

**Negotiating identities: The intersectional identity work  
of refugee women entrepreneurs**

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This study explores the complex identity work undertaken by women refugee entrepreneurs in the UK. Whilst popular discourse proposes self-employment as an accessible means to integration and autonomy for marginalised people, many refugees engage in entrepreneurial activities to avoid discrimination and disadvantage in the labour market. Drawing on translocational intersectionality to examine the experiences of this under-researched group of women, this thesis examines how the intersection of gender, ethnicity/race, class and other identity markers influence efforts to move from a stigmatised refugee identity to an entrepreneurial identity. In considering the multi-dimensional and dynamic agentic dialogue negotiated with institutional and socio-cultural structures, this study contributes to contextualised scholarship on identity and entrepreneurship. The thesis proposes the following research question: *How does engagement in entrepreneurial activities influence the identity construction of refugee women?*

Underpinned by a critical realist ontology and a social constructionist epistemology, the study is based on five in-depth case studies. It focuses on a UK context as a recipient nation of refugees fleeing persecution in their country of origin.

Three important theoretical contributions are made in this thesis. First, the thesis addresses the gap in entrepreneurship scholarship that overlooks the heterogeneity of women entrepreneurs. Thus, it presents as a legitimate subject women refugees from the Global South as they develop and perform their entrepreneurial identities in a Global North setting. Second, it proposes a process of identity construction in the context of refugee women entrepreneurs. Third, in its use of a translocational intersectionality framework, it contributes to greater contextualisation within entrepreneurship literature. In acknowledging institutional, temporal, social, cultural and gendered influences that enable and constrain the entrepreneurial identity process, it exposes notions of stigmatisation and liminality which affect this group of entrepreneurs.

Beyond the theoretical contributions, there are practical implications for policy makers and other stakeholder networks. In understanding the experiences of women refugee entrepreneurs, prevalent assumptions can be challenged. This has the potential to lead to a

review of services, training programmes and engagement strategies offered to refugee women entrepreneurs.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Context/Background

Entrepreneurship as an open, meritocratic site of opportunity is deemed to be accessible for disadvantaged groups and therefore, is proposed as a vehicle for integration, and economic and personal growth (de Clercq and Honig, 2011). This is consistent with the traditionally held view that entrepreneurship has a pivotal role in the generation of economic and social well-being within society (Thurik, Stam and Audretsch, 2013). Although entrepreneurship is historically framed within a discourse that prioritises rational economic behaviour and venture creation (Schumpeter, 1934), it has developed to encompass much broader conceptualisations. These are based on the entrepreneurial process (Kirzner, 1973; Scott and Venkataraman, 2000; Hjorth, Holt and Steyaert, 2015) and the relationships that are required for entrepreneurial activity. (Watson, 2013). Further conceptualisations consider entrepreneurship in developing economies where it is used as a means by which extreme poverty can be alleviated (Rindova, *et al.*, 2009; Datta and Gailey, 2012). However, the dominant discourse remains grounded in a Western neoliberal tradition of heroic self-sufficiency (Rose, 1990; Marttila, 2013), which assumes that entrepreneurship is a neutral activity with equal access to resources for all who are involved (Marlow and Martinez Dy, 2018).

Within an established body of women's entrepreneurship literature, a critical debate that has emerged in response to these assumptions of neutrality, challenges the bias towards a masculine discourse within the field (Ahl, 2006). Gendered critiques of entrepreneurship have confronted perspectives that place women-led business in a deficit position and considered women businesses as low performing (Marlow, Carter and Shaw, 2008). Subsequently, a recognition that inequalities are due to structural constraints has captured a range of biases within entrepreneurship that serve to affect the multiple groups that fall outside of the normative image of an entrepreneur. As a result, women, minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities, migrants and other groups considered to be marginalised, encounter additional challenges. Critical scholars therefore, call for a more contextualised approach to entrepreneurship studies, so that the conditions facing these groups can be understood (Welter, 2011; Imas, Wilson and Weston, 2012; Essers *et al.*, 2017). Critique also extends to

women's entrepreneurship scholarship which portrays a homogenous view of the woman entrepreneur (Marlow and Al-Dajani, 2017). Thus, the refugee woman entrepreneur has emerged as one such marginalised figure who can be used to provide further contextualised understanding within the field of entrepreneurship (Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2015).

In situating this academic discourse within current events in the UK, it is recognised that the issue of refugees and entrepreneurship has become increasingly relevant. Acting upon the narrative that entrepreneurship is an accessible endeavour for all, in 2019, the UK Government funded four pilot programmes which aimed to establish the role of refugee entrepreneurship programmes (Richey *et al.*, 2021). Despite these efforts to increase available support for the promotion of entrepreneurship as an elixir for the marginalised, critically engaged scholars of entrepreneurship would argue that this assumption requires critique and further examination (Essers *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, examining the refugee experience of entrepreneurship and identity construction within the UK context will enable a critical exploration of such assumptions.

It is recognised that refugees face additional challenges to other migrant groups which positions them in spaces of further disadvantage (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008; Heilbrunn, Freiling and Harima, 2019). However, the paucity of refugee entrepreneurship literature means that there is a relative lack of understanding of how this might affect their entrepreneurial experiences. Consequently, very little is known about how a positive entrepreneurial identity can be constructed in relation to an ascribed stigmatised refugee identity and how the two notions might co-exist. Additionally, the neoliberal tradition, assumes that entrepreneurship represents an inherently neutral activity (Marlow and Martinez Dy, 2018) which would suggest further incongruity given the heterogeneity within the refugee population.

Notwithstanding the limited body of empirical research that is focused on refugee entrepreneurship, there is a small emergent body of literature capturing the experiences of women refugees in the Global South (Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2015; Alkhaled and Berglund, 2018). However, there is less scholarship that has theorised the experiences of women refugees in the Global North, and in the UK specifically (Senthanar *et al.*, 2020; Huq and Venugopal, 2021).

Women refugees have remained a relatively hidden group as traditionally, they have been subsumed within the migrant entrepreneurship literature. Despite this hidden position, there is a case for empirical studies to focus on them as a discreet group based on the gender-based traumas they tend to experience associated with forcible displacement and the refugee experience (Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2001b). In order to capture how refugees are able to transition from a refugee experience to entrepreneurial activity, identity work is a valuable lens. It provides insight into how people navigate incongruencies between how they perceive themselves and how others perceive them. It also facilitates understanding of transitions between different identity states (Brown, 2015).

A fundamental debate within the identity scholarship addresses the distinction between conceptualisations of identity as substantive, whereby attributes remain fixed over time, or as a condition that is subject to continuous dynamic change (Gioia and Hamilton, 2016). As such, identity is a complex array of internal reflections, characteristics, social relations, and roles (Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, 2012) which traditionally reflect various theories that are used to examine this construct. The most prominent of these theories include social identity theory (Tajfel, 2010) and role identity theory (Stryker and Burke, 2000). Within the scholarship on entrepreneurial identity, identity construction is increasingly conceptualised as a continuous process that involves a dialogic engagement between the internal self and the social (Watson, 2009b; Ybema *et al.*, 2009). This thesis will join the academic conversation on identity work with a critical perspective and with a recognition that identity comprises multiple identity markers (Chasserio, Pailot and Poroli, 2014) and is mediated through power relations within a socio-political and historical context (Essers and Benschop, 2007; Leitch and Harrison, 2016).

An additional benefit of interrogating the identity work of this group lies in the insight it offers regarding the agency of the refugee entrepreneur and the interactions that occur with institutional and social structures. This tension between individual agency and social structure is a key dilemma presented throughout identity research and is valuable in exploring the power dynamics experienced by entrepreneurs (Down and Giazitsoglu, 2014; Stets and Burke, 2014). However, in the context of refugees, there is scope to extend conceptualisations of the domain within which this tension takes place to incorporate temporal and spatial

considerations. Thus, this thesis can provide contextualised insights into identity work which is currently lacking within the field (Leitch and Harrison, 2016).

This thesis critically evaluates the experiences of refugee women in the UK who engage with entrepreneurship. Specifically, it seeks to understand the forms of identity work that this shift from refugee to entrepreneur provokes. It proposes an examination of entrepreneurship as a vehicle which can be used to refute the stigmatising refugee label that is ascribed to this group. The thesis proposes the following research question:

*How does engagement in entrepreneurial activities influence the identity construction of refugee women in the UK?*

Key objectives are to determine:

- 1. how gender, class, race, refugee status and other social categories of difference intersect within a UK context*
- 2. how gender, class, race, refugee status and other social categories of difference influence, or are influenced by the entrepreneurial experiences of forcibly displaced women within a UK context*

Given that co-existing identity categories comprising gender, ethnicity, class and other marginalising identity markers intersect, an intersectional theoretical framework is suggested (Crenshaw, 1991). However, in order to accommodate the complexity of the identity work, Anthias's (2008, 2021) theoretical lens of translocational intersectionality is proposed. This adaptation uses the intersection of social locations, conceptualised as notional spaces representing various social categories as well as physical spaces. It then considers the relations of inequalities and hierarchies within this space which is understood as translocational positionality. This lens is appropriate for refugee women who have made transnational journeys and essentially, have to reconstruct their identities on arrival in the UK where they are ascribed a refugee designation. In capturing the positionality of individuals based on inequalities in the allocation and production of resources, it can explain shifts that occur over time and space. It also raises the question of how this complexity, and the ensuing tensions can be navigated given the inequalities faced by this group of women.

Feminist critical realism is acknowledged as a valuable perspective to underpin this research as it offers a critical challenge to subordination and the assumptions of male superiority. This philosophical underpinning is used to further enhance the intersectional theoretical framework by extending its explanatory capability. (Martinez Dy, Lee and Marlow, 2014)

Thus, the thesis seeks to bring refugee women entrepreneurs explicitly into the entrepreneurship research landscape using the UK as a contextual background. It is expected that this research will be of equal value to policy makers, business support providers, and finance providers.

## **1.2 Thesis structure**

Chapter two critically reviews past and contemporary analytical themes that have developed within the entrepreneurship literature. It traces the establishment of a gendered perspective within entrepreneurship. This is followed by a review of another critique of entrepreneurship as it turns to refugee entrepreneurship as an example of a contextualised illustration of entrepreneurship. The chapter ends by introducing intersectionality and positionality as a theory within which the research question is framed. The review focused on its genealogy, relevance and limitations.

Chapter three continues the review of the literature that underpins this thesis with an exploration of identity work. In so doing, it establishes identity work as a complex process that comprises activity which occurs as multiple levels. Next, it considers the entrepreneurial identity and associated notions of liminality and stigmatisation. The chapter concludes with an analytical review of selected themes and debates that relate to intersectionality and identity work: belonging, agency – structure dilemmas, and transformation.

Chapter 4 commences with a discussion of the key philosophical approaches that are used within women's entrepreneurship. It introduces the critical realist perspective that underpins this research, and which is used to enhance the intersectionality theoretical framework. The chapter then describes the case study methodology that was applied to address the research question and offers an account of the researcher's engagement in reflexivity during the interview and data analysis processes.

Chapter 5 presents the findings in the form of vignettes which introduce the five case studies. In so doing, not only are the voices of the participants explicitly heard as they narrate their stories, but their stigmatised identities are revealed. Furthermore, the chapter serves to expose the structural challenges they face as they engage in identity work, capturing their experiences within an intersectional framing.

Chapter 6 identifies an identity work process based on the strategies used by the participants to confront their stigmatised identities whilst constructing an entrepreneurial identity. It focuses on the dynamic nature of the identity work which has to be reviewed and re-worked over time.

Drawing upon a critical realist analysis, Chapter 7 consolidates the two preceding findings chapters. In so doing, it provides an explanatory account of the identity work process. It emphasises the dynamic and multi-level nature of the process and demonstrates the validity of translocational positionality. Emergent themes of liminal friction and stigmatisation are discussed as they provide further insight into the identity work undertaken by refugee women entrepreneurs

Chapter 8 draws the thesis to a conclusion as it highlights the empirical, theoretical and philosophical/methodological contributions. The limitations of the research, the opportunities for further research and finally, the implications for policy and practice are also discussed in this concluding chapter.

## 2 Entrepreneurship

Generic approaches to entrepreneurship present it as a meritocratic activity, (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Yang and Aldrich, 2014). However, this understanding is presumptive upon a normative male entrepreneur and thus, fails to acknowledge diversity and context which are key to framing the heterogeneity evident among entrepreneurs. One key differentiation is gender, and while this is reflected in an established body of literature which applies a feminist lens to offer a gendered critique (Henry, Foss and Ahl, 2016; Marlow and Martinez Dy, 2018), there remains a bias within this stream of work that assumes a normative westernised image of the gendered entrepreneur (Welter, 2011; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013). This thesis disrupts the prevailing subjective perspective of entrepreneurship by offering a contextualised analysis. In taking as its subject, self-employed refugee women in the UK, it explores the experiences of women primarily from the Global South as they enact their identities within a Global North setting.

The purpose of this chapter is to review key literature in entrepreneurship studies and familiarise readers with analytical themes that have developed within the discipline. In considering past themes, contemporary concerns and debates, it provides justification for including refugee women within entrepreneurship discourse. In order to present a preliminary conceptual framework for the research study, this chapter will commence by critically analysing the role and position of entrepreneurship in contemporary society. It examines its association with neoliberalism and governmentality from which the notion of an entrepreneurial self (Du Gay, 2000) emerges. This is followed by a discussion of contemporary analyses of claims that entrepreneurship offers a solution to poverty, marginalisation and oppression and therefore, can be used as a means to emancipation. Next, it critically evaluates the masculine discourse that underpins the notion of entrepreneurship, extending the feminist conversational turn to address additional gaps in the debate, specifically, how context shapes the gendered entrepreneurship conversation. Finally, it introduces intersectionality and translocational positionality as an extended framework through which refugee entrepreneurs can be analysed, highlighting the complexity of multiple social ascriptions that converge to expose 'inequality, identity and power relations' (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2016).



## 2.1 The Entrepreneurship discussion

### ***Neoliberalism***

Traditionally, economic theory has provided the foundational framing for understanding entrepreneurship. Most influential are arguments presenting entrepreneurship either as innovative economic activities which disrupt established industries (Schumpeter, 1934), or as the creation of business ventures as a result of identifying and exploiting opportunities (Kirzner, 1973; Scott and Venkataraman, 2000). Entrepreneurship has subsequently emerged as a critical element of contemporary society, particularly from the 1980s when small and new businesses began to play a greater role in driving the economy rather than the large corporations (Thurik, Stam and Audretsch, 2013). Behind this shift was a neoliberal rationality which saw the transfer of state responsibilities to communities and enterprises; consequently, individuals assumed responsibility for themselves (Du Gay, 2004; Marttila, 2013; Berglund, Lindgren and Packendorff, 2017). Deregulation, privatisation and profit maximisation formed the background against which choices and autonomy were bestowed on the individual resulting in citizens with the potential to be self-governing and self-regulating (Perren and Dannreuther, 2013). This mode of governance, a new governmentality (Rose, 1993), assumes a revised relationship between the state, the citizen and the market. Its traditional grounding in economic theory of market functioning is extended to transform the logic governing institutions in other spheres, while the state retreats to make room for economic identities, a new form of citizenship (Bröckling, 2005; Ahl and Marlow, 2012). In this world, individuals are encouraged to become active subjects managing their own social welfare and employment and, in effect, encouraged to develop a sense of entrepreneurial conduct (Rose, 1996; Perren and Dannreuther, 2013; Rottenberg, 2014). However, despite this general order of autonomy and freedom, Ahl and Marlow (2017), question the extent to which choice can truly be exercised without appropriate and necessary resources.

### ***What is entrepreneurship or who is an entrepreneur?***

Over the last 40 years the trend towards individual autonomy has continued with the concept of an 'entrepreneurial' or 'enterprising self' emerging to capture the neoliberal role model of social subjectivity (Bröckling, 2005; Marttila, 2013). The notion of the entrepreneur has moved beyond the economic innovator to become a collective heroic figure with a

responsibility to national economic growth as well as to their own economic security and personal well-being (Marttila, 2013); the embodiment of how individuals should conduct themselves within all spheres of life. Consistent with its neoliberal foundations, this shift to entrepreneurialism reaches beyond the economy into social arenas where the individual is expected to enact their entrepreneurial self (Du Gay, 2004; Marttila, 2013). Thus, entrepreneurship, seen in terms of generating wealth, creating employment and a means by which individuals gain self-sufficiency, is offered as the ultimate form of agency and neoliberal subjectivity with associated social welfare functions (Marttila, 2013; Ahl and Marlow, 2017). This perspective no longer views entrepreneurship solely as value creation through the creation of an individual business, but an expression of governance located within 'autonomous, self-regulating, productive individuals' operating in non-commercial and government organisations as well the more traditional business venture (Du Gay, 1991: 49, 2004)

Critical evaluations of entrepreneurship have intensified since the 1980s as the discipline has gained increased legitimacy and attention from academics and policymakers, (Mole and Ram, 2012). Despite this academic rigor, there exists a lack of consensus around a single definition of entrepreneurship (Wiklund, Wright and Zahra, 2019). Economic-based perspectives remain embedded within a traditional Schumpeterian model (Schumpeter, 1934) prioritising the person of the entrepreneur, the creation of ventures and wealth producing outcomes, whilst Kirznerian views (Kirzner, 1973; Scott and Venkataraman, 2000) emphasise the entrepreneur's alertness to opportunities and a reconfiguration of resources to create new value. However, these traditional perspectives and their inherent assumptions of rational choice have been critiqued and challenged by more recent conceptualisations of entrepreneurship such as processual perspectives (Steyaert, 2007; Moroz and Hindle, 2012). Although often building on these traditional foundations, contemporary considerations of entrepreneurship capture the pursuit and exploitation of opportunities regardless of the resources controlled by individuals (Stevenson and Jarillo, 1990). An alternative approach seeks to understand the phenomenon in terms of entrepreneurial action, highlighting the creative exchange activity between entrepreneurial actors and their trading partners (Watson, 2013), or according to Kitching and Rouse, (2017), between 'agential, social-structures and cultural causal powers', (559) . In so doing, these newer perspectives capture

a broader conceptualisation of entrepreneurship to include 'everyday entrepreneurship' in its various forms based on structure, behaviour and performance; an eclectic and dynamic paradigm (Watson, 2013; Audretsch, Kuratko and Link, 2015).

This debate regarding what constitutes an entrepreneur and what entrepreneurship is (Gartner, 1988), is seen in discussions regarding the scope of entrepreneurial activity, more specifically, in the conflation of entrepreneurship and self-employment due to the interrelated nature of the two categories. Whilst self-employment is often used as a measure of business ownership in empirical studies of entrepreneurship among marginalised groups (Marlow and Carter, 2004; Fairlie, 2005), it is generally acknowledged that not all self-employment can be classed as entrepreneurial and not all entrepreneurial activity is expressed through self-employment (Marlow, Carter and Shaw, 2008; Plotnikova, Romero and Martínez-Román, 2016). Using the prism of traditional scholarship where the emphasis within entrepreneurship is primarily on growth and innovation, disadvantaged groups are confined to the self-employment category of the 'economically marginal' rather than 'intrinsically entrepreneurial' (Hofstede *et al.*, 2004). However, in defining entrepreneurship as the use of limited resources under uncertainty and risky conditions to gain benefits, this thesis recognises that particularly in the case of marginalised groups, although a limited access to necessary resources might restrict their ability to pursue high growth entrepreneurial opportunities, this does not disqualify them from the practice of entrepreneurship. Consequently, self-employment can be used as a lower cost market entry strategy that may, or may not result in business incorporation, which is typically made possible for those with high resource capacity (Marlow, Carter and Shaw, 2008). Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, we consider a specific group of women who enact an entrepreneurial propensity to become self-employed or own a business.

The critical conversations within the field reinforce the fact that entrepreneurship is a complex and ambiguous phenomenon, heterogeneous and somewhat removed from earlier conceptions of entrepreneurship as simply synonymous with the small firm (Westhead and Wright, 2011); taking the form of either a "mom and pop" or "high potential" venture (Bygrave, 2007). The entrepreneur can be separated from the venture such that we can find the entrepreneur in many different settings (Jones and Spicer, 2009) and embodied within

various actors. Therefore, much of the research examines processes: first, what it is and what its effects are, and second, who does it, why and how.

***Transformative: more than an economic phenomenon***

Generally regarded as a positive economic activity (Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009), the benefits of entrepreneurship to the individual, and to the economy, have been expanded to consider a much broader transformational effect within social and institutional spheres (Murphy and Coombes, 2009; Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009; Mair, Battilana and Cardenas, 2012). According to Rindova, *et al.* 2009, this transformation can range from an individual's attempts to change their circumstances and make 'their own way in the world' (2009, p.480), to ameliorate "the social collectivity of which they are part" (p.481), to a much grander ambition, that of enacting "brave new worlds". In this sense, entrepreneurship also has the potential to overcome more imposing constructs such as poverty (Jennings, Jennings and Sharifian, 2016; Sutter, Bruton and Chen, 2019), exclusion or discrimination both in developed and developing economies (Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009; de Clercq and Honig, 2011). These streams of research seek to explore the emancipatory or empowering effects of entrepreneurship, offering a means by which individuals might seek autonomy and release from particular constraints, make their own choices, and take action (Essers and Benschop, 2007; Rindova *et al.*, 2009; Datta and Gailey, 2012; Scott *et al.*, 2012; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013; Alkhaled and Berglund, 2018). Collectively they contribute to the argument that entrepreneurship provides marginalised groups freedom from subordination, and labour market discrimination, and specifically for women, liberation from male dominance. The emergence of these studies which recognise the limitations and constraints with which certain groups are faced as they seek to draw on the benefits of entrepreneurship, suggests that the neoliberal 'responsibilization and autonomization' (Du Gay, 2004: 40) expected and encouraged by the State of the individual, is not so easily attained. It is in light of this fact that studies such as Imas, Wilson and Weston's, (2012) examination of 'barefoot entrepreneurs', identify spaces of entrepreneurship which exist "at the margins of the neoliberal economic world" (2012: 564).

The complexity and elusiveness of entrepreneurship (Jones and Spicer, 2009) is such that whilst it is recognised that based on Schumpeterian assumptions, entrepreneurship can lead

to economic growth, (Schumpeter, 1934), and subsequently has the potential to address issues such as poverty and emancipation, the consistency with which this is achievable is questionable. In response to these ambitious claims, there is a growing body of critical research and scholarly voices within mainstream research that challenge the promise of entrepreneurship as a solution to exclusion and subordination (Jones and Spicer, 2009). Alvarez and Barney's 2014 study found that policies implemented by governments and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) providing opportunities which had a minimal focus on wealth creation potential, resulted in movements from "abject poverty to poverty only to be trapped in poverty" for the entrepreneur (p.176). Similar critiques explore the extent to which entrepreneurship may also be oppressive or have limited emancipatory potential (Verduijn *et al.*, 2014; Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2015; Jennings, Jennings and Sharifian, 2016), thus exposing the false promise of entrepreneurship.

The entrepreneurship literature has remained mostly functionalist in nature (Verduijn and Essers, 2013). Its dependence on a framework that conceptualises venture creation grounded in a market-based approach and reliance on a subject who is immortalised with certain characteristics or traits, has created 'a static and universal entrepreneurial identity' (Verduijn and Essers, 2013:614). A challenge to this image of who the entrepreneur is, or who it can be, has provided the foundation for several topics of debate resulting in the creation of multiple 'ghettoised' subfields within the field (Baker and Welter, 2017). This has served to widen the scope of enquiry in recognition that entrepreneurial behaviours and context also play a significant role in understanding the phenomenon of entrepreneurship (Gartner, 1988). Furthermore, success defined in terms of economic gain, a contemporary focus on high-growth and high-investment ventures and rejection of micro-businesses (Bygrave, 2007) is limiting and overlooks other permutations of entrepreneurial ventures and motivations (Jones and Spicer, 2009). Therefore, critical scholars have sought to challenge the normative assumptions regarding entrepreneurship; not least the ungendered (masculine), western, heroic character which is deemed to be representative of an entrepreneur. This has been achieved with the inclusion of non-white and women entrepreneurial actors. (Essers and Benschop, 2007; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013).

## 2.2 A gendered view

The distinction made between sex and gender (Oakley, 1972) plays a fundamental, and yet often overlooked role in understanding how a field is gendered and the implications for those who participate within the field. Current theorising within (female) entrepreneurship studies conflates the two notions with women as a grouping being positioned as a representation of the gendered subject (Marlow, 2014; Marlow and Martinez Dy, 2018). Sex is grounded in the biological attributes of a human, identified scientifically by genes and hormones and capturing the physicality of reproductive functions. Gender, in contrast, is increasingly viewed as a theoretical construct, that reaches beyond a complex expression of masculine and feminine constructions to articulate a dynamic, fluid, multiplicity of social ascriptions (Linstead and Pullen, 2006). This view challenges essentialist views of gender (Gilligan, 2003). It suggests that even post-structural views of the performativity of gender (Butler, 1993; Gherardi, 1994), developed through a re-conceptualisation of gender from a static state of 'being' to an enactment of one's sex category (West and Zimmerman, 1987), do not fully capture the breadth and depth of gender articulation and performance (Linstead and Pullen, 2006).

Despite contemporary feminist thought which recognises the fluidity of gendered ascriptions, the prevalence and continued use of a binary categorisation of gender reflects a societal and cultural need to make sense of our interactions with others (Marlow and Dy, 2017; Butler 2004). Expressions of gender are thus policed and restricted by social norms which require that "man" and "woman", or "masculine" and "feminine" are enacted differently and done so in absolute terms. This essentialist approach would require that all women be caring, and all men be aggressive; it does not allow for each to exhibit alternative traits. However, acknowledgement of difference provides a starting point from which to critically explore power relations as gender devalues the position of women and those who do not fit the ascribed notions. It also serves to assign power and privilege to masculinity. Thus, gender serves as a useful social category that contributes to one's understanding of self and how one is perceived within social structures. We will now consider how social constructions of gender are enacted within theories of entrepreneurship.

### ***Gender-blind entrepreneurship***

The neoliberal expression of entrepreneurship promotes an entrepreneurial self, accessible to all and offering a reward system based on meritocracy; as such it was assumed to be gender-neutral (Dy, Marlow and Martin, 2017). However, the focus of research and policy assumed that the entrepreneurs were male. This assumption was first challenged through Schwartz's article on female entrepreneurship in 1976. However, it was not until the following decade that subsequent studies emerged to propel the development of a subfield which recognised women as a separate category and sought to understand their experience as entrepreneurs. Early studies were mostly descriptive, providing a demographic profile of woman business owners (Henry, Foss and Ahl, 2016) with the unit of analysis primarily positioned at the individual level. They focused on the woman herself, with some exploration into the types of business she is inclined to run and how she relates to entrepreneurship (Greene *et al.*, 2003; Marlow, 2014).

Scholars during this period actively sought to quantify the phenomenon and show how female entrepreneurs differed to their male counterparts (Chaganti, 1986; Birley, 1989), using gender as a binary variable to frame research questions. Although overall, findings tended to show no significant difference between men and women in areas such as risk taking (Masters and Meier, 1988), venture propensity and performance (Hisrich and Brush, 1984), many of the studies generally draw conclusions that place women entrepreneurs and their businesses in a position of lack or deficit (Carter and Shaw, 2006; Marlow, 2014). While the studies presented are important for a subfield which was in its infancy, particularly as they draw female entrepreneurs into the key lines of enquiry within mainstream entrepreneurship, such as the characteristics of the entrepreneur, motivations and founding strategies; the tone of discussion which positions female entrepreneurs as 'other' to men, is intrinsically flawed (Ogbor, 2000; Greene *et al.*, 2003; Ahl, 2006; Marlow, 2014; Henry, Foss and Ahl, 2016). Wider, structural and institutional influences are largely ignored as potential variables. Thus, structural inequalities reflected in the gendered nature of the labour market, work expectations (Loscocco and Bird, 2012), and lack of access to finance due to discrimination are marginalised in much of the research (Jones, Ram and Villares-Varela, 2017; Leitch, Welter and Henry, 2018; Ram, Jones and Villares-Varela, 2017). Methodological bias is also evident in the research design and measurement scales used, developed for and tested by men

(Stevenson, 1990; Greene *et al.*, 2003; Ahl, 2006). However, these omissions form the foundation on which future debates within the field of women's entrepreneurship have developed.

It is evident that the initial body of work which emerged within women's entrepreneurship required an injection of theorising which incorporated a feminist perspective. Whilst feminist theory is largely absent prior to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century (Ahl, 2006, Henry *et al.*, 2016), there are scholars who tried to incorporate a 'female -aware' view (Goffee and Scase, 1985; Birley, 1989; Stevenson, 1990; Hurley, 1999). Goffee and Scase's (1985) study explored a typology of women entrepreneurs, identifying four types of woman entrepreneur (conventional, innovative, domestic and radical). It takes a gender-neutral approach, emphasising the importance of acknowledging heterogeneity among women in their experience of business ownership, rather than solely in opposition to men. However, whilst one might acknowledge the progress this study represents in recognising societal subordination of women (Cromie, 1987), Mirchandani, (1999) is wary of its use of Bem's (1981) sex role inventory. She suggests that it is underpinned by masculine assumptions, which serve to reinforce the notion of female adherence to sex roles, an essentialist feature of the methodology. Indeed, research continued to be influenced by essentialist feminist approaches; studies used the variable "sex" to identify differences between men and women which might explain how women engaged with entrepreneurship. Notwithstanding these limitations, there were efforts to examine the effect of social structures on shaping these differences (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990), which required consideration of the context within which female entrepreneurship was viewed (Berg, 1997). Aldrich's research also explored the importance of a rich resource base and considered the impact of access to certain types of networks on gaining legitimacy and success within entrepreneurial activity (Marlow and McAdam, 2015).

These early studies provided a rather chequered insight into the profile of women entrepreneurs and the extent to which this stood in opposition to their male counterparts. Bowen and Hisrich's, (1986) study which built on earlier work by Hisrich and Brush (1984), suggested that female entrepreneurs were more likely to be: well-educated although lacking



management skills, masculine in their values, have entrepreneurial fathers, be a first born child, have a supportive spouse, and would be less inclined to start business in traditionally male-dominated industries. Cromie's, (1987) examination of entrepreneurial motivations provided a more direct comparison between men and women, noting several similarities between the two groups. It also recognised the impact of socialisation on the results, particularly given that the main point of difference showed that women were prompted into self-employment in order to balance their parenting responsibilities and career aspirations. Although the 1990s saw more overtly feminist theories introduced into the research, this gendered approach remained mostly essentialist and reinforced gender stereotypes (Greene *et al.*, 2003; Mirchandani, 1999). Undoubtedly, these earlier studies unearthed and contributed useful information to understanding of the female entrepreneur, but they did not go far enough to provide explanation of the findings or offer a more critical response to traditional entrepreneurship research (Mirchandani, 1999; Marlow, 2002). In fact, the woman entrepreneur remained problematic and required assistance to become more like male entrepreneurs (Marlow, 2013). Evidence presented in the research revealed, women's unique start-up difficulties and therefore, training needs (Pellegrino and Reece, 1982), poor management practices (Chaganti, 1986) and underperformance (Hisrich and Brush, 1984), less entrepreneurial and risk-taking nature (Sexton and Bowman-Upton, 1990) and general deficit when compared to men; difference continued to be actively sought. By prioritising the female perspective, there was increased recognition of women's subordinated position (Brush, 1992) but there was scope for more gender informed reflexivity.

### ***Challenging masculinised discourse: a call for more explicit feminist theorising***

Since the start of the twenty first century, calls for more gender informed reflexivity and explicit feminist theorising in the analysis of gender and entrepreneurship continue to gain support (Bruni, Gherardi and Poggio, 2004; Ahl, 2006; Hamilton, 2013; Lewis, 2014). There is evidence of several different feminist theories used within the field of entrepreneurship, including liberal, socialist and pragmatist perspectives (Carter and Williams, 2003; Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009; Scott *et al.*, 2012). However, examination of the literature suggests a continued urgency to this request, particularly with the appearance of poststructuralist feminist critiques within entrepreneurship literature (Ahl, 2006), and

captured later in Ahl and Marlow's, (2012) fear that debate within the field risked reaching a 'dead end'.

Drawing on the understanding that gender is socially constructed and consequently, that female subordination is constructed through discursive practices (Kelan, 2009), post structural feminism recognises that words and phrases associated with the feminine are construed as 'weaker, subordinate or different to those of the masculine' (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Ahl, 2006). Ogbor's (2000) postmodern assessment of discourse within entrepreneurship identifies an archetypal entrepreneur; a heroic, white, middle-class male. It explores the root of the masculinised discourse upon which entrepreneurship is traditionally formed and which perpetuates societal biases (Ogbor, 2000:629). He argues that this mythical character can be challenged through the application of critical enquiry and the deconstruction of existing assumptions within contemporary understanding of entrepreneurship. In application, post structuralist feminism has provided a challenge to the traditional entrepreneurial discourse that reinforces the dominant power structures found in Western society, as well as its masculinised ideologies. (Ogbor, 2000, p. 610; Ahl, 2006). Furthermore, it has offered an alternative lens to liberal feminism which implicitly informed much of the early comparative entrepreneurship research and was essentialist in nature (Ahl and Marlow 2012). Despite recognition of the benefits of incorporating a feminist lens in studies, there is still a proportion of research that pays limited attention to feminist theories and continues to apply gender as a variable in studies that compare the experience of male and female entrepreneurs (Justo, DeTienne and Sieger, 2015; Henry, Foss and Ahl, 2016).

### ***Challenging female deficit***

Much of the extant research examined women's entrepreneurship in opposition to the normative masculine standard and concluded a deficit positioning of women as they engage in entrepreneurial activity (Ahl, 2006; Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Marlow & Martinez Dy, 2018). Continued efforts to shift the research agenda to incorporate more gendered theorising provides a means by which scholars might challenge the notion of the 'female deficit' (Blackburn and Kovalainen, 2009; Ahl and Marlow, 2012). The empirical evidence which fuels this perception of lack and inadequacy suggests that women (because of their sex or gender) have fewer entrepreneurial skills and are less motivated to start and grow their businesses

(Deloitte, 2016). Marlow and McAdam (2013) join the post structuralist debate in their argument against the misconception that the disadvantage experienced by women as gendered subject beings (Butler, 1993), equates to their lack of agentic ability. Instead, they point to the multiple structural constraints which affect a gendered socio-economic positioning and limit women's ability to acquire the resources required for entrepreneurial activities (Marlow and McAdam, 2013). They suggest that the negative impact of these constraints on women entrepreneurs is incorrectly interpreted as under-performance, again evidence of the gender-biased discourse of entrepreneurship. The study emphasises the role that feminist perspectives can play in providing more useful explanatory analyses through their critiques of dominant epistemological perspectives and in recognising that subordination and gendered bias lie within social and institutional structures.

Lewis (2014), continues the gendered conversation using a postfeminist theoretical perspective to analyse the construction of entrepreneurial femininities. Acknowledging a shift in women's positioning within society to being different from, yet equal to men, post-feminism offers women the choice to express their femininity as they prefer. It suggests that feminist activism is now redundant as women are emancipated, having gained access to education and employment and acquired gender equalities protected by law. Under such conditions, post-feminism assumes women have an agentic freedom that defies oppression, subordination and bias and which is exercised through its acceptance of traditional gender norms and claims to empowerment and equal opportunities. Lewis's analysis identifies four representations or 'performances' of entrepreneurial femininities which can be enacted by both men and women: first: the gender-neutral and meritocratic 'individualised entrepreneur' who exercises agency and for whom, there is no gender discrimination. Second: a maternal 'mumpreneur' who recognises the right to simultaneously navigate business and domestic responsibilities by choosing to retreat to the home, reflected in home-based businesses. Third: a relational female who embodies the conventional positive values and attributes associated with femininity. Fourth: an excessive 'nonpreneur', having conventional negative values and attributions such as dependency and vulnerability which compromise her ability to gain legitimacy.

These forms of entrepreneurial femininities represent some of the more commonly observed entrepreneurial performances available for women to choose as part of their enterprising self. It might be argued that they challenge gender stereotypes and the assumption that the only option available to achieve legitimacy and authenticity is for women to assume masculine behaviours. Having solely one single option suggests a lack of agency but having a choice to defy or enact gender conventions on their own terms is a completely different position. Empowered by a sense of individualism and self-regulation consistent with neoliberalism, the postfeminist woman is able to construct herself as 'a new agentic citizen' who enacts entrepreneurial femininities (Lewis, 2014). However, one might argue that this attitude ignores societal marginalisation and gender discrimination; rather, it serves to reinforce male privilege. Notwithstanding, social structures such as race, class, gender and sexuality, present additional restriction to the autonomy of the postfeminist woman, challenging the extent to which she can truly make choices (Ahl and Marlow, 2017). It is argued that fundamentally, what is required is the 'redoing of gender' which is 'a change in the normative conceptions to which members of particular sex categories are held accountable' (West and Zimmerman, 2009: 117). This is better understood through a more contextualised approach to understanding gender (Ahl, 2006); positioning gender as it is enacted in specific times and places and within systems such as cultural patriarchy.

### **2.3 Contextualising entrepreneurship studies and challenging homogeneity**

Despite the growing maturity of the field, women's entrepreneurial discourse is critiqued with having reproduced the partiality of mainstream entrepreneurship (Bruton, Ahlstrom and Obloj, 2008; Imas, *et al.*, 2012; Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2015). Not only are mature, developed economies considered to be the normative institutional context in which entrepreneurship exists (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010), but the literature continues to make generic gendered assumptions, presenting female entrepreneurs as a homogenous category with universal experiences of subordination (Marlow and Al-Dajani, 2017). Noticeably absent from previous mainstream reviews on women entrepreneurs is their role in developing economies and transition economies (Brush, 1992; Ahl, 2006), despite their higher rate of engagement in entrepreneurial activities than their peers in developed economies (GEM, 2019). Also rarely found are studies on the relevance of immigrant women entrepreneurs in developed

economies (De Vita, Mari and Poggesi, 2014). However, there is now an emerging stream of literature which addresses these gaps and thus, challenges the assumed homogeneity of women entrepreneurs (Scott *et al.*, 2012; Yousuf Danish and Lawton Smith, 2012; Panda and Dash, 2014). Notwithstanding this progress, as with other subfields of entrepreneurship which have been marginalised (Baker and Welter, 2017), many of these studies remain peripheral to mainstream entrepreneurship studies. Of these, there are very few that have appeared in international journals within the last twenty years (e.g. Scott *et al.*, 2012; De Vita *et al.*, 2014b).

Although much of the research provides evidence that there are shared experiences amongst women entrepreneurs and indeed, similarities with their male counterparts, the studies continue to highlight the importance of context and the implications for perceived difference between the groups (Welter, Brush and de Bruin, 2014; Poggesi, Mari and De Vita, 2016). The range of influences that affect entrepreneurial behaviours in terms of the institutional, social, temporal or spatial conditions in which entrepreneurship is practiced is therefore, a critical area which merits further consideration (Welter, 2011; Zahra, Wright and Abdelgawad, 2014). These influences provide the context through which the entrepreneurial process can be understood (Zahra *et al.*, 2014).

While the institutional context captures the formal rules, regulations and more informal social norms, values and attitudes that enable and constrain entrepreneurial activities (Welter and Smallbone, 2011; Klyver, Løwe Nielsen and Evald, 2013), the social context recognises the networks that connect stakeholders. These networks provide resources, support and advice required for entrepreneurial activity (Marlow and Al-Dajani, 2017); connections that extend to households, families and community (Welter, 2011). Thus, institutional theory offers a useful framework for analysing the effect of these institutional, social and cultural influences on the performance and authentication of entrepreneurial firms and the entrepreneurs (Alkhaled and Berglund, 2018).

Context is also understood in terms of temporality. This focus acknowledges the significance of timing whether it be in the life cycle of the firm and its various stages of maturity, or the socio-political and socio-economic age in which entrepreneurship is being practiced. The

framing of temporality plays a role in determining how a firm or entrepreneur is perceived, is legitimised, and how entrepreneurship is performed. Thus, starting and attempting to grow a business during a period of recession will differ significantly to during a boom period. The different pacing of time within industries also has the potential to affect opportunity identification and exploitation, while a compulsion to focus on the present through necessity and circumstance might diminish an individual's attention to longer term strategies (Lévesque and Stephan, 2019).

The significance of environments on entrepreneurial activities is captured by the spatial context. Accounting for geographical and regional differences, examination of the spatial context also considers the impact of infrastructure upon start-up and growth activity. For example, recognising that the entrepreneurial experience in an urban setting with strong infrastructure such as access to broadband, transportation and knowledge differs to that situated in a rural setting or indeed, may differ between developed and developing economies (Audretsch, Heger and Veith, 2015).

Given that gendered ascriptions influence entrepreneurial activities and behaviours, gender can also be included as an additional aspect of contextualised behaviour within entrepreneurship (Welter, Brush and de Bruin, 2014; Marlow and Al-Dajani, 2017). Consequently, there is an opportunity to consider the entrepreneurial experience of forcibly displaced women who journey from the Global South to the Global North. This is particularly relevant given the global increase in transnational journeys (IOM, 2018; UNHCR, 2020), as voluntary migrants seek work elsewhere, and conflict and persecution push people out of their home countries in search of safety. Global South women, therefore, must adapt and navigate the Global North context while positioned in a stigmatised refugee and devalued gender status. Their experiences of how entrepreneurship is practiced in the Global South may influence their entrepreneurial mindset and expectations within the host country.

In Alkhaled and Berglund's (2018) cross-cultural study conducted into women entrepreneurs in Sweden and in Saudi Arabia, the juxtaposition of experiences of the women within the respective contexts ensures a non-comparative analysis. Thus, experiences of patriarchy, emancipation and empowerment and how these notions influence entrepreneurial activities

are elucidated in relation to their gendered and institutional contexts. This lends further evidence to the limits of traditional entrepreneurial discourse and the importance of contextualisation. Moreover, for the purposes of this thesis, it highlights a range of influences that enable or hinder refugee women, and which they must navigate, as they construct entrepreneurial identities.

### ***Refugee entrepreneurs***

Analysis of the refugee woman entrepreneur within a Global North setting provides a timely contextualised illustration of entrepreneurship as it captures the various influences to which this group are subject as they journey from country of origin to establishing ventures in a host country (Heilbrunn, Freiling and Harima, 2019). Furthermore, it exemplifies the heterogeneity of women entrepreneurs. The compelling force for exploring the phenomenon of refugee entrepreneurship is the recent refugee crisis of the early twenty-first century which reflects the highest recorded level of forced displacements since 1945 (Betts *et al.*, 2017). As a humanitarian catastrophe, this situation encapsulates the chaos, danger and uncertainty faced by individuals and their families who are forced to flee their homes and conflict-ridden countries. At the end of 2020, the number of forcibly displaced persons worldwide had reached 82.4 million (UNHCR, 2020). While the majority remain internally displaced, 26.4 million have journeyed beyond the borders of their countries of origin and are either formally recognised as refugees or are seeking asylum and recognition of their refugee status. In addition to the personal tragedy, the movement of refugees presents significant social and economic implications across the globe (Betts *et al.*, 2017). Although the impact on neighbouring countries is greatest, there is an increasing effect further afield as forcibly displaced migrants journey in larger numbers from the Global South to the Global North in search of safety and more secure living conditions (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008; Van Hear, 2014). Security, economic and environmental burdens on host countries, as well as issues of integrating refugees, are therefore, key concerns of governments and the host population (Betts, Bloom and Weaver, 2015).

Governments and refugee agencies promote entrepreneurship as an integrating mechanism for refugees, creating social cohesion, multiculturalism, and also as a means to self-sufficiency; presenting it as a meritocratic process for which there are no entry barriers (Al-

Dajani *et al.*, 2015; Betts *et al.*, 2017). Many refugees in turn, are drawn towards self-employment to avoid the difficulties of negotiating rights to work in employment, language issues, demonstrating required credentials and discrimination (Lyon, Sepulveda and Syrett, 2007; Wauters and Lambrecht, 2008). These push factors, for which we might turn to labour market disadvantage theory (Light, 1979) and the related blocked mobility hypothesis (Raijman and Tienda, 2000, 2003) for further explanation, act together with pull factors such as desires to integrate into the host country and secure economic self-sufficiency (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2006). Given the particular challenges faced by women refugees which can affect their ability to engage with the external labour market, and a vulnerability to discrimination, they are left with very few options for economic participation (Van Kooy, 2016).

Entrepreneurial enactment through self-employment (Marlow, Carter and Shaw, 2008) is therefore, a necessity and in some cases a means of survival, allowing refugee women to generate an income while at the same time enabling them to cope with male dominance (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013; Mawson and Kasem, 2019). Contrary to this experience which implies limited choice, Hakim, (2000) suggests that within contemporary, western societies, women are free from traditional constraints thus, allowing them to enact their own individual preferences for employment, for example, self-employment. This is a view which has been intensely challenged (McRae, 2003; James, 2008). The prevalence of various forms of structural constraints in the form of discriminatory societal and institutional processes such as class (James, 2008), systems of patriarchy and racism (Essers and Benschop, 2007), will determine how women are able to engage with entrepreneurial activities and consequently, their emergent entrepreneurial identity. Moreover, in contrast to the claims that entrepreneurship is accessible to all, self-employed actors may face restrictions in accessing resources (van Kooy 2016), a debate which will be expanded upon later in the thesis.

### ***Refugee women and discrimination***

Within the UK, women constitute approximately 30% of the total number of adults who are granted refugee status in the UK (Home Office, 2021) although, at a global level they represent as many as 50% of all refugees (UN High Commission for Refugees, 2020). An examination of the refugee experience suggests that there is scope to develop a gendered analysis which



reflects how they navigate multiple discriminations, social and economic constraints, and various gender specific challenges (Freedman, 2010). The psychosocial harm encountered by refugee women in their countries of origin and as they journey towards the countries of resettlement can be the result of extreme physical and sexual violence (Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2001a; Zannettino *et al.*, 2013; Canning, 2014). These experiences and fears of gender-based violence are compounded by other effects of war and persecution on their families. Male family members may be subject to imprisonment, torture and death which can lead to the fragmentation of households and consequently, women assuming primary responsibility for child-care and protection of the family (Lenette, Brough and Cox, 2012). Therefore, increasingly women must take responsibility for income generation to support dependents (Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2015). Such women face even greater challenges accessing formal employment in the UK as they are prohibited from paid work until they are granted formal refugee status following several years of waiting for a decision on their asylum application. Consequently, the experiences and skills of self-employed refugee women provide a specific context which sets them apart from the wider immigrant population and provide an interesting position from which to explore how forced displacement and attempts to integrate in host countries 'alter the nexus of identities available to the self' (Prasad and Prasad, 2003: 59).

In the current wave of refugees which are from conflict areas largely in the Middle East and Africa, where there are more conservative patriarchal societies, some women refugees will have conflicted and different experiences of gender. Consequently, there is a tension of experience between gender and patriarchal ideology which is further confronted by a westernised culture which promotes a different approach. Patriarchy refers essentially to the social structures that perpetuate male dominance over women, power inequalities and oppression evident within familial rule (households) and political rule (society) (Acker, 1989). Expectations of the role and behaviour of women, particularly in terms of maintaining the honour of male family members or having restrictions placed on their activities may be incongruous with the normative view of women's roles (family, community and professional) in the western host country (Essers and Benschop, 2007) . These women therefore, begin a spanning exercise between their traditional cultural norms and the host society which has potential implications for the identity work they undertake.

Studies from the Global South suggest that cultural and religious norms which prohibit women from having contact with men other than family members can have an impact on the willingness of women to seek finance from institutions which are typically fronted by men (Roomi and Parrott, 2008). Women restricted in this way by systems of female seclusion and gender segregation are likely to develop businesses which do not require significant financing, and which will provide services to a majority of women customers. Roomi and Parrott's study (2008) of entrepreneur women in Pakistan found that the majority of these micro-enterprises were based in the education, food and beauty industries, a generic trend that is consistent with findings in other studies, for example, in Middle Eastern countries (Mcelwee, Al-Riyami and Al-Fahal, 2003; Dechant and Lamky, 2005; Bastian, Sidani and Amine, 2018) and African countries (Spring, 2009; Welsh, Memili and Kaciak, 2013). Studies from the Global South region report women's engagement in small scale or micro businesses as well as the informal economy which may also be due to institutional or social factors (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013; Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2015).

Further evidence that women's Global South experience of entrepreneurship differs from that of a Global North perspective, can be found in Yousuf Danish and Lawton Smith's (2012) study into female entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia which uses Brush, de Bruin and Welter's (2009) 5M model as the theoretical framework. The study adapts the "motherhood" element of the model as the social dynamics within the region require a much narrower interpretation, given the economic and social segregation of men and women in the Arab world. As noted above, women in this region are subject to discrimination based on patriarchal systems, evident in the legal and cultural restrictions which are not applicable to men, and which have implications for their levels of education and ability to access bank loans. Notwithstanding this limitation, factors such as class and family wealth/status can determine a woman's access to personal finance and their access to education. Consequently, this can affect her ability to acquire the necessary resources to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Yousuf Danish and Lawton Smith, 2012). The impact of such patriarchal systems has a profound influence on the salience of a woman's maternal role and familial responsibilities (Spring, 2009). Therefore, this will influence how women engage in entrepreneurial activities and the effects this in turn has on defining one's self, the role in the household and challenging the patriarchal system (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010).

This positioning of women within entrepreneurship studies reflects a maturing gendered critique which is beginning to acknowledge heterogeneity amongst women entrepreneurs as they practise their craft, whether it be in the Global North or the Global South (Alkhaled and Berglund, 2018). While it is evident that an examination of refugee women entrepreneurs requires a theoretical and analytical tool that speaks with a feminist voice, such a tool needs to acknowledge that gender is only one aspect of an individual's lived experience. In so doing, it can capture differences among women which hitherto has been lacking within contemporary feminism (Davis, 2008). We draw on the concept of intersectionality to examine women's identities comprising of multiple social categories to better understand their engagement with self-employment as they navigate cultural expectations carried from their country of origin as well as those practiced within the UK. In order to capture this, we incorporate context and place, markers of heterogeneity which highlight how women are situated, and propose the related notion of positionality to extend intersectionality as a framework.

#### **2.4 Introducing intersectionality and positionality**

Intersectionality is the confluence of different social ascriptions of exclusion and systems of oppression which serve to position people at different junctures in society (Essers and Benschop, 2007; Down and Giazitsoglu, 2014). In its original form, the focus of intersectionality was the point at which race and gender intersect and the ensuing discriminations that exist because of this convergence of two marginalising categories of difference (Crenshaw, 1991, 1989). It sought to incorporate the experiences of women who were also marginalised due to race and in so doing, it exposed the complex system of oppression and power relations faced by black women. In addition to being a normative-theoretical argument and research paradigm, the original conception of intersectionality also positioned itself as a tool for political and social change (Hancock, 2007; Davis, 2008; Romero and Valdez, 2016).

With undeniable roots within black feminist thought (Collins, 1989; 1993) and a subsequently broad interdisciplinary reach to include sociology, psychology, migration studies and organisational studies, intersectionality is an emergent theoretical paradigm in entrepreneurship research (Essers and Benschop, 2007, 2009; Forson, 2013; Knight, 2016;

Romero and Valdez, 2016; Dy, Marlow and Martin, 2017). It is considered to be an effective tool used to explore the relationship between various categories of exclusion which is demonstrated by a form of 'mutual constitution' and intersection rather than being additive (Anthias, 2021). The bases of inequality as suggested by Acker (2006), hold gender, ethnicity and class as key social categories, however there are many other categories of difference that impact upon inequality. The core identity markers of difference have been explored within entrepreneurial studies (Walby, Armstrong and Strid, 2012; Villares-Varela, 2018), together with other social categorisations such as disability (Kašperová and Kitching, 2014), gender, ethnicity and religion (Essers and Benschop, 2007), and gender, ethnicity, national origin and national context (Verduijn and Essers, 2013). We propose that these examples can be extended to consider the legal status of the migrant so as to capture the status of being a refugee (Romero, 2008).

Gender and ethnicity are universally accepted core markers of identity (Butler, 2004), and yet within entrepreneurship research, whilst there is an established body of work that captures non-normative entrepreneurs, much of the research is critiqued for taking a "single-axis" approach (Dy, Marlow and Martin, 2017). This is evidenced in the gender-blindness of research on immigrant entrepreneurship (Ram, Jones and Villares-Varela, 2017) and mainstream women's entrepreneurship studies which often generalises results with a homogenous sample (Dy and Agwunobi, 2019) assuming a white, female entrepreneur (García and Welter, 2013; Chasserio, Pailot and Poroli, 2014). However, it is acknowledged that gender and ethnicity are enacted simultaneously and in conjunction with other social categories of difference (Essers and Benschop, 2009), permitting a more heterogenous and nuanced understanding of the woman entrepreneur. Thus, the use of intersectionality is able to expand the focus of both gender and migrant/ethnic research in entrepreneurship to examine how various social ascriptions influence entrepreneurial actors.

One such example is social class – an aspect of identity governed by forces which determine how individuals are positioned and perceived in society (Rivera and Tilcsik, 2016:1097). Essentially, it is indicative of social, economic, political and cultural powers as defined by

access to resources (Bullock and Lott, 2010), and consequently it is a determinant and expression of either privilege or disadvantage. Traditionally measured in the UK in terms of an individual's occupation and employment position (Goldthorpe, Llewellyn and Payne, 1980), it is increasingly recognised that there is an interplay of social, economic and cultural influences involved in the creation of class divisions (Savage *et al.*, 2013). In adopting a multidimensional lens that incorporates socio-cultural factors rather than a purely economic and labour-market approach, class can also be conceptualised in terms of cultural values, lifestyles, tastes and mores. Given that the individualism and independence associated with traditional neoliberal views of entrepreneurship (Kets de Vries, 1985) are based on middle-class experiences and their acquisition of resource (See Savage *et al.*, 2013 for class categories), social class positionings can be a source of inequality, disadvantage and exclusion (Markus and Stephens, 2017; Stephens, Townsend and Dittmann, 2019). This is primarily due to an individual's inability to access capital, resources and networks. (Savage, Warde and Devine, 2005; Anthias, 2012)

The examination of class in conjunction with gender and ethnicity enables a more comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurs and reveals the interdependency of the social categories as they are exercised within spaces of power relations (Valdez, 2016). Consequently, it de-emphasises the saliency of any one social category, thus challenging the siloed nature of entrepreneurship research and tendency to recreate a homogenous approach. In fact, Anthias argues that '*class makes effective the workings of race and gender as inequality regimes, but the workings (and naturalising properties) of race and gender enable the workings of class* (Anthias, 2021:100)'. This suggests that class needs to be understood within an intersectional framing as it signifies both hierarchy and inequalities. In her study into household economy and ethnic entrepreneurship, Valdez, (2016) finds that differential access to resources is produced by intersecting gender and class dynamics at the individual, household, group and structural levels of analysis, revealing that oppression and privilege are reproduced at each level. Another benefit of incorporating social class within intersectional dynamics is that it can be used to capture temporality and movements in class positions. This is particularly pertinent for women in transition moving from their countries of origin and whilst in the country of re-settlement. Such physical movements can influence how women migrants view themselves as entrepreneurs; for example, whether entrepreneurship

is seen as upward or downward mobility. Villares-Varela, (2018), found that Latin American women migrants in Spain who had lived a more elevated social position in their country of origin saw their new business activities in Spain as an act of sacrifice (downward mobility) in support of their husbands' career advancement, while for those who had lived a lower-class position, entrepreneurship afforded them autonomy and an opportunity to raise their social class. These attitudes can promote either a sense of privilege or further subordination among each group as these women entrepreneurs undertake identity work in defining themselves. Thus, an intersectional approach to class, gender and ethnicity, provides an opportunity to explore possible simultaneous expressions of disadvantage and advantage (Chasserio *et al.*, 2014) as it reinforces or challenges the power dynamics intrinsic within the process of constructing an identity.

In recognition of the value and limitations of intersectionality, in terms of its methodological rigour, clarity, and the need to broaden the context in which it is understood to include transnational perspectives (Nash, 2008), it is suggested that some adjustment to the original framework is required. Anthias (2002, 2021) introduced the concept of translocational positionality; a logical extension of intersectionality. It assumes a more dynamic and contextualised approach to difference and offers a paradigm through which intersectionality can capture social divisions (Anthias, 2008, 2012). This is achieved by applying intersectionality in broader terms of context and temporality with a keen focus on social locations and processes thus, addressing concerns related to the fixed and static interpretations of intersecting marginalised categories of difference (Anthias, 2008). These social processes elicit particular forms of positionality: first, conceptualised as a combination of social position, as outcome (the being) and social positioning as a process (the becoming), the latter identified by actions, practices and meaning; and second, located at the nexus of structure and agency (Marlow and Al-Dajani, 2017). Positionality theory is, therefore, useful for multi-layered analyses such as gendered refugee entrepreneurship research, as it considers issues of boundaries and hierarchy in identity construction while concurrently situating identity within a context of structures (Anthias, 1998, 2013).

The social ascriptions found within an intersectional and positionality approach, create structured constraints which represent a complex relation between structure and agency.

Agency can be defined in terms of the socio-culturally mediated ability of an individual to act independently (Ahearn, 2001: 112); thereby exerting a degree of control over, and ability to transform the social relations within which one is embedded (Sewell, 1992; in Bakewell, 2010). In contrast, structure represents a notion of the social world comprising of social, institutional, ideological and political formations that shape individual's lives (Block, 2013); or, as defined within organisational and entrepreneurship studies, conceived as discursive and material structures, in effect, rules /norms and resources (Verloo, 2006; Zanoni and Janssens, 2007; Chasserio, Pailot and Poroli, 2014). Thus, there exists tension between structure and agency as individuals are confronted by and attempt to challenge and navigate constraining rules and norms (Boogaard and Roggeband, 2010).

The translocation aspect of the positionality paradigm speaks of the context, 'societal arenas' which comprises of these 'institutional/structural and representational/discursive spaces'. It is not limited to the movement beyond national borders but extends to the experience of ethnicity, political and value systems as spaces which are crossed and are connected throughout movements in time (Anthias, 2008). Thus, locations are situated within context, meaning and time rather than within a fixed space. This is exemplified in the socio-cultural structures in the Global South where gender and entrepreneurship are typically enacted from a position of a patriarchal lens (Poggesi, Mari and De Vita, 2016) which will influence both the identity and behaviour of a refugee woman as she engages with entrepreneurial activities in a Global North host country. This conceptualisation and practice of a gendered identity which is both self-ascribed and externally ascribed, might differ between the household, the ethnic community and the wider host society, particularly as it is now recognised that identity is situational and fluid (Herrera, 2013; Doan and Portillo, 2017). Consequently, translocational positionality offers a dialectical approach that captures the "complexities of a multiplicity of contexts, contradictory social positions, and shifting references in terms of gender ideologies" (Villares-Varela and Essers, 2018: 213-214). The notions of translocational positionality, different societal arenas of investigation, and of a multilevel analysis, are collectively termed translocational intersectionality (Anthias, 2021). This terminology is used within the thesis to refer to Anthias' extension of the intersectional framework. However, intersectionality and positionality continue to be used where this is most appropriate.

Despite its increasing popularity across several disciplines over the last thirty years, the complexity of intersectionality and the diversity with which it is theorised and applied has left it subject to critique (Nash, 2008; Walby, Armstrong and Strid, 2012; Puar, 2018). It is argued that research approaches that focus on the individual, emphasising the marginalised position of disadvantaged groups, are limited in their ability to offer 'generalizable explanations of patterns or behaviours to alternative intersectional positions' (Atewologun, Sealy and Vinnicombe, 2016: 225). This interpretation of intersectionality exposes how a singular focus on individual difference can become problematic, raising issues of saliency, equity and relative positioning of various social categories without considering the context (Nash, 2008; Anthias, 2012). Furthermore, it is even argued that in restricting its application to that of race, gender and class, there is a risk of returning to a position of essentialism or even, exclusivism whereby the only legitimate point of reference for the purist is the black woman in the US (Nash, 2008). Conversely, confusion over how broadly or otherwise intersectionality might be applied can lead to an infinite number of identity configurations whereby all social phenomena are included to questionable benefit or practicality (McCall, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Brown, 2015). For the purpose of this thesis, intersectionality provides a lens by which the heterogeneity of women entrepreneurs can be examined from their position of 'otherness' to the masculine ideal of an entrepreneur as well as within a contextualised paradigm of being racialised and classed gendered beings. Within this framework, each social category is deemed to be interdependent and mutually constitutive (Healy, Bradley and Forson, 2011) and the legal status of individuals is incorporated in recognition of the structural influences and effects of being labelled a refugee.

## **2.5 Summary**

Within this chapter we have established the foundations of entrepreneurship and identified the causes of its elevated positioning within contemporary society as a result of neoliberal Government policies and related societal discourses. Scholarship reveals that women have been disadvantageously positioned within this discourse and subsequently debates have sought to recast the person of an entrepreneur from a one-dimensional male exercising a neoliberal solution to economic issues, to a gendered and more nuanced individual. Thus, women are recognised as individuals who exercise agency in relation to structural constraints.



However, the gender critique itself has been found wanting in its assumption of a homogenous woman entrepreneur and its focus on the Global North. Therefore, there is still a need to have a better understanding of the gender critique when it is enacted within different contexts. Although a comparable stream of gendered entrepreneurship literature continues to emerge from the Global South, it remains peripheral. Due to translocational journeys, the experiences of women entrepreneurs can also be captured between the Global South and Global North and adds a further dimension to our understanding of how women engage in entrepreneurial activities, opening up new debates and research opportunities.

In acknowledging the need for further contextualised analyses within both entrepreneurship and identity research, we must recognise other social categories beyond gender and ethnicity which position people at different junctures in society. Of equal importance is the role that these social categories have in the identity work undertaken by refugee women entrepreneurs. We suggest that intersectionality is a relevant concept with which to explore this theme, and in so doing, it serves to inject more explanatory research within the field of women's entrepreneurship. To contribute to this debate, this thesis is going to explore the experiences of refugee women who have re-settled in the UK and created small businesses. It aims to conceptually and empirically examine how multiple social categories intersect and how they shape and form the identity of a woman to take on the role of entrepreneurial actor, particularly as a contextualised experience of entrepreneurship potentially presents a range of complex and unequal outcomes.

### **3 Identity work and Intersectional influences**

In the previous chapter, this thesis explored entrepreneurship and gender. In so doing, it illustrated two key debates within the respective fields: First, based on the role of entrepreneurship within contemporary society, critiques that claim entrepreneurship offers a false promise of socio-economic freedom for disadvantaged individuals; a critique worthy of further development in the context of refugee women in the UK. Second, the entrenched masculinity within entrepreneurial discourse and resultant biases within the field which have elicited a gendered debate and a discrete discipline of 'women's entrepreneurship'. However, this valuable gendered critique has tended to isolate women from their context and consequently, offers a homogenous view of the woman entrepreneur. (Marlow and Martinez Dy, 2018). Therefore, intersectionality and positionality were introduced in the previous chapter as a framework within which the heterogeneity of women entrepreneurs and a contextualisation of their situation can be examined (Anthias, 2002a; Hancock, 2007).

This chapter builds on current identity, gender and entrepreneurship scholarship to further explore the use of intersectionality and positionality in terms of identity construction, the power struggles that this involves and the resultant transformations that may emerge. By probing into the heterogeneity associated with an entrepreneurial identity, it argues that entrepreneurship can be used as a means to confront economic disadvantage and the challenges of belonging to both a stigmatised refugee group and a subordinated gendered group. However, despite this potential benefit, the identity markers that intersect to fuel these stigmatised and devalued identities, make the process of identity construction a complex endeavour for women refugee entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurship is traditionally viewed as an agentic phenomenon with individual entrepreneurial traits, decision-making choices and actions demonstrating the totality of a rational entrepreneurial "self" or individual (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009; Achidi Ndofo and Priem, 2011). However, to focus solely on the agentic nature of entrepreneurship risks creating a decontextualized heroic model of the entrepreneur. In contrast, a prioritisation of the structural influences that affect individual actions, as traditional positivist approaches have assumed (see Grant and Perren, 2002), risks rendering the individual a potential victim and limiting their ability to affect change (Garud, Hardy and Maguire, 2007; Chasserio, Pailot

and Poroli, 2014). An intersectional approach facilitates a balanced examination of the agency-structure debate which has been longstanding within entrepreneurship scholarship (Kloosterman, Van Der Leun and Rath, 1999; Aldrich and Martinez, 2002), particularly in the context of entrepreneurship and identity work where power dynamics are also a feature. This chapter considers the process of identity work and the devalued and discredited identities associated with women refugee entrepreneurs. It then presents intersectionality and positionality as a paradigm through which mechanisms of identity work can be exposed: privilege and subordination, agency and structure, and belonging and exclusion that are negotiated by the individual, and which can be used to counter marginalisation as identities are repaired and reformed.

### 3.1 Constructing identities

#### ***Identity: a state of becoming***

Chapter 2 described the normative assumptions that have prevailed within entrepreneurship studies for decades regarding who or what is an entrepreneur. The critical perspectives that have emerged and continue to challenge these Western discourses about heroic, white males epitomising the entrepreneurial ideal (Ogbor, 2000; Ahl, 2006; Marlow and McAdam, 2013; Essers *et al.*, 2017) confirm the importance of examining the many identities that can be associated with an entrepreneur.

The notion of identity as a representation of who one is and who one is not involves a complexity that is evident from the multiple definitions of the construct found within a range of disciplinary perspectives (Stryker and Burke, 2000; Abdelal *et al.*, 2006; Alvenson, Ashcraft and Thomas, 2008). Subsequently, various conceptual and theoretical approaches such as personal identity, social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) and (role) identity theory (Stryker and Burke, 2000) have been employed by scholars of identity. Conceptual and empirical research have therefore, examined attitudes, behaviours, personalities, traits, values, and beliefs specific to the individual and which together, encapsulate the 'core self' or unique individual of a personal identity (Erikson, 1968 see Anthias 2008; Spencer-Oatey, 2007). Social identity theory has been applied to examine an individual's associations with specific social groupings such as gender, age, ethnicity, class, religious denominations or political parties (Tajfel, 1982; Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Greene and Brush, 2018); while, role identity theory, focuses on a

range of roles relating to an individual's work and responsibilities such as mother, entrepreneur, accountant (Stryker and Burke, 2000). Although identity research typically adopts either of these key approaches, it is understood that there is much to be gained from the integration of complementary insights from each and with other theories (Deaux and Martin, 2003; Stets and Burke, 2014). The application of identity theories in the study of entrepreneurs, their behaviours, personalities and traits, has led to the conclusion that there is a relationship between an entrepreneur's self-concept and how they engage in entrepreneurial activities and with the entrepreneurial process (Hoang and Gimeno, 2010; Navis and Glynn, 2010; Fauchart and Gruber, 2011).

While some scholars have perceived identity as a predominately essentialist state of being which is constant, static and fixed (Alsos *et al.*, 2016), it is also recognised that identity is an emergent phenomenon, reflecting a continuous process of dynamic and conflicting dialogues and interactions between an individual's evaluation of self and societal discourses. Thus, the construct of self is based on a bridging relationship between the personal and social (Watson, 2009). Consequently, the individual 'becomes' and 'does' rather than simply 'is'; a shift that acknowledges identity as being socially constructed and relational (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008; Harrison and Leitch, 2018). This debate is evident in entrepreneurship where studies reveal that identities are adapted as ventures progress through different stages, challenges and under specific conditions (Hoang and Gimeno, 2010; Fauchart and Gruber, 2011). Moreover, this notion extends to that of temporality within the construct of identity, reflecting not only the significance of experiences in the past and the present, but also how this can also have an impact upon future versions of oneself and aspirations of who one could be (McAdams, 1993; Thornborrow and Brown, 2009).

Where self-identity is the individual's internal conception of their character, externally, identity is reflected through the social world of "cultural, discursive or institutional notions of who or what any individual might be" (Watson, 2008:131). In effect, identity is crafted, both promoted and perceived; a simultaneous and continuous encounter between the individual, social actors and institutions, over multiple time-frames (Ybema *et al.*, 2009). This echoes Ibarra's (1999) work on provisional selves, highlighting the iterative nature of crafting identity required to make sense of and conform to a desired image. In offering itself as an anchor for

sense-making (Weick, 1995), identity captures more than the essence of an individual as it is the frame of reference for a) understanding social situations and one's position within the domain, and b) the defining of self in relation to others (Anthias, 2002). This notion is transferred to the domain of entrepreneurship where Navis and Glynn, (2011) assert that entrepreneurial identities are found at the intersect of claim-making or sense-giving on the part of the entrepreneur, and interpretation and sense-making on the part of investors. This intrinsic relationship between identity, sense-giving and sense making highlights the importance of identity not just for the individual, but for others too as the individual seeks to develop an identity and ensure that it is legitimised.

### ***Identity work: a process***

In understanding identity to be both the process and the outcome by which an individual is formed and enacted, consequently, the related notion of identity work, emerges as the specific process which ensures that constructions of self are formed, (re)negotiated, repaired revised, maintained or strengthened (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Identity work encompasses both the construction and performance of identities and as such has gained a prominent area of interest in organisation studies (Butler, 1990; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Brown, 2015) and increasingly in entrepreneurship studies (Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas, 2008; Fauchart and Gruber, 2011). It is conceptualised as *"the mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity and strive to shape the various social identities that emerge in relationship to others in the various milieu in which they live their lives"* (Watson, 2009: 129). However, despite its 'perpetually fluid and shifting' nature (Brown, 2015:26), the process of identity work is not unfettered; structural constraints shape the negotiating of identities within spaces of unequal power (Anthias, 2012). Hence, a focus on identity work challenges the tendency to overlook questions of structure, context and meaning which has been a criticism of the notion of identity (Anthias, 2008) and further shifts understanding of identity from that of a possessive attribute of an individual to the agency exercised by the individual as they demonstrate continuous efforts to challenge dominant forces, and construct and maintain an authentic and valid concept of self .

The formation, re-formation and maintenance of identity is dependent on the utilisation of various strategies which involve cognitive, behavioural, physical and discursive modes (Caza, Vough and Puranik, 2018). These include the 'artful navigation of rules, norms' and social expectations (Chasserio, Pailot and Poroli, 2014; Swail and Marlow, 2018: 272) or reflexivity of sense-making and self- questioning (Beech, MacIntosh and McInnes, 2008), gendered performances where women might choose to imitate masculinity by enacting certain masculinised attitudes (Marlow and McAdam, 2015; Swail and Marlow, 2018), the use of symbolic objects as in Muslim women choosing to wear headscarves as a means to demonstrate their Muslim identity, and narratives or storytelling which is increasingly presented as an important device used within identity work ( Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010; Donnellon, Ollila and Williams Middleton, 2014; Greene and Brush, 2018). While internally individuals engage with self-reflexivity, externally, they engage with others using dialogue and action. Through sharing stories and extracting from autobiography memories, individuals can *"create a coherent account of identity in time...convey(ing) to themselves and to others who they are now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future"* (McAdams and McLean, 2013: 233). Thus, narrative emerges as an integral medium through which a recognisable and acceptable identity is formed and through which continuity and change are captured (Tomlinson and Colgan, 2014).

The motivations for and timings of when identity work occurs are generally influenced by threats and challenges relevant to particular identities (Caza, Vough and Puranik, 2018). Having fled their country of origin, forcibly displaced migrants begin a process of identity reformulation which incorporates a refugee status (Burnett, 2013). The complex and often treacherous transnational journeys, which might include experiences of refugee camps as they travel to resettlement countries, contribute to the trauma, tensions and strains that often trigger an examination of the self and which can make a reconstruction of one's identity more necessary. This view, taken from Brown's (2015) review of identity work during times of transition in organisations, appears to be even more relevant for refugees who may subsequently find themselves in hostile host countries where previous professional and personal identities tend to be overlooked and replaced by more one-dimensional labels of refugee or asylum seeker. The over-arching marker of 'refugee' captures forcibly displaced migrants within liminal spaces. This space is both physical and psychological, as they move

from home country to host country; transitioning from one identity state to another. A liminal state is triggered as they enter into the UK as an asylum seeker, although earlier states of liminality associated with the circumstances of having to leave their home country will also have been experienced. They then endure the waiting period until refugee status is granted, and even after this point, continue to negotiate tensions that exist between multiple identity categories (Essers and Benschop, 2009) as part of the process of assimilating into the host country.

The notion of liminality has in recent years been used by scholars of entrepreneurship and organisation management to explore the underlying processes of identity reconstruction (Beech, 2011; Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly, 2014; Muhr *et al.*, 2019) . With its roots in anthropology (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969), liminality offers a means by which one can conceptualise the in between states of moving from one identity state to another. Van Gennep (1960) originally used the term in relation to human rites of passage and identified liminality as the phase experienced after ‘separation’ from the old identity (e.g. boyhood) but before ‘aggregation’ the point at which the new identity (e.g. manhood) is effectuated. From this original anthropological foundation, those in a place of liminality are associated with being invisible within society, being outside of societal rules, having limited rights and using the liminal space as preparation for the next identity state. As such, the notion of liminality aptly captures the transitions that take a person ‘betwixt and between’ life stages (Turner, 1969:359). Within organisational and entrepreneurship studies, liminality has been used to examine temporary staff as well as professional work transitions (Johnsen and Sørensen, 2015; Bamber, Allen-Collinson and McCormack, 2017). Despite the transitional nature of liminality (Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly, 2014), the refugee experience, requires that a longer term approach is applied, given that ‘refugeeness’ is perceived to be a perpetual state, “an ongoing, constitutive process of becoming a refugee”(Jackson and Bauder, 2014:362). Therefore, as identified by Alkhaled and Sasaki (2021), an interpretation of this transition period as ‘indeterminate’, is particularly relevant for refugees. The uncertainty and ambiguity associated with the identity changes that take place in a host country, suggest that there is a need for identity work that captures both temporal and spatial domains. Thus, the notion of liminality offers a means to further contextualise the process for refugees who pursue entrepreneurial ambitions.

Studies focusing on identity work among ethnic minority or immigrant entrepreneurs rarely explore in detail the impact of the legal status of forcibly displaced migrants (Wauters and Lambrecht, 2006). Neither do they consider the implications of previous identity construction or experiences on the refugee's view of 'self' which must then contend with social and community expectations and preconceptions (Essers and Benschop, 2014; Pécoud, 2003; Romero and Valdez, 2016). The effect of the 'refugee journey' and the transnational identities being developed along the way, may therefore, be relevant to the continued identity work undertaken by the refugee entrepreneur. Such a translocational experience provides an initial setting against which identity can be interpreted as it captures the multiple contextual locations of key identity markers in both time and space (Anthias, 2008, 2013).

Beyond the role of explaining and having an impact upon the way one is; feels, thinks and behaves, the process of constructing personal, social and role identities can be used to examine how individuals, and more specifically, women, develop their entrepreneurial identities (Greene and Brush, 2018) and how they negotiate the shift between multiple social categories (Essers and Benschop, 2007). This is particularly relevant in the transition 'from refugee to entrepreneur', although the conversion may not be as simplistic a process as such news headlines may imply (Bearne, 2017) as context and temporality are relevant considerations to explain the phenomenon of the refugee entrepreneur (Brown, 2015). Notwithstanding, identity work provides a means to relate identity to entrepreneurial intention, action and legitimation (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011; Leitch and Harrison, 2016; Hytti *et al.*, 2017; Swail and Marlow, 2018). However, this concept of identity work as a dynamic, on-going process of negotiation between 'self' and socio-political structures with associated temporal and spatial considerations, remains under-developed within entrepreneurship research (Down and Reveley, 2009; Gioia *et al.*, 2013; Leitch and Harrison, 2016). Consequently, there is scope to examine tensions between individual identity, social identities, and the entrepreneurial identity, and the process of how they evolve (Essers and Benschop, 2009; Chasserio, Pailot and Poroli, 2014).



## 3.2 Entrepreneurial identity

### *Constructing an entrepreneurial identity*

Efforts to understand the entrepreneurial person increasingly draw on the notion of identity and how an entrepreneurial identity is constructed through specific identity work (Wigren, 2003; Down and Giazitsoglu, 2014). As Down and Giazitsoglu argue, “explaining how individuals create their entrepreneurial selves is important if we are to observe and explain this constantly developing way of being” (2014:7). They point to the mutually reinforcing relationship between entrepreneurial activity and an entrepreneurial identity which gives rise to the performance of an entrepreneurial identity. Emerging from earlier work which centred on personality types and shifting towards a role-focused perspective, the entrepreneurial identity has been conceptualised and categorised using a range of typologies (See Cromie and Hayes, 1998; Westhead and Wright, 1998; Fauchart and Gruber, 2011b).

Conceptualisations of the entrepreneur as a positive figure who holds status, represents achievement, and contributes to society through economic activity and by providing a social good, is consistent with the neoliberal ideal (Marttila, 2013). However, whilst this image might be an attractive alternative for those who face challenges of poverty and prejudice, there is a potential disconnect between the experiences of individuals who are disadvantaged in society due to gender, race and class, for example, and the fallacious archetypal image of an entrepreneur. Critical entrepreneurship studies highlight the need for such marginalised actors and their businesses to be captured within entrepreneurship theory (Imas, Wilson and Weston, 2012). Theory is required that will reflect and allow them to legitimately assume an entrepreneurial identity that is distinctive and unique (Baker and Nelson, 2005), such as is required by any competitive venture, but which at the same time allows them to belong to this group that differs from those who cannot claim to be ‘entrepreneurial’. The traditional notion of the entrepreneurial identity assumes an individual who is competitive, aggressive and risk-taking, characteristics which are generally associated with the stereotypical white, male, middle-class entrepreneur as noted in the previous chapter. However, this normative profile of an entrepreneur has been critiqued from a number of angles including as discussed earlier, the gender notion which devalues women.

Research on the intersect of gender, identity and entrepreneurship has typically examined women business owners and their experiences of developing, enacting and defining their entrepreneurial identities (García and Welter, 2011, 2013). These studies consider the changes that women make in their behaviours and ultimately to their identities, in order to be recognised, accepted and validated as entrepreneurs. Building on these studies, Marlow and McAdam (2015) and Swail and Marlow (2018) present identity work as a process by which individuals might gain legitimacy as entrepreneurs; a particularly insightful interpretation in the context of exploring a gendered enactment of entrepreneurship. This approach to examining identity work captures the perceived dissonance between women's performance of being an entrepreneur and the phenomenon of entrepreneurship which is assumed to be an inherently masculine endeavour. The active process of identity work and legitimising a gendered entrepreneurial identity, is required to combat biases that discredit women entrepreneurs who establish businesses considered to be traditionally feminine. It is also necessary as women enact their entrepreneurial identity in enterprises that are considered to be the domain of men, such as in technology and engineering (Marlow and McAdam, 2015; Swail and Marlow, 2018) and where there is a presumed gender blindness as within digital entrepreneurship (Dy, Marlow and Martin, 2017). And yet, much of this work whilst offering a critique of the gender-blind assumptions of entrepreneurial identity, rarely encapsulates the implications of other aspects of identity such as ethnicity and class, (see Essers and Benschop, 2007; Villares-Varela, 2018 as exceptions). Consequently, the paucity of literature offering a broader acknowledgment of the heterogeneity and contextualisation of an entrepreneurial identity, also misses the opportunity to examine in depth the structural conditions working simultaneously with the agentic authoring of the entrepreneurial identity (Mirchandani, 1999; Imas, Wilson and Weston, 2012; Ram, Jones and Villares-Varela, 2017).

In considering the body of literature which focus on ethnic minority entrepreneurs, a distinct identity has emerged that associates certain ethnic groups with an exemplary hard-working ethnic entrepreneurial identity. Such groups have been found to benefit from traditionalist family values and religious values that support 'an entrepreneurial ethos of self-reliance, thrift, self-sacrifice and ....industriousness' (Ram and Jones, 2008: 354). This conventional notion of an ethnic identity is one that is 'othered' to the mainstream entrepreneurial identity, bounded within in-group networks of customers, suppliers and labour who have a shared

(immigrant) ethnicity (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990). It has the benefit of providing resource-based strategies that are served by an 'embeddedness in an immigrant milieu'; localised ghettos within which communities of minority ethnic-led business can interact and thrive (Kloosterman, Van Der Leun and Rath, 1999; Pecaud, 2004). Thus, a social identity with specific ethnic groups serves to emphasise the differences that consigns some entrepreneurs within these groups to 'ethnic enclaves' and which consequently determines their entrepreneurial identities and strategies (Wilson and Portes, 1980; Achidi Ndofor and Priem, 2011).

This presumption of 'ethnic exceptionalism', a salient ethnic identity that drives successful communities of ethnic entrepreneurs, and which underpins the dominant theories of ethnic minority entrepreneurship, has been critically evaluated to illustrate that it is more contingent than originally perceived (Ram and Jones, 2008). Consequently, ethnicity is understood to be one of many dimensions of an individual which is embedded within complex social relations (Ram and Jones, 2008; Ram, Jones and Villares-Varela, 2017). Such intra-group heterogeneity within ethnic entrepreneurship has hitherto been under-theorised within the field (Jones, Ram and Villares-Varela, 2017; Cederberg and Villares-Varela, 2019). Therefore, the incorporation of a gendered and classed perspective is required not only in order to formulate a more comprehensive image of the ethnic entrepreneurial identity, but also to extend the theorising of immigrant/ethnic entrepreneurship (Valdez, 2016; Ram, Jones and Villares-Varela, 2017).

A critical engagement with the prototypical entrepreneurial identity which focuses on a white, middle -class male personality, has enabled a space in which a greater debate can develop about how identities overlap with different social ascriptions. Although there is an established body of work that examines an entrepreneurial identity from the perspective of gender and ethnicity, research that overlooks the simultaneous influence of multiple core axes of difference such as gender, ethnicity, class, legal status, religion and disability, fails to capture a truly contextualised image of the subject. Therefore, in order to understand an entrepreneurial identity, it is imperative that at a foundational level, gendered, racialised and classed ascriptions should be considered. Consequently, the focus of this thesis is to consider

the refugee identity which will encompass issues of gender, class and race/ethnicity, but which will also present a specific notion of stigma.

### **3.3 A stigmatised identity: The restrictive discourses of the refugee identity**

#### ***Stigmatised identities***

A tendency within identity scholarship to focus on positive identities disregards the experiences of those who are subject to identities that are considered to be non-normative, flawed or stigmatised (Stets and Burke, 2014; Brown, 2015). Defined as deeply “*discrediting attributes*” that render an individual tainted and less than human (Goffman, 1963: 4, 5), stigmas are ascribed to individuals or groups based on various labelled differences that are linked to stereotypes and consequently, are marginalising (Link and Phelan, 2001). Thus, judgements related to stigma markings are incorporated into the identities of those deemed to be deviant in relation to social norms and attitudes. Such stigmatisation is received through discrimination, stereotyping or being ascribed derogatory labels (Zetter, 1991, 2007; Link and Phelan, 2001). Also intrinsic to the notion of stigmatisation is a sense of separation between people with the labelled attribute and those who do not share the negative attribute (Link and Phelan (2001). Consequently, stigmatisation exists within a context of unequal power dynamics, and is determined by those who dictate what is normative. Therefore, stigmatisation is reinforced by institutional procedures, industry practices and government policies (Toyoki and Brown, 2014; van Amsterdam and van Eck, 2019), structures with which individuals must interact. However, the focus of stigmatisation is on the individual and the attribute, rather than the actors or entities that confer the stigma. Consequently, within the literature there is an increasing interest in the specific strategies employed by those who are stigmatised, to challenge, manage or repair the damage caused by stigmatisation (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Toyoki and Brown, 2014). For the purposes of this thesis, we use the example of refugee as a stigmatised identity and contextualise it through notions of gender which is itself a devalued identity marker that leaves individuals subject to discrimination and subordination.

#### ***Stigmatised: The refugee identity***

A refugee identity emerges from consideration of what and who is a refugee. In the UK, it is the state who decrees that an individual is a refugee, thus demonstrating the power of the

discursive in providing understanding of the refugee identity (Phillips and Hardy, 1997; Goodman and Kirkwood, 2019). The influence of this legal and political discourse reflects the dominant social constructionist approach guiding much of the research on identity and identity work and its emphasis on discourse (Ybema *et al.*, 2009)

Refugee identities reflected in the media and constructed by other entities within the UK and other Western refugee systems generally depict images of a 'helpless, defenceless, individual' who is 'incompetent' standing in contrast to the economic migrant, representing deviancy (Phillips and Hardy, 1997; Wright, 2014). Women refugees in particular, are more likely to be depicted as submissive and victims (Amores, Arcila-Calderón and González-de-Garay, 2020) This discourse which dominates popular understanding of the refugee is an example of a social construct with which those who have been forcibly displaced must contend as they attempt to define an authentic self in the host country. In her study into the UK asylum system, Madziva (2018) highlights the complexities of identity construction at this pre-refugee phase, drawing on officials' use of "visible difference, ethnicity, religious belief and names" (Lynn and Lea, 2014: 428) to categorise and define applicants for refugee status. It is argued that changes within the refugee system over the last decade have resulted in a more politicised labelling of the refugee identity with which has emerged a language that breeds suspicion and associates the refugee with dishonesty, being a high-risk threat and consequently placed in a position of being the 'other' (Zetter, 2007; Madziva, 2018). The implications of such labels on the individual's ability to engage in entrepreneurial activities and further develop their identities, is under-explored, but is highly relevant given Watson's (2008) argument that social identities, which are themselves subject to various influences, are key to the process of identity work and the development of an entrepreneurial identity. Furthermore, within the broader sphere of ethnic and immigrant entrepreneurship research, findings that reveal a tendency of young entrepreneurs of migrant heritage to reject being branded as ethnic and immigrant entrepreneurs in favour of the pure identity of 'entrepreneur' (Ram, Jones and Patton, 2006), suggest a need to further investigate the experiences of women refugees in the construction of their entrepreneurial identities.

Despite the protected status granted under international law, refugees face significant challenges of integrating into an unfamiliar environment; including poverty, discrimination,

exploitation and high levels of unemployment (Jacobsen, 2006), which compound their stigmatised status. They experience the effects of being part of two stigmatised populations: foreign migrants, and, the national poor. As a subset of the former they can be vulnerable to 'negative' and 'unkind' representation in the media and politics (Wright, 2014 p.463) and xenophobia and racism as a common experience of life in the host country (Robinson, 2016; Vickers 2012). Equally stigmatising, the disadvantages of being poor have implications for where they are forced to live, their health and education. Refugees arrive in host countries ill-prepared following their flight from conflict and persecution and as such are even differentiated from other migrant groups who might also experience racism but whose circumstances of voluntarily leaving their countries of origin means that they can better prepare for the migration and bring both tangible and intangible assets. Although subject to government policies to facilitate their inclusion and integration, the experience of these policies in the UK and in European countries has been mixed (Thondhlana, Madziva and Mcgrath, 2016). For example, refugees are housed based on local authority availability, these provisions may be basic or inadequate and situated in poorer areas with unfamiliar forms of communities. Language barriers and cultural differences provide further obstacles to integration and also serve to heighten the feelings of inferiority in comparison to host communities.

Even within the social category of being a refugee, certain groups may experience greater or lesser stigmatisation because of their ethnicity, race or their religion. Targeted policies might be perceived to privilege, and therefore, validate one particular group of refugee or migrant over others such as the disparity of treatment and opportunities for resettled Syrian refugees who enter the UK under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme in comparison to the wider refugee community (*Understanding Sanctuary in Nottingham: The report of Nottingham Citizens Independent Sanctuary Commission, looking at the challenges facing refugees and asylum seekers*", 2017). Similarly, refugees who are Muslim or who are black African for example, may experience additional stigmatisation and discrimination due to Islamophobia in the UK (Goodman and Kirkwood, 2019) or racial hierarchies (Chadderton and Edmonds, 2015) respectively. Mistrust and rejection are also possible from within black communities where internalised racism can reinforce the racist stereotypes perpetuated by dominant white groups. Examining refugee status as a social category and stigmatised identity

allows for a much more nuanced understanding of how it might have an impact on how the whole 'self' is perceived and developed. Moreover, in the case of refugee women, the challenge they face in reformulating their identity particularly as they pursue entrepreneurial ambitions, is compounded by intersectional issues such as gender and class.

***Devalued: A gendered and classed entrepreneurial identity***

The entrepreneurial identity is constituted by multiple social identities as the individual also assumes different social roles which reflect their private, family and professional domains. Although several progressive conceptions of the entrepreneurial identity have been proposed which reflect an integrated and contextualised perspective in analysing the entrepreneurial person (Ahl, 2006; Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009; Essers, Benschop and Doorewaard, 2010), Chasserio *et al.* (2014), suggest that there is scope for this to be developed further. A broadened framework that recognises additional issues such as family embeddedness (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006), patriarchy or household positioning of women in entrepreneurship (Valdez, 2016) permits a more contextualised examination of the dissonance encountered by women entrepreneurs as they manage tensions between gender based identities of mother, wife and those of a normative profile of an entrepreneur, positioned as masculine, white and middle-class (Bjursell and Melin, 2011; Chasserio *et al.*, 2014). In research conducted by Chasserio *et al.* (2014), the entrepreneurial identities of women subjects were found to be devalued and rejected by members of their extended family if such identities were considered to be achieved at the expense of the women prioritising their maternal duties. Not only does this highlight the implications of validation by others, but it also emphasises the social expectations that can limit the identity work undertaken by women refugees.

As noted in chapter 2, intersectionality is an appropriate tool with which to analyse the identity work undertaken by refugee women entrepreneurs, particularly as the subordinating identity markers embedded in intersectionality such as gender, class and race, also fuel stigmatised identities. It captures the fact that these social categories can be both confrontational and synergetic. Although the use of intersectionality in entrepreneurial studies remains limited (Verduijn *et al.*, 2014), its application in (Essers and Benschop's, (2007) study of women entrepreneurs of Moroccan and Turkish descent in the Netherlands reveals

the various strategies that they use to manage their identities: conformist identity work which complies with social expectations of a patriarchal system; waiving their gender and ethnic identifications to promote and legitimise an entrepreneurial identity, and finally, recreating hybrid ethnic identities and reconfigured gendered identities to redefine an entrepreneurial identity (Essers and Benschop, 2007). Similarly they may choose to individualise their religious identity so as to distance themselves from the more dogmatic, collectivist interpretations of Islam which tend to stimulate attitudes that stigmatise an Islamic religious identity (Essers and Benschop, 2009).

### **3.4 Intersectionality, positionality, and identity work**

Given these circumstances and experience of being a woman refugee, it might appear that their agentic capabilities and ability to redefine themselves within the host country are somewhat compromised. However, the identity work and specific strategies used to become entrepreneurs demonstrate efforts to move from a stigmatised identity towards a valued identity (Reveley and Down, 2009). It highlights the use of agency to transform their lives and countering stigmatized identities as entrepreneurial identity is constructed.

Appropriation of stigmatising labels, claiming aspirational social identities and representing oneself as a good person, are strategies used by prisoners in a study conducted by Toyoki and Brown, (2014). Similarly, entrepreneurship can be understood in these term as it provides an 'active and agential response to stigma'(Reveley and Down, 2009: 174). Being labelled as a refugee entrepreneur, places refugee women within an 'accepted group', as the agentic nature of entrepreneurship challenges views of refugees as being dependents and lazy. Reveley and Down (2009) in their study of aboriginal entrepreneurs in Australia, found that mobilising resources such as government initiatives to start ventures is used to reposition individuals in relation to the power relationships and structural influences that most influenced their lies. Thus, combined, intersectionality and positionality permit an analysis of the dynamic interactions between structure and agency as individuals undergo the construction of their identities.



### ***Identity construction and belonging***

As an individual engages in the discourse of validation and authenticity taking place in the social domain, issues of acceptance, inclusion and recognition are drawn into identity construction; thus, identity work becomes a means to achieve legitimacy which can also counter stigmatisation (Pailot, Poroli and Chasserio, 2017). In 'creating a sense of belongingness' the individual can avoid the designation of 'other' serving both a need to self-affirm and connect the individual to society (Marlow and McAdam, 2015: 793; Stead, 2017). This sense of belonging encapsulates what people feel, their orientations and can also involve shared values, networks and resources (Anthias, 2016). It is a relevant concept for the refugee woman not only as she attempts to integrate into the host country but also as she engages in entrepreneurial activities. Swail and Marlow (2018) examine how women craft their entrepreneurial identities and achieve legitimacy in the context of a masculinised discourse of entrepreneurship by drawing on specific strategies to bridge the gap between the disadvantaged status of a woman's femininity, and the normalised masculinity that pervades entrepreneurship studies. However, we do not know how these strategies might change if there are multiple categories of discrimination. One potential dilemma facing the refugee woman entrepreneur might be in demonstrating to key stakeholders her conformity to normative notions of an entrepreneur, whilst maintaining expectations of her womanhood within patriarchal traditions (which may be one of few connections held with her country of origin). Translocational positionality provides a contextual framework in which identity work and the associated process of belonging can be reconciled. This is particularly pertinent given ties to the traditions of the home country and sentiment attached to heritage which is part of the old cultural identity. Such conflict between the old and new identities, between belonging and being different, can emerge through the entrepreneurial activities engaged in by refugee women in the host country. In these situations, heritage crafts are used to preserve a cultural identity, and in doing so, highlight a duality in terms of culture and belonging (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013).

Contemporary analyses are further limited in examining the tensions within migrant entrepreneurship where efforts to be legitimised within society may conflict with efforts to differentiate and categorise a collective ethnic identity; an ethnic identity that provides opportunity structures and resource mobilisation that encourage and support entrepreneurial

activities (Ram, Jones and Villares-Varela, 2017). There is, therefore, scope to develop understanding of the implications of belonging for women migrant entrepreneurs engaging in identity work. The status assigned to refugee women positions them as outsiders; standing apart from the masculinity and whiteness associated with the normalised entrepreneurial identity. However, the requirement to integrate into the host country whilst simultaneously accessing ethnic communities and networks which is assumed to be the route for immigrant entrepreneurship, highlights further tensions associated with belonging.

### ***Agency vs Structure – the heart of a multi-level analysis***

In discussing identity work within the context of entrepreneurship, Hytti (2005: 605) argues that *“entrepreneurs are active agents who construct an entrepreneurial identity by applying their other identities and positions, their own past and present experiences and future perspectives as resources in the story”*. This emphasises the agentic nature of identity work and the entrepreneurial experience, yet they are both concurrently contextualised social phenomena. There is a two-way process of validation and authenticity that takes place during the process of identity construction whereby the individual is able to act on and negotiate with the social structures which in turn shape the individual by constraining or enabling activities – ‘a continuous interplay between externalizations and internalizations’ (Ybema *et al.*, 2009) . Tomlinson (2010), in her study of refugee women in employment and voluntary work in the UK, emphasises the elements of inequality that are embedded in social structures which serve to exclude and inhibit the active agency of the marginalized individual. And yet, there is also evidence within entrepreneurship research that shows various ways in which marginalised women find means to exercise their agency: through entrepreneurial activity in identity work that challenges patriarchal structures (Essers and Benschop, 2007), as subversion (Knight, 2016; Banerjee, 2019), or as political resistance (Sabella and El-Far, 2019).

This tension between individual agency and social structure is a dilemma presented throughout identity research, yet, within both entrepreneurship literature and intersectionality literature, whilst structural and agential aspects are acknowledged, there remains a disconnect. It is argued that structural aspects of inequality have been stressed in the theoretical intersectionality literature while the effect of systemic processes and structures upon agency remains relatively under-theorised (Nash, 2008; Boogaard and

Roggeband, 2010; Dy and Agwunobi, 2019). Further theory development explaining the linkages between subjectivities, identities and structures, particularly through the use of positionality and a deeper philosophical perspective, will enable intersectionality to be more rigorously applied within entrepreneurship research. This thesis proposes the use of critical realism to develop a framework for translocational intersectionality as it provides a means by which identification and structural mechanisms can be explicitly examined.

Furthermore, this intrinsic tension found within intersectionality between levels of analysis based on agency or structure, has led critics to highlight its inability to acknowledge the potential for even partial privilege within the complex power dynamics of oppression (Nash, 2008; Geerts and Van der Tuin, 2013). This emerges from a perception of marginalised subjects based on static and essentialist conceptions of identity. In response, Atewologun, *et al.*, (2016), argue that a framework that includes both intersectionality and identity work has the potential to capture the complexities and dynamism of social interactions, thus offering a better understanding of how individuals respond and relate to external structures of power.

### ***Identity work and transformation***

Longstanding debates continue as to the genealogy of intersectionality and interpretations of whether it should be “limited to theorizing identity or whether it should be taken as property of social structures and cultural discourses” (Davis, 2008 p.68). Additionally, other related conversations regarding the purpose of intersectionality, question whether it can be more than a theoretical framework and promote action and transformation.

*“Making women of colour in general, but the intersectionally disadvantaged in particular, a visible and legible part of public discourse ...”.* (Hancock, 2016: 8).

Hancock’s reference to the original aims of this framework provides a basis for the often-overlooked aim that intersectionality moves beyond reform at the margins, affecting the individual actor, towards a more radical influence that has an impact upon structures. Within organisational studies, it is recognised that organisations can be vehicles for change so that through the application of intersectionality, inequalities within the work place can be challenged and change enacted (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2016). What does this mean for entrepreneurship and related examples of self-employment? Given that entrepreneurship is

perceived to be an agentic activity (Hytti, 2005) which on the one hand claims to resolve social and economic issues (Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2007, 2009; Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009) and yet on the other hand, it perpetuates inequalities and poverty (Shane, 2009), an intersectional lens used to examine identity work provides opportunity to capture efforts of the individual in responding to power and structural challenges. These structural influences may constrain or enable the identity construction of the individual as she engages in entrepreneurial activities. Moreover, in their study of indigenous entrepreneurs in Australia, Reveley and Down (2009) identify structural enterprise initiatives as a critical resource that can be used agentially to resist stigmatisation.

Consequently, a multi-level approach to analysis which addresses the individual, institutional, cultural and societal interactions (McCall, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006) provides the potential to uncover the mechanisms and strategies that are used to navigate various categories of oppression which appear in such forms as racism, capitalism and patriarchy (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Thus, intersectionality has the capacity to dissect social hierarchies and enable the identification of privilege as enacted in the power dynamics and how this might be exploited. Engaging in self-employment might offer the refugee woman privilege when compared to more marginalised groups such as those who have neither the legal right, nor the opportunity, to do so. Intersectionality and positionality capture the interaction with structures and institutional influences and the interplay of hierarchies that exist during the process of identity work (Holvino, 2010). Furthermore, they enable research to move beyond the static and partial view of only marginalisation and oppression allowing for more explicit inclusion of advantage and disadvantage when examining identity (Verloo, 2006; Nash, 2008; Rodriguez *et al.*, 2016).

Radical change at an individual level, therefore, might become evident in the transformation from being perceived simply as a refugee woman to presenting oneself and being acknowledged as an entrepreneur. From this position of being a credible entrepreneur, there is the potential to access networks, engage in conversations and behaviours that might ultimately have an effect on their gender roles and socio-political status (Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2015). This could subsequently lead to radical change beyond the individual level.

### 3.5 Summary

This chapter has outlined conceptualisations of identity and critically evaluated how this scholarship has evolved within the literature at the intersect of gender and entrepreneurship. The debates around identity have progressed to include a more processual and dynamic approach in contrast to earlier static views that focused on the notion of self in a state of being rather than becoming. Therefore, understanding the process of identity formation, particularly in different entrepreneurial contexts will be a valuable contribution to the field (Leitch and Harrison, 2016). Public discourse has increasingly promoted entrepreneurial action as a worthwhile activity for marginalised groups such as women, ethnic minorities, migrants and people with disabilities, and yet, the normative image of an entrepreneur continues to be masculine, white, Western and middle-class. A critical response to this disaccord joins an academic conversation that adopts a more heterogenous approach to understanding entrepreneurial identity. However, extant studies of marginalised entrepreneurial identities are generally limited by a focus on one or two subordinating social categories.

Although the gendered entrepreneurial identity has been substantially examined, very little is known about how an entrepreneurial identity is constructed in the context of heterogenous identities as they are informed by various social positionings. Consequently, there is still scope for women's entrepreneurship research to extend beyond the homogenous Western view of the female entrepreneur to incorporate other disadvantaged groups such as refugees who carry stigmatised identities. Intersectionality and positionality are suggested as a combined lens through which the heterogeneity of women entrepreneurs can be examined from varying positions of 'otherness' and marginalisation within a space of social hierarchies (Anthias and Yaval-Davis, 1993; Anthias, 2002a, 2008, 2012). Within the field, there is further scope to acknowledge additional structural and social contexts that might affect women entrepreneurs as they construct their entrepreneurial identities.

The aim of this thesis, therefore, is to address these gaps by examining how engagement in entrepreneurial activities influences the identity construction of refugee women in the UK.

Key objectives are to determine:

1. how gender, class, race and refugee status and other social categories of difference intersect within a UK context
2. how gender, class, race and refugee status and other social categories of difference influence/are influenced by the entrepreneurial experiences of forcibly displaced women within a UK context.

## **4 Methodology**

The objective of this chapter is to discuss the methodological foundation of this thesis which includes its philosophical underpinnings, the research design and research process. In so doing, it introduces critical realism as the philosophical paradigm through which the research question is addressed. Having proposed an intersectional framework, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, we now explore how a critical realist perspective might inform its application as a critical lens in investigating the entrepreneurial activity of refugee women. As such, this chapter offers a critique of the dominant philosophical approaches used in contemporary entrepreneurship and gender research and presents an overview of critical realism. The chapter then proceeds to demonstrate the relevance of critical realism for case study research that applies an intersectional framework. The latter section of the chapter addresses the methods of the research by presenting the study design, data collection and analysis.

### **4.1 Introduction**

The significance of a sound philosophical foundation for research lies in its evaluation of how social reality is viewed and the rationale that underpins the philosophical stance taken. Indeed, as researchers it is important to understand ‘how our philosophical commitments influence the logic behind our research methods and knowledge claims’ (Cunliffe, 2011:648). A well-defined ontological approach should lead to an unambiguous epistemology. Consequently, these philosophical assumptions determine the methodological approaches required to produce robust, verifiable research (Scott, 2007; Hlady-Rispal and Jouison-Laffitte, 2014). In scrutinising the essential nature of objects of inquiry and associated concepts, the ontological assumptions recognise inherent identifiable characteristics, providing substance and meaning to conceptualisations (Gruber 1993). Thus, a detailed ontological justification establishes the underpinnings of the research and in turn, informs the epistemological approach which then shapes the methodological approach for the research. However, consensus as to what constitutes reality is confused by multiple interpretations of this construct and related knowledge (Peters et al., 2013). As a researcher, my own perceptions of reality grounded in my understanding of black, feminist, post-colonial and entrepreneurship studies have also informed the methodological position of this thesis (see Perren and Ram, 2004:85).

### *Main philosophical perspectives: Objectivist vs subjectivist positions*

A key consideration when reflecting on the social world is whether reality is external to the individual, evident in a hard objective reality, or whether it is a subjective phenomenon, which the individual creatively constructs through the experience and interpretation of social reality (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). An unchangeable, tangible truth which comprises of objective units and discreet processes that pre-exist observation and which can be verified (Cunliffe, 2011), is at the heart of the former. The latter rejects this empirical (naïve) realist ontology, rather viewing reality as structured and framed by values and meanings, rejecting the possibility that reality can be understood beyond one's consciousness (Fletcher, 2012). Epistemologically, this subjectivist perspective assumes an interpretivist stance in its assertions that social reality is discursively constructed through the interplay of meanings between diverse groups and individuals. Thus, it places the individual centrally in the interpretation of a phenomenon. In contrast, an objectivist approach, with its links to the natural sciences, presumes rationality and an existence independent of individuals. It seeks out specific configurations and laws which regulate and validate knowledge around structural phenomena (Fleetwood, 2014).

This objective-subjective continuum, which underpins the Burrell and Morgan (1979) framework, has been critiqued for its generalisation and the assumption that knowledge is constrained within an irreconcilable opposition of two key perspectives (Schultze and Stabell, 2004; Pittaway, 2005; Fletcher, 2012). However, it forms the basis for a plurality of enquiry paradigms within social science research. Consequently, whilst complex in terms of mapping and with a tendency for misclassification of theoretical concepts (Fleetwood, 2014), it is precisely this mix of perspectives, and an obscuring of the distinction between the two positions in recent years (Davidsson, 2003; Cunliffe, 2011), that can provide depth in the knowledge of entrepreneurship (Mole and Ram, 2012).

An objectivist perspective rooted in attempts to mimic the natural sciences is valued by those who ontologically take an absolutist approach to understanding reality that is 'real and apprehendable' (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2018). This view of reality exists even in the absence of human observation, experience or comprehension. It is committed to an



epistemology based on the observation of empirical regularities, events which are reflective of cause and effect phenomena. Thus, positivist approaches claim to find truth and do so using mainly quantitative methodologies where hypotheses can be verified (Leitch, Hill and Harrison, 2010; Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2018). Consequently, they hold assumptions based on criteria of reliability, objectivity and generalisability. Fletcher however, joins Alvesson and Skoldberg, (2009) in their observation that positivist claims of reality have not ever intended to represent reality truly, but rather was purposed for prediction, to categorise observations and generalise them (Fletcher, 2012). Ostensibly, it is claimed that positivism enables 'the description, explanation and prediction of individual behaviour' (Johnson *et al.*, 2006: 137).

Despite its hegemony amongst research paradigms, it is suggested that positivism presents an untenable position, even for the natural sciences (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018). Consequently, there is consensus that ontologically the realms of reality include and extend beyond the material and therefore, are not limited to the observable (Alvarez *et al.*, 2014). This stance accepts, at a minimum, the logic of realism in its reaction against the pure empiricism of naïve positivism. Whether one accounts for beneath surface phenomena and structures as highlighted by post-positivists and structuralists (Hanson, 1958) or the subjective constructions of interpretivism (Berger and Luckmann, 1991), positivism appears not to account for the entire story (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009).

In its focus on identifiable objects or events, an objectivist realist approach has been perceived as representing an 'entitative ontology of being', that is to say, in opposition to an interpretivist 'ontology of becoming' or relational becoming, it prioritises objective entities (Chia, 1995; Fletcher, 2012). A traditional focus of analysis on objects, whether they be groups, individual, organisations, or states is deemed to be of more relevance within an objectivist paradigm than the underlying relational processes captured in the interpretations and sensemaking required for the process of becoming (Chia, 1995; Hosking, Dachler and Gergen, 1995) and which are reflected in subjectivist approaches. Hence, the dichotomy between objectivist and subjectivist is reinforced and the challenge in trying to reconcile the two perspectives emphasised; exemplified in the '*uncovering (of) new objective facts....amid social structures that appear to be subjective and man-made*' (Alvarez *et al.*, 2014: 227).

An opposing subjectivist approach to reality refuses to accept that there is an absolutist, singular standard by which truth can be determined. Instead, truth is negotiated and constructed collectively through human consciousness (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2018). The result is multiple iterations of reality which are contextual: 'socially and experientially based', specific to the individual (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2018: 114). Although post- and non-positivist paradigms are growing in legitimacy, they remain subject to criticism concerning validity not least because of ambiguities relating to the nebulous notions of 'social' and 'construction' (Fleetwood, 2005). It is partly for this reason that Fletcher (2012) contends that in terms of ontology, the objectivist-subjectivist contrast is less relevant.

The focus of this thesis captures both the agentic aspects of the identity work undertaken by refugee women and the social structures such as gender, ethnicity/race and class which interact during the process. Consequently, it seems fitting that a hybrid philosophical approach be applied which incorporates both an objectivist and subjectivist position relevant to various objects of inquiry within the thesis. Critical realism is firmly rooted in the belief that a realist ontology requires a subjectivist epistemology in order to capture the experiences of the individual and how they are potential outcomes of specific mechanisms, events, entities. Particularly in the case of marginalised groups, the interaction and power dynamics between the wider structures and the individual require this hybrid approach. Thus, a critical realist ontology provides a means by which researchers are challenged '*to move beyond the description of social situations to a more critical assessment of the relationship between structural factors and human agency*' (Blundel, 2007:63). Consequently, it enables potential links between entrepreneurial activity and the identity construction of refugee women entrepreneurs to be explored. It provides a comprehensive vantage point from which to interrogate dynamic structures such as pre-existing social categories: gender, class, ethnicity, stigmatised refugee identity, which represent social structures and contexts within which individuals engage with entrepreneurial activities. Furthermore, given the object of inquiry, it is argued that the dialectical logic inherent within a critical realist paradigm has the potential to facilitate progress within feminist and gender discourses (van Ingen, M., Grohmann, S., Gunnarsson, 2020). This is of particular importance given the prevalence of a 'discursive and epistemological focus' (Gunnarsson, Martinez Dy and van Ingen, 2016) that has dominated feminist research.

## 4.2 Women's entrepreneurship, philosophical positions and feminist theories

Despite a growing plurality of philosophical positions underpinning entrepreneurship research, the majority of studies within the field have historically conformed to a functionalist positivism approach (Neergaard and Ulhøi, 2007; Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009; Packard, 2017). This tendency has been rationalised as being consistent with the efforts of a maturing discipline to legitimise its academic status (Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009) and has been evident within feminist entrepreneurship studies particularly up until the mid-2000s (Ahl, 2006). Twenty years later, what can be seen is the breadth of perspectives found within the feminist movement mirrored in the epistemological perspectives that span the objectivism-subjectivism dichotomy. For those that adhere to a positivist approach, there is a requirement to ensure that it is modified to incorporate women's perspectives (Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007; Foss *et al.*, 2019). This is evident in feminist empiricist approaches which, essentialist in their recognition of fundamental differences between men and women and their conditions, typically assume a 'gender as a variable' approach to feminist research (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018). Consequently, it is argued that gender-conscious positivist approaches have the potential to highlight injustices particularly when they have used quantitative methods that eliminate irrational and biased aspects of research, suggesting that a positivist perspective is '*at least amenable to feminist transformations*' (Sprague and Zimmerman, 1989; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018).

The limitations of a purely objectivist ontology and epistemology, when used within gender research, is that it fails to capture the essence of a socially constructed gender as differentiated from the biological differentiation of sex categories (Ahl, 2006). Consequently, the normative positioning of entrepreneurial knowledge assuming a masculine bias is transferred to its ontology and epistemology. This determines how 'truth' is sought and perpetuates the male bias as it seeks to explain and predict (Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009; Marlow, 2012). Furthermore, its causal logic perpetuates the 'female deficit' as it has limited means of comprehending the structural factors in relation to constructed knowledge, value-laden realities, particularly within established systems of subordination and exclusion (Marlow, 2012).

In response to this bias, the philosophical discourses underpinning women's entrepreneurship studies experienced both an ontological and epistemological shift, particularly among the dominant liberal and radical feminist theories, from primarily functionalist positivism to one that is more interpretivist or constructivist (Ahl, 2006). However, the simplicity of an objectivist-subjectivist dichotomy is enriched by considerations of transformation and critical trends (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Harding's (1987) feminist standpoint, which maintains the female voice in a central position within the research and captures the positionality of the researcher in the process of interpretation, provides one such example. This situated approach to feminist research (see Haraway, 1988) challenges dominant discourse as it examines pluralities of power relations based on women's personal experiences of discrimination and repression (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018). Thus, this tendency to adopt an anti-positivist epistemological perspective has set the stage for methodologies which capture the heterogeneity of the lived experiences of entrepreneurial women (Leitch, Hill and Harrison, 2010; Fletcher, 2012). Despite being firmly grounded in the exclusivity of discourse constructing social reality and being therefore, subject to multiple realities, an interpretivist ontology is limited in the extent to which it can identify a single reality or genuine experience (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018). Consequently, where interpretivism is of value in exploring constructs of gender, stigma and identity, there still persists a tendency to focus less on explaining phenomena in favour of interpretation and constructing a narrative (New, 2002; Fleetwood, 2014).

As a result of this tension, Haraway, (2003: 30) argues for *'a doctrine and practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformations of systems knowledge and ways of seeing things..... (that is ) hostile to easy relativism'*. For Haraway, in recognition that *'the imaginary and the rational-the visionary and the objective vision – hover close together'* (Haraway, 2003: 30), the notion of a situated knowledge is an alternative to the truth-like knowledge of positivism and captures an objectivity that is partial rather than generalisable.

Extending beyond the challenge of standpoint theory within feminist methodologies, has seen the development of approaches which seek to capture a broader and more contextualised interpretation of feminist reality. Emerging as critical trends within feminist research,

penetrating questions relating to the ownership of knowledge, its construction and its purpose, shifted to capture difference and challenge normative conceptions of knowledge (Olesen, 2018) Research informed by intersectionality is one such route to address the complexities of feminist issues. As discussed in the earlier literature chapters, intersectionality offers a framework through which multiple marginalising social categories can be examined and in so doing permits a more contextualised and empowering methodological tool.

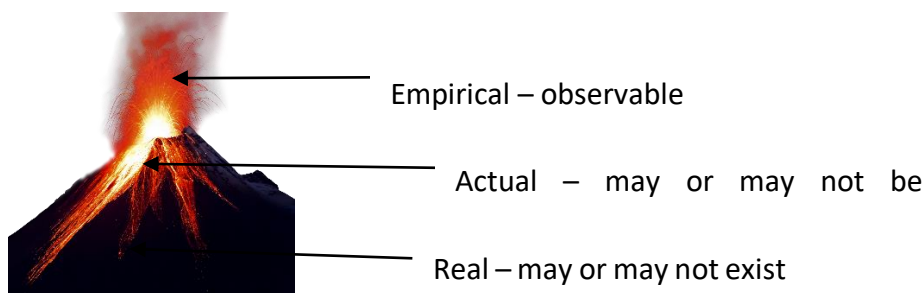
### 4.3 Critical realism: principles and application

Developed initially through the works of Bhaskar (1978, 2008, 1979, 2014) and adapted and refined by other scholars (Sayer, 1992, 2000; Collier, 1994; Archer, 1995, 2000; Fleetwood, 2005), critical realism is a philosophical approach that reconciles ontological realism with an interpretivist epistemology (Bhaskar, 1998a). As such, it questions the bipolarity of subjectivity and objectivity, and the inability of each to independently propose an in-depth comprehension of the social world. In its critique of existing perspectives, critical realism seeks to expand the explanatory potential of what is, or could be known of a social reality that may indeed be unobservable, so that it is neither solely interpretive or limited to being predictive (Fleetwood and Hesketh, 2006). This is illustrated in its depiction of the social world as an open system that operates a stratified model within which causal powers interact. Therefore, critical realism claims to provide more in-depth comprehensions of the social world (Sayer, 1992).

#### *Depth ontology: stratification, intransitivity and transfactuality*

Intrinsic to critical realism is the ontological belief that social reality exists independently of one's ability to observe or experience it (Fleetwood, 2005). Drawing upon a depth ontology, critical realism distinguishes between three spheres of reality: the empirical, the actual and the real as depicted in Figure 4-1. The empirical domain is the field which can be observed and measured and from where the remaining two domains can be experienced. The actual domain refers to the space where events and processes exist irrespective of if they are perceived or measurable, and the real domain, situated at the inner core of reality, represents possibilities; structures, mechanisms and powers that may or may not be actualised. These mechanisms

may not always be observable, but they are embedded within a complex interaction of contextualised activity, remaining independent from human knowledge and the events they generate in the empirical domain (Bhaskar, 2008: 13). This stratified conceptualisation of reality moves beyond empirical realism with its focus on the empirical; a fixation that renders its ontology 'flat, uniform and depthless' (Archer, 1998: 643). Moreover, it deviates from an interpretivist social constructivism which in its more radical expressions refutes the possibility of knowledge that is not discursively mediated (Elder-Vass, 2012; Fletcher, 2012); a position which leaves it unable to verify omissions or factual errors in an individual's explanation of reality. Thus, critical realism emphasises the stratified nature of the depth ontology where there is a clear ordering to the strata, but within which there is embeddedness and relatedness which benefit the process of explanation (Collier, 1998). Consequently, the duality of critical realism is such that it captures the context-dependent aspect of social reality without restricting it to either the discursive or only to that which is observable or measurable; it is emergent and therefore, can exist prior to being acknowledged (Archer et al, 1998).



*Figure 4-1: A volcano metaphor for depth ontology*

This notion is captured further in the ontology of transfactuality which recognises the causal objects that emerge and interact at multiple levels, an interdependence of structural forms such as in the relationship between sexism and gender difference (Holland, 2019). In acknowledging this complexity, it is evident that social reality requires more than determining predictability or explanation; it needs to be understood and made meaningful. Further

clarification of ontological depth is offered in Bhaskar's (2008) emphasis of two dimensions of knowledge. The intransitive dimension which signifies the object of knowledge, such as structures and mechanisms exists in the domain of the real, and as such is independent of our senses. The transitive dimension is the means by which knowledge is generated, such as through theories, models and paradigms (Bhaskar, 2008). These dimensions are related to the extent that the object of knowledge itself comprises of knowledge. However, they ought not to be conflated, lest they succumb to the 'epistemic fallacy', such as is found within positivism, where the knowledge obtained, however fallible, is reified. By differentiating the intransitive from the transitive, the '*domain of the real remains distinct from and greater than the domain of the empirical*' (Bhaskar, 1998: xii) .

### Retroduction

Retroduction is applied within critical realism to investigate and explain the factors that facilitate an event or an object to exist and be. It is the means by which explanation is captured through the identification and hypothesis of causal mechanisms and how their interactions may contribute to an outcome or phenomenon. The aim is not to derive a deterministic generalisation, but rather to understand the phenomenon in a contextualised space, to the extent of drawing on the researcher's skills requiring insight and intellect (Lawson, 1998; Hu, 2018). Thus, it permits a range of questions to be asked, such as, 'how might the trauma associated with the refugee journey affect identity work for an individual refugee woman?' A critical realist approach seeks the identification of causal powers and tendencies attributed to intransitive objects which interact independently, without necessary sequence or pattern and do so even within a complex open system of social reality. The activity encapsulated within the mechanisms enables and constrains possible outcomes transfactually. This mode of activity differs from that perceived within a positivist paradigm where constant regularities are required in order to validate and explain occurrences, and which serves to reduce reality to the realms of the actual and the empirical, the fallacy of *actualism* (Bhaskar, 1998: xii). Critical realism questions the explanatory potential of this positivist approach. Consequently, it offers an open system within which underlying complex interactions provide a means by which social realities such as the process of identity work, can be explained. The social constructionist approach, inadequate in its dependence on the primacy of discursive

revelations of reality, is enriched by critical realism as the inclusion of non-discursive elements in the reductive analysis, subsequently provides deeper explanation.

### *Emergence*

Another principal within critical realism is that of emergence which distinguishes various levels or entities upon which an object may be dependent. Drawing on identity as an explanatory framework, Archer (2000) categorises three levels of identity: the self, personal identity, and social identity. The self represents a core, embodied self which exists throughout the lifetime of an individual and which is physically distinct from other objects and humans. The personal identity is a product of the self and emerges as a melange of interests that create the distinctiveness attributed to an individual. Finally, the social identity reflects the network of interactions that exist between an individual and their external world, or the roles and categories that are generated within these social structures.

Unlike a realist approach which would prioritise internal processes such as reflexivity and memory, critical realism argues that identity cannot be understood solely in terms of the personal identity, at a singular level. Neither can it “collapse into discourse” as a result of a social constructivist conflation of ontology and epistemology (Marks and O’mahoney, 2013: 69 ); rather, there is a more complex interaction that is at play in the form of mechanisms which produce emergent powers (Elder-Vass, 2012). The identity work of a refugee woman entrepreneur may be dependent on memory, thought or reflexivity, and may be observed or recounted through narrative. However, if it is reduced to, and examined solely at this level, there is the risk that it represents merely a partial or inaccurate interpretation of identity work. Similarly, in illustrating the limitations of a singular perspective of identity, an individual’s understanding of patriarchy may be dependent on personal experiences, beliefs and values but there is a risk in drawing an understanding of the notion at a single level. In its fullness, patriarchy extends to social interactions and experiences as well as the personal reflections of such experiences. Consider the multiple identity markers of an individual who is a refugee, a woman, middle -class and an entrepreneur. As an entrepreneur she may be able to influence social attitudes. However, there is also the possibility that social structures may restrict her ability to engage in positive identity work or may ascribe stigmatised identities to her, or possible interactions with the social structures might elicit unexpected



emergent properties of identity (Marks and Mahoney, 2014). A critical realist perspective recognises the complexities of these interactions and causal powers in relation to identities. Extending this notion, Kasperov et al. (2018) apply Archer's three levels of reality: the natural, practical and social, to the entrepreneurial identity. These categorisations are conceptualised as "*distinct external conditions with powers to enable and constrain identity formation*" (Kašperová, et al., 2018; p.10). Thus, they conclude that entrepreneurial identity itself, is an example of a causal power that influences action and produces events.

### *Explanatory*

The aforementioned tenets of critical realism together provide the tools required to expose causality and reveal explanations for social phenomena and lived experiences. Consequently, critical realist research has the potential to analyse social problems and drive social change (Fletcher, 2017). This is of particular significance for research which is concerned with marginalised groups such as refugee women. Furthermore, a critical realist approach with its potential for explanation and emancipation is relevant when examining constructs such as identity work and intersectionality which acknowledge the existence of forces such as oppression and privilege. Critical realism substantiates the idealist's 'explanation' which is based on a socially constructed discourse, by identifying tendencies, causal events that precede an outcome as well as the wider conflux of these interacting causal phenomena (Fleetwood, 2014).

### *Structure and Agency: an emancipatory axiology*

Archer's morphogenetic cycle offers a framework that explains the process of change within a system contingent upon the relationship between social structures and the agency of individuals. These two constructs are directly related to both personal identity, the agentic, practical performance of 'being' and social identity, the roles determined by interaction with social structures. Archer (1998) uses a cyclical three-staged approach to explain the process. The first stage is based on the assumption that structures pre-exist agency due to the actions of previous agents. In this state, structures convey regulations, norms and values which in turn determine the actions (and existence) of the agent. For example, structures that might affect the identity work of a refugee woman entrepreneur may include, race, gender or class.

Therefore, on entering a host country, the refugee is confronted by this structural conditioning. The second stage recognises that by drawing on powers of reflexivity agents have the ability to affect outcomes through social interactions. The final stage of social elaboration produces outcomes of either, transforming, mediating or reinforcing the original structures. This transformative capacity of agency exists even if it is not actualised and gives rise to the possibility of emancipation within oppressive structures (Archer et al., 1998; see also Martinez Dy, Lee and Marlow, 2014). Thus, critical realism presumes the potential of agentic emancipatory powers and avoids the marginalisation of either agent or structure in relation to the other (Fleetwood, 2005). The interpretivist critique, however, challenges the pre-existing, causal and autonomous nature of structures as it views structures as constructs of human language while the agent is subject to discursive powers. Agency therefore, instead of being viewed as personal emergent processes (PEPs), with associated powers, is limited to the discursive construction of power. Consequently, social constructionism is unable to reveal adequate emancipatory potential in its understanding of identity.

This overview of critical realism serves to highlight the value of this philosophical perspective in conceptualising identity and a gendered view of entrepreneurship. In chapter two, intersectionality was introduced as a theoretical framework; we now proceed to determine its compatibility with critical realism.

#### **4.4 Critical realism, intersectionality and identity**

The 'enduring urgency of intersectionality' is an appeal by Crenshaw (2019) highlighting the continued need for intersectionality some thirty years after she first coined the term. As a framework that enables researchers to examine 'discriminatory consequences of intersectional inequalities' (Crenshaw, 2019:16), its adoption within research from a diverse range of disciplines is widely accepted (Kelly, 2009; Rubin *et al.*, 2018). However, as explored previously in chapter two, this is not without criticism of inconsistencies in terms of its philosophical and methodological approach and practical application (McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008; Martinez Dy, *et al.*, 2014). In efforts to address this 'methodological crisis' (Martinez Dy, Lee and Marlow, 2014), there is an emerging body of research which explores the use of critical realism to underpin the application of intersectionality (Martinez Dy, *et al.*, 2014; Clegg, 2016; Netto *et al.*, 2020). This thesis draws on this body of research as evidence of how

critical realism complements intersectionality and identity work with a particular focus on ontological assumptions, structural processes, privilege and the original purposes of intersectionality.

#### *Critical realism and intersectionality – ontology*

Intersectionality is critiqued for having a lack of consistent theorising in respect of its ontological underpinnings, particularly given the differences in ontological foundations of each social category (Anthias, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Clegg, 2016). When applied from either positivist or hermeneutics positions, this limitation becomes apparent to the extent that both perspectives are based upon what Bhaskar (2008) refers to as a 'flat ontology', each limited in its comprehension of reality, ignoring the unobserved. Where positivism refutes the existence of reality beyond the realm of what can be seen, the hermeneutic tradition denies the possibility of a reality that has not passed through the experiences and sensemaking of the individual (Martinez Dy et al., 2014). To bridge this gap, critical realism can offer a depth ontology with which to underpin intersectionality. In so doing, the intersectional frame is strengthened with a multi-level analytical capability and an ontology of transfactuality which recognises that realities can exist unobserved and without being actualised (Clegg, 2016). Consequently, in applying critical realism to the intersectional lens, the processes that take place within different levels and between various forces can be acknowledged; thus, a deeper level of explanation and comprehension can be explored (Netto et al., 2020).

#### *Critical realism and intersectionality: Structure, agency and structuring processes*

Another criticism levelled against intersectionality is its failure to adequately theorise constructs of structure and agency (Martinez Dy, et al., 2014; Clegg, 2016) with subsequent implications for understanding associated concepts of identity (Nash, 2008). Given the enduring debate between the powers ascribed to structures and the individual in determining action, it is possible to identify within intersectional research structuralist influences (Anthias and Yaval-Davis, 1993; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Collins, 2015) and those which take a more individual perspective, drawing on post-structuralist anti-categorical approaches (McCall,

2005). Critical realism with its notion of morphogenetics and emergence (Archer, 1995) avoids this conflation of structure and agency. It permits a conceptualisation and examination of the interactions between the individual and the prevailing structures as they unfold over space and time in addition to the ultimate effects of this interdependence. The significance of these concepts to identity work is that they are directly related to personal identity (agentic, practical performance of 'being') and social identity (roles determined by interaction with social structures). A morphogenetic theorisation of structures which might demonstrate the identity work of a refugee woman entrepreneur may include, for example, race, gender and class; intersectional categories abstractions with real implications capturing not just race, but racism, not just gender but sexism. As such they interact with the lived experience of the individual, but are not reduced to the lived reality of the individual (Gunnarsson, 2017).

*Critical realism and intersectionality: privilege and agent of emancipatory change*

A critical-emancipatory nature is part of both critical realism and feminism (Gunnarsson, Martinez Dy and van Ingen, 2016). This feature can be viewed as being consistent with the original transformational and activist aims of intersectionality theory which was presented as a tool for resistance and collective action (Crenshaw, 1989). Critics of intersectionality have concerns that it has drifted away from its original activist roots (Davis, 2008) and is limited in its ability to offer generalised explanations of agentic behaviours. Further critique suggests that it overlooks the notion of privilege and even risks perpetuating the marginalisation that it purports to expose and challenge (Nash, 2008). However, we recognise that it is precisely these gaps that a critical realist perspective can fill (Martinez Dy, Lee and Marlow, 2014). Critical realism offers the means to better highlight the workings of agency and privilege in combatting structures of discrimination. The notion of transfactuality can be used to explain the privilege that can exist but which may not be recognised by an individual who experiences oppression and marginalisation (Martinez Dy, *et al.*, 2014). However, this ability of critical realism to capture themes of emancipation, oppression and resistance whilst explored theoretically, is lacking in empirical demonstration (O'Mahoney, Vincent and Harley, 2018).

## 4.5 Methodology

It has been argued that both critical realism and intersectionality lack an explicit method when applied in empirical research (McCall, 2005; Bakewell, 2010; Fletcher, 2017). Increasingly however, scholars are identifying methods which overcome the methodological challenges faced by researchers choosing to use intersectionality theory or a critical realist philosophical framework (Fletcher, 2017; Dy and Agwunobi, 2019). Therefore, the following section will discuss the decision to undertake a qualitative case study approach to the research and theoretically operationalise the social categories of gender, race/ethnicity, refugee status and class. It will then proceed to critically reflect on ethical considerations, describe the case selection process, and offer a critical reflexive account of how researcher engaged with the research process.

### *The research question*

In recognition that women entrepreneurs are a heterogenous group, it is understood that they are located within multiple structural categories of marginalisation and differentiation. Consequently, the complexity of their experiences reflects multilevel positional interactions within constructs such as households, ethnic/racial groupings, entrepreneurship networks, institutions and community groups. All are influenced by social structures which include, gender, race/ethnicity and class. Refugee women who are self-employed and engaged in entrepreneurial activities, encounter an additional category of difference as they negotiate a stigmatised refugee identity in order to reconstruct an identity that incorporates an entrepreneurial identity. Given that entrepreneurship is purported to be beneficial for marginalised groups, it is valuable for scholars, policymakers and those working with entrepreneurs to understand this subgroup of entrepreneurs. Drawing on theory from entrepreneurship, identity and intersectionality and grounded within a critical realist perspective, the following research question was formulated: *'How does engagement with entrepreneurial activity influence the identity construction of refugee women in the UK'?*

Key objectives are to determine:

1. *how gender, class, race, refugee status and other social categories of difference intersect within a UK context*

2. *how gender, class, race, refugee status and other social categories of difference influence, or are influenced by the entrepreneurial experiences of forcibly displaced women within a UK context*

### *The case study approach*

A qualitative multiple case study design is employed to address the research question. This is deemed to be an appropriate method to explore contemporary phenomena as it captures the complexities of the lived experiences of subjects, within a specific context on which they are highly dependent (Gillham, 2000; Yin, 2009). The research question leading this thesis prompts an explanation that must take context into account in order for it to be meaningful. In this respect, this thesis assumes a compatibility between a case study method and critical realism which has been recognised by several other scholars (Dobson, 2001; Piekkari, Welch and Paavilainen, 2009; Tsang, 2013; Easton, Hu *et al.*, 2019). Case study research is particularly appropriate for critical realist research which requires *'an intensive study, with a limited number of cases, where the researcher systematically analyses the interplay between the ontological layers'* (Bygstad, Munkvold and Volkoff, 2016). This has the potential to produce causal explanations for the observable outcomes of each case. However, the explanations comprise of (causal) mechanisms or powers which may not be observable, (Ragin, 1992; Bygstad, Munkvold and Volkoff, 2016). As a complex phenomenon, an intersectional view of the identity construction of refugee woman entrepreneurs is suitably configured to be interrogated using a critical realist case approach (Easton, 2010). Furthermore, McCall (2008) in her examination of intersectionality and methodology, identifies the case study, 'a descendent of narrative studies', as a method used by feminist researchers to identify invisible groups at the intersection of multiple categories.

## 4.6 Research design

### *Case selection and access*

A key consideration in conducting case study research is the issue of case selection. Purposeful sampling was used in order to select participants in accordance with the research objectives (Guest et al., 2006). Although only a small sample size was required from which to select the cases, this process was not without its challenges. Despite media attention highlighting the potential for entrepreneurship among the refugee population in the UK (Bearne, 2017), women refugee entrepreneurs remain a largely hidden group. Desk-research enabled the identification of relevant refugee networks and enterprise networks that provide support to refugees through the entrepreneurship process. This permitted the identification and recruitment of potential participants either directly or by liaising with the organisations. Local authorities that hold a City of Refugee status were contacted to ascertain the provision of business start-up support for refugees that was available. This also provided access to additional refugee communities. As a result of this process, it is the more visible women who were reached, those who had actively committed to networks or who had already obtained the attention of local authorities, business support organisations and even the media in some cases.

A particular challenge which emerged in terms of access was that gatekeepers often felt protective of the women refugees due to their vulnerability and past experiences. In some instances, there was apprehension because of a fear that previous engagement with research projects could leave individuals feeling 'over-researched'. Consequently, some groups were reluctant to share information with their service users or members regarding this project. Wherever possible, I arranged face-to face meetings with gatekeepers and attended events that they hosted. Although there were additional potential participants who were interested in being a part of the study, some had concerns about the time requirements of the project which might take them away from their business. As a result of the recruitment process, I volunteered with a local authority-led initiative providing six weeks of work readiness mentoring for asylum seekers and refugees. This provided me with a general insight into the experiences of the refugee community in a local area in terms of the work and business

integration support provided, as well as enabling me to meet and mentor people from the refugee community.

As shown in the demographic profile of participants in Table 4-1, the selection criteria were sufficiently broad to capture a representation of social contexts, reflecting differences in the country of origin, geographical location of the UK business and the nature of the business venture. The criteria required that participants identify as self-employed or as a woman business owner, held refugee/amnesty status in the UK, and were formally trading. Whilst it was important that the women had officially been granted refugee status, this criterion was also required to ensure that the women were trading officially. The data collected, however, captured their experiences as asylum seekers and their earlier life histories.

Participants were contacted directly with an invitation to meet or speak informally, which allowed the building of a trusting relationship to be initiated. The importance of face to face meetings in order to establish a rapport and gain trust was of particular significance given the potential vulnerability of the participants (Madziva, 2015). I accepted invitations to events hosted by participants, shared meals and recognised the value of self-disclosure as part of this process. An increased use of technology, such as video conferencing, was an inevitability during the 2020 global pandemic due to Covid-19, which introduced social distancing measures and prohibited all non-essential contact between people. As businesses were forced to close, there was an additional challenge of maintaining contact with case participants. Interviews that took place using video conferencing during this period were affected to the extent that children were present, and during sensitive discussions, it was clear that they were listening to the interview. On one occasion, a participant's young son interrupted to ask questions. This reflected a degree of openness in terms of the participant wanting to share her experiences, even with her young child. It also supported the assumption that their identity work is very much embedded within a household context.



Table 4-1: Demographic profile of participants

	Year of migration to the UK	Country of origin	Age	Life situation	Business Type	Business (Years)	Age	Education	Previous Business ownership
Aliya	2012	Syria	Early forties	Married/younger children	Food manufacture	4-6		Postgraduate	**N
Zendaya	2002	Zimbabwe	Early fifties	Married/older children	Membership Organisation *(SE)	10+		Graduate	Y
					Fashion design	7-9			
Azadeh	2013	Iran	Early forties	Single/none	Upcycling Art Therapies *(SE)	0-1		Postgraduate	N
Anashe	2001	Zimbabwe	Early forties	Married/younger	Youth Charity	10+		Graduate	N
					Consultancy	2-3			
					Handbag design	2-3			
Floriane	2002	Cameroon	Early fifties	Married/ Older-Younger	Restaurant/ bar	10+		A levels Technical Accountancy	Y

\*SE: Social Enterprise

\*\*Assisted husband in business

A multiple case study approach, provides an effective means of exploring complementary aspects of a phenomenon (Neergaard, 2007) and consequently, by offering producing context specific causal explanations, 'glimpses of multiple realities' (Brundil, 2007) can be used to develop theory (Bell et al., 2018;). Despite limitations in its ability to offer universal generalisability, the use of multiple case studies allows for detailed analysis of subjects within their real-life, contemporary context (Yin, 2014) and consequently, offers a holistic view. It is by means of this immersion in a complex set of elements and interactions that the researcher is able to extricate meaning and explanation relating to the phenomenon (Easton, 2010).

Drawing on Eisenhardt's (1989) approach in terms of reaching saturation of knowledge to validate the number of cases to include in a project, five cases (n=5) were considered to be a sufficient number. Taking the individual as the unit of analysis, each refugee woman entrepreneur was used as a case. However, there were cases in which participants had more than one business interest and, these were all included in the research. The businesses represented for-profit businesses and social enterprises. In one instance, a participant was also the founder of a charitable organisation. The sample included participants from the Middle East and Africa, reflective of recent and earlier intakes of asylum applicants to the UK (Home Office, 2021).

Although the refugee women entrepreneurs remained the key participants throughout the study, the importance of recognising power relations within intersectionality framed research was acknowledged. This was achieved through the inclusion of observations within the participants' households whenever possible, and between the participants' and their employees and professional networks (Cole, 2009). Informal conversations were held with two business support organisations via the telephone and at their premises. However, unfortunately, due to Covid-19 restrictions this opportunity for in person data collection was limited.

### *Ethics and informed consent*

Ethical approval was obtained from Nottingham University Business School Research Ethics Committee. The main ethical considerations were in relation to the sensitive nature of some of the subject matters discussed particularly in relation to issues concerning the forced

displacement of the participants from their country of origin. To this end, the importance of developing trust and being aware of, and limiting power relations was prioritised in building empathic, authentic and reciprocal relationships. In order to achieve this, regular and open communication with participants, with a focus on promoting shared aspects of identity was pursued. Consequently, confidentiality was a necessity and participants were reassured of anonymity. However, there were two participant who gave consent to have the name of their business acknowledged as participating in the research if this was deemed to be appropriate. An associated consideration was the handling of data which was protected using password encryption and appropriate storage. Participants were free to leave the study at any time.

*Data collection: Interviews, observations, documentary evidence*

An initial interview guide was tested and developed by undertaking two pilot interviews. The final interview guide is shown in Appendix 2. Data collection was conducted between July 2019 and December 2020 with each participant engaging in one face-to-face unstructured, open-ended interview followed by two semi-structured interviews. In total this produced twenty hours of recording with either one or two additional follow up calls with each participant. During this time there was a total of 10 hours of visits and observations of the participants within their work or professional environment and at events. Interviews focused on the historical account of what had led the women to arrive in the UK, their entrepreneurial activities and the extent to which this had influenced their personal and social identities, family dynamics and status. Participants were also asked about their future aspirations. Within the unstructured interviews, participants were given the opportunity to narrate their stories which enabled them to voice aspects of their lives that were most important to them. This also was a space in which rapport and trust between the participants and the interviewer could be built, thus offering participants the opportunity to direct this initial interview session. In so doing, it was possible to redress the balance of power between interviewer and interviewee. Combined with semi-structured interviews, this process of data collection can itself be viewed as a vehicle for identity work (Atewologun, Sealy and Vinnicombe, 2016) as the conversations progressed in a manner which encouraged participants to reflect on their life stories and respond to questions about how they viewed themselves (see Appendix 2). Furthermore, this research design highlights the importance of language and discourse to

recover women's voices, a core tenet to much feminist thinking and is therefore, viewed as a feminist sensitive approach (McAdam, 2013).

The nature of interpretivist methods of interviewing is to encourage narratives and provoke interpretive developments (Smith and Elger, 2014). However, although valuable and forming a key element of this current study, this approach to interviewing can be further enhanced in order to ensure that interviews are conducive to critical realist analysis and the identification of causal mechanisms. This requires greater input from the researcher within the interview process. While engaging in a theory-driven approach to interviewing as suggested by Pawson and Tilley, (1997) influenced the interviewing method, this was tempered with opportunities for the participants to demonstrate their reflexivity. Therefore, the interviews conducted reflected the researchers ability to link theory and context to the participant's reasoning, motivations and choices (Smith and Elger, 2014). This was not so much about providing structured questions, but rather, making links to the intersectional social categories or abstractions as appropriate. Thus, theory underpinned the interview questions and participants were prompted to provide their thoughts as to why a phenomenon occurred or why they had acted in a certain manner. Also, following Archer (2003), the researcher was willing 'to participate in non-directive exchange' on everyday occurrences when necessary, such as conversations about their children's activities. This was particularly pertinent during video conferencing interviews which were sometimes interrupted by their children.

Interviews were conducted in accordance with participant preference: initially either at home or at the business premises and then subsequently, using a video-conferencing platform. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim before they underwent multiple rounds of coding. The interview data were then analysed thematically. Descriptive and reflective field notes were made by conducting observational research in participant's workspaces and also following each recorded interview. The field notes were summarised and were primarily analysed thematically as a 'contextualist' method, appropriate for research ontologically shaped by critical realism and an interpretivist epistemology (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Feminist critical realism focusing on the experiences of women, prioritises interpretive methods which capture individual reflexivity and the narrative; however, it is necessary to enhance these methods by contextualising conditions (Fletcher, 2017). Furthermore, a critical realist paradigm visualises an 'open system' (Bhaskar, 1998b; Wynn Jr and Williams, 2012) and therefore, would require that the case study reflects this state. In order to achieve this, case study research can be extended beyond the interviews to include multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). Hence, participant-observations and documentary material, such as business plans, newspaper articles, and an autobiography of one of the participants provided additional sources of data by offering contextual insight into the processes described by participants (Maitlis, 2005). In addition to this, online material was reviewed. This included the women's personal profiles on social media platforms and business websites where they existed. A background questionnaire capturing the demographic information of the women (Appendix 1) and a stress timeline (Appendix 3) were also used during the interview process. Thus, the use of multiple sources of evidence is compatible with the proposed theoretical framework of the study and a credible approach for researchers engaged in gender and entrepreneurship studies. Furthermore, comparison of the interview data with various other data sources is a means by which the reliability and validity of case study evidence can be critically evaluated (Yin, 2009).

Observations form a critical component of case study research as a complementary data source to interviews, and a means by which the phenomenon can be observed within its natural setting (Yin, 2009). Data collection through observations, facilitates insight into the participant's social interactions with the environment and stakeholders and thus, provides further opportunity to analyse social identities and identity formation. This thesis utilised two forms of observation: unstructured direct observations and participant-observations.

Direct observation is based on the researcher's conscious gathering of sensory data related to the phenomenon (Jones and Somekh, 2005). Consequently, the researcher contributes their own subjectivity as impressions and behaviours are interpreted. Observable behaviour may be collected formally at a specified time and place such as in meetings or more informally during times when other data is being collected (Yin, 2009). In contrast, participant-observations requires the active participation of the researcher in the event, rather than

involvement as a passive observer. This form of observation enables an 'insider' perspective which, it is argued, provides a unique and accurate view of the phenomenon (Jones and Somekh, 2005; Yin, 2009). However, there is the risk of potential bias involved in participant-observations as the researcher may have to become an advocate or supporter of the individual or organisation under study. Furthermore, the process of participating in the event can limit the available time required for effective note taking.

For this thesis, observations were conducted at the time of the initial interviews for three participants for whom the interviews were conducted at the business premises or in the home. The observations accounted for an additional hour of contact time per participant. At the time of the first round of data collection, the participant who had the interview at home was also, primarily operating her business from her home. Observations at business premises captured interactions with employees, customers and work processes. It also noted the presence of, and interactions with family members. A book launch event for one participant provided further opportunity for observation, as did a community event for refugee entrepreneurs where a participant was involved as a speaker. The former was an opportunity to undertake participant observation whereby the researcher was involved in the proceedings. Notes for these two observations sessions were compiled in brief during, and then in more detail immediately following the events. Both written observations captured the layout of the rooms, the positioning of key individuals and the general activity taking place.

A desk-based review of online materials included company websites, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn accounts as representations of the entrepreneurial identity in the virtual world. These sources were used to validate the other source data collected. Moreover, the digital environment provides an alternative view into the social and professional worlds and therefore, enabled further insight into how the participants present themselves to potential customers and other stakeholders. Images, videos and text were reviewed and interrogated based on how participants described themselves, whether there was visibility of their social categories of difference and how this presented. The data were included in the case notes and entered into NVivo for analysis with the interview data as supporting evidence.

Similarly, the review of documentary material enabled verification of other sources of data and provided further contextualisation of the cases (Yin, 2009). Where available, business plans were reviewed as well as online news reports, newspaper articles, reports in which participants had featured. The data were summarised into the case study reports and added into NVivo where it was incorporated into the main analysis process.

### *Reflexivity*

Reflexivity is recognised to be a critical aspect of the research process given the role of the self in generating knowledge (Harding, 1987; Neumann and Neumann, 2015). Consequently, it follows that the process of designing and conducting a study does not take place *in vacuo*, as the researcher is a constant presence throughout the process. The process, therefore, requires a 'continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of a researcher's positionality' (Berger, 2015:220). With this knowledge, the researcher can ascertain how this positionality may have an impact upon understandings and interpretations of knowledge, whilst also induce bias and serve as a source of unequal power dynamic within the research process. This is consistent with understandings of reflexivity within feminist scholarship and other critical approaches (England, 1994; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012). It is, therefore, critical that the researcher is cognisant of and transparent in disclosing their own positionality. My reflections throughout the study were further underpinned by the premise that '*reflexivity is situating the researcher as non-exploitative and compassionate toward the research subjects*' (Pillow, 2003). This was an important consideration, both because of the profiles of the participants and also in view of my own ethical value system. Furthermore, the process of reflexivity has contributed towards my own identity construction, as the research forms a part of my career development which currently involves expanding my finance professional identity to incorporate the identity role of academic.

As a black woman, born and raised in the United Kingdom, I have a heritage that is Caribbean and African; my mother having migrated to the UK from Jamaica with her family when she was a child and my father during the period of the Biafran War as a student, studying for a professional accountancy qualification. After embarking on a career in pharmacy my mother retrained as an accountant. This familial background together with my own experiences of being a woman, minority ethnic, mother, accountant and engaged in Doctoral research reflect

my intersectional identities from which I have experienced both disadvantage and privilege. As a result of this experience, I have a particular interest in supporting and empowering women in business with a belief that beyond their individual empowerment, there is a responsibility for social structures to enable greater equality within society. This provides insight into the spaces into which I am situated, as well as my positioning within the research.

A shared gender identity facilitated the bond I was able to build with the women. Throughout the study there were several instances of mutual understanding based either on shared maternal experiences or on being either a wife, daughter or a woman in business. Additionally, a shared minority ethnic status also served to build rapport with the participants. This enabled the women to speak more openly about their personal relationships and consequently, positions of power and authority in these categories of difference were more easily and equitably negotiated. The African women had a tendency to include me within their group on account of my African heritage. However, they also positioned me as an 'outsider' because of my British nationality and my dual African-Caribbean heritage, which carries a different minority ethnic experience. As one participant noted, *'(Your experience) will be very different because I come with an accent. You never had to fight for the accent, so my accent will put me in a wrong box. You don't have the accent'*. Egharevba (2001) noted this insider/outsider status as one way of describing the relationship when researching another minority ethnic group.

Despite this simplification of the relationship between the researcher and the participants, I found that my positionality shifted due to being located within an even wider landscape than a static insider-outsider dichotomy (Bettez, 2015). Researcher, ally, consultant, co-constructor of identity, I had to be vigilant that my role was transparent and flexible, but on occasions this proved to be challenging. One such example was in the invitation to attend a book launch event for one of the participants. I intended for this to be an opportunity to conduct direct observations. However, I was also invited to speak at the event on the topic of refugee entrepreneurs as well as offer a tribute. In so doing, I went beyond my role of observer/researcher and became enmeshed in the co-construction of her entrepreneurial identity, as I affirmed and encouraged and validated. This confirmed a potential risk of participant-observations that has been noted (Yin, 2009).



A similar instance of feeling the tension between involvement and detachment occurred during the interview process which took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. At times I felt conflicted between continuing to schedule interviews so as to completing the research process in a timely manner, and the very real threat to the women's businesses and consequently, their entrepreneurial identities. I was also concerned about their situations, and so questions about how they were coping throughout the pandemic extended to making sure that they were accessing government-led, pandemic-related financial/support programmes to which they were entitled.

My prior experience as an accountant and advocate for women in business led to a genuine concern and desire to help. However, in order to avoid exhibiting and exercising hierarchical power on account of my professional experience and position of researcher, I refrained from offering business advice when business-related questions were asked of me. I limited my responses to signposting the participants to formal sources of support. I was conscious that if I maintained a very strict participant-researcher position and refused to offer any form of meaningful response, there was the possibility that I was contributing to reinforcing the inequalities they faced. I felt this as a particular responsibility during the challenging circumstances of the pandemic.

Notwithstanding my efforts to maintain a supportive position, I was still a part of the structure that had the potential to affect the development of their entrepreneurial identity. Moreover, having encouraged the women to ask me questions, I felt obliged to respond in a helpful way to their queries and respond to questions openly. In being able to pose personal questions to me, participants were able to exercise a degree of agency in terms of our interactions and thus, the relationship was not just on my terms.

During the analysis process, I had to be mindful of challenging my assumptions based on preconceptions relating to aspects of the participants' narratives which resonated with my own experiences. In order to mitigate this, I reflected on particular situations that might be at risk of this particular bias. The critical realist analysis then enabled me to find multiple alternative explanations for the phenomenon which I could test using various additional evidence sources, whilst being mindful of the identified bias. Thus, I was able to ensure that

my preconceptions were challenged. Participants were also sent copies of their case report, a summary of the data analysis together with example quotes and invited to respond with any queries. This provided them with an opportunity to verify the reasonableness of my interpretation of the data.

Finally, I conclude my reflections with a few thoughts on the philosophical underpinnings of this thesis. My decision to use a critical realist approach was made after being challenged during my research into philosophical approaches. Although a weak form of social constructivism was a comfortable position, I was conscious that my personal world view compels me to seek, or at least acknowledge the existence of reality even when it is neither observed or articulated. I was increasingly convinced that it helped to explain some aspects of my thinking and resonated with my Christian worldview, thus allowing me to maintain authenticity as I undertook the research.

#### **4.7 Operationalising social categories**

Consistent with the critical realist methodology, social categories of gender, ethnicity and class were treated as high level abstractions (Gunnarsson, 2017) which have implications within cultural, social and political contexts (Martinez Dy, *et al.*, 2014). These intersectional categories/abstractions are the spaces from which identity work by refugee women entrepreneurs takes place, having a high level ontological role, whilst simultaneously demonstrating real outcomes (Anthias, 2013) and are fundamental to framing both the methodology and analysis of the research. In addition to being core markers of identity (Butler, 2004), these classifications have been chosen because they also suggest the specific positionality of women entrepreneurs who have been forcibly displaced from the Global South to the Global North where they have been granted refugee status (see Anthias, 2013). Grouped under a feminist perception of differences that matter, a critical realist perspective would capture these identity markers as material structures of oppression (Flatschart, 2017). While the intersection of various social categories is well-documented, it should be noted that the role and nature of intersectional categories remains contested (McCall, 2005; Hancock, 2007).

In recognition that gender and ethnicity are considered to be socially constructed with no fixed meaning (Tomlinson, 2010), these social categories do not capture an homogenised perspective of what it means to be a specific gender (distinct from biological sex) or of a specific race or ethnicity. Historically, intersectionality has focused on oppression due to racial difference, with race being an identifiable marker as it is related to physical characteristics. However, ethnicity captures group differences based on shared traditions, ancestry, cultural differences that stand in contrast to the host country. Both provide a means for self-identification with a particular group and in this way represent societal constructions as well as self-positioning within which identity work can take place (Nordqvist and Aygoren, 2015). In contrast, class was determined using indicators from the participant via the completion of a participant profile questionnaire and observations from the researcher. These indicators included household income, university education, employment history and a profile of parents and their occupations which were mapped to UK class division classifications.

Disability was operationalised based on self-declaration by the participant during interviews. Recognised as a heterogeneous notion, disability comprises of various dimensions which manifest differently. Consequently, it was acknowledged that impairments might be visible and or invisible and therefore, not identified. Disability in this thesis was categorised as follows (White, 2009): physical conditions included mobility issues; sensory conditions, such as having a serious visual impairment; mental conditions, examples of which include depression and anxiety; neuro-developmental conditions, for example: dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); longstanding illness such as epilepsy or diabetes.

## **4.8 Data analysis**

### *Coding*

Data analysis began with a coding process which served to identify themes within the empirical findings. In the first round of coding, a provisional list was compiled manually by drawing on existing theory and constructs from the research question, the literature review and theoretical framework. These initial codes included gender, ethnicity, class, identity work, intersections, discrimination, structures and agency. The two latter codes for example, were informed by both critical realism and intersectionality and provided a means by which to conceptualise agentic action in the context of these women as well as cross-coding categories.

The codes were then expanded upon during the transcription stage, to reflect themes, events, actions and processes that appeared dominant in the data. This round of coding was further extended to incorporate codes that emerged from field notes, observational data and archival documents which had been converted into reports. A second round of coding was carried out within NVivo where the codes could be easily amended, added and deleted as necessary based on subsequent interviews and additional observational data. This was an iterative process that occurred with multiple readings of the transcript and notes. The data was coded in a line-by-line format, resulting in additions and re-coding of the original codes. An extract of the coding is shown in Table 4-2.

*Table 4-2: Extract of the coding with supporting quotes*

Representative quotation	Code Level 2	Parent code Aggregate
We don't see racism only in the street. It's institutionalised. They've put policies in place that are racially discriminating people	Criminalisation Exclusion	Stigma/Discrimination (Structure)
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."	Gendered work roles	Gender (Structure)
I just felt anyway I need to expand myself because I needed more income	Motivation	Constructing an entrepreneurial identity (Agency)
I am not a begging person. I have got a brain. So, I can use my brain to create opportunities for myself	Challenge/Recl aiming one's truth	Resisting stigma (Agency)
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	Lack of start- up funds	Finance (Structure)

Following the coding process, three types of analysis were undertaken. The first, a within-case analysis served to identify the unique patterns within each case and also gave voice to each of the women so that their own personal narratives could be heard. This analysis underpins the vignettes that are presented in Chapter 5. This was followed by a cross-case

analysis which was the basis for the findings presented in Chapter 6 incorporating the identity work strategies as they occur over time. Finally, a critical realist retroduction analysis was undertaken to identify the deeper causal structures and mechanisms that explain the phenomenon of identity work as discussed in Chapter 7.

The within-case analysis involved compiling detailed reports of each case. This began with a descriptive narrative of the first case using the most dominant codes and subsequent themes that had been devised from the data and theory. This process was then repeated for the remaining cases providing an opportunity to assess how each case aligned to the emergent themes such as intersectionality (gender, race, class, disability). Participants were given an opportunity to review the narrative and provide feedback. The analysis revealed the women's individual experiences of stigmatisation, racism, sexism as well as indicating their enactment of their multiple identities. Drawing from the interview transcripts and reports, vignettes were then devised to further consolidate this analysis and document the data. As *'compact sketches that can be used to introduce characters, foreshadow events and analysis to come, highlight particular findings, or summarise a particular theme or issue in analysis and interpretation'* (Ely et al., 1997:70), vignettes were deemed an appropriate way in which to introduce the cases in the first findings chapter. Furthermore, often applied as a method of reporting in qualitative studies (Yin, 2009), the vignettes allowed each of the women's voices to be centralised. The interview excerpts and vignettes were chosen based on the cases which best demonstrated each of the emergent themes associated with the intersectional experience of being a refugee woman entrepreneur. This allowed each of the women to be introduced in turn.

The cross-case analysis developed the thematic analysis to identify repetitions and trends that presented across all the cases and to determine the process of identity construction over time. Therefore, of particular significance during the cross-case analysis was the relationship between the emergent themes and the various stages at which they were most prominent in reflecting a process of entrepreneurial identity construction. The thematic analysis was used as a 'contextualist' method in its *"acknowledge(ment) of the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of 'reality'"* (Braun and

Clarke, 2006: 81). Building on the initial coding that had been transferred to NVivo, relevant data extracts were collated to support the emergent themes and subthemes and thus first-order categories, and second order themes were compiled. The resultant data structure is shown in Appendix 4.

Consistent with a critical realist approach to analysis, this post coding process can be categorised as abduction or redescription which involved a continuous process of inference and reframing the data through a theoretical lens. Thus, the experiences of the participants were drawn into a theoretical setting (Danermark, Ekström and Karlsson, 2019). This process was used to further develop and frame the data in the context of structure and agency. Also, themes associated with entrepreneurial identity construction, for example, were considered in light of existing theories to help to draw out the relevance of other theories in relation to the data, such as founder identity (Hoang and Gimeno, 2010). A processual approach to an entrepreneurial identity construction was ultimately deemed to be appropriate for this group of women as they sought to establish this positive identity in relation to other stigmatised identity markers. Thus, as the original theory was subjected to thorough testing and reframing according to the data, empirical observations were combined with theory which served to elucidate the research phenomenon (Hoddy, 2019).

Finally, a critical realist retroductive analysis was undertaken whereby causal mechanisms, structures and social conditions were explicitly identified (Fletcher, 2017) in order to understand why the women engaged in the identity work that they did. The process of retroduction required grappling with the reasoning of individuals as well as other events as they interact with social structures to bring about action and change (Shaw *et al.*, 2018); in effect, exposing what needed to occur in order to elicit a particular outcome (Danermark, Ekström and Karlsson, 2019). The outcome was the identity work that led to an entrepreneurial identity/ (de)stigmatised identity. Building on the within-case and cross-case analyses, structures and mechanisms were identified by seeking out potential explanatory patterns that lay within the descriptions of challenges and the experience of entrepreneurship based on a stigmatised refugee status. This then informed an understanding of the enabling and constraining conditions in which the activities take place.

Whilst the mechanisms that became apparent were understood as a causal explanation of how and why the entrepreneurial identity (the outcome) developed, this also led to the identification of related structures with causal powers to bring about the conditions as depicted in Figure 7-2. As such, it was an iterative process that oscillated between the concrete and the abstract in order to ascertain meaning and causal effects. The retroduction analysis was consolidated through empirical corroboration which meant that the mechanisms were tested to ensure that they had the strongest explanatory potential when compared with alternatives that were present in the data (Wynn & Williams, 2012). Thus, the analysis process was dependent on clear conceptualisations of context, structures, mechanisms and outcome and how they link in order to provide explanatory power (Shaw et al., 2018; Mukumbang et al., 2019).

Although overall the data analysis applied in this study was a complex and iterative process due to the vast volume of data collected, it can be simplified within a critical realist framework to fall within three key phases. The first, the explication of events, involved the coding, description and redescription of the data which informed the within-case and cross-case analyses previously described. In this stage the data was identified, reorganised and interpreted in light of existing theory. The within-case analysis provided 'thick description' through the creation of the narrative reports (Freeman 2014) and permitted an interpretation of each case within its context. Thus, the analysis described the women's narratives, initiated the identification of structures and revealed the effect of the structures on the women. This formed the basis of the vignettes presented in Chapter 5. The cross-case analysis further developed the data interpretation through redescription to incorporate in more detail the interaction between the women and the structures. This served to reveal the strategies used by the women to navigate the structures through identity work as shown in Chapter 6 (See Figure 6-1 and Appendix 4). The second and third phases, retroduction and empirical corroboration sought to uncover and validate the 'real' level of reality, whereas the interviews and observations facilitated engagement with the 'empirical' and 'actual' levels of reality. This hidden level was accessed by means of identifying causal mechanisms eliciting the various experiences and events which led to the identity work (outcome) undertaken by the women. In providing explanations of the phenomena, the retroduction analysis underpins part of the discussion presented in Chapter 7 (see Figure 7-1, Figure 7-2, and Figure 7 4).

Table 4-3 illustrates the process of conducting a critical realist methodology as applied and interpreted by a selection of researchers. It highlights an agreement regarding fundamental steps that constitute the process and the non-linearity associated with this method of analysis (Fletcher, 2017). Whilst later examples have consolidated the number of key steps, essentially, they pivot around the function of retrodution. Hu (2018) and Fletcher's (2017) use of critical realism is applied within an entrepreneurship context and as such they have both informed this study.



Table 4-3: Critical Realism: Analysis process

Bhaskar, 2008; Mole, (2012)	Mingers, Mutch and Willcocks, (2013)	Bygstad et al. (2016)	Fletcher, (2017)	Hu (2018)	
Resolution	Description	Description of events	Description	Explication of events	<b>Resolution:</b> A phenomenon is resolved into simplified components <b>Description</b> of events: Data-coding identification of main empirical findings <b>Explication of events:</b> The description, identification and abstraction of the phenomenon into composite parts
Redescription (Abduction)	Retroduction	Identification of key entities	Redescription (Abduction)	Retroduction	<b>Redescription/Abduction:</b> Re-describing the data in terms of theory. <b>Retroduction:</b> Identification and hypothesizing of mechanisms and causal powers that may have been activated and how they interacted <b>Identification of identities:</b> objects of the case, individuals and other structures and the interactions between them.
Retroduction	Elimination	Redescription (Abduction)	Retroduction	Empirical corroboration	<b>Identification and elimination</b> of mechanisms that do not apply. <b>Empirical corroboration:</b> hypothetical structures and mechanisms are examined and tested through empirical scrutiny for explanatory rigour and casual depth (Hu, 2018).
Elimination	Inference	Retroduction			
Identification	Context	Analysis of the set of affordances and associated mechanisms			<b>Identification and evidencing</b> of mechanisms that will permit a clear understanding of causal mechanisms <b>Context:</b> recognition of the impact and import of broader context
Correction		Assessment of explanatory power			<b>Correction:</b> The iterative nature of the process allows for correction and updating of the initial theory.

## 4.9 Summary

This chapter has explained the methodological approach adopted for this research. It has established the philosophical grounding of the study in a critical realist perspective and the value of integrating this within an intersectional framework in exploring the phenomenon of refugee women entrepreneurs and their identity work. Drawing on an interpretation of intersectional social categories as critical realist abstractions, it also offers an explanation of how these were operationalised in order to understand participants in terms of their gender, race/ethnicity, class and disability. These social categories are essential in this research as they form the basis of the temporal and spatial arena in which the identity work takes place, emphasising structure-agency dynamics. Furthermore, regarding the data analysis, as abstractions they provide context whilst being linked to the outcomes and mechanisms which provide explanation for the behaviours and experiences of this particular group of women.

In elaborating on the methods used to conduct the research, the chapter explained the rationale for a qualitative case study design. It also described the criteria for the cases selected and how participants were recruited. Ethical considerations and the importance of reflexivity within critically engaged research provided further insight into how the research was carried out. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the analysis process which was informed by critical realism. The following two chapters will present the research findings which will then be discussed in Chapter 7.

## 5 Refugee women entrepreneurs: Stigmatised and marginalised identities?

In the preceding methodology chapter, intersectionality underpinned by a critical realist philosophical lens was presented as an effective framework with which to examine the multiple marginalising social categories affecting refugee women entrepreneurs. This chapter will now present the cases and explore the participant's experiences. In so doing, it is noted that some were previously self-employed or entrepreneurial actors before they arrived in the UK. Consequently, they bring unique expressions of being entrepreneurs as they have these foundational identities in different contexts which have been suppressed by the ascribed, all-consuming, stigmatised identity of the refugee. For some, these hidden identities may be re-worked, while for others, the entrepreneurial identity may be a new form of identity. In this chapter, we explore such identity issues, related challenges and adopted responses. Following this, in chapter six, we examine in further detail this process of identity work.

In addressing the research question: *'How does engagement with entrepreneurial activity influence the identity construction of refugee women in the UK?'* this chapter explores the structural and agentic tensions that arise from the stigmatising effects of various intersectional social categories of difference. This focuses upon the period from the women's point of arrival in the UK and as they engage in entrepreneurial activities. Drawing on positionality (Anthias, 1998, 2021), it makes connections between their starting positions, who they were in their country of origin and who they are becoming as they find themselves in need of reconstructing their identities.

Entrepreneurship is promoted as a potentially positive route for marginalised groups to achieve upward economic mobility (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Verduijn and Essers, 2013) and as a means for refugees more specifically, to integrate into the host country (Desai, Naudé and Stel, 2020). The findings presented in this chapter suggest that engagement with entrepreneurial activities is a more complex endeavour than popular discourse presents for those who are subject to multiple marginalising categories of difference. Emerging themes within these findings highlight that: i) there are stigmatising effects of holding a refugee status, ii) there is racial discrimination affecting perceptions of self-identity, iii) gender influences the experiences of refugee women given evidence of gendered work roles, iv) additional factors such as social class and disability biases influence women refugee's

experiences and outcomes. Finally, intersectional effects arising from the multiple marginalising categories of social difference relevant to each woman endure throughout the life-cycle of the business. The confluence of these experiences influences identity construction. Furthermore, the narratives the women share highlight the presence of various discriminatory discourses, such as those of the media, host communities and government offices (Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2001a; Gudrun Jensen, Weibel and Vitus, 2017; Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou and Wodak, 2018); the same structures with which the participants need to interact in order to engage with the entrepreneurial process (Rowley, Morant and Katona, 2020).

The chapter commences by presenting vignettes which reveal individual experiences of inequalities. They are organised using extended extracts which offer a glimpse of each woman's story, giving each a primary voice whilst also providing an introduction to the themes and issues raised. Supporting quotes from the other women demonstrate shared experiences and serve to further expand on the relevance of the themes and add further nuance. A profile of the women participating in this study is provided in Table 4-1. The chapter concludes with a presentation of findings that highlight the intersectional effects of running a business as experienced by the women. This then completes the tableau which demonstrates the stigmatisation and challenges encountered by the refugee women entrepreneurs in this study. Furthermore, it serves to set the scene for the next chapter where the strategies and the dynamic process of identity work undertaken by the women are examined in more detail using a cross case analysis. This will provide insight into how identity work is used over time to reject the stigmatised ascription the women experience and to secure an entrepreneurial identity. Table 5-1 provides an overview of the characteristics of the sample which inform this study.

Table 5-1: Demographic profile of participants

	Year of migration to the UK	Country of origin	Age	Life situation	Business Type	Business (Years)	Age	Education	Previous Business ownership
Aliya	2012	Syria	Early forties	Married/younger children	Food manufacture	4-6		Postgraduate	***N
Zendaya	2002	Zimbabwe	Early fifties	Married/older children	Membership Organisation *(SE)	10+		Graduate	Y
					Fashion design	7-9			
Azadeh	2013	Iran	Early forties	Single/none	Upcycling Art Therapies *(SE)	0-1		Postgraduate	N
Anashe	2001	Zimbabwe	Early forties	Married/younger	**Youth Charity	10+		Graduate	N
					Consultancy	2-3			
					Handbag design	2-3			
Floriane	2002	Cameroon	Early fifties	Married/ Older-Younger	Restaurant/ bar	10+		A levels Technical Accountancy	Y

\*SE: Social Enterprise

\*\* Outside scope of study

\*\*\*Assisted husband in business

## 5.1 Refugee status: a stigmatised identity

### **Floriane**

This section commences with a vignette outlining Floriane's experience which highlights the impact of the conferral of a stigmatised refugee identity. Floriane is from Cameroon having arrived in the UK in 2002 and subsequently granted her leave to remain in 2010. Married and mother to six children, she owns a restaurant and bar. Floriane owned a similar establishment in her home country before she had to flee. She was asked to recount her story.

*"I am from Cameroon. I am married with six children. I used to own a business over there, a restaurant and bar. Because I was nearby to one of the university buildings, when there was a strike, the students came and rioted into my place which brought me into problems with the government and I had to flee the country because they were after me with my husband. [...] At the time I didn't come with the children because you cannot run away with children. **So, when I arrived here, it was not easy for me. I applied for asylum, but I spent eight years before being granted leave to remain. It was not easy for me. I've been to detention with my three children when they arrived here and I've been traumatised, because I had mental health issues sometimes. It was not easy for me. But finally, I was settled. When I arrived, the treatment was good because we used to be with National Asylum Support Services (NASS) and they would provide us with accommodation. They would give us some weekly money, which wasn't enough, but at least you have some food. But on the street it wasn't easy because, some people are not happy with foreigners coming to their country and where we used to live, people would know that these are asylum seekers' houses. And sometimes there is a bit of noise when you are going past the street, and they would say "go back to your country... we don't want you here". But you take it easy because you can understand them, because it can be a bit scary to have people that you don't know near you as neighbours. Maybe in time they will understand that we are different, that we are not here to steal, we are not here to bother them..... You don't know anyone in the country, just the authorities, just people from NASS and the police. You're not too sure people are going to accept you. You can't go to the neighbour and say, I am a refugee, I am coming here because of this reason or that, they are scared of you [.....]Even the social workers they are a bit scared because they***

*don't know who you are. It made me feel down because no-one will accept you as a friend. You can't make friends, because you don't know anyone. [.....] When you are in asylum accommodation you cannot go anywhere. You have to be where the government can find you at any time. One day they came and fetched me with all my kids. I spent two weeks in detention with all the kids.*

*It's never easy. It is not easy at all (cries) You know sometimes it is not easy to leave your family behind, people you know. To come into a country where you don't know anyone. [.....]But after some time, you are happy because you say, at least I am still alive, although you struggle. When I had my leave to remain, I was so happy because at least they accept me in their country and after one year I just say to myself, you have to fight, you have to stand on your two feet.....That's why we thought about it. Why don't we do what we used to do?"*

Floriane's account of her entry to the UK highlights the need for identity construction as she seeks to establish herself and subsequently a business in a safe space. Whilst the new identity label of refugee imposed upon her was evidence that she had been granted temporary leave to remain in the UK and was no longer an asylum seeker, it continued to carry the burden of stigmatisation (Zetter, 1991, 2007). The negativity emerging from societal views of refugees was apparent in various discriminatory encounters and incidents from the point of arrival in the UK. The verbal abuse and mistrust that Floriane experienced in her new environment were driven by suppositions that refugees had travelled to the host country for nefarious purposes and were a burden to the society (Innes, 2010; Goodman and Kirkwood, 2019). The perception of refugees as passive and dependent individuals is reinforced by the system which prohibited Floriane from engaging in any work before her status was confirmed. She explains further this state of dependency into which she was placed:

*"You should be in the accommodation offered by the authorities. .... You cannot live anywhere different to where they are giving you the accommodation. They are the one feeding you. They are giving you some money which is not enough but at least they give you something until you have the leave to remain. It takes away your dignity because you*

*live by what people say to you..... I have never sat in the house back home. Always I worked. But over here I couldn't work until they allowed me to work".*

Floriane was prevented from working for the eight years during which she awaited a ruling on her asylum application. This placed her in a liminal space as despite only ever having been self-employed in her home country as the proprietor of a restaurant bar and having also worked as a hairdresser, she was forced to put aside these earlier aspects of her professional identity (Beech, 2011). Thus, she could not claim her previous entrepreneurial identity nor could she progress to build a new professional identity; rather, she was ascribed the stigmatised identity of refugee. This was in effect an identity marker which confined her to a liminal space as it was salient with her sense of who she was or who she could become. Consequently, perceptions of how she was positioned socially were lowered which served to challenge her own perceptions of self. At this point, her identity was both far removed from the normative view of an entrepreneur and equally distanced from who she knew herself to be as a businesswoman in Cameroon.

One consequence of carrying such a stigmatised identity was a decline in mental health. In Floriane's case this was significant and contributed to her hospitalisation whilst all of the other women spoke of experiencing some form of depression or sadness. The impact of the stress associated with having a stigmatised refugee identity was most evident in the women's accounts of their earlier years in the UK. It is seen that in these instances, stigma can be identified and understood in terms of the resultant stress (identity- threatening conditions) it elicits within the individual (Major and O'Brien, 2005). As can be seen from Floriane's account it was also a contributor to her identity construction as she had to move beyond the low self-perception she had as a result of this stigmatised identity in order to 'fight .... and start afresh' by starting her business.

### ***Assumptions of criminality as a stigmatising effect***

The asylum-seeking process leading to the women being granted refugee status highlighted their feelings of being criminalised. Floriane's experience of being detained at Yarl's Wood, a UK immigration detention centre that has been the subject of ongoing controversy since it was established in 2001 (Shaw, 2015), is one such example. She was held in detention for two



weeks with three of her children who had travelled with her initially. At the time of detention, the children were eighteen, six and the youngest was less than a year old. The accounts of the other women who had also experienced detention were similar in regard to their feelings of being criminalised and dehumanised. For some, the refugee journey brought them to their lowest point as human beings, stigmatised as deserving of being further denied their freedom.

The reason for Floriane's detention was because her application had been refused; they had rejected her explanation of why she had to leave Cameroon. She explains:

*"Sometimes they won't believe you and there is nothing you can do. You see the way of relating a story or a situation you may be right but the way you are talking, it's for the person interpreting to consider whether what I am saying is true or false. It's the person in front of you who interviews who gives the decision. They may be right or wrong, they are the one to give the decision. They can look at you and say no, I don't believe your story and there is nothing you can do. So, you have to wait to be deported or wait to be granted amnesty".*

The implications of having one's word and integrity scrutinised confers further stigmatisation on the status of being a refugee and fuels the assumption that the individual is lying and untrustworthy in character. In her reflection, Floriane highlights the power dynamic that is present during these interactions with the officials and which serve to position her not only in terms of being deserving of humanitarian protection but also her worthiness as a human being to be put on a path to citizenship (Dagg and Haugaard, 2016). The decision as to whether or not she is credible and trustworthy ultimately determines her future outcomes. This experience sets a precedence for how the women will engage with officials in the UK and highlights a sense of powerlessness.

As Floriane's experience shows, these interactions with the authorities that occur before refugee status is formally granted serve to reinforce a negative impression of who the women are, having been forcibly displaced from their home country. Once they have been granted refugee status establishing their right to be in the UK for a limited period, and as they shift towards a more defined entrepreneurial identity, the refugee label generally becomes less prominent in terms of criminality. Nevertheless, there remains a fear in relation to the

authorities and a sensitivity regarding whether they are perceived by the host country to be operating within or outside of the law. In discussing her business, Floriane offers insight to how this fear is manifested as a refugee businesswoman:

*“I have to comply by the law. Everything has to be neat and clear. There is nothing...You can’t go out of the law because you are scared, you don’t know what may happen”.*

Floriane recognises that the rules and regulations involved in conducting business in the UK are different to those in her home country where, as an SME she operated in a more informal way (Akinboade, 2015; St-Pierre *et al.*, 2015). One example of this related to rules about noise levels. Here in the UK a breach results in a visit from the police and a potential fine. In Cameroon she said, “the neighbours... they like music and will even ask if you can turn it up”. Similarly, in respect of making timely payments:

*“back home, you can even go six months without paying your bills, you just speak to your landlord. Here you have to comply; tax, business rates, there are so many things to pay on time, back home it’s not so strict”.*

There is an additional level of fear that some of the women continue to experience as businesswomen, fear that these cultural differences, reflected in the way in which they conduct business, will be interpreted through a biased lens that reinforces the negative stereotypes associated with their refugee identity.

### ***Excluded stigmatised identities***

Given that the exclusion of refugees can be observed in the location and nature of the accommodation in which they are placed, there are also implications for the construction of their identities (Netto, 2011). Not only was Floriane’s experience of verbal abuse based on the recognition that her housing was specifically for asylum seekers, but the permanent accommodation offered to her would also determine the initial location of her business premises. Both properties were located in the poorer parts of the city and while they were less expensive to maintain, this confined their access to certain demographic and socio-economic groups. It can be seen in the cases of some of these women, where their businesses are situated in predominantly ethnic minority communities, that ‘ethnic enclaves’ (Wilson and

Portes, 1980; Achidi, Ndofor and Priem, 2011) can emerge not necessarily from choice, but from the refugee experience and the bureaucratic process that determines where refugees are placed by the system. This was the case for Floriane and Anashe who are serving mainly migrant African communities. Geographically they were initially confined within minority ethnic communities or in socio-economically deprived areas. Although a close affiliation with minority ethnic communities can create a sense of belonging, this separation from the host community reinforces marginalisation. Moreover, the fact they are located in 'ethnic enclaves' reinforces a racial dimension to their segregation and positionality - a point that will be discussed in the following section. This positionality based on racial difference is also emphasised in instances where participants were located in a socio-economically deprived area that comprised majority white host communities.

A sense of being judged and viewed as an outsider served to accentuate feelings of difference and lack of belonging. These feelings did not diminish once Floriane had been granted the right to remain (Platts-Fowler and Robinson, 2015; Huizinga and van Hoven, 2018). She felt that the host community feared her when she first arrived in the UK and believed that this sentiment was also held by those assigned to help her to integrate. Speaking at a refugee event several years later as an established business owner, this apprehension about how she may be perceived by others is still noticeable. Although the event was to celebrate and showcase the achievements of refugee entrepreneurs, Floriane appeared reserved and understated particularly when her comportment is compared to how she conducts herself as Head Chef and owner of her restaurant bar where it is evident that she is highly esteemed by her clientele. The self-assured way in which she moves from table to table speaking with the diners about their families, current affairs and making sure that their orders are satisfactory is a contrasting image to the more hesitant, although competent guest speaker who appeared to be less eager to engage in the networking session.

Being excluded and marginalised was a common experience amongst the women during various periods of their transition from being asylum seekers to established refugee entrepreneurs. Floriane's ability to feel a sense of full inclusion at the refugee entrepreneurship event was limited primarily because of a lack of confidence she had about her English language skills. She was also the only black woman speaker of the group, which

heightened this sense of difference. Accounts from some of the other women confirm this apprehension and heightened feeling of being different and not accepted. A refugee from Cameroon, Anashe for example, says,

*“.....even though the language is a barrier. Although I speak English and understand it, at the same time I am not confident with my accent... I feel will I be accepted? Or if they see my name, maybe a business plan or proposal, I am not confident enough that I will be accepted because of the colour of my skin, or my name, or how I will come across when I speak to them.”*

Many felt that language barriers, separation from the host community and lack of friendships compounded the experience of and the stigma associated with being a refugee, highlighting the close relationship between the identity categories of race and the refugee identity. The saliency of the refugee aspect of the women’s identities during the early phase of the women’s lives in the UK is suggested because on arrival to the UK, it is this new identity label based on their immigration status and imposed upon each of the women which gives them the legal right to reside in the UK. The refugee ascription had several negative associations that were manifested through interactions with the authorities and the local host community which the women had to navigate; a process which will be examined further in the following chapter.

## **5.2 Racialised and minority ethnicity identities: discrimination and opportunity**

This section centres on a vignette about Zendaya whose experiences highlight the role of race within the intersectional discrimination to which she is subjected. It then draws on the experiences of some of the other women which support these findings.

### ***Zendaya***

Zendaya, founder of a fashion label and advocacy community programme arrived in the UK in 2002 from her home in Zimbabwe. She was granted refugee status in 2010. Zendaya previously ran a business in Zimbabwe that provided the interior design for the hotel industry.

*I was a young lady when I came here..... I didn't know anyone in this country in coming to seek for refuge in Britain. I had hopes and expectations. Indeed, coming from the former colony*

*and master country, I had hopes that you know, I was moving like from home to home and I didn't get that obviously. [.....] It was a very sad moment when I was in Britain trying to seek for refuge. I was left in limbo and my case was not taken into consideration on time and it made me to be vulnerable in many times. I faced discrimination from the society, discrimination from the system, discrimination from the fellow people that I worked with and I felt like I had lost myself at some point, especially when I had to be a destitute, while yesterday in Zimbabwe, I was an employer. It made me to be very much vulnerable. I felt like I was losing my identity .....I couldn't dress the way I used to.*

*The racism we talk about it's not in the street only. You find it inside the system in the housing, in the aid, in the way prisoners are treated it's there. There is a lot of conflict in the refugee organisations simply because race is applied. A black refugee is different from a Syrian refugee because of the colour. It was important to make sure that we are visible..... that we are on the map like everybody else. What triggered that was that I used to work in the voluntary sector and there was no tick box that says African, and I was asking them, so where are we? Where do we tick ourselves? Then we would have to tick 'others'. The equal opportunities reflected that there was no equality of services, because, we were not expected to be there, I think or, we were just invisible. So, I advocated for the equal opportunity to be added, African as a separate box. I didn't want to be identified as black Caribbean....I want it to be visible that we are Africans in diaspora. So, I influenced even those in the meetings who were refugees and some of the migrants, to say no, we cannot fall under 'others', we need to have an identity..... And once you cannot be identified by your real identity, you cannot also access resources because they assume you belong to 'Others'. So, that 'Others' is what I created to be the African box. It allowed us to access resources. It allowed us to be addressed as an African people, as a continent. To say Africa is a continent not a country. We have to educate people. Because they used to say, Oh, where do you come from? Oh, you come from Africa, how are you? Things, like that, but I said no, I come from Zimbabwe. Africa is a continent. To educate people, it was very important and crucial for our integration. We have been colonised by the British for hundreds of years and coming here..... There should be a history. Why I am here. My history has to come in the business..... The white community see us as a people who should be always begging to them but what I put across is the history of the British Empire.....*

*I am not a begging person. I have got a brain. So, I can use my brain to create opportunities for myself”.*

### ***Perceptions and self-perceptions: Identity and business roots***

Zendaya’s online profiles state that she is a Business Owner, Managing Director, Founder and Advocate, all of which stand in stark contrast to the refugee label she carries while in the UK but which represent various versions of the Zimbabwean businesswoman who was forced to leave her country due to persecution. Her experience of this transition between identities as she resumes her entrepreneurial identity is long and complex, in part, due to the many years it took for her asylum application to be granted. Whilst her refugee status has had an impact upon this process of identity work, it is also evident from the data that Zendaya’s race and ethnicity are at the heart of her businesses and her personal identity. This is a common occurrence among the women as four of the five women have at least one business that was related to their heritage which served to make their ethnicity more prominent but which was also consistent with forms of cultural entrepreneurship as a form of resistance against discrimination (Sabella and El-Far, 2019). Other studies of refugee women have shown them to be involved in heritage businesses or activities in the home centred around traditional crafts and cuisine (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010; Alkhaled and Sasaki, 2021). Three of the five women, Zendaya, Anashe and Floriane have businesses that were primarily serving ethnic minority communities although they have longer-term aspirations of expanding this target market to capture the native host community.

The significance of retaining one’s ethnic identity is demonstrated by Zendaya’s experience of being a refugee in that it highlights the need to identify the self with a collective (Tajfel, 2010). Drawing on various dimensions of ethnicity, which may include classifications based on colour, national culture, language, amongst several others (Aspinall, 2009), we see Zendaya’s entrepreneurial activities centred around African women. One of her ventures is a social enterprise which designs and produces African attire combining traditional African fabrics with British designs. Another started as a project during the asylum-seeking process and sought to empower migrant African women to be active citizens as they tried to integrate into UK society. It was a forum through which Zendaya, and the group she had assembled, could seek to understand themselves and deal with the confusion and isolation that they were

experiencing. Like Zendaya, the women she sought to bring together had left their children in their home country and were not able to access the labour market because of the asylum process. It was a time during which she recalls, “we were fighting to maintain our identity”. This response reinforces the need for identity work and will be elaborated upon further in the next chapter where the strategies used by the women to navigate discrimination as they pursue an entrepreneurial identity are examined in greater detail.

Although racial difference has proved to be an advantageous factor in most of the women’s businesses, providing either the inspiration or the market for the venture, the effect of racial stigma and discrimination was also evident. Zendaya had a keen sense that her colour and foreignness made her a target for discrimination:

*“...even if I'm going to be championing for things to say we have concerns, when they see your face or my face, they'll just think, black people.....Our identity matters. It comes with our hair comes with our eyes. It also comes with our large, big nose. So, you cannot take it from us unless you kill us”.*

Whilst race evidently mattered in terms of the physical attributes ascribed to specific groups, ethnicity based on a shared language and cultural characteristics were also emphasised points of difference. In the extended extract, Zendaya stresses the heterogeneity within the refugee community and discriminatory difference based on colour and ethnicity which she felt were factors that would lead to her being stereotyped and experiencing further racism. So, although in one respect Zendaya actively promotes her ethnicity, she is also conscious that it can be a source of negative prejudice embedded into various societal structures. In addressing the researcher, who identifies as black British of African Caribbean descent, Zendaya emphasised the distinction between their blackness:

*“... it will be very different (for me) because I come with an accent. You never had to fight for the accent, so my accent will put me in a wrong box...The accent puts us in a wrong box and also the immigration status... People will think Oh gosh, someone from*

*Syria (Africa)...poor people they've done this, they've done that.....Britain is better than your country. Then already, you are outside the normal zone."*

In this instance, she alludes to the fact that a racially biased frame serves to both 'other' and devalue her accent as it relates to her foreignness. Confirming this, prior research shows that non-native accents are associated with lower social status and lower intelligence (Gluszek and Dovidio, 2010; Fuertes *et al.*, 2012). From this, we see the intersectional framing of the discrimination which incorporates a further dimension of oppression based not only on her race and refugee status as she herself recognises, but also that of social status.

As with the other women in this study, Zendaya regularly saw, felt or faced some form of direct racism. However, once they became business owners, less overt examples of racist encounters were reported, rather, there were instances of being undermined, overlooked or stereotyped. Zendaya explains:

*"The racism we talk about it's not in the street only.... It's institutionalised. They've put policies in place that are racially discriminating people. So how do you know it's racism unless you come across an aggressive person who is engaging with the company over the business, then you know that was a racial act.*

This reference to racism that is institutionalised is consistent with Feagin and Elias's (2013) notion of systemic racism which includes narratives, stereotypes, images and interpretations from the perspective of a dominant 'white racial frame'. It also highlights the fact that institutionalised racism is harder to discern because it relies on traditional, normative ways of operating which reinforce and protect the assumptions of the dominant group. For Zendaya, the racism she encounters in business is most evident when she is confronted directly with an individual who is aggressively racist.

### ***Colonialism: Race and social class***

Just as intersectionality and positionality facilitate appreciation of the combined effects of two or more categories of belonging, colonialism, which combines social class and race, is drawn upon to make sense of their experience. Whilst in the UK, Zendaya found herself at a point of destitution: homeless and with a devalued social status. This is in contrast to the



position she held in post-colonial Zimbabwe where she and her family were financially secure in what she describes as a middle-class lifestyle. This shift in social mobility has been duly noted in previous refugee research (Huq and Venugopal, 2021). Despite this change in status, Zendaya's business ventures in the UK have allowed her to raise herself out from the precarious position in which she was placed as a refugee. Zendaya draws heavily on the legacy of colonialism to explain how she is perceived and positioned in the UK. This perspective emphasises the role of power relations, probing deeper to reveal the interactions between class and race as race heritage, social history and social positioning become a political frame through which she understands the institutions with which she must interact (Sandhu and Higgins, 2016).

Both Zendaya and Anashe, who is also from Zimbabwe, a former British colony, referred to this special colonial relationship. This positioning was not present in the reflections of the Middle Eastern women whose previous attitudes towards and interactions with the UK were based primarily on business trips and holidays. The African women each experienced a long asylum-seeking process, waiting an average of eight years after several rejections and re-applications. In contrast, the Iranian and the Syrian participants received a favourable response to the application for asylum within months of their arrival in the UK. Zendaya refers to this distinction between the treatment of different refugee groups within the refugee organisations and explains it through a racialised and classed lens. She recognises a colonial relationship that repositions her to a lower social status because of her race and which therefore, explains *'the white community see(ing) us as a people who should be always begging to them'*.

This racism and class bias is present not only within the white host community but also within the Zimbabwean community where there is an expectation that black women ought not to exceed a certain position in society. It is when these internalised colonial attitudes intersect with gendered beliefs, we see the intersectional effects of class, race and gender upon these women's experiences. Such attitudes are exhibited in the form of internalised racism whereby *'marginalised groups turn on themselves...reinforcing self-fulfilling negative stereotypes'* (Padilla, 2001:61; Pyke, 2010).

*“For the first time in my life I was victimised by my own community. They would say, how come she is making money? So, from the political side, they find me to be a strong person who understands the good politics to allow the community to grow and to come together, but as a black woman .....”.*

Although as an entrepreneur and political advocate, Zendaya’s standing in the Zimbabwean community is recognised and applauded, she interprets the negative responses from some members of the Zimbabwean community as them finding it hard to comprehend her success in the host country as a ‘black woman’. The internalised racist thinking assumes that a black female would hold a subordinated and dependent financial position in the host country, thus, accepting and reinforcing the ‘white colonial’ view. Anashe has had a similar experience. She explains that when clients arrive at her office premises for a meeting, sometimes they assume that she is an employee rather than the owner: the expectation is that the owner will be a white man. This reveals a dual notion of bias based on an assumption of whiteness and gender. Anashe makes sense of this internalised racism by seeing it as stemming from an inferiority complex among black groups borne out of the colonial experience.

*“..... the migrant community it is mixed, so some see me as possibly a threat. I think I have faced more backlash from my own, they don’t really understand what I am doing. They don’t really connect with me. They probably feel that this business should be run by a white person and they would engage more because of the inferiority complex issues that some people have which is the reality.....There are certain types of service that our people are not expected to be in, so if you are an accountant and you are black, some people would think you are working for someone and not owning the firm yourself”.*

The expectation that the positioning of the black person is one that is removed from certain positions of power helps to explain some of this behaviour as understood by Anashe. The ‘inferiority complex’ that she refers to reflects the lower position that is expected of black people by her own Zimbabwean community based on the legacy of how they were positioned as a result of colonialism (Salzman and Laenui, 2014). As such, she felt herself to be a victim of some individuals within her own community who were exhibiting the same racist

thoughts, values and stereotypes perpetuated by the dominant White group (Pyke, 2010; Seet, 2019).

Zendaya highlights the detriment associated with being not just black and of low social status, but also a woman where a louder voice is interpreted as aggression because of racial stereotypes. She noted that black women are treated differently to black men of similar social standing, as the men appeared to access project funding more easily and on more favourable terms.

*“There is a lot of hate for black women in England ...so, of course I’ve seen racism, yes. The men were favoured because they were having affairs with the white female members of staff, but what was I offering? The way people look at you, they may not ask you questions, but they can fight you without you realising they are fighting you. So as black women it doesn’t make it right for us. If there is any problem....you see as I am speaking now they will say that we are very aggressive. They assume everything about us is negative, but when we are emphasising a fact, this is how we speak. So, things like that”.*

To varying degrees, race and ethnicity matter for the women. At one end of the spectrum these identity categories have been the source of inspiration for their business ideas and helped them to retain links to the home country. At the other, racial stigmatisation has caused further marginalisation and highlighted power dynamics that exist particularly as race intersects with their refugee status, gender and class.

### **5.3 Gender and the entrepreneur: Aliya and Anashe**

In discussing gender, Aliya and Anashe are introduced. Award winning businesswoman, wife and mother of three from Syria, Aliya is educated to degree level and in Syria, helped her husband in his business. Aliya’s interview extract offers a glimpse of the tensions she faces due to her womanhood – the way she presents herself within the business and the impact it has on her future plans for the business and for her family.

Anashe has two nascent businesses, a business consultancy and handbag design company. She is also founder of a charity which seeks to empower migrant youth in the community. The charity emerged out of a community project which she launched whilst awaiting her

application for asylum to be granted. She is married and has a young child. Anashe arrived in the UK aged 18 years. She was expecting to start university when she had to flee her country.

### **Aliya**

*“One time we went to a farm which had a farm shop ..... and when we got in, there 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. And I said maybe we are in the wrong place, and we just left. I was with my husband, but we don’t fight anyone. We just looked at him. This is not our style. We just turned around and went out. But this is just one place out of hundreds so you really can just ignore it because it is normal. [.....]*

*I have heard so many times from people that whenever there are negotiations, you go because women make it sometimes smoother or less aggressive. They negotiate longer. They keep talking and talking whereas men, they make it strict with one decision no and that’s it. Sometimes, women accept that I made a decision, and I changed my mind - I might be wrong. While with men it is hard for them to say they are wrong. They will convince themselves that we are wrong. People are looking at the business in a more gentle way I think when they see women in charge and they feel they need to support her. Whenever we are standing, me and my husband, people will want to talk to me instead of him. They appreciate that a woman is doing this business. They feel always that they want to raise this issue and they don’t ignore women. So, I think in general here (in the UK), the culture, the women here are stronger than any other place. That has helped me in my business. I did not think of using my gender to making things better for my business, but I think always this has been helpful.*

*“(This is) where you feel you are in again another challenge. Who is the (priority), business or the kids? ...always the kids actually will be your priority. So, I need to minimise a little bit my time in the (business)..... I am most involved in these things (household responsibilities) 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”.*

## **Anashe**

*It is very hard managing, because obviously, everything I do I have to work around my son or my family. My husband works in healthcare and he is full time and a manager, so his 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. So, if he is to get up in the morning and go to work, obviously I take our son to school in the morning at 8:30, so I don't live a flexible life where I can say everything should shift around me (laughs)..yes, I am the one shifting around everybody in the house. So, that's the challenge I have. So, here is what I do, I fit in meetings or whatever, with the understanding that it has to be around all of them.*

(In explaining how her gender had had an impact on her during the start-up stages of her business)

*So, there was a time I was doing campaigning work for people in detentions because there were no Zimbabwean community people who had been through the process, so I was one of the leading campaigners. As you know we used a lot of email, there wasn't social media or Facetime. So, I used to coordinate activities online. We organised a face-to-face conference and I was asked to speak about the campaigns, and it was the first time meeting everybody and that people were meeting me. So, after my talk, people got to put a face to the name in the emails I was sending. I was passing a group of Zimbabwean men and one of them was in a group and came to me and was like are you the person who coordinates the emails and the campaigns? and I said 'yes', and he actually said, "I thought you were a man". Why is that? I asked .."because the work you are doing I would expect a man to do that". So, this was definitely, I would say from my own community. We are not yet at that stage understanding that certain things women can do and at that time I was even younger. And I said, but my name is a girl's name. But he was confused, he could not work it out in his head. He had to approach me and that is the mindset of the men in my community. Again, that is the thing, they come to my office for a meeting, they sit down and have a cup of tea, they ask me questions. I say this is my workplace and they expect that it is run by someone else; they think I am a volunteer. The bias is more from my community than from the native community. It is because I am a woman ..... That is the perception in my community".*

### ***Gendered work roles: It's a family affair***

It is increasingly recognised that the role of an entrepreneur is not a solo performance, but rather, much entrepreneurial action is performed within the context of families and households (Carter *et al.*, 2017). In three of the cases, the spouses and/or other family members either work formally or help informally in the business. Most of the women, however, are very much the face and leader of the business both physically in the workspaces and when promoted online. Roles and responsibilities are clearly assigned and husbands, although they may have their own separate business or job, all tended to play a supportive role, some contributing specific skills as and when required. The degree of spousal involvement in the businesses varied between the cases.

As the owner, leader and face of the business, Aliya's entrepreneurial identity is securely established. However, her husband is a notable presence in her dialogue as she recounts her experiences as a business owner, and he is often visible by her side in media photos and at industry events. At the factory in her interactions with staff, her leadership position as the owner is evident and staff are deferential to her when in her presence. Aliya notes that when together, people will often address her rather than her husband in recognition of her leadership role and despite her gender. Whilst this serves to reinforce and sustain her entrepreneurial identity within the workplace, it is a noteworthy reality given that her husband was a successful and established businessman before they came to the UK.

Aliya's husband's main role within the business is to source the machinery and he is responsible for developing productivity and efficiency. This role is related to his previous business and at the same time reinforces the distinction between what might be perceived as masculine and technical roles from more feminine responsibilities related to caring and helping; relational tasks such as people management and marketing (Hechavarria and Ingram, 2016). This is a similar experience to Zendaya whose husband also assists her in the business although, he works abroad, and his main form of employment is in a different sector. In Zendaya's case her husband is a designer as a hobby and as she says "*... he has added value to my brand and in the CIC company, I have registered him as an external director. He knows where to get things. He knows where to source fabric. He knows where to get machinery*". In both cases, the input of their spouse is seen as complementary to the roles held by the

businesswomen. However, fundamentally, the women feel that they control their businesses but do so with the assistance of their spouses.

In contrast, although Anashe has expressed ambitions of one day running a business jointly with her husband, her reflection also suggested strong reservations:

*".... my business is my business. I am in control. He is not in control of my business which is great. He does not meddle with my business. I think if that were the case, then I wouldn't be here to be able to ...because I think he might feel a discomfort with his authority. (Now) I am able to manage my husband...so he doesn't interfere in my business at all. In fact, (since) I met him years back, he knows who I am, he knows that I am the type of person who is always up and about doing stuff. So, he knows me, and he never tried to sabotage my business or cancel my ideas".*

In this instance, she is reluctant to have too much spousal involvement because of the potential conflict it may cause and challenge to her entrepreneurial identity. However, she recognises the support that she has in being free to run her business even though it may not be profitable and contribute to the household in the short term.

*"I'm certain if I had a husband who was demanding like financially and who would have been saying, go and look for a job, so that you get more money... I'm privileged to be in that position of taking (a few) years of developing a business without income".*

The support that is required is specific and it is noteworthy that in all of the responses, even in the case where the woman is single, they were cognisant of, if not directly experiencing, the potential for power struggles based on gender. This is consistent with findings of Osirim's (2003) study which considered entrepreneurial women in a Zimbabwean context and found that the assistance provided by husbands in their wives' business can be a means by which the husbands reassert patriarchal control and therefore, can represent a real risk.

In the cases in this study where women are married, they indicate an awareness of the patriarchy that exists in their countries of origin but also recognition that their UK experience requires that there be some form of adaptation or reconciliation between the differing cultures. Given that her husband had previously been a successful businessman in Syria, Aliya

is aware that culturally her role as a business owner in the UK is significantly different to the practice in her home country. Although she states that the division of household responsibilities is weighted towards her because it is more practical for her to assume the childcare duties, she asserts that it is less *“about our traditional culture but we are adapting to our lifestyle here”*. Consequently, her husband will undertake household chores if he sees that they need to be done but spends more of his time in the office at the factory working on his own business and closes up the factory and offices on behalf of Aliya each day.

Aliya is acutely conscious of the trauma her husband has encountered as a refugee in having lost an established business due to the Syrian crisis and having to rebuild it from nothing. Furthermore, he had a longer investigation into his asylum application. Mutual support and a diffusion of cultural gendered power struggles has been a necessity as she transitions from refugee to entrepreneur. The importance of this familial support both in the workplace and in the home is of crucial importance. Zendaya reflects in a similar way on this topic as follows:

*“He is very, very extra good because as much as he is an auditor in the pharmacy world, he understands as well that when we met, I was already successful. He is not embarrassed to follow. That’s what I like about him, he is a humble person... Some men they get.. they are pushed down when the woman brings in more money than they do, but this one, he does not find it like that ..... So, it is good when you have family support and those are the close people. In English they say, charity begins at home and I think in my base in the home, I have enough support. So, when I go out there, whatever people say ....., we have our own direct community, so we are fine”.*

This deep sense of responsibility between immediate family members, an inner circle of support was echoed by most of the other women. Thus, a stable background context provides a buffer that enables a resilient self-identity in the face of stigmatised and marginalised identities which are experienced externally to the private sphere.

### ***Motherhood: tensions and duty***

The tension caused by the pull of maternal responsibilities against the requirements of the business was another gendered constraint identified. All of the women originate from cultures where the centrality of the family and the allocation of childcare and domestic



responsibilities are placed in the domain of women (Ahmad, 2011; Welsh *et al.*, 2014). Consequently, it is against a background of these norms where the maternal identity is dominant for women, that the women have started their businesses. Azadeh who is Iranian, single and without children reflects on her decision to opt-out of this dilemma:

*“But women are mothers. They have responsibilities, like sacrificing themselves. Maybe that is why I didn’t want to be a mother because my Mum was always sacrificing herself.....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”.*

She explains that the experience of launching a business has been challenging even without the additional responsibilities of a family and the expectations placed on women within the family setting. The excerpt from Anashe’s reflections on being a mother and an entrepreneur fits this description particularly as later, she discusses the effect on her wellbeing of carrying the majority of domestic and caring responsibilities, *“it does make me tired being a mum, a wife and running my businesses. It is not very easy to juggle”*. Not only must Anashe, fit the business around her household responsibilities, but the disadvantages of being a refugee with a low social status in the UK, with limited access to resources, means that Anashe, like the other women, is managing her home very differently to how she would have done in her home country. In Zimbabwe, her middle-class status based on her family background, would have given her access to domestic help, for example. Consequently, there is a cost associated with attempting to combine these identity roles, whether it be in terms of physical wellbeing or in an ability to devote the time necessary to grow the business which then limits the potential financial rewards of the business (Klyver, Løwe Nielsen and Evald, 2013; Marlow and Martinez Dy, 2018)

The conflict arising from managing a business and a young family is similarly captured by Aliya, who has a more established business, which she feels places more demands upon her time than she is now prepared to invest. The trade-off that takes place between pursuing a successful business and the responsibility for the wellbeing of one’s family is a tension that weighs heavily on Aliya.

The dominance and persistence of the maternal identity has multiple implications for the identity work of the women. First, it can be seen to have an impact upon the self-identity and purpose of the women, strengthening their sense of self and further empowering the family relationship ties that will combat the stigma associated with being damaged refugees. Second, it can be a driver to claim an entrepreneurial identity. Third, it can be a hindrance to the pace of development of an entrepreneurial identity as demonstrated by the struggle some of the women encounter as they try to balance their responsibilities. These themes will be discussed further in the following chapter where the identity work undertaken by the women in regard to their gendered identities will be presented.

#### **5.4 Class and disability and the entrepreneur**

Azadeh is from Iran and is single, with no children. Her business, which offers therapy to primarily vulnerable women through upcycling craft activities, is in its start-up phase. She is struggling to access funding and secure contracts to progress the business. In this extract she talks about the challenges she faces as she engages in entrepreneurial action.

##### ***Gendered work roles - legitimacy***

The impact of gender upon the choice of business, how the business is run, gendered roles within the business and how it fits within the household context were themes that informed the entrepreneurial experience of the women in this study and raised issues of their legitimacy as business owners (Marlow and McAdam, 2013). In most of the cases, the women were involved in feminised sectors: food, fashion design and accessories, crafts and therapy. Aliya initially considered a catering business, but she ultimately decided to launch a business in food production, which we see from the extract was deemed to be a less appropriate undertaking for a woman. This is a subtle distinction made between the two types of business highlighting the type of activity and the degree of scalability that is expected of women entrepreneurs (Treanor, Marlow and Swail, 2021); the difference between baking in a kitchen (food production in a domestic setting) and a larger scale food production business requiring a factory and industrial equipment. The anticipated start-up costs associated with industrialised food production appear prohibitive to many women; Aliya notes that many of the other businesses in the food production industry had an established heritage within the local farming community as their foundation. In the absence of these advantages Aliya was

equipped with a desperate need to support her family financially (her husband's asylum application had been delayed), science and language degrees, and a passion for authentic food from her home country. These were the key motivators and enablers that led her to start her business.

Whilst Aliya emphasised that the prejudiced response of the farmer described here in the extract was a rare occurrence, this example clearly demonstrates that within entrepreneurship, a gendered and a racial bias can be experienced concurrently, the effect of which is to reinforce difference and a sense of being an outsider (Essers and Benschop, 2007; Dy, Marlow and Martin, 2017). As previously noted, Anashe is subjected to internalised racism from some individuals in her home community and what is seen here in this extract, is a racial bias intersecting with a gender bias. In her experience, it was not expected that as a black woman she would have a high-profile role coordinating and organising events, and in her role as a businesswoman, leading an organisation. This challenge to her identity serves to undermine Anashe as she tries to progress and legitimise her consultancy business and convince others of her ability:

*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?*

In contrast, Aliya recognises what she views as more positive ways in which her gender can elicit a favourable response where she and her business are viewed *"in a more gentle way .....they see women in charge and they feel they need to support her"*. The novelty element of being a woman in an industry can position her as warranting support and assistance (Swail and Marlow, 2018), rather than being perceived as a challenge to patriarchal norms as Aliya felt would be the case in Syria. Although this approach reinforces the notion of an assumed female deficit in entrepreneurship (Marlow, 2020), it also signals to Aliya that her gender is tolerated and can be used to her benefit. Aliya talks of the women in the UK being *"stronger"* than in her home country and so it is evident that her experience of being gendered as a businesswoman is seen in relation to who she is as a woman in the UK and who she was as a woman in Syria.

Zendaya also reinforced this distinction when she recounted the disadvantage that women experience due to their gendered position in her home country of Zimbabwe and the socio-cultural implications when they are in the UK:

*“If a woman does something wrong, a man would go in place of her simply because 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 it was that I was so shocked... that you know 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 elder's eyes, it is showing disrespect. So, the cultures differ”.*

This highlights the significance of how based on gendered cultural norms, women's behaviours may be misconstrued, particularly when they are in spaces where there are explicit power dynamics. The implications of this are evident not only within the asylum-seeking process, but also later within the context of entrepreneurship when the women may be seeking finance for the business.

### **Azadeh**

*In the beginning it was supposed to be help and support from the other directors but later on I found that I am on my own and it is very hard to write proposals and in looking for funding and contracts, so recently I am looking for people who can help me in writing .... because I am dyslexic and I am ADHD .....I didn't know that support existed (for this) until I had a meeting with one of the artists working at this charitable organisation for creatives and he said that a particular charity has a special service supporting people who have disabilities, but I didn't know. I have physical, mental, learning disabilities. So, I am ticking all the boxes, but I didn't know there was extra support out there to help me with writing my bids. But it's with that organisation only; as for the other organisations, I do not know how to find this help..... But now I'm feeling a very low mood, I need energy, I need more hands. It's a very big idea to run. It's like it is a very big tree but I need to tailor the shape that I want and on my own, I can't do it. It needs skills, it needs more hands. It needs at the same time pushing from different sides together.....And business wise, when I was working in Iran it was very good but here it is more*

*politics. It is not easy here. Here you need to know people, the connections. Like that artist was saying, if you have connections in that particular organisation, if you know the artists there, the panellists there, then you can access the help. And I see yes, all the things are going to particular organisations or certain people here. So, it's like privilege here is a lot. It is in Iran as well but it's heart-breaking because when you are talking about ancient Iran, and India is the same, they are talking about castes, if you know about different castes, people of this caste never can get to that caste. So, it doesn't show here but when you go in you feel it like, okay, this is not my caste and I am not allowed to get there. If they let me to get above that caste that I am, then I am the lowest, because I am a refugee and I am from Iran, this is still very low. Even to make friendship or relationship, I feel like people have that in their mind. If they let me to get from here to the top, it's for some advertising. Oh, we let that person grow that much and we have people from that community, so that MP or that member from somewhere or the director coming from that estranged background, but just to show how good we are. But who is controlling? It is those people from there. This is the object. (Sighs) Yes, this is the problem.*

### ***Embodied effects and entrepreneurship***

This extract introducing Azadeh demonstrates the prominence and challenges caused by the intersection of disability, class, race and refugee status in the early stages of her business. In so doing, it highlights the implications of carrying multiple marginalising and stigmatising identity markers. Diagnosed with a physical chronic illness together with neurodevelopmental conditions, Azadeh's experiences of disability and being a refugee have inspired the therapeutic craft workshops she offers. This confirms previous research that identified disability as a 'business asset' that could form the basis of a business opportunity (Jammaers and Zanoni, 2018) as well as providing the flexibility that she requires in living with various impairments (Cooney, 2008). Neurodiverse individuals can be stigmatised or at a minimum, their disorders can be so little understood that they can be left feeling marginalised (Wiklund *et al.*, 2018). Conditions such as ADHD are associated with symptoms including inattentiveness and difficulty in organising tasks while dyslexic individuals can struggle with reading and writing. Consequently, Azadeh struggles to focus when writing proposals and funding applications and is likely to make spelling and grammatical errors; therefore, her ability to undertake certain entrepreneurial activities are hindered.

These challenges are further compounded by the fact that English is an additional language for Azadeh and so her ethnic minority status provides another source of disadvantage. In her opinion, *“if you have good vocabulary, good grammar and good English, you win. That’s it”*. Although Azadeh’s disabilities are non-visible, her experience demonstrates that there are embodied effects on the entrepreneurial experience (Kašperová and Kitching, 2014; Kašperová, Kitching and Blackburn, 2018) beyond that of being a refugee. The stresses endured by her body as she tries to complete funding application forms are physical as well as psychological. Consequently, the implications of this process have an impact upon both the development of the business and her identity construction. The process has caused Azadeh to compare herself with other similar business start-ups who appear to be getting ahead in their business endeavours. She feels her growth has been stunted and admits *‘I am already feeling behind. If I switch off, I am behind.... The other people running similar projects are doing good. They have different support, but I don’t know how to find similar support. I am not happy about myself’*. Thus, the self-employed route has made her feel even more vulnerable and unsure of herself, having an impact not only upon the early stage of her business, but also upon her self-identity.

### ***Social class, networks and entrepreneurship***

As Azadeh attempts to establish her business she is conscious that her refugee status has supplanted her previous social class status. Here, in the UK she is subject to a class system which, although outwardly more subtle, operates similar to the caste system found in other cultures. Despite having lived through many years of war in Iran, Azadeh does not fit the media- presented profile of a refugee (Mac for the Daily Mail, 2015; Selby, 2015). Looking back to how the notion of class was enacted based on access to resources, social position and credibility through credentials, Azadeh would clearly be defined as middle-class, but she has been stripped of her class position because of her refugee experience, although she still refers back to it frequently. Her family background is upper-middle class in terms of education, job roles, and wealth and she holds multiple degrees. She previously worked as an architect and was in the process of completing a PhD in Italy prior to her persecution by the authorities in Iran who accused her of spying.

When she considered the change in her status, she compared her current life with previous times in Iran where she had strong networks and privilege; effectively she has taken steps down the mobility ladder, as she says, she had become *'the lowest'*. Accordingly, this has had implications for the various social groups that she was able to access. The significance of this shift in her class position is highlighted by the fact that she has concealed her refugee status from her family because, in their opinion and based on the history of Iranians leaving during periods of war, *'it was always a shame to have a title of refugee. People begging, please help me, please accept me'*. Her family is concerned that she is living below the standard that they would expect, imagining poverty and poor conditions when compared to the more luxurious Iranian lifestyle to which they are accustomed, conditions which she explains away by claiming she lives a student lifestyle. However, for Azadeh, the trade-off for this shift is *'the opportunity to sit here safe and having food, having a roof, having a pet, having company'*. Despite the relief felt in being recognised as a refugee and being given the right to stay, a lowered social status has potential implications when starting as self-employed. In Azadeh's experience, this has meant that the environment is not a level playing field as she has limited access to resources and networks.

As she has ventured into self-employment, Azadeh remains acutely aware that she is often prejudged based on her race and her migration status and sees how this can be used to serve the purposes of others. With the development of her business and as she and her business are endorsed, she is sceptical of the motivations of those who are promoting the positive discourse; they still remain the ones who have controlled this shift. She is not yet confident that the agency she possesses will be sufficient to counter the structural constraints of discrimination. In this instance, class race and migration status meet as she tries to shift from a volunteer refugee to entrepreneur.

As is the case with some of the other women in the study, social status in the community for Azadeh is increasing relative to the starting position of being a refugee. However, this shift is complex as there remains a disparity in relation to her wealth status when compared to her previous life in Iran and there remains a power dynamic that she must negotiate as she strives to establish the business in her dealings with local authorities and various other organisations and businesses. This is mirrored in Aliya's experience of growing her business as she deals

with national supermarket chains and gaining national recognition whilst managing her family responsibilities. It is the complexity of these power dynamics to which Azadeh has referred as she deals with the challenges of class, gender, race, disability and refugee status.

### **5.5 Persistent challenges: intersectional effects on running a business.**

The vignettes presented above described the stigmatisation and marginalisation caused by the various social categories that the women carry and examined how this is experienced in terms of their identities as they transition from being refugees to becoming business owners. The chapter now turns to consider some of the persistent challenges faced by the women; the findings reveal that there are intersectional effects that have a direct impact upon how they experience fundamental aspects of entrepreneurship.

#### ***Access to finance***

The continued uncertainty associated with having refugee or humanitarian protection status whereby individuals are granted the permission to stay in the UK for an initial five years, means that within this period it remains difficult for individuals to approach banks for finance in order to start or grow a business. Three of the participants were able to launch their businesses using either a start-up loan through the enterprise agency or a grant which was part of a generic business development scheme. Floriane used savings accumulated over two years from her husband's paid employment, whilst crowdfunding was an alternative source of start-up funding for Anashe. Aliya recounted the difficulties she experienced in accessing bank funding:

*"I could not go to the bank because I'm not having residency full like permanent residency and the business is not built up so the bank will give me loan. According to what? They cannot risk it... this even made us to stop for a couple of months in production and the business could easily just be ruined and stopped because I have no other options. None of the banks will lend me money. The start-up loan of £2500 was already spent on as much as we could in equipment and there was no other source of money.....Banks, all financial companies will say you've got five years residency so they can't like, half guarantee that I can pay back what I'm getting out...even getting a mortgage for your premises is challenging because you only have five years stay....."*



Given the limited financing options available, Aliya has also had to consider alternative forms of investment, such as crowdfunding, and while she successfully raised the funds needed to buy additional equipment, she is reluctant to do so again as she feels that “it’s like begging people” and reinforces the ‘dependent refugee’ stereotype. In contrast, Anashe has a more favourable opinion of crowdfunding having successfully run a campaign to raise funds for her accessories company. The campaign was launched as part of a NatWest Bank programme encouraging women into business. However, Anashe has found that accessing more traditional funding for her consulting business has been more difficult.

*“Getting funds from banks is a challenge. Banks don’t give loans... Now if they are to give loans, you have to be a certain type of business that they feel will make millions. I guess you know as we see it on TV that investors like investing in things that will give it big return. Yeah, so for me I don’t even try to get a loan from the bank. I fear, I don’t think I’ll get a loan from the bank. I would look for crowdfunding and from friends”.*

Not only does Anashe feel that her business does not fit the profile of one that would be attractive to formal funders, but also, she feels that the requirements are such that her refugee experience limits her from accessing such funding:

*“If I am looking for loans or financial support it is the criteria that the system brings..... So, those kinds of systems that include if you own a house. I don’t have a mortgage. I don’t have a credit card with thousands of money. I have some arrears because I did not understand financial planning. I never had the education that if you miss a payment, it will impact you. So, I thought if I miss a payment I could call up and say I’m sorry, I will pay it, then will pay it later, that should suffice, but actually, it works against you. So, I understand that ..... you should build in your financial history and put things in place... I didn’t know that. 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. So, for me, it wasn’t intentional that I wanted to be in that position. If I had the education, the support, I would have known some of these things”.*

This also highlights the significance of contextual differences. Having arrived in the UK aged 18, Anashe, feels that she has missed learning the life lessons she would have had within her

family environment, and also spoke of how things were done differently in her home country. Greater informality with payments and business dealings in her country of origin do not have the same implications as in the UK where a much more tightly regulated system results in tarnished credit profiles and compromises an individual's credibility. Floriane had a similar experience in terms of reconciling the way business is conducted here in the UK and in her home country of Cameroon where she had successfully run a similar business:

*“And here, if you don't pay your rent, you're going to be in trouble. Back home if you don't pay your rent you explain to the landlord. But here, they don't want to know. It is hard, the system here. It's a different system and there is so much to do. So much to apply for, so many rules”.*

Although access to finance is universally recognised as a primary challenge for business start-up and growth, particularly for women entrepreneurs and other marginalised groups (Carter *et al.*, 2015; Leitch, Welter and Henry, 2018), the women in this study are facing increased challenges that are rooted in the uncertainty and stigma associated with their refugee status. In Floriane's example, a poor credit history may be the result of failure to adapt to, or lack of knowledge of the cultural differences that affect the way in which business is practiced in the UK when compared to back in Cameroon. Aliya felt that lenders viewed refugees only in terms of being high risk, rather than recognising the resilience they would use in order to be resourceful and persistent in their entrepreneurial endeavours. Her experience was that in order to have a raised profile and positive recognition, she required a success as a refugee. The image and identity presented and access to supportive networks was required to gain this credibility.

### ***Access to information and networks***

A lack of access to information was an additional structural constraint with which the women were confronted. With similarities to the challenges faced within the asylum process which was complex and wieldy for refugee women who arrived in the country with limited resources, a lack of language skills and often settled in areas where they did not know people, accessing information to help them start and run a business was an equally challenging process. Further disadvantage was evident in the paucity and fragility of their networks due

to the low social class position they held as refugees (Pichler and Wallace, 2009). For many of the women, their embeddedness within refugee groups limited their exposure to people who were in the same situation as them. In her reflections on the implications of this limitation, Zendaya suggests that she would have been able to access information and navigate the complexities of the business start-up process with greater efficiency and speed if she had partnered with someone who had papers and was already established in the host country.

In describing the greatest challenge she faces as a business woman, Anashe also refers to not being able to access information:

*“a lack of information, timely information. So, I would go round and round trying to find the correct information.....Yes, 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. Yes, these are some of the challenges”.*

Floriane relied on her experience of owning a restaurant and bar in her home country and informal advice from her social worker who later became her mentor: *“I had no help at all. No business advice. The only thing I had was just from back home”.* Based on the experiences of the women, it was not just the availability of support and guidance that was needed but the quality of the support was deemed to be of equal importance. Encountering restrictions from the institutions, Aliya describes the frustration she felt with not being able to access effective assistance from the local council:

*“Now, one of the struggles we actually had was the council because they are claiming that they are supporting businesses, but whenever I ask for help, they just sent me links. They don't do really good support and this is what made us leave and relocate to another council, they are a more cooperative council”.*

Further negative encounters with the authorities stem from the refugee experience as well as a lack of understanding shown by the authorities. The experience of being moved from one accommodation to another as an asylum seeker left one participant excluded by the council in terms of alleged council tax arrears. This had implications for her when she attempted to

apply for premises for her business located in the creative retail area in her city, as her application was refused because of the outstanding debt. These experiences demonstrate that institutions such as local authorities or banks can be either a source of assistance or a source of obstruction for women refugees as they engage in entrepreneurial activities. There are power dynamics that were made manifest in the form of legal interactions, whilst disengagement left the women feeling abandoned.

## 5.6 Summary

This chapter presented the findings using a series of vignettes. In so doing, it effectively demonstrates at an individual level the effects of the stigmatising refugee identity ascribed to each of these women upon their arrival in the UK. It also gives voice to the individual women. The thematic analysis of data reveals the stigmatisation and structural inequalities faced by refugee women on account of the intersection of their race, gender, class and immigration status as they pursue entrepreneurial endeavours. The asylum process is shown to have an impact upon how the women are identified as foreigners in the UK and provides a starting point from which they reconstruct their identity. It emphasises the social implications of identity construction and the interaction between structure and agency. Beyond the saliency of the refugee status, the findings show that the women experience discrimination linked to their class positioning, racial biases and gender roles. Disability was also present for one of the participants as an identity marker that results in disadvantage as she attempts to access funding and deal with the practical and administrative activities of entrepreneurship. Gender was shown to potentially affect growth ambitions as women navigate their expected maternal responsibilities with business demands. It also served to position the women as they reconstructed their identities drawing on their past positionality, gendered and classed in view of who they were or could be as businesswomen. All of which have an impact upon their identity work and the business activity that they engaged with.

One of the issues we see emerging is a liminal space, deemed to be a state of “in-betweenness and ambiguity”(Beech, 2011) between the sense of identity that people have had of themselves and the identities that are being ascribed to them. This creates a liminal friction where the individual tries to make sense of who they were, who they are, and how they are being seen. The space in which the women must make sense of their contested identities

presents a conflictual notion of liminality, which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 7. The findings also suggest that there are elements of empowerment and strength within this experience and these aspects will be explored in subsequent chapters as the structural and agentic dynamics are examined in detail.

Although the findings are consistent with extant work examining challenges facing women entrepreneurs and ethnic minority entrepreneurs, they offer new insight into the intersectional effects of these various categories of difference when underpinned by a stigmatised refugee identity. The next chapter will consider in further detail the strategies used by the women in reconstructing their identities in order to navigate the stigma and discrimination resulting from these structural constraints. It will capture the dynamic nature of the identity work process as the women draw on various strategies as they develop their entrepreneurial identities.

## **6 Constructing an entrepreneurial identity, challenging stigmatised identities**

*“Life is like drawing with a pen. You don’t have time to make a mistake and then erase it. It must be from the beginning; you must think where you are going to draw your line. So, I learned that if I draw something and make a mistake and if I make a line in a way I don’t like it, I’m going to put nice paint on and draw attention to those points somewhere else to take the eyes away from the mistakes I made and tailor it in a nice way instead of just concentrating on cleaning those lines..... So how can we remake, or retailor those mistakes, bad knocks, or whatever happened to us that broke us or that made us disappointed. It is the art of life to put nice colours, the positivity of that.” Azadeh*

The preceding chapter revealed the various identities held by each of the women and illustrated their entrepreneurial experiences. The accounts of racial stigma, refugee stigma and gender, disability and class biases highlighted the intersectional effects experienced by the women from their arrival in the UK and their application for asylum, through to the establishment of their various businesses. This chapter now extends this analysis to present additional findings that move beyond a description of these challenges and inequalities to highlight the identity work processes the women undertake in order to navigate these biases. In recognition that identity work is not a linear process, this chapter offers insights into how the women have had to review and re-work their various identities as they transition towards establishing an entrepreneurial identity.

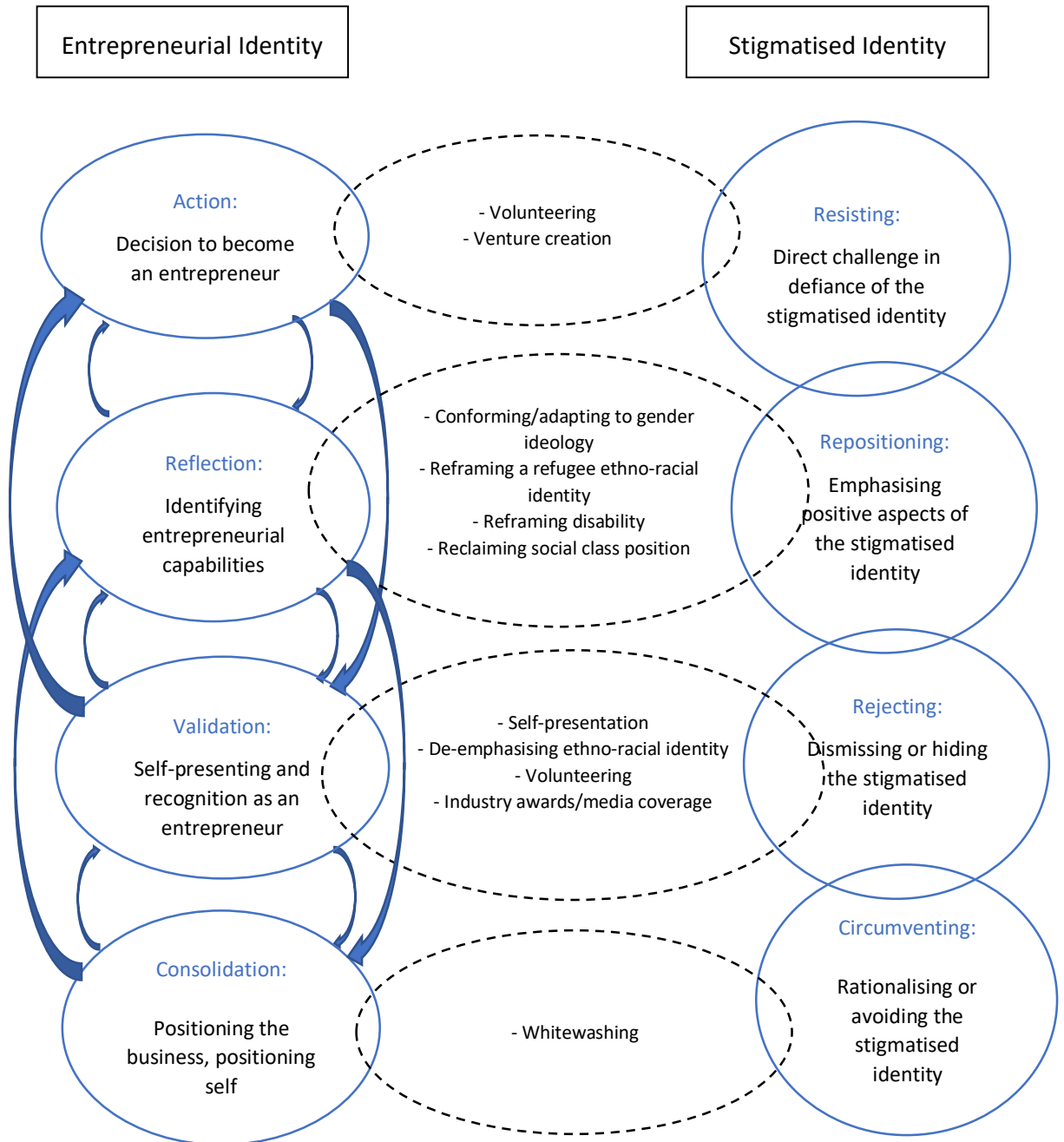
The findings in this chapter are set out in relation to two key themes: First, the interconnectedness of stigma management and developing an entrepreneurial identity are highlighted as the overall process of identity work. Then, using thematic analysis and an intersectional positional lens, forms of identity work are identified with a focus on the dynamic nature of this process as the women construct their identities in the passage of time. In so doing, we are able to examine the interaction between engagement with entrepreneurship and the identity construction of refugee women in the UK.

## 6.1 Identity work: Constructing and confronting identities

In recognition that the identity work undertaken by individuals includes stigma management strategies (Brewis and Godfrey, 2018), this thesis contends that there is a distinguishable process of identity work within which refugee women devise strategies to reconstruct their stigmatised identities and move towards an entrepreneurial identity (Figure 6-1). The process of becoming an entrepreneur involved four broad areas corresponding to entrepreneurial activities that emerged through a thematic analysis of data, these were: action, reflection/evaluation, validation and consolidation. The findings illustrated how this identity work process also involved key responses to the stigmatised identities; these were: resistance, repositioning, rejection, and circumvention. Although presented sequentially, these broad groupings are for purposes of analytical ease rather than reflecting a linear process. (See Appendix 4 for an extract of the data structure).

The individual strategies the women adopted for this process of identity construction correspond to their various identity markers, but as an intersectional lens would suggest, this is a dynamic and complex process. Therefore, as is evident from the findings which will be presented later in this chapter, consciously and unconsciously, the women each use multiple and, in some cases, contradictory strategies concurrently.

Figure 6-1: Overview of the identity work process





## 6.2 Refugee entrepreneurs: reworking a gendered identity over time

### ***Entrepreneurial Action: reclaiming and re-working gender roles***

The identity work undertaken by this cohort of women in terms of their gender identity related predominantly to their understanding of what it means to be a woman and how their womanhood must be enacted in the context of being an entrepreneur in the UK. For those who had children, their gender identity was ostensibly connected to their maternal and spousal roles. This position emanated from their prior expressions of womanhood in their countries of origin where they were defined primarily by these roles. Two of the women had left their children behind in their home countries therefore, they entered the UK feeling stripped of their maternal identity. For Zendaya, leaving her home country meant leaving her husband and children resulting in her also feeling robbed of her marital status. Hence, for some women, they felt that these important expressions of being a woman had been taken from them, compounding the effects of their refugee status.

*Yes, when there are no conjugal roles taking place, you are not regarded as a wife. So, they started to address me as Ms. I asked why. They said, where is your husband now? So, imagine I was struggling with those things to accept the Ms instead of a Mrs. So yes, it was very hard. (That part) of my identity is very important.*

*Having to leave my children was the most difficult thing to do in my life....*

In response to feeling denied these gendered attributes, Zendaya aligned herself with other African refugee women who had left behind their children and who were “*struggling to understand themselves, who felt isolated, confused and who were (also) fighting to maintain their identities*”. It was through this network of grieving women that her first project dedicated to empowering marginalised African women was born, developing into a membership organisation. Taking entrepreneurial action was thus, synonymous with Zendaya reclaiming her identity as a woman and then in establishing herself as an independent refugee woman. She achieved this by creating a network of women with whom she could relate and to whom she would subsequently offer a service.

In Floriane’s case, whilst entrepreneurial action emerged as a reaction against the refugee experience, it also enabled her to send for her remaining children in Cameroon. Through the

financial rewards of the business, she could prove her ability to be financially independent and self-sustaining. In so doing, she reclaimed her role as mother.

*That's the good part of my business, for making my children to be reunited with me. You know it is not always about money. It is about living a good life, a family life and make sure that you care about your kids. It's not about money. What is the point if you have money, but you don't have your kids with you? You know they are somewhere; they can't come near you, it's killing you. That was the best day of my life when they had the visa. So, when I do a review, I can't say that it is a loss because at least my kids are here.*

Thus, the findings demonstrate that taking action through self-employment enabled the participants to reclaim their maternal role. When constrained by the structural barriers confronting refugees in a host country, and with the additional responsibility of providing for the household, the participants drew on entrepreneurial agency, action rather than inaction. There is further evidence of this in Aliya's case. For Aliya, becoming a refugee in the UK prompted a shift in her traditionally gendered role as she became the primary income earner in her family due to the delay to her husband's asylum application. This represented, and required, a reworking of her gender role particularly given the patriarchal roots of her Syrian origins (Bastian, Sidani and Amine, 2018). Thus, her decision to start a business was in direct response to the situation in which she found herself due to her refugee status and driven by her identity as a mother and wife with a responsibility to care and provide for her family.

*That made me think I need to do something 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...*

In these examples, entrepreneurship is the means by which the women can enact provider maternal roles and yet, the findings show that as the women become more embedded in their entrepreneurial identity, a conflict emerges that requires further identity work. Aliya first highlights this when she reflects on what it means to be a woman entrepreneur:

*As a mother and entrepreneur you need to show these strong points but inside you feel emotional...you need to be a strong tough image on the outside but on the inside, you*

*are not like this..... It is a big conflict with women rather than with men, really. I feel...I'm working on these priorities.*

Externally, Aliya feels that she must portray more masculine qualities that mask what are seen as her inner emotional feminine characteristics. Zendaya also refers to notions of masculinities, associating these behaviours with an entrepreneurial identity. She highlights being direct, intentional and strong-willed as she reflects on having to, at times, *'be like a man in (her) thinking'*. Rather than this being in conflict with her identity as a woman, she interprets this to be a strength as she conducts her business because, *"when they say I behave like a man, then it is good because I know that I am impacting them!"*. However, she is conscious that she must project a strong masculine image to counter the gender bias that she experiences and thus, she, like Aliya reworks this aspect of her gender identity. This finding is consistent with previous research which captured women adopting masculine characteristics which they associated with an entrepreneurial identity in order to gain legitimacy (Swail and Marlow, 2018).

### ***Conforming to and adapting traditional gendered ideologies***

Within their private relationships the women negotiated traditional gender roles and rearticulated them where they felt it was necessary within the UK context. The findings suggest that it is a complex identity that over time requires that the women either prioritise or attempt to balance various aspects of their gendered identity. This requires that they engage in reflexive self-evaluation of how they enact their womanhood in relation to traditional gender ideologies and their entrepreneurial activities.

Floriane, uses her entrepreneurial identity to strengthen her maternal role. Above the bar in her restaurant, there is a large portrait of her posing regally for the camera. She refers to herself in this photograph as *'The Barbeque Mother'*, an apt title given that her husband and children all work in the business and securing her position as a matriarchal figure in the family business (Smith, 2014). Her business continues to be the vehicle through which she enacts her womanhood from a position of assertiveness. She explains:

*We (Floriane and her husband) lead in the business together but I would say I am most in charge....however, if I am cooking in the kitchen at home, I have to serve my*

*husband because it has nothing to do with business. Once you are married, and as a mother you have certain commitments .....I feel stronger as a person as a mother, as a wife. As a businesswoman you have to stay strong to combine (those roles). It's not easy.... Most difficult is that you have to deal with the marital situation. You have to look after your husband.*

*I've got no family life, ..... because I work every single day..... I speak to them a lot and they understand that Mummy is busy. I buy everything that they need and sometimes they will come and stay with me in the (restaurant) kitchen, so, it's a routine. They have grown up with that routine.*

Notwithstanding the obvious tension that exists between the expectations she faces as a mother and a wife and the demands of her business, Floriane has chosen to enact her maternal identity and her entrepreneurial identity in such a way that over time, they have become mutually supportive. This resonates with the work of Duberley and Carrigan (2013) who found that among some of their respondents, being business owners enabled them to be 'good mothers'. Although Floriane's experience may not equate to traditional Western ideologies of 'good mothering' where mothers stay home with their children (Reynolds, 2001; Knight, 2020), she believes that she achieves this through the very act of being a business owner as she has provided her children with their needs and she is able to maintain a close relationship with them as they work with her. She also adheres to traditional gender ideology in the home space but within her business space, she is able to challenge this. Despite this perceived equilibrium, studies of family businesses suggest that there is the potential for longer term tensions to emerge (Caputo *et al.*, 2018).

Whilst Floriane feels that she has managed to successfully achieve a balance between her maternal identity and her entrepreneurial identity, after six years in her business, Aliya has chosen to engage in continued identity work which will prioritise her maternal identity. At the time of interviewing, she was considering reducing the time spent in the business to assume a more traditional gender role at home that would be consistent with expectations of womanhood from her home country.

*And now I think, my daughter next year is going to high school, and I feel I need to be closer to her. I want her to talk to me and feel there's no barrier between us, because there is no point to have money, big business and be famous and my kids are not in the right position. 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 children) and 90% for the business. Nowadays, I have managed to make it 50-50. But I think I need to change it to a different way so my husband will be involved more in the business and I will be more with the kids..... they need to feel that they are secure and that the support is there and that they are the priority for their parents.*

Aliya's gendered identity work has come full circle. However, reclaiming her maternal role at this point in the lifecycle of her business requires that she renegotiates her entrepreneurial identity. Although she does not explicitly refer to the cultural and social norms of her home country, she has shifted towards a more traditional gendered approach.

### **6.3 The refugee entrepreneur: reworking racial and ethnic identities through time**

#### ***Reframing a refugee ethnic minority identity***

In response to the racial discrimination and the stigma associated with being a refugee, for some of the participants, their choice of business reflected a reframing of the refugee identity discourse to focus on more positive aspects of their ethnic roots. This is consistent with findings from earlier studies on stigmatised identities (Toyoki and Brown, 2014; Doldor and Atewologun, 2020) and also resonates with observations of resistance in marginalised and oppressed individuals through acts that uphold ethno-cultural heritage (Richter-Devroe, 2011; Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2015; Sabella and El-Far, 2019). Thus, through the act of positively accenting their ethnic roots and presenting it as something of value and with purpose, some of the participants were able to engage in identity work that challenged their stigmatised racial and refugee identities. When speaking about her first venture and supporting other refugee women who had to make court appearances, Zendaya recounts:

*I introduced myself as a black African woman who has an interest in the integration of African women and their children. So, the judge got very much interested in me, but I did not say I was an asylum seeker.....*

Here, we see that in self-identifying as a 'black African woman' who has a purpose to support African women refugees because of her knowledge, Zendaya is proudly claiming her racial/ethnic identity whilst simultaneously hiding her migration status and the associated stigmatised refugee identity. This accentuating performance of ethnicity is repeated as she progresses her entrepreneurial activities. Zendaya's fashion business promotes her ethnicity further through the use of traditional African textiles which are used to create clothes based on Western designs. This stands in stark contrast to how she felt in the earlier days in the UK as an asylum seeker where she "couldn't dress the way (she) used to back home". Her African dressing habits added to the stigma associated with her ethnic difference, but transposed into the core element of her business, she was able to promote African attire within her entrepreneurial identity. In addition to this, as part of her product development, she has also repositioned the colourful African materials as 'therapeutic', suitable for interior designs within mental health care settings. Rather than accepting the negative reaction to products that are foreign, Zendaya has assigned value to her ethnic minority status and as such, this is used to explicitly counter the racism she experienced.

This strategy can be seen in a similar example where Aliya's business refocuses attention away from the stigma of a war-torn country along with its religious Islamic connections towards a more positive Syrian culinary experience. Aliya's production of a Middle Eastern food using British ingredients makes her product unique and desirable rather than stigmatised. Whilst none of the women indicated this repositioning of their ethnic identity to be a conscious act of resistance, it is a strategy that served to reconceptualise the ethnic minority and refugee identity.

### ***Whitewashing a refugee ethnic minority identity***

In contrast to the promotion of positive aspects of their racial identities as some of the women launched their businesses, another identity construction strategy involved 'whitewashing'; replacing the ethnic identity with a more acceptable and normative white image (Martinez Dy, Martin and Marlow, 2018). This strategy was observed during times when the women were making an effort to consolidate their entrepreneurial identities, particularly as they undertook various entrepreneurial activities which included moving the business to larger premises, expanding product ranges and widening their target markets. This type of strategy

was a means by which the discrimination could be circumvented; Zendaya refers to this as ‘*scaling things and navigating things*’, a conscious decision to engage with the stigma in a non-confrontational manner. In efforts to grow her business, Zendaya sought to expand her target market to include hospitals and large retail stores. To do so would require engaging with white clients. She explains:

*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 example of ‘whitewashing’ demonstrates the expediency Zendaya feels in this situation to hide her racial identity and to replace it with a more conventional image of the entrepreneurial identity. In this case, there was no explicit reference made to the stigmatisation associated with her own ethnic minority identity, but its presence was acknowledged simply by the response that it elicited. This strategic reaction as part of the identity work process was corroborated by Floriane’s experience who when relocating her business to different premises, renamed the business originally being her namesake had an overtly African name:

*The previous place where I used to be was called Zxxx-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 every day to change the style.*

In renaming the restaurant using an English word, outwardly its branding had been anglicised despite continuing to serve African cuisine and play African music. In both of these examples the women subconsciously acquiesce to the stigma associated with their marginalised ethnic minority identities whilst at the same time exercising their agency in terms of consciously devising a reactionary strategy. They are forced to respond to the otherness of being different which it is presumed will have a negative impact upon the growth prospects of their businesses. There is an obvious paradox associated with this strategy in that whilst the

products remain ostensibly African, it is perceived that the legitimacy of the business and its marketability is denied unless it is whitewashed.

Doldor and Atewologun (2020), identified atypical responses to stigmatised identities in an organisational context. They found identity strategies of ‘doublethink’ and ‘dodging stigma’ whereby their respondents demonstrated a simultaneous denial of the stigmatised identity whilst claiming an alternative more positive identity in response to the stigma, or by conceptualising the stigma in a depersonalised and abstract way. In this study, however, as is shown by Zendaya and Floriane, we find that in order to circumvent the stigmatised identity, some rejected the stigmatised identity through a temporary denial of their racial identity. This was replaced with an expression of identity that more closely matched the normative view of the entrepreneur. Previous studies have used whitewashing in the context of a derogatory label rather than an intentional strategy to cope with stigmatised identities and in the construction of new identities (Pyke and Dang, 2003).

#### ***De-emphasising a refugee ethnic minority identity***

Another variation of this strategy as it serves to confront the stigmatised refugee ethnic minority identity, was demonstrated by Azadeh who repositions her Iranian identity to be one of many ethnicities to which she feels connected.

*I've always said I am a citizen of the world. Yes, I was born in Iran, (but) I lived in different countries. Any part I live, I like. I try to be flexible, liking everything happening around me.*

As a “citizen of the world”, Azadeh, is drawing on her rounded, international experience and repositioning her (multi)-ethnic minority status as a positive feature of who she is, in so doing she also rejects the refugee label. Having studied for a PhD in Italy, she speaks Italian and is familiar with the culture. She is highly educated and well-travelled. She chooses to dress in ‘Western’ attire without the veil because to do so “suits” her, whilst also deflecting assumptions of her religious beliefs and how she should act as an Iranian woman. The motivation behind this strategic reaction suggests that this approach is not an explicit denial of an Iranian heritage or hiding it as with whitewashing, but rather a downplaying of a single ethnicity. Consequently, she has the freedom to express herself as she chooses, a means by



which she can assimilate her identity with other countries with which she associates herself, achievable through her previous privileged social status which allowed her to travel. In a community public health meeting she was asked to be a public health champion for the Iranian refugee community. Here she explains why she was reluctant to be the voice of local Iranians:

*I am Iranian, but I have friends from everywhere. I have Chinese friends, Indian friends, Kurdish, Kenyan, South Africa, Ghanaian friends, Polish friends. I don't look at people like, oh you are my community, so it is like a club (and) I will join you because I am the same colour, or we are speaking the same language.*

Thus, her identity work involves actively de-emphasising her Iranian ethnic identity as she chooses to be inculcated into a much broader representation of her ethnic identity. Although Azadeh maintains her Iranian identity, speaking passionately about its history and politics and evidently maintaining links via social media with family and friends, she intentionally downplays cultural symbols of this heritage such as in her clothing. This is similar to the identity work found to take place among bi-racial Americans who dress according to their preferred black or white racial identity (Khanna and Johnson, 2010) and North African immigrant women in France who manage their appearance according to the expectations of host communities (Killian and Johnson, 2006).

Thus, Azadeh's refugee status is managed by viewing the UK as simply one other country that she is experiencing. This approach is also evident in her interactions with her family who are in Iran and are unaware of her refugee status. They have accepted her explanation for her absence as having been studying and now, creating a new business. She has chosen to hide her refugee status to protect them from the Iranian authorities and also because of negative opinions her family hold against Iranians who have left the country to seek safety elsewhere.

These examples demonstrate that the identity work undertaken by the women is complex. Even when they think they may have challenged the stigma associated with their racial/ethnic identity, having successfully established a business, there remains the issue of legitimacy and growth of the business which requires further identity work, as stigmatisation based on racial bias persists.

#### 6.4 The refugee entrepreneur: reworking classed identities through time

This cohort of women engaged in class work in conjunction with the other categorisations as they as they sought to transition from being stigmatised refugees, into entrepreneurial actors where they have the potential to assume a higher social rank. The transition to business owner reflects an upward mobility from the lowlier social position of refugee. Consequently, they are elevated as symbols of success, providers of jobs and contributors to the economy. However, the identity work strategies that are required for this transition are complex and highlight that this is neither a linear nor a progressive process. As revealed in the previous chapter, in all of the cases, the women self-identified as having previous middle-class status in their home countries and therefore, experienced a downward mobility in their social class positioning on arrival in the UK. This reflected their position once they were labelled asylum seekers and refugees who were dependent and helpless (see also McGregor, 2008). Understanding class position as associated with the skills, education, wealth or ability to access resources as discussed in the literature chapter, the findings suggest that the women mobilised their social class positions through actions such as volunteering, reclaiming prior social positions and through self-validation.

##### ***Volunteering as identity work***

Volunteering emerged as a form of identity work for some of the participants. Primarily volunteering among refugee organisations, the positions required them to have a basic level of English language education. Thus, it confirmed for these participants who secured volunteering roles, a prior social class positioning which had afforded them access to language classes (Cederberg, 2017; Hassemer, 2020). In so doing, it also served to position them above refugees within the community who lacked English language skills. Furthermore, volunteering was a means by which they could develop resources that would contribute to their construction of an entrepreneurial identity and facilitate their social mobility.

Drawing on the experiences of Anashe and Zendaya, this identity work was enacted before they had been granted the right to work. For example, Anashe recounted how, by not focusing on the lengthy asylum process, she was able to move beyond the liminal space and the stigmatised refugee identity:

*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... developing skills or developing my brand; in this way I could start something.*

Her reference to her brand is synonymous with developing her identity as it is the foundation on which she will build both her business and develop her professional identity. Thus, involvement with volunteering was directly intertwined with her personal identity (Wuthnow, 1991; Grönlund, 2011), challenging the stigmatised refugee identity and replacing it with a presentation of one's self as a good citizen (Yap, Byrne and Davidson, 2011). Moreover, it positioned her as someone who is capable of providing a service; an indication that she was beginning to mobilise her position upward. Acting entrepreneurially enabled the creation of a community project, a vehicle through which she could reposition herself. Volunteering is therefore, identified here as part of the identity work process undertaken by some of the women. Not only was Anashe a volunteer engaged in an altruistic endeavour and thus contradicting the stigma of dependency, but she was also the creator of a new volunteer led project that would eventually become a charitable organisation.

Similarly, for Zendaya, from her early start as a volunteer for charitable organisations, her initiative to bring other women together helped her to address the isolation she felt by providing her with a network and to give her a sense of purpose. Through this community project, she has developed her project into a social enterprise that employs refugee women and supports others into self-employment. There is a simultaneous impact of developing self-esteem as they engaged in good works. This directly challenged the stigma associated with refugees being dependent and of bad character (Easton-Calabria and Omata, 2018), and it positioned her as a provider of social benefits rather than a recipient. As Anashe explained:

*“So, me working in the community delivering projects, that was a way for me to come out and say, I am a human being. I am able to integrate and do what anyone else can do rather than be labelled as refugee.”*

Volunteering demonstrated that the participants, when unable to access paid employment, were contributing to their communities and able to develop additional skills that could be leveraged for entrepreneurial action (Wilson, Mantovan and Sauer, 2020). However, there

was evidence that volunteering also had the potential to limit future identity work. In Azadeh's story, volunteering initially enabled her to compile a portfolio of work that was directly related to her creative upcycling/wellbeing business and connect with marginalised groups who would be her primary target market. Nevertheless, in this example, whilst being a means of access to entrepreneurial action, long-term volunteering for the refugee can also be viewed as exploitative. Volunteers can be left feeling ill-used and thus, it can become a liability to their identity work as they seek to create distance from their refugee status. Azadeh felt further marginalised when there was no opportunity for employment or engaging with the volunteer organisation in a self-employed capacity.

*"I was feeling that I had been used only to run some projects for them for free. So, they want me just for free, not for (contracts) ...they don't appreciate (me).....If I am a second-class citizen, resident of this country or, the world, or I am not privileged, what should I do? Should I sit down everyday and cry? No. Well, it's my choice".*

Azadeh found it challenging to shift the organisation's view of her from being a volunteer refugee to an entrepreneur. In this regard, volunteering was no longer providing her access to further mobilise her social class position. Given that the volunteer placement was often within refugee organisations and restricted to the refugee community or other marginalised groups, volunteering can limit exposure to other dominant spaces within the host society (Tomlinson, 2010). So, whilst this experience offered a group, albeit restricted to the refugee community or other marginalised groups, to which the women might belong, it also had the potential to reinforce the refugee identity. Consequently, this had an impact upon how they were perceived and how they perceived themselves in terms of social positioning in the UK.

### ***Reclaiming social class positions***

Another identity work strategy observed among this cohort of women draws on a recognition of the class-based privilege they had previously held in their home countries. For example, Aliya's reflection on how her higher education has facilitated her business activities, demonstrates how this can directly refute the stigma associated with refugees, and the role it plays in who she is as a businesswoman,

*“People think refugees come here and they are just like having a 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.”*

This reflection on her past social status enables the development of her entrepreneurial identity and challenges negative and deficit assumptions about refugees. However, further evidence of reclaiming her previous class values is provided through her maternal role within the household where she enacts a “middle class’ involvement in her children’s education’ (Lopez Rodriguez, 2010). She prioritises spending household funds on additional tuition for her children whilst her aspirations and expectations for their futures involves them attending university, thus retrieving her class position. This has only been made possible as the business has grown and generated disposable income. Similarly, all but one of the participants pursued some form of higher education in the UK, in order to retrieve this attribute which they had previously attained in their country of origin.

Other women in the cohort also made reference to class ascriptions other than that determined by UK refugee status, such as their middle-class status or professional identities as business owners in their home countries. Zendaya spoke of her *“pride in being a former businesswoman”*, while Floriane recognised that in the absence of any business support in the UK, she had drawn on her previous business experience. She said *“the only thing I had was just from back home I used to do selling. Buying food and reselling”*. Consequently, both women launched businesses that were directly related to their previous businesses and expertise. Such references back to their prior social position, provided the women with reassurance and fuelled confidence that they would be able to achieve an upward social mobility trajectory. Furthermore, these examples suggest that aspects of prior identities can in part, be the source of the women’s entrepreneurial capability and self-efficacy, thus,

facilitating their transition towards an entrepreneurial identity in the UK. As such, throughout their time as business owners, the desire to reclaim past social class positions provides the inspiration required to persevere in their entrepreneurial endeavours.

### ***Engaging in self-validation***

An important strategy that most of the women consciously engaged in was an internal-external process of validating their entrepreneurial identities. There were indications that this was internally devised and then presented to others. This strategy conforms to current understanding of how identity construction is dialogic, where the “self-narrative” relates to the social identity through a “public narrative” (Somers, 1994). This approach directly and firmly rejected the stigmatised refugee identity through its affirmation of an entrepreneurial identity. In describing herself during the asylum period when she had set up the project, Zendaya states:

*“I was becoming a businessperson by portraying myself, as an African woman who is directing the integration of African people...I was an asylum seeker, but nobody could have listened to me without the badge ‘XXXX Director’. I was the director, and I am the director so yes, they would want to talk to businesspeople”.*

Anashe expressed having used the same approach, *“So, obviously, I must act as a businessperson”*. Enacting the entrepreneurial role is equally important among the host community as well as within local ethnic minority communities. And yet, despite this positive identity work in terms of class positioning, there are limitations for some of the women. Anashe emphasises the difficulty she experiences in securing a space within wider professional networks, where it is clear that she lacks a feeling of belonging. She is uncertain as to how to navigate this as drawing on her previous privileged class position may not be sufficient to counter this barrier which may also be affected by her ethnic minority and racial identity, and therefore require further identity work.

As Zendaya interacts with host country judges and local authority personnel, we see an intentional claim and narration of the entrepreneurial identity. There is also a masking and, in some instances a deliberate hiding of the asylum status. As a direct consequence of this self-presentation, Zendaya's is able to gain an elevated status by being able to advocate on behalf of other refugee women who have been summoned to court on charges relating to breaching the asylum rules. She is also invited to chair meetings with various local community groups and the local authority, thus establishing her entrepreneurial identity within the context of the first organisation she launched. This then enables her to found her fashion design business.

For Zendaya this self-narrative is strengthened by a re-evaluation of her relationship with the UK. This is an overlap with the previous strategy used to reposition the stigmatised ethno-social identity. Zendaya rejects the 'freeloading' connotation of asylum seekers in favour of a stakeholder identity which legitimises her presence in the UK, as a descendant of a colonised group.

*I was coming here like a stakeholder not like an asylum seeker. So, I wanted that to be out...To say, who am I? where am I from and why am I here? .....so, I have to answer that for me to trade with them.*

This narrative adopts business related language which further aligns her with an entrepreneurial identity, although it is also emerging from her identity as she perceived it in post-colonial Zimbabwe. This reframing of the refugee label allows her to confront and dismiss the stigmatised refugee label associated with her racial identity which overwhelmingly influenced her experiences in the UK during the earlier years. The position of a stakeholder rather than a refugee represents a transfer of power that Zendaya claims as rightfully hers. This then liberates her to develop a transnational dimension to her entrepreneurial identity (Essers and Benschop, 2007) which is revealed in a practical way through her fashion business as her supply chain of African materials incorporates African countries beyond Zimbabwe.

The deteriorating social class position of the women when they were designated as refugees prompted strategic manoeuvring between previous class positions, dictated class positions

and aspirational positions. The examples discussed above highlight the complexity of the identity work required particularly as it intersects with other social divisions.

### **6.5 The refugee entrepreneur: reworking disability centred identities through time**

For Azadeh, navigating a disability identity in order to craft an entrepreneurial identity informed similar expressions of identity work as seen in relation to race and class. Although we recognise that the refugee experience left most of the women in the cohort vulnerable to further stress related disorders such as anxiety and depression, the findings draw on Azadeh's experience as she spoke more openly about this aspect of her identity and other disabilities.

#### ***Reframing a 'disabled refugee' identity***

Azadeh's experience of being subjected to dual stigmatisation based on her refugee status and disabilities is utilised as an advantage within her identity work and has become core to her business. This re-conceptualisation of disability and refugee status as aspects of her 'self' that can be mobilised to achieve a positive outcome through entrepreneurial activity, has emerged over time during her seven years of volunteering with refugee groups. It provides the *raison d'être* for her business. It is a similar strategy to that which is used by some of the women to reframe their stigmatised ethnic minority/racial identities. However, rather than drawing on her ethnicity as the inspiration for her business, she works with vulnerable women, refugees and those suffering with depression and other disabilities, using craft and other creative art forms as a therapeutic medium for wellbeing. Repositioning herself through this entrepreneurial activity is a direct challenge to the vulnerable position in which she found herself on arrival in the UK as an asylum seeker. The following extracts capture how Azadeh views and develops her entrepreneurial identity in relation to her clients who also experience the effect of multiple stigmatised identities:

*"As I had the pain, I know what it is the others might have suffered the same thing. It is my responsibility of this life to not let them suffer from that (what I have gone through). Teaching myself how not to suffer and helping the others. Just sending some reminders that they are good enough, they are very precious, they have lots of skills. Not to tell them that because of (their) isolation, because of (their) mental health they are nothing...reminding them of those negativities and putting labels, No. I need*



*(them) more than (they) need me. I need to see those smiles. I need to see the change. The business is very important to me”.*

*“Because I have this disability, I can go through five different ways to answer a question and then one way may make sense (for the different learners)”.*

*“I try to see the good part of any disability that I have, that it is causing some other ability. So, if I am partially-sighted...my hearing is very weak as well, I use the other senses more and it is supposed to be stronger ... I am very sensitive. So, a ‘sixth sense’ is helping me. I am reading people’s behaviours, so I can feel when someone is stressed and so it is very helpful in my sessions when I am teaching dance and someone is sitting in a wheelchair and I am looking at them and I see the smile, but I can feel that is a bitter smile so I try to change the mood”.*

In providing a service that validates other stigmatised women, Azadeh is affirming that she is able to compensate for the disadvantage she experiences due to her disability and refugee status (Jammaers and Zanoni, 2020). In so doing, she is able to reframe her disability by using her entrepreneurial activities to construct a more positive view of her stigmatised identities (Richard and Hennekam, 2021). Furthermore, this is enacted as a combination of internal self-identity work, and an external engagement which helps her to develop her identity beyond the stigmatisation. Thus, her identity work that challenges the stigmatisation, is constructed in response to interactions with her clients. Watson, (2009b) describes this as ‘relational and dialogic’ identity work that takes place through dialogue. In Azadeh’s case, this work is not only expressed through dialogue, but also in gestures and behaviours.

## **6.6 Summary**

This chapter built on the findings presented in chapter 5 which exposed notions of liminality, friction and contested identities encountered by the women. Thus, a broad process of identity work has emerged from the current across case analysis. It highlighted the processual

transition between the person that they were and the person that they become because of the circumstances in which they found themselves. The use of a range of identity work strategies interdependently served to emphasise the intersectionality of the women's multiple identities. This is apparent as they sought to reposition themselves based on the various social categories by which they were, or had previously been defined, such as a privileged class position, positive aspects of their ethnic identities which had become highly stigmatised or in reaffirming their maternal identities. As such, this identity work served to simultaneously help the women to self-identify with an entrepreneurial identity (Obschonka, Silbereisen, Cantner and Goethner, 2015; Newbery *et al.*, 2018), and, manage their stigmatised identities. Stigma management thus, was clearly an intrinsic part of the identity work process.

In seeking to understand the specific relationship between entrepreneurial activities and the identity construction used by this cohort of women, the findings demonstrate how they performed various aspects of their identities during the time they were refugees and became entrepreneurs in the UK. Development of an entrepreneurial identity was for some a legacy identity that was reconstructed, for others a response to a shifting gender identity that had repositioned them as the primary earner within the family, while for others, an act of resistance and reframing of a colonial legacy associated with their ethnic minority status. All of these strategies however, served to challenge the stigma conferred upon them as refugee women. It is important to recognise that whilst the women may feel that they are making progress in one area of their identity and securing their entrepreneurial identity, this may in fact undermine another aspect of their identity. This was the case with Aliya who is looking to limit the growth of her entrepreneurial identity as she questions what it means to be a mother. Or, when the entrepreneurial identity is faced with challenges such as a lack of legitimacy or rejection due to racial discrimination or exclusion, they may need to draw on their previous class privilege through self-validation. This dynamic movement of identity work indicated the resilience required by the women as they shifted back and forth between identity privileges and oppressions. Whilst, as they engage in entrepreneurial action they are forced to make sense of the complex power relations that having multiple identities elicit.

Having identified the key strategies used, we now turn to consider the implications of this identity work. The following chapter will establish how this identity work process is configured and in so doing, it will discuss the structure and agency movements and power dynamics using a critical realist approach. While the current chapter has addressed social categories of difference in turn, the next chapter will discuss how they interact collectively and have the potential for a transformative outcome against the backdrop of stigmatisation and marginalisation.

## **7 Discussion: Negotiating identities – Navigating structures**

The preceding two chapters presented the identity work undertaken by these refugee women in developing their entrepreneurial identities. Simultaneously, they challenged the stigmatisation and marginalisation associated with the ascribed refugee identity marker and various other identity categories of difference. Having established our theoretical framework and illustrated it through empirical work, we have identified a range of strategies used by a small cohort of refugee women to reconfigure their identities based on the intersectionality of their experiences. This chapter will now link these findings with the extant literature on entrepreneurship. The discussion presented in the first part of this chapter is oriented towards an explanatory account of the dynamic intersectional identity work undertaken by this sample of refugee women entrepreneurs. It draws upon a critical realist analysis to provide in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and considers identity work in the context of structures and mechanisms, liminality, translocational intersectionality, and reflexivity. Following this, the notion of stigmatisation is discussed to extend our understanding of entrepreneurial identity work among this group.

### **7.1 Introduction: Refugee to entrepreneur - the identity work process**

Positioned at the intersection of several literatures, the purpose of this thesis was to explore how engagement with entrepreneurship influences the identity construction of refugee women in the UK and how refugee status, race, gender and other social categories of difference intersect and influence their entrepreneurial experiences. Framed within three key strands of literature; entrepreneurship, identity work and gender, this line of enquiry addresses the tensions presented by the positioning of refugee women as stigmatised and marginalised individuals who also claim an entrepreneurial identity. The thesis demonstrates that the entrepreneurial experiences of refugee women can be simultaneously affected by multiple categories of social difference, which, subsequently, affect the identity work required of them. Thus, it adds to the voice of critical entrepreneurship scholars who continue to challenge presumptions of neutrality within dominant entrepreneurship discourses (Marlow and Al-Dajani, 2017; Brush and Greene, 2021). Through the empirical insight provided into experiences of refugee women entrepreneurs, this discussion contributes to a growing trend of incorporating greater contextualisation within entrepreneurship research.

A fundamental premise of this thesis is that in the context of refugee women entrepreneurs, identity work involves two key contemporaneous processes: the pursuit of an entrepreneurial identity and the simultaneous rejection of a stigmatised refugee identity. Thus, among this cohort of women, a dual identity process was found to take place at the intersect of gender, class, race, disability and migration status. Drawing upon an intersectional and positional lens (translocational intersectionality), this thesis argues that the identity work of refugee women entrepreneurs is inherently a multi-level, dynamic, spatial and temporal process. First, the women were subjected to stigmatisation and bias based on mutually constituted identity markers as they constructed an entrepreneurial identity (intersectionality). Second, the positionality of the women was based on social locations and hierarchies of gender, ethnicity, class and disability, which denied or afforded them access to resources resulting in inequalities, oppression and privilege (translocational intersectionality). This was found to occur across time and space based on the transnational journeys that had been made from the country of origin to the host country. It was evident through the findings that the women's previously held identities still lingered despite being denied, ignored or challenged by the host community.

In addition, this thesis introduces a relatively novel contribution to entrepreneurship research by applying a critical realist<sup>1</sup> understanding of entrepreneurial identity work to better explain the findings as shown in Figure 7-1. A critical realist perspective suggests that identities are emergent; as such, a social identity is an emergent property of social structures whilst a personal identity is an emergent property of the self (Marks and O'Mahoney, 2014). The identity work that ensues is not only an indication of the women's agency but is also an outcome of external influences and interactions. Accordingly, a critical realist perspective presumes that individuals engage knowingly, and unknowingly, in forms of identity work. Regardless, the resultant identity work is generated by the structures and mechanisms that form the context in which the women exist. As such, identity work at a still yet deeper level is a potential outcome of their situation (Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett, 2013). Therefore, whilst

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<sup>1</sup> For other examples of critical realist analyses within entrepreneurship see (Kašperová and Kitching, 2014; Dy, Marlow and Martin, 2017; Hu *et al.*, 2019)

the interviews revealed the visible (empirical domain), cross checking with observations and researcher interpretations, revealed the possibility of identity work and influences at hitherto, unknown levels (Real and Actual Domains). This permits insight into additional levels of identity work, strengthening the use of the intersectional framework, noted in the methodology chapter.

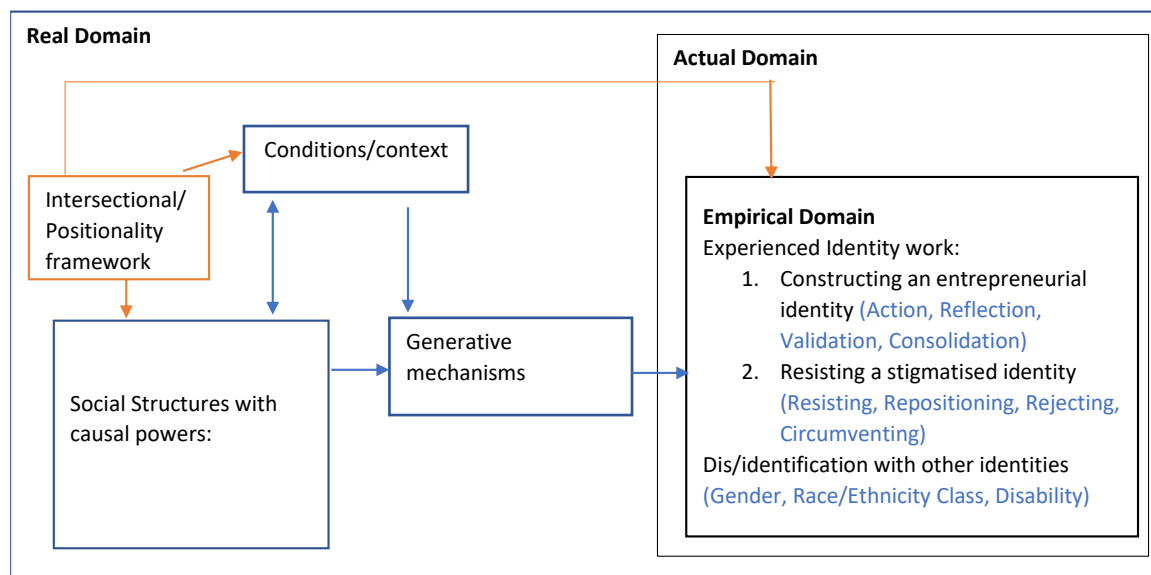


Figure 7-1- Overview and causal explanation of the identity work process (Adapted from Hu, 2018)

This thesis illustrates how the identity work of this cohort of refuge women entrepreneurs is a complex multi-level process affected by structural constraints. The following sections discuss the implications of these findings with reference to the extant literature on identity work and entrepreneurship.

## 7.2 Identity work: emergence, liminality and translocational intersectionality

### *Dynamic identity work – context, structures and mechanisms*

As a presumed meritocratic, agentic and positive endeavour, particularly for those who are from minority groups and therefore, crucially disadvantaged (de Clercq and Honig, 2011; Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2015; Betts and Collier, 2017), it is assumed that the main protagonist of entrepreneurship is an independently constructed heroic ‘enterprising self’ (Bröckling, 2005; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009). This interpretation is reflected in a tendency towards a

positive focus on entrepreneurial identities with individuals being in control of their identity work (Muhr *et al.*, 2019). However, scholarship within and beyond the field of entrepreneurship suggests that there are structures that would seem to be prohibitive, or limiting, for more marginalised (entrepreneurial) individuals and, which serve to reinforce the inequalities they face (Carter *et al.*, 2015; Ram, Jones and Villares-Varela, 2017). The effect being that identity work becomes *'the dynamic interplay between internal strivings and external prescriptions, between self- presentation and labelling by others, between achievement and ascription and between regulation and resistance'* (Ybema *et al.*, 2009: 301). The findings in Chapter 5 offer insight through an intersectional lens into the structural challenges that confront this group of entrepreneurs, and which consequently, had an impact upon their identity construction. Furthermore, they highlighted the stigmatisation to which the women are subjected; this in turn, prompted the incorporation of stigma management as an integral aspect of their identity work process and a demonstration of agency.

The application of a critical realist lens enhances the intersectionality framework as it offers an in-depth understanding of the context in which the identity work is enacted by explaining the constraining and enabling structural processes and mechanisms that the findings suggest. It is not sufficient to know what the women do to construct their identities and manage the effects of stigmatised identities as they engage in entrepreneurial activities, but greater explanation of why and how they do so is required. To this end, this section will continue by discussing the structures and mechanisms/causal powers that have an impact upon the women's entrepreneurial actions and which invoke an identity work response (See Fig 7-2). The findings in Chapter 5 suggested that multiple layers of exogenous structural conditions informed the identity work of the women by enabling or constraining their efforts to construct their identities as they engaged in entrepreneurial activities. These enduring challenges include: financing; support networks; business support; gendered assumptions; caring responsibilities; language barriers. As such, they represent the external forces that have the power to shape the identities of the women and, consequently, can offer insight into why the women employed specific particular identity work strategies.

Figure 7-2: Extract of structural conditions and mechanisms interacting to elicit the identity work of entrepreneurial refugee women in the UK

CONSTRAINTS				ENABLEMENTS					
L e v e l	Social structures		Examples of generative mechanisms (causal powers)	Examples of Conditions/Context (Structure/Culture/Agency/Relations)	Examples of Conditions/Context (Structure/Culture/Agency/Relations)	Examples of generative mechanisms (causal powers)	Social structures	L e v e l	
Macro	Producing/reproducing social categories of difference	Institutions (Banking/Government)	(Post-colonial) Discrimination	Disjointed approach to local authority business support	Access to philanthropic/ LEP grants and loans	Financial resources	Open system Networks	Macro	
			Bureaucracy						
Social		Refugee status	Class	Internalised racism	Access to resources	Local Authority resources	Entrepreneurial know-how	Class	Social
				Education					
		Race	Prejudicial attitudes	Gendered assumptions	Refugee specific business support	Social capital	Refugee Networks		
		Gender	Unequal division of labour						
Individual	Disability		Deficit perspective	Caring responsibilities	Family support	Entrepreneurial Action/identity	Belief systems	Individual	
			Limited access to resources Limited language fluency						Self-efficacy



### *Institutional structures: Finance and government policies*

Turning to explore such issues, evidence from this thesis concurs with extant scholarship that both women (Marlow and Patton, 2005; Leitch, Welter and Henry, 2018) and ethnic minority immigrant groups (Ram *et al.*, 2003; Aldén and Hammarstedt, 2016) face challenges associated with accessing finance at a macro level. Critical scholars attribute this to structural constraints rather than accepting a solely female deficit perspective whereby women would be assumed to be less risk-taking and therefore, be reluctant to approach lenders and funders for finance (Ahl and Marlow, 2012). Such structural constraints are exemplified within Verduyn and Essers', (2017) study of female migrant entrepreneurs in the Netherlands, in which barriers to finance were evident when an official articulated that the 'banks do not find (this group) interesting enough'. However, a more detailed analysis of the refugee experience reveals that this sub-group of migrant entrepreneurs are presented with additional prohibitive institutional barriers with restrictions on individual rights. Such restrictions are based on immigration status as they are only granted temporary stay in the UK for an initial five years. This holds them within a precarious position given that even if indefinite leave to remain is granted after this point, it does not guarantee permanent residency. Thus, the women's accounts of struggling to access bank funding highlighted an intersectional effect that reinforced the implications of their immigration status, with their experiences of being female and ethnic minority entrepreneurs. Furthermore, as gatekeepers to entrepreneurial finance, the institutions also determine whether the women and their businesses conform to the normative profile of an entrepreneur. Consequently, they are an external source of validating the women's legitimacy within the UK context. Thus, the powers or mechanisms that are generated by these institutional structures are further exposed.

### *Mechanisms: (Postcolonial) discrimination, bureaucracy*

While the salience of the refugee status is cited by most of the participants as being a hinderance to accessing finance, Zedaya's interpretation of the institutional discrimination captures an identity conflict. Her reflections intimate a fundamental incompatibility between herself and the institutions with which she must interact: "...the institutions are built of many people of different identity than mine. Obviously, it will not tolerate me because they have built it to protect themselves". This resonates with previous research which suggests that a

lack of diversity within the institutional structures also limits the accessibility of funding to minority and marginalised groups (de Lange *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, this confirms the women's sense of being perceived as different to the establishment and not conforming to the expected profile of a professional. Zendaya deems that the structural conditions are governed by additional forces, one of which is the legacy of colonialism working to reinforce the stigma associated with her refugee status and to emphasise her difference, transposed into a lower status. This concurs with the repositioning of the asylum and refugee status within a postcolonial narrative which perpetuates an image of Global South women as backward, ignorant and docile victims (Fernando, 2016). Such an image is evidently incongruous with the Global North institutions and the image of an entrepreneur. Identified as a causal power, post-colonial discrimination is an example of a force with class, gender and racial implications that defines Zendaya's space and alludes to a power imbalance embedded in the UK's post-colonial legacy. This is further clarified through a translocational intersectional lens which captures the experiences of Global South women in the Global North and their perceived positionality transferred temporally and in figurative social spaces.

### *Enabling conditions*

In contrast to the ensuing constraining conditions from the aforementioned structures and mechanisms, enabling conditions and social structures that positively affected and facilitated the women's access to finance were noted. For example, structures such as open system networks and principles of social equality enabled crowdfunding opportunities, philanthropic grants and equal access to small value loans distributed by an Enterprise Agency. These funding options advanced the women's engagement with entrepreneurship and consequently, served to develop their entrepreneurial identities. However, there is no clear consensus of the accessibility and value of crowdfunding for those, such as women, minorities or the marginalised (Cumming, Meoli and Vismara, 2019). Given this product has fewer formal barriers for access and there is some evidence that congruity between lenders and borrowers leads to positive outcomes, it could be a valuable source of funding for refugees as they become established (Mollick and Robb, 2016; Venturelli, Pedrazzoli and Gallo, 2020).

### *Business support and networks*

The landscape for developing entrepreneurial skills and networks was found to consist of both constraining and enabling structural conditions. In the first instance, a lack of access to generic business support and networks had the potential to further marginalise the women and hinder progress in their entrepreneurial endeavours. Whilst host country institutions might classify migrant women entrepreneurs as a 'difficult group to approach' (Verduyn and Essers, 2017), this serves to place the responsibility on the women to be accessible rather than the services, which Verduyn and Essers interpret as arrogance. This is illustrated when Anashe spoke of often being the only ethnic minority entrepreneur present at broader industry related networking events. Consequently, she is reluctant to seek out these networks, whilst Azadeh has struggled to find entrepreneurship support that might cater for those with disabilities and neurodiverse conditions. Therefore, it is unsurprising that most of the women felt compelled to stay within their local networks and consequently, were less inclined to engage with opportunities to access a wider range of business support. Thus, the structures producing causal powers driving this condition were evident in terms of gender, race and disability divisions.

In contrast, enabling conditions for the women included the ability to access business support specifically for refugees. Anashe and Zendaya benefitted from this opportunity which they reported gave them practical experience as well as social capital. Aliya and Azadeh were assigned short term access to a mainstream business mentor which they felt provided guidance in respect to developing business plans and conducting market research, but there was no opportunity for continuity or network. The literature suggests that current business support for marginalised groups is limited (Ram, Jones and Villares-Varela, 2017). However, collectively these forms of business support either specifically for refugees or local authority run, became enabling through the inherent power of social capital. Where social divisions based on gender and race prevented some of the women from proactively engaging with generic business support networks or being welcomed into these spaces, one-to one mentoring initiatives and collective refugee spaces facilitated the women's access to this support. Both the refugee and entrepreneurial experiences of most of the women involved drawing on the social capital of refugee and co-ethnic community networks which has been

shown to be beneficial to refugee entrepreneurs (Bizri, 2017). Whilst on the one hand, this serves to reinforce and maintain the othering and labelling of the women particularly when applied to business support (Högberg *et al.*, 2016), on the other hand, it cements a collective entrepreneurial identity and a social identity, offering the women solidarity and affirmation. These networks provided an enabling condition and offered a belief system that was familiar and from which they could gain confidence and a sense of belonging. This confirms arguments that such minority networks are necessary structures for entrepreneurial progression for the marginalised (Wingfield and Taylor, 2016; Owalla *et al.*, 2020). Notwithstanding, these conditions can also be affected by gender bias mechanisms based on home country patriarchy that exists within some of the co-ethnic communities. However, the women were able to interact with and adapt these mechanisms in order to further develop their identities. So, for example, Azadeh, who is Iranian, chooses not to wear traditional clothing, in an effort to distance herself from gendered expectations of how she should dress and behave.

#### *Language barriers*

Another condition that affects identity work is the importance of host country language proficiency. Although the participants all had a basic knowledge of English, they each spoke of the challenges related to a lack of language fluency in terms of understanding refugee integration policies and in enacting their entrepreneurial roles. This concurs with findings among female migrant workers where proficiency in English, with the necessary support mechanisms to enable attendance at courses, was noted as crucial for progression in the workplace (Netto *et al.*, 2020). The perception that a limited command of the English language or that a heavily accented spoken English, equates to a lack of ability, subjects marginalised groups to a language ideology that carries with it covert racial and class discrimination (Milroy, 2001). Whilst these mechanisms generate constraints within the environment, previously held class privilege had provided the women in this sample with prior knowledge of English language in their home country through their education. This then permitted access to higher education opportunities in the UK to further their language skills and qualifications which provided additional credibility to their entrepreneurial identity.

### *Gender biases*

Gender bias mechanisms explained the tendency for the women to be charged with caring responsibilities in the home and to conform to gendered assumptions within the business. It shaped business decisions, such as how much control women maintained over the business as well as how they engaged in entrepreneurial activities on a daily basis. While Aliya whose husband has played a significant role in her food production business contemplates transferring more responsibility for running the business to her husband, Floriane has given the role of managing the business to her eldest son. In the Global South, spousal involvement is a common occurrence, particularly given the historical restricted rights afforded to women in patriarchal countries (Yousuf Danish and Lawton Smith, 2012). Similarly, in the Global North, the overlap between entrepreneurial activities and the household sphere is such that spousal involvement or a more formally embedded copreneurship is not uncommon (Marlow and McAdam, 2013). Thus, beyond an existence at the level of values and norms, gender biases are seen to have the ability to have real effects on the women's businesses.

A gender ideology of what it means to be a woman and mother contributes to one's social positionality which can generate mechanisms at micro and meso levels. Ultimately, for this cohort of women it is seen to drive certain conditions such as an unequal division of labour and caring responsibilities within the household. These are classified as constraining to the extent that gendered expectations can impinge upon the ability for the women to engage in entrepreneurial action fully (e.g. time committed to the business). In Forson's (2013) study, wealthier lawyer migrant women are able to employ nanny's and cleaners to help counter the unequal division of labour in the household. For refugee women, whilst this may have reflected their social positioning in their home country, the downward mobility experienced in becoming refugees prohibits this. However, the family support is another counteracting condition that is in part driven by the belief system within the family unit of what womanhood and motherhood means. Here, we see that such mechanisms can interact to produce a specific outcome. On one hand, a female-led family business reflecting familial support, can serve to strengthen the maternal identity. This is in terms of enabling the woman to demonstrate a provider role and carer role in the workspace, whilst also supporting the entrepreneurial identity. Alternatively, spousal support can enable a woman to choose to

manage the conflict between a maternal identity and an entrepreneurial identity by permitting the woman to prioritise a maternal identity.

### ***Dynamic identity work – Spaces of liminal friction***

The women responded to the structures and mechanisms discussed above, by exercising their agency through identity work. In the context of refugee women, the identity work involved making sense of personal identities and roles as women in the host country, having been ascribed a refugee identity. As presented in chapter five, some of the women referred explicitly to having been 'left in limbo' and consequently feeling as though they had lost their identity. It is precisely in this state where they experience the full force of the stigmatised refugee identity that has disrupted the equilibrium of their previously held identities. It is recognised that instability and uncertainty is typical of the refugee experience during which refugees find themselves in a greater 'state of social, emotional, economic flux' than other migrant groups (Mawson and Kasem, 2019). This rupturing from prior identities as they are ascribed new identities first, that of asylum seeker and then refugee in the host country, can be viewed in terms of liminality (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969; Groeninck *et al.*, 2020). To recap on this construct see chapter 3. Liminality reflects the ambiguity, uncertainty and precarity of 'betwixt and between' socio-cultural spaces as individuals move from one state of being to another (Turner, 1969; Ibarra and Obodaru, 2016). As such, it is consistent with the notion of identity work and can also be conceptualised within this process in terms of the dialogue that takes place between the internal self and the outer social identity (Beech, 2011).

### *The structural space of liminality*

Alkhaled and Sasaki, (2021) propose that 'indeterminate liminality' is an appropriate conceptualisation of the liminal space experienced by refugee women. They define it as '*a liminal state into which actors are forcibly entered, and (in which) their agency is structurally constrained until an unknown end date, leaving them to experience seemingly never-ending uncertainty*' (Alkhaled and Sasaki, 2021:28). The findings of this study would confirm this, particularly given the seemingly perpetual state of the refugee experience (Jackson and Bauder, 2014). This thesis would also suggest that this liminal space is the domain in which the women undertake their identity work. Forcibly displaced from their home countries, all of the women came to the UK in search of asylum and safety, but the asylum-seeker and

refugee designations also represented imposed stigmatised identities. It is from this point that the women enter a liminal space as they attempt to deal with the implications of this new situation on their identity. However, the liminal experience for this group was two-fold. The liminal refugee experience triggered identity work that included a transition towards an entrepreneurial identity which is itself 'considered as a permanent liminal state of being 'in-between' (Steyaert, 2007; Bamber, Allen-Collinson and McCormack, 2017; Muhr *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, this thesis conceptualises liminality both from the perspective of the refugee which requires reaching back for past identities in search of a dominant non stigmatised identity, and as an entrepreneur constantly moving between states of newness. Thus, the individual is considered in their entirety across both time and space. Consequently, the subjective liminal experience of the refugee entrepreneur is more complex, decidedly less ritualised than originally conceived within its anthropological origins (Turner, 1969). Furthermore, it appears to be under-institutionalised as despite the legal restrictions dictating the refugee existence in the UK, there is minimal guidance as to how the liminal space, concurrently refugee and entrepreneurial, is to be navigated (Ibarra and Obodaru, 2016).

During the period of liminality there are two contemporaneous realities/narratives unfolding for the refugee. First, the experience of the displaced individual who seeks asylum in the UK. Within this phase, asylum seekers are provided with limited social rights such as conditional access to healthcare (Kang, Tomkow and Farrington, 2019). If the application is successful then they are granted refugee status at which point rights are conferred which enable full integration into society through access to the labour market, the education system and other such institutions. Amidst the uncertainty of what this means for the individual, the refugee identity is being imposed and embedded. Second, there is a process of rebuilding a subjectivity (Lacroix, 2004). Lacroix's findings emphasise that refugees start with minimal economic resources, but there is also a sense that they hold on to the 'wealth of who they were within themselves (2004;157). Capturing this dissonance, Aliya's experience reveals that her self-perception was based on having travelled several times to the UK accompanying her husband on business trips rather than the reality of fleeing her war-torn home, Syria. They travelled to the UK using a visa and did not register for asylum immediately on landing in the UK. As she entered this period of liminality, she had to reconcile her previous

conceptualisation of 'self' with the refugee status that was now a dominant expression of who she was in the UK.

Consequently, there is a sense of the rupturing of prior identities that occurs as Aliya enters the institutionalised process of becoming a refugee. Yet, concurrent with this, during this phase of liminality there is also evidence of her holding on to a 'lingering identity' (Wittman, 2019), that of being the wife of a successful businessman, educated and with a career history in her own right. They struggled to accept that the refugee process would apply to them given their prior privileged background and social position. Although the asylum process for her was a relatively short month when compared to that experienced by some of the other women, this period was closely linked to her husband's asylum process which took two years. As he did not have the right to work, she had to claim benefits for the family whilst she sought employment.

For most of the other women this period was prolonged. Zendaya, Anashe and Floriane, all spent between eight to ten years awaiting a positive outcome from their asylum application. Zendaya refers to this period as 'a dry season', likening it to the *'Israelites when they were leaving the Egypt compounds... they tried to capture whatever they could to sustain themselves, but they couldn't.'* The physical space of liminality for some was expressed in periods of destitution having been ineligible for refugee accommodation at points when their asylum application had been denied. These moments stood in stark contrast to their previous professional identities.

#### *Liminal friction and contested identities*

The liminal space is an ongoing arena of friction between the sense of identity that these women have had of themselves, and the identity ascribed to them on arrival in the host country. As such, it is within this space that identity work is initiated that must negotiate these frictions in order to construct a future self. The evidence illustrates that as marginalised entrepreneurial individuals try to dodge and reject the stigmatised identities ascribed to them, they are simultaneously attempting to project new identities or reclaiming past identities. Drawing on notions of creativity and playfulness (Hjorth, 2004; Ibarra, 2005), Garcia-Lorenzo *et al.* (2018) highlight the role of entrepreneurial improvisation for those living



in precarious conditions and engaged in entrepreneurial activities. However, the findings of this thesis suggest that among refugee women, entrepreneurial improvisation is more an expression of identity contestation due to their stigmatised identities, rather than identity play. One such example is when, during her prolonged asylum application period, Anashe makes the decision to engage in volunteer activities which subsequently enable her to start a community project and business ventures. This is a reaction against the lived experience of having an identity that is viewed primarily as a vulnerable female refugee, subjected to an extended asylum process. She envisions a different future life for herself to that described by her solicitor, a white male figure of authority who not only made unwanted advances towards her but, advised her to either 'go back to Zimbabwe, or get married, or have a child'. Thus, he was perpetuating a stigma ascribed to refugee women as 'immoral and opportunistic' (Smith, 2017). Therefore, this challenge to reclaim and build an identity is a direct struggle against external preconceptions and ascriptions of who the individual is and what they should become. Whilst demonstrating the creativity that emerges through the course of the liminal experience, this thesis argues that the liminal experience for the refugee is an act of survival, and the pursuit of an entrepreneurial identity is one that resembles identity contestation rather than identity play.

### ***Dynamic identity work – A translocational intersectional perspective***

Positioned at a disadvantage and subject to inequalities within different societal arenas, entrepreneurial refugee women must therefore, navigate the intersecting effects of multiple social categories of difference. The evidence highlighted that the identity work undertaken by the women shifted situationally during the period in which they were refugees and as they developed their business ventures. While this finding is consistent with previous identity work that uses an intersectional lens (Essers and Benschop, 2007; Doldor and Atewologun, 2020), in this study, the temporality of the identity work process is more pronounced as it incorporates a translocational intersectional lens. As such, gendered experiences for example, are understood, not in isolation but as '*they penetrate the realms of class, where they are complexly woven in time and place, shifting and fluid*' (Anthias, 2021:116). The implications of the gendered and classed identities held before being ascribed a refugee is important, and consequently life histories are significant to this understanding (Harrison and

Leitch, 2018). This serves to better illustrate the dynamic nature of the process in relation to the entrepreneurial experience.

### *Leveraging gender*

As they begin to engage in entrepreneurial activities, refugee women need to reconcile the conceptualisations of womanhood and of entrepreneurial identity that they carried with them from their home countries. The evidence suggests that this is then revised as the businesses became more established or changes took place in the household (Meliou and Edwards, 2018; Jayawarna, Marlow and Swail, 2020). Shifts in status associated with the physical act of becoming refugees meant a loss of womanhood associated with the traditional saliency of the maternal role identity. This occurred as the women were either forced to leave their children behind, or on arrival in the host country becoming the sole breadwinner. Thus, the maternal role assumed a secondary position. This highlights how the asymmetrical relationality of gender which was in place in the home country has been disrupted by the circumstances of refugee status, only to be repositioned within a different interpretation of gender inequalities in the host country. The intersectional effect of being a refugee and the impact this had on their gendered and classed positions, led the women to pursuing an entrepreneurial path when they were unable to access the labour market. Consequently, entrepreneurial engagement enabled them to either reclaim their maternal roles by being able to provide for their families, or to generate sufficient income to be able to be reunited with their children.

Although the study confirms that this cohort faces gendered tensions and structural constraints that are universally acknowledged (Swail and Marlow, 2018), a translocational intersectional analysis provides further insight. This reaches into the impact of classed and traditional gender ideologies that are a lingering aspect of the preconceived gender roles within the women's home countries (Anthias and Mehta, 2003; Villares-Varela, 2018). This is seen to have an effect within the household where the women undertake the majority of caring responsibilities and household labour which subsequently affects the amount of time they can commit to the business and their well-being. The study found that gendered hierarchies were therefore, reproduced, and were also (re)negotiated within the context of the host country, as the women engaged in entrepreneurial activities. At times this was

clearly an influence upon the way in which some of the women managed their firms and presented themselves as women business owners. Either supplementing their entrepreneurial identity as women, with spousal involvement being a strong, visible, but non-dominant presence (as with Aliya), or, exercising spousal exclusion for fear of a loss of control of the business (as with Anashe). The translocational shift requires a reappraisal of gendered role identity which is subjected not only to the host country's interpretation of gender roles but also the co-ethnic community in the host country. This can take the form of a lack of support from co-ethnic communities some of whom see traditional gender ideologies being distorted when women engage in entrepreneurial action instead of prioritising motherhood.

Although cognisant of certain gendered inequalities, the participants felt that they were constructing their gendered identities on their own terms: 'gendered choices' which they create as active agents (Meliou and Edwards, 2018). Therefore, a decision such as prioritising the maternal role identity by transferring responsibility for the business to a spouse was explained as a direct response to the household needs, rather than the influence of traditional gender ideologies. Whilst this thesis recognises the structural implications of gendered ideology not only in the host country but of those associated with the patriarchy that exists in the countries of origin, it also gives space to the agency of the women to retain their understanding of what it means to be a woman beyond the conceptualisations and expectations of current Western feminism. Ultimately, these positions and the various degrees of conforming and adapting that the women undertake, need to be viewed within this broader framing.

Previous studies have identified the various degrees of masculinisation and adjustments to the enactment of femininities that women undertake as part of their identity work when involved in entrepreneurial action (Lewis, 2014; Swail and Marlow, 2018). Whilst this was not a dominant theme among these participants, it was clear that their notions and expressions of femininities were very closely related to mothering: needing to *be 'soft on the inside as a mother whilst hard on the exterior for business'* (Aliya). There was little evidence that the women felt that they were consciously defying their traditional gendered expectations, although there were adaptations due to the expediency of being a refugee in a Global North

context and holding on to the entrepreneurial identity. For some, this meant a changing enactment of womanhood depending on the space they were in, whether at home or work.

These participants reflected a heterogeneous profile of women entrepreneurs. Some of the participants embedded the maternal role within an entrepreneurial identity by maximising the overlap between the domestic and the business domains. So, for instance, creating a family business and enacting both roles in the workspace, reflected a belief that value as a mother is directly related to an ability to run the business and provide for the family. An alternative yet similar model combining the two role identities was to manage the business around the needs of the household, comparable to that of the 'mumpreneur' (Lewis, 2014). Finally, the findings also revealed a version of copreneurship (McAdam and Marlow, 2013). This encouraged spousal involvement to the extent that the responsibility within the business could be transferred, ultimately so that the entrepreneur can resume the prioritisation of her maternal role. In all instances, an unequal distribution of responsibilities placed on women within the domestic sphere is accepted as normative. The participants interpreted this as a testimony of the strength (and burden) of womanhood.

Within these cases, the intersection of ethnic and gendered identities, and consequently, the form of patriarchy in the home country, may also account for these variances in how the participants enacted their entrepreneurial identities. In Syria a more conservative form of patriarchy is recognised than in the African countries represented in this sample. This may correspond to the greater freedoms permitted for women in African countries to be engaged in some form of entrepreneurial activity (De Vita, Mari and Poggesi, 2014). Consequently, African participants who had managed their own business in their home country can potentially accept the tension more easily than their Middle Eastern peers.

The findings also suggest that the construction of an entrepreneurial identity may not always be a permanent transition but rather, a necessary means to re-establishing a salient maternal identity. This is a similar temporary identity shift to that identified by Jones, Ram and Villares-Varela (2017) among entrepreneurial immigrants in the UK. For this group, entrepreneurial action is a transition stage for integration into the country of destination with the priority being to achieve longer term professionalism as a career path for future generations. In the

thesis case where this is seen, a reassessment of business goals and therefore, also of the entrepreneurial identity, is a response to the changing needs of the household as children reach different life stages. Consequently, the need for entrepreneurial femininities is exchanged for a dominant maternal role identity and a return to a supportive entrepreneurial role as was lived in the home country.

#### *Dynamic identity work – Leveraging class*

The tendency for entrepreneurship research to overlook the relevance of class has contributed to the homogenisation of women and ethnic groups (Cederberg and Villares-Varela, 2019). In response, embedded in the argument put forward by this thesis regarding the importance of positionality within the theoretical framework of translocational intersectionality, is an emphasis on the significance of social class to entrepreneurial identity work and its interrelatedness to other categorisations of difference (Anthias, 2021). Social class positions an individual within society based on such factors as education, occupation, family status/background and wealth. These attributes combine to facilitate an individual's access to resources of economic and social value, and consequently can be a source of inequalities (Anthias, 2021). However, it is deeply intertwined with positions and hierarchies of race and gender which can influence an individual's class position. It was found that despite having to leave behind many aspects of their lives, class privileges such as education, and previous professional experiences served as resources for the development of an entrepreneurial identity. Furthermore, they also provided a defence against stigmatised and marginalised identity markers. Thus, differentials in class positions situated between the home country and host country play a significant role in the identity work process as the women in this cohort experienced a downwards mobilisation from a 'middle-class status' to a lowly refugee status in the UK.

As discussed above, amplifications of disadvantage were evident in the gendered and classed positions of the women in being ascribed an additional label as refugees. Notwithstanding the Westernised view of patriarchal societies, all of the women had previously been subject to varying degrees of subordination and marginalisation on account of their gender. However, with the ascription of a refugee status they lost the class privilege they had previously held in their home countries which would have afforded them, for example, the domestic help

required to facilitate the development of an entrepreneurial identity, and access to the labour market and other resources. Furthermore, the findings suggested that the contradictory processes to which Anthias (2008) alludes, can lead to unexpected outcomes. For example, prior privileges can become a source of increased confidence and self-efficacy which transfer to the host country and can be drawn upon at a later stage in the process of constructing an entrepreneurial identity (Figure 7-4).

The experience of the respondents suggests that a refugee ascription negates prior middle class and professional claims by assigning refugees to the lowest social class status. However, whilst privileged identity markers are not recognisable within the host country, it was evident that internally, identity work could be conducted that reached back to reclaim and draw from the previous social class position. Thus, certain residual class resources, such as familiarity with the English language, could be utilised during the process of structuring and restructuring an entrepreneurial identity. This was achieved when respondents drew upon their previous social status as motivation and a source of resilience to challenge downward mobilisation. They often referred to how much they had achieved, or how they had lived in their home countries and used this as a goal for what they aspired to be and hoped to achieve in the host country. It also provided a space within which they were able to reflect on their skills and capabilities that would enable them to embark on an entrepreneurial pathway, such as a reflection on prior qualifications.

Consequently, there is a cognitive element that serves to fuel the confidence that those from the middle-classes have in their ability to achieve their entrepreneurial ambitions. In her work on migrant Latin American women entrepreneurs in Spain, Villares-Varela, (2018) captures the significance of class repositioning and the negotiation of gender ideologies as women migrant entrepreneurs move from their home countries to the destination country. The thesis builds on this argument by incorporating a more dynamic interpretation of movements in social positioning. Such recognitions of shifts in hierarchies permit challenge through the use of time and space and accordingly, affects the identity work that is undertaken.

### *Dynamic identity work – (Dis)identifying race/ethnicity*

In its focus on refugee women entrepreneurs, this thesis offers insight into how ethnic minority entrepreneurial identities are crafted as they respond to structural racism and institutional discrimination during various phases of engagement in entrepreneurial action. In so doing, it moves beyond the limiting dominant perceptions of the ethnic minority entrepreneurial identity as a cultural collective, acting as a homogenous group against structural inequalities. This traditional conceptualisation frames this group in terms of their cultural values (Ram and Jones, 2008), ethnic networks (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990), embedded localised ghettos of ethnic minority businesses (Kloosterman, Van Der Leun and Rath, 1999) and ethnic enclaves (Wilson and Portes, 1980). Thoelen and Zanoni, (2017) argue that such an homogenous view of the ethnic minority entrepreneurial identity serves to obscure identity constructions and denies them the agency that is synonymous with understanding of the entrepreneur (Ogbor, 2000). The findings of this thesis and its critical realist underpinnings, contribute to efforts to redress this imbalance (Essers and Benschop, 2007; Vincent, Wapshott and Gardiner, 2014; Thoelen and Zanoni, 2017) as it demonstrated the dynamic nature of the identity work, undertaken by the women in regards to their ethnicity.

The evidence demonstrates that the reflexive identity work undertaken by the women was centred primarily upon reframing, which focused on accenting more positive aspects of the identity marker, de-emphasising, or whitewashing their racial-ethnic identities. This resonates with previous research framing the work strategies of migrant entrepreneurs within notions of either conformity, or being distinctive to the host country (Abd Hamid, O’Kane and Everett, 2019) ; ‘fitting in or standing out’ (Thoelen and Zanoni, 2017), ‘covering or accenting’ (Fernando, Reveley and Learmonth, 2020). The participants enacted specific identity work in promoting their racial-ethnic identity as some based their businesses on products that reflected their ethnic origins. Thus, they were able to situate their ethnicity as more acceptable within the host country context: less foreign, and more reflective of ‘ethnic creativity’. This positive reframing of racial-ethnicity was then used to underpin the transition towards an entrepreneurial identity. So, for example, for all but one of the women, it formed the product or service that was at the heart of the business.

Within ventures such as Zendaya's fashion business, which uses traditional African material to make Western fashion designs, or Aliya's traditional Syrian food product using locally produced ingredients, we can identify the legitimacy of the product achieved by mixing the minority and majority cultures as noted by (Thoelen and Zanoni, 2017). In so doing, racial-ethnicity was not only positioned as something positive, with value and no longer a threat, but it was also located within the domain and legitimacy of business. This serves to preserve lost and damaged cultures providing healing and comfort in new host spaces (Alkhaled and Sasaki, 2021). It also provides an ongoing opportunity in cases of internationalisation of the business, for participants to reach back to neighbouring countries to their home country to source supplies and expand their sales. In so doing, participants reposition themselves within a more elevated classed status back in this home region. In some cases, as they provide jobs for local women, they are recognised as having shifted within race and class hierarchies from the perspective of the new markets. Similarly, a positive ethnic identity is retained and accentuated through identification with a collective. In these spaces and within these networks of either refugee or ethnic groups, positive aspects of ethnicity are celebrated and maintained thus, reinforcing the ethnic minority self. This has been important for the women both during the early asylum-seeking period and in the refugee entrepreneur period.

Whilst reframing in order to accent their ethnicity provided the business with purpose in the conception stage of their business venturing, two of the women sought to either consolidate their business (rebranding or extending target market to include majority ethnic group) by shifting their identity work strategy to whitewashing. This metaphor was used to describe the act of covering or replacing a racialised identity with a white or non-ethnic minority identifier (Dy, Marlow and Martin, 2017). Hiding one's racial identity in the form of whitewashing is not a new phenomenon, it is similar to the act of 'passing' for biracial or light-skinned black people (Khanna and Johnson, 2010). Previous studies recognise the negative use of the term often by co-ethnics exhibiting internalised racism (Pyke and Dang, 2003; Charsley and Bolognani, 2017) whereby whitewashing reinforces the racial inequality, legitimising the exclusion of black identity as compatible with the entrepreneurial identity. However, used strategically, it is implemented by some of the respondents as a measure of expediency. In so doing, they co-opt white privilege to support the growth of a business, showing a display of power in response to the stigmatisation of their blackness.



### ***Entrepreneurship and transformation: the power of reflexivity and agency***

The previous section discussed the identity work undertaken by the participants in this study. First, it demonstrated the structures and the resultant mechanisms at both a macro and meso/societal level to which the women must respond and interact in order to rework their identities. Then, through the identity work process, it illustrated that despite structural constraints, the women were able to respond to the situation in which they found themselves; thus, exercising their agency. This thesis further argues that through the identity work process, the respondents were able to affect change within themselves and within certain structures. This transformation is interpreted as the extent to which they were able to resist and free themselves from stigmatising and marginalising identities and construct an entrepreneurial identity (engage in entrepreneurial action). It is intricately linked to notions of transformation related to an intersectional enquiry. This is an important consideration given the quandary with which the respondents were faced in terms of being encouraged to embrace entrepreneurship, whilst being systematically disadvantaged by gender, race, ethnicity and ascribed class positions. Collectively, these social categories have the potential to limit access to resources and reproduce inequalities.

The potential for change and transformation for this group of women occurred at several levels. Whilst it is unclear at what point assimilation takes place and the refugee identity is replaced with a migrant identity, at an individual level, through engagement in entrepreneurial activities, they have (re)constructed an entrepreneurial identity, a positive rather than a stigmatised identity. At a social community level, they have each gained the respect of the host and local, co-ethnic communities. At a household level financial contribution from the business to the household income has enabled them to generate income. Furthermore, at this meso level, they are positioned as role models promoting entrepreneurship to their family members and other refugee women, thus, affecting change. At a macro level, they contribute to job and wealth creation within the economy and through social businesses they are affecting policy change for refugee women. In order for this to take place, the women exercise their agency through reflexivity (Archer, 2007).

Reflection was identified as a key element in the identity work process (Figure 6-1). The respondents reflected on who they had been, how they were perceived by the host

community, their future aspirations of who they wanted to become and how they might affect change. Each reflected upon how they drew upon their personal resources, experiences, determination to refute stigma. Consequently, through this process of identity work, they have recreated themselves with vestiges of who they were, transposed onto who they are becoming. Several of the women spoke of wanting to leave a legacy reflecting their values and what they had achieved. Thus, the experiences of these respondents reflect Archer's (2007) argument that identity is not simply determined and constructed by the enablements and constraints of structural conditions upon an individual or the contexts in which they act. Neither do structures exist independently of the actions of individual actors. Archer would argue that a process of reflexivity on the part of the individual provides this 'conscious mediation' (Sayer, 2009: 114) between the social structures and the individual, whereby the individual considers themselves in relation to their contexts (Archer, 2012). This process is consistent with theories of identity work (Ibarra, 1999; Muhr *et al.*, 2019). Not only does this help to explain possible outcomes but can also be used to guide us towards the potential for transformation and emancipation within these processes. Taken together with Archer's (2012) morphogenetic approach, analysis of the findings suggest that the women have the potential to affect change through their identity work. Figure 7-3 provides an overview of this position using a critical realist lens.

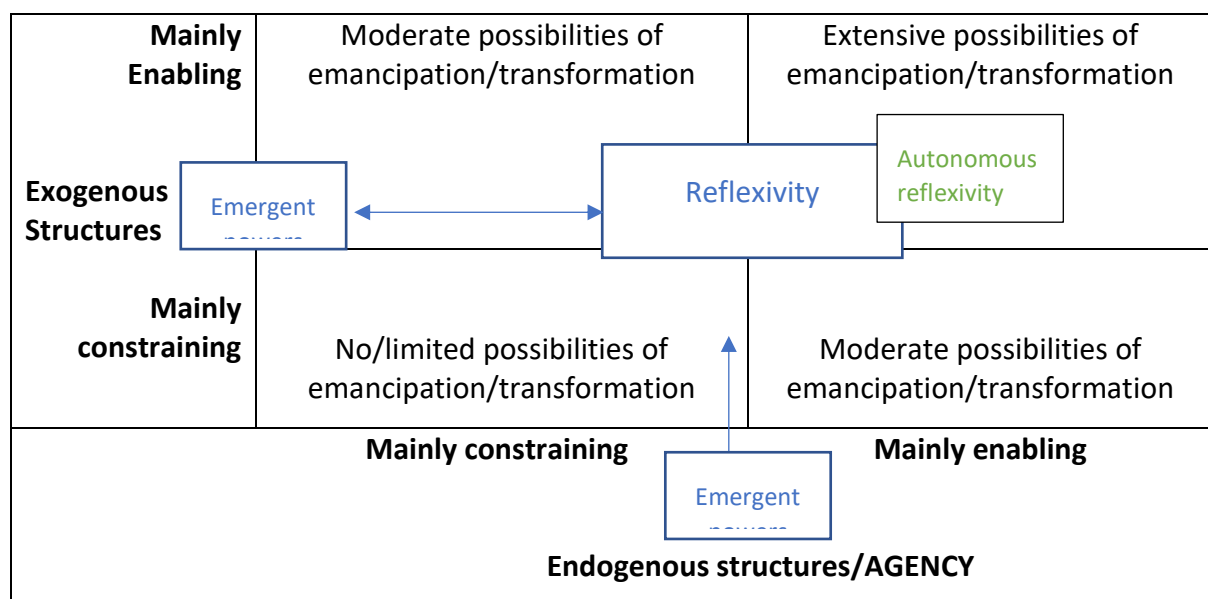


Figure 7-3: Critical realist possibilities of emancipation/transformation (Adapted from Modell, 2017)

Endogenous structures represent the agency of the women illustrated below in Figure 7-4 as the mechanisms that enable them to engage in entrepreneurial action. This critical realist extension of the findings presented in Chapter 6 provides insight into the internal reflexive drivers of identity work. In so doing, it captures a psychological element of the process in recognition that there is a personal self, separate to the social identity. We will then see how this has the potential to affect further change within the external structures.

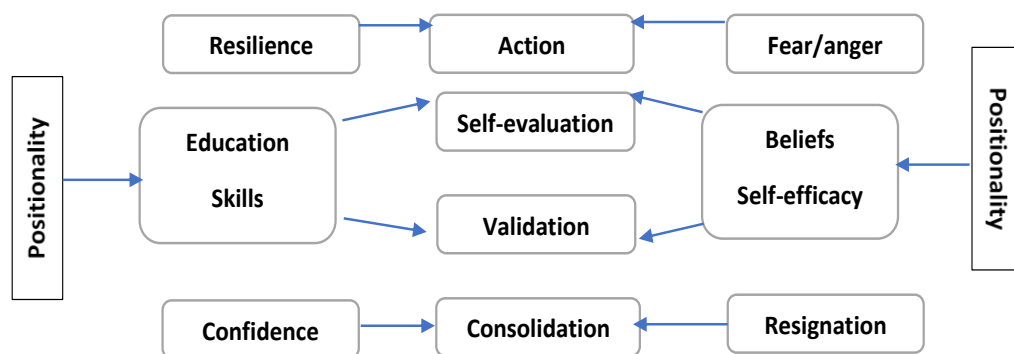


Figure 7-4: Entrepreneurial identity work: Internal enablement (Psycho-social level mechanisms) (Adapted from Martinez-Dy, 2014)

Whilst this view of the psycho-social mechanisms presents an explanation of how their reflexive process contributes to the development of an entrepreneurial identity, it also concurs with previous research that identifies self-efficacy and resilience, particularly for those who had arrived independently of the refugee placement programme (Mawson and Kasem, 2019). Aliya refers to other refugees who when faced with the limiting effects caused by institutional discrimination, became incapable for action. In contrast, after reflection that analysed her position, her identity work required that she *'needed to do something'* which in her case was to reposition herself as a business owner. However, it must be recognised that there will be women whose positionality does not enable this outcome, for example, those who do not have the privilege of a higher social class position which they can draw upon to take such action. Alternatively, their gender positioning may be such that it restricts the possibility of engaging in entrepreneurial activities.

Within this reflexive space a translocational intersectional analysis can expose the heterogeneity amongst these respondents and also within the wider refugee group. As the participants compare how they would be positioned as women businessowners in the home country versus in the host country, this had an impact upon how they viewed themselves as entrepreneurs. Aliya, from a more conservative patriarchal society where it is rare for women to be self-employed, recognised the novelty and power in this role despite other structural constraints in the UK. This caused her to view the potential of an entrepreneurial identity more broadly and take advantage of whatever institutional benefits were available. She felt that there were more opportunities and support in this regard, compared to those available for women business owners in Syria. As with most of the participants, there is a willingness to be promoted as an entrepreneur in spaces such as on social media. Floriane in contrast, proceeds more cautiously in recognition that the business environment is more formal in the UK than in her home country of Cameroon where she had previously owned her own business. She is conscious that the credibility of her entrepreneurial identity is tied to the institutional requirements of the host country and therefore, this becomes more limiting for her. This has an impact upon decisions to promote the business more widely.

Another expression of heterogeneity is revealed in the postcolonial discourse used by the Zimbabwean participants to explain the oppression they experienced as refugees, and as refugee entrepreneurs. The significance of this for the study of identity work through a translocational intersectionality lens is two-fold: First, identity work is embedded within the socio-political-historical context in which it occurs (Carrim and Nkomo, 2016). Second, social categories such as race, class and gender are rooted within the historical context of colonialism (Anthias, 2021). Consequently, to understand the identity work of refugee women in the UK, it is imperative that a much broader, social, political and historical context is considered. The legacies of colonialism situate the Zimbabwean participants within the context of British colonisation, the nature of which was experienced differently in the other regions from which the participants originate. For example, postcolonial tensions contributed to the persecution that had caused one of the Zimbabwean participants to leave her country. Floriane, has a history of dual colonisation by the French and the British, with the former having a majority presence.

In recognising these distinctions in the socio-politico-historical relations between nations, a further level in the interpretation of racial hierarchies is revealed. Where postcolonial disputes still exist in the home country regarding land rights and ownership, to lose one's positionality further by being labelled a refugee is a reproduction of colonialism. Hence, the identity work emerging from the Zimbabwean experience as demonstrated by one of the participants, reconfigures the narrative: 'stakeholder' rather than 'refugee'. It suggests a movement to claim the right to reframe the narrative from the position of being an equal. Consequently, the identity work through entrepreneurship becomes an act of subversion (Knight, 2016; Banerjee, 2019)

A shared postcolonial experience serves to expose refugee women to additional discrimination in the form of internalised racism exhibited by their compatriots in relation to their entrepreneurial actions. Therefore, the long-term effects of colonialism can serve to entrench the historical views of the colonisers within the co-ethnic community, reinforcing low class, race and gender positions. This is made manifest through limited expectations of what the women in this group can achieve and an acquiescence to the limits dictated by the host country. Thus, the evidence in this thesis supports the argument that there is a "multi-layered and nuanced nature of ethnicity in relation to entrepreneurial identity" (Barrett and Vershinina, 2017:440) based on realities that are both historical and translocational. These reflect variances in the way different histories, ideologies and beliefs are transferred from the home country and reinterpreted in the context of the host country.

Whilst the indication of transformation through the identity work process would appear to justify the promotion of entrepreneurship as a beneficial endeavour for marginalised groups, the critical position of this thesis argues that transformation is both relative and limited (Verduijn and Essers, 2013). The participants, although generating income have not attained their previous standard of living. Notwithstanding the elevated social positioning based on the success of the business, and that the women feel respected, this too is limited as it has not completely overcome barriers of gender, racial or disability discrimination and the refugee label keeps them in a liminal space. Thus, regarding transformation, there is a need

for a continued dialogue on entrepreneurship and identity work which critiques the extent to which it is able to affect a permanent change within the structures and whether this should, in fact be the burden of the refugee women.

### **7.3 Identity work, stigma management and power dynamics**

As this thesis has demonstrated, identity work within entrepreneurship scholarship increasingly recognises that the process is complex and dynamic. Whilst it is acknowledged that there are potential antagonisms within identity work (Lewis, 2013), one prominent tendency within the literature is to perceive identity work as an endeavour motivated by a desire to achieve a positive and coherent identity (Brown, 2015), particularly one that is aligned to the presumptive heroic entrepreneurial identity. Where a more negative context is explored in extant literature, the notion of stigma is mainly introduced in terms of business failure (Shepherd and Haynie, 2011; Simmons, Wiklund and Levie, 2014; Mudambi, Smith and Deeds, 2017) or stigmatised industries (Analoui and Herath, 2019; Lähdesmäki *et al.*, 2019; Ruebottom and Toubiana, 2020). Studies on stigmatisation in organisational contexts and among professionals arising from ethnicity (Slay and Smith, 2011; Doldor and Atewologun, 2020), sexuality and disability in the workplace have been examined to a lesser degree. To add and contribute to this literature, we have introduced the notion of multiple stigmatised identities and how they are managed together with non-stigmatised identities as part of a process of identity reconstruction; moving from a negative stigmatised identity to a positive entrepreneurial identity. In revealing stigma management to be an intrinsic aspect of the identity work process undertaken by the refugee women entrepreneurs, this thesis also reinforces the significance of the power dynamics that drive this process.

Discredited by a loss of social class status when positioned among the lowest ranking social groups upon arrival in the host country as asylum seekers, and then when formally ascribed the label of refugees, the women were also stigmatised as a result of ethno-racial differences. For Azadeh, disability was an additional stigmatising marker although all of the women were affected by mental health issues to varying degrees particularly throughout the asylum-seeking process. Thus, the evidence presented key indicators of stigmatisation: labelling, negative stereotyping, being othered, discrimination and status loss within a context of power

inequalities (Link and Phelan, 2001). The rights held by host country citizens are denied to refugees and the freedoms granted once individuals are legally recognised as refugees, are temporary. Consistent with findings on refugees in other contexts (Baranik, Hurst and Eby, 2018), refugees are criminalised, excluded and vulnerable. It is argued by Toyoki and Brown (2014), that such stigmatisation is *“an effect of power (which) can marginalise an individual, resulting in that person being disqualified from full societal acceptance”* (715-716). The stigmatisation experienced by these respondents went beyond disadvantage and accordingly, highlighted power inequalities imposed by institutional structures as well as a negotiation of these powers. The identity work that these women undertook is therefore, a quest to justify and reclaim their existence and agency by recreating an identity that can thrive in the host country.

### ***Entrepreneurship as stigma management***

Engagement in entrepreneurial activity was found to be one of the means by which this cohort of women responded to stigmatisation and thus, resisted the dominant notions about who they were as refugees. This is consistent with Reveley and Down's, (2009) finding in their study of indigenous people in Australia where entrepreneurial action was used to respond to stigma from various sources. Assuming an entrepreneurial identity by 'acting as a businessperson' provided early evidence of the use of this tactic as a defensive/offensive move to counter the stigmatisation some of the women felt when they entered certain situations. For three of the women, this action was an act of resurrecting a latent entrepreneurial identity as they had either owned a business or helped in a family business in their home country before having to seek asylum in the UK. Thus, through dramaturgy and discourse (Reveley and Down, 2009) stigmatised identities are able to confront, if not displace, the refugee identity with an entrepreneurial professional role identity; attempting to replace the presumed dependency and deviancy of the refugee label with a productive and respectable image of an entrepreneur.

Constructing an entrepreneurial identity challenged stigma and created advantage or a privileged identity. This is similar to the experiences of Afro-Caribbean women who used entrepreneurship to emphasise their professional identities and escape racism and sexism in the workplace (Knight, 2016), or Romanian professionals in the UK who used their Whiteness

and professional advantage as a shield against the stigmatised ethnic identity (Doldor and Atewologun, 2020). In this thesis, developing an entrepreneurial identity positioned these women as role models within their co-ethnic communities, as well as positioning them within the wider host community as exemplars of successful refugees. They sustain this elevated position by making themselves available to help other refugees in the community thus, reinforcing a positive identity and reclaiming some aspects of their social class position and status in society. Thus, demonstrating themselves to be active and engaged. This outcome would appear to confirm the neoliberal ideal (Marttila, 2013) and exemplify the 'ethnic exceptionalism', particularly for those that remained embedded in their refugee and co-ethnic communities (Ram and Jones, 2008). However, to accept this position without critique, would be to disregard the ongoing forms of structural discrimination based on the stigmatised refugee status and ethno-racial identity to which the entrepreneurial experience itself exposed the women. The use of translocational intersectionality reveals the structural constraints that create entrepreneurial disadvantage based on a shift in their positionality. For example, the women reported of ongoing challenges in accessing finance particularly during the start-up and early growth stages of their businesses, and in accessing wider business networks. As Berglund (2017) notes, entrepreneurship is an activity where 'precariousness still prevailed but was silenced'. Similarly, in using entrepreneurship as a stigma management tactic, stigma still prevails but is challenged.

Recent research by Bacq *et al.*, (2020) explores the notion of stigma entrepreneurship as an outcome of a moral anger response to stigmatisation. This resonates with two of the cases in the current study where the objective of the business was to challenge the stigmatisation of refugee women and other marginalised groups through services that address their empowerment and wellbeing. Moreover, the women's emotional responses to the stigmatisation of refugees have remained a driving force behind their businesses. During the interviews, it appeared that for these two women, the stigmatisation of their refugee and ethno-racial identities were more negatively experienced and were painful to recount, particularly when compared to discussions about their gendered identity. Although recognised as equally marginalising, this latter identity marker did not evoke the same emotional response. In both cases, not only are the women redefining the balance of power



as represented by the stigma placed on them, but in so doing, they are reconfiguring the stigmatised stereotypes as resources that can be used for entrepreneurial action. By means of their entrepreneurial activities (both of which are social enterprises), they are able to offer advocacy and empowerment on behalf of other refugee women which is a direct challenge to the refugee image of dependency. Thus, confirming the opinion that the experience of having stigmatised and marginalised identities can be used in a positive way to construct an entrepreneurial identity (Malheiros and Padilla, 2015).

The use of an entrepreneurial identity is also a means by which the women can potentially align themselves with an alternative social identity group, which may in fact include the stigmatisers. In so doing, they can reduce the stigma by challenging stereotypes, 'covering' the refugee label, and prioritising the product rather than being representative of a 'stigmatised' people group. The businesses provided the opportunity to belong to an industry, so for example Aliya immersed herself in the food industry by putting herself and her product forward for awards and participating in trade shows. In so doing, she became known within the network and was able to ally with a host community (stigmatiser). This is a similar notion to the findings of Hampel and Tracey, (2017) who identified this as a stigma management strategy to move towards legitimacy. With the success of her business, Aliya noted that locally, people were accepting her for her achievements rather than focusing on her ethnicity and refugee status. However, this was not consistently experienced among the group, many of whom remained within their ethnic enclaves. It could be argued that this is a missed opportunity on the part of some of the other women. However, this should not negate the reality of the structural conditions limiting the access of some to similar networks.

As argued above, translocational intersectionality highlights the multi-level inequalities that exist for these women in accessing such networks and other resources based on their positionality. These inequalities serve to alienate the stigmatised from the stigmatisers and other supportive groups. An alternative approach to reconciling stigma and entrepreneurship that might overcome this impasse is restorative entrepreneuring (Wainwright and Muñoz, 2020). This combines entrepreneurial practices together with relevant institutional systems of support that will help at-risk, stigmatised groups *"to reconstruct their identity, sense of*

*ownership and self-worth and engage in a progressively autonomous rehabilitative life project*” (Wainwright and Muñoz, 2020: 5). This is a similar approach to the recommendations made by ethnic minority entrepreneurs with disabilities (Owalla *et al.*, 2020). Whilst this view of entrepreneurship and stigma focuses on the service providers supporting at-risk groups, it also introduces a reframing of service provision that would permit disassociation with the stigmatised refugee label in relation to the entrepreneurial identity. This recognises that the term refugee is inherently dehumanising as a stigmatised identity and may elicit a similar response as migrant-heritage business owners who reject labels such as ethnic or immigrant entrepreneur (Ram, Jones and Patton, 2006). Refugee entrepreneur is not how the participants described themselves either through discourse or on any social media platform. Consequently, external structures, in this instance business support providers, can be positive contributors to the identity construction of refugee women rather than reinforcers of the stigma. Thus, the burden of stigma management need not rely solely on the agentic ability of the women, but rather, (de)stigmatisation can be accepted as a responsibility for institutional actors. This co-construction can also serve to break down the power dynamic that is an unavoidable component of identity work and stigma management.

### ***Navigating power relations – controlling the stigmatised identities***

Previous research has identified stigma management as the space within which power is negotiated between those who are stigmatised and the conveyors of stigma (Toyoki and Brown, 2014; Lyons, Pek and Wessel, 2017). This mediation of power relations is generally recognised within identity construction (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013; Bardon and Pez , 2020), but is particularly relevant in the context of refugees entrepreneurs who have experienced a loss of rights related to their newly ascribed refugee identity. For this power shift to bring about change, those who are stigmatised put forward alternative identity claims which must then be accepted by those who had the power advantage and imposed the stigma (Lyons, Pek and Wessel, 2017). In this thesis, the alternative identity claims take two dominant forms: that of finding a positive aspect of the stigmatised identity and presenting non-stigmatising identities. We see this dialogic interaction as the shift to becoming an entrepreneur serves to legitimise the refugee label. Media coverage of the women as refugee entrepreneurs is one such example. The media, which has a reputation for reporting negatively about the threat of refugees (Thomas, 2012) ‘defers’ to the reconfiguration of the

refugee who has started a business and is now deemed to be a positive contributing member to society (Bearne, 2017). This forms part of the process of negotiating power.

Notwithstanding this shift in power dynamics, this is not a 'once and for all' power negotiation. Zendaya, for example, finds that whilst she may have negotiated legitimacy with the media and has become a poster girl for the successful refugee entrepreneur, replacing the stigmatised 'refugee' identity with a less stigmatised 'refugee entrepreneur' identity, she retains a powerless position within the business sphere on account of the stigma associated with her ethnic minority status. Consequently, her identity work strategy of whitewashing does not confront the stigmatisation but rather, it is an avoidance tactic. The use of a white salesperson as a surrogate merely circumvents the impact of stigmatisation in a business environment where the refugee entrepreneur has not yet been fully accepted as legitimate. However, it is a subversive act and, arguably one that challenges the power dynamics despite its inability to remove the stigmatisation that is experienced on account of her blackness. This is because the stigma management takes place in a context of oppression and so each act can be interpreted as one of resistance. Thus, stigma management for this group of women was visible as a form of resistance that is consistent with the identity work undertaken by marginalised groups (Killian and Johnson, 2006) and also for some groups pursuing an entrepreneurial identity in contexts of oppression and discrimination (Sabella and El-Far, 2019).

#### **7.4 Summary**

This chapter has analysed and discussed the implications of the empirical findings on refugee women entrepreneurs and their identity work strategies in relation to extant literature. The identity work process was reviewed with further insight and depth provided into the intersectional effects of gender, race, class, disability and migrant status and the ensuing entrepreneurship structure and agency dynamic through the use of a critical realist analysis. Thus, it was able to position the study within the critical entrepreneurship body of literature in its recognition of unequal power dynamics caused by structural constraints that exist and which can be perpetuated through entrepreneurship (Essers *et al.*, 2017a). Identity work was presented as a dynamic, multi-level process in its response to these structural effects at a macro (institutional), meso (household, community, firm) and individual level (Leitch and

Harrison, 2016). This was extended through the use of translocational intersectionality to demonstrate that temporality and spatial considerations were significant to the process (Anthias, 2021).

The findings suggest that identity work strategies as revealed in the extant women's entrepreneurship, migrant entrepreneurship and disability entrepreneurship literatures are relevant and negotiated by this cohort of women in an iterative manner over time. Class-based privileges from previous identities in the home country were used as a resource to counter stigmatised identities in the host country. Thus, it contributes qualitatively with findings that show how, through the use of multiple intersectional identity work strategies including entrepreneurship, stigmatised identities can be positioned positively. It draws on literature on collaborative means to overcome stigma (Wainwright and Muñoz, 2020) in an effort to demonstrate how this can be operationalised to affect change beyond the agential efforts of the women, thus redressing the balance of power and responsibility. The findings also provide insight into how the notion of liminality can be applied within the dual context of refugee and entrepreneur. Liminal friction was presented to capture the struggle for ownership of the identity of the individual reflecting the ongoing structure-agency challenge as individuals engage in entrepreneurial activities.

Overall, this critique of the conditions in which refugee women entrepreneurs construct their identities and examination of the process of this identity work challenges the homogenised view of women entrepreneurs. In revealing the agency and resilience of the refugee women, it also exposes the structural constraints which challenge the expediency of promoting entrepreneurship as a one size fits all, meritocratic endeavour.

Given the varied themes emerging from this research, it is evident that the implications discussed in this chapter have the potential to extend beyond the singular context of the refugee woman entrepreneur in the UK. Notions of identity, liminality, stigma management and power can be examined where power imbalances exist such as more broadly within migrant entrepreneurship or the informal economy. Similarly, the use of translocational intersectionality is shown here to be relevant not only where there are marginalised identities

but also, where there is the potential for advantage or privilege to co-exist when considered within a broader translocational context.

## 8 Conclusion

This chapter presents an overview of the thesis followed by a summary of the empirical, theoretical, and philosophical contributions it makes to the literatures on entrepreneurship, gender and identity work. It then reflects on the limitations of the research and proposes opportunities for future research. The penultimate section discusses the implications of the research findings for policy and practice and finally, the chapter ends with a few concluding remarks.

### 8.1 Introduction and Overview

#### *Aims of the research*

The aim of this thesis was to explore and contextualise the complex identity work undertaken by refugee women entrepreneurs in the UK. In so doing it offers insight into how this group of entrepreneurs is affected by the intersection of multiple social categories of difference as they construct entrepreneurial identities. Thus, this thesis addresses the gaps in entrepreneurship and identity scholarship caused by a limited commitment to contextualisation, and an enduring preoccupation with a masculine and western view of the entrepreneurial actor. Overall, it contributes to academic conversations within entrepreneurship, gender and identity work.

Popular discourse grounded in a neoliberal tradition suggests that entrepreneurship is a beneficial endeavour for those who occupy marginal positions in society, affording all individuals the opportunity to better themselves and exercise autonomy (Karnani, 2009; Marttila, 2013). However, given that the domain of entrepreneurship and the character of the entrepreneur remains overwhelmingly biased towards masculinity and westernness (Ahl, 2006), it is argued that entrepreneurship may in fact hold a 'false promise' for those who do not conform to this image (Ahl and Marlow, 2021).

In acknowledging the potential benefits and limitations of the phenomenon of entrepreneurship, a review of the literature drew attention to the fact that more explanation is required in order to understand the implications of entrepreneurship for marginalised groups who operate within contexts that have hitherto received very little attention. With this purpose, this thesis has considered women refugee entrepreneurs in the UK. Thus, it

addresses the issue of heterogeneity within women's entrepreneurship, and, within refugee entrepreneurship, a field in its infancy, this thesis injects a contextualised feminist critique. It has argued that the process of identity work and more specifically, for those with stigmatised identities, is a relevant focus in order to understand the transition refugee women undergo as they leave behind their former identities in the face of conflict, war and persecution. Such rupturing with 'old lives', requires that new identities are constructed as they develop their entrepreneurial selves in a Global North host country. This has provided a rich and more inclusive conceptualisation of an entrepreneurial identity and consequently, theoretical advancement of a dynamic processual approach linking identity and entrepreneurship (Leitch and Harrison, 2016).

Despite the progress that has been made through efforts that acknowledge the heterogeneity of entrepreneurial actors (Marlow and Al-Dajani, 2017), there is still a tendency for gendered approaches to entrepreneurship to overlook other categories of difference. Consequently, women entrepreneurs who are classed and racialised remain under-theorised as are entrepreneurial women with identity markers reflecting disability or a refugee migration status. This prevailing homogenous perspective of women entrepreneurs risks reproducing the marginalisation that gendered approaches to entrepreneurship intended to challenge (Ahl and Marlow, 2012). In response to this gap in the literature, this thesis has applied a translocational intersectionality theoretical framework which allows it to capture the multiplicity of identity categories as experienced by women entrepreneurs. In so doing, it has revealed inequalities, power dynamics and positions of oppression and privilege that are part of the lived experiences of this group of entrepreneurs as they construct their identities in the host country. Furthermore, the literature also revealed that there is relatively little research on stigmatised identities within entrepreneurship scholarship. Consequently, understanding of the issues that surround the construction of an entrepreneurial identity if an individual holds a stigmatised identity, remains limited. In its examination of women refugee entrepreneurs, this thesis directly addresses this gap as it considers the identity work that is required to transition from a stigmatised identity to an entrepreneurial identity.

An overview of the contemporary theorising regarding entrepreneurship and gender was presented in Chapter 2. This established the research question within critical debates such as

a contextualisation of entrepreneurship and the intersect of diverse characteristics within the field. Following this, the thesis drew on the identity and identity work literature which revealed the need for a more processual understanding of identity work within a critical social debate (Leitch and Harrison, 2016). This raised the issue of the implications of identity work as a process over time in the context of refugee women who were transitioning from stigmatised refugee identities to more positive entrepreneurial identities, and the transnational journeys they had made from the Global South to the Global North. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) and an enhanced version in the form of, translocational intersectionality (Anthias, 1998, 2021) were introduced as a theoretical framework for analysing this phenomenon.

The research question posited by this thesis was: *How does engagement in entrepreneurial activities influence the identity construction of refugee women in the UK?*

Key objectives were to determine:

1. how gender, class, race, refugee status and other social categories of difference intersect within a UK context
2. how gender, class, race, refugee status and other social categories of difference influence, or are influenced by the entrepreneurial experiences of forcibly displaced women within a UK context

### *Methodology*

Drawing on translocational intersectionality, this thesis captured the interplay of multiple social categories of difference experienced by refugee women entrepreneurs as they engaged in identity work. The identity categories revealed in the thesis included gender, class, race/ethnicity, disability and refugee status. The intersectionality framework facilitated the development of the structure-agency debate as, when using an identity work approach, it highlighted how individuals responded and related to external power structures. A translocational perspective of intersectionality incorporated the notion of positionality. This served to enhance and increase the robustness of intersectionality with an additional contextual and temporal lens requiring that social categories are conceptualised in terms of spaces that can shift and which represent positions in terms of hierarchies and inequalities (Anthias, 1998, 2021).



The use of a critical realist perspective provided a means to strengthen the effectiveness of translocational intersectionality as a theoretical and analytical lens. It offered a depth ontology and an analysis process of retroduction which secured intersectionality with a robust explanatory capability. This was applied in the examination of the identity work undertaken by refugee women entrepreneurs navigating the effects of living in the host country.

The empirical element of the thesis was conducted using in-depth case studies based on three interviews with each of the five refugee women entrepreneurs who comprised the sample group. They had come to the UK seeking asylum from Syria, Zimbabwe, Iran and Cameroon. The interviews took place over a period of over twelve months, the first comprising of an unstructured interview followed by two semi-structured interviews. Observations, documentary evidence, online material and visual stress timelines provided supplementary evidence. The transcribed data was coded in NVivo and subjected to within-case and cross-case analyses which incorporate thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and critical realist analysis (Fletcher, 2017; Hu *et al.*, 2019).

## 8.2 Contributions

### *Empirical contributions*

This thesis gives voice to a largely ignored and hidden group as it reveals the narratives of refugees, specifically, women who are racialised, classed, and in one case, also embodying various disabilities. In examining the experiences of women entrepreneurs from the Global South who engage in entrepreneurial activities within a western context, they become a visible group as this thesis seeks to ensure their legitimacy within mainstream entrepreneurship research. The findings in Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrated the refugee experience and how the experience of the asylum process had significant impact on how they came to view themselves and were viewed as refugees. It established the refugee identity, ethno-racial and disability identity markers specifically, as stigmatised, as they interacted with other marginalising identity categories such as gender and class. The intersectional framework revealed that the identity work undertaken involved multiple identity markers. Where marginalised and disadvantaged actors are typically assigned stigmatised and victimised roles, the opportunity to exercise agency was evident through entrepreneurial activities. Consequently, the process of identity construction was presented through a prism

of complex power dynamics. Thus, the thesis was able to theorise on the interplay between entrepreneurship and identity work based on findings that demonstrated that acting entrepreneurially influenced identity work, whilst the identity work itself, enabled entrepreneurial activities.

Entrepreneurial action was a means by which stigmatised identities could be challenged. This unveiled a complex and multi-layered identity work process undertaken by the women as they sought to construct their entrepreneurial identities. At the same time, it exposed the interplay between the various identities carried by the women thus directly responding to the objective of this thesis. Despite the marginalisation and disadvantage experienced through various identity categories, the women's identity work is primarily based on repositioning themselves into a more positive space.

The findings showed that the dominance of the refugee identity in earlier years prompted the initial transition towards an entrepreneurial identity which required a de-prioritisation of the maternal identity and adapting the traditional gender ideology based on patriarchal expectations from the previous home country so that an entrepreneurial identity could be accommodated. In some cases, this was a temporary measure in order to reclaim a maternal identity which involved conforming to traditional gender ideologies whilst de-prioritising the entrepreneurial identity. In other cases, conforming to a traditional gender ideology takes place in the home, whilst in the workplace, it is adapted. Adjusting the gendered identity in the workplace was found to involve either enacting masculine behaviours or, establishing a family business in which a symbiotic relationship between the gendered maternal identity and the entrepreneurial identity was evident. This contrasts with women who chose to establish home-based businesses in an effort to accommodate the entrepreneurial identity within the demands of childcare responsibilities and the associated traditional gender ideologies.

Ethno-racial identity work was found to take place particularly during times of reflecting on entrepreneurial capabilities, validating the entrepreneurial identity and during times of consolidating the entrepreneurial process. A key strategy used by the participants was in reframing the stigmatised ethnic minority identity in order to positively accentuate their

ethnic roots, which consequently, provided entrepreneurial opportunities. Thus, heritage or traditional foods and clothing are legitimised within the context of entrepreneurship rather than being seen as a threat or alien to the host country. This served to simultaneously reposition the stigmatised identity. Similarly, engagement with entrepreneurial action required disability identity work that reframed the stigma associated with disability and refugee status by using this experience within the business offering. This interaction shifted the negative stigma associated with disability and repositioned it as a positive factor contributing to the development of an entrepreneurial identity.

Conversely, when validating the entrepreneurial identity, there was a tendency to de-emphasise the ethno-racial or refugee identity and self-present with a focus on other more positive aspects of identity. This thesis, thus supports the established literature on immigrant entrepreneurs gaining legitimacy through conforming or being distinct, concealing or accenting (Abd Hamid, O’Kane and Everett, 2019). However, it identified additional identity work strategies such as whitewashing. This is presented in the form of co-opting White sales staff to engage with white clients when bidding for contracts with larger organisations or anglicising the business name to hide its minority ethnicity in the branding. Another strategy was seeking and attaining validation of ‘self’ and the business through industry and business awards.

The findings suggest that the process of constructing an entrepreneurial identity benefitted from identity work that draws on privilege based on social class positioning. The downward mobility experienced in becoming a refugee required a reclaiming of prior social class advantage that was held in the home country. This was used as a source of aspiration and motivation as the women developed an entrepreneurial identity. More specifically, the women drew on past privilege in terms of education, skills, experience and self-efficacy as additional resources in constructing the entrepreneurial identity. This is in contrast to the disadvantaged class positioning they are ascribed with in the host country. Such positioning is associated with their stigmatised refugee and ethnic minority status, and marginalised gender identity which denies them access to resources.

The strategies employed reflect a need to regain advantage and combat being positioned with a negative and oppressed framing. Where privilege may be seen to exist on the other side of the dichotomous positioning wherein they are placed, such as in Whiteness, masculinity, being able-bodied or, having a higher rather than lower class positionality, this thesis argues that such positionality is neither rigid nor static. The women need the freedom and space to be accepted and visualised beyond the confines of marginalisation and oppression, whilst recognising that the oppressive and marginalising structures continue to exist. This will allow aspects of privilege to become evident. Without searching for the possibility of advantage, refugee women will be permanently enclosed within a stigmatised and marginal position.

Once refugee women had engaged in identity work and developed an entrepreneurial identity, they were perceived more positively. However, this ought not to detract from the change that is required to transform the structural constraints which are highlighted in this thesis. While the women can be involved in this transformation process, this thesis argues that the responsibility lies within the domain of actors who have power within the structures. These are the actors who are able to distribute or hinder access to resources and consequently, influence the effectiveness of the women's individual efforts.

Further examination of the relationship between entrepreneurial action and identity work revealed that the identity work takes place within a liminal space. As applied to this group of entrepreneurs, liminality lasted for an indeterminate length of time and was twofold: first there was a liminal experience associated with being ascribed a refugee label and second, liminality was experienced through the framework of developing an entrepreneurial identity. The complexity of this period as the women contested against the refugee identity and attempted to gain control of and enact their other identities on their own terms, was captured by the notion of liminal friction. This liminal space is also the domain in which sensemaking and the reflexivity that is required to construct an entrepreneurial identity occur.

Thus, the empirical data contributes to the literature recognising that identities are neither static or coherent, but rather, are processual, fluid and dynamic in nature (Hytti, 2005; Watson, 2009a; Leitch and Harrison, 2016). They also respond to calls for more contextual

conceptualisations of entrepreneurial identity acknowledging its interaction with spatial and temporal contexts (Radu-Lefebvre *et al.*, 2021)

### ***Theoretical contributions***

This thesis re-envisioned entrepreneurial identity work in the context of refugee women. Consequently, a key contribution made to the identity work literature is a processual view of the identity shifts performed by refugee women entrepreneurs. The findings revealed a dual process of identity work based on the pursuit of an entrepreneurial identity and a concurrent challenge to a stigmatised identity, with the overall process being underpinned by the interplay and repositioning of various other identity markers. The process mapped out by this thesis makes the case for a multi-level approach to understanding the dynamic performance of identity construction. It builds on previous gendered identity work studies, particularly those that offer an intersectional perspective of the various strategies used by migrant women (Essers and Benschop, 2007; Villares-Varela, 2018). However, it contends that the gendered identity work among this group of women is more complex and can be mapped as a non-linear process that changes over time depending on the stage of development of the entrepreneurial identity and the saliency and hierarchies of other identity markers. Thus, oscillation between multiple identities through movements of oppression and privilege is used to develop identity work that either serves to promote or constrain an entrepreneurial identity, whilst resisting or circumventing the stigmatised identity. The thesis also suggests that the identity work occurs in a range of spaces and consequently, at multiple levels. Activity is conducted internally at the individual level, within households, social groupings and in the workplace, at an institutional level, and a temporal dimension.

A second contribution of this thesis is that it extends the notion of entrepreneurial identity work within the context of stigmatisation. Extant entrepreneurship scholarship primarily focuses on the positive image of the entrepreneur, with discrimination and disadvantage filtered through the lens of either gendered or minority ethnic views. Furthermore, where stigma is addressed within entrepreneurship literature, it is mostly in the context of business failure or stigmatised industries. This thesis calls attention to entrepreneurs who have been ascribed stigmatised identities which dehumanise them, in addition to carrying other non-stigmatising identities which may or may not be marginalising. In identifying these 'spoiled

identities' (Goffman, 1963), the entrepreneurial experiences of this group of entrepreneurs is understood beyond the realms of navigating discrimination and marginalisation and a more complex picture of stigma management within the identity work emerges. Stigma emphasises perceptions of the stigmatised individual and the discrediting mark that is in the person, rather than the actions and perceptions of the perpetrator or 'stigmatiser' as is the case with the notion of discrimination (Link and Phelan, 2001). However, within this thesis, the perspective of identity work in the context of stigma, elucidates expressions of power as those holding stigmatised identities reject ascribed identities and reclaim or exercise ownership of more positive identities. Thus, further contextualisation and a deeper sense of the identity work that is required of stigmatised entrepreneurial actors is revealed.

Although refugee women were found to draw on previously theorised identity work strategies in response to their stigmatised identities, such as countering the stigma through entrepreneurship (Reveley and Down, 2009; Bacq *et al.*, 2020) and creating positive personal identities (Toyoki and Brown, 2014), this thesis recognises additional strategies such as the notion of whitewashing as a means of avoiding having to confront and engage with the stigma. We extend the theorising around this strategy previously identified as a means of countering anticipated discrimination among online entrepreneurs and have positioned it firmly within the domain of identity work and stigma management.

Initially, this thesis had anticipated that the benefit of examining stigmatised identities lay in rendering this group more transparent, and therefore, better understood by the host country institutions. However, beyond increasing the visibility of this group, this thesis concurs with recent research that a more collaborative approach can be adopted in the stigma management process by including other actors within social structures, who hold power, and who may inadvertently, reproduce the stigmatisation of this group.

This thesis recognises the notions of liminality, friction and contested identity in the case of refugee women entrepreneurs to capture the processual transgression between the person that they were and the person that they become due to the circumstances in which they find themselves. The findings emphasise the friction caused by contested identities in the liminal space based on shifts in social positionality which are subject to conflicting internal and

external perspectives. As such it emphasises the significance of translocational intersectionality and spatiotemporal considerations regarding the identity work of this group of entrepreneurs. It is within this liminal space that their positionality from times past, present and future are challenged by others who ascribe them with an alternative identity. Thus, this thesis extends the literature on liminality and identity work (Beech, 2011; Alkhaled and Sasaki, 2021) and liminality and entrepreneurship (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018; Muhr et al., 2019; Garcia-Lorenzo, Sell-Trujillo and Donnelly, 2020) within the context of refugee entrepreneurs who use this space to convert the negativity of their identities to positivity.

In order to make sense of this new identity within the structural constraints which have previously been discussed, the women reflect back in order to reclaim their lost or disregarded identities, that is to say, their 'lingering identities' (Wittman, 2019). As the findings reveal, this is a significant aspect of their identity work which we have already shown to be influenced by translocational intersectionality. We refer to the tension between the past, present and future identities as liminal friction. It is in this space that individuals struggle for ownership of the right to determine their future identities and retain aspects of their former identities.

The notion of an extended liminal space resonates with the conclusion drawn by Alkhaled and Sasaki (2021), that refugee women are able to extend the boundaries of indeterminate liminality by symbolically maintaining close ties to their former lives through the production of traditional crafts. This thesis, however, extends their theorising to suggest that not only is heritage retained, but former social positioning can also be re-mobilised within the host country setting and provide inspiration for their future selves. This then serves as a resource for the identity work that takes place in developing an entrepreneurial identity. Additionally, it is seen that new entrepreneurial identities are projected back to the home region or country either through internationalisation or simply by reputation. This offers further evidence that this experience of liminality and identity work traverses both time and space. It also suggests that assumptions as to how the liminal reaggregation stage should unfold, may be limited. Within the extended liminal period, several of the women in this study have plans to return to their home countries, either tired of having to fight racism, or wanting to be back in an environment where they did not have to negotiate so many disadvantages. Yet, concurrently,

they plan ahead for citizenship, home ownership in the host country and growth of their businesses in the UK. Incorporating internationalisation as part of their business growth strategies, particularly to neighbouring countries to their home country, is one means whereby this can be achieved. This offers a further perspective on the frictional and paradoxical nature of the liminal experience.

In its examination of agency, structure and transformation, this thesis is able to make a modest advancement to the debates on whether entrepreneurship is an optimistic and transformational endeavour for marginalised and disadvantaged groups. It argues that through a high degree of reflexivity and agency, entrepreneurship can be used to change the effects of stigma and disadvantage experienced by refugee women. While wanting to avoid an overly optimistic and simplistic view of the promise of entrepreneurship, the thesis suggests that refugee women entrepreneurs have access to power that enables them to challenge the stigmatisation with which they are confronted. They can reclaim or construct a privileged identity which can be used creatively to bring about change for themselves, their households and in some cases for their communities. Consequently, the identity work undertaken adapts to and reconfigures assumptions of who refugee women are based on their gender, ethno-racial, classed identities. In so doing, a positive entrepreneurial identity can be developed. However, this is a complex endeavour. Notwithstanding the potential for entrepreneurship to bring about transformation through the agency of the individual, the thesis identified a perpetual conflict based on structural constraints and the positionality of refugee women in the UK which restricted access to resources. Therefore, in order to stimulate transformation, refugee women have to interact with enabling conditions and identify the privileges and power that they might hold. The argument that remains, is whether the responsibility should be left for the women to affect change on their own terms or whether the institutions should take greater responsibility for stimulating social change?

The thesis concurs with critiques of institutional efforts that reflect a 'one-size-fits-all (ideal)' of entrepreneurship (Verduyn and Essers, 2017) and which reinforce stigma and discrimination. These efforts are seen to be stifling to migrant women entrepreneurs, who respond to the institutional conditions by creatively engaging with entrepreneurship to affect change within their own spaces. However, we extend this theorising to suggest that



disadvantaged refugee women entrepreneurs can also, through their identity work, affect change within these structures. In order to achieve long-term societal change, the significance of networks for this group, suggests this it would require that they collectively do so. Therefore, entrepreneurial action, particularly in the cases in which the participants managed social enterprises or membership organisations, can provide an opportunity for advocacy and the potential for structural change.

The findings of this thesis suggest that the identity work of refugee women maintains the structure-agency debate. However, it does so in its challenge of perspectives that would prioritise a structural view of the entrepreneurial identity work of marginalised groups, yet at the same time, it challenges those that exaggerate the influence of agency. The complex interworking of identity manoeuvres as the women try to navigate stigma and discrimination, suggests that responsibility for transformative and emancipatory action lies within both structural and agentic efforts.

### ***Philosophical and methodological contributions***

Another contribution of the thesis is in its application of a critical realist analysis to identify the underpinning structures and causal mechanisms that have an impact upon the identity construction of the women entrepreneurs. The additional critical realist analysis enabled the intersectionality theoretical framework to have greater explanatory power of the identity work undertaken both at the level interfacing with social structures, and at the individual level as the entrepreneur engages in reflexivity and self-validation. Similarly, the use of translocational intersectionality (Anthias, 2021) supported by a critical realist philosophical perspective addressed the need for greater contextualisation within entrepreneurship research. It did so by broadening the entrepreneurship frame; incorporating not only the positionality and agency of the entrepreneur, but also the social and institutional structural inequalities that influence the identity process within a temporal and spatial paradigm. In its ability to detect nuances of oppression and privilege, it also facilitated further understanding of the potential for transformation as an outcome of the identity work. Consequently, this thesis has demonstrated that extending intersectionality through a translocational lens and combining it with both identity work and a critical realist perspective, advances intersectional theory. It is progressed *'towards the original aims of the intersectional and realist projects of*

*dismantling structures of social oppression and promoting emancipation and human flourishing'* (Martinez Dy, Lee and Marlow, 2014: 464). This acknowledges Crenshaw's (2019) assertion that there is still an 'enduring urgency of intersectionality', although we would argue that its original form has required adaptation in order to strengthen its effective.

### **8.3 Limitations**

Although the setting and cases studied in this thesis yielded a rich data set, the research was not without limitations, which will now be acknowledged. A diverse sample of women entrepreneurs was sought and whilst there may have been justification to include greater diversity within the sample, the practicalities of including a larger number of cases was prohibitive given the time and financial resources available for this thesis. Consequently, only theoretical generalisations can be derived from the analysis. Notwithstanding the number of cases used, they encompassed a range of diversity with representation of different countries (capturing the Middle East and Africa), business types, stages of business maturity and experience of entrepreneurship. However, the cases reflect a sample that comprises of solely middle-class refugee women, all of whom spoke English. Additional results may have emerged if there had been a similar diversity of prior social class positioning, capturing refugee women who were of a lower-class position with less observable privilege. The inclusion of women who were less proficient in English language skills would also have been valuable in eliciting a wider range of findings.

Additionally, despite the thesis generating a sufficient amount of contextualised material and applying multiple methods for collecting data, it was expected that additional observations would be included for all the participants. Unfortunately, the restrictions enforced during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic prevented more observations from taking place on business premises and in other work-related spaces. Therefore, there were limited opportunities in which the women's interactions with staff could be observed as well as how they enacted their entrepreneurial identities in other settings. Furthermore, whilst interviews during this period could take place via videoconferencing, it was at times a challenging medium to negotiate in the instances when participants expressed intense negative emotions. Conveying

empathy through a screen was less effective than when conducting face to face interviews and may have had an impact upon further candidness by the participant.

Another related limitation is the failure of the thesis to capture more in-depth data from family members and other stakeholders. In the thesis there are a limited number of observations and informal conversations that include family members, staff and colleagues at events, as well as refugee business support providers who had worked with two of the participants. Consequently, the thesis is not able to theorise in further detail the relational aspect of identity work as is required to determine a more holistic view of the process (Petriglieri and Obodaru, 2019). However, it is acknowledged that additional insight into the identity work undertaken by the women as it occurs in relation to others, both within the household setting and in the business environment, would provide further richness to the findings.

Whilst a feminist aligned approach promotes the prioritisation of the women's voice in the data, a critical realist perspective recognises that there may be data that is inaccurate or omitted from the women's narratives. Accordingly, the mode of interviewing required from a critical realist perspective asks 'why' questions to seek explanation of the phenomenon. However, such an approach to interviewing can be perceived as intrusive as it seeks to uncover the knowledge that lies at the level of 'real' (Stutchbury, 2021). This is potentially of a greater risk when interviewing vulnerable groups who may feel judged or further victimised. For example, in questions posed such as, "why do you think they treated you this way?" Although all the data gathered were included in the analysis, the findings that were reported had to be treated with sensitivity and discretion. Failure to do so, risked exposing the participants to feelings of further vulnerability and oppression from the authorities and other host communities. Therefore, care for the participants had to be prioritised at every stage and balanced against the full exposure of reported data. Being dependent on both a feminist and critical realist approach, however, was particularly helpful in addressing this limitation in part. It sought out that which was not observable or narrated as it probed into areas that might require particular sensitivity. In Chapter 7, for example there were elements of the

unconscious, that became evident through the analysis that demonstrated the psycho-social level of mechanisms.

An additional limitation lies in the visual representation of the identity work process. Despite the evidence finding this to be a dynamic and non-linear process, reflecting identity work with all of its complexity and intricacies is problematic as the very notion of a process suggests a series of events that are ordered. The thesis seeks to overcome this limitation by offering thick descriptions of the strategies and aligning them broadly to various stages of the process of constructing an entrepreneurial identity. Furthermore, the use of translocational intersectionality and the additional critical realist analyses, serve to demonstrate the multi-level nature of the process. However, there is scope for a more sophisticated depiction of the process to encapsulate the temporal, fluid and multi-dimensional nature of identity work to be attempted.

The aforementioned practical limitation is a reflection of one of the underlying critiques of intersectionality, that the inclusion of too many identity dimensions can become problematic, unwieldy and ultimately a liability (Brown, 2015). However, we would argue that the framework allows salient identity markers to emerge, so for example in this thesis, disability emerged as a significant marker for only one participant although there were indications that mental health issues had been relevant to other participants during the asylum-seeking stage of their life experience. Therefore, this thesis included preliminary theorising in the context of refugee women entrepreneurs with physical, mental and neurodevelopmental conditions, but this remains a potential avenue for further investigation. Notwithstanding, this highlights that intersectionality, as with the identity work, is an ongoing process and experience.

As a final limitation to the thesis, it is worth noting the additional contextual influences that will have affected the data. Data collection took place during a period when there were two significant global issues: the Covid-19 pandemic and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement during the period of 2019-2020. The former event presented additional and unprecedented challenges for all businesses while for some, there were also opportunities. The latter event brought to the fore issues of race, discrimination, and colonialism. Statues of

former colonial masters were being brought down whilst protests against inequality took place in major cities across the nation. This resulted in the issue of race becoming a more acceptable topic to speak about openly. Although these contextual events legitimately contribute to shaping the experience of identity work for the individuals, they may also have heightened a sensitivity to identity issues particularly around race.

#### **8.4 Future research**

The initial explanatory insights offered by this research present a rich opportunity for further work to support and develop its findings, particularly in terms of developing the scope of identity work theory and expanding knowledge based on greater contextualisation of entrepreneurship and recognition of heterogeneity amongst its actors.

This research contextualised entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial identities through its focus on Global South refugee women acting entrepreneurially in the UK. Given that other Global North countries such as Germany and France have an even larger number of asylum applications than the UK (Eurostat, 2021), there is scope for this thesis to be replicated within each of these countries. Equally valuable would be a larger scale cross-national study using the research question and theoretical model developed in this thesis. Extending this research in such a way would provide insight into other national institutional frameworks and their gendered regimes. Using the critical realist analysis and a translocational intersectional framework, such a comparative study would also develop valuable knowledge of structural constraints and enablements that might lead to social change and the development of best practice strategies.

In seeking to further develop knowledge of this under-researched group of entrepreneurs, the thesis could be replicated and examined with a larger sample that includes a wider range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, it can also acknowledge the impact of differences in skin colour as well as the role of religion. Alternatively, the theoretical generalisations obtained through this research could be deepened with a focus on homogenous groupings capturing the experiences of only Syrian women or only Zimbabwean for example, so that the gendered work in relation to patriarchy from the home country can be explored further. Not only will this serve to deepen the contextualisation of the topic, but it can elicit further

evidence of the heterogeneity among women entrepreneurs and within this subgroup of migrant entrepreneurs. Broadening the gendered lens to include men within the sample would offer a more holistic contribution to the refugee entrepreneurship literature whilst also enabling further examination of the notions of oppression and privilege which have been raised in this thesis.

Another area in which this thesis might serve as a catalyst to further research would be in shifting the level of analysis to the household. The current thesis has offered preliminary insight into the interaction with family members as a part of the identity process. As such, it would be suited to further extension that adopted a perspective that captures the interaction between the entrepreneur and other family members. This level of analysis would recognise that neither identity work nor entrepreneurship is undertaken in isolation, but rather, both are relational activities (Carter *et al.*, 2017). Building on the notion of entrepreneurship and transformation, a household perspective could encourage further exploration into the benefits of entrepreneurship for families which can then extend to developing theory based on wellbeing, emancipation or empowerment, and even resistance and resilience. This could also incorporate communities, given the embedded nature of some of the businesses within this thesis in co-ethnic communities.

Similarly, while this thesis focused on the formation of self-identity, this level of analysis could be extended to include the venture identity. Just as the women are ascribed the refugee label, this raises the question of whether or not the businesses adopt a similar identity and are recognised as refugee businesses, and if this carries a similar stigmatised position. It would be interesting to determine how refugee women-led businesses are perceived particularly given the issues around growth and extending the business beyond the co-ethnic community, as is suggested by this thesis. Further critical realist analysis could be useful in eliciting understanding of what conditions and mechanisms need to be in place in order to enable growth in businesses that are associated with stigma. This could provide the opportunity to develop the methodology to incorporate a mixed method study which would include the use of quantitative surveys based on hypotheses developed by earlier findings. Given the increasing number of refugee businesses that are being formed, this would offer valuable

data, particularly in terms of trying to capture what is quite a disjointed business group. A mixed methods study would also be consistent with a critical realist approach.

## **8.5 Policy and practical implications**

From a practical perspective, this thesis argues that given the interplay of the identity work process with entrepreneurial action and the ensuing structural constraints, the identity work undertaken by refugee women in the UK is of critical importance to policy makers, business support agents and providers of finance. Currently, there is a negative disconnect between the assumptions made by the host community of the refugee women entrepreneurs and what this thesis has revealed their lives to be.

The refugee process in the UK focuses on the credibility of the asylum seeker in meeting the requirements to be eligible for refugee status. Therefore, the political and legal process is framed in a discourse that excludes prior positionality. Previous entrepreneurial, professional and life experiences of this subgroup of entrepreneurs are not recognised by the host community. Consequently, a stigmatised refugee ascription remains the dominant identity marker with which the women must contend. Policymakers, providers of finance and business support agents would benefit from the learnings of this thesis's identity perspective in several ways. In recognising the individuals and their businesses, they should be informed by the women's prior histories and not assume that women's lives are of relevance only from the point of arrival in the UK. Villares-Varela, (2018) suggests that policy makers should take a biographical approach when dealing with refugee women and we would concur with this recommendation. However, we would also give equal weight to a process of self-assessment by policy makers and providers of finance in particular, reflecting on the extent to which policies constrain or enable the refugee women to advance their entrepreneurial endeavours. Policies for refugees cannot assume that they have the same experiences and therefore, access to resources as economic migrants. In our thesis, the participants, did not have access to physical funds from their home country, but rather, their previous privileged social positionality provided motivation and aspiration, skills and experiences that served as resources in the host country as they engaged in entrepreneurial actions. Specific refugee-related regulations were found to further limit the participant's access to resources in addition to constraints due to gender, ethnicity, class and disability. This thesis, therefore,

argues that business support actors, policy makers, and funders need to become allies in this process so that they are not reproducing the disadvantage and stigma with which the refugee women are faced. Rather, they should proactively seek to remove the structural inequalities confronting refugee women.

This is of particular importance for business support providers who can use the findings of this thesis to identify areas within programmes that will develop advantages for the women and elevate their social positionality, thus providing them with greater access to resources. As the thesis argues, there is opportunity for this group specifically, to become co-constructors in the development of the entrepreneurial identity of refugee women. As such, amongst the body of experts should be individuals who reflect some of the experiences of the women, whether in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, class. The thesis confirms that these considerations are of vital importance when engaging with refugee women. Furthermore, it suggests that a space should be made available within mainstream business support whilst recognising the value of peer support, whether this be based on gender, ethnicity or migration status. Events based on geographic location or industry that are oriented toward a diverse group would enable this.

## **8.6 Concluding remarks**

In recognising the persistent structural inequalities that exist in society, a critical engagement with entrepreneurship promotes a contextualised approach to the phenomenon. Consistent with this approach, this thesis challenges assumptions based on the neutrality of entrepreneurship which elicit disadvantage and oppression. Notwithstanding this critical position, through its focus on the identity work of refugee women, this thesis has demonstrated their agential efforts to overcome stigma and the intersectional effects encountered as they strive to construct entrepreneurial identities. Whilst the creativity, and agency of the women is recognised as they engage entrepreneurially, it is also acknowledged that the process is challenging because of enduring structural constraints. Consequently, a discourse of regret, versus attainment, is evident; although proud of their achievements, there is a sense that respondents still yearned for aspects of their previous lives. For many, the refugee experience in the host country has deprived them of much and yet has afforded them new rewards and experiences.



In the pursuit of a contextualised understanding of entrepreneurship and being cognisant of the significance of a translocational intersectional perspective, a few words of caution are offered. First, there is a responsibility to reflect upon the possible risk of imposing a westernised view of what is an oppressive structure or indeed the ultimate entrepreneurial identity for women, that is to say, the attainment of maternal entrepreneurial femininity in the hope of superwoman status (Byrne, Fattoum and Diaz Garcia, 2019). Ultimately, the positions claimed and the various degrees of conforming and adapting that the women undertake, need to be respected from each individual's point of view. This is emphasised by Verduyn and Essers (2017), who argue that the emancipating benefits of entrepreneurship are best realised when 'entrepreneurs can make sense of it in their own (cultural) way' (p.174).

Second, a racialised migrant cannot be reduced to a collective type. The experiences revealed in this thesis involved shifting articulations with gender and class in addition to the socio-political-historical context that positions an individual. Zendaya's words capture this aptly, *'My history has to come into the business who am I? where am I from and why am I here? So, I have to answer that for me to trade with them'*. Therefore, entrepreneurship can take place when individuals are known and understood in terms of their positionality.

Finally, a simplified use of the intersectional lens risks denying refugee women entrepreneurs of the ability to demonstrate contradictory social positions as they construct their identities. Thus, they are denied the potential to identify their privileged positions and sources of power within the dynamics of social stratifications. Undoubtedly, structural changes are required to address enduring issues of inequalities in the production and distribution of resources. However, social transformation requires a further disruption to the status quo that underpins these inequalities, a disruption caused by the agentic endeavours and even collective action of those who can reclaim and redefine their authentic selves, on their own terms.

## 9 References

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## 10 Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Participant questionnaire

#### Refugee Women Entrepreneurs

*(Please tick or write in as appropriate)*

1. Age     25-30     31-40     41-50     51-60     60+

2. Please describe your ethnic grouping:

#### **Asian /Arab**

Asian (please specify country): \_\_\_\_\_

Arab (please specify country): \_\_\_\_\_

Any other Asian/Arab background, please describe \_\_\_\_\_

#### **African / Caribbean**

African (please specify country) \_\_\_\_\_

Caribbean (please specify country) \_\_\_\_\_

Any other Black / African / Caribbean background, please describe \_\_\_\_\_

Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups (Please specify countries)

\_\_\_\_\_

#### **White**

European (please specify country)

Gypsy or Traveller

Any other White background, please describe \_\_\_\_\_

3. In which year did you arrive in the United Kingdom? \_\_\_\_\_

4. In which year were you granted refugee status? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Please state your marital status:

Single  Partnered  Married  Divorced  Widowed

6. Do you have children?  Y  N If yes, how many?  Ages:

7. Do you have a disability?  Y  N If yes, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

8. Which of the following reflects your highest level of qualification?

None  GCSE  A Levels  Degree (please specify)

Technical (please specify \_\_\_\_\_)

Professional (please specify)

9. If you attended university, are you of the first generation in your family to do so? (Y / N)

10. If no, which generation(s) attended university?

Parents

Grandparents

Great-grandparents

11. Do you currently rent or own your home?  rent  own

12. How would you describe your role as an earner in your household?

Sole

Primary

Secondary

13. If you are not the primary earner, which option best describes the type of work that the primary earner in your household does:

Professional

Freelance

Administrative

Service/Retail

Managerial                       Manual  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please specify)

14. What is your household income per year?

Under £10K  
 £10-25K  
 £25-50K  
 £50-100K  
 Over £100K

15. What is your annual personal income?

Under £10K  
 £10-25K  
 £25-50K  
 £50-100K  
 Over £100K

16. What type(s) of business do you own?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

17. In which year did you start your business?

18. What is the ownership structure of your business?

Sole owner  
 Partnership (please state your business partner's relationship to you)

\_\_\_\_\_

19. How much finance did you use to start your business?

£0K-£500    £501-1k    £1k-£5k    £5k-£10K    £10K-£20k  
 £20K-50K    £50K-100K    £100K+

20. What sources of finance did you use to start your business?

Personal Savings       Credit Card       Friends & Family  
Grant

Bank or other institutional loan       Venture Capital

21. How many employees, if any, do you have in your business?

**Thank you for completing this questionnaire**

## Appendix 2: Final Interview Schedule

### Section 1: Can you tell me about your background?

1. Where do you come from originally?
2. What was your life like before you were displaced [prompt on family structure, any qualifications, work history, ambitions and dreams – who were they before they got here
3. How might you describe your childhood background/family/class born into? How did this position you within the community?
4. Could you share the circumstances which forced you to leave your homeland and if you are happy to do so, tell me about your journey to get here? Prompt for how they were treated and if they felt this was differentially as a result of their class?

### Section 2: Arrival in the UK

- 1 Could you tell me about how locals reacted to your arrival and since you have settled – can you tell me about the positive and negative experiences?
- 2 How did these experiences make you feel; did it influence your decisions regarding your business/employment in any way?
- 3 Could you tell me a little about how your standard of living now compares to your previous standard of living in your home country.
- 4 Can you tell me how you think your position in the community has changed in comparison to how you felt in your home country?
- 5 After you arrived and settled here, did you have any plans about working; were you able to look for work –
- 6 Can you tell me about any ambitions you had about working in the UK and also, any experiences good or bad, if you have worked here? [how did they see themselves at this time]

### Section 3 – Can you tell me about your business?

1. Can you tell me the ‘story’ of your business, what prompted you to start it, how did you do this, what have been the challenges, what are the rewards?
2. Could you tell me a little bit about how the business operates – is it from home, is it part-time, how do you find customers, do you do any form of advertising or marketing – so find out how it works
3. Could you tell me about the income from your business – how does it contribute to the household,

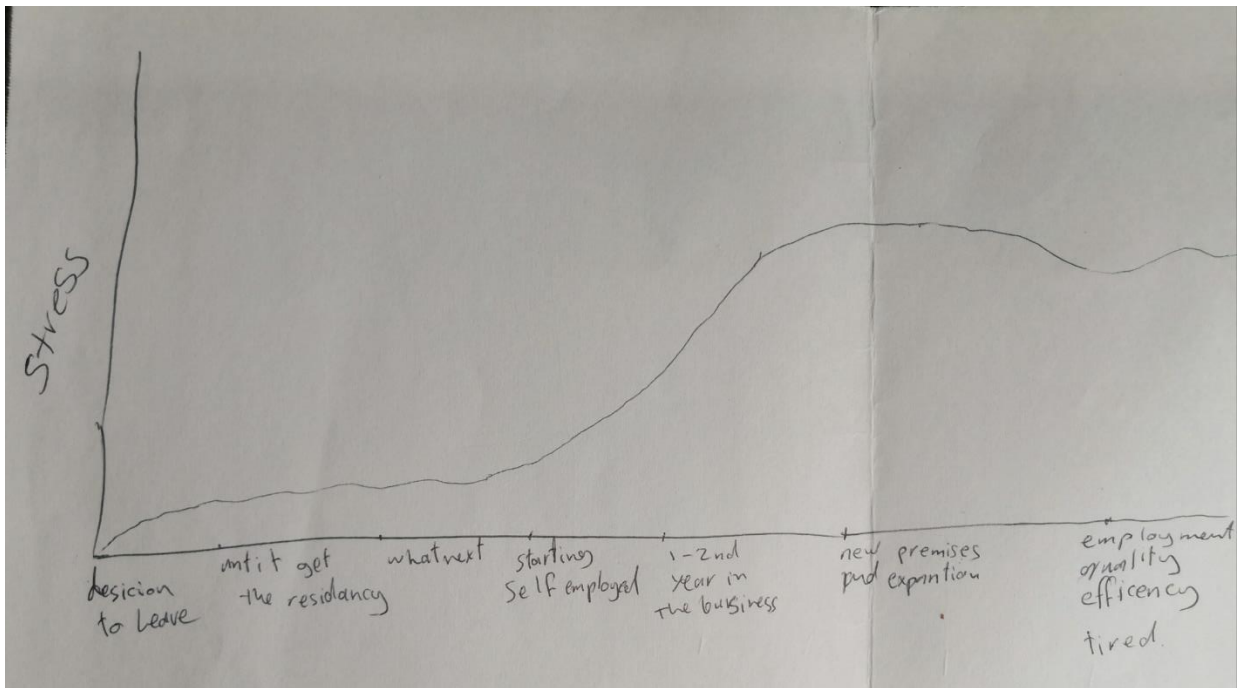
4. Does the business always break even, make a profit, does it fluctuate, can you predict your income?
5. Do you get any other forms of income support – from benefits or partner income?
6. Where do you see this business going in the future – where would you like it to go?
7. Can you tell me about any really important events which have affected the business – so your first client, losing a client, not being able to get materials, new competitors

#### Section 4 – Can you tell me about other aspects of your life?

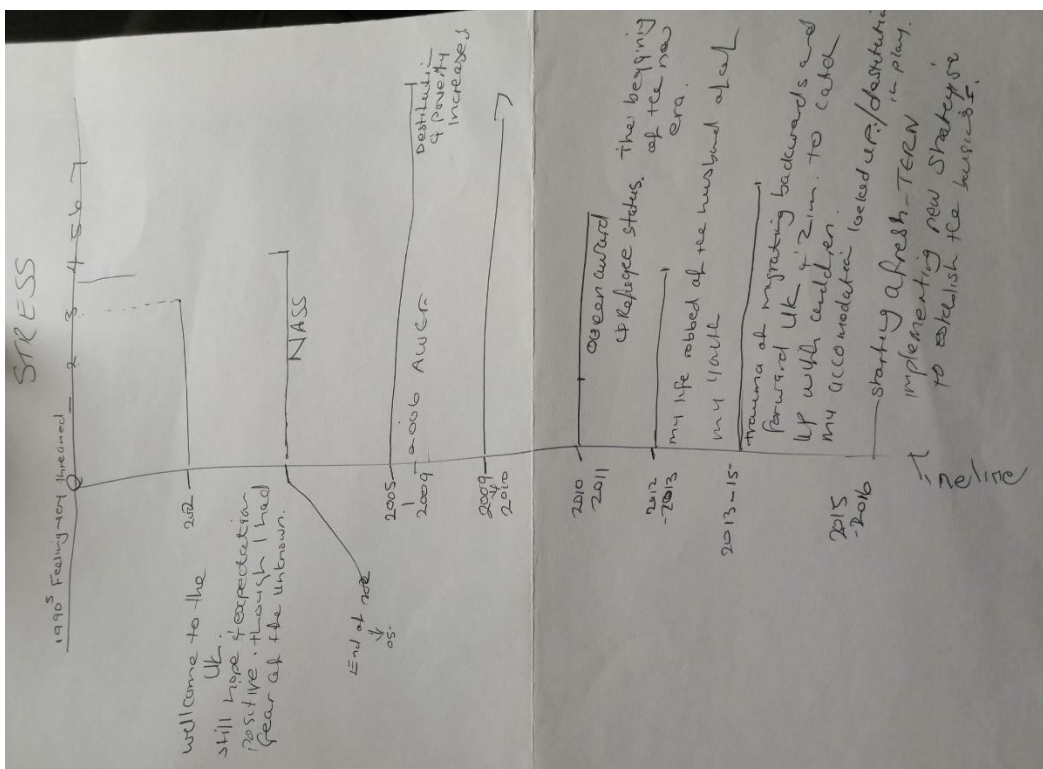
1. How does your business fit in with the other parts of your life – do you get support from your family for example, or does it create problems sometimes?
2. Do you feel you have support from your community as a ‘business owner’ - how does this work?
3. Could you tell me what forms of other support you have used such as advisors, family, friends, church groups, community organisations
4. Where would you like you, your family and your business to be in five years’ time?
5. How has creating this business changed you as a person, do you think it has changed how other people [family, friends, community] see you? Is this a good thing?
6. How has your view of yourself changed, if at all, throughout your journey from being [in your previous career/role as] in [wherever] to now?

### Appendix 3 - Stress Timelines

Timeline - Aliya



Timeline - Zendaya



## Appendix 4: Data Structure

Level 1 categories

Level 2 themes

Overarching themes

