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**Proceedings of the
4th International Conference on
Gender Research
A Virtual Conference hosted by
University of Aveiro
Portugal
21-22 June 2021**



**Edited by
Professor Elisabeth T. Pereira, Professor Carlos Costa
and Professor Zélia Breda**

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Proceedings of the

**4th International Conference on
Gender Research
ICGR 2021**

**A Virtual Conference
hosted by**

**University of Aveiro
Portugal**

21-22 June 2021

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Preface

These proceedings represent the work of contributors to the 4th International Conference on Gender Research (ICGR 2021), hosted by University of Aveiro, Portugal on 21-22 June 2021. The Conference Co-Chairs are Professor Elisabeth T. Pereira and Professor Carlos Costa, and the Programme Chair is Professor Zélia Breda, all from University of Aveiro, Portugal.

ICGR is a well-established event on the academic research calendar and now in its 4th year the key aim remains the opportunity for participants to share ideas and meet the people who hold them. The conference was due to be held at The University of Aveiro, Portugal but due to the global Covid-19 pandemic it was moved online to be held as a virtual event. The scope of papers will ensure an interesting two days. The subjects covered illustrate the wide range of topics that fall into this important and ever-growing area of research.

The opening keynote presentation is given by Professor Vanessa Ratten, from La Trobe University, Victoria, Australia on the topic of *Gender, Ageing and Entrepreneurial Ecosystems*. The second day of the conference will open with an address by Professor Erica Wilson, Southern Cross University, NSW, Australia who will talk about *Gender in the time of COVID: Imagining a more Inclusive (Tourism) World*.

With an initial submission of 113 abstracts, after the double blind, peer review process there are 37 Academic research papers, 2 PhD research papers, 1 Masters Research paper and 8 work-in-progress papers published in these Conference Proceedings. These papers represent research from, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, India, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Nigeria, North Cyprus, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Turkey, UK, UAE, USA and Vietnam

We hope you enjoy the conference.

Professor Elisabeth T. Pereira, Professor Carlos Costa and Professor Zélia Breda

University of Aveiro
Portugal
June 2021

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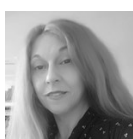
Biographies

Conference and Programme Chairs



Professor Carlos Costa is a full professor and entrepreneur based at the University of Aveiro, Portugal. Carlos started out doing an undergraduate degree in regional and urban planning (University of Aveiro). This was followed by a specialization in tourism, at the master's and doctoral level, at the University of Surrey, in the UK. Carlos is now Head of Department, at DEGEIT – the largest department of the University of Aveiro.

With publications at the highest level, Carlos also enjoys writing down-to-earth articles for the media and for the general public. As the Director of the PhD in Marketing and Strategy, as well as of the PhD in Tourism, both at the University of Aveiro, Carlos is an inspiration to colleagues and students alike – to perform beyond their dreams and achieve new entrepreneurial heights, whatever the domain may be.



Professor Elisabeth T. Pereira holds a PhD and Master in the fields of Economics and Business Management. She is Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Aveiro (Portugal), and senior researcher in the field of Competitiveness and Innovation at the Research Unit GOVCOPP-University of Aveiro. She is author of several dozen articles, books, chapter of books and communications at international conferences.



Zélia Breda, Assistant Professor and Director of MA in Tourism Management and Planning, University of Aveiro. Member of Research Unit Governance, Competitiveness and Public Policies (GOVCOPP); founding member/vice-president of Observatory of China and Portuguese Institute of Sinology. Authored/co-authored national/international papers/communications on tourism development, networks, tourism in China and Goa (India), gender and tourism, and internationalisation of tourism economy.

Keynote Speakers



Vanessa Ratten is an Associate Professor of Entrepreneurship and Innovation in the Department of Management, Sport and Tourism, La Trobe Business School at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia. She is the Program Director for Entrepreneurship and Innovation courses and teaches Entrepreneurial Business Planning, Managing Innovation in Organisations and Entrepreneurship. She has published numerous books including "Gender and Family Entrepreneurship" (Routledge), "Diversity and Entrepreneurship" (Routledge), "Women Entrepreneurship in Family Business" (Routledge), "Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Smart Cities" (Routledge) and "Frugal Innovation" (Routledge). Her research interests include gender studies, international business, entrepreneurship and innovation.



Professor Erica Wilson is Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic Innovation) at Southern Cross University, based at the Lismore campus. Previously, Erica has held the roles of Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic (Acting), as well as Acting Dean, Deputy Head and Director of Teaching and Learning in the School of Business and Tourism. Born in Seattle, Erica has called Australia home for over three decades. Erica has published over 80 scholarly outputs, including two co-edited books, including, 'Women and Travel: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives' in 2017. She currently sits on the Editorial Advisory Boards for several journals focusing on management and hospitality research. Ministerially appointed, Erica was member of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Technical and Scientific and Advisory Committee (from 2006 to 2015). She is passionate about supporting higher degree and early career research, and has supervised a number of PhDs, Masters by Research and Honours theses to successful completion. Erica is a proud advocate for gender equality in higher education and research.

Mini Track Chairs

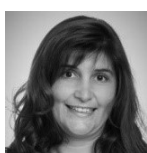


Tindara Addabbo is a full Professor in Economic Policy at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia. Current main research areas: wage discrimination by gender, well-being, gender budgeting, gender gap in education, gender equity firms certification. Coordinator of Leading Towards Sustainable Gender Equality Plans in research institutions – (H2020-SwafS-2019 –873072). Web site:

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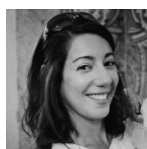
Teresa Carvalho is an associate Professor at the University of Aveiro, Portugal and a senior researcher at CIPES (Center for Research in Higher Education Policies). She is the coordinator of the H2020 CHANGE project - CHAlleNging Gender (In)Equality in Science and Research.



Francesca Dal Mas is a Senior Lecturer in Strategy and Enterprise at the Lincoln International Business School, University of Lincoln, UK. She has a Master's Degree in Business Administration and a PhD in Managerial and Actuarial Sciences from the University of Udine, and a law degree from the University of Bologna. Her research interests include strategy, knowledge management, and intellectual capital.



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Emília Fernandes is an Assistant Professor in the School of Economics and Management of the University of Minho, Portugal, lecturing at undergraduate and post-graduate levels in courses of Management, Human Resources Management. Her publications have been in research areas related to gender discourses and identities, practices of resistance, entrepreneurship and small and medium enterprises, and professional embodiment.



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Giuseppe Modaffari is a PhD student in Business and Administration at Niccolò Cusano University of Rome His main research areas are financial reporting, corporate finance, female entrepreneurship and turnaround management



Dr Manuel Au-Yong-Oliveira has a PhD in Industrial Engineering and Management from FEUP (University of Porto, 2012). Manuel is an Assistant Professor at the University of Aveiro, and a researcher affiliated to GOVCOPP. At present, Manuel is the Director of the Master's degree in Management at the University of Aveiro, in Portugal. Manuel is also a member of the Executive Committee of his department - DEGEIT – Department of Economics, Management, Industrial Engineering and Tourism, University of Aveiro. Manuel has over 200 academic publications.



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Paola Paoloni is a Full Professor in Accounting at the Sapienza University of Rome, Italy. She teaches Business Economics and Contemporary Strategy Analysis. Her main research interests include general management, financial reporting, female entrepreneurship and intellectual based management. She is an author and co-author of several articles and books on above mentioned research areas. She is foundress and scientific director of “Ipazia,” the scientific observatory on gender research.

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Nasima M.H. Carrim is an Associate Professor at the Department of Human Resource Management at the University of Pretoria. Her research focuses on gender in management, culture, religion and minorities in the workplace from an intersectionality and identity perspective. She has authored many articles in international journals and books related to diversity management.

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Family Firms Search for Innovation: Women in the Board Can Help?

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Abstract: We focus our attention on the specific case of family women's prejudice as a proxy to analyze family firm innovation. Family women's presence in the board should be solid because of family succession, due to new generations with the presence of daughters or marriages involving third parties. However, their contribution is not relevant and previous contributions noted that this presence should be visible or invisible depending on the moderation of the institutional context. Using the role congruity theory - based on institutional theory - we test our hypothesis on a sample of 709 Italian family firms through a count data model due to the nature of the dependent variable (i.e. number of patents). Results show how and why the invisible women became visible and their effect on innovation performance are positive. Prejudice against women in FBs are confirmed and it is detrimental to innovation. However, family firms' boards where the presence of a critical mass for women is reached helps in mitigating the effect of prejudice on innovation (i.e. internal institutional context). Our findings also show that the invisible women became visible and their effect became positive on innovation performance when the firm is located in an egalitarian context (i.e. external institutional context). Finally, our findings also have managerial and policy implications. With our empirical evidence, we aim to advise family business owners and managers with regard to their innovation strategy. A greater understanding of the role of family women on the board and their impact innovation may contribute to removing the prejudice of women competences and skills and increasing the number of women as innovators inside their family firms. In terms of policy, reinforce formal institutions to increase the female presence on the board is still needed.

Keywords: family firms, women, CEO, institutional context, innovation

1. Introduction

Family businesses represent the most widespread type of business worldwide (Family Business Yearbook, 2017), characterized by "the desire to maintain" the presence of the family in the ownership and management over time (Chua, Chrisman and Sharma, 1999). Consequently, with the entry of new generations or with marriages, the presence of women could be more recurrent and consistent in these firms compared to non-family ones. Thus, our purpose is to investigate whether the presence of family women on the boards can support (or, conversely, negatively affect) the innovation of family businesses.

There are many contributions in management literature that analyze the implications of women's presence on corporate behavior and results (Fagenson, 1993; Vinnicombe & Colwill, 1995; Terjesen, Sealy & Singh, 2009). Some of these have investigated the relationship between the presence of women in management roles and strategic choices (Post & Byron, 2015; Sila, Gonzalez, & Hagendorff, 2016). Others dwelt on the differences in the results as the presence of women in top positions increases. These studies can be framed within the Upper Echelons Theory (Hambrick and Mason, 1984), according to which the cultural, psychological and cognitive characteristics underlying the "observable" demographic variables constitute important factors of influence on the decisions taken by the top management team and consequently on the behavior and results of the firm.

This paper aims to advance this field of study by analyzing the specific case of family women in family businesses and their innovative path. Specifically, this is a first paper that aims to analyze the prejudice against family women in a family context. This is a way to tell a different story on the relationship between women's presence on the board and innovation in family firms by adopting an institutional point of view on the relationship among family and firm (D'Allura, 2019a). We focus our attention on the specific case of family women's prejudice as a proxy to analyze firm innovation. Family women's presence in the board should be solid because of family succession, due to new generations with the presence of daughters or marriages involving third parties. Previous contributions noted that this presence should be visible or invisible depending on the moderation of the institutional context. Specifically, we identify internal institutional context defined by the family.

We test our hypothesis on a sample of 709 Italian family firms through a count data model due to the nature of the dependent variable (i.e. number of patents). Prejudice against family women in FBs is detrimental to

innovation. However, the presence of a critical mass helps in mitigating the effect of prejudice on innovation (i.e. internal institutional context).

Our findings have both managerial and policy implications. With our empirical evidence, we aim to advise family business owners and managers with regard to their innovation strategy. A greater understanding of the role of family women' on the board and their impact innovation may contribute to removing the prejudice of women competences and skills and increasing the number of women in these important roles.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Institutional impediment on women action (and presence) in the firm: the role congruity theory

The context in which individuals and organizations act is made up from institutions that form the 'rules of the game' (North 1990). Moreover, institutions are created to facilitate economic transactions and increase the efficiency of the economic systems (North, 1990). However, there is a part of this game that it is out of control: the interaction among informal (i.e., tradition, culture, value, and belief) and formal institutions. Interesting to know is that interaction, all over the world, presents a gendered effect on the context in which firms are created and developed. The adoption of an institutional lens is needed to improve our understanding of family women's presence in different contexts (i.e. family firms vs nonfamily firms context). Coherently, recent contributions on female entrepreneurship recognize the gendered nature of institutions (Aidis et al, 2007; Jennings and Brush, 2013). Specifically, scholars found out that there are gendered restrictions that influence women to start their business and to scale up (Aidis and Schillo et al., 2017). Those evidence are the results of informal institutions that are socially prescribed but not legally enforced (North, 1991). Thus, if from one side, the formal institutions are the visible "rule of the game" (usually constitutional law), there is another side of the story that are invisible "rule of the game" based on the acceptable behaviors based on history, tradition and belief that are accepted and considered appropriate in a giving setting. Further, informal institutions (i.e., gender roles, beliefs, norms and values) create stereotypes that may influence individual behaviors, talents and skills (Rouse et al., 2013). Literature shows how stereotyped institutions end up considering women less able than men to perform a particular function, being a leader in business one of this (Roomi et al., 2018).

From the theoretical point of view, institutional theory has introduced the consideration of gender through the development of the gender role congruity theory (Eagly and Karau, 2002). The role congruity theory puts light on the gendered informal norms that impede the egalitarian path of women, generally, inside the society and, specifically, as entrepreneurs' leaders or inside the board of the firms (Eagly and Karau, 2002). In this paper, we consider the gender role congruity theory in the specific context of family firms that may present additional impediments for women to be part of the business life. Taking in consideration the social role theory, gender role congruity theory put emphasis on two types of informal institutional norms: descriptive and injunctive norms (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Descriptive norms are referred to descriptive stereotypes or gender stereotypes; injunctive norms referred to as prescriptive stereotypes or gender ideology. Those informal norms could make a less presence of women in the ownership and or management caused by the work-family conflict (Vera & Dean, 2005): women can have problems looking after the family if they work too many hours a day (Cadieux et al., 2002). Therefore, the family tends to protect the primary role of caring for the woman's family at the expense of her presence in the firm. Further, Eagly and Karau theory proposes that role congruity theory creates prejudice toward female leaders that takes two forms. The first is a less favorable evaluation of women's (than men's) potential for leadership because leadership ability is more stereotypical of men than women. The second is a less favorable evaluation of the actual leadership behavior of women than men because such behavior is perceived as less desirable in women than men. Both of these prejudices are, in our view, an impediment on women's presence (the first prejudice) and in the action (the second prejudice) inside the family firm in those contexts that are not egalitarian in the evaluation between men and women.

2.2 The presence of women in family firm ownership and management: antecedents and consequences

Since Lansberg's seminal work (1983), the family business has been considered a complex system, in which three distinct subsystems intersect and overlap: business, family and property. Individuals involved in this type of organization act differently depending on the role covered. Specifically, as members of the family, they pursue the goal of well-being and unity of the same; as owners, they pursue a return on investment and the solidity of the company; as a manager, they pursue the goal of economic efficiency of the business. Tagiuri and Davis (1996) share the same though. According to their interpretation, the family and the business are the two systems which, although different in nature, objectives and logics, interact by conditioning each other. Thus, studying family

businesses is equivalent to observing families and their dynamics, since there is no single type of family at the head of the business, as many family structures and models capable of shaping the ownership and the top management team in a different way (D'Allura, 2019b). The dynamics of the family unit linked to the vicissitudes that the family undergoes over time by natural course (e.g. marriages, births, deaths, new parents) or unexpected aspects (e.g. separations, divorces, enlargements, re-compositions), inevitably reverberate on the firm, although the latter is an independent from the family on both a legal and on an economic level. Advancing this approach, recently, D'Allura (2019a) proposes the study of family businesses considering how family and business can be considered as two different institutions that interact over time in a given institutional context. Therefore, there is a double level to investigate: a first level, concerns the way in which the family is structured in a specific institutional context (i.e., role and responsibilities, of the woman, inside the family), a second level concerns the way in which the family transfers those informal institutions to the firm (i.e., ownership and/or management).

Referring to the ownership structure, the family business is characterized, regardless of the institutional context, by a concentrated type in order to avoid solutions that could reduce the control by the family over the business (Casillas, Moreno, & Acedo, 2012). In this scenario, the role that women can take in these firms is particularly important. However, taking into light the role congruity theory, the specific setting of the family firms could reserve surprises linked both to, first, a specific institutional context (and therefore regardless of whether the company is family owned and / or managed) and, second, to the fact that it is specifically a family business. The latter case concerns the specific way in which the two institutions (family and business) can interact (D'Allura, 2019b).

While work on female role in the family business field tends to be limited (Campopiano et al., 2017), in the management literature the issue of the implications of the presence of women in leadership positions has long been investigated by measuring the effects in different ways (e.g. economic results, rates of return on capital, levels of growth, survival rates) (Klapper and Parker, 2011). Among these, there are contributions that describe the positive influence of the presence of women (Agnete Alsos et al., 2013; Krishnan and Parsons, 2008; Erhardt, Werbel and Shrader, 2003; Adams and Ferreira, 2009; Adler, 2001).

Investigations aimed to interpret the relationship between the presence of women in the ownership and or management of the firm appear necessary, adopting (as already started in the entrepreneurship field) the institutional lens. Our focus is to investigate the presence of women in the top management team of the family firm.

2.3 Hypothesis development

Family businesses represent a context in which two superficially different social units (i.e., families and businesses) are substantially integrated (D'Allura, 2019a). There is an "intimate connection between family and business" that is "natural and compatible" (Davis, 1998). This connection covers the succession across generations. One of the results of this connection is that family businesses generally have more women on the board than non-family businesses, because female directors are part of the owning family. The main consequence is that they are often selected because of their family ties rather than for their competencies and then they are not listed (Bettinelli et al., 2019). For all these reasons, we expect that:

Hypothesis 1: There is a negative association between family women on board of directors and firms' innovation due to family context.

Considering social barriers family and nonfamily female face in the boardrooms (González et al., 2020; Nekhili et al., 2018), previous contributions suggested that women minorities need to reach a critical mass (Kanter, 1977; Konrad et al., 2008), which the literature identifies as three members (e.g. Torchia et al., 2011; Amorelli and García-Sánchez, 2020) in order to be influential. We consider that the same should be occurred in the family firms, in particular:

Hypothesis 2: The negative association between family women on board of directors and firms' innovation due to family context becomes a positive one when the firm is big.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data, Variables and Models

The sample for this study comprises 709 Italian family firms. The dataset, updated to 2018, was randomly gathered by merging data from the following datasets: Espacenet, Aida (Bureau Van Dijk), Borsa Italiana and Reprint. We operationalize family business through the key dimensions of ownership. We select Family Business as a binary variable equal to 1 if either a non-listed firm is majority owned by the family or no less than 20% of a listed firm is owned by the family, and zero otherwise (Anderson and Reeb, 2003).

The dependent variable is the number of patents (Innovation). We measure the family female presence as the number in BoD (Female Family Board). We measure the variable Critical mass as a dummy variable indicating whether there are at least three women in the board or not. According to previous research on the factors affecting firm's degree of innovation, we controlled for several firm-specific characteristics: firm size and age, firms' internationalization, financial constraints, profitability, geographical localization, and industry (e.g., De Rassenfossé, 2010; Chabchoub and Niosi, 2005; Arundel and Kabla, 1998; Mansfield, 1986; Horstmann *et al.*, 1985) (Table 1).

Given the count nature of the dependent variable, for the main effect we adopt Poisson models to estimate the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variables (Wooldridge, 2015). To test our hypothesis, we develop two econometric models that relate the innovation output of the firm with the different kinds of presence of female women in the boardroom. First, we consider the simple presence of a female family member in the board. Then, we consider the presence of a female family member in the board when the Critical mass is reached. Correlations are acceptable among all variables.

MODEL 1: Innovation = f (Female Family Board; Token; Critical_mass; Control Variables)

MODEL 2: International_Countries = f (Female Family Board; Token; Critical_mass; Female Family Board*Critical mass; Control Variables)

Table 1: Dependent and independent variables

Variables	Definition	Source
<i>Dependent Variables</i>		
Innovation	Number patents	Espacenet
<i>Independent Variables</i>		
Female Family Board	Number of female family directors	AIDA
Token	Dummy variable equal to one if at least one woman is found within the Board of Directors, 0 otherwise	AIDA
Critical_mass	Dummy variable equal to one, when at least three women are in the BoD, 0 otherwise.	AIDA
<i>Control Variables</i>		
Sales	Logarithm of total sales in Thousand euros	AIDA
Age	Logarithm of age since firm foundation	AIDA
Internationalisation	Number of foreign investments	Espacenet
Financial_constraints	Current ratio	AIDA
ROI	Return on investment	AIDA
North	Dummy equal to one if the firm is located in the North of Italy, 0 otherwise	AIDA
Industry	Dummy equal to one for a set of 5 sectors, 0 otherwise	AIDA

Table 2: Empirical results

Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeff	Std Err.	Coeff.	Std.Err.
<i>Independent Variables</i>				
Female Family Board * Critical mass			8.63**	4.34
Female Family Board	10.41	10.79	-81.20	51.51
Token	-12.55	13.90	0.47	0.43
Critical mass	48.22***	20.86	2.44***	0.75

Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeff.	Std Err.	Coeff.	Std.Err.
<i>Control Variables</i>				
Sales	15.78****	3.23	13.27***	3.52
Age	1.83	9.67	1.18	9.69
Internationalisation	3.48***	0.24	3.22***	0.31
Financial constraints	0.22	0.25	0.22	0.24
ROI	-2.77	0.65	-2.77	0.64
North	3.34	16.58	3.35	16.55
Industry		yes		yes
Prob > F		0.00		0.00
R-squared		0.12		0.12
Number of observations: 709				
Sign. * 10%; ** 5%; *** 1%				

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

4. Empirical results

Table 2 reports the regression results for Model 1 and Model 2. The econometric results highlight that not all Female variables considered exert the same impact and that only some of the traditional variables included as determinants of innovation have the expected impact.

Results show that the family female presence in the board has no impact on innovation while Critical mass impact positively (Model 1). We argue that results suggest the existence of the phenomenon of family tokenism from family female members. When interacting the presence of female family members and critical mass, the variable became positive and significant at $p < 0.01$ in Model 2. This reveals that the presence of family females has a no impact on innovation that became positive when they found female support inside the board (Female Family * Critical mass is positive and significant at $p < 0.01$ in Model 2). As explained, literature argues that females should reach a critical mass in order to be effective (Kanter, 1977; Konrad *et al.*, 2008), the literature identifies the critical mass as three members (e.g. Torchia *et al.*, 2011). When looking at the interaction of Female Family and Female Board as a factor in Model 2, results demonstrate that the influence of female family members became positive only when at least three women are in the board, suggesting that the critical mass must be reached in order to make the contribution effective and heard. These results confirm the idea that, given the social barriers female families face in the boardroom, women minorities need to have either critical mass or powerful positions to be influential.

5. Conclusion, limits and future developments

In this paper we investigated the effect of board gender diversity on innovation with a focus on family businesses. From a theoretical point of view, we moved from the invisibility of female family members to build our hypotheses. From an empirical point of view, we tested our hypotheses on a sample of 709 Italian FBs. Our results support the idea that the relationship between family women on the Board and level of innovation is absent due to their invisible condition. Specifically, given the social barriers family females face in the boardrooms, they need to reach a critical mass in order to be influential. In that case the relationship between family women on the Board and level of innovation becomes positive because they lose their invisible condition.

The invisibility of the woman is a well-known phenomenon in the literature: women are rarely considered as candidates for the management for the succession at the helm of the business. Still, in family firms, women presence in boards and in control positions (president or vice-president of the BoD) is higher than in non-family firms; however this is often an obligatory choice due to the lack of male successors or due to a crisis looming over the company (Curimbaba, 2002; Dumas, 1992, 1998; Haberman and Danes, 2007). Our findings confirm the idea that the prejudice against women is present in family firms (as it is in non-family firms) and show that this prejudice is detrimental to innovation. However, the presence of a critical mass (i.e. three or more women in the BoD) helps in mitigating the effect of prejudice on innovation inside the family.

Our findings have also impacted on practice. Owners and managers can observe how the gender diversity in the board, in general, and the family female presence, specifically, positively impact firms' innovation strategy. We hope that our results will inspire a new path for women inside family business, increasing the number of women in important roles. Further research is still needed in order to improve our understanding of the relationship between gender diversity on the board and innovation with the goal to support owners and managers practice.

Our paper presents some limitations. First the sample is limited to Italian firms. The same study may be replicated in countries characterized by different institutional and socio-cultural contexts and could provide different results. The social dynamics and the role of women in the entrepreneurial arena are strongly influenced by the institutional system in which the firm operates. Specifically, a culture more inclined towards the female figure in leadership roles can influence the contribution made by women to those processes.

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Mothers of Intervention: The Politics of Motherhood in the Battle Against ISIS

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Abstract: To what extent does “motherhood” serve as a mobilising and empowering political identity? and to what extent does it restrict women's mobilisation and empowerment? Political motherhood: the women's use of the power of motherhood to justify engagement beyond the domestic sphere, evoking meaning within a given context and eliciting participation and/or support of collective action (Carreon & Moghadam, 2015), is generally under-studied within the scholarship of social movements. Recently, mothers have been playing significant roles in fighting radical Islamism and violent extremism. Drawing on three in-depth interviews with three mothers who have experienced the loss of a child to ISIS, and the observation and participation in a call-to-action involving the coming together of 40 mothers of “ISIS foreign fighters” in France, this article aims to build on the growing scholarship of “political motherhood,” by examining ways in which women use maternalist frames to legitimise their positions of challenging radical Islamism and violent extremism, and to generate sympathy for their cause. By demonstrating an interactive relationship between opportunity structures and motherhood-based mobilisation, this article argues that while on one level “motherhood” may be a universal experience, the meanings and practices of it are versatile, and depend on the contexts within which mothers interact. It concludes that while the maternalist frame may be culturally resonant regardless of the location, it is not always a safe collective action frame.

Keywords: gender activism, social movements, political motherhood, radical Islamism

1. Introduction

One day in August 2013, a 19-year-old from Belgium, left his family to “save the world.” Sabri was recruited by Al Nusra Front¹ and in the name of a humanitarian ideal, he left for Syria from where he never returned.² By the time his mother discovered his empty room, he was already on his way to joining the ranks of some 6,500 Europeans designated as foreign fighters in Syria.³ Sabri died in December 2013 in Aleppo in circumstances that his family are, to this day, unaware of.⁴ After Sabri was gone, his mother was left with huge grief. It was sorrow at the loss of a child; guilt of what he or she may have done; shame in the face of hostility from friends and neighbours; and doubt about all the things she did not realise about that person whom she and her husband have brought into the world. Over the last few years, the world has learnt about many Sabris and dozens of mothers from around the world have found each other, knitting alliances through their loss. What these mothers wanted more than anything is to try and make sense of the senselessness of what happened to their children, and perhaps for something meaningful to come from their deaths, by preventing other innocents from falling into the same trap. In their alliances, these mothers have succeeded to move from the margins to the centre using their roles as wives and mothers as the basis of their political entitlement.

Since 2014, mothers have been playing significant roles in fighting radical Islamism and violent extremism around the world. They have campaigned, joined demonstrations, lectured at schools and implored politicians to take their appeals seriously. They are demanding a voice in the fierce debate on how to fight extremism as well as request legal, financial and psychological support from governments to help their families cope with the trauma of their children leaving for Syria. In this article, I draw on three in-depth interviews with three mothers who have experienced the loss of a child to jihadism: Saliha Ben Ali, the founder of Society against Violent Extremism (SAVE Belgium), a non-profit organisation established to counter radical Islamism and violent extremism; Dominique Bons, the founder of *Syrien Ne Bouge ... Agissons*, (a “si rien” wordplay to mean “if nothing moves ... let's act”) in France, created after the loss of her son and his half-brother in 2013 to battle, with fellow mothers, against ISIS recruitment; and Aziza Sayeh, the founder of Syria against Martyr Integrist

¹ Al-Nusra Front or *Jabhat al-Nusra* in Arabic was a Salafist jihadist organization formed in 2012 fighting against Syrian government forces in the Civil Syria war. Its aim was to establish an Islamic State. The group has changed its name several times and merged with and separated from other groups.

² See https://www.levif.be/actualite/international/maman-de-djihadiste-je-m-appelle-saliha-ben-ali-refla-et-je-l-assume/article-opinion-1047875.html?cookie_check=1612631102

³ See <http://projects.aljazeera.com/2015/06/mothers-of-fighters/>

⁴ See <http://www.mothersforlife.org/en/keyparents/saliha-ben-ali>