

# NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES: EMPOWERING REFUGEE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

## Abstract

This paper critically analyses the complexities of identity work amongst refugee women entrepreneurs in the UK. Once labelled as refugees, individuals are homogenised and disadvantaged by association with this stigmatised identity. We explore how women refugees undertake dynamic identity work to recreate themselves as entrepreneurs attempting to ameliorate such stigma. Using case study evidence, we find that claiming an entrepreneurial identity enables the refutation of the stigmatised refugee label and as such, it can be personally enhancing improving well-being and socio-economic standing. The vestigial negative effects upon access to entrepreneurial resources arising from gendered constraints and a refugee background however, persist. Thus, these refugee entrepreneurs face a double-edged sword; while challenging stigmas through entrepreneurship is potentially liberating, having a refugee background acerbates the impact of enduring structural challenges upon women's entrepreneurial activity. This has implications for venture potential and relatedly, to the sustainability of fragile entrepreneurial identities amongst a cohort of vulnerable women.

**Key words:** Gender, Refugees, Stigma, Identity Work.

## Introduction

The recent refugee crisis of the early twenty-first century has seen the highest recorded level of forced displacement since 1945, largely from sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East (Betts *et al.*, 2017). By 2020, the number of displaced persons seeking refuge from conflict and persecution on a global scale has reached approximately 79.5m (UNHCR, 2020); whilst most are displaced internally or to neighbouring countries, a minority have reached the global north (Desai, Naudé and Stel, 2020). Regardless of their final destination, most refugees face a range of wicked problems including persecution, discrimination, poverty, limited access to housing, health-care and employment (Fong, Busch, Armour, Cook Heffron and Chanmugam, 2007; Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2019; Kone, Ruiz and Vargas-Silva, 2020). These are accentuated for those journeying to the global north who are also likely to face language barriers, unfamiliar institutional norms and protracted claims for asylum (Alrawadieh *et al.*, 2019; de Lange *et al.*, 2020). Such challenges

negatively impact upon the options available for refugees to overcome poverty and exclusion through economic participation. Even if granted leave to work, accessing employment in the face of such diverse barriers is challenging; added to which are problems of accrediting prior experience and formal qualifications. Consequently, many refugees may turn to entrepreneurship to circumvent employment-related barriers and discrimination (Desai et al., 2020; Kone et al., 2020).

While empirical research focussed upon refugee entrepreneurship is scarce (Desai et al., 2020), a self-employment strategy is precarious given that the culmination of limited access to entrepreneurial capital, market constraints and weak legitimacy would generate poor returns with implications for longer-term sustainability (Al Dajani and Marlow, 2013; Al-Dajani, Carter, Shaw and Marlow, 2015). An overriding attraction of entrepreneurship, however fragile, may be the ability for refugees, drawing upon their skills and experience, to utilise personal agency to generate income; thus, facilitating an enhanced status while simultaneously refuting the refugee label and associated negative connotations (Kone et al., 2020). Within this paper, we contribute to such arguments by exploring how entrepreneurial activity can act as a conduit for positive identity work. This enables individuals subject to a highly stigmatised identity, that of refugee, to refute this ascription by reconfiguring themselves as entrepreneurial actors and, in so doing, to distance the self from this damaging label that taints all other life experiences. In addition, we add a gender dimension by focusing upon women who carry the dual burden of subordination and privation that arises from the stigmatised intersection of being refugees and women.

Evidence is unequivocal that in conflict situations women are highly likely to have been subject to specific forms of gender-based violence and, as refugees, bear the brunt of caring responsibilities whilst coping with poverty in contexts where male family members struggle to gain employment due to the stigma of the refugee label (OHCHR, 2020). These experiences provide a specific context which distinguishes refugee women from the wider immigrant population and in turn: *'alter the nexus of identities available to the self'* (Prasad and Prasad, 2002:59). We seek to delve into the notion of how those homogenised and stigmatised by their gender and social status use entrepreneurship for income generation but also, to reconfigure their identities. Consequently, our underpinning research objective is to: *'critically analyse the identity work undertaken by women refugees in the UK to refute their stigmatised refugee identity using entrepreneurial activity'*. Using an intersectional positional lens, we analyse how refugee women use self-employment to inform dynamic identity work to reconfigure present and future identities

and so, challenge their status which strips them of their individual biographies, reducing them to a stigmatised generic identity. We adopt an interpretist ontology to explore how our case study participants make sense of their experiences as refugees in the UK and the identity work they employ as they reposition the self through entrepreneurial activity. Our findings illustrate how entrepreneurial activity is critical for our participants in refuting the stigmatised identity of the refugee. Yet, whilst they may claim entrepreneurial identities, the negative connotations of their refugee backgrounds persist in constraining the accrual of capital and access to markets; these aspects are in turn, exacerbated by the specific gendered constraints encountered by such women.

To explore these issues, the paper is structured as follows: first, we review the extant theories which inform our theoretical lens, developing a framework that combines intersectionality and related transnational positionality, and identity work. Together, they capture the power dynamics of the agency-structure debate that is evident within entrepreneurship. Second, we explore the following streams of literature as helpful in understanding the identity work undertaken by refugee women entrepreneurs: structure and agency, entrepreneurial legitimation, refugee entrepreneurship, and women's entrepreneurship. Having outlined our methodology and presented our findings, we discuss the implications for policymakers and business support providers based on the theoretical insights gained into identity construction among refugee women entrepreneurs as well as opportunities for further research.

### **Identity work: rejecting stigma, embracing entrepreneurship**

Central to the notion of identity work is narrative; individuals maintain their self-identity or personal narrative by relating to the social identities within “public narratives” (Somers, 1994: 619) that are encountered at home, in work and throughout society (Watson, 2009). Importantly, identity work is relational and dialogic as individuals shape their identities in contestation with actual people or “in our minds with the arguments of human others” (Watson, 2001: 23). Not only do reflexive individuals undertake identity work to enhance their comfort with certain identities (Lewis, 2015), but also to legitimise their identities which “requires contextualised recognition and approval for the self as a credible subject within a particular setting or across a cultural and symbolic milieu” (Marlow and McAdam, 2015: 794). Understandings of identity vary greatly depending on one's ontological and epistemological position (Brown, 2017). Social psychologists have traditionally viewed an individual's self-concept as “relatively stable, coherent and

unproblematic” (Ashforth and Schinoff, 2016:112). However, scholars with a critical and post-structuralist orientation argue that there is no single unified self and identities only appear to be stable and coherent as a result of power operations (Ramarajan, 2014). In keeping with the latter view, this study recognises that identities are in continuous flux and are “the *ongoing achievements* of human interactions” (Watson, 2001: 223, original emphasis). This view of identity as the temporal result of a dynamic process (Schulz and Hernes, 2013), which is informed by memories of the past and affected by present and future identity claims (Gioia, Schulz and Corley, 2000; Hatch and Schulz, 2002), is widespread in the individual and organisational literatures.

Adopting a dynamic perspective on identity and identity work raises the issue of whether identities are chosen by or ascribed to individuals (Brown, 2017; DeRue and Ashford, 2010). We acknowledge that individuals have a certain degree of agency in terms of how they identify, whilst also recognising that “identities exist and are acquired, claimed and allocated within power relations” (Jenkins, 2008: 45). Individuals have a self-identity, defined as the “*the individual’s own notion of who and what they are*”, which is shaped and influenced by their array of social-identities, defined as the “*cultural, discursive or institutional notions of who or what any individual might be*” (Watson, 2008: 131). Accordingly, identity work is a dynamic interplay between “internal self-reflection and external engagement—through talk and action—” with other individuals (Watson, 2008: 130) and with the cultural and institutional forces that prescribe certain subjectivities (Foucault, 1980).

There is a well-established literature exploring notions of an entrepreneurial identity and related identity work undertaken to legitimise the self in this context (Watson, 2009; Marlow and McAdam, 2015; Powell and Baker, 2014). An entrepreneurial identity can satisfy the individual psychological need to be distinct, facilitate autonomy and enhance their self-esteem (Shepherd and Patzelt, 2018); however, their entrepreneurial activities and behaviours must align sufficiently with societal and sector norms and stakeholder expectations to ensure they possess entrepreneurial legitimacy (Marlow and McAdam, 2015) which in turn reinforces the entrepreneurial identity. Given that the relationship between entrepreneurial activity and entrepreneurial identity is found to be mutually reinforcing, the enactment of an entrepreneurial identity and how that process develops, becomes of greater relevance (Down and Giazitzoglu, 2014). Yet, this debate largely ignores the context in which such identity work occurs. In the global north, suffused with a neoliberal ideology, entrepreneurship is promoted as individuals are encouraged to be their

entrepreneurial selves (du Gay, 1991; Bröckling, 2005) and entrepreneurs are afforded status and esteem (Treanor, Jones and Marlow, 2020). However, the focus remains upon the destination identity: that of the entrepreneur, with little consideration of how existing ascribed identities shape the motivation for, and experiences of, identity work.

There is also a bias within the identity literature towards research that focuses on positive identities and yet, it is evident that there exist identities which are deemed non-normative, negative or stigmatised (Stets and Burke, 2014; Brown, 2015). A stigma is recognised as a severely discrediting attribute that positions an individual in a place of ‘differentness’ and renders them ‘not quite human’ (Goffman, 1963: 4, 5). Physical, social or personal marginalising differences such as disability, addiction, unemployment, race, and religion are the basis of stigma which can be individualised or held against groups. However, it is understood that stigmas exist and develop in relation to specific contexts and as a result of stereotypes, processes of labelling and discrimination (Zetter, 1991, 2007; Link and Phelan, 2001). Within the arena of unequal power dynamics where individuals negotiate their identities, personal social interactions, institutional procedures, cultural norms, industry practices and government policies are influences which determine identities to be inferior and marginalised (Toyoki and Brown, 2014; van Amsterdam and van Eck, 2019). In turn, those who hold stigmatised identities, actively work to challenge or fix the negative effects of the stigmas imposed on them and in so doing manage their self-identities. Thus, a response to stigmatisation or stigma management is incorporated into the reparatory strategies used within identity work (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Toyoki and Brown, 2014). For those allocated a stigmatised identity, such as refugees who face ensuing barriers to employment, the attraction of entrepreneurship as a means of income generation, autonomy and enhanced social and self-esteem is easily comprehended.

### **Refugee Entrepreneurship**

Public discourse promotes entrepreneurship as capable of empowering, emancipating and integrating marginalised groups (Bearne, 2017; Kloosterman and van der Leun 1999; Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009). Faced with challenges of integrating into an unfamiliar environment, marginalisation, difficulties in finding employment and poverty, many refugees are drawn towards self-employment. However, analyses of refugee entrepreneurs have mostly been subsumed within the more established body of literature on immigrant or ethnic minority entrepreneurship (Desai

et al., 2020). This extant literature has developed in complexity and sophistication since the 1980s moving from a generic focus upon ‘immigrants’ or ‘ethnic minorities’ to far more nuanced analyses recognising heterogeneity, super diversity and contextual influences (Ram, Jones and Villares-Varela, 2017; Vertovec, 2019). Subsequent calls for a similar approach to refugee entrepreneurship are not unsurprising (Essers, Dey, Tedmanson and Verduijn, 2017:10-11; Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008).

Within this emergent body of refugee entrepreneurship literature (Bizri, 2017; Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008) there is increasing acknowledgement of heterogeneity and the influence of context, with research exploring: entrepreneurship in refugee camps (Jacobsen, 2006), the influence of gender upon displaced women entrepreneurs (Al-Dajani, Carter, Shaw and Marlow, 2015; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013; Refai, Haloub and Lever, 2018), entrepreneurial intention among refugees (Lazarczyk-Bilal and Glinka, 2021; Mawson and Kasem, 2019) and refugee business support programmes in developed economies (Meister and Mauer, 2018; van Kooy, 2016). Research conducted into the refugee experience of entrepreneurship in European host countries found that refugee entrepreneurs face greater barriers to their endeavours than economic migrants; being less likely to access extensive social networks in the host country or return to their home country to access funds, capital or labour for their ventures and having left with little or no preparation, refugees often arrive with no valuables or certificates of credentials (Fong et al., 2007; Gold, 1988; Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008). Thus, this emerging strand of research within the broader discipline of ethnic minority/immigrant entrepreneurship acknowledges how the experiences of conflict, displacement and refugee ascription generate a specific context for exploring entrepreneurial behaviour that is further influenced by issues such as place, gender and social positioning.

We contribute to this debate with a focus upon how gender intersects with refugee status to position women’s entrepreneurial activities. The contemporary body of evidence analysing gender and entrepreneurship now acknowledges the impact of context and the need to challenge assumptions that mature western economies form the normative institutionalised backdrop for such activities (Welter, 2011; Imas, Wilson and Weston, 2012). Thus, there is a greater focus upon women’s entrepreneurship on a global basis – for example, work focused on Africa (Spring, 2009; Welsh, Memili and Kaciak, 2013), the Middle East (McElwee, Al-Riyami and Al-Fahal, 2003; Dechant and Lamky, 2005; Bastian, Sidani and Amine, 2018) and Pakistan (Roomi and Parrott,

2008) as examples. A focus on refugee women in the UK adopts a novel stance by analysing how gender intersects with context and status to shape entrepreneurial experiences and related identities. Whilst gender and ethnicity are fundamental universal identity markers (Butler, 2004), it is now acknowledged that each is enacted through an intersectional matrix of other social categories (Essers and Benschop, 2009). Using an intersectional positional lens provides the opportunity to analyse how refugee status, and associated fracturing of identity, influence women's experiences of entrepreneurship. This draws upon past, present and future identities, spaces and experiences whilst recognising the social, cultural and historical contexts associated with identity and its construction (Down and Giazitzoglu, 2014). This offers the possibility of assessing women refugee entrepreneurs as something other than passive victims of subordination and disadvantage but as those able to use agency to refute stigmatised identities.

Refugee identities reflected in the media and constructed by other entities within the UK refugee system depict among varying images, a 'helpless, defenceless, individual' and 'incompetent' standing potentially in contrast to the economic migrant (Phillips and Hardy, 1997:176-177). This discourse surrounding the construction of various refugee identities assigned to refugees is an example of a social construct with which they must contend and use to redefine their own sense of identity (Phillips and Hardy, 1997). The implications of such labels on the individual's ability to engage in entrepreneurial activities and their identity work, is unknown. We argue that this distinction which can be seen in the experience of displaced migrants crossing borders in search of safety and arriving in host countries where they may be subject to a negative societal reception, is reinforced in the process of identity construction as refugees develop and renegotiate their identities.

### **Intersectionality, Translocational Positionality and Identity Work**

Intersectionality acknowledges the co-existence of multiple social categories of exclusion and systems of oppression (Essers and Benschop, 2007; Lascelles and Shaw, 2021). It captures difference and highlights the 'multidimensionality of marginalized subjects' lived experiences (Crenshaw 1989:139). In its original form, rooted in Black feminism (Crenshaw, 1991, 2015; hooks, 1981), it was concerned with the intersection of non-dominant race/ethnicity and gender categories. However, intersectionality has subsequently been used to explore the interlocking, rather than additive, relationship between multiple exclusionary social categories, such as those

experienced by refugee women, who are positioned in the intersect between gender, ethnicity and complex status ascriptions. It is argued that the complexity of intersectionality as a construct presents both ontological and epistemological challenges in its application when conducting intersectional research, which ultimately limits its explanatory power (Geerts and van der Tuin, 2013; Nash, 2008).

Research approaches that are individual-focused, emphasising the marginalised position of, and which give voice to, those from marginalised groups are critiqued for their exclusivity and limited ability to offer ‘generalizable explanations of patterns or behaviours to alternative intersectional positions’ (Atewologun, Sealy and Vinnicombe 2016:225). However, we would echo Atewologun et al. (2016) in arguing that when combined with identity work, intersectionality offers scope to analyse in greater depth the multiplicity and dynamism of interactions with social structures, thus, offering a better understanding of how individuals respond and relate to external structures of power. Applied within the context of entrepreneurial identities, intersectionality advances our understanding of how multiple identities are constructed within different settings of power dynamics and behaviours, particularly given the agentic nature of entrepreneurship. Thus, an entrepreneurial identity itself might be perceived as an advantage that can be used to positively challenge another disadvantaged category. Exploring how oppression and privilege intersect and operate simultaneously can therefore, promote a more robust conceptualisation of identity and challenge criticisms related to the limitations of intersectionality as a theory (Nash, 2008).

A logical extension of the intersectionality framework has been captured by Anthias (2008, 2013) in the notion of translocational positionality. This construct explores the social spaces that reflect a broad landscape of social categories such as gender, race, class and their consequences, recognising that they are ‘context, meaning and time-related’ (2008: 5). Such spaces are then mapped onto the social positions (outcomes) and positioning (processes comprising of practices, actions and meaning) emerging as agency intersects with structure (Anthias, 2013:15). This approach affords an additional temporal and contextual lens which permits a conceptualisation of social categories as spaces which are shifting, rather than fixed, and that intersect. Positionality thereby addresses the operational limitations of intersectionality, facilitating a dynamic analysis of how agents negotiate constraining structures. For the purposes of this paper, we focus this analysis upon the process of identity work undertaken by refugee women entrepreneurs.



## **Methodology**

This paper seeks to ‘critically analyse the identity work undertaken by women refugees in the UK to refute their stigmatised refugee identity using entrepreneurial activity.’ This necessitates delving into how women designated as refugees use particular forms of identity work to refute this stigma and claim an entrepreneurial identity, as such, an interpretist stance is axiomatic. We adopt a social constructionist perspective, seeking insight and understanding of the identity work and sensemaking processes undertaken by participants over time. As such we recognise the entrepreneur “*as an active agent who shapes or constructs his or her own reality, and as such is simultaneously the driver of the entrepreneurial process operating within a reality which sets limits on choice of action possibilities*” (Chell, 2000: 66). We also recognise that entrepreneuring and identity work are processes. To understand the contextual influences and the individual’s process of identity construction/reconstruction, and the identity work necessitated therein, we adopted a case-study approach.

Case studies facilitate detailed analysis of individuals within their contemporary context (Yin, 2014) and align with a social constructionist position (Chell, 2000). We undertook purposive sampling (Guest et al., 2006) and this paper reports our findings from five detailed case studies undertaken with women, who had come to the UK from Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Iran and Syria, and engaged in entrepreneurial activity (see Table 1 for participant profiles). Refugee women entrepreneurs are a hard-to-reach population that includes vulnerable individuals; we therefore, sought to build rapport and trust with participants (Ellard-Gray, Jeffrey, Choubak and Crann, 2015). The case studies comprised three personal interviews undertaken over a period of 12 months which were complemented by visits to, and observations undertaken at, their place of business. Initial interviews were unstructured to facilitate rapport building; subsequent interviews were semi-structured, exploring both specific and emerging issues.

### **Insert Table 1 Here**

To analyse the data within and across the case studies we employed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2017); level one coding occurred within cases with level two coding relating to key themes appropriate across cases (see Appendix I for table of codes and supporting quotes). The key themes identified, under which we will present our findings in the subsequent section, reflect the process undertaken by the women from their designation as refugees upon

arrival in the UK, through to their reflections upon their entrepreneurial identities. The themes are being a refugee woman and bearing the stigma, becoming an entrepreneur – an identity work project, and finally, being an entrepreneur - the persistent challenges.

## **Findings**

In this section, we draw upon brief excerpts from interviews with the women that are related to the themes outlined. This enables us to demonstrate how refugee women entrepreneurs in the UK engage in identity work and in so doing, challenge the stigma and discrimination associated with their various identities.

### ***Being a refugee woman and bearing stigma***

The experience of being labelled a refugee is a dominant feature of the identity project for the women on arrival in the UK. The stigmatisation and negativity emerging from societal views of refugees as well as the legal implications surrounding the asylum-seeking process, provide the backdrop against which the women begin a process of reassessing and legitimising who they are and who they can become in the host country (Link and Phelan, 2001; Toyoki and Brown, 2014; Marlow and McAdam, 2015). The verbal abuse and mistrust they encountered on arrival were underpinned by assumptions that refugees are in the country illegally and are a burden to the society. Zendaya explains:

*“We were labelled people with complex needs. You know they saw us as strangers, we were thieves, people coming to reside on benefits.....Because nobody bothers to listen to where you are coming from. They see you here as a poor refugee.....looking for mercy.... looking to be helped. We are always seen from a begging perspective, not as people who can do things better than they can do, we are looked at as, “Poor them or, they have killed their people, their people have died”, things like that. So, it's what puts us at risk in terms of growing the business and getting to do what you intended to do.”*

Here, Zendaya is acutely aware of the causes of what she refers to as ‘negative socialization - negative people talking to me in a negative way’. She anticipates having to face continued consequences of this stigmatised refugee identity as she develops her business. Whether stigmatised as ‘criminals’ or beggars, the implications are that she is made to feel without worth. Indeed, three of the women were detained in immigration detention centres and spoke of these

experiences and similar encounters with the police as direct attacks on their freedom, integrity and humanity.

In addition to a stigmatised refugee identity, the women also faced gender bias:

*“We went to a farm shop and when we got in, it was an old man sitting down and he looked at us in a really strange way and he said ‘aah you immigrants coming here to get money...’ I said, ‘no, no I am not coming here to get money, I am coming here just to introduce our product if you want to buy it’. Then he said, ‘you are a woman, you should be just in the mills baking and doing pies.’”*

This example highlights the additional barriers and stigmatisation faced by women refugees since the reality of a gendered bias is not always experienced in isolation but is often entwined with a racialised stigma and a general sense of being ‘othered’. The assumption of the farmer was that as a woman, Aliya ought to be restricted to a domestic environment, baking rather than engaging in industrial food production. The patriarchal logics from both home and host countries provide a discriminatory framework which the women must navigate. So, for example, Zendaya spoke about the disadvantage that women like her faced due to their status in Zimbabwe and the cultural implications for African women once they were in the UK:

*(In Zimbabwe) “we never had an ID; my mother never had an ID until 1980. She never had an ID because as women we were not seen as people who can stand in court, we were nothing. You know, so I was so shocked... that when you go to court in the UK you should keep eye contact. You look in someone’s eyes and that demonstrated that you are telling the truth. But where I come from, you cannot look in an older man’s eyes, it is showing disrespect. So, the cultures differ”.*

This difference in terms of how women behave in formal settings where men hold the power, is pertinent not only during the asylum-seeking process where they might be in a court room or police interview room, but also as women engage in entrepreneurial activities such as pitching an idea to a panel or requesting funding.

### ***Becoming an entrepreneur: identity work in progress***

#### ***Pursuing an entrepreneurial identity: Resisting a stigmatised identity***

Problems accessing the labour market served as a key motivator for all the women to pursue entrepreneurship (Carter, Mwaura, Ram, Trehan, and Jones, 2015; Kone et al., 2020). Creating work for oneself represented survival, both financially and in terms of well-being. For example, Aliya, whose husband's asylum application took longer than her own, felt that there was no alternative other than to start her own business if she was to support her family:

*“So, university I cannot do, college I cannot do.... I need to pay for that, and I don't have the money. That made me think I need to do something for myself after a year searching for a job. I cannot do volunteer work as I've got kids to look after, I have a family.... My qualifications have not been recognised. I applied for loads of jobs, but nobody accepted me. Then I started to think that I need to do something.”*

Aliya exercises her entrepreneurial agency when constrained by the system, her assigned refugee label and faced with the responsibility of providing for a family. For Anashe, Azadeh and Zendaya, volunteering commenced this transition towards engaging in entrepreneurial action. Their voluntary work while awaiting the outcome of their asylum application challenged the notion of dependency and resisted the saliency of the refugee label, while laying the foundations for their future enterprise. For example, Anashe says,

*“I decided to not put immigration status as a measurement to success, but rather to do voluntary work and set up an organisation, running it as a volunteer and developing skills or developing my brand; in this way I could start something.”*

Not only did this strategy serve as a stepping-stone in terms of capacity building for her to establish her businesses, but it also allowed her to contribute to her local communities. For Azadeh, this became the source of opportunity for her business which provides craft therapy for disadvantaged women, many of whom come from a refugee background. Zendaya, through her business ventures which started as voluntary community programmes, has been able to employ other refugee women and support others into self-employment. In so doing, she has contributed to the local economy and enabled others to do the same.

*Identifying an entrepreneurial identity: repositioning a stigmatised identity*

All the women self-identified with a higher social class in their country of origin than that ascribed to them as refugees in the UK. Consequently, they drew on their past education and business experience to develop businesses in areas in which they felt competent and, during this process, constructed an entrepreneurial identity (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011). In the case of Aliya, her degrees provided the knowledge with which to understand the requirements of the food production industry and issues of health and safety. Although, she had only previously assisted her husband with his business, this exposure fostered confidence that she was able to run her own business.

*“People think refugees come here and they are just like having miserable life. And they want to take them out of this miserable life. But people are coming here with lots of rich civilization, history, experience and skills... So, (in my business) this is where my studies and background in the laboratory and then pharmacology helped me to understand the bacteria, handling food, what can make food not good for consumption. So, for me, it ... was like not making a recipe, it was science, understanding more about protein and all that stuff.”*

Aliya has drawn on the privileged aspects of the scientist identity she held prior to becoming a refugee in the UK as she created her venture. In so doing, she challenged stigmatising assumptions which prioritised a homogeneous refugee identity negating her history, background and heritage. Her entrepreneurial venturing enabled her to resurface such aspects of the self and so, enabling her to constitute a complex and nuanced identity distanced from the pejorative refugee label. In our study, four of the five women drew upon their background and ethnic identity as a source of opportunity for at least one of their businesses. In Aliya’s case, the lack of all-year availability of a traditional Middle Eastern food product prompted her to target this as a product gap that needed to be filled. She positioned it as a Middle Eastern food product made with authentic British ingredients, making it complementary to the British palette. Thus, she reclaimed positive aspects of her ethnic heritage as a strength. Similarly, Zendaya used African textiles and paired them with western influenced designs; re-positioning the bright and bold African prints as ‘therapeutic materials’ for interior designs in hospitals and other healthcare environments.

*Validating an entrepreneurial identity: Rejecting a stigmatised identity*

Consistent with the notion that the entrepreneurial identity exists in relation to that of others (Leitch and Harrison, 2016) and is enacted by individuals in dialogue with others (Lewis, 2015), some of the women purposefully self-presented as businesswomen before they had established their businesses. To illustrate this, we turn to excerpts from Zendaya and Aliya. Firstly, Zendaya explains that she was engaging in advocacy work whilst awaiting her asylum application to be granted:

*“I was becoming a businessperson from portraying myself as an African woman who is directing the integration of African people....so with that I would make myself as a businessperson. I was an asylum seeker, but no-one would have listened to me without the badge of Director. I was the Director of the women’s forum, so yes, they would want to talk to businesspeople.”*

Self-presentation was a form of securing validation for the entrepreneurial identity which she was constructing. At times, this involved hiding her immigration status in order that she might enact a more legitimate identity. This was then reinforced by others, for example Zendaya was asked to chair meetings with the local authority and other community groups and was called upon to be a speaker at events as an expert on women refugee issues.

In a similar way gaining industry awards and exhibiting at shows demonstrated the credibility of an enterprise. For example, Aliya stated that she was searching for a way ‘to certify what I am doing’ as she realised that at trade shows, other exhibitors often enquired about the provenance of her business. Within the first year of trading, she entered an international award for her produce and won a bronze award. This affirmation was essential both in terms of validating her produce and in legitimising her as an entrepreneur. Consequently, she gained media attention as well as recognition from a celebrity chef and politicians who saw her success story as a refugee entrepreneur. Under such circumstances, Aliya’s standing was enhanced given her achievements in overcoming the disadvantages and stigmatisation of her refugee status in becoming a successful entrepreneur. She felt respected by her local community and even by Syrians back in her home country who had heard of her success. Aliya refuted the refugee identity to impose her own sense of self and identity upon her achievement; discussing the book she was writing about her experiences, she commented:

*“I don’t want to have it as a refugee story. It’s a story of resilience and that you can make things happen... I don’t want people to look at it and cry and feel like oh, sorry poor person, No, I am a more of a positive person than negative.”*

Here, we can see how Aliya does not want to be distinguished by what she perceives to be a ‘pitiful refugee’ status despite her success. Rather, she wanted to focus on other aspects of her identity that would be reflected in the book such as her ability to create a successful venture and her expertise as a food producer which combined to support and justify her entrepreneurial identity.

#### *Consolidating the entrepreneurial identity: circumventing a stigmatised identity*

As the women engage in entrepreneurial activity, they frequently reported attempting to avoid the discrimination that accompanies being a refugee, compounded by racism. Zendaya for example, explained her approach in relation to expanding her target market to include more of the white host community:

*“sometimes I think that maybe if I put a white face when I want white businesses, this would help me to deal with white people. I have been thinking about it. I searched an agency, they supply to hospitals and home care, and they understand that maybe I need a white face. So, in the next few months, I will be using a white face so that I can penetrate the market.”*

This ‘whitewashing’ is intrinsically offensive as it is assumed that trust is associated with race; those who do not have the privilege of whiteness have to manufacture it by using contrived images and names (Martinez Dy, Martin and Marlow, 2018). Although Zendaya considered this a necessary strategy to expand the business it represents a fundamental assault upon her subject being when having to denigrate and deny her identity as a black women who is also a refugee. Thus, she has to work through multiple stigmas in order to position herself, and her business as legitimate.

#### **Being an entrepreneur: persistent challenges**

Whilst entrepreneurship may offer a pathway to escape a stigmatising identity, the trappings of this stigma in terms of accessing resources, achieving legitimacy and the general challenges of

business management remained and indeed, were exacerbated by refugee status. We draw out some of these key challenges.

### *Financial challenges*

The most prominent challenge facing all the women was the lack of access to finance. Although this is universally recognised as a barrier facing most entrepreneurs particularly, women and other marginalised entrepreneurs (Carter et al., 2015; Ram, Jones and Villares-Varela, 2017; Leitch, Welter and Henry, 2018), these women's experiences were exacerbated by their refugee status. The continued uncertainty associated with being permitted to stay in the UK for an initial five years once refugee status is granted, means that during this period it is not feasible to approach banks for start-up or growth funding. Aliya spoke of the inaccessibility of bank funding:

*“I could not go to the bank because I don't have permanent residency and the business is not built up, so the bank will not give me a loan. ... this even made us stop production for a couple of months and the business could easily be ruined ...because I have no other options. None of the banks will lend me money... even getting a mortgage for your premises is challenging because you only have five years.”*

Here, we see the precarious position in which Aliya found herself due to having limited access to finance during the start-up years of her business. Although crowdfunding was suggested as an alternative solution, she was reluctant to engage with this source of funding as she felt it placed her in a position of begging, thus, reinforcing a negative refugee stereotype.

### *Navigating conflict with a gendered maternal identity*

A key challenge for the respondents related managing the tensions that emerged between the gendered maternal identity and that of the entrepreneur (Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009) within the gendered framework of expectations of home and host country cultures. Anashe spoke of having to fit her business commitments around her family as she retained most of the caring and domestic responsibilities.

*“It is very hard managing, because obviously, everything I do I have to work around my son or my family. My husband's work is demanding. And he as a man, a Zimbabwean man, naturally or unfortunately, I don't know, I have to work around them more than they work around me. That's the challenge I have. I am the one shifting around everybody in the*



*house.... So, here is what I do; I fit in meetings with the understanding that it has to be around all of them.”*

In the early years, Aliya highlights that starting her business was as demanding as caring for a baby; such demands have increased to the extent that she is considering curtailing her entrepreneurial activity to spend more time with her young children and handing control of the business over to her husband. While work life balance is a common challenge facing women in business (Jayawarna et al., 2020), the cultural expectations upon many African and Middle Eastern women is that their maternal role will be dominant and assume primacy (Spring, 2009; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010). Given the success of her business, Aliya was considering stepping back to enable her husband to run it so she could spend more time with her children reflecting traditional gender roles. .

#### *Continued lack of access to information and networks*

Another source of structural constraint experienced by the women was a lack of access to information. The social positioning of the women puts them at further disadvantage in terms of the paucity and weakness of their networks (Pichler and Wallace, 2009). Despite their enhanced status by creating new ventures, the women remained primarily embedded within refugee groups limiting networks to those who were in similar situations. Reflecting on the impact of this, Zendaya stated, *“maybe if I had partnered with someone who had papers and worked behind that person, then, maybe I could have thrived quicker”*. This would have provided her with greater access to information and understanding of processes through a more established partner. In describing the greatest challenge faced as a businesswoman, Anashe refers to:

*“accessing the right information and also the proper networks and relationships that will help me build my business..... I spent years trying to connect with the right people so that I can be in a better position.”*

These findings highlight the gap caused by an inability to access relevant business networks that will strength the entrepreneurial identity and in so doing, lessen the stigmatising effects of a refugee identity.

### *Limited economic benefit*

Finally, our findings show that despite escaping economic poverty, many of the women still had not achieved the socio-economic standing they had held in their home countries as their businesses were generating limited profits. Aliya explains:

*“We are still not making massive or noticeable profits. I don't have extra each month. Each month I stretch to not spend everything, but I can say that the kids are doing gymnastics and this year we managed to go for one vacation. Actually, I want to have bigger house. We're living now in two bedrooms, so I want the kids to have their own rooms...to live the good life we had there (in Syria).”*

Although having her business has contributed financially to the household and permitted some additional activities for the children, Aliya continues to experience fluctuating profits and is particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of economic crises. Particularly during the COVID-19 crisis, it is evident that she experienced a heightened sense of responsibility towards her employees not only in terms of their livelihood but also in respect of their well-being.

*“Most of the employees were scared by the full lockdown and I thought why do I need to risk them? If they don't want to come to work, then I don't want to force them...I told them I don't want you to go by public transportation. I don't want them to get any virus (coming) to work. Then they stayed at home for a couple of weeks and gradually they started to come back to work and we offered to transport them between work and home, so they feel secure.”*

Having been able to access government support and focus on online sales, Aliya states that her business is *‘surviving, but it is not growth’*. Evidently this will have implications for both her employees and the aspirations she has for her family. However, the ongoing challenges of running business and a sense of responsibility for staff add to Aliya's burden rather than entrepreneurship providing a route to security, empowerment or liberation.

### **Discussion**

This paper sought to critically analyse the identity work undertaken by women refugees in the UK to refute their stigmatised refugee identity using entrepreneurial activity. Adopting an

intersectional approach to analysis, informed by translocational positionality, we were able to appreciate the stigmatising effects of their multiple categories of social belonging upon their experiences, as gender compounded the stigma attached to their refugee status, ethnicity and nationality. Thematic analysis of interview data assisted in illustrating the stigmatising effect of the ascribed refugee label, the discrimination and ‘othering’ experienced as a consequence and the effects of this upon their entrepreneurial decision and subsequent identity work undertaken when becoming and being a refugee woman entrepreneur in the UK.

We offer a theoretical contribution through our advancing understanding of the effects of a stigmatised identity and how identity work offers a means to actively seek agency within the constraints of social structures and discourse which suggest marginalisation and difference (Tomlinson, 2010); thus, permitting the individual to ‘become’ rather than accept a single, given, fixed identity. Our findings highlight the dual process of identity work undertaken by this group of women as they simultaneously incorporate a recognised entrepreneurial identity and refute the stigma of being refugee women. The women are intentional about how they present themselves in response to how they are perceived, emphasising the tense balancing act they must perform as they selectively draw on various strategies used to navigate the construction of their identities in the host country. Enacting an entrepreneurial identity serves to resist and reject the stigmatised refugee identity as is demonstrated by Zendaya, and yet for Aliya, having attained success as a refugee entrepreneur whereby the refugee label has been repositioned, she now feels that the entrepreneurial identity is too much in conflict with her gender identity as a mother. This highlights the intersectional challenges that the women encounter as they undertake identity work.

Building on intersectionality and using a translocational positionality approach, we illustrate that, for all these women, their prior social positionings served as incentives to develop or repair their identities. Within our sample, social positioning illuminates how prior levels of human and social capital, in particular their social class (for example, Aliya’s middle-class background afforded her a high level of educational attainment) facilitated a relative degree of privilege to some refugee women in the host country. This highlights the heterogeneity within the refugee community and individual experiences (Ram, Jones and Villares-Varela, 2017). It also affords insight into the complexity of the identity and entrepreneurial processes through recognising both being and becoming (Anthias, 2006, 2008); the women drew on aspects of who they were as a resource in their identity work to move from being a refugee to becoming a socially acceptable,

agentic and autonomous entrepreneur through engaging in entrepreneurial action in their new context.

Previous research has identified the reconfiguring of stigmatising stereotypes as resources used for entrepreneurial action (Malheiros and Padilla, 2015) or the use of a professional privilege as a buffer against stigmatised identity (Doldor and Atewologun, 2020). Our contribution is the extension of this theorising by using positionality to illustrate the role of privilege, across time and space, that can be employed as a resource to resist the stigmatised refugee identity which imposes a lower social status on the women. Positionality also highlights the structural constraints that create entrepreneurial disadvantages which continue to plague the women as they try to access resources such as finance or information networks. These inequalities, conferred on the women by their stigmatised identities, reinforce their ascribed social positioning at the bottom of the pecking order. Earlier studies from Essers and Benschop (2009) and Villares-Varela(2017) provide a basis for exploring the strategies used in the construction of entrepreneurial identities given the multiple social categories negotiated by the individual. Our study highlights that positionality and intersectionality provide an appropriate framework to critically examine a similar group, namely refugee women, with a focus not only on their identity construction but also on the persistent implications for their entrepreneurial activities and ensuing resource access (Martinez Dy, 2020).

There has been substantial research on the benefits of entrepreneurship for marginalised groups (Verjuin and Essers, 2013) with the assumption that entrepreneurship is a meritocratic and agential endeavour (Ahl and Marlow, 2012). Whilst we have observed that the women in this study have experienced restored respect within their local communities, have created employment for themselves and in some cases for others and have reaped some economic benefit, the latter is limited and negative structural forces prevail. Options for business growth are restricted due to limited access to finance and particularly during challenging economic times, there is an increased sense of vulnerability due to the ongoing challenges that they face as refugee women entrepreneurs. In some instances, the stress and adversity they encounter as entrepreneurs is comparable to the situations leading to them leaving their home countries and becoming refugees.

This research is not without limitations. Our study comprises a small number of refugee women entrepreneurs; a larger scale, cross-national study would be useful to determine the influence of different institutional frameworks and gendered regimes upon the experiences, outcomes and identity work of such women. Building on an intersectional identity work approach in such future

research would prove useful in expanding our understanding of how marginalized women refugees undertake identity work and yet, it is a broad enough framework to adapt to other dominant social categories as required. The inclusion of analysis that incorporates oppression and privilege provides the opportunity for future research that compares the intersectional identity work of male refugee entrepreneurs. We contend that through an integrated intersectional identity work framework, such as is proposed in this paper, entrepreneurship research has the potential to become more clearly situated in the social world; an important step given the agentic nature of the entrepreneur.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has explored the how women refugees can use entrepreneurial activity to challenge the stigma attached to the homogenising and negative refugee identity. In the current neoliberal era, entrepreneurship is feted as a positive choice with scope to exploit personal agency and generated socio-economic benefits on a broader scale. Thus, for refugee women who have a double stigma in terms of their gender and status, creating new ventures not only offers opportunities for independence, income generation and enhanced social standing it can also act as a gateway to specific forms of identity work. By identifying themselves as entrepreneurs, such women claim a privileged identity whilst distancing themselves from the negative connotations associated with ascribed refugee status. Yet, we instil a note of caution; despite the potential positive identity aspects associated with entrepreneurship, it should not be considered as a seamless pathway to economic empowerment, autonomy and freedom. The respondents acknowledged that their entrepreneurial ventures remain constrained by the vestiges of the stigmatised identity allocated upon their arrival to the host country; this restricted access to resources, encouraged racist ‘white washing’ to gain customers and demanded high levels of time investment to the detriment of family life. It is not an easy option and the precarity of the enterprises undertaken by many, mirrors the precarity of the entrepreneurial identity sought, in part, as a means of reparation and distancing from the stigmatised refugee identity they were assigned upon arrival in the host country.

The study of refugee women entrepreneurs through a lens of intersectionality challenges the primarily ethnocentric approach that has driven much of the research to date in migrant entrepreneurship. This has the potential to have an impact on both policymakers and business support organisations who may be challenged to consider women refugee businesses beyond the

constraints of ethnic enclaves. Just as there is a need for analytical frameworks to be used to make visible and give voice to refugee women entrepreneurs within the field of entrepreneurship, so there must be freedom for this group of entrepreneurs to construct authentic identities. This freedom should allow them to be represented as they are, multidimensional entrepreneurial individuals.

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**Table 1: Participant Profile**

	<b>Year of migration to the UK</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Life situation</b>	<b>Business Type</b>	<b>Business Age (Years)</b>
<b>Aliya</b>	2012	Syria	Early forties	Married with 3 younger children	Food manufacture	4-6
<b>Zendaya</b>	2002	Zimbabwe	Early fifties	Married. Accompanied by young adult son, other adult	Membership organisation	10+
					*(SE) Fashion design	7-9

				children remain in Zimbabwe		
<b>Azadeh</b>	2013	Iran	Early forties	Single/none	Upcycling art/ craft for wellbeing of disadvantaged women *(SE)	0-1
<b>Anashe</b>	2001	Zimbabwe	Early forties	Married/one young child	**Youth charity	10+
					Consultancy	2-3
					Handbag design	2-3
<b>Floriane</b>	2002	Cameroon	Early fifties	Married/ 5 Older-Younger	Restaurant/ bar	10+

\*SE: Social Enterprise

\*\* Outside scope of study

## Appendix I

Overarching Themes	Level 2 Code	Level 1 Code	Representative Quotations
Stigmatised refugee experience /identity - intersectional	Discrimination /stigmatisation		<p>“I feel fed up with people calling me refugee because, like sometimes they look at you in like a miserable way” Aliya</p> <p>“We don't see racism only in the street. It's institutionalised. They've put policies in place that is racially discriminating people.” Zendaya</p>
	Criminalisation/ dehumanisation	Detention/ Legal restrictions	<p>“You know they saw us as strangers, we were thieves, people coming to reside on benefits..... refugee, these people they only think that we are criminals” Zendaya</p> <p>“being in that place where when we were in Yarls Wood detention, the way they treated us. You know you're treated like a statistic. You are not treated like a human being.” Anashe</p> <p>“I've been to detention with my three children when they arrived here” Floriane</p>
	Exclusion	Inability to access key aspects of society whilst awaiting refugee status	<p>“when I arrived, I was treated as an outcast because I had no right to work, I wasn't allowed to go to school, so was treated as an outcast.” Anashe</p> <p>“Living as an asylum-seekers, being supported by the mass, getting vouchers, so I couldn't work. I couldn't do anything for myself, that's how I started volunteering as a way of meeting other people because I was isolated. I had no family and no one to look up to.” Anashe</p> <p>“But when we came here with big loss, no money and this is hurts even more because you know how UK looks like when you've been in a position that you are selling products and everybody welcome in you and you are coming now in the unwelcoming phase and as people, you need people to cooperate with you because you've got nothing. So, knocking the door when you got lots of advantages is different than when you are in the weak point.” Aliya</p>
	Lack of autonomy	Uncertainty	<p>“I felt like I was losing my identity because I couldn't dress the way I used to. I couldn't also direct anyone. I had no children around me to share the grief. I call it the grief simply because it became a grieving matter because in many times I was saying in tears as if someone had died. So, it was not very much a conducive</p>

			environment I was in, and I started to revisit myself and I became very much stressed.” Zendaya
		Mental health issues	<p>“I would be explaining and telling my story to each and every Tom, Dick and Harry I meet. So, it became, you know, it affected me. I became anxious, I became unstable.” Anashe</p> <p>“And sometimes I was ill..... because I was mentally, really, really down.” Floriane</p>
	Gendered work/domestic roles	Gender biases	<p>“Men from Africa did not find me okay. They thought that I was not supposed to be saying things that I was saying or doing things that I was doing. They would say, what did you tell our women? What are you telling them? So yes, that was not easy. They think that we are in competition.” Zendaya</p> <p>“he actually said I thought you were a man. Why is that? Because the work you are doing I would expect a man to do that.” Anashe</p> <p>“he is not as much involved as me at home just because he is staying at work longer. He wants to ensure that all the jobs are being done, secure everything the right way. So, sometimes, if he thought the vacuuming needs to be done, he will take it and just vacuum the floor. That’s fine. There is no problem to do it. If he thought we need to clean something, he will do it. He is not that man who thinks I am not going to do it, this is your job. I am most involved in these things because I will do it whilst he is still at work. It’s not about our traditional culture but we are adapting to our lifestyle here.” Aliya</p>
Identity work project: Constructing an entrepreneurial identity	Motivation	Intention to pursue an entrepreneurial identity	<p>“So, university I cannot do, college I cannot do. Any course I cannot do. I need to pay for this, and I don't have the money. That made me think I need to do something for myself after a year searching for a job. I cannot do volunteer work. I've got kids to look after, I have family. I'm going out of the war. Now, while my qualifications, not been recognised. I did apply for loads of jobs, nobody accepted me, then I started to think that I need to do something.” Aliya</p> <p>“..instead of sitting at home and feeling so depressed. I was even applying for some jobs but I was not successful. One of the jobs was a place that I have been volunteering with for years .....but the project coordinator, because we had worked together, and she really appreciated what I had been doing for them and</p>



			<p>she was feeling so sad that they couldn't take me. She sat with me and said your CV it was not good enough." Azadeh</p> <p>"Okay, forget about not having the right to work. Forget about, that's not the ending itself. You know, maybe my life will end up being somewhere. Let me start my life. Now let me not measure my life with it ...let me not put immigration status as a measurement to success? I felt OK. If I can do voluntary work and set up an organisation running as a volunteer, but developing skills or developing my brand, that's the way I can start something". Anashe</p> <p>"I just felt anyway I need to expand myself because I needed more income"</p> <p>Anashe (starting the second business)</p>
	Identifying an entrepreneurial identity: Self-efficacy	Experience and knowledge in the chosen fields	<p>"So, the community knows that I am very active in those humanitarian, charitable activities and I was always teaching.... Teaching English, teaching Maths, teaching IT but now I am presenting that I am doing Art and Art Therapy. I need to do some courses to be eligible for being an Art Therapist so at the moment I am just saying that I am using art and craft for wellbeing, not a therapist because I am not yet accredited." Azadeh</p> <p>"I finished that Master's, I finished my second Bachelors and I was working very well. I was working building innovations and part of my first Degree, I could work as an interior architect. Then I started interior architecture and did some exterior as well because of experience". Azadeh</p> <p>"...but people coming here with lots of rich civilization and history and experience and skills." Aliya</p> <p>"pride in being a former businesswoman" Zendaya</p> <p>"I had no help at all. No business advice. The only thing I had was just from back home I used to do selling, buying food and reselling.... I used to own a business over there, a restaurant and bar." Floriane</p>
	Self-presentation	Acting the role of the entrepreneur	<p>"I was becoming a business person from portraying myself, You know, as an African woman who is directing the integration of African people....So yes. I practiced under the (name of the organisation) as the champion director and founder." Zendaya</p> <p>"So as an African woman migrant business oriented, I set up the African women empowerment forum, which is a voluntary organisation. Looking at the needs of the African women and looking for opportunities for this group of people.....So</p>

			<p>with that I would make myself as a business person.....I introduced myself as a black African woman who has interest in the integration of African women and their children. So, the judge got you very much interested in me, but I did not say I was an asylum seeker [laughs]. Then they wanted to ask me for my ID, I said I don't have.” Zendaya</p> <p>“I was an asylum seeker, but nobody could have listened to me without the Badge African Women Empowerment Director. I was the director and I am the director so yes, they would want to talk to business people”. Zendaya</p> <p>“So obviously, I have to act as a businessperson”. Anashe</p> <p>“I see myself now as an entrepreneur.” Aliya</p>
	Validating entrepreneurial identity	Need to validate	<p>“This is one of the things I've noticed when I was in the trade show people when they ask for how long will be business. Did your parents do this business before and this stuff. I thought, how can I certify what I'm doing?” Aliya</p> <p>“I got this business, there isn't that confidence to say, “Oh is it can I trust you with my service, you know, can she help me?” So, I think that is that is where people who don't want to pay comes into it all. So, with the business I'm thinking how? How should I sustain my business, how should I convince people to trust me, that I can deliver? Or to trust me that I can help them with whatever service they need me to do?” Anashe</p>
		Awards/shows	<p>“Then they keep asking “where are you from originally? how did you make it in the business?” and then telling them just the truth what is happening with us, and people just say “amazing”, “inspiring”.....I see myself now as an entrepreneur.” Aliya</p> <p>“And then we found out that we did win the Bronze Prize for the product award.....Everything changed. Everything changed....Then my kid's teacher in the nursery, when she knew that, because you know when the kids go in the nursery, they are telling everything, and she asked, is that right what happened? You need to contact the local news.....” Aliya</p> <p>“I got the award which draws a lot of money. I was awarded it to build African fashion industry in the UK. So, I was the first refugee to be appointed this business award.....I got the first gift which was almost £45,000 and the money was funding for me to do it internationally to work in partnership (with other countries)” Zendaya</p>

<p>Identity work project: Challenging a stigmatised identity</p>	<p>Resisting stigma</p>	<p>Explicit challenge to discrimination/ stigmatisation</p>	<p>“Since arriving since I came here, you fight racism. We fight racism there in the days that we live.” Zendaya.  “Okay, forget about not having the right to work.....that's not the ending itself. You know, maybe my life will end up being somewhere. Let me start my life. Now let me not measure my life with it ...let me not put immigration status as a measurement to success? I felt OK. If I can do voluntary work and set up an organisation running as a volunteer, but developing skills or developing my brand, that’s the way I can start something”. Anashe  “I am not a begging person. I have got a brain. So, I can use my brain to create opportunities for myself.” Zendaya</p>
	<p>Re-positioning to a positive ethno-social identity</p>	<p>Drawing on more positive identities</p>	<p>“I’ve always said I am a citizen of the world. Yes, I was born in Iran, I lived in different countries. Any part I live, I like. I try to be flexible...” Azadeh.  “I am a human being. I’ve got needs and wants. So what is an immigration status at the end of the day? That's what I decided to tell myself, which obviously then helped me to be where I am now. Because if I did not make that decision, I would have started my life ten years later when I am now an adult. So, you see, so I thought this is really not a disability. Not having your papers is not a disability.” Anashe  “..the Middle Eastern part of me affected the business (in terms of ) flexibility....So we are, Middle eastern doing quicker action rather than thinking. The English they think a lot, then they do action. So, this is the part of the flexibility, our responses to disasters or problems.” Aliya  “Now this is where my studies and background in the laboratory and then pharmacology helped me to understand the bacteria, handling food, what can make food not good for consumption. So, for me, it ...was like not making a recipe, it was science, understanding more about protein and all that stuff.” Aliya  “The Middle Eastern part of me has affected the business in terms of flexibility...So we are as Middle Eastern, doing quicker actions rather than thinking the process through. The English they think a lot, then they take action. So, this is the part of the flexibility, our responses to disasters or problems.” Aliya</p>
	<p>Circumventing</p>	<p>Non-confrontational</p>	<p>“The best way I used is to work around everything. I work around the system. There is no other way, I could fight to change the British system. British people</p>

		challenge to stigma	would expect me to affiliate within their system. But I have managed to build my own system within their system.” Zendaya “It was very very tough, but I would find myself scaling things and navigating things. I never allowed myself to get into any argument because an argument would drain me and make me think silly things. And I started to talk about big issues and by then small things didn’t matter. I was only focussing on big things. The thinkgs that were affecting us and myself.” Zendaya
		Whitewashing	“Sometimes I also think that maybe if I put a white face when I want white businesses to deal with white people. I have been thinking about it. And even, I searched an agency called PV, they supply to hospitals and home care. The PV have understood that maybe I need a white face. So, from August I will be using a white face so that I can penetrate the market.” Zendaya “The previous place I used to be was called Hxxx-Bar. But people told me that it looks a bit African. Do something that everyone can feel like they are at home. So, we named this one xxxx Bar. xxxx means that something is clean, posh and we are doing every effort everyday to change the style.” Floriane
	Reject/Deny stigma	Actions indicating hiding/denying an identity	“I didn’t face much negativity, it’s usually been either normal or positive”. Aliya “It’s more like anyone, it doesn’t matter if you are a refugee or not as a status, you will have these difficulties. But yes, refugee thing, you’ve got nothing to lose. You are already getting a new life so it’s like starting from zero.” Aliya “If I say like a story from Syria or refugee, I don’t want to have it as a refugee story. It’s a story of resilience and that you can make things happening. ... I don’t want people to look at it and cry and feel like oh sorry poor person, No I am a more positive person than negative.” Aliya “So, I don’t concentrate on refugee, refugee in my day-to day working with young people from the black community. I just say let’s make a change, this is how we do it using universal tools. So, that’s how I think I challenge that concept or labelling of refugee”. Anashe “I had to change my name to a kind of Westernised, so now it is Nina, so Nina can be from here or can be from any European country, perhaps more Eastern European”. Azadeh
Persistent challenges:	Finance	Lack of start - up funds	“So now, when I need to run a business and I asked for a loan, I was told, you are not capable to get one”. Anashe

intersectional effects			“The funding is the big challenge at the moment..... Money, connections..... I’m just working free everywhere just to introduce myself and my skills and my business more and more. I was over different festivals or events, producing free videos for crafts, arts. Just to introducing myself.” Azadeh
		Limitations of bank dealings	“I could not go to the bank because I don’t have permanent residency and the business is not built up, so the bank will not give me a loan.... this even made us stop production for a couple of months and the business could easily be ruined ...because I have no other options. None of the banks will lend me money... even getting a mortgage for your premises is challenging because you only have five years.” Aliya “Getting funds from banks is a challenge...Now if they are to give loans, you have to be a certain type of business that they feel will make millions. .... Yeah, so for me I don’t even try to get a loan from the bank. I have no alternatives. I have nowhere to go really.”
		Refugee experience having an impact on credit rating	“I was negatively socially discriminated, and I could not access the creative quarters. After I have gone halfway after paying a deposit, they brought that council tax business, (saying I) did not pay the council tax since 2002 and that disqualified me. Because it is the council asset. But I knew that during the time I was seeking sanctuary, the local authority has a duty of care and I didn’t need to pay tax.” Zendaya
	Knowledge/ Networks	Lack of access to information/ professional networks	“a lack of information, timely information. So, I would go round and round trying to find....once I have the right information I will be able to work with time. Yes, accessing the right information and also the proper networks and relationships that will help me build my business so that... I spent years trying to connect with the right people so that I can be in a better position. Yes, these are some of the challenges.” Anashe

	Navigating conflict with a gendered maternal identity	Family relationships and tensions	<p>“.....as a mother, as a wife as a business woman you have to stay strong to combine that. It’s not easy because your mind keeps running every minute. Most difficult is that you have to deal with your marital problems. You have to look after your husband.....I have to serve my husband. Because it has nothing to do with business. Once you are married, you have certain engagements and as a mother you have to advise them, you have to make sure you check on them. It is your responsibility to check on your kids.” Floriane</p> <p>“I’ve got no family life, to tell you really, because I work every single day. I start every day at 2pm and finish at midnight.” Floriane</p> <p>“There is no point to make a successful business without making successful kids.” Aliya</p> <p>“Yes, those women they think and they were told your role is just to be a good mother , and they are suffering of many things, but they are quiet and do not know their rights.” Azadeh</p> <p>“You know these things are really important to focus on because kids are, thy have this period of time. This time is running fast. This is their establishment. Nowadays, I feel I should concentrate more on them rather than the business. So, when we started it used to be maybe 10% for them the 90% for the business. Nowadays, I managed to make it 50-50. But I think I need to change it to a different way so husband will be involved more in the business and I will be more with the kids.” Aliya</p>
	Limited economic benefit	<p>Insufficient household income</p> <p>Aspirations to own</p>	<p>“We are still not making massive or noticeable profits. I don't have extra each month. Each month I stretch to not spend everything, but I can say that the kids are doing gymnastics and this year we managed to go for one vacation”. Aliya</p> <p>“I am not getting as much income out of it as I would want. I feel I can, but again, I'm not at the moment.” Anashe</p> <p>“It’s not that big money that you are going to have savings or big savings, no, it’s to pay bills and enjoy yourself with the rest – look after your family. It’s not too bad but it is not as much as we were expecting and not as much as back home.....I’m not asking for much. I just want to be settled. Buy my own house, treat myself, go on holidays.” Floriane</p> <p>“Even though life is still difficult for me because I have no savings, I have no savings at all. Because it is so hard with the business, paying the bills, look after</p>

		home/have savings	the kids, but I am happy because at least I have something that is taking me out of the house every day.” Floriane
Outcome: Respected	Empowering	Recognition from the host community  Increased status in the community and abroad	<p>“So, sometimes if you are not satisfied about yourself, but when we meet the others, and they say what you've done till now is great, then you feel. It's nice to see that in other’s eyes.” Aliya</p> <p>“Well, I can say that like in the past I was just like all ladies. There was nothing special about me so I feel respected and there are lots of people they don't know why they did need to be closer to me now being, after the success actually, there are lots of people even from my community, they try and like to contact me even on social media. Lots of people from Syria, all who I don ’t know, they are adding to be friends and they always appreciate what I've achieved. So, they are happy for me as well.” Aliya</p> <p>“The reward for running the business. It's the first thing actually before, is actually having like, you know you have been lost and you find yourself and this is like having a respected view from people, because this is really been important for me because people when they look at you. Who you are a Syrian? Okay? They don't care what how you used to live in Syria straight away. The refugee words. Very low level and people looking at you in a very bad way as though you are just bad. Maybe like you know, when they feel sorry about you so you feel....I wasn’t used to people looking at me in this way. So, having the business at least that made us confident, telling that we are fighting. We exist. We can do something, and we are proving that we are not taking other’s money or other’s opportunity.” Aliya</p> <p>“I think now I've got more recognition in the community. Obviously, then when I left Zimbabwe, because I was young, I had not many connections. So now I think my position is in a better position in terms of connections with people. Um, my relationship with the community and having that trust.” Anashe</p> <p>“I haven’t any problem as they respect the position that I am in. I think they acknowledge what I do and appreciate. I have not faced any discrimination, face</p>

			<p>to face. They actually respect me. Or acknowledge what I do. I think because of their professionalism. I think if you are professional, there is a standard that you need to be at.” Anashe.</p> <p>“Very proud as at least they know that I am not someone who is just staying at home. I work every single day. I work hard. They see me as a hardworking person and I still help.” Floriane</p>
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