carriers of powerful resources that can lead to institutional or social transformation.

Religion is a valuable spiritual resource for many women entrepreneurs (Dodd and Gotsis, 2007; Henley, 2017; Smith, McMullen, & Cardon, 2021). Spiritual resources can contribute to an entrepreneur's motivation and vision (Astrachan et al., 2020; Hill et al., 2000; Smith, Lawson, Barbosa, & Jones, 2023) and provide direction, purpose, and resilience, particularly for entrepreneurs navigating significant constraints (Rashid & Ratten, 2022). In fact, "religion is likely to affect deep cognitive structure, offering cognitive resources that shape individuals'

mental models of what it means to be an entrepreneur and what an entrepreneurial opportunity looks like" (Dubbard Barbosa & Smith, 2024: 1316).

More specifically, researchers have shown that religion, religious norms, and practices play a role in the entrepreneurial journey, helping women identify and contextualize opportunities, create new ventures, operate and expand them (Balog et al, 2014; Ozasir Kacar, 2024). Dubard Barbosa and Smith (2024:1315) suggest that "deep anchoring of religious beliefs might help to foster optimism and cope with uncertainty, which can be beneficial in daunting times."

While entrepreneurship scholarship has examined how religion shapes norms, beliefs, rituals, and behaviors (Anderson, Drakopoulou Dodd, & Scott, 2000; Block et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2021; Tracey, 2012), its impact has primarily been investigated in relation to access to social networks (Alemayehu, Steffens, & Gordon, 2023) and human capital development (Dodd & Gotsis, 2007). At the same time, the notion of spiritual resources invites a broader perspective—one that considers how entrepreneurs experience, reinterpret, and mobilize faith. Spiritual resources are not finite or consumed through use; rather, they are continuously (re)constructed, expanded, and reinterpreted through lived experiences and social interactions. Building on this reasoning, we ask: *How do women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments, such as Ethiopia, use spiritual resources?*

Further, extant research asserts that bricolage can be a pertinent strategy for managing resource constraints in environments with scarce resources (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Baker & Powell, 2016; Steffens et al., 2023). Applying bricolage to the spiritual domain, we conceptualize spiritual bricolage as "making do by applying combinations of *spiritual* resources at hand to new problems and opportunities." It appears viable that by 'playing' with possible scenarios and using a different set of beliefs, women entrepreneurs can consider how an alternative belief system might benefit them on their entrepreneurial journey. Moreover, while most extant bricolage research focuses on accessing and managing resources at hand, researchers have taken for granted that women entrepreneurs are and remain motivated. In other words, we know little about how women entrepreneurs access and manage cognitive resources to maintain their entrepreneurial drive and motivation despite resource constraints (Cavalcanti Junqueira, Discua Cruz, & Gratton, 2023; Dubard Barbosa & Smith, 2024). This leads us to our second research question: *How does spiritual bricolage support women's entrepreneurial engagement in resource-constrained environments, such as Ethiopia*?

To answer these questions, we employ a qualitative inductive approach, drawing on 52 life-story interviews conducted with 25 Ethiopian women entrepreneurs. Our empirical focus on this group is informed by two key considerations. First, Ethiopia presents a compelling context characterized by a rich religious heritage where spirituality is deeply ingrained in the social and cultural fabric, forming an integral part of everyday life (Delle & Segaro, 2023).

Second, operating within a traditional and resource-constrained environment, Ethiopian women entrepreneurs frequently encounter gender-based cultural constraints, including social ostracism and censure for prioritizing business over other roles (Markowska & Abebe, 2021). While bricolage is recognized as a crucial strategy in such settings, the role of symbolic forms of bricolage—particularly spiritual bricolage, examined here—how it supports entrepreneurial pursuit has received limited scholarly attention.

Our findings indicate that women entrepreneurs perceive their spirituality as a valuable resource and engage in spiritual bricolage. We also observed that the intensity of reliance on spiritual resources (e.g., the strategies used to access spiritual resources) and spiritual bricolage have consequences for the generative aspects of their entrepreneurial motivation through the mechanism of entrepreneurial reframing. In doing so, we make important contributions: First, we introduce the concept of *entrepreneurial reframing*, a cognitive and interpretive process that influences the relationship between spiritual bricolage and sustained entrepreneurial motivation. Second, we advance understanding of spiritual bricolage by demonstrating that entrepreneurs actively mobilize spiritual resources through distinct strategies—diligent embedding, adventurous sourcing, and relational anchoring—and that these strategies vary in their capacity to generate entrepreneurial reframing. Third, we contribute to research on entrepreneurial motivation by showing that motivation is not solely rationalistic or performance driven. In contexts of scarcity, motivation can be sustained through meaning-making and legitimacy work grounded in spiritual logics.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. First, we present the literature review on gender and entrepreneurship, bricolage, and spirituality. This is followed by a description of the empirical setting and methodology. Next, we outline the findings and provide a discussion. Finally, we conclude with the theoretical and practical implications, as well as the study's limitations and suggestions for future research.

2.2 Literature Review

Gender and Entrepreneurship

Although the number of women entrepreneurs is rising, entrepreneurship remains male-gendered (Elam et al., 2019). The consequences of men being the norm in entrepreneurship are the challenges that women entrepreneurs experience, from difficulties with identification as an entrepreneur (García & Welter, 2013), through challenges with access to social networks and other resources, particularly financial (Guzman & Kacperczyk, 2019; Malmström et al., 2017) to structural obstacles that do not allow or limit women to actively and fully participate in the labour market (Brush et al., 2019). These challenges can be exacerbated in contexts with resource constraints and strong traditional social norms (Alshareef, 2022; Markowska & Abebe, 2021). How women entrepreneurs overcome these challenges remains of great public interest. For example, Chatterjee et al. (2022) show how family support and prior work experience help women entrepreneurs at the bottom of the pyramid better set and achieve realistic goals, contributing to their flourishing. Markowska et al. (2025) show how women entrepreneurs engage in gender abating and coalescing to redefine their role as mothers. While gender abating refers to the stripping of gendered coating from performed roles and redefining the roles as more gender neutral, coalescing refers to the blending of the private and the public spheres. Similarly, Hashim et al. (2021) evidenced that women entrepreneurs in the Arab context actively engage in building their own and their venture's legitimacy by relying on various legitimacy markers. Simply put, women entrepreneurs use their agency to make do with available resources, redefine the use of some of them, and actively shape their lives and their entrepreneurial activity. Next, we focus on bricolage, one type of agentic action women entrepreneurs undertake in the entrepreneurship process.

Bricolage and Resource Constraints

Bricolage, a concept originating in anthropology and first articulated by Lévi-Strauss (1962, 1967), describes how novelty can be created by 'making do.' Making do implies "the rearrangement of elements already at hand, but it may also entail the blending in of new elements that have diffused from elsewhere" (Carstensen, 2011, p. 154). It can be understood as 'happening by chance' because the outcomes are unpredictable and contingent on what resources the bricoleur has at their disposal (Altglas, 2014).

In the entrepreneurship context, bricolage has been defined as "making do by applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities" (Baker & Nelson, 2005, p.333). This definition highlights three core dimensions of the concept: (1) *making do*, which entails engaging with problems and opportunities without seeking optimal solutions, thereby refusing to enact limitations and dealing with whatever the result can be, fostering bricoleur's skill development and adaptability; (2) the *creative (re)combination* of existing resources for purposes beyond their original intent; and (3) reliance on *resources at hand*, accumulated over time with potential yet undetermined future utility in mind. These resources are often low-cost or freely available. They may be obtained from external sources, enabling entrepreneurs to leverage undervalued or overlooked resources that others might disregard (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Di Domenico, Haugh, & Tracey, 2010). Where resource scarcity is prevalent, bricolage becomes essential (Fisher, 2012; Mateus & Sarkar, 2024) through crafting practical, locally relevant solutions that align with the unique challenges of the context (Korsgaard et al., 2021; Mair & Martí, 2009; Witell et al., 2017). While bricolage facilitates resource replacement, it may also introduce constraints and risks by accumulating compromises, particularly in more established companies (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Steffens et al., 2023). Thus, bricolage can be a double-edged sword.

Prior research has examined the impact of bricolage on various entrepreneurial outcomes, including innovation (Witell et al., 2017), flexibility (Desa & Basu, 2013), performance (Tasavori et al., 2018), survival (Stenholm & Renko, 2016), growth (Bojica et al., 2018), the competitive advantage (Salunke et al., 2013), and organizational resilience (Senyard et al., 2009). Beyond business continuity, bricolage plays a role in institutional and social transformation (Cleaver, 2002; Desa, 2012; Desa & Basu, 2013; Di Domenico et al., 2010). These studies predominantly focus on the productive dimensions of entrepreneurship, implicitly assuming sustained motivation and engagement among entrepreneurs. However, sustaining entrepreneurial motivation—particularly under prolonged uncertainty or repeated setbacks—remains a critical challenge (Xheneti et al., 2019). For instance, entrepreneurs may experience emotional fatigue, loss of confidence, or disengagement when facing persistent resource constraints or market rejection (Chatterjee et al., 2022). In such contexts, bricolage may serve not only as a practical problem-solving approach but also as a motivational resource, enabling entrepreneurs to reframe challenges creatively, maintain a sense of agency, and find renewed purpose in their ventures. This suggests a need to explore whether bricolage can actively support the continuity of entrepreneurial intention and engagement over time.

Building on the idea that symbolic bricolage involves recombining cultural meanings, identities, and narratives, allowing entrepreneurs to reinterpret the experiences and reaffirm their purpose within a broader institutional and symbolic context (Carstensen, 2011; Cleaver, 2002), we investigate spiritual bricolage as a complementary lens to understand how entrepreneurs sustain engagement over time. For example, entrepreneurs in faith-based communities often reinterpret religious teachings to justify and sustain their ventures, framing business activities as moral obligations or acts of service (Tlaiss, 2015). Similarly, entrepreneurs in post-conflict contexts often invoke collective stories of resilience and renewal to legitimate their efforts and maintain motivation (Althalathini et al., 2020). These examples illustrate how spiritual bricolage enables entrepreneurs to construct coherence in their beliefs and attitudes, using cognitive schemas to process information and navigate uncertainty selectively.

Entrepreneurs are often portrayed as willful agents. As 'possessors of agency', entrepreneurs can be seen as "conscious and unconscious social agents, deeply embedded in their cultural milieu but nonetheless capable of analysing and acting upon circumstances that confront them" (Cleaver, p.16). Cleaver argued that bricolage necessitates "an active assembly of parts, the adaptation of norms, values and arrangements to suit a new purpose" (p.20). In other words, entrepreneurs actively select which ideas and beliefs to build on, and their beliefs can change over time, reflecting the usefulness of different ideas available. Next, we will explore spirituality as an intangible symbolic resource that entrepreneurs can draw on next.

Spirituality as Symbolic Resource in Entrepreneurship

The meaning of spirituality varies among different scholarly communities (McCormic, 1994; George et al., 2000; Karakas, 2010). Spirituality has been shown to be the "heart" of religion (Delle and Segaro, 2024), but it is conceptualized at the individual level. Spirituality is broadly understood as a personal quest for purpose, self-growth, and connection to a higher or transcendent reality (Delle & Segaro, 2023; McCullough et al., 2001; Obregon et al., 2022; Panzini et al., 2011). In entrepreneurship, this often manifests as a mission-driven approach, where ventures hold meaning beyond purely financial objectives (Kurt et al., 2020; Rashid & Ratten, 2022).

Spirituality has been shown to influence a range of entrepreneurial actions (Smith et al., 2019), including opportunity identification, venture establishment, operation, and expansion (Balog et al., 2014; Rashid & Ratten, 2022; Rocha and Pinheiro, 2020). Although religion and spirituality overlap, their influence on entrepreneurial decision-making is distinct (Delle & Segaro, 2023; Phipps & Benefiel, 2012). In entrepreneurial contexts, spirituality is conceptualized as an evolving process that enables entrepreneurs to discover deeper meaning and resilience in their work by fostering self-awareness (Benefiel et al., 2014; Kurt et al., 2020; Rashid & Ratten, 2022) or facilitating pivots in entrepreneurial action.

In essence, spirituality can be a valuable symbolic resource, offering ethical guidance, moral mooring, a sense of purpose, and a meaning for existence, though it may also involve personal sacrifices. Conceptualizing spirituality as a symbolic resource at an individual level (Carstensen, 2011; Cleaver, 2002) could significantly enrich our understanding of bricolage behaviors—how entrepreneurs creatively "make do" with their symbolic resources to drive entrepreneurial action. Therefore, further research is crucial to explore how spirituality, as a symbolic resource, provides the future-oriented adaptive sensemaking necessary to shape entrepreneurial action.

Empirical setting

Ethiopia, one of Africa's largest economies, provides a unique and dynamic context for examining the intersection of spirituality, gender, and entrepreneurship. With a population of approximately 126.5 million (World Bank, 2024), the country is characterized by its deep-rooted religious traditions, where spirituality permeates various aspects of social and economic life (Crabtree, 2010). Ethiopia is widely regarded as one of the most religious nations in Africa, with the majority of its population considering religion a fundamental element of their identity and daily activities (Delle & Segaro, 2023). The country's religious composition is diverse, with Orthodox Christianity comprising 44% of the population, Islam 31%, and Evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity 23%, while the remaining 5% includes Roman Catholics, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, and practitioners of indigenous religions (Delle & Segaro, 2023; United States Department of State, 2022).

Spirituality in Ethiopia, as in many African societies, is closely intertwined with religious faith and is embedded in values, behaviors, and decision-making processes that influence various domains of life, including business and entrepreneurship (Balcomb et al., 2017; Namatovu et al., 2018; Paris, 1995).

Prior research indicates that religious beliefs can serve as a significant source of entrepreneurial motivation, resilience, and resource mobilization, particularly in resource-constrained contexts (Namatovu et al., 2018; Reid, Roumpi, & O'Leary-Kelly, 2015). Similar patterns have been documented in other African contexts, such as Ghana, where spirituality functions as both a coping mechanism and an enabler of entrepreneurial perseverance (Reid et al., 2015). In Ethiopia, spirituality is not only a psychological resource that fosters resilience but also a strategic asset that shapes business decisions, opportunity recognition, and long-term sustainability (Parboteeah et al., 2015; Reid et al., 2015).

This study focuses on women entrepreneurs in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital and economic center, where rapid urbanization, evolving market opportunities, and entrenched socio-cultural norms shape entrepreneurial engagement. Women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia face distinct challenges, including domestic and caregiving responsibilities that constrain their mobility and ability to access financial resources necessary for business expansion (Hundera, 2014; Markowska & Abebe, 2021). Empirical evidence suggests that businesses operated by women are 2.52 times more likely to fail than those owned by men, highlighting structural barriers that disproportionately affect female entrepreneurs (Bekele & Worku, 2008).

Moreover, multiple shocks since 2018—including persistent droughts, floods, locust infestations, and conflict—have affected nearly all households across the country, with approximately 91% of the population experiencing at least one of these crises or a combination of them (World Bank, 2024). These compounded challenges have further intensified the vulnerabilities faced by women entrepreneurs, making adaptive strategies not only relevant but essential for business survival. Despite these constraints, the role of spirituality in shaping women's entrepreneurial strategies, resource utilization, and resilience remains insufficiently explored.

2.3 Methodology

Research Approach and Data Collection

We employed a qualitative research design that allows for a rich and nuanced understanding of 'the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it' (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118), as well as a deeper exploration of how women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained contexts use spiritual resources and spiritual bricolage to support their entrepreneurial journey (Dana and Dana, 2005; Van Burg et al., 2022).

Our initial aim was to explore how women entrepreneurs who are also mothers navigate the tensions between their business and family lives, in a context characterized by resource scarcity. We focused on mothers because they are likely to experience heightened resource challenges and additional social constraints due to cultural expectations around caregiving, making their entrepreneurial journeys particularly salient for studying resource bricolage in a context of scarcity. Interestingly, many of the women entrepreneurs we spoke to considered spirituality a very important resource, to the extent that some of them even changed their religious affiliation. Despite these changes, they demonstrated persistence and resilience, maintaining their entrepreneurial engagement under challenging conditions. These observations highlighted the pivotal role of spirituality in sustaining their endeavors, prompting us to refine our research focus toward understanding how women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments use spiritual resources and how spiritual bricolage supports women's entrepreneurial engagement.

To select our participants, we adopted a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling strategies (Patton, 2002; Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Our inclusion criteria required participants to be mothers actively engaged in running a business in Addis Ababa with at least one year of entrepreneurial experience. No restrictions were placed on age, number of children, ethnicity, or religion, and women who became entrepreneurs either before or after motherhood were eligible. We recruited the initial 9 participants through the first author's network. Additional participants (n = 16) were recruited either from lists provided by organizations supporting women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia, including the Ethiopian Women's Chamber of Commerce, the Center for Accelerated Women's Economic Empowerment (CAWEE), and the Ethiopian Women's Trade Association or via snowballing. We continued our data collection until we achieved data saturation. This was achieved after approximately 22 interviews, when no new codes, themes, or concepts emerged from participants' narratives. This suggested that further data collection would likely not provide additional insights.

In total, our sample consists of 25 women entrepreneurs in Addis Ababa who were actively managing their businesses during the data collection period. Participants represented diverse sectors, including hospitality, manufacturing, beauty, fashion, agro-processing, construction, and import–export, and varied in age, family size, educational background, and entrepreneurial experience (see Table 1). The ages of the participants ranged from 23 to 65 years; most were married, while others were divorced or widowed, with a corresponding number having between one and eight children. While many had completed secondary education, several held vocational or higher educational qualifications relevant to their business sectors. Approximately two-thirds had prior employment experience, whereas others transitioned directly from homemaking or informal work. A cross-section of participants also reported engaging with or reinterpreting spiritual practices to navigate resource constraints and uncertainty, a topic we unpack further in the findings.

We adopted a life-story interview approach to generate rich, retrospective longitudinal qualitative data (Atkinson, 1998; McAdams et al., 2009). This method enables participants to narrate their experiences in their own words and highlight events and decisions they considered pivotal in shaping their entrepreneurial trajectories. Life-story interviews are particularly suited for exploring entrepreneurial cognition, as they integrate past experiences with present interpretations and future aspirations (Ganzin, Islam, & Suddaby, 2020; Krueger, 2003). Simply put, this method provides a qualitative framework for exploring how individuals attribute meaning and purpose to their lives by constructing and reflecting on their evolving self-narratives (McAdams, 2001, p. 100).

All interviews were conducted in Amharic, the native language of the participants. The first author conducted the interviews in person at locations chosen by the participants, creating a comfortable environment for open discussions about their motivations, challenges, opportunities, and future aspirations. Interviews lasted an average of one hour and twenty-one minutes. Most participants were interviewed twice, and two participants were interviewed three times due to the depth and complexity of their stories, resulting in a total of 52 interviews conducted between 2021 and 2022, which yielded 1,672 minutes of recorded data. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim and translated into English by professional transcribers. To ensure quality, the transcripts were reviewed by the bilingual co-author, who verified that the meanings were retained. This multi-step process helped to preserve the integrity of participants' voices while enhancing the credibility of the findings.

Table 1: Participants' Information

Name	Age	Marital Status	Children	Venture	Founding Year	Employment Background
Bizunesh	55	Married	6	Hotel	1993	No employment background
Tsehay	53	Married	4	House Renting	2006	Employed
Fatuma	30	Married	3	Car oil shop	2009	No employment background
Meron	50	Widow	5	Supermarket	1999	Employed
Mulu	46	Married	3	Home-made Juice, fruit & Vegetable supplier	2003	Employed
Emnet	38	Married	2	Beauty Salon	2011	Employed
Danawit	47	Married	3	Furniture	2007	Employed
Rebika	40	Married	3	Fashion college, custom-made designing, garment, and tele-birr business	2004	Employed
Marta	64	Married	2	Agro-Industry/Jam Factory	2008	Employed
Heywot	48	Married	3	Car oil shop	1994	Employed
Neziza	64	Widow	8	Restaurant	1989	No employment background
Setina	23	Married	2	Muslim Women's Boutique	2017	No employment background
Samira	26	Married	1	Cosmetics	2018	Employed
Tsige	33	Married	3	Construction	2014	Employed
Enqu	46	Divorce	3	Event Organizer and rental services for different events	1994	Employed
Mariyam	43	Married	4	Event organizer and Travel Service	2011	Employed
Azalech	55	Widow	4	Import different products from Dubai	2003	No employment background
Kemem	65	Married	5	All local spice and Injera	1990	Employed
Aberash	48	Widow	4	Hotel, construction business, and covid-disinfection cleaning service	1987	Employed

Table 1. (Continued).

Tagesech	54	Married	3	Women and children wearing boutique	2001	Employed
Shetaye	38	Divorce	2	Min-supermarket	2020	Employed
Konjit	39	Divorce	3	Leather Products manufacturing	2017	Employed
Tibeb	31	Married	3	Home Decor (online business)	2018	Employed
Wesane	33	Married	1	Importing computers & accessories, Printing, promotion, and Import	2012	Employed
Lidya	43	Divorce	1	Custom clearing agent	2009	Employed

Data analysis

To analyze our data, we employed the Gioia method (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013), which enables inductive systematic identification of first-order concepts, second-order themes, and overarching aggregate dimensions. Analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection and involved iterative interpretation, cross-case comparison, and reflexivity.

We began by familiarizing ourselves with the data through repeated readings of transcripts and notes (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). Open coding was first conducted to identify first-order concepts from participants' narratives, ensuring that their voices and lived experiences remained central. The coding process focused on identifying meaningful snippets of data, finding suitable descriptions of them, and grouping them based on similarity, providing a backbone for the emerging data structure (see Figure 1). These concepts were then grouped into more abstract second-order themes that illustrated the spiritual bricolage and entrepreneurial reframing process—for example, spiritual resources at hand, repurposing, recombining, enabling, guiding, boosting—and eventually synthesized into aggregate dimensions that explained broader resource mobilization and adaptation processes. This systematic coding process enhanced the transparency and rigor of our analysis, demonstrating a clear progression from raw data (participants' lived experiences) to theoretical insights (Gehman et al., 2018; Tracy, 2010).

We focused on identifying how participants accessed, assessed, and redeployed a wide range of resources—including intangible and spiritual resources—as part of their entrepreneurial bricolage and outcomes of the process. Coding was conducted independently by the authors

and subsequently discussed to reach a consensus, ensuring the reliability and credibility of the interpretation. Examples of resources referenced in narratives include “faith as a source of confidence,” “networks formed through religious community,” and interpretations of “God’s guidance” as a form of cognitive support in decision-making. These were analyzed in connection with broader resource mobilization efforts, such as repurposing household items for business use or leveraging personal relationships for credit or supply access.

Researcher reflexivity and positionality were integral throughout the analysis to ensure that interpretations remained data-driven rather than influenced by theoretical preconceptions or personal biases (Tracy, 2010). The research team consisted of Ethiopian and European scholars. The Ethiopian researchers provided cultural and linguistic sensitivity, while the European researchers offered analytical distance and theoretical framing. Such a composition assured integration of both insider and outsider perspectives. Regular meetings were held to review interpretations, and detailed analytical memos were maintained to document the decision-making process. The co-author, who was not directly involved in coding, also reviewed themes to provide critical feedback and enhance the analytic rigor. This collaborative and reflexive approach enriched the trustworthiness and depth of the findings, ensuring alignment with best practices in qualitative research and entrepreneurship scholarship. As an author team, we also reflected on our positionality as women researchers and spiritual beings, and we discussed our emerging findings in light of these positionalities.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully adhered to throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were briefed on the study’s objectives, confidentiality protocols, and the voluntary nature of their participation. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were used and identifying details were either omitted or altered. Given the sensitive nature of some discussions, particular care was taken to ensure that participants felt comfortable and safe in sharing their experiences.

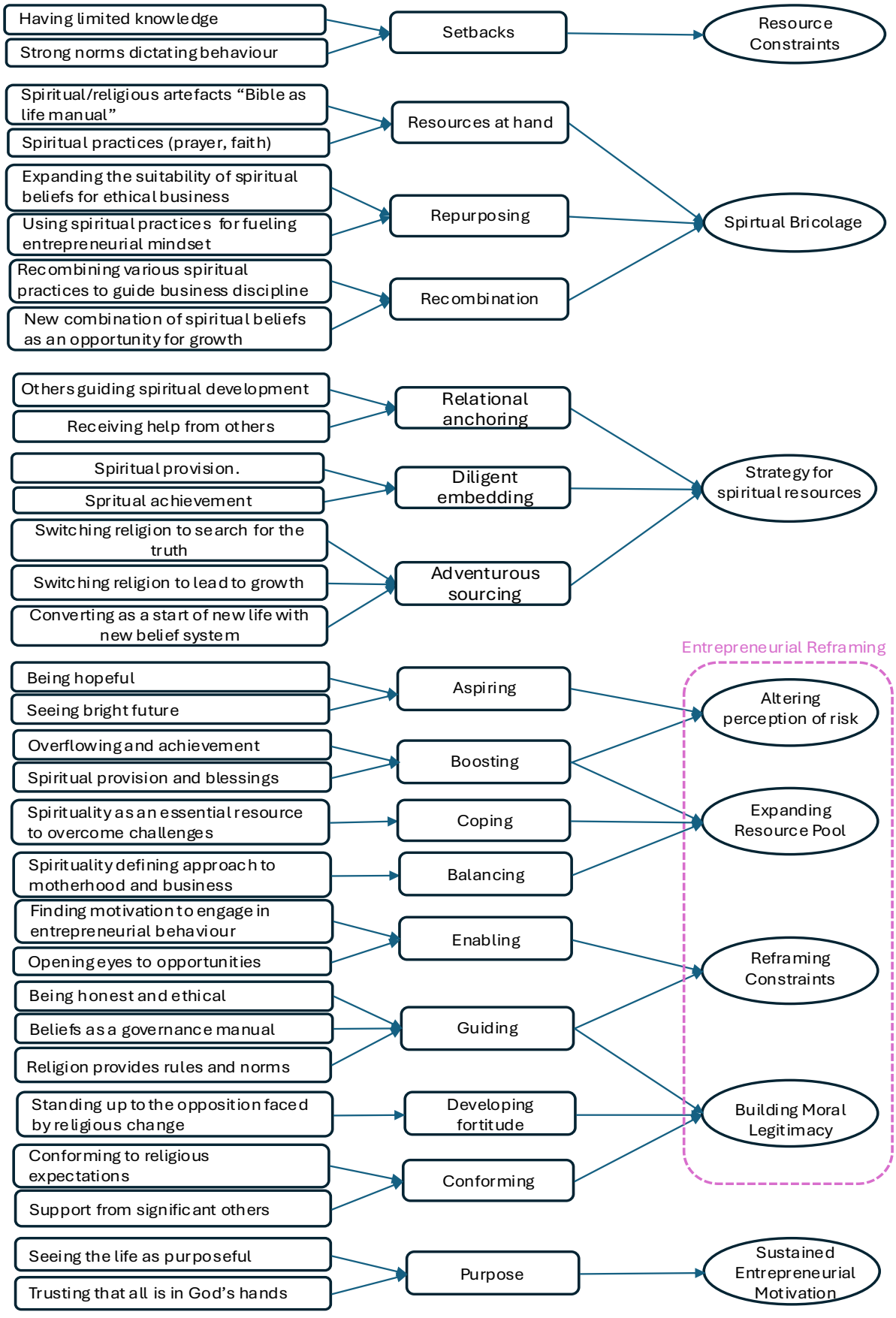


Figure 1: Data structure.

2.4 Findings

Our material presents several interesting findings. First, we contextualize our research setting, and we then demonstrate how women entrepreneurs utilize spiritual resources, engaging in spiritual bricolage to address the experienced resource constraints. We then discuss the three spiritual bricolage strategies that they utilize to approach spiritual resources. Finally, we focus on the outcomes of their bricolage, entrepreneurial reframing (See Appendix 1), and sustained entrepreneurial motivation. In doing so, we address our two research questions: *How do women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments, such as Ethiopia, use spiritual resources? And how does spiritual bricolage support women's entrepreneurial engagement in a resource-constrained environment?*

Resource constraints

Navigating the entrepreneurial space is challenging; it is even more difficult in resource-scarce environments with strong cultural norms that dictate women's behavior. Sharing their stories with us, our participants paint a picture of themselves as strong and resilient women entrepreneurs with an entrepreneurial mindset, solid morality, and deep commitment to values and spirituality. Despite many obstacles, our participants continue to actively manage their resources, juggling and 'making do', while pursuing their entrepreneurial endeavors and remaining hopeful (Emnet); some even consider themselves and their businesses blessed (Rebika, Mulu). They rely on available spiritual resources, such as faith and prayer, to find ways to overcome resource scarcity and thrive in their environment. For example, Konjit reflects:

> *Perseverance and faith have been my pillars of strength. I deeply believe in a higher power that guides and sustains me through life's difficulties. My spiritual identity is a core part of who I am, helping me maintain hope and resilience during tough times. Instead of dwelling on problems, I focus on prayer, reflection, and proactive solutions….*

This positive approach is also evident in other stories our participants share with us. They are void of complaints; they acknowledge the situation without dwelling on the scarcity of resources and challenges encountered. Instead, the participants emphasize the positive outlook and how they deal with the situation. They present themselves as capable entrepreneurs, skillful bricoleurs, caring mothers, and spiritual individuals.

Spiritual bricolage in resource-constrained contexts

Our material shows that out of the 25 women participating in our research, only six remained with the original business idea (Samira, Mariyam, Shetaye, Konjit, Marta, and Lidya), the remaining 19 have adapted their business activities to the changing conditions on the market, to changing personal situations, some of them multiple times. We observed that our participants consistently focused on the liquidity and profitability of their businesses, controlling the resources at their disposal. For example, Tagesech noted that when the business she started did not deliver in terms of profitability, she quickly decided to close it down to avoid losing the resources involved in the venture. *I took an importing license but returned it since it was not profitable.* The entrepreneurs' pragmatic approach to business goals and resources was evident in their willingness to close unprofitable ventures and pivot towards starting new or concurrent businesses. Also, Tsige mentioned that "*the income was not satisfactory as the time we spent on the business and the income we got was not balanced*". It is evident from the interviews that as soon as participants observe that the business is not going well, that their resources are at risk, they pivot (Bizunesh, Fatuma, Meron), diversify (Enqu, Rebika, Wesane, Emnet), and often run multiple businesses simultaneously (Neziza, Mulu). This means that they actively manage the resources they have control over. For example, Mulu started with the sewing business. A few years later, she also entered the construction business due to a serendipitous encounter that provided her entry into the industry. She began importing products from Dubai and, most recently, started selling vegetables and fruits, while closing both her sewing business and importing business. This allowed her to 'free' resources engaged in one business and use them to start another one. Simply put, the scarcity that they experience makes them very agile. These women can tell at any moment how their business is faring and how much money they have, because they cannot afford to waste or lose any resources.

In trying to understand what drives these pursuits, our participants explain that the necessity to survive and 'save' the resources causes them to be constantly aware of and rely on the repertoire of resources they have; it forces some of them to (re)combine and repurpose resources. In their efforts, they actively mobilize and utilize all the resources at their disposal, including their spiritual resources, for entrepreneurial action. Spirituality is an intangible resource that can be used in versatile ways. In the following, we explore how women entrepreneurs engage in bricolage, that is they rely on a repertoire of resources (resources at hand), repurpose (make do) and recombine resources, particularly the spiritual ones.

Spiritual resources at hand

Our participants rely on the various resources to which they have access. Among these, spirituality emerges as a significant and enduring source. Drawing from their spiritual repertoire, the entrepreneurs actively engage in beliefs and practices that help them navigate challenges, make decisions, and sustain both their personal and professional lives. For example, Danawit sees '*The Bible' as her 'life manual'.* Also, Bizunesh talks about spirituality as a resource that gives her 'strength', 'God's word' as a source of 'resilience and grace', and finally her 'faith' as a source of 'wisdom and balance'. She sees spirituality as the underlying critical resource that helps her cope with and enjoy every day. Simply put, prayer, scripture, faith, or vision represent spiritual practices that can be seen as spiritual resources available to women entrepreneurs from our study, guiding their cognitive processes and mindset, helping them redefine constraints or how they perceive risk.

> *As a Christian, I believe that having a strong spiritual foundation is essential, as both personal and business life come with many challenges. My spirituality gives me the strength to overcome obstacles, making life's difficulties more manageable. God's word provides me with resilience and grace, allowing me to navigate every challenge I encounter. I rely on my faith for wisdom and balance, helping me juggle both motherhood and entrepreneurship. My spiritual life shapes my perspective, enabling me to approach hardships with a sense of ease and simplicity … (Bizunesh)*

Furthermore, the development of a set of spiritual practices and beliefs occurs over time, reflecting the accumulation of experiences. The participants draw on their existing spiritual toolkit as needed, relying on these practices and beliefs to address challenges and find solutions in new ways. See Appendix 2 for five profile stories of our participants showing their spiritual journey over time. For example, Meron talks about how her spirituality (prayer and faith) has played a role in supporting both her business and her role as a mother. She is using her established spiritual practice (prayer) as part of her ongoing resources at hand to help balance her responsibilities.

> *Being a spiritual person has greatly supported my business, giving me the strength to overcome the challenges I've faced. I believe my success is rooted in the help I've received from the spiritual world. I make prayer a priority and trust that it helps me run my business more effectively as a spiritual woman. My spirituality has played a significant role in how I raise my children, instilling strong values in them as we*

> *regularly pray together. Despite the demands of running a business, I have been able to manage both responsibilities by seeking strength from God through prayer.* (Meron)

Similarly, Danawit discusses how her religion provides her with the wisdom necessary for her various roles. Her spiritual practices, which include teachings from the Bible, are part of her spiritual repertoire, and she applies them across multiple aspects of her life, including business, motherhood, and marriage. Finally, Rebika explains that she regularly seeks guidance through prayer and relies on her established faith practices. She reflects on how her spiritual resources have been a valuable tool for navigating life and business challenges, and how, when perceived as insufficient at some point in her life, she transformed her spiritual beliefs to provide her with new insights and renewed strength.

> *One day, during a very low point in my life, everything in my business seemed to be falling apart. While sitting in my office, I had a vision… I saw a hand reaching out to me, lifting me up. Through tears, I remember hearing a voice say, 'Follow the light.' This experience marked a turning point in my life. …At that time, my business was in chaos, and I felt trapped, but God helped me understand who He is. This experience marked a turning point in my life. Choosing to believe in Jesus and change my religion was a transformative decision. When I start any business, I always seek direction from God, and this guidance has been instrumental in my success … For me, the best way to overcome any challenge is through a close fellowship with God. By consistently praying and surrendering each day to Him, even the most overwhelming challenges become manageable.* (Rebika)

Our material shows that spirituality influences their belief systems, self-perception, and actions, thereby shaping how they interpret their experiences and respond to challenges. Many participants emphasized the centrality of spirituality in their lives. For instance, Rebika described spirituality as "*my life and my everything*," while Aberash asserted that she is "*spiritually strong*." Similarly, Konjit expressed her belief in a "*supernatural power within me, which is my spiritual identity*," and Marta highlighted that "*being spiritual is important in both motherhood and business.*" These statements demonstrate how spirituality serves as a vital personal resource for perseverance, resilience, informed decision-making, and discovering purpose in life. Shitaye reinforced this perspective, stating, "*I often think that there is a lot to gain from being spiritual*."

The stories of our participants reveal a significant reliance on spirituality when confronting challenges, pursuing opportunities, accessing resources, and making decisions. While spirituality is often viewed as a personal journey and serves as a critical resource for many, some participants emphasized its role as a primary source of support for entrepreneurial action; some went so far as to change their religion to access new spiritual resources, while still others remain rather conservative in how they use their spiritual resources. Next, we focus on how women entrepreneurs use spiritual resources to overcome the challenges and solve new problems.

Spiritual repurposing

Women entrepreneurs from our study utilize spiritual resources through repurposing, which involves finding new uses for existing resources to solve their problems. This readaptation of spiritual resources to guide and serve in entrepreneurial contexts has been particularly evident among participants for whom spirituality is a highly valuable resource. They utilize repurposing to inform business decisions and promote ethical practices. For example, Fatuma explains that: *"My religion has helped me to get in line—not to take loans with interest and not sell products by lying. …It has a lot of roles in shaping my business to be ethical."* Similarly, Marta reflects that there is a close relationship between her spirituality and how she runs her business and makes decisions.

> *My spiritual life has a significant role in my business because it made me view people equally. It made me empathetic toward people. And on the product that I manufacture, it has an impact. I will not do something that I don't want to eat.* (Marta)

In other words, in repurposing**,** individuals adapt their existing spiritual practices or beliefs to serve a new purpose, such as navigating business or entrepreneurial challenges. This is exemplified by Emnet who relies on religion to provide hope and energy for her daily life and business, indicating that she draws on her spiritual practices (such as prayer) to fuel her entrepreneurial mindset and motivation. This reflects repurposing her spiritual life to navigate business challenges.

> *For me, religion is mandatory for every area of my life, which gives me hope and energy to live… Every day, I wake up early and pray and start my day with God to have hope and faith and a bright future. It's just faith and hope that keeps me going.* (Emnet)

Also, Mulu discusses how her spiritual life has had a profound effect on her personal and business discipline, ensuring she acts with integrity. She has repurposed her spiritual values, holding herself accountable in both her personal and professional life. Mulu says:

> *For me, faith is important. A mother with faith gets everything she wants in life … My spiritual life has had an impact and kept me disciplined. It makes me accountable for my actions. It makes me a mannered person, and I don't want to do wrong things in any way.*

Our participants explain how their faith and spirituality shape their business. For example, Fatuma emphasizes how her religious principles inform her ethical business practices, such as avoiding interest-based loans and dishonest sales practices. She has extended the validity of her religious values beyond her private life to ensure the ethical conduct of her business. Additionally, Marta explains how her spiritual life influences her business by enabling her to view people equally and ensuring that the products she manufactures align with her values. This demonstrates how she utilizes her spiritual life to inform her business decisions, particularly in matters of ethical consideration. Danawit directly relates her business decisions to her religious beliefs, actively seeking God's guidance before taking any business steps. This shows how her faith is repurposed to ensure that her business aligns with her spiritual values, focusing on truth and honesty. She claims that:

> *My business is directly related to my religion. My top priority is following God's word … Before we take any step in our business and life, we ask God for His will … I want to do business in a truthful and honest way, though it is challenging.* (Danawit)

Repurposing is thus related to women entrepreneurs seeing more tangible value in their spirituality, who find ways for their spirituality to shape and give direction to their entrepreneurial pursuits. Next, we focus on how women combine resources to solve new problems.

Spiritual creative recombination

The process of recombining spiritual resources involved integrating diverse spiritual traditions and personal experiences, generating novel perspectives that influenced both the personal lives and business activities of women entrepreneurs.

Notably, participants employing recombination often recognized the inherent value of spirituality. When confronted with challenges or obstacles that revealed perceived limitations or insufficiencies in their existing spiritual framework, they actively sought out additional spiritual resources. These newly acquired resources were then integrated or synthesized with their original ones, addressing the perceived gaps.

For instance, one participant, Mulu, integrated elements from her Orthodox Christian background with Protestant beliefs. She leveraged this spiritual resource synthesis to inform her business discipline and guide her pursuit of success. This deliberate combination of spiritual principles directly shaped her entrepreneurial actions. Similarly, Tsehay merged the spiritual resources gained from her Orthodox with Protestant. This spiritual resource integration enabled her to reframe business challenges, such as the loss of customers, as opportunities for growth, thereby illustrating the practical application of recombined spiritual elements within her venture. She reflects on the impact her conversion from Orthodox to Protestant had on her and her business:

> *My conversion initially hurt my business, as many of my customers, who were Orthodox followers, stopped visiting my café. However, I viewed this as an opportunity for growth and relocated my business, eventually gaining more customers in a new area.* (Tsehay).

The process of recombination entails synthesizing different spiritual practices or beliefs, frequently drawn from disparate or contrasting traditions, thereby establishing a personalized spiritual framework to guide life and entrepreneurial activities. For instance, Bizunesh integrated spiritual resources originating from her Muslim background, encompassing specific beliefs and personal experiences, with resources later derived from her engagement with Christianity.

> *I was raised in a Muslim family but converted to Protestant after marriage. This decision was influenced by an incident where my first child fell seriously ill. His recovery, which felt miraculous, led me to seek spiritual guidance in a church. This marked the beginning of my Christian journey. Although I initially faced opposition from my family, my faith brought positive changes in all aspects of my life. I converted to the Protestant faith in 2004, transitioning from Islam… Changing my religion was a personal choice, and I'm happy with my spiritual path… Spirituality has been a cornerstone of my life, helping me navigate personal and professional challenges. (Bizunesh)*

To summarize, we observed women entrepreneurs employing strategies that involve reliance on a repertoire of resources, their repurposing, and their recombination for the benefit of their ventures. These elements taken together form the core of spiritual bricolage. Building on this, the following section examines the three approaches through which these entrepreneurs leverage spiritual bricolage to support their entrepreneurial engagements.

Three strategies for using spiritual bricolage

We identify three strategies that our participants use when engaging in spiritual bricolage: adventurous sourcing, diligent embedding, and relational anchoring. These three strategies are related to how entrepreneurs relate to spiritual resources. While those engaging in adventurous sourcing are open to searching for new spiritual resources outside the current pool of resources, those who engage in diligent embedding carefully rely on their existing spiritual resources. Finally, those engaging in relational anchoring draw spiritual resources from external sources, often significant others in their close networks.

Relational anchoring

Entrepreneurs who choose this strategy tend to depend on others for guidance and instructions in their spiritual growth. These individuals may not actively nurture their own spirituality independently, resulting in a limited collection of spiritual resources and a perception of them as less valuable. Their spiritual growth primarily focuses on *navigating challenges* and *meeting* the expectations of significant others to remain connected to their spiritual or religious group and access group-level resources, such as those provided by family or the local community, through osmosis. Regarding overcoming challenges, for example, one of the women participants stated:

> *…my mother plays a role in guiding me to wear Hijab, to live according to what the religion expects from me, and so on…getting some knowledge in the Islamic religion helps me to be still and have my own business…When I shifted my business, I had a challenge with finance but with the help of my husband and my husband's family, I passed that challenge. (Setina)*

Individuals who adopted this strategy could be described as possessing relatively low levels of spirituality, but who purposefully perceive that adhering to the religious faith of others with higher levels of spirituality can help them overcome entrepreneurial challenges. One of the women explained how significant others contributed to her spirituality:

> *Faith plays a significant role in my life. I was raised Catholic, and my parents emphasized the importance of prayer and reading the Bible. Now, inspired by my children's Protestant faith, I am considering converting. (Tagesech)*

Relational anchoring primarily involves making sense of, accessing and leveraging group-level spiritual resources to support their entrepreneurial endeavors.

Diligent embedding

Entrepreneurs who have engaged in diligent embedding have carefully woven together heterogeneous spiritual resources into a consistent, lived framework that feels authentic and sustainable. Their bricolage strategy exhibited a consistent and deepening engagement with spirituality, drawing upon resources from their existing religious affiliations, demonstrating a strong commitment to their current faith. Deepening their spirituality enabled them to reinforce adherence to religious norms and expectations, provide moral guidance, facilitate the overcoming of challenges, and contribute to overall success in life and business. Women entrepreneurs who use this strategy adeptly balance the demands of motherhood, family, and business, demonstrating their ability to manage multiple roles. For example, regarding balancing, one participant stated:

> *When I became a mother and engaged in business, there were many pressures for me, in addition to my children, my mother was sick … which puts a lot of pressure on my work, …. I was able to balance everything because God is giving me the wisdom to do everything. (Shetaye)*

Adventurous Sourcing

At the bottom of the adventurous sourcing lies the experience of spiritual emptiness and depletion from spiritual resources, combined with a longing to refill the spiritual reservoir with new spiritual beliefs. To overcome this emptiness, our participants turned to alternative religions and beliefs that were present around them. Consequently, in the acquisition process of new spiritual beliefs and resources, they changed their religious affiliations. Nine out of 25 participants engaged in adventurous sourcing. Their subsequent spiritual and entrepreneurial journey was characterized by feelings of abundance and blessedness, which they attributed to their newly acquired spiritual resources.

These participants reported that spirituality fostered a sense of hope, resulting in optimism about their business and life journeys. Spirituality also enabled them to initiate or expand their

businesses by facilitating the identification and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities. However, some of these participants experienced opposition from their family or community upon changing their religion, resulting in a temporary loss of social capital. While this can be understood as a short-term cost of religious conversion, the women emphasized that these challenges gradually diminished as their new religious identity became more accepted. Over time, this transition often enabled them to flourish both personally and entrepreneurially. Notably, some participants even faced resistance from customers, illustrating how community-level opposition could impact their businesses. On the positive side, such adversity also contributed to the development of inner strength, fostered fortitude, and empowered them to navigate broader challenges with confidence and resilience. As one participant shared:

> *My initial business faced a decline as customers gradually ceased patronizing it due to their disappointment over my change in religion…after I changed my religion, I saw God's provision in my life, and I understood that I am getting all the blessings from Him. (Tsehay).*

Another participant stated: *"I believe changing my religion helps me to start my business in a way that helps me to do business progressively." (Wubit).*

In conclusion, when participants' existing spiritual resources proved insufficient, they actively sought alternative spiritual pathways. This "search for truth" often involved converting to a different religion, drawing on belief systems prevalent in their social environment. Essentially, they drew on new spiritual sources to replenish their depleted spiritual reserves. Spiritual bricolage combined with their adventurous sourcing thus enabled these women entrepreneurs to make sense of and construct a coherent framework that integrated their spiritual beliefs with their entrepreneurial practices.

Summing up, the relation to participants' spirituality informs their ways of acting, such that those using relational anchoring rely on their current spiritual resources and those provided to them in the local community, those using diligent embedding deepen their spirituality, relying even more on the currently possessed resources, while those applying adventurous sourcing search and access new spiritual resources via new religious affiliations. Next, we focus on the outcomes of spiritual bricolage and the strategies used.

Entrepreneurial Reframing

The women entrepreneurs we interviewed have demonstrated themselves to be agents of their spiritual resources, actively engaging in spiritual bricolage, as evidenced above. Exploring how their spiritual bricolage supports them in their entrepreneurial activity, we identified entrepreneurial reframing as a mechanism of spiritual bricolage that contributes to women entrepreneurs developing a sense of sustained entrepreneurial motivation. Entrepreneurial reframing includes four dimensions: altering how they perceive business risks, expanding the resource pool, reframing constraints, and (re)building moral legitimacy. We describe them in detail below.

Altering the perception of risk

Many participants described spirituality not just as a source of strength or comfort but as an essential resource that nurtures their entrepreneurial dreams and broadens their sense of possibility. This greater sense of possibility leads to a changed view of risk, helping them develop a more positive outlook. For these women, spirituality is deeply aspirational, inspiring them to look beyond immediate survival and pursue ventures aligned with purpose, meaning, and service. Their stories show that hopes are closely linked to spiritual beliefs, which influence how they set their goals and see success. Bizunesh exemplifies this aspirational attitude, saying: "*I know I'm doing fine now, and I can meet my family's needs, but I don't feel I've reached where I want to be. I carry a big dream with me. For me, holding on to hope and aiming high never slows me down—it keeps me moving forward.*" Her words highlight how her hope and ambition, rooted in her spirituality, serve as resources that shape her perspective on risks and propel her forward.

The accounts given by our participants illustrate that spiritual bricolage is about dreaming beyond current constraints while "making do" with the available resources at hand, given a more positive approach to risks. The women entrepreneurs draw on spirituality to explore alternatives, pursue personal and collective goals, and engage in meaningful ventures. Their aspirations, whether centered on business expansion, social impact, or spiritual growth, are not separate from their spirituality; they are founded in it.

Following the launch of their ventures and the commencement of their entrepreneurial journeys, spirituality continued to exert a significant influence on business development. Those who engaged in adventurous sourcing and changed their religion in the process talk about the

significant boost they received and how it altered their perspective. For example, Mulu says, *"After I changed my religion, I was able to be content and hopeful in life (...) I got answers and know where I am going; I know my destination."* She explains that she became more grounded and less stressed, that she had a clear purpose. Similarly, Bizunesh explains that spirituality plays a significant role in her business success. By embedding her behaviour in her spirituality, she believes that God is taking care of her and her business. She asserts, *"If we give priority to God and work hard, we can be successful in our business*."

Furthermore, the participants described experiencing a "sense of overflowing," a feeling that transcended mere well-being, contentment, and hopefulness. Bizunesh states that "…*the day I decided to change my religion is the day I started a new life. After that, the door of blessing started to open*." This profound sense of overflowing, undergirded by external religious principles and internal spiritual experiences, was reported by both participants who engaged in adventurous sourcing and those who used diligent embedding and deepened their existing spiritual practices. Though their external environment still posed challenges and was characterized by constraints, these women experienced abundance overflowing from their spiritual wellspring. For example, Rebika asserted that: "*I never had any challenge in my business because of changing my religion rather it was a blessing."* Similarly, Tsehay notes that: *"…after I changed my religion, I saw God's provision in my life, and I understood that I am getting all the blessings from Him."* In this context, spiritual bricolage can be understood as a process leading to a "sense of overflowing," which boosts the confidence of the women entrepreneurs and provides them with a sense of achievement and new altered perspective on risk. Hence, engaging in spiritual bricolage facilitates a shift in perspective on risk. It also facilitates a perception of an expanding repertoire of resources available to the entrepreneur, which we describe next.

Expanding the resource pool

Describing their experiences and resilience in the face of the complexities and challenges inherent in business life, women entrepreneurs in our study view spirituality as a crucial source of strength and adaptation, enabling them to navigate challenges effectively. They can address these challenges effectively because spirituality expands the resources available to them. More specifically, entrepreneurs derive courage and adaptation—new cognitive resources and capabilities—from their spiritual life. They emphasize the role of spirituality in fostering acceptance and gratitude, which provides emotional relief and enhances problem-solving

capabilities by promoting a positive outlook. Our data shows that spiritual resources are employed to help face and surmount the hurdles encountered in their entrepreneurial practice. For example, entrepreneurs seek divine intervention through prayer for guidance and patience in handling conflicts or challenges presented by others. This spiritual reliance not only offers emotional support but also hope and trust in discovering solutions to complex issues, adding to the repertoire of resources available to them. Additionally, spiritual resources serve as a tool for managing interpersonal relationships within the workplace. Simply put, spirituality facilitates wider access to other resources.

Many of our participants emphasized how their spiritual resources have helped them find a way to balance their responsibilities and cope with the work they need to do by expanding the pool of resources available to them. Balancing often requires or even implies the effort to conform to the multiple roles and expectations placed on women, especially when balancing personal, spiritual, and professional responsibilities. Surprisingly, the framing expressed as *"Business is directly related to religion*" and "*Source of Wisdom*" suggests that religion and spirituality provide additional resources enabling adhering to ethical standards and integrating religious values into business practices. Conversely, "*Making a profit is not a priority*" suggests a departure from typical business norms, where prioritizing spiritual and ethical values over financial gain is emphasized. This is illustrated by Danawit, who says, "*My religion has made me follow the right path based on the word of God. I have learned that I must trust in God. My religion has given me the wisdom to be a mother, businessperson, and wife.*" The received wisdom is part of this extended pool of resources available to the women entrepreneurs.

Our participants clearly see the intertwined relationship between their spirituality, family life as mothers, and their businesses. Many of them discuss the positive experience of finding a balance between their spirituality and other aspects of their lives. Marta discusses the importance of balance in achieving well-being. She states, "*I believe being spiritual is important in motherhood and business…Thus, I believe spirituality plays a role in every area of my life- in my job, motherhood, and business".* Similarly, Konjit stressed that *"I cannot separate from being spiritual where I got help while balancing my motherhood and business roles."* In other words, our participants view spirituality as helping them manage and recombine resources so that the different areas of their lives can coexist and be brought into balance. This is exemplified by Mulu*:*

> *…my business affects my spiritual life because the business takes more time, and this is a challenge since spiritual life needs its own time. At the same time, business needs its own time too. Balancing is a skill (Mulu)*

Overall, engaging in spiritual bricolage results in more than just a belief system; it expands the resources available to entrepreneurs and influences their approach to business challenges and entrepreneurial actions. Through spiritual practices such as prayer and gratitude, these entrepreneurs cultivate a sense of resourcefulness. Next, we focus on how engaging in spiritual bricolage can result in reframing constraints.

Reframing constraints

Spirituality, for many of our participants, serves as a vital moral compass that guides their ethical decision-making in business practices. Participants highlighted how their spiritual beliefs shape their entrepreneurial actions, ensuring they align with the ethical principles of their respective religions. For instance, Rebika described her spiritual foundation as an essential guide, stating, *"The word of God is like food to my soul, and it governs my life, teaching me to forgive and be good."* For her, spirituality serves as a framework that not only dictates personal conduct but also guides her approach to business, emphasizing compassion and righteousness. Similarly, engaging in spiritual bricolage fostered core values such as honesty, discipline, accountability, and integrity in the participants' business practices. Danawit expressed the centrality of honesty and integrity in her entrepreneurial journey, acknowledging that while challenging, these values are non-negotiable for her. As she stated, *"I want to do business with integrity and in an honest way. Though it is challenging, by God's grace, we do our best."* Her words underscore how her spiritual bricolage informs her ethical decision-making in her business, even in the face of challenges.

For other participants, spiritual bricolage is more than a set of moral guidelines—it is seen as a governing manual that directs their actions and shapes the way they manage and develop their businesses. As Fatuma explained, *"My religion teaches me how to behave in life, and how to approach my business. It gives me the direction I need to develop my work."* This sentiment highlights how spiritual bricolage operates as a dynamic process, where spirituality serves not only as a source of ethical guidance but also as a tool for informed strategic business decisions. In this way, spiritual bricolage acts as a foundation for maintaining moral integrity in both personal and professional domains.

Some of our participants discussed 'searching for truth' and attempting to make sense of their personal and professional lives. These women entrepreneurs turned to spiritual resources to cope with life's challenges but discovered that their spiritual resources at hand were depleted. This spiritual void led them to seek alternative belief systems within their immediate environment to "make sense" of circumstances. Engaging in spiritual bricolage, these women entrepreneurs creatively adapted and recombined existing resources to meet their evolving needs. This exploration, sometimes leading them to a sense of epiphany, motivated them to change their religion. For instance, one of the participants points out, "*But then, I started reading the bible and educated myself. Then I saw the wrong things I used to follow in my previous religious experiences."* (Mulu). For Mulu, the change of religion enabled her to start her formal business. Participants whose change of religion happened before they started their businesses reflected that their shift in faith or even their change in religion provided them with the spiritual resources necessary to initiate businesses, revitalize existing ventures, and ensure their sustainability. For example, Meron assured that "*I believe changing my religion helps me to start my business progressively*". In this context, spiritual bricolage can be understood as enabling entrepreneurship through reframing constraints.

By framing their experiences through a spiritual lens, they transform difficulties into manageable tasks, ultimately contributing to their personal and professional growth. Meron notes that "*being a spiritual person helps my business because it helps me to be strong and pass all the challenges I face"*. Also, Emnet reflects that *"being spiritual makes me accept my challenges. I always thank God for helping to overcome my challenges."* Rebika expects direct action and help; she said, *"When I face a challenge with my employees, I will pray and ask God to move the person I am dealing with.* Simply put, engaging in spiritual bricolage combined with diligent embedding or adventurous sourcing results in reframing constraints; that is, our participants were able to change how they think about the challenges they encounter, they began to see them as something that can be overcome, something that can result in something positive, and they developed the strength to deal with these constraints. As such, reframing constraints allows women entrepreneurs to be hopeful and efficacious.

(Re)Building Moral Legitimacy

The spiritual bricolage that our participants engaged in also resulted in (re)building moral legitimacy for their actions and businesses. Many of our participants report feeling more confident when relying on their spirituality in their lives and entrepreneurial endeavours.

Specifically, the participants crafted narratives to illustrate the importance of conforming to religious beliefs and the readiness to act when their spiritual resources are low. They discussed their current spiritual inclinations as integral components of their strategies. For example, Samira explained that she is trying to follow the religion and gain spiritual resources resulting from that adherence. She says: *"I am a Muslim religion follower, but am not as strong as I should be, but I try my best to exercise what religion says."* She believes that adherence to spirituality can result in her building the necessary legitimacy for herself as an entrepreneur and her business.

Conforming to religious expectations may involve participating in religious rituals, adhering to moral codes, and attending religious services, thereby building and sustaining the moral legitimacy of their business. For instance, the quote "*Tries to do what the religion expects*" illustrates this form of conformity. It also signals that these women, who utilize their spiritual resources to assert their conformity, are aware that by increasing their spirituality, they can gain access to more spiritual resources. For example, Neziza argued that: "*I love my religion and believe in Allah, and I believe what the Quran says, but I don't have deep knowledge."* Therefore, relying on religion can help them establish legitimacy by conforming to social and religious practices and norms.

More generally, relying on spirituality provides coherence and reference for what is legitimate, appropriate, and worthwhile. This was particularly evident among those who engaged in adventurous sourcing and changed their religious affiliations. However, some of them encountered initially stiff resistance from their families, friends, and social circles. They needed to work extra hard to rebuild this moral legitimacy. In the face of this strong opposition, they developed the fortitude to stand by their decision. For example, Bizunesh endured ostracism and exclusion from her family. Despite these difficulties, she persevered, observing that the situation "through time [...] changed." For others, conversion meant facing exclusion or shunning from customers, particularly those who belonged to their former religion. Tsehay, for instance, lost business after changing her religion; regardless, she remained strong, demonstrated fortitude, and rebuilt her moral legitimacy:

> *...Changing my religion had a direct negative impact on my business, this was because more of my customers that came to my business were orthodox religion followers and they were disappointed when I changed my religion which I took as a challenge to my business at that time but later on I take it as a blessing ... which pushed me to expand my business both in size and income (Tsehay)*

Having changed their religion, beliefs, and norms, the women entrepreneurs in our study experienced gradual business growth and developed new friendships and social circles. Despite initial setbacks, they claim that this religious transition ultimately helped their businesses flourish and gain legitimacy.

In summary, our findings reveal that spirituality serves as a vital inner resource for women entrepreneurs, often rooted in personal religious beliefs, yet extending beyond formal religious practices. Our material illustrates that spiritual bricolage—defined as the creative mobilization of spiritual resources at hand to solve new problems—supports women entrepreneurs in diverse ways, reflecting varied approaches to navigating entrepreneurial challenges. Furthermore, the study delineates how women entrepreneurs draw on their spiritual resources to adapt, launch, and sustain their businesses under challenging conditions. We focus on the motivational outcome of spiritual bricolage next.

Sustained Entrepreneurial Motivation as Outcome of Spiritual Bricolage

Engaging in spiritual bricolage not only helped women entrepreneurs in our study overcome resource scarcity but also sustained their entrepreneurial motivation over time through entrepreneurial reframing and the four dimensions it comprises: altering their perception of risk, expanding the resource pool, reframing constraints, and (re)building moral legitimacy.

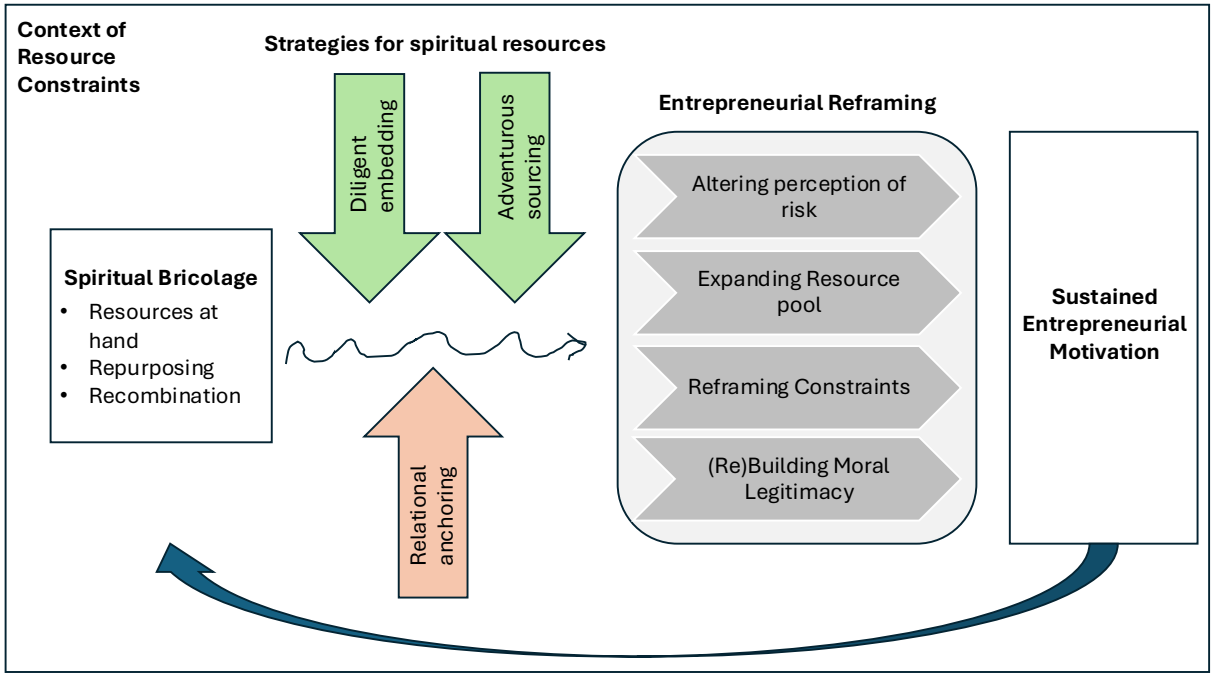
The renewed energy that comes from deep engagement with spiritual resources has contributed to the women focusing on the positive aspects, on the purpose that drives their pursuits, rather than on the challenges. For example, Tsehay links her entrepreneurial motivation to her belief in divine support and her aspiration to uplift others. As she recalls, *"When I started, I had strong spiritual confidence that the business would succeed. Over time, I was able to expand and create job opportunities for many others. At one point, I had about twenty employees working with me. That gave me purpose."* In this case, spiritual affinity and bricolage are not limited to individual success but are extended to the well-being of others, particularly through job creation. Others, like Mulu, express their aspirations in terms of deepening spiritual commitment and aligning their life and work with divine purpose. As she puts it, *"What drives me now is becoming deeply spiritual. My biggest goal is to live the rest of my life for God's purpose. I feel a strong hunger to honor God in everything I do, including how I run my business."* Her entrepreneurial journey is framed not simply as a financial endeavor but as a manifestation of spiritual devotion. Consequently, the use of spiritual bricolage has facilitated

the recognition of purpose for women entrepreneurs and the subsequent sustaining of motivation to continue their entrepreneurial endeavors.

2.5 Discussion

The basic premise of our study is that spirituality matters in the entrepreneurial context. Grounded in a qualitative inquiry, we investigated how women entrepreneurs in a resource-constrained Ethiopian context used spiritual resources and the role of spiritual bricolage in their entrepreneurial endeavors. Our analysis revealed that engaging in spiritual bricolage leads to entrepreneurial reframing among women entrepreneurs and, through this, helps them sustain their entrepreneurial motivation. The process and outcomes of bricolage are facilitated by the strategy used to access spiritual resources. We model our findings in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Entrepreneurial reframing as a mechanism of spiritual bricolage facilitating sustained entrepreneurial motivation.



Our research contributes to the bricolage and entrepreneurial motivation literatures in two keyways. First, our findings suggest that *entrepreneurial reframing* operates as a critical connecting mechanism between spiritual bricolage and sustained entrepreneurial motivation. We define entrepreneurial reframing as a cognitive and interpretative process through which entrepreneurs reconstruct the meaning of risk, resources, constraints, and legitimacy to sustain entrepreneurial motivation in the face of uncertainty. This process involves four interrelated dimensions: altering perception of risk, expanding pool of resources, reframing constraints, and (re)building moral legitimacy.

By introducing this concept, we extend bricolage theory (Baker and Nelson, 2005) beyond its traditional emphasis on resource recombination to incorporate sensemaking and legitimacy work (Weick, 1995; Suchman, 1995). While bricolage explains how entrepreneurs 'make do' with resources at hand, our findings show that spiritual bricolage provides interpretative schemas that enable entrepreneurs to reframe adversity into opportunity. Through entrepreneurial reframing, constraints are not merely circumvented – they are cognitively transformed into enablers, and moral legitimacy is actively reconstructed to align entrepreneurial action with socially accepted norms. This interpretative work reduces perceived uncertainty and reinforces motivational persistence, resonating with research on psychological resilience (Shepherd et al., 2020) and identity work in entrepreneurship (Powell and Baker, 2014) or even external enablement (Davidsson et al., 2020).

Theoretically, entrepreneurial reframing contributes to the literature on entrepreneurial motivation by highlighting a mechanism that sustains engagement under resource scarcity and institutional ambiguity. It also enriches bricolage research by demonstrating that bricolage is not only a material practice but also a cognitive and moral process that shapes how entrepreneurs perceive and enact opportunities.

Second, our findings demonstrate that *spiritual bricolage*—defined here as utilizing one's spiritual resources at hand to repurpose and recombine them for new problems and opportunities —facilitates entrepreneurial action and persistence. These findings highlight the impact of spiritual resources in fostering entrepreneurship in the face of adversity. By unpacking the concept, we extend the focus of the bricolage theory beyond the conventional emphasis on material or social resources (e.g., Lévi-Strauss, 1962, 1967, Baker &Nelson, 2005). We demonstrate the crucial role of intangible spiritual resources (like prayer, divine purpose, faith-based reasoning) in everyday entrepreneurial adaptation and decision-making.

Responding to calls to investigate symbolic bricolage (Carstensen, 2011; Cleaver, 2002), we show how entrepreneurs draw upon these culturally embedded resources, especially when formal support is lacking. Consequently, spiritual bricolage acts not merely as a passive coping mechanism but as an active cognitive, relational, and moral toolkit that enhances agency in constrained settings. Importantly, our study extends the domain of bricolage to include the spiritual dimension, demonstrating that strategies for engaging with spiritual resources can either facilitate or hinder entrepreneurial reframing. Entrepreneurs who engage in diligent embedding, deepening their spiritual engagement, and those who adopt adventurous sourcing of spiritual resources tend to benefit most, as these practices generate interpretative flexibility and legitimacy work. In contrast, those who rely primarily on relational anchoring are less likely to experience reframing benefits, as this engagement does not produce the cognitive transformation necessary for sustained motivation.

We also demonstrate that while spiritual bricolage is a positive strategy because it triggers the emergence of new ideas, access to new resources, and helps sustain entrepreneurial motivation over time, it can also have a short-term negative impact on women entrepreneurs who must contend with rejection and exclusion from previous religious networks when using an adventurous sourcing strategy.

Ultimately, our study responds to calls for more context-sensitive theorizing (Welter, 2011), showing how spiritual logic infuses entrepreneurial cognition and enables adaptive responses in resource-constrained settings. In viewing these spiritual bricolage practices through the lens of entrepreneurial resourcefulness—as creative strategies for utilizing available means in constrained settings (Welter et al., 2018)—emphasizes their legitimacy and the value of incorporating this perspective into mainstream entrepreneurial support.

Practical Implications

Our findings have important implications for the design of entrepreneurship support interventions. First, programs should move beyond a narrow focus on functional knowledge and technical skills to incorporate context-sensitive content that addresses the motivational foundations of entrepreneurial persistence. In resource-constrained environments, motivation is not always rationalistic or purely performance-driven; rather, it can stem from intangible resources such as values, purpose, and spiritual beliefs. Interventions that help entrepreneurs

articulate and leverage these non-material resources can strengthen resilience and sustain their engagement.

Second, entrepreneurship training should recognize the recognition and mobilization of additional resource pools, including spiritual and social resources, alongside financial and material assets. By reframing constraints and highlighting alternative resource logics, such programs can equip entrepreneurs to navigate uncertainty creatively and maintain confidence in their entrepreneurial endeavors. This approach aligns with the growing evidence that resource bricolage and interpretative flexibility are critical for entrepreneurial survival under adversity.

Third, support mechanisms should integrate meaning-making practices that reinforce identity and legitimacy. Entrepreneurs often face moral and social challenges that affect their motivation as much as economic constraints do. Mentorship, peer networks, and community-based initiatives can provide spaces for entrepreneurs to reconstruct legitimacy narratives and align their ventures with shared values. These interventions can help entrepreneurs sustain motivation by connecting their business activities to a broader sense of purpose, which is particularly vital in contexts where institutional support is limited.

Fourth, interventions should recognize that not all spiritual bricolage strategies yield equal benefits. Our findings indicate that entrepreneurs who engage in diligent embedding (deepening spiritual engagement) and adventurous sourcing (actively seeking diverse spiritual resources) are more likely to experience entrepreneurial reframing and sustain motivation. In contrast, those who rely primarily on relational anchoring (depend on social connections for spiritual guidance) may not achieve the same cognitive transformation. Training programs should therefore encourage entrepreneurs to adopt strategies that foster interpretative flexibility and legitimacy-building, rather than limiting engagement to relational aspects.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study is subject to several limitations that open avenues for future research. First, our sample consisted of women entrepreneurs, which constrains the scope of our findings. Expanding future research to include a broader range of participants could enrich our understanding of how gender and family roles shape spiritual engagement in entrepreneurship. Second, our reliance on life-story interviews provides rich, in-depth retrospective accounts of entrepreneurial experiences; however, this design may be influenced by memory reconstruction

and recall, as well as social desirability biases. Complementary methodologies—such as longitudinal or ethnographic approaches—could capture the reframing processes as they unfold in real time, offering deeper insights into the dynamics of spiritual bricolage and motivation that evolve over time and under uncertainty.

Finally, while our study focused on a specific context characterized by resource constraints and cultural norms, the transferability of findings to other settings remains an open question. Comparative research across diverse institutional environments—such as high-resource ecosystems or different cultural contexts—could illuminate whether the mechanisms identified here are universal or context-dependent. Such work would advance theory by clarifying the boundary conditions of entrepreneurial reframing and its relationship to spiritual bricolage.

2.6 Conclusion

This study explored how women entrepreneurs use spiritual resources and how spiritual bricolage supports their entrepreneurial engagement. Our findings show that women entrepreneurs actively engage in spiritual bricolage and, in the process, develop their entrepreneurial cognitive frames by altering perception of risk, expanding their resource pool, reframing constraints, and (re)building moral legitimacy; this helps them sustain their entrepreneurial motivation over time. In doing so, we contribute to the literature by demonstrating how spirituality functions as a critical resource that enables entrepreneurial behavior in resource-constrained contexts, showing that not only the type of resource is important, but also how it is utilized. Our findings highlight the symbolic dimensions of spirituality, thereby broadening the conceptual boundaries of bricolage. More generally, this research advances scholarship on entrepreneurial, symbolic, and spiritual bricolage and provides practical insights for supporting women entrepreneurs in economically constrained environments. Additionally, this study contributes to the theological turn in entrepreneurship by examining spirituality as a culturally embedded and integral aspect of entrepreneurial action.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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CHAPTER 3: FAMILY WELLBEING: NAVIGATING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL JOURNEY BY WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Authors: Tigist Tesfaye and Ethiopia L. Segaro

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Abstract

This study examines how women entrepreneurs perceive family well-being in their *entrepreneurial journeys from a Global South context. Drawing on interpretative phenomenological analysis with eleven entrepreneurs, we show that women conceptualize and pursue well-being not as an individual endeavor but as a relational and collective process embedded within family life. Through entrepreneurship, they navigate caregiving responsibilities, economic pressures, and socio-cultural expectations while advancing intergenerational progress. We identify four interconnected dimensions—family growth, family potential, family goals, and family commitment—that illustrate how entrepreneurial action becomes a vehicle for nurturing familial stability, meaning, and future possibilities. These findings demonstrate that entrepreneurship operates as a relational practice through which women cultivate purpose, continuity, and shared aspirations. The study contributes to entrepreneurial well-being scholarship by reframing well-being as family well-being and offering a gender-sensitive, contextually grounded perspective from the Global South. It also provides practical insights for designing support mechanisms that recognize the deeply intertwined nature of business and family in women's entrepreneurial lives.*

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Well-being, Family Well-being, Women Entrepreneurs, Ethiopia, Life-story Interviews, Relational Entrepreneurship

3.1 Introduction

Despite global increases in women's entrepreneurial participation, the everyday realities of women entrepreneurs in the Global South, such as Ethiopia—and particularly how they construct and sustain family well-being through entrepreneurship—remain underexamined in mainstream scholarship (Ahl & Nelson, 2015; Amine & Staub, 2009). In these contexts, women's entrepreneurship is rarely an individualistic pursuit of financial ambition; rather, it is embedded in relational responsibilities, caregiving demands, and collective survival strategies (GEM, 2020; Hailemariam & Kroon, 2018). Women frequently turn to entrepreneurship not only to generate income but to navigate structural voids, maintain household stability, and respond to the intertwined expectations of providing both emotional and practical support (De Vita et al., 2014; Ojong et al., 2021). Thus, entrepreneurship becomes a relational practice grounded in care, resilience, and moral responsibility.

This relational orientation is increasingly reflected in the evolving literature on entrepreneurial well-being (EWB), which recognizes well-being as both an outcome *and* a motivation for entrepreneurial engagement (Wiklund et al., 2019; Shir et al., 2019). However, despite these advances, the majority of EWB research continues to emphasize hedonic dimensions such as positive affect, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction (Binder & Coad, 2013; Johansson Sevä et al., 2016; Pergelova et al., 2025). Such accounts often compare entrepreneurs to employees (Nikolaev et al., 2020; Stephan, 2018), thereby narrowing the analytical lens and overlooking eudaimonic dimensions of well-being—those concerned with meaning, personal growth, and purpose. These omissions are particularly limiting for understanding women entrepreneurs in the Global South, whose well-being is inseparable from the well-being of their families (Bianchi et al., 2016; Hailemariam et al., 2022).

In Ethiopia, like many Global South contexts, family occupies a central place in women's entrepreneurial narratives. Women's entrepreneurial actions are shaped not only by market opportunities but by their roles as mothers, daughters, and caregivers (Amine & Staub, 2009; Chant & Sweetman, 2012). Family well-being—emotional security, children's progress, household stability—often becomes the primary motivation for starting and sustaining a business, even under significant structural constraints. Yet, limited research has examined how women entrepreneurs themselves define and construct family well-being within their entrepreneurial journeys (De Clercq et al., 2022; Hailemariam & Kroon, 2018). This gap

prevents a holistic understanding of entrepreneurship in settings where well-being is relational, interdependent, and often negotiated through daily trade-offs.

Responding to this gap, the present study explores *how women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia perceive and enact family well-being through their ventures.* Anchored in a eudaimonic perspective and drawing on Ryff's (2019) multidimensional model of psychological well-being—autonomy, purpose in life, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, personal growth, and positive relationships—we conceptualize family well-being as a dynamic process of meaning-making and relational flourishing. In settings with limited formal welfare systems, women often shoulder the central responsibility for sustaining household well-being, making entrepreneurship a key site where purpose, responsibility, and care converge (Hailemariam & Kroon, 2018; Stephan et al., 2023).

Empirically, this study draws on life-story interviews with eleven Ethiopian women entrepreneurs selected across diverse business sectors and family contexts. Through interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), we examine how they navigate family disruptions, balance caregiving and business demands, and redefine entrepreneurial success in terms of their children's futures, intergenerational progress, and emotional stability. Their narratives provide a culturally grounded and gender-sensitive understanding of entrepreneurial well-being as co-constructed within the family, rather than individually attained. By foregrounding these lived experiences, the study contributes to the growing scholarship on eudaimonic and relational dimensions of entrepreneurial well-being in under-researched contexts (Shir & Ryff, 2022; Stephan et al., 2020). It offers a nuanced account of how women leverage entrepreneurship to maintain dignity, continuity, and flourishing within interdependent familial environments.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: we begin with the theoretical framework, followed by a description of the methodological approach and context. We then present the empirical findings and conclude with a discussion of their theoretical, practical implications and conclusion.

3.2 Theoretical Background

3.2.1 Women Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurial Well-being

While entrepreneurship is often associated with financial ambition and innovation, a growing body of research shows that many women entrepreneurs are equally driven by a desire to make meaningful contributions to their families and communities (Barkema et al., 2024; GEM, 2020; Hailemariam & Kroon, 2018). This is especially evident in the Global South, where women's entrepreneurial motivations often emerge from an intricate web of economic necessity, caregiving responsibility, and social obligation (Hailemariam & Kroon, 2018; Ojong et al., 2021). In sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, women frequently turn to entrepreneurship not only to generate income but to navigate structural voids and provide emotional and practical support to their families (Amine & Staub, 2009; Hailemariam & Kroon, 2018; Hailemariam et al., 2019). Entrepreneurship in such contexts becomes a relational and adaptive practice—one rooted in resilience, care, and collective survival (De Vita et al., 2014).

This relational framing is increasingly reflected in the evolving literature on EWB, which recognizes that well-being is not only an outcome of entrepreneurship but often a central motivation for engaging in it (Wiklund et al., 2019; Shir et al., 2019). However, much of current literature remains dominated by a hedonic perspective (e.g., Binder & Coad, 2013; Johansson Sevä et al., 2016; Kumar et al., 2025; Pergelova et al., 2025), emphasizing positive affect and life satisfaction, and frequently contrasts entrepreneurs with employees (Nikolaev et al., 2020; Stephan, 2018). While such comparisons have established that entrepreneurs often report higher levels of subjective well-being, yet literature is limited on the eudaimonic well-being of women entrepreneurs (Pergelova et al., 2025).

Despite a global increase in women's entrepreneurial participation, women remain underrepresented in mainstream entrepreneurship research—particularly in terms of how their work intersects with family dynamics and well-being (Ahl & Nelson, 2015; Bianchi et al., 2016). In many Global South contexts, women's entrepreneurial journeys are shaped not only by market dynamics but by their roles as mothers, daughters, and caregivers (Amine & Staub, 2009; Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Hailemariam & Kroon, 2018). Although women entrepreneurs' well-being is often inseparable from family well-being, this intersection remains under-researched, particularly concerning how women entrepreneurs themselves understand and articulate family well-being (De Clercq et al., 2022; Hailemariam & Kroon, 2018; Hailemariam et al., 2022; Jamali, 2009).

Anchored in well-being perspective eudaimonic—concerned with meaning-making, personal growth, and the realization of one's full potential—the study adopts Ryff's (2019) multidimensional model of psychological well-being, encompassing autonomy, purpose in life, self-acceptance, personal growth, environmental mastery, and positive relationships. From this lens, family well-being is conceptualized not merely as the absence of hardship or the attainment of financial stability, but as a dynamic and relational process through which women strive for dignity, continuity, and flourishing within interdependent familial settings (Hailemariam & Kroon, 2018). In Global South context, such as Ethiopia, family life is often characterized by both emotional resilience and relational demands, functioning simultaneously as a source of strength and responsibility (Stephan et al., 2023; Shir & Ryff, 2022). In contexts where formal welfare systems are limited or absent, women's central role is sustaining household well-being has profound implications for how entrepreneurship is practiced and experienced (Hailemariam & Kroon, 2018).

3.2.2 Entrepreneurial Well-Being

Entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized not only as an economic pursuit but also as a pathway to personal development and psychological well-being (Shir et al., 2019; Wiklund et al., 2019). This broader lens has encouraged scholars to investigate the subjective meanings and lived experiences that entrepreneurs attribute to their work. Within this discourse, EWB has emerged as a vital area of inquiry, encompassing the emotional, psychological, and cognitive dimensions through which individuals experience their entrepreneurial journeys (Stephan, 2018; Contreras-Barraza et al., 2021).

Although early research tended to conceptualize well-being as a consequence of entrepreneurial success, more recent work highlights the dynamic and reciprocal nature of this relationship (Wiklund et al., 2019).

Ryff's (1989) multidimensional model of psychological well-being, which includes autonomy, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance—offers a useful conceptual anchor for examining these experiences on an individual level. Yet, while interest in women's EWB is growing, much of the literature remains framed around individualistic and motivational constructs (Chatterjee et al., 2022; Hailemariam et al., 2019; Ribes-Giner et al., 2019) and the heterogeneity within the self-employed population remains underexplored, particularly regarding the impact of family well-being perspectives from women entrepreneurs understanding (Barkema et al., 2024). Despite the importance of

family in women's entrepreneurship, studies specifically addressing family well-being in this context are scarce (Banu, 2022; Barkema et al., 2024).

3.2.3 Relational Dimensions of Well-Being in Women's Entrepreneurship

Although growing attention has been paid to the WB of women entrepreneurs, much of the literature remains anchored in individualist and motivational frameworks (Chatterjee et al., 2022; Hailemariam et al., 2019; Ribes-Giner et al., 2019), and the heterogeneity within the self-employed population remains underexplored, particularly regarding the impact of family well-being perspectives on women entrepreneurs' understanding (Barkema et al., 2024; Kleine-Stegemann et al., 2024). In many Global South contexts, women's entrepreneurial journeys are shaped not only by market dynamics but by their roles as mothers, daughters, and caregivers (Amine & Staub, 2009; Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Hailemariam & Kroon, 2018)

This study responds to such gaps by foregrounding the lived realities of women entrepreneurs operating in a resource-constrained, socio-culturally complex setting. In Ethiopia, entrepreneurial ecosystems are shaped by limited institutional support, gendered labor divisions, and strong cultural expectations surrounding motherhood and family care (Hailemariam et al., 2019; Hailemariam et al., 2022; Markowska & Abebe, 2021). In such contexts, well-being is not merely an individual state but a deeply relational and collective bound up with women's commitments to family security, children's education, community upliftment, and moral responsibility. Accordingly, this study advances a relational understanding of EWB that situates women's motivations, aspirations, and outcomes within broader familial and social ecologies.

Following Wiklund et al.'s (2019) conceptualization of EWB as involving "the experience of satisfaction, positive affect, infrequent negative affect, and psychological functioning in relation to developing, starting, growing, and running an entrepreneurial venture," this study expands the discussion by examining how these experiences are shaped by women's perspectives on family well-being. For many entrepreneurs in general and women in particular, the entrepreneurial journey was inseparable from efforts to care, support, and uplift others, particularly their family. Despite the importance of family in women's entrepreneurship, studies specifically addressing family well-being in this context are scarce (Banu, 2022). While the existing literature provides valuable insights, it also highlights the necessity for more focused research on the interplay between family well-being and women entrepreneurship, suggesting a promising avenue for future studies.

3.2.4 Women Entrepreneurship in Context

Women's entrepreneurship in the Global South, such as Ethiopia, is often embedded in entrepreneurial ecosystems constrained by weak institutional capacity, persistent gender hierarchies, and cultural expectations that prioritize caregiving and family responsibilities (Hailemariam et al., 2019; Hailemariam et al., 2022; Markowska & Abebe, 2021). In such contexts, well-being is not experienced merely as an individual psychological state but as a relational and collective process—interwoven with women's efforts to secure household stability, support children's education, fulfill moral obligations, and contribute to community welfare (Jennings, Breitkreuz, & James, 2013; Jenning & Brush., 2013). Adopting a relational lens on EWB allows for a more contextualized view of women's motivational aspirations, and entrepreneurial actions, which are often shaped by familial interdependence and broader socio-cultural obligations. As Wiklund et al. (2019) emphasize, EWB encompasses emotional satisfaction, functional resilience, and personal growth throughout the entrepreneurial journey. This study extends such conceptualizations by exploring how women's entrepreneurial engagement is driven by a desire to support and sustain family well-being, thus responding to growing scholarly interest in the intersection between entrepreneurship and family life (Jennings & McDougald, 2007).

3.2.5 Empirical Setting

Ethiopia, one of the most populous countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, is home to approximately 126.5 million people (World Bank, 2024). Although the country experienced rapid economic growth—averaging 10.5% annual GDP expansion between 2005 and 2016, nearly double the regional average—this progress has not translated into broad-based access to resources for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Hailemariam et al., 2022; World Bank, 2017). Women entrepreneurs remain particularly marginalized, facing persistent constraints in securing capital, accessing markets, and formalizing their ventures (Hailemariam et al., 2019; Milazzo & Goldstein, 2017).

Beyond financial limitations, women operate within socio-cultural environments shaped by deeply embedded gender norms, hierarchical family structures, and extensive caregiving duties (Gudeta & Van Engen, 2017, 2018). In the Ethiopian context, "family" extends well beyond the nuclear household to include spouses, children, siblings, parents, in-laws, and sometimes

non-biological dependents (Hailemariam & Kroon, 2018). Within such relational systems, entrepreneurship is not solely an economic pursuit; it is a moral and social obligation. Women are expected to contribute to the collective well-being of the family unit while simultaneously navigating business demands.

These dynamics underscore that women's entrepreneurship in Ethiopia is inherently relational. Family well-being not only motivates entrepreneurial entry but also becomes a central measure of success. Cultural expectations concerning domestic responsibilities, coupled with participation in community-based associations such as *iddir*, further limit women's time, mobility, and entrepreneurial autonomy (Hundera, 2014; Gudeta & Van Engen, 2017). As a result, women-led enterprises face higher discontinuation rates compared to those led by men (Bekele & Worku, 2008).

Despite these constraints, many women pursue entrepreneurial activities with determination and adaptive strategies that enable them to sustain their ventures over time (Markowska & Abebe, 2021). Their experiences reveal the complexities of navigating structural barriers, managing dynamic family obligations, and leveraging available resources—often through creative or non-conventional means. This empirical context provides a rich setting for examining how women construct and sustain family well-being throughout their entrepreneurial trajectories. Understanding these lived realities is essential for illuminating the relational, processual, and context-specific nature of women's entrepreneurship in the Global South.

3.3 Methods

3.3.1 Research approach

In this qualitative study, we used a life-story interview design and IPA to examine the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs running medium- and small-scale enterprises in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia—a patriarchal society in the Global South where entrepreneurial activity is shaped by structural constraints, limited finance, and socio-cultural norms (Hailemariam et al., 2022). IPA's idiographic and double hermeneutic approach enabled in-depth interpretation of participants' narratives (Nizza et al., 2021; Smith, 2017). Rooted in health psychology, IPA is concerned with how individuals experience and interpret significant life events (Larkin et al., 2011; Wagstaff & Williams, 2014). It is particularly valuable for capturing nuanced, practitioner-

oriented perspectives (Anderson & Gaddefors, 2017; Raco & Tanod, 2014; Rajasinghe, Aluthgama-Baduge & Mulholland, 2021). Our objective was to explore the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs as they navigate the interplay between entrepreneurial activity and motherhood (Stephan et al., 2023).

We conducted life-story interviews with 11 women entrepreneurs, following McAdams' (2008) protocols, with each participant interviewed at least twice between 2021 and 2022 in the Amharic language, which were recorded, transcribed, translated, and collaboratively reviewed for accuracy. **Table 2** presents participants' information.

Table 2: Summary of Participants

Participant *(Pseudonym)*	**Year of Business Start-Up**	**Age**	**Family status**	**Current Venture**
1. Bizunesh	1993	45	Married with 6 children	Hotel
2. Tsehay	2006	53	Married with 4 children	House renting
3. Fatuma	2009	30	Married with 3 children	Car oil
4. Meron	1999	50	Widow with 5 children	Supermarket
5. Emnet	2011	38	Married with 2 children	Beauty Salon
6. Mulu	2003	46	Married 3 children	Juice & Vegetable supplier
7. Danawit	2007	47	Married with 3 children	Furniture
8. Mariyam	2011	43	Married with 4 children	Event organizer and Travel Service
9. Marta	2008	64	Married with 2 children	Agro-Industry/Jam Factory
10. Neziza	1989	64	Widow with 8 children	Restaurant
11. Rebika	2004	40	Married with 3 children	Fashion college, custom-made designing, garment, and tele-birr business

3.3.2 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using IPA, which provided a flexible, iterative approach for exploring how participants made sense of their lived experiences within their social and relational contexts (Larkin et al., 2006; Oliveira et al., 2024; Rajasinghe, 2020). Grounded in the philosophical traditions of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography, IPA foregrounded idiographic depth and reflexive interpretation, requiring the researcher to remain critically aware of preconceptions while attending closely to participants' meaning-making (Finlay, 2014). The analytic work drew on established IPA guidance (Smith & Nizza, 2022; Dwyer et al., 2020) and followed the method's iterative six-stage process of repeated immersion, noting, emergent theme development, and cross-case synthesis.

The analysis began with deep immersion in the material. Each interview transcript was read several times and reviewed while listening to the original audio recordings to preserve linguistic nuance and emotional tone. This repeated reading supported close attention to salient concerns emerging from the narratives—significant relationships, life events, values, and meaningful places—and formed the basis for initial exploratory notes. These notes captured descriptive content (for example, life events and business activities), linguistic features (emphases, repetitions, and metaphors), and early conceptual reflections (aspirations, tensions, and values), providing the raw material for interpretation.

From these notes, personal experiential themes (PETs) and sub-themes for each participant were developed. This stage involved physically organizing printed transcript segments, annotating with color-coded notes, and visually mapping narrative structures (for example, pre-business life, transition to business, family role, and future thinking). Initial coding and thematic development were undertaken independently by the researcher and then discussed with academic supervisors; these collaborative discussions prompted critical reflection, tests of alternative readings, and repeated returns to the transcripts to ensure that interpretations remained firmly grounded in the data.

Following the idiographic work on individual accounts, the analysis shifted to cross-case synthesis to identify group experiential themes (GETs). Comparing themes across the eleven cases enabled recognition of shared patterns—such as motherhood as a driver of business—and meaningful divergences, including differences in how education or business formality shaped experiences. The availability of dual interviews (conducted in 2021 and 2022) allowed temporal tracking of shifts in meaning and identity; this enabled the analysis to capture the evolution of

participants' self-understandings and well-being over time, and to surface common turning points and trajectories within and between cases.

Higher-order interpretations were then developed by integrating participant quotes with the researcher's interpretive lens, which was informed by literature on well-being, relational agency, and gendered entrepreneurship. This synthesis produced analytic constructs (for example, themes such as "Entrepreneurship as Legacy Work" or "Temporal Repositioning of the Self") that explain how entrepreneurial activity operates as a relational practice aimed at family well-being. Throughout this process, the researcher continually redirected attention to the raw data to preserve analytic fidelity and coherence.

Several measures were implemented to ensure the quality and rigor of the analysis. Translation accuracy was verified by a bilingual collaborator, and transcripts were cross-checked against recordings. Reflexive practices—peer debriefing with supervisors and reflective journaling—were used to surface and manage researcher bias and to document analytic decisions. Pseudonyms were applied and informed consent procedures were followed to protect participant confidentiality (Farr & Nizza, 2019; Smith et al., 2021). Overall, these procedural steps maintain methodological integrity and make transparent how idiographic analysis and reflexive interpretation shaped the study's findings.

Data were analyzed using IPA's six-stage process, involving iterative reading, noting, theme development, and cross-case synthesis. Ethical protocols, including informed consent and the use of pseudonyms, were strictly adhered to (Farr & Nizza, 2019; Smith et al., 2021). Detailed methodological procedures are provided below.

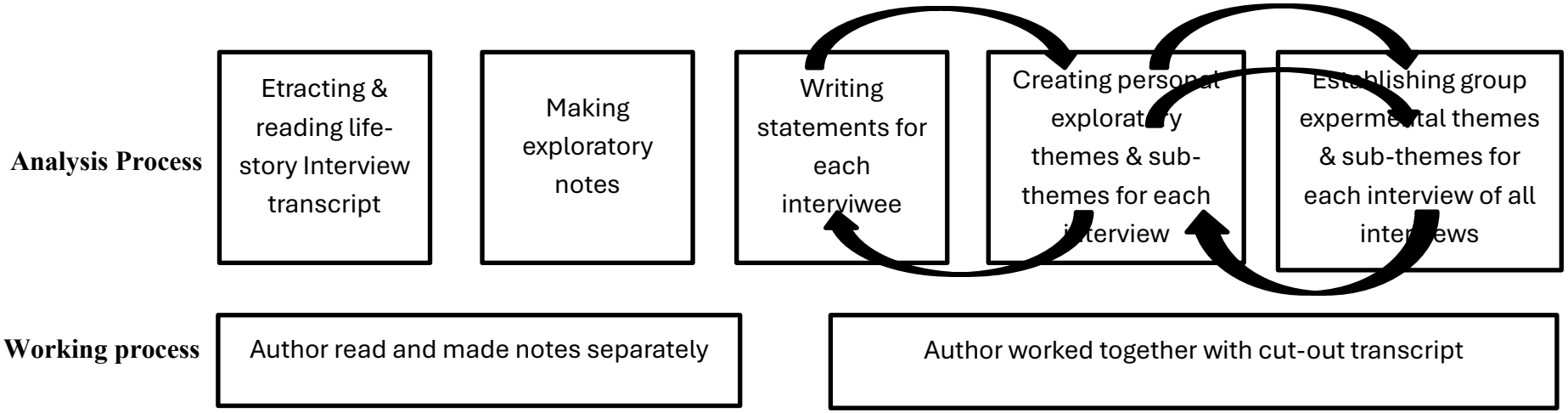

Figure A. *IPA analysis process (Adapted from Smith et al. (2021), Casteleijn-Osorno and Duong (2025) and Oliveira et al. (2024)).*

3.3.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical standards were upheld throughout the research process. All participants provided informed consent after receiving a clear explanation of the study's purpose, the confidentiality measures in place, and their right to participate voluntarily. To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms were assigned, and any potentially revealing information was removed or modified. Given that some narratives touched on personal and sensitive aspects of family and entrepreneurial life, particular attention was paid to creating a respectful and secure environment in which participants could share their experiences freely. Pseudonyms are used in all reporting to protect participants' identities and ensure confidentiality.

3.4 Results

The findings of this study reveal a contextually grounded and relational understanding of well-being among women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia, in which *family well-being* emerges as a central organizing principle of entrepreneurial life. Across the narratives, women articulated well-being not as an individual state but as a collective and interdependent process embedded within family relationships. Four interrelated themes—family growth, family potential, family goals, and family commitment—capture how women interpret, pursue, and sustain well-being through entrepreneurial action.

Participants consistently described "family" as a fluid and expansive construct that extends far beyond the nuclear household. While spouses and children remained central, family was also understood to include parents, siblings, extended kin, neighbours, and, at times, broader community members. This collective orientation reflects deeply rooted Ethiopian cultural norms in which caregiving, moral responsibility, and social support are distributed across intergenerational and communal networks. Such a worldview shaped how the women positioned themselves within their entrepreneurial journeys and framed their understanding of success, purpose, and resilience.

The narratives provide three central insights. *First*, women entrepreneurs perceived their personal well-being as inseparable from the well-being of their families. Whether describing their first venture or reflecting on multiple business transitions over time, entrepreneurship was not presented as a vehicle for personal achievement alone, but as a relational endeavor grounded in familial obligations and aspirations. Their stories consistently located family well-

being as the lens through which entrepreneurial meaning, perseverance, and decision-making were interpreted.

Second, the analysis advances a contextually informed conceptualization of EWB by foregrounding family well-being as its defining feature in resource-constrained settings. Rather than being framed as an individual psychological state, well-being appeared as a relational, dynamic process through which women cultivate meaning, contribute to family stability, and enhance future possibilities for those they care for.

Third, this construct unfolds through four interconnected dimensions—family growth, family potential, family goals, and family commitment—each illustrating how entrepreneurial activity becomes a mechanism for sustaining family relationships, fulfilling caregiving responsibilities, and advancing shared futures. For this study, family well-being is defined as *a state of living a meaningful and purposeful life characterized by family growth, potential, goals, and commitment*. In this context, family well-being is not approached as an individual pursuit but as a relational achievement tied to collective security, emotional connectedness, and social cohesion.

This relational orientation was vividly captured in Marta's reflection:

> *"Growing up during a time when child-rearing was a collective responsibility, I was shaped not only by my parents but also by the broader community. My Ethiopian cultural upbringing has had a profoundly positive influence on my life. (...) Family extends beyond the nuclear household—neighbours, teachers, and community members all play a role in guiding and disciplining children to ensure they stay on the right path. This strong sense of social connectedness continues to shape how I approach life and business."*

Through this lens, the four emergent themes elucidate how family well-being operates not as an outcome of entrepreneurship but as a foundational principle shaping women's entrepreneurial identities, actions, and aspirations. The women do not pursue entrepreneurship as an individualistic endeavor; rather, their efforts are deeply entangled with familial roles, moral obligations, and shared visions for the future. The findings demonstrate how participants navigate competing demands, mobilize their agency, and make sense of their entrepreneurial trajectories through their embedded relational contexts. ***Table 3*** presents a summary of the four emergent themes, selected illustrative quotes, and the associated interpretive meanings. In the following sections, each theme is elaborated in detail to illustrate how entrepreneurial practices

intersect with family motivations, normative expectations, and processes of becoming within resource-constrained environments.

Table 3: Summary of the findings by themes.

Themes	***Example Quotes***	***Entrepreneurial Outcome***
Family growth	*"While my earlier ventures primarily supported my children's education and household needs, later successes allowed me to buy a car, land, and an apartment. [...] My first business provided a reasonable return, but most of the income went toward paying my children's school fees and managing household expenses.* (Tsehay) *"I have two sons, and my eldest is autistic…I see my eldest child as both a challenge for my business and a key factor influencing every step of my personal and professional growth."* (Emnet)	Entrepreneurship enabled the progressive improvement of the family's welfare—starting with basic needs and culminating in asset accumulation and stability.
Family realization (potential)	*"Every step taught me something not just about the business or other people, but about myself. I discovered strengths I didn't know I had. And through it all, what kept me going was the thought of creating a better life for my family, that's what made it all worth it."* (Marta) *"My children are my reason to live. I want to watch them grow and reach their dreams. In my business, I want to reach a higher level than where I am now…What I long for most in life is connected to my children—I want them to be successful"* (Fatuma)	Entrepreneurship is a pathway to personal and family transformation in developing family capability.
Pursuit of family goals (family goals)	*"Launching my own business has allowed me to pursue the life I've always dreamed of while also enabling me to provide for my children and support them in everything they need.* (Tsehay) *"My husband and I prioritize our children's education, even sending them abroad for studies. We believe in equipping them with quality education to ensure they can achieve their dreams."* (Bizunesh)	Entrepreneurship is a means for achieving family goals. Family goals is a long-term goal funded and motivated by entrepreneurship

Family commitment	*"My son was feeling unwell because I was not able to give him the attention he needed while being busy with work. Therefore, I decided to close the café business."* (Fatuma) *"I encountered challenges in raising my children, especially when I couldn't find a reliable nanny to assist me. This directly impacted both my business and social interactions"* (Meron)	Entrepreneurship is characterized by not only a proactive, risk-taking, autonomous undertaking, but family sacrifices override business continuity in times of need.

3.4.1 Family growth

The women entrepreneurs in this study rarely framed their entry into business as an individualistic pursuit; rather, entrepreneurship was understood as a relational, moral, and often sacrificial endeavor rooted in caregiving, familial responsibility, and the aspiration to create a better life for children and extended kin. For these women, business ownership was not merely a vehicle for personal achievement or financial gain—it was a means of stabilizing the family unit, providing essential resources, and preserving dignity within financially constrained environments. Success, therefore, was measured not solely in economic terms but in the ability to remain emotionally and physically present for their families while meeting day-to-day needs. Mariyam's reflection encapsulates this dual orientation:

> *"I have ambitions for my business, but at the end of the day, I know that being a mother comes first."*

Her account illustrates how maternal identity functions as both a grounding force and a boundary within which entrepreneurial decisions are made. Business ambitions are not rejected but continually recalibrated to align with caregiving responsibilities, emphasizing that entrepreneurship is pursued in service of family growth rather than at its expense. Similarly, Meron emphasized the moral and emotional fulfillment derived from her children's progress:

> *"As a mother, I find happiness in the growth and progress of my children."*

For Meron, the advancement and success of her children represent the ultimate measure of prosperity, highlighting the inseparability of maternal roles and entrepreneurial endeavors.

In more complex circumstances, such as Emnet's experience as a mother of an autistic child, caregiving demands both shaped and reinforced entrepreneurial agency:

> *"I have two sons, and my eldest is autistic… I see my eldest child as both a challenge for my business and a key factor influencing every step of my personal and professional growth."*

Here, caregiving challenges are not perceived as barriers but as catalysts for resilience, innovation, and meaning making. Entrepreneurship becomes a channel for adaptability, personal growth, and the pursuit of purpose, demonstrating that maternal responsibilities can enhance, rather than constrain, business engagement. Marta's narrative further illustrates how family considerations influence the timing and trajectory of entrepreneurial engagement:

> *"I waited to start my business until my children had completed high school… I hope to create something they can take on if they choose to."*

In contrast, Danawit's decision to start a business was driven by the need for presence and flexibility in her children's lives:

> *"I believed that starting my own business might offer the freedom to be more present with my children… That's how my entrepreneurial journey began."*

Across these narratives, family growth emerges as a central organizing principle of entrepreneurship. Whether manifested through children's educational attainment, emotional support, or intergenerational legacy, the family unit shapes and defines the purpose, direction, and success of entrepreneurial activity. Business ownership is understood not as a departure from caregiving but as its extension—offering new modalities of care, stability, and leadership. In this way, entrepreneurship becomes a mechanism through which women actively nurture, protect, and elevate their families, integrating personal ambition with relational responsibility.

3.4.2 Family potential

Entrepreneurship for the women in this study functioned as a pathway to realizing their family's collective potential. Beyond generating income, business ownership provided a means to nurture aspirations, support intergenerational growth, and foster the flourishing of children and loved ones. For participants, personal fulfillment and entrepreneurial purpose were inseparable from the advancement and well-being of their families. Meron captured this sentiment succinctly:

> *"As a mother, there is immense joy and pride in watching my children succeed, achieve their education, and realize the dreams I have for them—this is the ultimate satisfaction."*

This perspective reflects a culturally grounded form of eudaimonic well-being, in which self-actualization is achieved not in isolation but through enabling the success and potential of the next generation. Entrepreneurship thus becomes a vehicle for intergenerational advancement, transforming business activity into a moral and relational endeavor rather than merely a professional pursuit. The women's narratives highlighted the interdependence of caregiving and entrepreneurship. Maternal responsibility was central, yet fulfillment required material and financial agency. Mulu explained:

> *"Motherhood is a gift and a demonstration of grace and generosity. To fully embrace this grace, a mother needs a source of income. Motherhood requires giving, and without resources, a mother would have nothing to offer. While I know I'm not raising my children alone, I still feel a responsibility to contribute meaningfully to their lives."*

Here, financial empowerment is depicted not as an end in itself, but as a prerequisite for fulfilling moral and relational obligations, enabling mothers to meaningfully support their families and contribute within a broader social network. Support from spouses and extended family members further enabled women to integrate business and caregiving aspirations. Marta described her husband's involvement in her entrepreneurial journey:

> *"My husband has been instrumental in every aspect of my business, starting from the initial idea. He has contributed his time, money, and unwavering support. He initially viewed the business to secure our retirement finances, but when he realized it was my passion, he encouraged me to pursue my dreams."*

This account exemplifies a relational model of ambition, in which family members are co-contributors to the realization of entrepreneurial and familial potential. Women's aspirations were consistently framed as embedded within these networks of moral, emotional, and material interdependence, rather than as isolated pursuits. Even amidst trade-offs or competing demands, participants consistently prioritized family well-being. Mariyam reflected:

> *"I have dreams for the business, big ones. But I also know, I am a mother first…"*

Such reflections underscore that entrepreneurship is not merely a vehicle for individual self-actualization but a means of enabling the flourishing of others. Family potential, therefore, is measured not only through economic outcomes or business growth but through the capacity to cultivate meaningful opportunities, support aspirations, and sustain intergenerational well-being.

Together, these narratives illuminate how women's entrepreneurial activity is intrinsically relational, where the realization of family potential is central to both their motivation and conception of success. Business ownership becomes a medium through which maternal responsibility, collective flourishing, and personal fulfillment are simultaneously enacted and sustained.

3.4.3 Family Goals

Across the women's narratives, entrepreneurship emerged as a strategic pathway for pursuing family-centered goals that span both immediate needs and long-term aspirations. These goals were not framed merely in economic terms but were deeply embedded in caregiving responsibilities, personal fulfillment, and visions for intergenerational advancement. As such,

business activities became purposeful vehicles for balancing day-to-day family demands with broader aspirations for stability, independence, and future progress.

For many women, entrepreneurship was less an initial career choice and more a practical response to the intertwined challenges of caregiving and financial necessity. Rather than viewing business ownership as a departure from domestic life, they positioned it as a mechanism for sustaining it. Emnet, for instance, described how her photography business enabled her to remain physically present for her child while covering essential household expenses:

> *"My photography business allowed me to care for my child, essentially serving as a form of daycare. Although it wasn't highly profitable, it helped cover the costs of a nanny and rent." (Emnet)*

Similarly, Danawit emphasized how entrepreneurship allowed her to reorganize her daily routine to place her children at the center:

> *"So, I started organizing my day better to prioritize my children. They should always come first." (Danawit)*

These examples illustrate that for many women, the value of entrepreneurship extended beyond financial returns. Success was evaluated by the extent to which the business supported caregiving continuity, autonomy, and emotional peace. Rather than treating work–family balance as a tension to be managed, the women reconfigured entrepreneurial arrangements to create a more flexible and supportive environment—something formal employment rarely afforded them. Entrepreneurship also served as a means of preparing for future phases of life. Some women articulated aspirations for rest, exploration, and personal fulfillment once their children became independent. Neziza captured this long-term, intergenerational orientation when she explained:

> *"I want to live a more relaxed life and visit various historical places. My goal is for all my children to become independent, and once they do, I would like to travel to places I haven't visited before." (Neziza*)

Here, entrepreneurial labor becomes an investment in future possibilities—allowing women to imagine a season where their efforts today create space for personal growth and freedom later. Pursuing these family goals also catalyzed personal transformation. Several women described an unexpected journey of self-realization that unfolded alongside their entrepreneurial responsibilities. Mariyam reflected on how the demands of supporting her family gradually shaped her into an entrepreneur:

> *"I didn't set out to be a businesswoman—I just wanted to support my family. But as time went on, I found myself doing more: managing things, handling negotiations, making plans… I became someone I never imagined I could be, and it all happened alongside my role as a mother and caregiver." (Mariyam).*

Marta similarly described entrepreneurship as a process of incremental learning:

> *"I didn't have a clear plan when I started the business. I just knew I wanted to do something meaningful. Each step taught me something—about the market, about people, about myself. I became an entrepreneur by living it every day." (Marta)*

Danawit echoed this evolution:

> *"I never saw myself as an entrepreneur (...) I was just helping out. But over time, things changed… Now, when I look at what I've built, it feels real. It's not just a business—it's a part of who I've become." (Danawit)*

These reflections show that the pursuit of family goals did not simply motivate entrepreneurial action—it reshaped the women themselves. Entrepreneurship became a relational journey through which they developed new capabilities, identities, and confidence. Their growth was not driven by abstract strategies but by lived experiences anchored in caregiving responsibilities and family priorities. In this way, family goals were not static endpoints but ongoing relational commitments. Entrepreneurship enabled the women to meet immediate needs, pursue future aspirations, and experience personal transformation—all within the entangled rhythms of work, motherhood, and caregiving. Ultimately, their ventures served as dynamic tools for cultivating family well-being, continuity, and long-term possibility.

3.4.4 Family Commitment

Family commitment emerged as a central organizing principle in the women's entrepreneurial journeys, shaping how they made decisions, allocated resources, and navigated competing demands. Rather than viewing business and family as separate spheres, the participants integrated their entrepreneurial and caregiving roles in ways that foregrounded familial stability, responsibility, and moral obligation. This deep commitment often required them to prioritize family well-being over business expansion, reflecting a value system in which relational responsibilities took precedence over individual ambition.

For many women, family commitment involved making principled sacrifices in response to caregiving demands. Emnet's narrative illustrates how motherhood could reshape—and at times constrain—entrepreneurial capacity:

> *"Motherhood is challenging, and my experience has been even more so. I couldn't manage my business the way I intended, often having to cancel work when my child was unwell." (Emnet)*

Here, caregiving responsibilities were not experienced as failures or setbacks, but as necessary choices rooted in relational priorities. Entrepreneurial plans were adjusted not out of resignation but out of conviction that family well-being must come first. The women consistently framed such trade-offs as moral commitments rather than economic losses.

Some participants took deliberate steps to integrate their children into the everyday rhythms of their businesses, crafting an entrepreneurial environment that preserved connection and presence. Rebika described how she ensured that her work life remained intertwined with her children's lives:

> *"When it comes to my children, I make a conscious effort to spend time with them. If they're not attending school, I spend my lunch break with them, and whenever they're home, they accompany me everywhere I go. They observe what I do, how I interact with my employees, and other aspects of my work. My children are deeply integrated into my life and business means everything to me." (Rebika)*

This blending of roles reflects a relational model of entrepreneurship in which professional activities are not shielded from family life but become shared spaces of interaction, learning, and modeling. Children witness resilience, responsibility, and leadership, while mothers sustain emotional closeness without compromising their work. Other narratives highlight how family commitment anchored women's endurance during periods of profound hardship. Neziza, a mother of eight, continued to manage and sustain her business while navigating significant family challenges, including her husband's incarceration:

> *"I have eight children, and I always strive to provide the best for them by working hard on my business. During my husband's imprisonment, I faced many challenges managing the family." (Neziza)*

For her, entrepreneurship represented both a survival strategy and a moral undertaking. Despite adversity, her commitment to family propelled her to shoulder the dual burdens of provider and caregiver. Her business became a testament to perseverance, sacrifice, and duty.

Taken together, these narratives demonstrate that family commitment does not operate as a constraint on entrepreneurship but as its foundation. The women's entrepreneurial motivations, decisions, and actions were anchored in their sense of responsibility toward those who depended on them. In a context where formal support systems are limited, their businesses served as both economic engines and expressions of care, enabling them to preserve stability, uphold their obligations, and navigate uncertainty. Ultimately, family commitment shaped not only what the women did but also why and how they did it. Their enterprises were constructed not despite caregiving demands but in conscious response to them, reflecting a powerful ethic of care that underpinned their entrepreneurial identities. This finding enriches the understanding of EWB by showing how family becomes a source of purpose, identity, and resilience within women's entrepreneurial lives.

3.5 Discussion and Implications

3.5.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study set out to explore how women entrepreneurs perceive and construct well-being within their entrepreneurial actions, particularly in contexts shaped by material constraints, relational responsibilities, and culturally embedded moral expectations. The use of life-story narratives and a eudaimonic well-being lens revealed that family is not merely a unit of care or dependency but a moral compass, emotional anchor, and aspirational horizon that shapes entrepreneurial purpose. Women's entrepreneurship emerges as a relational practice of care, growth, and purposeful contribution.

First, the study advances entrepreneurship and well-being research by demonstrating that family well-being functions as both a driver and an outcome of entrepreneurial activity. Rather than pursuing entrepreneurship for personal autonomy or individual achievement, the women viewed their ventures as extensions of familial responsibility. Business ownership was framed as a way to sustain children's education, uphold dignity, meet caregiving demands, and ensure long-term stability for the family. This relational orientation challenges dominant, individualistic models of entrepreneurial well-being (Wiklund et al., 2019; Stephan et al., 2023) and affirms that entrepreneurial purpose in resource-constrained settings often emerges from collective aspirations and intergenerational care (Ojong et al., 2021).

Second, the findings illustrate that caregiving and entrepreneurship are not competing spheres, but co-constitutive domains through which meaning is constructed. Themes such as *Family Growth* and *Family Potential* show that women did not seek to "escape" caregiving burdens but to navigate them with dignity and moral intentionality. For participants like Emnet, caregiving—such as raising a child with autism—became a formative experience shaping business trajectories, self-understanding, and identity development. This resonates with eudaimonic perspectives on flourishing, where well-being arises from effortful engagement and purposeful striving within constraint (Ryff, 2019).

Third, the theme of the Pursuit of *Family Goals* demonstrates that entrepreneurial identity is not a fixed role but a lived process of becoming, unfolding through daily negotiations between ambition, obligation, and relational embeddedness. Women like Danawit and Marta reorganized their routines around childcare, education, and future aspirations, illustrating that identity is co-produced through practice, reflection, and social ties (Hytti & Heinonen, 2013). Their sense of agency was expressed not through independence from others, but through context-sensitive contribution to family goals.

Fourth, the theme of *Family Commitment* reveals that women exercised agency through sustained care, sacrifice, and devotion—especially during periods of hardship. Narratives from Rebika, Emnet, and Neziza show that caregiving was a foundation for resilience and moral direction. Entrepreneurship served as a stabilizing force in times of partner absence, economic pressure, or emotional strain. In this framing, business ownership is not liberation from care but a mechanism for enacting commitment through economic and emotional labor.

Taken together, these insights contribute to a relational and decolonial theorization of entrepreneurial well-being (EWB). They show that for women in the Global South, well-being is constructed as family well-being, produced through relational ethics rather than individual pursuit. This relational framing challenges Western-centric myths of individualism, scale, and profit-maximization (Baker & Welter, 2017; Shir & Ryff, 2022). The findings foreground a more situated, persistent, and relational form of entrepreneurship—deeply grounded in social ethics, relational sacrifice, and intergenerational purpose.

By centering Ethiopian women lived narratives, the study advances efforts to decolonize entrepreneurship research and offers a more gender-sensitive, culturally embedded framework for understanding entrepreneurial agency and well-being.

Practical Implications

The findings carry significant implications for policymakers, development practitioners, and organizations supporting women entrepreneurs. Because women's entrepreneurship is deeply intertwined with family life, support mechanisms must be redesigned to reflect this integration. Programs that focus solely on business performance overlook the relational realities that shape entrepreneurial decision-making in contexts like Ethiopia. Effective interventions should therefore recognize family well-being as a core component of entrepreneurial success. Concretely, support initiatives must enable women to navigate the complex family–business interface. This includes:

- Flexible and modular training programs that align with women's caregiving duties and seasonal demands.
- Childcare support, particularly during training sessions, market days, and business expansion phases.
- Access to home-based business resources, including small equipment, digital tools, and financial incentives designed for domestic work environments.
- Culturally attuned mentoring programs that acknowledge moral responsibilities, relational obligations, and social expectations embedded in women's entrepreneurial lives.
- Family-inclusive policies, such as programs that encourage saving for children's education or intergenerational skill-building.

These measures shift the focus from narrow business outcomes to broader indicators of collective flourishing, acknowledging that entrepreneurial success for many women is inseparable from the well-being of their children, partners, and extended families. For implementation, policymakers must move beyond acknowledgment toward practical, sustained action. Designing support systems that reflect the relational realities documented in this study can create environments where women are empowered not only to sustain viable ventures but also to fulfill their relational and moral commitments.

Conclusion

This study provides a contextually grounded understanding of eudaimonic well-being—not as an individual achievement but as a relational process embedded in caregiving, moral responsibility, and intergenerational aspiration. Through their narratives, Ethiopian women entrepreneurs revealed how well-being is experienced as a dynamic and multidimensional endeavor encompassing family growth, potential, collective goals, and enduring commitment. Entrepreneurship, for these women, was not primarily a pursuit of personal profit or autonomy. Rather, it was a vehicle for caring, sustaining, and contributing to family life. Agency was expressed through the navigation of tensions—between ambition and obligation, business and caregiving—not despite these tensions but through them, using entrepreneurship as a means of relational flourishing. By foregrounding women's lived experiences in Ethiopia, this study challenges dominant individualistic models of well-being and entrepreneurship, expanding understandings of entrepreneurial purpose beyond autonomy or financial gain. It invites scholars and policymakers to recognize the invisible emotional and moral labor women perform to sustain both livelihoods and families. Doing so advances a more inclusive, gender-sensitive, and culturally attuned entrepreneurship scholarship—one that honors the complexities of women's lives and the values guiding their choices.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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CHAPTER 4: ESCALATION OF COMMITMENT AMONG WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS: RESOURCE FLOW MANAGEMENT BEYOND THE INITIAL VENTURE

Abstract

This study explores how women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments escalate commitment to resource flows rather than their ventures, thereby sustaining their entrepreneurial activity. Drawing on life-story interviews with three women entrepreneurs in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the study employs narrative analysis to explore patterns of persistence, venture exit, and re-entry. The findings reveal that entrepreneurial commitment is directed not at individual ventures but at critical resources—financial capital, networks, social legitimacy, and business knowledge—that enable ongoing entrepreneurial action. Exits from ventures are strategic responses to resource disruptions rather than indications of failure, while persistence reflects deliberate efforts to maintain access to these resources across multiple ventures. The study introduces the concept of resource-flow escalation, demonstrating that women entrepreneurs actively manage, reconfigure, and leverage resources to navigate structural, social, and institutional constraints. By reconceptualizing persistence as resource-centered rather than venture-centered, the study extends Escalation of Commitment theory to resource-constrained contexts and provides insight into how women entrepreneurs sustain engagement, adaptability, and strategic decision-making under challenging conditions.

Keywords: Women entrepreneurship, Resource-flow escalation, Escalation of Commitment, Resource management, Ethiopia

4.1 Introduction

Entrepreneurial persistence has traditionally been conceptualized as sustained commitment to a single venture, even when faced with negative feedback, mounting losses, or signals of potential failure (Staw, 1976, 1981; Brockner, 1992; McCarthy et al., 1993). Escalation of Commitment (EoC) theory explains this phenomenon as the outcome of psychological attachment, identity fusion, and self-justification for continued investment. Within this framework, exiting a venture is typically interpreted as failure, while persistence reflects unwavering dedication to the venture itself (Nouri, 2021).

However, women entrepreneurs' escalation may indicate that, given various difficulties of establishing a business for women, once they establish their businesses by overcoming multiple impediments and then become entangled in an escalating situation, it would be too hard for them to let it go (Nouri, 2021). These patterns indicate that the traditional EoC theory provides a limited explanation for why high venture exit rates coexist with sustained entrepreneurial persistence in such contexts.

Entrepreneurs operating under constrained resources face unique structural, institutional, and social pressures, including limited access to finance, informal business regulations, and dual household responsibilities. These challenges require strategic, vigilant, and adaptive approaches to resource management, including sequential or simultaneous venture engagement as a deliberate strategy to protect, leverage, and sustain essential resources rather than as a sign of instability or failure.

Despite extensive research on entrepreneurial persistence and decision-making biases, critical gaps remain. Most prior studies have focused on the consequences of escalation (Thomas, 2018; Sleesman et al., 2012) and its antecedents (Nouri, 2021) and have largely ignored the role of gender in shaping these behaviors. While decision-making biases, including overconfidence, risk aversion, and escalation, have been widely documented among entrepreneurs, very little is known about how these biases manifest among women entrepreneurs, particularly in resource-constrained settings is for venture or resource (Shepherd et al., 2015; Nouri et al., 2019).

To address these gaps, this study asks: *"How do women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments, such as Ethiopia, escalate commitment to ventures, or to the resources that sustain their entrepreneurial activity?"* By exploring this question, the study extends EoC theory through the concept of Resource-Flow Escalation, where the object of commitment

shifts from the venture to the critical resources that underpin entrepreneurial action. In this framework, persistence is conceptualized as a sustained effort to maintain access to resource channels across ventures, exit is understood as a strategic response to resource disruption rather than de-escalation, and decision-making is guided by rational assessment of resources rather than emotional attachment or sunk costs.

Empirically, this study draws on life-story interviews with three women entrepreneurs in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, capturing rich retrospective longitudinal insights into how they navigate structural, social, and institutional constraints. Their narratives illuminate how resource-centered persistence drives sequential and simultaneous venture engagement, revealing a form of entrepreneurial persistence that is rational, strategic, and resource-focused rather than venture-bound.

This study makes several contributions. *First,* it extends EoC theory to resource-constrained contexts, demonstrating that persistence can be strategic and resource-centered rather than anchored to a single venture. *Second,* it provides nuanced insights into how women entrepreneurs manage resources across ventures while navigating household, social, and institutional pressures. *Third*, it reconceptualizes entrepreneurial persistence, showing that high venture exit rates may reflect deliberate resource-flow strategies rather than failure.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Next, the relevant literature review, then the research methodology, findings, discussion and implications will be presented, respectively.

4.2 Literature Review

The context of women's entrepreneurship in Ethiopia

Ethiopia hosts a vibrant and growing cohort of women entrepreneurs, yet their entrepreneurial potential remains tightly constrained by persistent socio-economic and institutional barriers (Hailemariam et al., 2019; Woldesenbet Beta et al., 2022). Women's entrepreneurship has increasingly been recognized as a key driver of economic inclusion, poverty reduction, and broader societal transformation. However, women's entrepreneurial activities are continuously shaped—and often limited—by a complex interplay of structural, institutional, and socio-cultural forces.

Despite Ethiopia's position as the second most populous country in Africa, with an estimated 126.5 million people (World Bank, 2024), women continue to face systemic gendered inequalities that restrict access to formal education, financial capital, and professional networks. These constraints create deeply entrenched disparities in the entrepreneurial landscape, leaving women at a significant disadvantage (Gudeta & van Engen, 2018).

Within such a context, entrepreneurship often serves as more than a pathway for innovation or growth. For many women, it becomes a necessary response to limited life opportunities—a means to sustain livelihoods, support families, and navigate institutional voids (Hailemariam et al., 2019; Mekonnen & Cestino, 2017). Policy initiatives such as the Women Entrepreneurship Development Project (WEDP) have attempted to address these challenges through financial and training interventions, yet they frequently fall short of meeting the complex and evolving needs of women entrepreneurs, particularly in conditions marked by long-term uncertainty and systemic exclusion (World Bank, 2024).

The resource management practices revealed in this study illustrate how entrepreneurial action is continually shaped by scarcity rather than being solely driven by pre-planned strategies. The Ethiopian context therefore provides a compelling empirical setting for examining the lived dynamics of resource allocation and reallocation through the lens of EoC, offering valuable insights into how women entrepreneurs navigate constrained environments.

Although prior research has substantially contributed to our understanding of entrepreneurial decision-making biases, notable gaps persist—especially in relation to EoCto a venture or resource. Despite its recognized relevance across entrepreneurial (Baron, 1998), managerial (Nouri, 2021), and marketing decision-making domains (Nouri & AhmadiKafeshani, 2019), EoC remains surprisingly underexamined within the context of women's entrepreneurship (Nouri, 2021; Thomas, 2018). Moreover, although a wide range of antecedents of escalation has been explored in broader organizational literature, the mechanisms driving EoC—whether to a failing venture or a strained resource—are still not well understood (Nouri, 2021; Sleesman et al., 2012). This gap is particularly notable in entrepreneurship research, where empirical studies have largely focused on the consequences of escalation or on general antecedents, rather than unpacking the core mechanisms that shape how entrepreneurs persist, withdraw, or redirect their commitment across ventures (Nouri, 2021; Thomas, 2018).

Escalation of commitment

EoC has long been recognized as a central yet complex aspect of entrepreneurial behavior, particularly in environments marked by uncertainty and adversity (Nouri, 2021). While persistence and perseverance are often essential for entrepreneurs to advance their goals and sustain their ventures (Shane et al., 2003; Van Gelderen, 2012; Bullough et al., 2014), research has paid comparatively little attention to why entrepreneurs continue investing in a venture when conditions deteriorate (Holland & Shepherd, 2013). EoC captures this tendency to persist with an unsatisfactory or declining course of action, often resulting in overinvestment of time, money, and emotional energy into ventures or strategies that offer diminishing returns (Staw, 1981; Carter et al., 2007; Strough et al., 2013).

Across entrepreneurial contexts, several factors have been shown to trigger escalation, including feelings of personal responsibility for initial decisions, reluctance to re-engage in a cognitively demanding decision-making process, and concerns about losing face among peers or customers (Baron, 1998; McCarthy et al., 1993; Nouri, 2021; Shepherd et al., 2009). Overconfidence, status-quo bias, and emotional attachment to a venture can further intensify these tendencies (Muehlfeld et al., 2017; Nouri, 2021; Wong et al., 2006; Cardon & Kirk, 2015).

However, despite this growing body of research, EoC remains a highly context-dependent phenomenon with antecedents that are still scattered and not well understood (Sleesman et al., 2018). Even more striking is the limited attention given to escalation among women entrepreneurs, despite evidence that women frequently display this bias in opportunity evaluation and growth-related decisions (Nouri & AhmadiKafeshani, 2019; Nouri, 2021). Existing studies have largely relied on self-justification explanations and have rarely examined how structural constraints, resource scarcity, and socio-cultural expectations shape escalation for women.

This gap is particularly notable in contexts like Ethiopia, where women operate under chronic resource constraints, institutional gaps, and limited access to alternative livelihood options. In such settings, decisions to persist, pivot, or withdraw involve more than individual-level bias: they are deeply intertwined with the need to secure, preserve, or reallocate scarce resources that sustain entrepreneurial activity. EoC may therefore emerge not only from irrational overinvestment but also from strategic attempts to maintain critical resources, navigate uncertainty, and stabilize household well-being. Despite the relevance of these dynamics, little is known about how women entrepreneurs escalate commitment—to ventures or to the

resources that allow those ventures to survive—when operating in resource-constrained environments. This study contributes to filling this gap by examining how women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia enact EoC within their everyday resource decisions and entrepreneurial trajectories.

4.3 Research Methodology

Understanding entrepreneurial persistence in resource-constrained environments requires approaches that capture strategic decision-making beyond traditional venture-centric models. Standard EoC research often assumes sustained commitment to a single venture; however, in contexts such as Ethiopia, women entrepreneurs frequently exit ventures yet remain actively engaged in entrepreneurship. To explore these dynamics, this study adopts a narrative inquiry approach, which allows for in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, strategic reasoning, and resource-focused persistence (Hjorth & Steyaert, 2004; Lal et al., 2012). Narratives are particularly suitable for examining how entrepreneurs mobilize, conserve, and reconfigure resources across ventures over time.

Sampling

The study focuses on women entrepreneurs who are also mothers, operating in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Participants were selected using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling to identify information-rich cases capable of providing insight into strategic resource management in entrepreneurial activity (Patton, 2002; Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Inclusion criteria required participants to be actively managing at least one business for a minimum of one year and to have experienced multiple ventures or business transitions. Three women entrepreneurs were selected for this manuscript, each representing distinct trajectories of commitment, exit, and resource reconfiguration.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth life-story interviews (Atkinson, 2007; McAdams, 2001, 2008; McAdams et al., 2006, 2009), conducted in Amharic and audio-recorded with participant consent between 2021 and 2022. Interviews aimed to capture the entrepreneurs' retrospective

accounts of venture initiation, exit, resource management, and strategic decision-making. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to recount their entrepreneurial journeys in detail, such as: *"Can you tell me the story of your entrepreneurial journey?"* and *"How did this experience influence your subsequent business decisions?"* Follow-up prompts explored how family responsibilities, institutional constraints, and resource availability shaped their decisions to exit, restart, or diversify ventures.

Data analysis

The sample of this study consists of three women entrepreneurs whose experiences illustrate diverse patterns of entrepreneurial commitment and resource-flow strategies. Participants were selected using a purposive and snowball sampling approach to identify information-rich cases capable of providing detailed insight into how women entrepreneurs sustain, exit, and reconfigure their ventures in resource-constrained contexts (Patton, 2002; Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Inclusion criteria required participants to be mothers actively managing at least one business for a minimum of one year and to have engaged in multiple ventures over time.

Data were collected through in-depth life-story interviews, conducted in Amharic, audio-recorded with participant consent, and later transcribed and translated into English. Life-story interviews were chosen because they allow participants to recount their entrepreneurial journeys in their own words, highlighting critical events, decisions, and resource-related strategies that shaped their trajectories (Atkinson, 2007; McAdams et al., 2009). Interview questions were open-ended, such as *"Can you tell me the story of your entrepreneurial journey?"* and *"How did this experience influence your subsequent business decisions?"*, with follow-up prompts exploring family responsibilities, institutional constraints, and access to resources.

The participants represent distinct entrepreneurial trajectories:

Fatuma began her journey with limited financial resources and no formal employment experience. She exited her first venture due to caregiving responsibilities and family health challenges, but re-entered entrepreneurship multiple times, drawing on skills, confidence, and small financial reserves accumulated from earlier ventures.

Enqu discontinued her initial business after encountering structural constraints, institutional barriers, and household pressures. Despite setbacks such as loss of business premises, domestic conflict, and financial precarity, she re-engaged in entrepreneurial activity and eventually diversified into related sectors such as catering, exhibitions, and informal food service,

leveraging customer relationships, market knowledge, and her commitment to securing economic independence.

Tsehay experienced multiple cycles of starting, closing, restarting, and expanding businesses over several decades. Each transition reflects her ability to navigate institutional changes and reconfigure her resource base—including skills, networks, and microfinance opportunities—to align with emerging opportunities.

Narrative data analysis was used to interpret the life stories, following a structured process to ensure rigor and meaning-making (Kim, 2016; Elliot, 2005). Analysis involved multiple readings of the transcripts, open coding guided by literature on EoC and resource-flow strategies, identification of salient events and decision points, and interpretation of patterns reflecting strategic persistence rather than venture-centric commitment. Steps included bracketing text, noting sequences of key events, coding for resource-related strategies, and making analytical memos, as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2016).

To enhance credibility, member checks were conducted, and detailed documentation of data collection and analysis procedures was maintained (Lincoln & Guba, 1988). Through this process, three overarching narratives were identified, highlighting distinct strategies driving EoC in resource-constrained contexts. These narratives provide insight into how women entrepreneurs maintain access to critical resources—capital, networks, and legitimacy—across multiple ventures. Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the interviewees.

A brief overview of the three narratives is provided in the following section of the findings.

4.4 Findings

The analysis of the life-story interviews reveals three interrelated themes that explain how and why women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments escalate commitment—either to a venture or to the resources that sustain entrepreneurial activity. These themes emerged from the lived experiences of three women entrepreneurs whose demographic characteristics and entrepreneurial contexts are summarized below:

Enqu: 46 years old, divorced, BA degree holder, mother of three children, currently running a small food and beverage business after operating multiple ventures in the past.

Tsehay: 53 years old, married, diploma holder, mother of four children, currently running a sewing and tailoring business with a history of shifting between several micro-businesses.

Fatuma: 30 years old, married, completed 10th grade, mother of three children, active in a retail business after previously running a small shop and engaging in informal trade.

These women's entrepreneurial trajectories illustrate how EoC is shaped by the interplay of personal histories, perceived responsibilities, and limited resource alternatives rather than by irrational persistence alone. Their narratives offer insight into the structural conditions and emotional drivers that push women to continue investing in ventures or resource pathways, even in the face of repeated setbacks.

Table 4: The demographic characteristics of the interviewees

	No.
The interviewees	
Age (years)	3
<=30	1
30–50	1
50–70	1
Education	
10th grade	1
Diploma	1
Bachelor's degree	1
Industry sector	
Food and small trade	1
Service and retail	1
Hospitality and small-scale production	1
Number of children	
3 children	2
4 children	1
Marital status	
Married	2
Divorced	1

The following are some parts of the entrepreneur's narratives regarding their life and business, which resulted in escalating behavior:

Narrative 1: Fatuma – Navigating Instability Through Strategic Venture Repositioning

Fatuma married young and left school before completing tenth grade. With no employment experience and three children born between 2008 and 2016, her entrepreneurial journey began not from aspiration but from necessity. She entered her first business in 2009, opening a construction-materials shop after community members advised her that the sector was profitable. Although she initially preferred a juice bar—work she described as "easy to manage"—she followed others' suggestions and entered the more demanding but more

rewarding trade. The business quickly generated steady income and became the foundation of her entrepreneurial identity for nearly nine years.

Yet the construction sector soon exposed her to the volatility of Ethiopia's regulatory environment. Fatuma began facing increasing pressure from the tax system, particularly the early-generation electronic cash register that automatically recorded sales inaccuracies and penalized vendors. Competitors who bypassed VAT obligations gained pricing advantages, leaving her formal compliance costly and risky. She recalls the fear vividly: "I loved the business, but it might even get me in jail." With regulatory uncertainty escalating and her risk tolerance diminishing, she closed the shop despite its profitability. This exit was not a sign of failure but a strategic response to deteriorating institutional resource flows—specifically, the regulatory conditions that made continued operation dangerous.

Fatuma maintained her entrepreneurial activity by repeatedly repositioning herself. In 2011, she briefly opened a café alongside the construction business, but caring for her sick child made it impossible to sustain both responsibilities. She exited not because the business lacked promise, but because household demands—another crucial resource domain—required reallocation of her time and emotional capacity.

Two years later, in 2019, Fatuma shifted into a boutique business after finding a suitable location. She tried to align her work with her personal style: "*In the boutique, I could be neat and follow fashion. It fit my personality.*" Yet despite this alignment, the boutique did not generate sufficient returns. After two years, she closed it, noting both a lack of profitability and the mismatch between the business and her deeper competencies. Again, the exit reflected rational resource-based assessment rather than emotional loss.

Periods between ventures were particularly challenging. Fatuma described the idleness, financial depletion, and loss of confidence she experienced while waiting for new opportunities. With no safety net and no institutional support, she often relied on her husband and friends to bridge these gaps. "*I had to use the capital for expenses*," she noted, highlighting how resource depletion—not the venture outcome itself—drove urgency to re-enter entrepreneurship.

In 2022, Fatuma entered her current business: selling car oil. She selected this sector because demand is stable, unaffected by season, and less vulnerable to regulatory volatility. The business was also recommended by peers—again demonstrating her reliance on social information as a resource for opportunity identification. After experiencing the taxing complexities of construction retail and the low margins of the boutique, the car oil business offered a more predictable environment for sustaining income flows.

Across her trajectory, Fatuma demonstrated a pattern of escalating commitment not to any specific venture but to maintaining viable resource channels. She repeatedly exited businesses when resource flows—regulatory, financial, or household—became unstable, and re-entered new ones when conditions reset. Her persistence emerged through strategic movement across sectors, not through attachment to a single enterprise.

Fatuma's journey reveals how women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments navigate institutional fragility, household demands, and economic uncertainty by shifting their commitment from ventures to resource flows. Her multiple entries and exits, far from signaling instability, illustrate a strategic recalibration aimed at sustaining income and protecting capital in a volatile economic landscape.

Narrative 2: Enqu— Restarting and Diversifying Through Experience and Market Knowledge

Enqu's entrepreneurial trajectory is shaped by extraordinary early-life adversity and continuous reinvention. Born in Addis Ababa, she was forcibly taken to the Somali land at age thirteen during the Derg regime and assigned to marry a soldier. By age fourteen, she had her first child. Surviving this period—while many of her peers did not—established a pattern of persistence that later defined her entrepreneurial actions. When political changes allowed young women to file complaints against forced marriages, Enqu led others in the movement despite threats from her husband, illustrating an early form of psychological commitment to change under severe constraints.

Returning to Addis Ababa after escaping the forced marriage, she faced her father's death and economic hardship. She worked in construction for survival, later marrying again and becoming a mother of three. The turning point toward entrepreneurship occurred when she felt restricted and dependent on her husband for basic social participation. Determined to "*emancipate from the slavery*" of dependency, she sought a government-supported loan and joined a cooperative, producing and selling "Injera". Her readiness to work intensively—even after injuries—shows her initial EoC: investing personal effort and identity into entrepreneurship despite physical strain and household conflict.

Her trajectory is marked by repeated cycles of starting, closing, and restarting ventures in response to environmental shocks, institutional barriers, and domestic pressures. After leaving the cooperative due to injury and marital tension, she opened a home-based restaurant, which

she later shut down because customers disturbed her household. She then moved to a government-provided shed, only to lose it when authorities reclaimed the space. She shifted into catering and exhibitions, but suffered a severe bee-sting attack and later a car accident that halted operations. Each closure did not lead her to exit entrepreneurship; instead, she redirected remaining resources—skills in cooking, networks, cultural knowledge—into a new form of venture. At one point, she operated an informal food business from a cleaned dirt site, supported by local workers who guarded her materials at night. When evicted again, she persisted and eventually secured another location.

Enqu's pattern of reinvestment despite repeated losses and setbacks illustrates EoC in a resource-constrained context, where entrepreneurship becomes both a survival mechanism and an identity anchor. She continuously deepened her commitment through actions such as selling her jewellery to start a café, waking at 3 a.m. to work door-to-door, and pursuing education later in life, ultimately earning a degree in hotel management and studying management. Her achievements extend beyond economic outcomes; she raised three children who have reached higher education and professional careers, reinforcing her identity as "*an entrepreneurial mother*."

Despite institutional instability, domestic abuse, accidents, financial shocks, and the COVID-19 crisis, Enqu maintains strong entrepreneurial aspirations. She describes her dream of opening a cultural restaurant and believes "*nothing will stop me now*," reflecting a sustained psychological attachment to entrepreneurship that surpasses economic rationality. Her case illustrates how women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments escalate commitment not only to ventures but also to the resources—skills, networks, cultural practices—that sustain ongoing entrepreneurial activity.

Narrative Case 3: Tsehay — Reconfiguring Commitment Across Places, Roles, and Setbacks

Tsehay's entrepreneurial trajectory illustrates a long-term pattern of resource-based persistence shaped by mobility, family responsibilities, and shifting institutional conditions. Born and raised in Tigray, she first gained exposure to business management through unpaid work in her family's hotel during her adolescence. Although she later earned a diploma in accounting, much of her early adulthood was defined by caregiving: after marriage and the birth of four children, she remained a stay-at-home mother until economic pressures pushed her toward formal

employment. Between 1992 and 2005, she held a series of low-paid administrative and accounting roles in kebele offices, microfinance institutions, and schools, repeatedly relocating in response to her husband's changing work assignments. These jobs provided stability but not sufficiency. Salary constraints, discrimination, and misalignment between her qualifications and assigned roles gradually eroded her expectations of formal employment, reinforcing her long-standing aspiration to run her own business.

Tsehay's entrepreneurial entry was neither abrupt nor singular. While still employed, she operated an informal fast-food and beverage business at exhibitions and trade fairs between 2001 and 2005—a side activity that generated essential liquidity for household expenses. This parallel engagement marked her first major EoC toward resources, not ventures: she consistently reinvested earnings in household needs, loan repayments, and business materials, building a base of equipment and know-how she would later redeploy. In 2006 she resigned from salaried work and formalized her entrepreneurial path by opening a small café in Addis Ababa—fulfilling a dream she had held since childhood. With successive loans from microfinance institutions, she expanded the business into a restaurant and pool house operated from her own home until 2012.

Tsehay's trajectory, however, is defined by cycles of growth, displacement, and re-entry. Customer withdrawal linked to religious tensions, landlords reclaiming rented premises, and irregularities in public bidding processes forced repeated closures. Her 2013–2015 cafeteria and juice service at a university became her most profitable and stable period, enabling her to accumulate significant assets including land, housing, and a vehicle. When she unexpectedly lost the bid to continue—an outcome she associated with bribery—she pivoted again, establishing a bakery and later another café. Even when a fire destroyed equipment and landlords requested her departure, she reconfigured her activities, drawing on portable resources such as machinery, skills, and established supplier relationships. Her pattern demonstrates a commitment not to a specific venture but to sustaining a resource-flow system that enabled income generation, household management, and asset building.

In 2018, a health crisis resulting in the loss of one leg brought a temporary halt to her physical mobility and business operations. Yet even this major disruption did not reduce her commitment to entrepreneurial engagement. She shifted to managing rental properties based on assets accumulated during earlier business cycles, and she continues to maintain equipment and business materials "on standby," anticipating re-entry into café work once her health

permits. Her husband contributed transportation and procurement support, though he discouraged expansion beyond a single establishment—an ongoing tension that shaped the scale but not the continuity of her entrepreneurial efforts. Her children also played an active role in operational tasks, enabling her to coordinate motherhood and business responsibilities without perceiving them as competing demands.

Across sites, industries, and personal challenges, Tsehay's journey demonstrates EoC directed toward maintaining and mobilizing resources—skills, equipment, networks, and liquid cash—rather than remaining tied to any single venture form. Her repeated restarts were triggered not by emotional attachment to prior businesses but by strategic recalibration in response to institutional barriers, market conditions, and household needs. Even today, her orientation toward future business re-entry reflects a long-standing logic of resilience through resource continuity: as long as she can sustain a productive resource base, she considers entrepreneurial activity not only possible but expected.

4.5 Discussion

The cases of Enqu, Tsehay, and Fatuma demonstrate that entrepreneurial persistence in resource-constrained contexts operates differently from traditional venture-centered models. Unlike classical EoC theory, which interprets sustained commitment as attachment to a single venture (Staw, 1976, 1981; Brockner, 1992; McCarthy et al., 1993), these women frequently exited viable ventures and promptly initiated new ones. Notably, these transitions were not accompanied by grief or rationalizations based on sunk costs, suggesting that their commitment was directed less toward individual ventures and more toward maintaining access to the critical resources—financial capital, social networks, human labor, physical locations, and legitimacy—that support ongoing entrepreneurial activity.

The narratives reveal that these entrepreneurs strategically managed resource flows across ventures, shifting the object of commitment from the venture itself to the resources enabling entrepreneurial action. Persistence was expressed through continuous efforts to secure and redeploy these resources, while venture exits were tactical responses to disruptions in resource availability rather than evidence of de-escalation or failure. Decisions were guided by rational assessments of resource configurations, opportunity, and risk, rather than emotional attachment or adherence to sunk-cost reasoning. In this way, the data indicate a form of resource-flow

escalation, where cognitive mechanisms interact with strategic resource management rather than merely reflecting venture-centric attachment.

Although these patterns partially resonate with classical mechanisms of EoC—such as self-justification and the sunk-cost effect (Åstebro et al., 2007)—the drivers observed in these cases extend beyond psychological attachment to ventures. In the narratives of Enqu, Tsehay, and Fatuma, escalation reflected a proactive and deliberate strategy to maintain access to critical resources that could support future entrepreneurial action. Enqu, for instance, redeployed social, financial, and human resources across multiple ventures despite losses, regulatory challenges, and household pressures. Tsehay leveraged accumulated business knowledge, family support, and institutional networks to restart ventures after closures or health setbacks. Similarly, Fatuma strategically reallocated capital, networks, and know-how to new ventures following personal and family-related disruptions. Across these cases, venture closures were not endpoints but opportunities for resource reconfiguration, while sustained engagement reflected commitment to the resources underpinning entrepreneurial activity.

These findings highlight the iterative, dynamic nature of entrepreneurship in resource-constrained contexts, characterized by repeated transitions, temporary pauses, and strategic re-entries. Women's movements between ventures illustrate a logic of resource-focused EoC, where persistence is guided by experience, social and family responsibilities, flexible recombination of resources, responsiveness to changing market conditions, and the pursuit of autonomy. This perspective extends EoC theory, demonstrating that in resource-limited environments, persistence can be rational, strategic, and resource-centered rather than venture-centered. High venture exit rates, therefore, should not be interpreted as failure but as a reflection of resource-flow escalation that enables continued entrepreneurial engagement and adaptive navigation of structural, social, and institutional constraints.

The cases also shed light on cognitive mechanisms underlying resource-flow escalation. Classical EoC explanations—self-justification, overconfidence, and sunk-cost reasoning—remain relevant in explaining entrepreneurial persistence, particularly when founders have strong identity fusion with their ventures (Baron, 1998; Cooper et al., 1988). However, in these narratives, the interplay between cognitive tendencies and strategic resource management emerges as a central driver. Commitment was maintained not simply to validate prior decisions but to optimize access to vital resources and sustain entrepreneurial action over time. The stories of Enqu, Tsehay, and Fatuma underscore that decision-making under resource

constraints is not solely influenced by overconfidence or sunk-cost considerations but is shaped by careful, forward-looking evaluations of resource availability, opportunity, and risk.

By drawing on first-hand narratives, this study contributes to the entrepreneurship literature in several ways. First, it highlights the need to reconceptualize EoC in contexts where resources are scarce and venture exits are common, showing that persistence may be strategic and resource-focused rather than venture-focused. Second, it illuminates how women entrepreneurs in developing economies navigate structural, social, and institutional constraints while maintaining continuity of critical resources across ventures. Third, these findings provide a nuanced understanding of the antecedents of entrepreneurial persistence, revealing that escalation may arise from rational resource management rather than psychological biases alone. Finally, the insights have practical relevance: they offer guidance for women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained contexts on how to sustain entrepreneurial engagement, manage risk, and strategically redeploy resources across ventures, thereby avoiding resource loss or premature exit.

4.6 Implications

This study offers important practical insights for women entrepreneurs operating in resource-constrained environments. It demonstrates that persistence and strategic reallocation of resources across ventures can be a rational and necessary response to environmental constraints. Women entrepreneurs should recognize that not all commitment to ventures is venture-centric; careful attention to resource availability, market opportunities, and family and social responsibilities can guide effective entrepreneurial decisions. At the same time, entrepreneurs should remain vigilant against irrational persistence that could deplete critical resources, emphasizing the importance of regular assessment and strategic flexibility.

For future research, this study highlights several directions. First, given the dearth of studies on women entrepreneurs in resource-limited contexts, further research could explore how resource-flow escalation interacts with other decision-making biases such as overconfidence, overoptimism, or confirmation bias. Second, while this study focused on experienced women entrepreneurs, future work could examine whether novice entrepreneurs show similar patterns of resource-centered persistence and how prior entrepreneurial experience influences the EoC. Finally, because resource availability and social structures vary across contexts, comparative

studies in other developing economies could shed light on contextual factors shaping resource-flow escalation and its impact on entrepreneurial persistence.

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CHAPTER 5: GENERAL DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 General Discussion

This dissertation explores *how women entrepreneurs mobilize intangible resources and sustain family well-being within and across ventures in a resource-constrained context, with a particular focus on Ethiopia.* It highlights the role of spiritual, relational, and resource-centered strategies in sustaining entrepreneurial engagement and seeks to broaden our understanding of women's entrepreneurship under conditions of scarcity. The dissertation comprises three independent yet interrelated research papers. Paper 1 of this dissertation (see chapter 2) emphasizes the importance of understanding spirituality as a critical entrepreneurial resource and highlights the role of spiritual bricolage in shaping women's cognitive and motivational processes. By engaging in spiritual bricolage, women entrepreneurs were able to reframe constraints, expand their perceived opportunities, and sustain their entrepreneurial motivation over time. The findings demonstrate how symbolic and cultural resources are mobilized strategically to enable entrepreneurial action, offering insights into the broader conceptualization of bricolage beyond material or financial resources. This paper lays the foundation for the subsequent empirical research by illustrating how spirituality functions as both a practical and symbolic resource in entrepreneurial practice.

Paper 2 of the dissertation (see chapter 3) focuses on how women entrepreneurs perceive and enact family well-being through their ventures. It provides a contextually grounded understanding of eudaimonic well-being as a relational and multidimensional process, embedded in caregiving, moral responsibility, and intergenerational aspirations. The study shows that entrepreneurship, for these women, is not primarily a pursuit of personal profit or autonomy but serves as a mechanism to sustain and contribute to family life. Women navigate tensions between ambition and obligation, business and caregiving, using entrepreneurship as a means of relational flourishing. The findings challenge dominant individualistic models of well-being in entrepreneurship scholarship and expand the understanding of entrepreneurial purpose to include moral, emotional, and familial dimensions. This paper provides valuable insights for scholars and policymakers, highlighting the invisible labor and relational commitments women manage while sustaining both livelihoods and family well-being.

Paper 3 of the dissertation (see chapter 4) examines how women entrepreneurs escalate commitment to ventures or to the resources sustaining their entrepreneurial activity in resource-constrained contexts. The study reveals that women frequently exit ventures and initiate new ones, not out of failure or loss, but as a strategic response to maintain access to critical resources such as financial capital, social networks, human labor, and legitimacy. This form of resource-flow escalation shows that persistence in such contexts is resource-centered rather than venture-centered. Decisions to exit or enter ventures are

guided by rational assessments of resource configurations, opportunity, and risk rather than emotional attachment or sunk-cost reasoning. The findings extend traditional EoC theory by demonstrating that persistence can be adaptive, strategic, and oriented toward maintaining access to resources necessary for ongoing entrepreneurial engagement.

Taken together, the three papers highlight that women's entrepreneurship in resource-constrained contexts is shaped by multiple, interacting dimensions: spiritual resources, family and relational obligations, and strategic resource management. Women leverage spiritual and cultural practices, navigate family and social responsibilities, and strategically manage material resources to sustain entrepreneurial engagement despite structural, institutional, and economic barriers. This dissertation contributes to entrepreneurship scholarship by integrating insights on spiritual bricolage, relational well-being, and resource-centered persistence, offering a nuanced understanding of how women entrepreneurs create and maintain value in challenging contexts.

Generally, this dissertation underscores the need to further examine women's entrepreneurship in resource-constrained environments, particularly in Ethiopia, and the ways in which spiritual resources, family obligations, and strategic resource management shape entrepreneurial persistence and engagement. While existing research largely emphasizes venture-centered outcomes or financial objectives, there remains a gap in understanding how culturally embedded practices and relational responsibilities influence women's entrepreneurial activity. This dissertation highlights the necessity of investigating these dynamics to recognize the complex interplay between spirituality, family, and resources in sustaining entrepreneurial action. By doing so, it provides valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneurs, thereby broadening both theoretical and practical understanding of entrepreneurship in resource-limited contexts.

5.2 Conclusion

This dissertation addresses the role of spirituality, relational well-being, and strategic resource management in women's entrepreneurship in resource-constrained contexts. It highlights how women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia engage with spiritual resources, navigate family and social responsibilities, and strategically manage resources across ventures to sustain entrepreneurial activity over time. By foregrounding women's lived experiences, the study emphasizes the

relational, culturally embedded, and contextually grounded nature of entrepreneurship in economically constrained environments.

The findings illustrate that spiritual bricolage plays a critical role in shaping entrepreneurial cognition, enabling women to reframe risks, expand resources, and rebuild moral legitimacy, thereby sustaining motivation and engagement. Entrepreneurship, for these women, extends beyond financial gain or individual achievement—it is a vehicle for relational flourishing, family well-being, and intergenerational aspirations. Furthermore, the study shows that entrepreneurial persistence operates through a resource-focused logic, where strategic reallocation of financial, social, and human resources across ventures allows women to maintain access to critical assets and continue entrepreneurial engagement despite constraints and setbacks.

Overall, this dissertation contributes to a growing body of knowledge that recognizes the unique dynamics of women's entrepreneurship in resource-limited contexts. It provides practical insights for policymakers, practitioners, and support programs seeking to foster inclusive, gender-sensitive, and contextually appropriate interventions. More importantly, it underscores the need to expand research on women's entrepreneurship in the Global South, particularly in contexts where social, cultural, and resource constraints shape entrepreneurial practices, in order to build a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of entrepreneurship in resource-constrained environments.

5.3 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

Theoretical Contributions

This dissertation advances the theoretical understanding of entrepreneurship in resource-constrained contexts by highlighting how women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia mobilize and integrate diverse forms of resources across their entrepreneurial journey. The dissertation stresses the importance of understanding the contextual influences on entrepreneurial action, including socio-cultural, familial, spiritual, and institutional dimensions. It argues that these contexts shape how opportunities are interpreted, how resources are mobilized, and how persistence is enacted, extending theoretical frameworks by situating entrepreneurship within culturally and materially constrained environments.

The dissertation (see Chapters 2–4) organizes existing literature on bricolage, relational well-being, and escalation of commitment, identifying gaps regarding the use of symbolic and spiritual resources, relational agency, and resource-centered persistence in non-Western contexts. This structured approach can guide future research, helping scholars focus on the contextual dimensions of entrepreneurship and the ways intangible resources are strategically leveraged.

First, the dissertation advances bricolage theory (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Senyard et al., 2014) by demonstrating that symbolic and spiritual resources are actively repurposed to reinterpret constraints, sustain motivation, and reframe opportunities. This extends existing work on resource mobilization (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Villanueva et al., 2012) by showing how culturally embedded practices enable persistence under resource scarcity.

Second, this study contributes to scholarship on women's entrepreneurship and relational well-being (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Jennings & Brush, 2013) by showing that entrepreneurship is deeply embedded in family and intergenerational obligations. Also, it challenges dominant individualistic models of well-being and entrepreneurial purpose (Kasser, 2002; Ryff & Singer, 2008) by highlighting collective and relational dimensions of success. Furthermore, the study provides a context-sensitive perspective on agency, illustrating that entrepreneurial action can be expressed through relational flourishing, where success is measured by contributions to family and community life, as well as economic outcomes.

Third, this dissertation extends theory on entrepreneurial persistence and escalation of commitment (Staw, 1976; Sleesman et al., 2012; Shepherd et al., 2020) by showing that repeated venture exits and re-entries reflect a resource-centered logic rather than irrational persistence. Women entrepreneurs strategically manage critical resources, reallocating social, financial, and human capital across ventures. This perspective nuances classical EoC frameworks, emphasizing rational decision-making, strategic flexibility, and context-specific adaptation in resource-limited environments.

Overall, the dissertation provides a coherent theoretical framework that integrates symbolic bricolage, relational well-being, and resource-centered persistence. It expands existing theories by incorporating intangible and culturally embedded resources as key enablers of entrepreneurship and by demonstrating how socio-cultural and spiritual practices are dynamically repurposed to support entrepreneurial engagement. This structured, contextually grounded perspective offers a foundation for future research on entrepreneurship in developing

countries, highlighting the complex interplay of culture, family, spirituality, and strategic resource management in shaping entrepreneurial action. By integrating symbolic bricolage, relational well-being, and strategic persistence, the findings contribute a more holistic understanding of how entrepreneurship unfolds in contexts of institutional voids and socio-cultural obligations.

Practical Contributions

The findings of this dissertation offer valuable guidance for policymakers, practitioners, and organizations seeking to support women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained environments. By foregrounding women's lived experiences, the study provides insights into designing interventions that are culturally sensitive, contextually grounded, and aligned with the relational and moral dimensions of entrepreneurial engagement (Shane et al., 2003; Ryff & Singer, 2008).

First, the study emphasizes the importance of developing entrepreneurship support programs that extend beyond functional skills and technical knowledge. Effective interventions should recognize the motivational and symbolic foundations of entrepreneurial persistence, helping women leverage spiritual, social, and moral resources alongside financial and material assets. Such programs can strengthen resilience, sustain engagement, and foster long-term participation in entrepreneurial activities (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Garud & Karnøe, 2003).

Second, the findings highlight the need for family-oriented and culturally attuned support mechanisms. Programs should incorporate flexible training schedules, childcare support, access to home-based business resources, culturally sensitive mentoring, and family-inclusive policies that recognize the interconnectedness of entrepreneurship and household well-being. By integrating these measures, policymakers and development practitioners can ensure that interventions reflect women's lived realities, relational responsibilities, and moral commitments, thereby promoting both venture sustainability and family flourishing (Kasser, 2002; Ryff & Singer, 2008).

Third, the dissertation provides practical guidance for women entrepreneurs themselves. Persistence and strategic reallocation of resources across ventures emerge as essential strategies in resource-constrained contexts. Women entrepreneurs are encouraged to adopt a resource-centered approach to commitment, continuously evaluating opportunities, market conditions,

and family and social obligations. At the same time, entrepreneurs should remain vigilant against irrational persistence that could deplete critical resources, emphasizing strategic flexibility, forward-looking decision-making, and adaptive resource management (Staw, 1976; Brockner, 1992; Åstebro et al., 2007).

In sum, this dissertation contributes both theoretically and practically by integrating spirituality, relational well-being, and resource-focused strategies into the study of women's entrepreneurship. The findings provide actionable insights for designing inclusive, context-sensitive, and culturally attuned support programs, while also advancing scholarly understanding of entrepreneurial persistence, resource bricolage, and relational agency in resource-limited settings. Policymakers, practitioners, and entrepreneurs alike can leverage these insights to foster sustainable and meaningful entrepreneurial engagement, enhancing both individual and collective outcomes in developing country contexts.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study is subject to limitations that give rise to opportunities for future research. The empirical papers (Chapters 2–4) of the dissertation are based on in-depth life-story interviews with 25 women entrepreneurs operating primarily in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia seek explanations on how women mobilize spiritual resources, sustain relational well-being, and manage resources across ventures with a qualitative approach that generated rich and contextually grounded insights. However, it may limit the analytical generalizability of the findings to other contexts.

First, the empirical papers (Chapters 2–4) are based on in-depth life-story interviews with 25 women entrepreneurs operating primarily in Addis Ababa, an urban and relatively resource-rich environment. While this approach generated rich, contextualized insights, it also limits the geographic diversity of the sample. Women entrepreneurs in rural areas may face different structural barriers, resource constraints, and socio-cultural expectations, which could shape distinct patterns of spiritual resource use, family well-being perceptions, and escalation-of-commitment to resource-flow. Future research should therefore include rural populations and more heterogeneous samples across regions and industries to capture variations in entrepreneurial processes across diverse Ethiopian contexts.

Second, the dissertation primarily reflects the perspectives of women entrepreneurs themselves and does not incorporate the viewpoints of key external stakeholders such as spouses, children, mentors, community leaders, or institutional actors. These individuals play important roles in shaping entrepreneurial decision-making, resource access, legitimacy, and persistence strategies. Including these perspectives in future research would enrich the understanding of the relational, structural, and institutional dynamics that shape women's entrepreneurship. For example, exploring how families, community institutions, or religious networks support or constrain women's ventures could illuminate critical mechanisms beyond the scope of individual agency.

Third, although this research highlights strategic resource allocation and persistence through escalation-of-commitment (EoC) mechanisms, it does not systematically examine how cognitive biases—such as overconfidence, overoptimism, or confirmation bias—interact with resource-flow decisions. Future studies could investigate these psychological dimensions to better understand how women entrepreneurs balance rational persistence with potential biases under uncertainty, particularly in resource-limited environments.

Fourth, the Ethiopian context, with its distinct cultural, spiritual, and family-oriented dynamics, plays a central role in shaping the entrepreneurial processes studied in this dissertation. While this contextual grounding offers rich insights into spiritually and relationally embedded entrepreneurship, it also limits transferability. Future comparative research across countries or cultural settings could reveal how context moderates the role of spirituality, relational well-being, and resource management in entrepreneurial persistence. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable in capturing how these dynamics evolve, especially across multiple venture cycles.

Fifth, the study does not account for potential differences among women based on socio-economic class, ethnicity, religious affiliation, or prior family business experience. Examining such in-group variations could deepen understanding of how diverse life histories and social positions shape opportunity recognition, resource access, and patterns of persistence. Additionally, exploring the role of domestic helpers or household caregivers—whose labor may indirectly support women's entrepreneurial engagement—could uncover important insights into the household as a collective site of entrepreneurial production.

Finally, while this dissertation offers important insights, expanding empirical scope, incorporating diverse stakeholder perspectives, conducting comparative and longitudinal studies, and examining contextual and intra-group variations would significantly deepen our understanding of culturally embedded, gender-sensitive, and resource-aware entrepreneurial practices in Ethiopia and across other developing countries.

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The Life Story Interview-Guide

Tigist Tesfaye Abebe
PhD Candidate at Addis Ababa University
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Introduction

This is an interview about the *story of your life*. As a PhD student, I am interested in hearing your story, including both your past life experiences and your future as you imagine it. The story is selective; it does not include everything that has ever happened to you. Instead, I will ask you to focus on a few key things in your life – a few key scenes, characters, and ideas that you have experience in your lifetime. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions. Instead, your task is simply to tell me about some of the most important things that have happened in your life and how you imagine your life developing in the future. I will guide you through the interview.

Please know that my purpose in doing this interview is for research purposes only, and its main goal is simply to hear your story and make a sense. As a PhD student, I collect women entrepreneur's life stories in order to understand the different ways in which mother entrepreneurs in our society and in others live their lives and the different ways in which they understand who they are as a women and business owner where to explore the role played in balancing both. Everything you say is voluntary, anonymous, and confidential.

I hope you will enjoy the interview. Do you have any questions?

A. Life Chapters

Please take a moment and think about all your past life events/stories. To begin here, please tell me about yourself. As you going to tell me about your life story here, what you will do is to give me an overall plot summary of your life story which I am really interested to hear. We will spend no more than about 20 minutes on this first section of the interview.

B. Key Scenes in the Life Story

Now that you have described the overall plot outline for your life, I would like you to focus in on a few key scenes that stand out in the story which starts from your childhood memory and go through your motherhood scene. A key scene would be an event or specific incident that took place at a particular time and place. Consider a key scene to be a moment in your life story that stands out for a particular reason – perhaps because it was especially good or bad, particularly vivid, important, or memorable. In addition, I ask that you tell me why you think this particular scene is *important* or significant in your life. What does the scene say about you as a person? Please be specific.

Positive childhood memory. The first scene is an early memory – from childhood or your teen-aged years – that stands out as especially *positive* in some way. This would be a very positive, happy memory from your early years. Please describe this good memory in detail. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you or about your life?

Negative childhood memory. The second scene is an early memory – from childhood or your teen-aged years – that stands out as especially *negative* in some way. This would be a very negative, unhappy memory from your early years, perhaps entailing sadness, fear, or some other very negative emotional experience. Please describe this bad memory in detail. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you or your life?

Vivid adult memory. Moving ahead to your adult years, please identify one scene that you have not already described in this section (in other words, do not repeat your high point, low point, or turning point scene) that stands out as especially vivid or meaningful. This would be an especially memorable, vivid, or important scene, positive or negative, from your adult years. Please describe this scene in detail, tell what happened, when and where, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling. Also, what does this memory say about you or your life?

Turning points. In looking back over your life, it may be possible to identify certain key moments that stand out as turning points -- episodes that marked an important change in you or your life story. And, for each of these events describe what happened, where and when, who

was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling. Also, please say a word or two about what you think this event says about you as a person or about your life.

Please identify episodes in your life story that you now see as a turning points in your life. If you cannot identify a key turning point that stands out clearly, please describe some event in your life wherein you went through an important change of some kind. Again, for this event please describe what happened, where and when, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling. Also, please say a word or two about what you think this event says about you as a person or about your life.

(...For the researcher use only: Maybe, after that she has told me about the turning points in her life in general, I could focus on the turning points for her business. In this way, I might be able to receive information about the business and its development)

C. Motherhood and spirituality Scenes in the Life Story

Motherhood. Thinking back over your entire life, please identify a scene that stands out as an event that make you different and how of being a mother? Please tell me what it looks like being a mother and what different experience you can tell me after you become a mother? Again, please tell me the challenges and opportunities that you face after you become a mother?

Motherhood and being business owner. Please describe a scene, episode, or moment in your life that stands out as an especially wisdom that help you to balance the two roles. What happened, when and where, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling while you are playing both roles. Also, please say a word or two about why you think this particular wisdom was so good and what the scene may say about who you are as a person while you engaged in this role.

Motherhood and spirituality. Please tell me e about your spiritual belief and value you have before and after you become mother. Thinking back on your entire life, please identify an episode or moment in which you felt something different experience you had before or after you become a mother.

Wisdom event. Please describe an event in your life in which you displayed *wisdom*. The episode might be one in which you acted or interacted in an especially wise way or provided wise counsel or advice, made a wise decision, or otherwise behaved in a particularly wise

manner. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you and your life?

Religious, spiritual, or mystical experience. Whether they are religious or not, many people report that they have had experiences in their lives where they felt a sense of the transcendent or sacred, a sense of God or some almighty or ultimate force, or a feeling of oneness with nature, the world, or the universe. Thinking back on your entire life, please identify an episode or moment in which you felt something like this. This might be an experience that occurred within the context of your own religious tradition, if you have one, or it may be a spiritual or mystical experience of any kind. Please describe this transcendent experience in detail. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does these memories say about you or your life?

(...For the researcher use only: This will help me later on to conduct comparative analysis of salient features that may exist in the way they utilize, if they have, credit, employment, information, supply networks and any other context specific networks with their co-religionists.)

Please describe for me the environment and culture that you think may influence your current spiritual values.

In addition,

- Tell me about how the spiritual beliefs and values that you are in is related/play a role with your motherhood and business?
- Tell me about your family background - How are spiritual beliefs and values? Do they have any role in developing your values and beliefs of religion?
- Tell me about what is your top priority/goal in life right now and in future? - Is there anything that makes reaching this goal difficult?

Now, we're going to talk about the future.

D. Future Script

The next chapter. Your life story includes key chapters and scenes from your past, as you have described them, and it also includes how you see or imagine your future.

Please describe what you see to be the next chapter in your life. What is going to come next in your life story?

Dreams, hopes, and plans for the future. Please describe your plans, dreams, or hopes for the future. What do you hope to accomplish in the future in your life story?

Life project. Do you have a project in life? A life project is something that you have been working on and plan to work on in the future chapters of your life story. The project might involve your family or your work life, or it might be a hobby, avocation, or pastime.

Please describe any project that you are currently working on or plan to work on in the future. Tell me what the project is, how you got involved in the project or will get involved in the project, how the project might develop, and why you think this project is important for you and/or for other people.

E. Motivation

Can you tell me your motivation for becoming entrepreneur or business owner and also the motivation for the specific business type? Particularly if you have started the business before or after becoming mothers.

F. Challenges and Opportunities

Can you tell me the various challenges, struggles, and problems you have encountered in your life? You can begin with a general challenge, and then you can focus in on three particular areas or issues where many people experience challenges, problems, or crises.

Life challenge. Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe what you now consider to be the greatest single challenge you have faced in your life. What is or was the challenge or problem? How did the challenge or problem develop? How did you address or deal with this challenge or problem? What is the significance of this challenge or problem in your own life story?

Motherhood and opportunity. Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe a scene or period in your life, including the present time, wherein you confronted a major *motherhood* problem, challenge, or crisis. Please describe in detail what the challenge is or was and how it developed. In addition, please talk about how you coped with the problem and what impact this crisis, problem, or challenge has had on you and your overall life story.

Business opportunity and challenge. Tell me about the development of your business and how you came to this stage. Please describe the overall opportunity and challenges you face while you are developing your business

Loss. As people get older, they invariably suffer losses of one kind or another. By loss I am referring here to the loss of important people in your life, perhaps through death or separation. These are *interpersonal* losses – the loss of a person. Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe the greatest interpersonal loss you have experienced. This could be a loss you experienced at any time in your life, going back to childhood and up to the present day. Please describe this loss and the process of the loss. How have you coped with the loss? What effect has this loss had on you and your life story?

Failure, regret. Everybody experiences failure and regrets in life, even for the happiest and luckiest lives. Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe the greatest failure or regret you have experienced. The failure or regret can occur in any area of your life – work, family, friendships, or any other area. Please describe the failure or regret and the way in which the failure or regret came to be. How have you coped with this failure or regret? What effect has this failure or regret had on you and your life story?

Perception towards the opportunity and challenge. How does she see/think about/consider these challenges? (We talked about a possible focus on adversity, so understanding how you frame the challenges/opportunities is important)

G. Personal Ideology

Now, I would like to ask a few questions about your fundamental beliefs and values and about questions of meaning and morality in your life. Please give some thought to each of these Questions.

Spiritual ethical values. Consider for a moment the religious or spiritual aspects of your life. Please describe in a nutshell your religious beliefs and values, if indeed these are important to you. Whether you are religious or not, please describe your overall ethical or moral approach to life.

Change, development of spiritual views. Please tell the story of how your spiritual moral, views and values have developed over time. Have they changed in any important ways? Please explain.

Single value. What is the most important value in human living? Please explain.

Other. What else can you tell me that would help me understand you're most fundamental beliefs and values about life and the world? What else can you tell me that would help me understand your overall philosophy of life?

H. Life Theme

Looking back over your entire life story with all its chapters, scenes, and challenges, and extending back into the past and ahead into the future, do you discern a central theme, message, or idea that runs throughout the story? What is the major theme in your life story? Please explain.

Last questions:

- How do you see yourself; do you consider yourself as an entrepreneur or not? Business owners? Mompreneurs? Women? Mothers? Who do you see yourselves as generally speaking?
- The business. When did you start driving the business? Why did you engaged in staring and running it? Why this business? What influenced this decision? How did you feel and think about driving a business prior to the decision to star it and how does you feel and think now? Have there been any changes in the line of business? Why and when? What influenced these changes?

I. Reflection

Thank you for this interview. I have just one more question for you. Many of the stories you have told me are about experiences that stand out from the day-to-day. For example, we talked about a high point, a turning point, a scene about your health, etc. Given that most people don't share their life stories in this way on a regular basis, I'm wondering if you might reflect for one last moment about what this interview, here today, has been like for you. What were your thoughts and feelings during the interview? How do you think this interview has affected you? Do you have any other comments about the interview process?