Neoliberal Turns in Global Humanitarian Governance: Corporations, Celebrities and the Construction of the Entrepreneurial Refugee Woman

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Abstract

In this article we seek to extend recent debates on how the promotion of self-reliance through vocational training and entrepreneurship has become the new neoliberal mantra among refugee-supporting agencies, policymakers and humanitarian actors. More specifically, we do so in the context of corporate and celebrity-endorsed humanitarian partnerships and initiatives that single out refugee women and girls. Informed by postcolonial feminist scholarship and guided by Carol Bacchi's 'what is the problem represented to be' (WPR) approach we compare IKEA's partnership with the Jordan River Foundation (JRF) in Jordan and Angelina Jolie's support for the RefuSHE project in Kenya. While differences between the two problem representations exist, both initiatives seek to empower refugee women by activating latent entrepreneurial abilities. These, we conclude, reinforce a saviour/saved humanitarian logic while also obscuring the gender division of responsibilities and precarious nature of artisanal labour.

Keywords: corporations, celebrities, entrepreneurship, refugee woman, neoliberal humanitarianism, development

Introduction

The promotion of female entrepreneurship in the global South has animated a great deal of feminist research on the World Bank, public-private partnerships and celebrity-endorsed initiatives. Hinging on a 'business case for gender equality', it recasts the 'Third World Woman' (Mohanty, 1984) as agentic and endlessly enterprising (Wilson, 2011; Altan-Olcay, 2016; Roberts and Zulfqar, 2019). Recent scholarship, however, suggests that the promotion of self-reliance through vocational training and entrepreneurship programmes has become the new neoliberal mantra also among refugee-supporting agencies, policymakers and different humanitarian actors (Easton-Calabria and Omata, 2018; Turner, 2019; Richey and Brockington, 2020). Yet, little attention has been devoted to exploring how the discourse of entrepreneurship is mobilised for the presumed benefit of refugee women in the realm of humanitarian

governance, here broadly conceptualised 'as the increasingly organized and internationalized attempt to save the lives, enhance the welfare, and reduce the suffering of the world's most vulnerable populations' (Barnett, 2013: 379).

Who (mis)represents women, and who besides states and intergovernmental organisations diagnoses deficiencies in a population and proposes schemes of improvement, are open empirical questions (Marchand and Parpart, 1995; Li, 2007; Barnett, 2013). Conjoining recent debates in feminist political economy and humanitarian governance in this paper we examine how prominent humanitarian actors such as corporations and celebrity activists construct gender-based problems and knowledge as part of entrepreneurial artisanal projects, aiming to empower women in the global South. Corporations have a long history of sponsoring and championing humanitarian as well as gender and development work to enhance the value of their brands

and secure costumers' loyalties (Richey and Ponte, 2011; Tornhill, 2019). Female celebrities have also sought to use their visibility and fame to address the specific needs of women and girls in the global South and conflict zones, often locating their activism within notions of maternal care and cosmopolitanism (Bergman Rosamond, 2016, 2020a, 2020b). Our focus on corporate and celebrity humanitarianism is thus intended to bridge and speak to strands of feminist scholarship that have rarely been intersected but have been univocal in their critique of gendered and racialised 'civilising missions' (Wilson, 2011; Repo and Yrjölä, 2011; Bergman Rosamond, 2016; Bergman Rosamond and Gregoratti, 2019; Budabin, 2020).

In this paper, however, we seek to gain a deeper understanding of the specificities of this entrepreneurial discourse through an exploratory comparison of IKEA's partnership with the Jordan River Foundation (JRF) in Jordan and Angelina Jolie's support for the RefuSHE project in Kenya. We first came to learn about them through UNHCR's online communication channels where they are upheld as 'successful' examples of female refugee empowerment in contexts of protracted displacement. Both initiatives are transnational partnerships that aim to alleviate the insecurities of urban-based refugee women through artisanal work. Both also compete for the attention of compassionate consumers who may purchase these products. They thus shared substantive similarities, but it is the visibility and legitimacy accorded to them by the global refugee agency that prompted us to research them further to apprehend the specific logics that inform them.

In what follows, we first locate our article within postcolonial feminist debates in gender and development and the ways in which such scholarship enables a critical analysis of humanitarian initiatives seeking to empower refugee women through artisanal entrepreneurship. We then introduce Carol Bacchi's 'what is the problem represented to be' (WPR) approach, pointing to its significance in identifying stereotypical representations of the refugee woman in humanitarian discourse. We also discuss our material, which is collected in digital settings. Thereafter we analyse the problem representations of the refugee woman within the two cases, the assumptions that underpin them as well as their discursive silences. The problem representation articulated by the IKEA partnership with JRF focuses on the insecure livelihoods experienced by Syrian women refugees and Jordanian women, while RefuSHE emphasises vulnerabilities and trauma arising from experiences of forced displacement and conflict. As solutions, the former integrates women in IKEA's supply chain, while the latter combines education, healing and artisanal work. We conclude that despite differences, both problem representations are united in constructing the refugee women as a homogenous 'other' whose latent

entrepreneurial abilities need to be activated to become closer to a hegemonic model of emancipated womanhood, namely a woman who works and can independently support herself and her family. Such constructions, we argue, reinforce a saviour/saved humanitarian logic while also obscuring the gender divisions of responsibilities and precarious nature of artisanal labour.

The Refugee Woman, Her Saviours and Schemes of Improvement

In this article we are inspired by postcolonial feminist writings in gender and development, from which we derive a number of theoretical points of departure and analytical strategies. Feminism and postcolonialism are wedded in their efforts to disrupt 'the boundaries that divide what's inside from the outside, but also *what's superior from inferior*' (Ling, 2017: 478, *emphasis added*). In an early seminal intervention, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984) critiques the development field for being located within a western hegemony that indiscriminately attributes victimhood to all third world women. Postcolonial feminists have attended to critiquing ongoing colonial constructions of refugee women as a homogenous group bound by a shared, cross-cultural form of oppression. Prior to the mid-1980s, little attention was paid to gender issues in refugee policy, practice and research (Baines, 2004; Olivius, 2015). This has significantly changed, as 'all UN actors, many government donors and many larger humanitarian NGOs have policies that explicitly advocate for gender equality and endorse the importance of a gender perspective in humanitarian aid to refugees' (Olivius, 2015: 2). However, the meaning assigned to gender equality is rarely straightforward. Rather, 'it is represented as a means to aid effectiveness through the strategic mobilization of refugee women's participation, and as a project of development, involving the transformation of "traditional" or "backward" refugee cultures into modern societies' (Olivius, 2016: 270). While refugee women's agency, courage and resilience are often elevated within contemporary humanitarian discourses, there is still a tendency to represent them as 'vulnerable and victimized ... in need of protection from their own culture' (Olivius, 2016: 282), and being entangled in the tentacles of a regressive 'Third World patriarchy' (Olivius, 2014).

In contrast to the construction of refugee women, the humanitarian aid worker is defined by technocracy and efficiency (Olivius, 2016: 280). Other categories of humanitarians such as corporations are often represented in media discourse as good corporate

citizens while celebrity activists are narrated as beautiful and stylish ‘global mothers’, dedicated to the wellbeing of refugee women beyond borders. Yet, UNHCR-endorsed corporate and celebrity humanitarians are located within immense privilege and power, as well as being immersed in the colonial, gendered and capitalist logics of humanitarianism, rather than being wedded to the transformation of the global order and decoloniality (Bergman Rosamond, 2015, 2016). Directly relevant is also the contention that humanitarian actors, many of whom are located within a neoliberal feminist logic (Prügl, 2015; Roberts, 2015), habitually diagnose deficiencies and devise interventions to bring about improvements. The offering of such problem representations, moreover, rarely attends to the power relations that are reproduced when the other’s story is reinterpreted and simplified to fit within logics and finalities of improvement schemes (Li, 2007). It is not uncommon for humanitarian actors seeking to empower women beyond borders to engage in an ‘instrumentalisation of women’ (Chant and Sweetman, 2012; Chant, 2016), rather than placing ‘standard divides of Self vs. Other into a continuum of intimate, reciprocal relations’ (Ling, 2017: 478), or through ‘cross-border feminist solidarities anchored in struggles on the ground’ (Mohanty, 2013: 987).

Today the ‘Third World Woman’ is represented as somebody who would stand to benefit from global discourses and practices of economic empowerment (Wilson, 2011). Such economic strategies of empowerment have been identified as hallmarks of neoliberal development cloaked under a feminist face (Prügl, 2015; Roberts, 2015). An assumption running through this discourse is that the offerings of vocational trainings or work can lift women and their families out of poverty, reduce the costs of refugee assistance while also contributing to economic growth (Gregoratti *et al.*, 2018; Oliver and Boyle, 2019; Tornhill, 2019). Yet, such promises rarely problematise the location of refugee women within intersecting categories of oppression. Whether participation in stratified and competitive labour markets can by itself challenge ‘existing power relations’, the ‘control over the sources of power’ (Batliwala, 2007) and ingrained gendered identities can thus be questioned. A key feminist postcolonial undertaking then is to disrupt western knowledges and understandings of the ‘Third World Woman’ and, as such, challenge hegemonic discourses of development (McEwan, 2001) which too often cast gender justice as coterminous with the forging of women entrepreneurs ready to compete in the market.

Constructions of refugee women then come with binary and hierarchical representations of others beyond borders. Such stories position the vulnerable but always

potentially agential other in juxtaposition to the protecting, emancipating (and privileged) humanitarian (Bergman Rosamond, 2020a, 2020b). Humanitarians are constructed as the ones able to save the refugee woman through the application of western notions of gender justice, like legal knowledge, education and work, often in combination with each other. In the context of refugee governance, Olivius (2014: 35) has defined gender equality programmes for refugees as ‘accelerated modernity projects’ modelled upon a neoliberal notion of emancipation premised on self-responsibilisation, self-sacrifice and work.

Methodological Approach: What Is the Problem of the Refugee Woman Represented to Be?

Our feminist postcolonial critique of representations of refugee women within the IKEA and the Jordan River Foundations and RefuSHE initiatives rests on Carol Bacchi’s poststructural analytical framework ‘What is the Problem Represented to Be?’ (WPR) (Bacchi, 1999, 2005, 2009a, 2012, 2018). Bacchi notes that ‘by studying the ways in which specific governing practices *problematized* what was taking place, the researcher gains access to how “the real” was constituted’ (Bacchi, 2018: 9, *emphasis in original*). The constitutive relationship between problem representations and their solutions is also key to Bacchi’s WPR framework (Bacchi, 1999, 2009a; Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016). Prevalent in any given policy are explicit and implicit understandings of what the problem is and how it should be solved. As Bacchi (2018: 5, *emphasis in original*) observes:

[P]olicy proposals or proposed ‘solutions’, [...] by *their nature* contain implicit representations of the ‘problem’ or ‘problems’ they purport to address. This argument builds on the common sense understanding that what we propose to do about something reveals what we think needs to change and hence what we think the ‘problem’ is.

Analytically, Bacchi tends to focus on policies, conceptualising them as problematisations whereby distinct problems are constructed and requiring distinct solutions (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016: 6). As we shall show below, there is a strong tendency on the part of refugee initiatives that promote entrepreneurship to assume that the problem of the refugee woman is her lack of security, but also that the capacity to transform complex predicaments already resides within herself, in her skills, propensity for hard-work and self-sacrifice for her family. Linked to these problem representations are solutions identifying how self-reliance, particularly economic self-reliance, can be nurtured. Bacchi’s WPR

approach distances itself from positivist attempts to locate a problem in the political world and once you have done so tick it off and view it as fixed, rather than a structural long-term process. Instead she is critical of what she sees as the proliferation of problem constructions in public policy-making and political debates since they rest on 'taken-for-granted descriptions of conditions that ought to be rectified and/or eliminated' (Bacchi, 2018: 4). By constructing women refugees as victims but also as potential entrepreneurs, a whole host of other problem areas and ethical concerns are silenced.

Our analysis below unpacks the discourses and knowledge that produce representations of a particular problem: the problem of refugee women. This requires a close reading of the representations that render a problem legible and amenable to humanitarian intervention. The wider study of problematisation is not an exclusive concern for those interested in formal public policy, laws and governmental programmes. It has found applications in studies concerned with how authorities other than states define what counts as development (Li, 2007; Prügl, 2015). In taking the WPR questions to the field of humanitarian governance we ask: (a) what do corporate and celebrity-endorsed humanitarian projects represent as problems and hope to change in the lives of refugee women?; (b) what assumptions underpin the representation of the problem?; and (c) and what is left unproblematised in their discourses?

The material for this research includes a variety of publicly available, mostly online sources, which offer rich textual and visual indications as to how humanitarian actors construct problems and justify solutions for refugee women. We sourced this material precisely because of its power to tell us 'how to interpret the world, and shape our imagination' (Johnson, 2011: 1017). In the case of IKEA, material was collected from IKEA webpages, the Jordan River Foundation's website, as well as news and editorials from design and business magazines. In the absence of a dedicated webpage for the partnership, the latter were particularly helpful as they often contained interviews with IKEA and the JRF's project managers as well as promotional videos. Our study of RefuSHE is also based on online material such as RefuSHE's webpage. Moreover, we have analysed materials such as an interview with Angelina Jolie in the women's magazine *Harper's Bazaar* (Cohn, 2018, 2020) as well as a video clip portraying Jolie's visit to a RefuSHE fashion show in Kenya in 2018 (RefuSHE, 2018; UNHCR, 2018). Following Bacchi's call for reflexivity in research we have scrutinised our privileged positionality (Bacchi, 2009b) and as a way not to reproduce our taken-for granted assumptions we have also made use of diverse feminist scholarship providing

deeper ethnographic insights on women refugees' livelihoods and gender relations in both Jordan and Kenya. In what follows, we identify the problem representations, assumptions and silences in each of the two cases.

The IKEA and the Jordan River Foundations in Jordan

Jordan has a long history of hosting refugees from conflicts in neighbouring countries such as Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq. At the time of writing, in 2020, the number of refugees registered in Jordan stands at 744,795. Among them approximately 655,000 are Syrians, 67,000 Iraqis, 15,000 Yemenis, 6,000 Sudanis and 2,500 refugees from 52 other nationalities (UNHCR, 2019). Most refugees live in communities outside of camps in the northern governorates of Irbid, Mafrq and Zarqa. Large populations can also be found in the south in Ma'an, and in the capital city Amman, where the IKEA and JRF partnership is located. In Jordan, Syrians have faced fluctuating levels of humanitarian assistance and limited access to legal livelihoods; as such, many Syrian female refugees have been propelled into work due to the reduction of aid and the heavy surveillance placed on Syrian men's illegal work (Ritchie, 2018). Women have taken up both home-based work such as food production, and, less often, non-home-based work as housemaids, shop assistants or factory workers (Ritchie, 2017). An international solution for the crisis of refugee livelihoods and the pressure that the influx of refugees was placing on host communities was attempted in 2016 with the Jordan Compact. Through the renegotiation of trade agreements with the EU and the concession of loans, the Jordan Compact promised to turn a crisis into a development opportunity (Lenner and Turner, 2019). As part of the Compact, Jordan pledged to emit 200,000 work permits for Syrians while boosting work opportunities for both Jordanians and Syrians.

IKEA and JRF's Partnership

IKEA's humanitarianism in Jordan is probably best known for its in-kind donations and its financial donations to UNHCR through cause-related marketing campaigns. IKEA's partnership with the JRF departs from these more conventional forms of corporate humanitarianism. Framed as a social entrepreneurship project, the partnership is based on a commercial relationship whereby the corporate giant has committed to purchasing handcrafted goods from Jordanian and refugee women artisans already organised and trained by the JRF through donor funding. IKEA does not introduce a completely new scheme of improvement, but

rather taps on the development work of a local organisation in order to scale it and make it more profitable (Li, 2007). An external assessment of the partnership describes it as aligned with the Jordan Compact's commitments and as an instrumental 'win-win' proposition: 'For profit-seeking companies whose CSR [corporate social responsibility] budgets are modest, this model will likely produce sustainable and scalable engagements for beneficiaries, including vulnerable populations. From the JRF's perspective, this offers a non-traditional yet lucrative revenue stream for achieving its core mission of empowering refugees and Jordanian women through skills building' (Malik *et al.*, 2018: 2).

The partnership commenced with product development activities in 2016, and handcrafted items – embroidered pillows and rugs – were available in IKEA's Amman stores already in December 2017. The purported development benefits of the partnership have been described in similar terms across different communication channels: as of 2018, 110 women had received training and were employed at work in sites managed by JRF, a number expected to double in 2019 (IKEA, 2019; Wilkes, 2018). Besides providing training and work, a more detailed assessment has highlighted how the partnership also provides practical and legal support to acquire work permits, health insurance, transport service and childcare for the women employed. Women artisans are also allowed to conduct up to 80 per cent of the work at home (Malik *et al.*, 2018).

IKEA and JRF's Problem Representation

The problem representation of the partnership cannot be grasped in a single document; rather, it emerges from the accounts of different partners involved in it (IKEA, 2017, 2019; JRF, 2018a, 2018b). Read as one text, a cumulative narrative can be grasped. The problem is that in Jordan today the livelihoods of both Syrian refugees and Jordanian women are constructed as insecure, and the way out of these insecurities is to help both communities of poor women participate in the labour market. In this problem presentation the partners speak about themselves as providers of livelihoods or bestowers of empowerment. For example, from an IKEA video we learn: 'The vision for the partnership and the collaboration between IKEA and the Jordan River Foundation is that we shall create livelihood for hundreds of women in Jordan, hundreds of refugees, mainly from Syria' (IKEA, 2017, *emphasis added*). Women, on the other hand, appear to enter the initiative as one undifferentiated group of insecure others to then learn how to make and sell beautiful handmade pieces (JRF, 2018a, 2018b), but what insecurity might mean to them is never made apparent, but rather silenced.

Only once the image of the 'Third World Woman' comes into full view, particularly in the account offered by the JRF Director General who claims that '[w]omen empowerment is really about women's rights to a better future, it's about helping them rise above themselves, and unleash their entrepreneurial potential through the business of handicrafts; a business that is able to save entire communities, who, otherwise, could end up smeared by social and economic disintegration, abused children, troubled youth, broken families, increasing violence and crime, child marriages, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking, to name a few' (JRF, 2018b). Here the need for improvement schemes is justified as a solution to women's location within forms of oppression of an unspecified historical and political origin. What is however clear is that the solution to 'third world problems' (Mohanty, 1984) lies in offering women the opportunity to unleash a latent entrepreneurial potential.

There are several epistemic assumptions that undergird this problem representation. Several discursive elements appear to echo the discursive tropes of the 'business case for gender equality' popularised in the 2000s by the World Bank, as well as earlier efficiency approaches to women in development (WID) (Chant and Sweetman, 2012; Gregoratti *et al.*, 2018) – a neoliberal logic that also tends to permeate statist understandings of women's empowerment within and beyond borders. What empowerment is taken to mean is to offer women the opportunity to work and combine paid work with responsibilities for dependants and households (JRF, 2018b). As mentioned in one of IKEA's videos: 'We believe that the best way out of poverty is to have a decent job' (IKEA, 2017). Here assumptions being made about entrepreneurial desires are, as such, discarding other ambitions they might harbour (Thorne, 2020). Moreover, it is assumed that this work can not only be a route out of family's poverty, but that it can also 'save entire communities' (JRF, 2018b). Women then are charged with the responsibility of moving their families and communities out of poverty through artisanal work without acknowledging that constructions of good and self-sacrificing womanhood stem from specific configurations of patriarchal structures, institutions and ideologies (Wilson, 2011: 318).

Crucial questions around the gendered nature of the work that women perform are not thoroughly scrutinised. While the partnership provides training to compete in an exacting global market for handicraft, some work-related benefits (e.g. healthcare) and claims to provide a modicum of support for transport and childcare, the nature of the work that women are trained in and perform is left entirely unproblematised. IKEA claims to provide 'decent jobs', yet artisanal work is notoriously precarious, and entirely dependent on

buyers' demand. Existing studies conducted in Jordan indicate that interventions focused on vocational training for women have created a saturation of home-based tailors (Thorne, 2020), and that work in the garment sector in Jordan's special economic zones is not favoured by Syrian refugees due to lengthy and costly journeys, lack of childcare facilities and the hesitancy of working with unknown men (Lenner and Turner, 2019: 81). What is also left largely unquestioned is the notion that women should be working mostly at home performing endless care work and paid work. The partnership allows home-based work; as such it seems to recognise gendered responsibilities for childcare and housework and that refugee women who have stepped outside the boundaries of acceptable female behaviour – which includes refraining from public/economic life – have faced intimidations and violence (Ritchie, 2017, 2018). Yet, in doing so, it paradoxically keeps refugee women in the private sphere, where they are expected to and often prefer to belong. A study conducted by REACH and UN Women (2017), however, has indicated that such preference can be understood as a form of adaptation to restrictive livelihood environments and limited availability of household resources. It further suggests that 'promoting home-based work as a longer-term approach would fail to address underlying obstacles to women's employment, and to take into account women's preferences, aspirations and needs, possibly further limiting women's presence and participation in the public sphere' (REACH and UN Women, 2017: 31).

RefuSHE and Angelina Jolie in Kenya

Kenya is one of the largest recipients of refugees in Africa. Most of those refugees have fled their home nations, with 53.9 per cent of those refugees and asylum seekers originating from Somalia, while South Sudanese people make up 24.7 per cent, followed by Congolese (9 per cent) and Ethiopians (5.8 per cent). About 44 per cent of the asylum and refugee seekers live in Dadaab, located in the east of the country and hosting three UNHCR-managed camps, while 40 per cent live in Kakuma in the north of the country and 16 percent live in the capital Nairobi (UNHCR Kenya, 2020), where the RefuSHE initiative is based. Women and girls make up 49 per cent of the total asylum seekers and refugee population in Kenya (UNHCR Kenya, 2020), having fled conflict, war, poverty and violence. A good number of scholarly studies, across disciplines, have centred on the lives and experiences of women refugees in Kenya (Tippens, 2017; Ritchie, 2018; Jaji, 2015; Gee *et al.*, 2019). According to Jaji (2015: 494) there is a tendency within refugee studies to equate Nairobi-living refugee women's femininity with 'vulnerability' and 'victimhood',

when in fact it is 'heterogeneous, fluid and complex'. Her research indicates that many refugee women, married and unmarried, have taken control of the household economy and that they work beyond the home (Jaji, 2015: 494). Similarly, Ritchie's (2018) research shows that Somali women migrants, living in the town of Eastleigh in Kenya, have through their participation in paid work, at least in part, broken with the dominant tradition of the man being the household's primary breadwinner, going out to work under difficult circumstances. In what follows, we first introduce the RefuSHE initiative's support for women refugees in Kenya, and critically reflect on the problem representation and epistemic assumptions undergirding it.

The RefuSHE Initiative

The RefuSHE initiative is a non-profit-making organisation with headquarters in Chicago. Its humanitarianism evolves around the protection and empowerment of women refugees through education and work. The American RefuSHE co-founder Anne Sweeney notes that the initiative 'was born, to offer an innovative solution within the global refugee crisis, or a one-of-a-kind model for protection, empowerment, and peace-building in Kenya and beyond' (Rigou, 2018). The women that are offered such 'innovative solutions' have often lived through ongoing periods of prostitution, abuse, rape, kidnapping as well as forced displacement and separation from their parents and country of origin, and the RefuSHE initiative promises to offer them rehabilitation through training and artisan work (RefuSHE, 2020a). The artisanry logic of the RefuSHE initiative, unlike IKEA's partnership with the JRF, is coupled with a 'trauma-informed approach' (RefuSHE, 2020b), which views social enterprise as a 'step in the journey toward independence and a new life after war and conflict'. Emancipatory and healing qualities thus are assigned to artisan work whereby refugee women 'learn, grow and become leaders in their own right' (Rigou, 2018). This is coupled with an emphasis on the significance of education and offering a 'safe shelter and a peaceful environment to enable refugee girls to recover from what they have seen and lived through' (Rigou, 2018). The intended beneficiaries of that healing and emancipatory strategy are African girls and young women (aged between 13 and 23) from countries such as Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Somalia and Sudan.

Each year the RefuSHE initiative stages an annual fashion challenge in Chicago which brings together fashion designers who are based in the American city. Present at the show are the designers who have transformed the textiles, produced by refugees in Kenya, into pieces of clothing for American consumers who

wish to support social entrepreneurship as a development and gender strategy. However, the refugee women, whose artisan efforts undergird the fashion show, are absent, reinforcing the traditional production patterns of periphery and core that underpin the initiative. Rather, the fashion challenge provides 'an opportunity for Chicagoans to declare that we stand *with* and *for* refugee girls', a message put across by the RefuSHE Executive Director Alisa Roadcup (Rigou, 2018, *emphasis added*). The question whether the purchase of a piece of clothing can really be viewed as a feminist transnational act of solidarity remains unanswered by RefuSHE. In 2018 a parallel fashion show was held in a refugee shelter in Kenya, where women refugees were showing the textiles that they had produced. The visual online projections of the local fashion show are telling in that the event almost entirely lacked the glamour of its Chicago counterpart, aside from UNHCR Special Envoy Angelina Jolie being in attendance. Her presence at the show quickly went viral and added visibility to the RefuSHE initiative (Cohn, 2018). Being the UNHCR Special Envoy, Jolie has carved out a role for herself in global refugee activism, with many photographs of her visiting refugee camps around the world being visually circulated online. Her refugee activism, moreover, has emerged from her broader pursuits of global motherhood and maternal care of distant other women, (Bergman Rosamond, 2016, 2020a, 2020b; Richey and Brockington, 2020). That commitment rests on her subjective experiences as the mother of six biological and adopted children, enabled by her fame and privileged position in the world economy as well as a broad commitment to cosmopolitan justice (Bergman Rosamond, 2016). In what follows we unpack the character and problem representation that surround the RefuSHE initiative and Jolie's support of it.

RefuSHE and Angelina Jolie's Problem Representation

The problem representation of the RefuSHE initiative emerges across a range of texts, including online accounts of its mission statement, interviews with its founder and the endorsement of UNHCR Special Envoy Angelina Jolie. Together these texts produce an aggregate narrative that centres on the problem-solving qualities of the initiative and its dedication to women's empowerment and healing through training and artisan work. The problem representation underpinning that narrative evolves around the negative impact of insecurities, vulnerabilities and violence, caused by war, conflict and gendered violence, on the lives of refugee women in Kenya. Representing itself as a problem-solving initiative, RefuSHE seeks to *heal* those traumas through education, the teaching of artisan skills and paid work.

Indeed, in various online materials RefuSHE defines itself as a problem-solving and emancipatory initiative wedded to the healing of traumatised women (Rigou, 2018; RefuSHE, 2020b, 2019), but without critically engaging with the varied experiences that refugee women harbour, whether sentiments of hardship or achievement. Rather, RefuSHE uncritically represents itself as an entity that offers refugee girls and young women 'safety, sisterhood and a path toward economic independence through our textile-making social enterprise' (Rigou, 2018). Intricate needlework, and resist-dyeing (a traditional East African technique similar to tie-dye) are assigned emancipatory qualities in terms of assisting the refugee women and girls involved in RefuSHE. Such work is traced to the distinctive heritage of Africa, a continent of artisan knowledge passed down across generations; 'in Ethiopia, women spin the yarn by hand and men weave – a specialized technique operated predominantly by male craftsmen' (Rigou, 2018). Furthermore, 'in Kenya, the Maasai tribes are known for handcrafting their beaded jewelry – colorful necklaces, bracelets and pendants – to maintain their pastoral lifestyle and in Ghana's Akan ethnic group, they handcraft Kente, a type of silk and cotton fabric made of interwoven cloth strips, now known around the world' (Rigou, 2018).

Hence, the main problem representation of RefuSHE is women's positioning within displacement and structural violence, while economic dependence and textile-making are the solutions, a position reiterated by Angelina Jolie, who is one of the funders of the initiative. To start with, Jolie identifies gendered subordination and violence, forceful displacement as key problems/obstacles to the emancipation of the women involved in the RefuSHE initiative. During her visit to the fashion show she noted that '[a]ll the girls I met had been separated from their families or had seen their parents killed ... [a]lmost all had suffered sexual violence, and many had given birth after being raped'. Jolie, moreover, observed that the talent of the refugee women 'goes to waste because people are not allowed to work or are not able to work' (Cohn, 2018). Thus, the neoliberal logic of privileging the lack of work over other forms of inequalities is present in Jolie's problem representation. Jolie identifies empowering qualities in craft, with the actor/activist noting: 'I thought the girls represented their culture and their craft in a way that was so impressive.' Jolie, moreover, sees artisanry as a solution to the indignity of refugee and displaced life. She uses the examples of 'Rwandan basketmakers' and 'Afghan kilim weavers' to illustrate the connectedness between artisanry and self-responsibilisation as, in her view, 'nobody wants to be a refugee or to live on aid ... [t]hey want to lead dignified, useful lives, like any of us. So, I hope this is just the beginning' (Cohn, 2018).

The problem representation of the RefuSHE initiative employs a notion of the Third World Woman as somebody whose sense of self and empowerment will benefit from the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. While the self-representation of the RefuSHE initiative is discursively couched within a wish to empower women who have suffered at the hands of conflict, violence and war, there is a tendency to essentialise such traumatic experiences, rather than treating them as lived and intersectionally subjective. Those representations, nonetheless, are coupled with the recognition that refugee women are 'more than the labels to which they are assigned', being 'savvy entrepreneurs, mothers and students, with hopes and dreams' (Campese, 2018), whose lives are also defined by 'boldness', 'brightness' and 'leadership' (RefuSHE, 2019). To sustain this narrative the RefuSHE initiative projects personal stories of success on its website. Here for example we read a testimony of Solange, a young woman from Ethiopia, who expresses happiness and gratitude to RefuSHE for giving her life skills and an education as well as a sense of sisterhood (RefuSHE, 2019).

Little by little the third world woman is reconstituted into a neoliberal empowered subject whose traumas can be healed through humanitarian intervention and care, a discursive logic that is also employed by Angelina Jolie. However, that identity construction often results in a narrative of emancipation that lacks recognition of the complexity of femininities and lived experiences (Ritchie, 2018) harboured by refugee women. What is more, the training of women in entrepreneurial skills does not automatically disrupt the binaries between refugee women and women originating in the global North, with Jolie's appearance at the 2018 fashion show reinforcing the image of the latter being the sophisticated, caring and glamorous humanitarian honouring the local refugee women with her presence and endorsement. Her praise for the initiative and the refugee women it seeks to empower is thus imbued with colonial undertones and western privilege. After all, she was probably the only woman present at the fashion show who could afford to buy the final RefuSHE products when they went on sale in Chicago that year.

The RefuSHE initiatives then rests on epistemic assumptions about the ability of business and entrepreneurship to bring gender equality, well-being and healing to refugee women, assumptions that are echoed by the World Bank and statist approaches to development, as we have noted above. Empowerment is equated with the ability to conduct paid work enabling the woman refugee to take control of her own life. Assumptions are thus made about the ever-entrepreneurial woman whose life dream is to work, as well as the ability of artisanry engagement to heal her body and soul. What RefuSHE does not recognise and communicate

are the 'heterogeneous, fluid and complex' (Jaji, 2015: 494) components of refugee women's femininities and life stories. Rather, the initiative stresses the logic of artisanry as a route to dignity, self-responsibilisation and economic independence. As such, the representation of women refugees shifts from having been vulnerable and traumatised individuals to being relentlessly entrepreneurial, seeking change in their lives through artisanry.

Lacking here is a critique of the gendering and colonial logic underpinning the project, which appears to rest on an unquestioned belief in the power of artisan work in emancipating the 'third world woman' through humanitarian governance. Yet, such work is often underpaid and does not automatically lead to empowerment or the realisation of subjective ambitions. What is more, rarely is such work praised for its emancipatory qualities among affluent women in the global North, but rather seen as a solution to the problems facing their counterparts in the global South. This argument is further sustained by the fact that the main RefuSHE fashion event is held in Chicago each year, rather than where the textiles are produced, and, as such, reinforces its underpinning centre-periphery discourse and practice.

Conclusion

Our article has explored the ways in which self-reliance through vocational training and entrepreneurship has become a new neoliberal mantra among refugee-supporting agencies, policymakers and humanitarian actors. Drawing upon postcolonial feminist scholarship and informed by Carol Bacchi's WPR approach we have compared the IKEA partnership with the Jordan River Foundation in Jordan and Angelina Jolie's support for the RefuSHE project in Kenya. As our analysis has shown, both initiatives employ problem representations premised on a rather monolithic image of the 'refugee woman'. She is represented as *somebody* in need of saving through the market, coupled with assumptions about her presumably latent and endless entrepreneurial skills and tireless energy to work in and beyond her household. Yet, the two initiatives lack a thoroughgoing critical analysis of the gendered assumptions that underpin such representation. RefuSHE, however, much more so than the IKEA partnership with the JRF, recognises traumas, oftentimes induced by conflict and gendered violence, and offers women temporary counselling, medical and legal services. Across both cases, however, the refugee woman's insertion into paid labour markets is depicted as a solution to the multiple problems ranging from the traumas of war, gender-based violence, rape and displacement to economic hardship. Such market-based solutions are actively created and dependent on a privileged

class of Northern – and often private – humanitarian saviours as well as compassionate consumers who may purchase the products that are manufactured within the initiatives. What is, however, celebrated as empowerment is often little more than the reinforcement of neoliberal gender norms of individual responsibility, self-help and the insertion of women refugees' labour in precarious and low-pay artisanal markets.

We argue that projects such as these deserve scrutiny not only because they are located within neoliberal rationalities, but also because they share affinities with ideas of helping refugees 'at home' or in the first country of arrival, rather than inviting us to think politically about the root causes of displacement and addressing these accordingly, for example, by offering hospitality to asylum seekers and refugees in the global North. While we envisage this article as a critique of neoliberal turns in global humanitarian governance, we concede that we are both located within a deeply western privileged context that undoubtedly colours our interpretations and writings throughout the article. Indeed, this piece is entirely based on an analysis of texts and videos alone, rather than fieldwork and conversations with refugees in either Jordan or Kenya. Nonetheless, we hope that this article may inspire further field research and raise questions around the pervasiveness of neoliberal forms of global governance that mobilise feminist ideas and goals. It is also our hope that it invites collective feminist considerations on what may be alternatives to the simplistic conflation between women's empowerment and entrepreneurship as well as taken for granted assumptions about the emancipatory qualities of the market.

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