Article

"I am free": Gender statements and the empowerment pedagogies for refugee women in Brazil

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Abstract. In this article, I analyze a set of gender statements that, intertwined with the category of refuge, constitutes a specific narrative articulated by the international organizations integrated to the transnational human rights regimes. I take the United Nations (UN) project Empowering Refugees as a reference to introduce gender narratives that will largely direct the asylum policies in the Brazilian context. I also discuss the effects of these actions on the lives of two women who engaged in the project in the city of Sao Paulo: Samira, example of empowerment presented publicly; and Jana, also a participant in the project, but who did not become a public voice for its results. My main argument is that projects aimed at "refugee women" headed by international agencies are promoting an empowerment pedagogy based on concepts such as autonomy and freedom, which does not necessarily favor women who are the targets of their actions.

Keywords. Gender, empowerment, asylum, refugee women.

In this article, I analyze the activation of a set of statements on gender that, intertwined with the refuge category, constitute a specific narrative articulated by international organizations integrated to the "transnational human rights regimes"[2] (Piscitelli, 2016). These statements, in dispute with other narratives, will direct a large number of projects and policies for refugees in the Brazilian context. They are also indicative of the exclusion of other narratives and ways of living the asylum experience. I take the UN project *Empowering Refugees* as a reference in the analysis of these statements and their effects on the lives of two women who participated in the action: Samira, one of the protagonists in the documentary produced to publicize the results of the project and model of empowerment, presented publicly; and Jana, also a participant in the project, but who did not become a public example of its results.

In the following sessions, I present fragments of what I call gender statements in the Brazilian context of asylum administration. These statements are contemporary narratives

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[2] Adriana Piscitelli (2016) uses the expression in the context of the regimes to combat trafficking in persons at the transnational level, whose expansion is based on a human rights language. When referring to these regimes, the author considers a set of policies, norms, discourses, knowledge and laws on human trafficking formulated in the intertwining of supranational, transnational, national and local plans. I apply the expression in the context of the governmentalities of refugee mobilities, also based on a human rights language at the transnational level.

that circulate in the conjuncture of refugee mobility in Brazil and, more specifically, in the city of Sao Paulo. Through the ethnography carried out in the closing event of the UN project, I present the articulation between the narratives of international organizations, national companies, multinational corporations and humanitarian institutions in their framing of gender and refugees. My main argument is that the gender statements presented by the international agencies pursue the "empowerment" of women as a normative horizon for gender equality. The effects of these actions, however, seem far from the intended objectives, considering that those who will benefit from the projects are the women that correspond to the agencies' own vision of what an *empowered* woman should be. I illustrate these effects briefly by showing the experiences of Samira and Jana, two participants in the *Empowering Refugees* project.

In the next session, I present the UN project and make a description of the documentary presented at the occasion of a closing event of *Empowering Refugees*. This description is based on observation made on the day of the event as well as on conversations and interviews with two project participants. With this description, I seek to point out important modulations in the projects of the international agencies, which use the experiences of "refugee women" as successful examples of female "empowerment". In the following session, I analyze some of the narratives on gender in the UN norms and guides. I also explore some of the meanings of "empowerment" for the organization, put into practice in their actions for refugee women. Subsequently, I present a case of success and another one that represents a supposed failure of the actions of "empowerment" and employability. I argue that the gender narratives produced by the international organizations exclude women who do not fit into their apolitical humanitarian view, which reinforces gendered performances articulated to notions of autonomy in their pedagogy of "empowerment". In the final session, I present a reflection on the changes that the transnational asylum regime undergoes, influenced by the gender narratives produced and reinforced by international agencies.

1. From the logic of charity to the logic of investment: supporting the differences

Samira and Jana are some of the honor guests at the closing event of the *Empowering Refugees* project. On that sunny day in August, just over a hundred people sit in a movie theater at Itaú Cultural, in downtown São Paulo. I am at the back of the theater, standing. All the chairs are taken by guests and partners of the UN Global Compact Network's project in Brazil[3]. Each person at the event receives a badge with their names on and the name of the institution or company they represent. I notice that the majority of them are workers of non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, private companies or news media. Since it was impossible for me to register, I did not receive a badge. The room is crowded and, like me, another dozen people are waiting in line. We are authorized to enter only after all the guests and participants are accommodated in their chairs.

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[3] The UN Global Compact involves the corporate sector in actions of "citizenship" and "social responsibility", seeking to align corporate practices with "fundamental and internationally accepted values in the areas of human rights, labor relations, the environment and the fight against corruption". The projects are carried out through partnerships between international agencies, NGOs, companies, trade unions and other partners of interest. The Brazilian network operates in partnership with The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Brazilian financial corporation Itaú Unibanco held its presidency at the date of the event.

Standing, we witness the beginning of the institutional speeches. "The UN Global Compact is the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative and has an obligation to influence business on the issue of refugees as we experience the greatest humanitarian crisis in history", says the Executive Secretary of the Global Compact. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) representative proceeds: "You need to look at these women not as victims but as people who can contribute to the growth of businesses with their talent, dreams, traditions and cultural wealth". Another representative, this time from UN Women, enunciates: "Entrepreneurship is an alternative for refugee women and an excellent opportunity for companies committed to this cause".

The Thematic Group on Human Rights and Labor of the Brazil Network of the Global Compact together with UNHCR and UN Women head the project. They are partners with several organizations for refugees operating in Brazil, such as Caritas Arquidiocesana of Sao Paulo[4] and PARR, the Support Program for the Replacement of Refugees[5], in addition to five private companies[6]. The institutional purpose of *Empowering Refugees* is to increase women's access to formal employment in Brazil through "corporate awareness". There are also monthly training and counseling meetings on rights, professional planning and entrepreneurship for women[7].

In the audience, I recognize faces I have seen on several other occasions: public events, audiences, and institutional meetings of the "refuge world". I notice that the participants in the project, sitting in the front ranks of the theater, are mostly *public voices*, as observed by França (2017). These are voices and faces of refugees often presented by UNHCR and other asylum management organizations in their projects and ceremonies. The same people also had their stories told in the 23 minutes of that edition's closing documentary.

The lights go out. A black screen appears. White letters overlap explaining the project. Then, we see a few scenes of the daily lives of the refugee women in their homes. The narrative presents their morning routines. They get up, wash their faces and prepare breakfast. They go down the stairs, open the doors and leave their houses. We see peeling walls and rusty gates. We go for a walk with them through urban settings in the city of Sao Paulo. The screen shows the title of the documentary: "Restarts: About Women, Asylum and Work". From that moment on, the images of the women's routines are interspersed with the narratives of the company representatives about the advantages of hiring refugees for the promotion of "diversity" in their businesses. There are also women's testimonies on their economic difficulties in Brazil, where they talk about their qualities of good workers

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[4] Caritas International includes 162 humanitarian organizations from the Catholic Church all over the world. Caritas Arquidiocesana of São Paulo has a covenant with UNHCR and the Brazilian Ministry of Justice to lead the assistance to refugees in the country.

[5] PARR is a program created by EMDOC, a migration-consulting firm. It is a job search platform designed specifically for refugees. The program operates in Brazil with support from Caritas and UNHCR.

[6] Participating in the second edition were Carrefour supermarket chain, EMDOC, Lojas Renner stores chain, Facebook and Sodexo.

[7] This information was presented at the closing ceremony of the project. The numbers indicate, in the sum of the two editions, the participation of 80 refugee women, among whom different companies hired 21 and others have opened their own businesses. Another 40 received individualized professional counseling through coaching sessions offered by partners. According to data from the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) - an agency of the Ministry of Justice responsible for judging requests for refuge in the country, there were approximately 8,400 refugees recognized in Brazil in 2016. Of this total, 29.3%, or almost 2,500, are women.

and, in some cases, show their gratitude for the job vacancy they achieved through the UN project. Violence and suffering in the context of displacement, exposed and explored in several of the images produced by the UNHCR in most of its campaigns, in which precisely women and children are the most visible protagonists, are not part of the video's narrative. In it, there are few references to the history of persecution in the lives of these women. There is also no discussion about the reasons they left their home countries or descriptions on the details of their lives before the refuge situation. The movie, therefore, differs from the majority of UNHCR's audiovisual production on refugees. Its purpose is to show the lives of these women after their arrival in Brazil, removing them from the scenarios of war and privation.

A woman with her hair stuck in a cap, wearing green gloves and blue uniform appears. She wipes a mirror that reflects her image. She seems to be in a bathroom. As the camera approaches, we see that her uniform has a red stripe named after one of the project's partner companies. She says she has higher education in Administrative Secretariat. Her name and nationality appears as the camera closes up on her face: Luna, from Democratic Republic of Congo. "This job does not bother me because I really like working". Then images of Luna cleaning the company's facilities follow her narrative: "I've never worked in a company like this, but [supervisor's name] taught me everything".

In the next scene, the diversity manager of the company that hired Luna gives his testimony: "The more diverse a team, the more innovative it can be, and diversity also hides a very large return on investment. So that's not just a cute thing. I think it's part of a business too". The group of potential contractors for refugee labor is the target audience for the film's narrative. The speech of Luna's employer seeks to withdraw the idea of charity and aid commonly associated with humanitarian action. In addition, Luna, blessed with a work and the teachings transmitted to her by the employee of the company, exposes a certain feeling of gratitude in her narrative.

In the next scene, the owner of a renowned restaurant in São Paulo, nationally known and turned celebrity for her participation in a culinary reality show, points out the advantages of hiring refugees. She talks about "cultural diversity" present in "cosmopolitan cities such as New York and Paris" and the richness that contact with "other cultures" would bring to those localities. The hiring of Odara, a refugee who is now a waitress in her restaurant, derived, according to the business's owner narrative, from Odara's qualification and preparation more than by her gender, race or her migratory condition: "I did not do charity. I hired a person who has the talent to do a job and who, by chance, is a black woman and a refugee. She's different and I appreciate the differences".

Categories like "investment" and "business" overlay others like "charity" and "aid". In this business model, intertwined with humanitarianism, the refugee carries a "difference" that appears somewhat naturalized and allocated in their bodies. A "difference" that is also profitable. The desired advantage for contractors, therefore, is to ensure the presence of "diversity" in their companies. An advantage both symbolic and material. The refugees could also benefit by achieving their financial independence, "autonomy" and, ultimately, their "empowerment". As Odara and Laura, two participants of the project, illustrate in the video, this autonomy is a condition of independence both in relation to husbands and in relation to care organizations. Odara notices "In Brazil it is different. Here women work and men work. So, that's why I say I'll stay here in Brazil. Because here women feel inde-

pendent". Then Laura, a cashier in a department store, emphasizes, "It's hard [...] because before I found a job, it was the people who gave me money, the church and everything. Now that I'm independent, I have to carry this burden, this cross for my family. Anyways, I believe it will be ok, because this is the beginning of a new life".

The narratives of the international agencies representatives and of the entrepreneurs reflect, in this sense, more than notions about work, diversity, entrepreneurship and social responsibility in the "world of projects"[8]. These entrepreneurial gains would be just a step towards what is ultimately desired for the broader Brazilian society, the purpose of actions and projects that intercept the relationship of refugee women and private companies: gender equality, women's "empowerment".

2. Gender statements and the *empowerment* meanings

The existence of a project such as *Empowering Refugees* highlights the construction of "refugee women" as a category of interest as well as indicates the location of these women as subjects of rights within the framework of the UN refugee protection system. Under the international legal framework, the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, or the Geneva Convention, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1951, consolidates the category of refugee[9]. In addition to the Geneva Convention, another important tool is the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, which eliminated the temporal and geographical constraints previously established in the 1951 Convention.

Brazil, in the post-war context, adheres to the international regime constituted within the UN framework, with signature and ratification of the 1951 Convention. The country also adheres to the 1967 Protocol, in April 1972. However, it is only with a specific law from 1997 that the country establishes an administrative political framework, regulating the mechanisms for the implementation of the Statute. The third paragraph of the law follows the Cartagena Declaration's (1984) recommendation that the legislation also considers those who have fled their countries because of "massive violation of human rights" as refugees.

The official UNHCR documents and guidelines predict the possibility of request and recognition of refuge claims founded on "gender-based persecution". Those documents provide legal guidance to governments, decision-makers and agencies staff in several countries. Haines (2003) points out that the Executive Committee of the UNHCR called upon States in 1985 to recognize that women victims of violence and persecution should be protected based on the principles of the 1951 Convention. Ten years later, the Committee recommended to the High Commissioner to support States in the making and imple-

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[8] Guilherme Mansur (2014) explores in his research the dynamics of the "world of projects" as "an environment of institutional reproduction of categories and organizations in the international scene". The concept aims to describe the performance of international organizations that operate through projects funded by national and supranational states.

[9] The text defines a refugee as any person who, "As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (UN General Assembly 1951).

mentation of norms and guidelines on the persecution specifically suffered by women, regulating the recognition as refugees of those whose claims are based on justified fear of suffering sexual violence and other gender-based violence.

This is how a set of guidelines and documents related to gender-based persecution was consolidated, within the framework of the international asylum system[10]. In this web of documents, certain statements about gender are settled. Those narratives, inserted in broader conceptual and political disputes, deeply affect the programs and policies of asylum in the Brazilian context. Intended to provide legal guidance to officers and staff working within the UN system, the publication *UNHCR Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls*, released in 2008, describes what it considers the biggest challenges in the protection of women and girls under the status of refugees. The publication also seeks possible solutions for the problems faced by the refugees. The guide asserts that the protection of women and girls is an "organizational priority" for UNHCR and that in order to guarantee this protection, it is necessary to understand the challenges faced by women, related to "their gender, their roles and their position in society". The text also recognizes that violations of rights of women stem from gender inequalities between men and women common to "most societies", which, in turn, consist of human rights violations.

The meanings of persecution and violation of women's rights produced in UN documents also relate to the view of international organizations on gender relations in the countries of origin of these refugees. The 2008 *Handbook* also points out that some of the biggest challenges to gender equality are the "community values and traditions" that violate rights and the "cultural relativism". It argues that certain values, including religious practices and traditions, could facilitate the occurrence of gender inequalities and gender violence. The guide predicts that those values could also lead members of the community to challenge the "universality of human rights on the grounds that local culture and tradition should take precedence". The document also states "cultural relativism is the greatest challenge to women's and girls' rights and the largest obstacle to eliminating harmful traditional practices".

The policy direction in the United Nations system is for all agencies, including UNHCR, to develop gender-specific projects and actions. These actions should be based on the "empowerment" of women as a condition for gender equality. The 2008 guide describes "empowerment" as a process of support and provision of tools for women and girls to be able to:

Analyze their situation from an age, gender and diversity perspective; access information on their rights; define their own priorities, and take action as they consider appropriate to address inequalities and realize their full capacities and skills, so that they can attain a level of control over their own environment and livelihood (UNHCR 2008, p.13)

"Empowerment" implies the knowledge and access to information on rights, in order to subsidize an analysis of the personal situation and the capacity of action to face

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[10] These include the 1991 *Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women*; the 1995 *Sexual Violence against Refugees: Guidelines on Prevention and Response;* and the 2000 *Position Paper on Gender-Related Persecution*. Also includes the *Guidelines on International Protection: Gender-Related Persecution within the context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees*; and the *Guidelines on International Protection: "Membership of a particular social group" within the context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees*.

inequalities. It is a capacity to be learned and developed. A process taught according to certain concepts of international law and facilitated by partnership with stakeholders from non-governmental organizations, states or companies. It has, therefore, a pedagogical characteristic.

Influenced by the discussions raised by an extensive literature criticizing the humanitarian processes, the orientation provided in the 2008 *UNHCR Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls* observes the importance of considering them as "rights-holders with legal entitlements" rather than "passive recipients of humanitarian aid". In addition, the 1991 Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women, designed to be a tool to raise awareness among UNHCR staff and partners, already include the concept that aid and assistance affects the protection of women, emphasizing the importance for them to participate in decision-making and planning processes in the UN projects.

Regarding the critique of humanitarian aid, numerous studies, especially influenced by Didier Fassin's work (2011), analyze the performance of these organizations in the production of victimization processes. For Fassin, the "humanitarian reason" acts in the production of vulnerable individuals and populations, characterized by processes of "exclusion" and "psychic suffering". In his critique, Fassin refers to a "repressive compassion" in which suffering and compassion are transformed into political resources in the allocation of scarce resources by states, international agencies and non-governmental organizations. Liisa Malkki (1996) also analyses what she claims to be a process of depoliticization as one of the effects of humanitarian administration. This depoliticization operates through the making of the victim: a universal subject positioned in a "national order of things". A process that could interfere, according to the author, in the perception of the people enrolled in the refuge category as historical actors, taking from them the authority over the construction of their own narratives.

In Brazilian context, Carolina Moulin (2009) analyzes the construction of the category of asylum in the scope of the international organizations. Based on the anthropological contributions of Mauss' system of symbolic exchanges, Moulin examines the meanings of humanitarian protection as a "gift". Her argument, similar to Fassin's analysis, is that the moral exchange of the relationship between the refugee as a humanitarian victim and the international agencies always presupposes some kind of reciprocity and "gratitude" permeated by "exploitation and abjection mechanisms" of the subjects. That fragile victim figure described by Moulin, Fassin and Malkki still prevails in some of the UNHCR materials, especially in the images of its web pages and in the pamphlets that solicit donations. However, with regard to the definitions on gender produced by the humanitarian international asylum regime, it seems to me that the "refugee woman" targeted by the actions described in the UNHCR handbooks and guides is not a passive subject, victimized by the management procedures of States and nongovernmental humanitarian organizations. Those same refugee women, when presented in the publications related to gender, appear as the privileged receptacles of pedagogical actions for "empowerment".

The project *Empowering Refugees* is part of this documental and conceptual narrative. The initiative considers, in its local network, the specificities of Brazil as a destination for refugees and the country's position in the transnational scenario. Here, they produce and update new meanings for "empowerment", forged in contemporary mobility. Narratives on assistance, economic dependence and gender inequality are also updated and locally reas-

signed. Female empowerment, in this context, relies on financial independence, with two main purposes: i. autonomy in relation to assistance and ii. autonomy towards unequal gender relations. The autonomy related to assistance, in the context of asylum, refers to freedom from the aid relations of humanitarian organizations. It consists of removing charity from the actions of international agency programs, emphasizing the economic profit from hiring refugee women and the celebrated benefits of the presence of diversity in companies. Its aim is for refugees to be able to govern themselves and escape the "dependence" of NGOs, shelters for migrants and other humanitarian institutions, for this assistance is considered responsible for the increase of institutionalization of populations under tutelage[11].

The second purpose of the "empowerment" actions is to seek personal autonomy, a freedom related to the ties imposed by unequal gender relations, associated mainly to their countries of origin, and also, in some cases, embodied in their companions, boyfriends and husbands as representatives of cultural backwardness. In this sense, it aims to remove them from the situation of subordination, hindrance to gender equality, especially in marital relations. The narratives emphasize the necessity of a broader change in gender arrangements inside the families, considering the presumed prevalence of more egalitarian gender relations in Brazil, in comparison to their countries of origin. The gender narratives publicized by the organization produce effects related to this passage from a life of ties in social and cultural relations to a life of autonomy. It is a path that intertwines the persecution, reception, and protection in order to achieve women's autonomy through "empowerment". The idea of "empowerment", therefore, also relates to nationality and gender conceptions regarding different countries' social and political positions / locations[12].

In the next session, I reflect on the conditions for the success of these actions. What makes Odara a different candidate in the eyes of the restaurant owner? What distinguishes the stories of triumph presented to the audience at the event from the many stories that are not made public? What are the narratives that the gender statements in the project exclude and silence?

3. Jana and Samira

Of the 80 women invited to be part of the project in its two editions, 10 were part of the documentary. They represent the public voices selected by NGOs and UNHCR to tell

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[11] Antônio Carlos de Souza Lima (2013) builds on the concept of "tutelary power", based on an analysis of the state apparatus for the administration of indigenous populations in Brazil. It is a power exercised over geographical, social and symbolic spaces, which products and delimits populations considered "deprived of full capacities necessary for civic life." The people under tutelage would need a pedagogical mediation with the objective of inserting them into a civic community. This relationship establishes a bond of submission/protection between the administration and the administered. Souza Lima's formulation allows the use of the concept of tutelage to different management objects, not only to indigenous populations.

[12] There is an extensive literature that discusses whether displacements leads into more or less empowerment for women. These works take into account the position of these women in origin and destination countries. For some examples see: Mahler and Pessar (2003), Pessar (2005), Walton-Roberts and Pratt (2005), McIlwaine (2010). In the Brazilian literature there are also contributions regarding the reconfiguration of women's positions in a transnational level. This rich set of studies articulate gender, nationality, race and generation in their analyses of mobilities between global north and south. See: Assis (2011), Piscitelli (2013), Togni (2014).

and re-tell their stories of persecution and integration in the country. Some of the images and representations of empowerment showed in the video documentary are materialized in the story of Samira, a 27-year-old Syrian refugee, married and mother of two. Samira gives her testimony in the domestic space. She talks about the exhaustion she experiences with the intense work she does daily, cleaning her house and taking care of her children. Following the images in which she appears cooking and playing with the children, the video shows her in front of a computer in the modern Facebook office in Sao Paulo, accompanied by a company employee. The employee, who teaches Samira to promote her business through the social media platform, emphasizes her personal involvement with the "cause" and her identification with Samira as a woman and mother: "When I heard that Facebook was working on a refugee empowerment initiative and I found out about Samira's story I could relate to her story because I also had a moment in my life with a small daughter in which I was depending on my business to be successful". The employee sees herself in Samira's story and this identification is now mutual: Samira and any other of those refugee women have the opportunity of being like that employee in the future. They now see the possibility of being mothers and, at the same time, successful entrepreneurs.

Samira received the company's support to boost her Arab food buffet. For six weeks, every Tuesday, she would come to the Facebook office to work on her business page and receive tips on how to succeed. The marketing strategy was successful and a nationwide television program invited Samira to recount her story of overcoming and to advertise her business. Currently, in most of the events and seminars on asylum and migrations that take place in the city of São Paulo, Samira is responsible for food and catering services. She is always mentioned as an exemplary case.

Jana, also sitting in the audience that day, could not see her face on the screen. Like Samira, Jana is married, a mother, and a participant of the UN project. She is a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo, where she practiced as a lawyer and had experience working with humanitarian and human rights organizations. Jana is also a public speaker at various meetings and projects related to her refugee situation. Her narrative, however, is quite different from Samira's. Exceeding the demands for dignified living conditions presented by most of these public voices, Jana always makes very critical and strong speeches about the troubled political situation of her country. Heavy criticism on the actions of the transnational refugee regime and humanitarian agencies are a constant in her speech, in which she positions herself as refugee as well as a former employee of that regime. Jana did not get work through *Empowering Refugees* and did not have her story told in any media of the project. She is currently struggling to fund a support NGO for African refugees in Sao Paulo. Encouraged by the possibility of re-engaging in her country's political processes, she has never abandoned her activism.

In the final act of the closing ceremony, after a long ritual of delivering flowers to the women and an extensive photo shoot for the media, the participants were invited to a last interaction activity with the project's business partners. A generous brunch was offered to them. Each of the woman received personal presentation cards, which included their name and contact. The activity consisted of giving the cards to the representatives of the companies, so they could analyze the possibility of calling the refugees for a job interview. It was a sort of simulation of the presumed relations between employee and employer in

the job market. Those who delivered at least three cards would receive a surprise gift at the end of the event.

I see Jana sitting on a bench in the back of the patio while the others talk and interact with the companies' representatives. At that moment, Jana also had movement limitations due to health complications in her fifth and most recent pregnancy. She could not stand for a long time and it was a problem, for she would not be able to participate in the activity. I approach and ask her if she will hand deliver the cards. She looks me in the eyes and laughs: "No, I do not want to be a cleaner."

Considering the meanings of "empowerment" in gender statements made public by UNHCR, Jana is not a model case, for she challenges that same gender narrative on several levels. The value of work, transmitted in the documentary video script, emphasizes that carrying out activities outside the original training area of these women, as well as the occupation of vacancies considered of lesser social value, is part of a transition process and considered normal for people who have fled from a dangerous situation and are "starting over". They must be patient, disciplined and, at the same time, proactive entrepreneurs.

Jana's public voice is a political narrative that does not fit the model proposed by transnational organizations like UNHCR, an agency that works on the "non-political" key of humanitarianism. On this matter, the mandate of the UN agency, as spelled out in the 1950 Statute, is clear on its role and purpose of "providing international protection to refugees in a non-political and humanitarian way and seeking permanent solutions for them". In its general provisions, the document emphasizes that: "The work of the High Commissioner shall be of an entirely non-political character; it shall be humanitarian and social and shall relate, as a rule, to groups and categories of refugees".

Jana's speech does not fit into the personal narratives presented in the video. Emotional and appealing testimonies that bet on the effects of the exposure of suffering and stories of search for overcoming this suffering. Samira's story, however, seems to fit into the gender statements produced by the refuge regime in the context of the project, as she states: "Before I could not leave the house, I could not have friends, he used to check my cell phone, I could not keep my money. Now I can do anything. I go out, I have friends, he does not touch my cell phone, I have my money, I work. I can do everything now. I'm free".

4. Final reflections: Gender in the transformations of the transnational refugee regime

It is hard to think of a more representative group of the horizon of "empowerment" sought by transnational humanitarian agencies than women who fled from situations of conflict, persecution and human rights violations to reach another country and, with the help of these same agencies, become self-governing. Women who are ideally free from both aid decoys and gender gaps that reflected the alleged delay of inequality between men and women in their previous home countries. In these statements, categories such as "empowerment", "autonomy" and "freedom" are contextually updated, always in relation to the senses attributed to violence and persecution, placed in a distinct space-time, in a past that these women left behind. In that same past they ideally left the unequal gender relations and the violations of rights.

It is not the purpose of the project presented here, nor is it a central element in the narratives of other actions aimed at women refugees within the transnational agencies to portray the sufferings arising from the traumatic events, wars and political persecution, characteristic of the asylum in its juridical-legal form. Rather, the focus is on the suffering they experienced for being a women, prior to displacement, as well as difficulties in maintaining the family and fulfilling the duties of motherhood in the destination country. The pedagogical character of these narratives and actions also consolidates in the positive valuation of certain models of family, domesticity and femininity. In it, not only are specific gender ideas reinforced, but also a model of nation that builds Brazil as a place of security, in which egalitarian gender relations and equal opportunities prevail. They are also representative of the asylum policy models currently implemented in the country, which value an entrepreneurial pedagogy as a way to escape the feared humanitarian aid, hand in hand with the business groups. Less assistance, more autonomy.

The gender statements presented here pursue the *empowerment* of women as a normative horizon for gender equality. The effects, however, seem far from the intended objectives, considering that those who will benefit from the projects are the women that correspond to the agencies' own vision of what an *empowered* or *empowering* woman should be. It is a model that embraces certain differences while erasing others. The employer discards the categorizations of being a woman, black and refugee as plausible reasons for hiring Odara. Jana refers to exactly the same categories in her arguing about the reasons why she was fired from her previous job in a cafeteria in the east side of Sao Paulo. There seems to be a discrepancy between favoured and neglected traits of differences The valued and positive differences result in employability, while the neglected ones do not. The operation of certain distinctions, embodied in categories of differentiation, separates the employable refugee from the non-employable refugee into a production of borders involving ideals of gender, race, and nationality.

The strengthening of essentialized identities like *refugee*, *woman* and *African* does not consider the processes of differentiation between women. It does not take into account that Samira is a Muslim woman in a Christian majority country. It does not consider that Jana is racialized in ways that do not affect Samira. Lastly, this model does not consider the discriminations that black, African, Arab, Muslim, young and old women suffer in the labor market. It does not consider that not every refugee woman desires cleaning or cooking Arabic food.

The narratives operated by the humanitarian actions of the transnational refugee regime are undergoing transformations. Other statements, coming from different sources, notably feminisms, guide these changes. Entrepreneurial humanitarianism overlays the statements of the assistant humanitarianism. Just as the institutional procedures are transformed, the objects of the humanitarian actions are also modified. Thus, it is not possible, in this regard, to analyze the actions of these networks, in the Brazilian context, solely from the key of the victimization, already criticized also from within, by the agents of the asylum regime.

As the refugee women, produced as a specific category by international agencies, must correspond to the image of the ideal victim of the refuge in certain management spaces[13],

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[13] A massive bibliography indicates the gender processes that act in the formation of the victim. See, among others: Piscitelli (2013); Ross (2013); Vianna (2014) and Lowenkron (2015).

this does not happen in the same way in projects that focus on work and entrepreneurship, where, in order to enjoy policies and goods, they must prioritize a performance of autonomy and pro-activity. On the moral level, victimization seems to be necessary for adequacy in the refugee category; however, in the daily life and subsistence level other categories appear to be more valued.

The work of institutions for refugees, based on the pedagogy of transnational agencies, restricts its actions on "teaching how to do". To this model of projects also corresponds a model of what would be the most appropriate policies for refugees in the country, in the view of this administration. These policies transfer the "problem" to the private sector and to the women themselves, who, given the supposed tools for their autonomy, are held accountable for their failures and successes. While these actions reinforce the need to build an autonomous life, they still claim for an ideal victim to sensitize and to protect the status of the refuge in accordance to the asylum international laws. Hence their pedagogical actions and the production of their indispensability with the apparently paradoxical objective of teaching these women to be independent and empowered.

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