

# Female entrepreneurship in the European Union: are gender equality policies othering women?

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## **Abstract**

This research aims to explore the gendered construction of the entrepreneurial discourse in the EU, engaging with post-structural feminist analysis. The purpose is to investigate the practice and process of female entrepreneuring performed by European political actors, involving policy makers, experts and stakeholders across Europe. In Europe only 30% of all entrepreneurs are women. It is a phenomenon that the EU is trying to tackle through gender equality policies. The risk of this kind of policy is the perpetration of a male-centered entrepreneurial discourse, which questions the roots of the principle of equality, as defined in the Maastricht Treaty and the European Charter of fundamental rights. Since the 1970s different scholars have been studying female entrepreneurship using different feminist theoretical approaches, focusing on the relations between gender and class, work and family etc. Those analyses underlined the gendered nature of the entrepreneurship concept, which tends to reproduce an androcentric entrepreneur mentality, making hegemonic masculinity invisible. Since EU gender equality policies are based upon the principle of equal treatment they risk to 'other' and 'second-sex' women entrepreneurs. Those policies are based upon specific assumptions, which do not question the liberal conceptualisation of the principle of equality. The objective of the research is to investigate the consequences of 'othering' and 'second-sexing' women entrepreneurs by European policies, focusing on European agendas and initiatives, such as: Strategy Europe 2020, European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs, Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors, Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan. The research wants to open up space for future studies and political actions, in which gender plays a key role as both an analytical and political category. The research is also a contribution to the feminist debate on equality-difference, towards a discourse less rooted in binary oppositions.

## Abstract

La ricerca intende esplorare la costruzione di genere del discorso imprenditoriale sviluppato nell'UE, coinvolgendo policy makers e stakeholders. In Europa solo il 30% degli imprenditori sono donne. Per accrescere il numero delle donne imprenditrici l'UE ha adottato negli ultimi anni politiche ad hoc, incentrate sul raggiungimento dell'eguaglianza di genere tra donne e uomini nel mercato unico. Il rischio di questa tipologia di politiche è la perpetuazione di un discorso imprenditoriale androcentrico, che mina il principio d'eguaglianza come definito nel Trattato di Maastricht e nella Carta europea dei diritti fondamentali. Sin dagli anni 70 diversi accademici hanno studiato l'imprenditoria femminile adottando vari approcci di ricerca, concentrandosi sulla relazione tra genere, classe, lavoro, etc. Questi studi hanno contribuito a mettere in luce la costruzione di genere del concetto di imprenditorialità, che tende a riprodurre una mentalità imprenditoriale androcentrica, rendendo invisibile l'egemonia del punto di vista maschile. Le politiche europee fondate sul principio di parità di trattamento rischiano di definire le donne imprenditrici come soggetto "altro" rispetto al soggetto maschile, in una dialettica in cui le imprenditrici trovano ragion d'essere in quanto "secondo sesso". Le politiche di eguaglianza di genere, infatti, sono basate su premesse che non problematizzano il principio liberale di eguaglianza. Obiettivo della ricerca è esplorare la possibilità che le politiche europee per l'eguaglianza di genere definiscano le donne imprenditrici come "altro" e come "secondo sesso", con particolare attenzione alle seguenti iniziative e misure promosse dall'UE: Strategia Europa 2020, Network europeo dei mentori per le donne imprenditrici, Ambasciatrici dell'imprenditoria femminile, Piano d'azione per l'imprenditorialità 2020. La ricerca, inoltre, intende stimolare nuovi studi dove il genere svolga un ruolo chiave in quanto categoria d'analisi.

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## **Abbreviations**

EC European Commission

EU European Union

ILO International Labor Organization

UN United Nations

EP European Parliament

## Chapter 1

### 1.1 Introduction and research structure

In the EU 30% of all entrepreneurs are women<sup>1</sup> and 70% are men. For reducing this gender gap the EU developed ad hoc policies, framed within the European gender equality agenda. What are these policies? How are they framed in the European context? What are their aims? Are they moving the EU towards gender equality or are they othering women?

In order to respond to these questions I undertook a research journey across the EU legal framework for gender equality. This topic is not unfamiliar to me because of my previous academic background in Political science and my job as a part-time teleworker for two Italian web sites, dealing with financial opportunities and the EU (Chapter 3). Combining my research and work interests I interrogated EU policy focusing on female entrepreneurship, adopting post/structural feminist approach. This interrogation was driven by a main research question: how and until what extent female entrepreneurship policies are othering women? Before exploring the answers to this question I present the relevant research context and the research structure.

The research process started with a political focus on the EU legal framework for female entrepreneurship, which is neglected in the European research field. Passing through the female entrepreneurship scholarship of the last 40 years I noted that female entrepreneurship research is more developed in the USA context rather than the European one. This discrepancy made me aware of the urgency of exploring female entrepreneurship in the EU.

This research wants to contribute both to the research field and the political one. In the research field, it wants to reduce literature gaps on female entrepreneurship (see next section) in the EU context. In the political field it wants to explore how the EU gender equality agenda for female entrepreneurship is othering women entrepreneurs. In order to contribute properly to both fields the research begins with the review of previous feminist studies on female entrepreneurship, in which I locate my research. It is characterized by a post-structural feminist theoretical framework, the red-thread that accompanied me through the entire research process, methodology included (Chapter 3). I applied a post-structural feminist approach for exploring the latent risk of othering women entrepreneurs through the implementation of gender equality policies. Why and how may a policy aimed for gender equality produce its counter effect by othering women? This question reveals the latent risk of ad hoc policies - such as affirmative actions, policies for women, policies for minorities – of reinforcing patriarchal discourses. In order to investigate this risk in the EU political strategy for female entrepreneurship the research is articulated in three sub-levels: legal, political

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<sup>1</sup> EC data (April 2013, <http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/promoting-entrepreneurship/women/>)

and empirical. All three levels are explored through a post-structural feminist approach, where great attention is paid to the feminist debate on citizenship, gender relations, gender regimes, division between the public and private sphere.

## **1.2 Women in business: challenging otherness in entrepreneurship research**

Research on female entrepreneurship is relatively young. The pioneer was Eleanor Schwartz (1976) with the article “Entrepreneurship. A new female frontier”. Her article opened the path for a new research field, in which women entrepreneurs became the new subject of analysis, instead of simply the Other side of the male-entrepreneur coin. Research on female entrepreneurship passed through a lot of changes during the last decades, which saw since the 1970s the interest of different scholars, feminist and non-feminist. The early works were characterized by comparative analyses between men and women entrepreneurs, focusing on their psychological and sociological characteristics. According to Minitti (2006:183) these first studies “did not test the theory but, rather, consider gender (or sex) as a variable”. Anyway they underlined the gendered nature of the entrepreneurship concept, claiming for more analytical researches.

In the 1980s, women started to run bigger enterprises in sectors generally dominated by men – such as insurance, manufacturing and construction - while improving their educational and technical skills. This growing engagement of women entrepreneurs - registered in different countries - on the one side pushed policy-makers to develop ad hoc measures for promoting female entrepreneurship as an economic resource, while on the other side it stimulated scholars in exploring this new ‘phenomenon’ (Powell 1999). From the 1990s until nowadays the academic literature on female entrepreneurship enormously increased, thanks to the contributions of scholars from different fields, such as economy, feminist studies, sociology, psychology (Ahl and Marlow 2012; Bruni, Gherardi and Poggio 2004; Minitti 2006). The Anglo-Saxon literature is prevalent and the USA context is the most explored. Greater interest for female entrepreneurship in the EU context and in developing countries is increasing, thanks to ad hoc research projects, political interventions and international networks. Ad hoc measures and actions refer to specific targets of actors, in this case to women entrepreneurs. That specificity has its own 'pros and cons', as we will see in the next Chapters. Policy for female entrepreneurship, indeed, helps women in the short term, but they also reinforce political ghettos (Chapter 5) and gendered stereotypes (Chapter 6).

Literature about female entrepreneurship is hence in progress. It is a vivid research field, characterized by specific tendencies. In order to understand the state of art of female entrepreneurship research, I report a review of the literature, starting with Moore’s (1987) five clusters of research: 1) behaviors, stereotypes and role; 2) performance, transitions, ownership span

and loan status; 3) networks, the interactive approach and affiliations; 4) global findings on gender differences; 5) career typing of entrepreneurs. Researches in the first cluster analyze the impact of personal home life, climate and culture at the workplace and psychological traits. According to these studies women and men entrepreneurs have more similarities than differences when it comes to entrepreneurial motivations and psychological attitudes (Brush 1992), but they differ in other aspects. Women entrepreneurs, for instance, give more value to equality and internal stable attribution in comparison with external stable attributions. Focusing on leadership, women seem to be stronger innovators with a lesser need for business achievement. Studies in the second cluster focus on women entrepreneurs' career, which is characterized by less experience in starting up a new business. This lack of experience is connected to education and personal motivations. Women entrepreneurs tend to have less formal education in business and management, and among the main reason for starting a new business there is the desire of being one's own boss rather than making more money. Researches in this cluster stressed the need of considering women's launching of a new business a "gradual process" (Powell 1999:379). It is characterized by different variables: motivations in entering/exiting entrepreneurship, cultural environment, access to credit, firms dimension and economic sector. Women tend to have more difficulties in obtaining loans from banks, which have a greater perception of risk compared to men entrepreneurs' requests. This perception is linked to women's reduced managerial experience and their over-representation in retail business. The difficulties encountered by women entrepreneurs in having loans may encourage women to seek for internal equity with positive effects in terms of equality for the financial market (Chaganti, De Carolis and Deeds 1995). Studies in the third cluster analyzed the role of networking which both for women and men is central in order to gain success as entrepreneurs. Helgesen (1990), Yammarino, Dubisky, Comer and Jolson (1997) found out differences among women and men leaders in cultivating their personal relationship. Women leaders tend to build one to one interpersonal relationships with their subordinates. This characteristic has a direct effect on the business organization, which seems to be more similar to a wheel with the female entrepreneur at the center, rather than the traditional hierarchical pyramid (Moore and Buttner 1997). The fourth cluster of researches is characterized by studies on gender differences in different fields – such as education, occupational background, skills, approach to venture creation, business goals - and countries. According to these studies women entrepreneurs tend to focus more on relationship and take on more volunteer activities than men entrepreneurs. The last cluster divide entrepreneurship career into three types: corporate climbers, intentional entrepreneurs and copreneurs<sup>2</sup>. In every group women entrepreneurial potential is influenced by

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<sup>2</sup> Copreneurs are involved in a personal relationship – such as husband and wife - and they run the same business together with their partner.

specific determinants: independence, personal development, job freedom, challenge, self-determination, family concerns, organizational dynamics and blocks.

As stressed by feminist scholars mainstream entrepreneurship studies - despite their progressive interest in female entrepreneurship - treat 'sex' as a variable without considering the gender implications on women entrepreneurs' experiences. Mainstreaming literature on female entrepreneurship, indeed, lacks the "theoretical understanding of the experience of such women: their motivations, problems, success and aspirations" (Green and Cohen 1995:298). That lack favors the persistence of patriarchal bias in 'everyday talk' and research, where androcentricity limits deeper insights into women entrepreneurs' experiences. Traditional research approaches to entrepreneurship construct definitions of who an entrepreneur is and what entrepreneurship is without explicitly excluding women but according to gendered assumptions and connotations in favor of an "image of the entrepreneur as undeniably male" (Green and Cohen 1995:299). These assumptions mainly rely on a set of factors that theorists consider central for the definition of entrepreneurship: innovation, financial risk and opportunity (Powell 1999).

Innovation – according to the Shumpeter's model – refers to the creation of new combinations of means of production, which allow the realization of new products, new working practices and process. However innovation is defined on 'other' basis when it refers to women's their innovative potential. Women entrepreneurs are considered innovators because their decision of running their own business challenges the traditional patriarchal discourse, which confines women within specific realms (care, family, public sector). Becoming an entrepreneur within the phallogocentric economy is a gendered process, which requires attentive analysis in order to avoid the reproduction of patriarchal bias. An entrepreneur is generally considered to have male characteristics. Hence women entrepreneurs are perceived as path-breakers who enter an area that is not supposed to be theirs. This happens both when women decide to start their own business and when they become managers/owners of business in traditional male sectors<sup>3</sup> (Puwar 2004). The traditional definition of entrepreneur implies also financial risk as a main factor. However the focus on financial risk obfuscates other kinds of risks such as personal and psychological risks. In their research on women entrepreneurs Green and Cohen (1995) analyzed the language used by women entrepreneurs in describing their activities. The sense of vulnerability perceived by women in business strongly emerges from their research, emphasizing the necessity of re-visioning commonplace concepts of entrepreneurship. The traditional conceptualization of entrepreneurship includes the entrepreneur's pursuit of opportunity in the free market. The liberal market is considered a free place for equal opportunities among equal abstract individuals who through their innovative potentials manage to grasp the right opportunity to start their own business (Stevenson

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<sup>3</sup> Puwar (2004) explores how positions of authority are racialized and gendered, focusing on male-centered sectors.

1990). This approach is problematic because it does not take into account differences among individuals, disconnecting the market from a broader context, in which gender, class, ethnicity, educational and social differences are at stake. Feminist researches on entrepreneurship and gender revealed the patriarchal bias, that characterizes the “benign image of entrepreneurship as a meritocratic accessible field of economic opportunity” (Ahl and Marlow 2012:544). The entrepreneurial discourse is hence a gendered discourse, where men represent the center and women the peripheral Other. The capital 'O', which I use in the entire research, aims to underline the gendered cartography of the entrepreneurial discourse. This gendered map affects both researches and policy on entrepreneurship, with the risk of othering and second-sexing women entrepreneurs in research, social, political and economic context (Bruni, Gherardi and Poggio 2004:260-266). The aim of this research is to analyze the possibility of that risk, focusing on the European context. The analytical tools I use for the research are gender and post-structural feminist theory.

### **1.3 Post-structural feminist theory and entrepreneurship**

The decision of using gender and post-structural feminist theory as my tool of analysis stems not only from my personal interest and approach, but I consider it furthermore the most useful to reveal hidden assumptions in political discourse and studies together with embedded power relations. As stressed by feminist scholars, gender – together with other analytical categories such as class, ethnicity, sexuality – allow us to improve our knowledge of power relations in the private and public sphere (Scott 1986; Fraser 1989). Feminist studies problematized the centrality of patriarchy and masculinity in many fields, from philosophy to art, stressing the need of de-centralizing male-centered discourses while giving voice to differences. This process took and is taking place also in entrepreneurship studies where female entrepreneurship is more and more studied. But as described above female entrepreneurship is mainly studied in comparative terms with ‘male’ entrepreneurship. At the beginning this approach helped to show the limits of the entrepreneurial discourse, characterized by a phallogocentric economy. This economy relies on the exclusion of all those individuals who do not fit within the norm, which is represented by the middle class, rational, independent, white, bodily able, heterosexual, Western man. Within the phallogocentric economy women entrepreneurs represent the other side of the male-centered entrepreneurial discourse. In order to fit in that discourse women entrepreneurs need to be fixed and defined through specific interventions for explaining their assumed deficits.

First feminist studies on female entrepreneurship worked towards those directions, highlighting the gendered bias in entrepreneurship researches and policy. Studies which focused on women entrepreneurs’ experiences were extremely useful because they gave voice to women

personal lives, showing their own desires, expectations and problems. Through these first studies researchers managed to explore how gender influences women entrepreneur's location not only in the labor market, but also in the public and private sphere, where patriarchy and capitalism perpetuate women's subordination and segregation (Green and Choen 1972; Rees 1998). For the analysis of female entrepreneurship the relation between public and private is determinant (Chapter 4). It stresses the need for re-conceptualizing entrepreneurship as a research and political topic, in order to better understand female entrepreneurship. The integration of more women into the entrepreneurial discourse is not the only aim, since if it is taken to the extreme it may become a risk. As underlined by Ahl and Marlow (2012) the focus on individual women entrepreneurs and their own business is not any longer sufficient to enhance the understanding of current patterns of female entrepreneurship. The focus of female specific differences as entrepreneurs was extremely important at the first stage of feminist research on entrepreneurship, but now is mainly dangerous. It risks reaching a "dead end" (Ahl and Marlow 2012:544) where the epistemological focus on women difference does not question anymore the hegemonic and normative assumption of entrepreneurial discourse. This risk in the research field has concrete consequence at the political level where women entrepreneurs are assumed to require specific policy interventions in order to fill in their assumed lacks. In the EU context there are ad hoc policies for women entrepreneurs, whose political aim is to increase the number of women entrepreneurs in the labor market. That policy is contextualized in the EU gender equality agenda, which I describe in Chapter 4. The contextualization of female entrepreneurship policy within the broader gender equality context is fundamental for exploring the research question: is EU female entrepreneurship policy othering women?

The **process of othering** is one of the main findings of second-wave feminist research, which revealed the reproduction of phallogocentric power relations, characterized by binary oppositions and dualistic thinking (Scott 1988a). The opposition between women and men is the central opposition of the structural and institutional subordination of women. Women's subordination relies on gendered assumptions which feminist critiques contested, exploring the dynamics at the basis of female subordination in power relations. These dynamics are characterized by the centrality of man and masculinity, whose hegemony is built through the in/exclusion of the Other. The Other (non-man, non-able, non-white, non-heterosexual, dependent, non-Western, non-rational) is required for the affirmation of male centrality, which cannot exist without the peripheral Other. These main findings are fundamental for the development of feminist thoughts, which are heterogeneous and self-critical. Post-structural scholars, for example, criticized some feminist perspectives for the tendency of essentializing gender (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser 2004). This essentialization risks to reinforce the process of othering without really contesting the patriarchal

discourse. Blaming the victim/Other, risks to over-simplify women subordination. For this reason post-structural scholars started studying how gender is done rather than what it is (Braidotti 1994; Butler 1990; Irigaray 1985; Kristeva 1980). This approach pays serious attention to the social construction of gender and female subordination within and through language and texts (Ahl and Marlow 2012). Post-structural feminist analyses of the “man made language” (Spender 1980) revealed how the feminine side of the opposing binomial man-woman is constantly portrayed as abject, subordinate, Other through linguistic practices and socio-political discourse. Inspired by Foucault’s thinking (1972), post-structural feminist scholars studied how language and material discourses produce and reproduce gendered assumptions, through the institutionalization of stereotypical and normative discourses characterized by women’s subordination. However - as stressed by post-colonial research, third world studies, queer theory and black feminism - a proper analysis of normative discourses cannot exclude issues such as age, class, religion, disabilities and sexual orientation. Those differences represent specific analytical categories whose ignorance risks to reproduce new hegemonic dynamics and subordinations. Intersectionality is at stake, since it allows us to understand the interactions between differences in different discourse, such as the entrepreneurial discourse (Steinbugler 2006). Acknowledging the importance of intersectionality, in this research I focus on the analytical category of gender, as a first step for developing new discussions in the field. This focus aims to explore how the category of women entrepreneurs is constructed and reproduced in EU gender equality policy in the private and public sphere. I analyze both spheres and the interrelation between them, because as revealed by feminist studies (Chapter 2) the uncritical and assumed opposition/division between those spheres has been used to affirm female subordination and their othering in patriarchal economy. Through the investigation of both spheres we can understand how the entrepreneurial discourse is gendered at the EU level, avoiding the reproduction of essential and opposing categories. The aim of the investigation is hence to understand if female entrepreneurship is defined as Other in relation to ‘male’ entrepreneurship, through ad hoc policy. This investigation is structured in three sub-levels. In the following section I give an outline of my research and the structure of this thesis.

#### **1.4 Research structure**

The research develops at three sub-levels: legal, political and empirical. The aim of this multilayered exploration is to understand the dynamics of the othering process, which involves different areas: the EU legal framework for gender equality (legal level), the EU policy for female entrepreneurship (political level), everyday activities of political and social actors involved in the fields of gender equality and female entrepreneurship. At the first level (Chapter 4) I explore the EU



gender equality agenda, giving an historical overview of its evolution. This exploration investigates how the EU gender equality agenda changed across the years and how these changes affected gender relations in the EU context. Next (Chapter 5) I focus on the political level by analyzing the EU policy for female entrepreneurship. Finally, at the third sub-level (Chapter 6) I involve policy makers, experts and women networks interested in gender equality and female entrepreneurship. Their involvement into the research process is driven by my will of confronting and extending my analysis of the EU female entrepreneurship policy to people who work within this political sector. This research decision is influenced by the desire of favoring a concrete political change in the EU strategy for gender equality, where patriarchal dynamics are still a reality. The EU strategy for gender equality is based upon the Marshallian paradigm of citizenship, which is male-centered (Chapter 2). Within this paradigm gender equality is defined by binary oppositions, which - if not critically analyzed - risk to reproduce women's definition as Other, as different from the male norm. The risk of othering women is at stake in the EU. In this research I investigate that risk focusing on female entrepreneurship policy, since it challenges the Marshallian paradigm of citizenship in the public and private sphere. These spheres are characterized by gender relations, which cross the family, the labor market and the state.

In order to understand how gender relations works in the EU context I first present the research theoretical tools (Chapter 2) and then the way in which I applied them at the three research sub-levels (Chapter 3).

## Chapter 2

### Theoretical framework: feminist theories, gender and politics

#### Introduction

Are EU female entrepreneurship policies othering women? Answering this question requires a reflection about the process of othering within feminist scholarship. The dynamics of this process were explored in various fields, such as psychoanalysis and art, in the attempt of challenging male-centered discourses. In this research I investigate the process of othering, focusing thereby on citizenship. This focus is necessary for understanding the crucial arguments that will characterize the investigation of the research question at the legal, political and empirical level. The EU entrepreneurial discourse, indeed, is framed according to the male-breadwinner model of citizenship, which is built upon the Marshallian paradigm of citizenship. This paradigm depicts women as Other in the public and private sphere, on the basis of gendered power relations. These relations affect the definition of social, economic and political strategies, such as gender equality ones. In this Chapter I analyze the Marshallian paradigm and its limits.

#### 2.1 The citizen entrepreneur: problematizing the Marshallian paradigm

In the EU the entrepreneurial discourse is framed within the male-breadwinner model, which is built upon the Marshallian paradigm of citizenship (Marshall 1950:28-29), defined as “a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All those who possessed the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed”. The key elements of that definition are rights, duties and equality. Citizenship as rights implies a set of rules and relationships between the individuals and the community, which different political traditions<sup>1</sup> defined according to the Marshall’s triad of civil, political and social rights. The access to these rights – hence the access to citizenship – is connected to a set of duties and responsibilities. According to Marshall (1950:79-80) “the essential duty is not to have a job and hold it, since that is

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<sup>1</sup> We can distinguish four main political traditions: communitarian, civic-republican, libertarian or neo-liberal and social-liberal. The communitarian and civic-republican traditions define citizenship in relation to social and political participation, while the libertarian or neo-liberal one describes citizenship as a legal status within the free market. The social liberal tradition, instead, citizenship implies equal civil, political and economic rights and duties. Marshall is one of the most important representatives of that tradition (Voet 1998).

relatively simple in conditions of full employment, but to put one's heart into one's job and work hard". This main duty is accompanied by more obligations such as paying taxes and contributions, education, military services. The balance between rights and duties - which can be reciprocal or conditional – is of great interest for political scientists and theorists from different disciplines. It conditions the definition of citizenship as a status and/or as a practice (Lister 1997; Oldfield 1990). Citizenship as status defines the citizen as a rights bearer, while citizenship as practice implies active participation and human agency. Both concepts are built upon a rigid division between **the public and private sphere**.

The public sphere is the realm of the 'political', whose borders have been discussed by scholars, especially feminist scholars (Landes 1998; Lister 1997; Radtke and Stam 1994). The private sphere, instead, is the place of family-care, which - according to different political traditions - has to be or not to be sustained by the central government through welfare state measures. Generally the concept of **active participation** is linked to the public sphere. The active citizen is the one who actively participates in the political and public life of the community. Active participation is a civic duty performed by the citizen to fulfill the common good, through human agency. The citizen is a political actor capable of rational choices for the well-being of his/her community. What happens to those people who fail to be political actors because of their differences in the public and private sphere? Critical citizenship studies and feminist studies have stressed **the limits of the Marshallian notion of citizenship** – both in terms of rights and duties - which does not relate to ethnic, class, and gender divisions within the community<sup>2</sup>. Marshallian citizenship is blind to differences among the members of the community. Though it takes into account inequalities – at the civil, political and social level – it stems from an abstract conceptualization of the individual. That abstraction was generally used as synonymous of **universalism**, such as in the Declaration of the rights of man and of the citizen (1789) and the Universal declaration of human rights (1948). However, as stressed by feminist scholars, the individual described in those documents is far from being universal and abstract, since it has a set of specific characteristics (Lister 1997; Lorber 1994; Pateman 1992, 1998; Voet 1998). First of all it is a Western white and rational man, who is heterosexual, non-disable and economically independent. Since he is appointed as the point of reference for acquiring citizenship all his characteristics become the borders through which one can or cannot have access to citizenship.

In the process of becoming citizen, the division between the public and the private is at stake. Fraser (1989) criticized Habermas's conceptualization of that division (Habermas 1989),

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<sup>2</sup> For Marshall, the participation within the labor market is the entrance ticket for complete citizenship. As underlined by feminist scholars (Bock and James 1992; Lister 1997; Pateman 1992) Marshall, as many other political theorists, linked female care and reproductive work to the private sphere, making it irrelevant for the public sphere and for a broader concept of citizenship.

underling the gender blindness of his approach and the gendered nature of citizenship. Since the 1960s, feminists offered different conceptualizations of the 'political', far from the "reified abstraction separated from the rest of social life" (Lister 1997: 26). 'The personal is political' was the motto of the second-wave feminism, which after the Second World War expanded in the USA and Europe. The everyday problems faced by women in their families were no more segregated in the private sphere. Women's lives inside the household became a political topic, brought into the political sphere (Halsaa et al. 2012; Rossi Doria 2007) by challenging the public male-centered notion of citizenship. The move from private to public allowed women to take voice in the public sphere, a male fortress whose walls were built through the exclusion of the private sphere. Though feminist movements struggled and struggle for a more inclusive notion of citizenship, the proposal of effective alternatives beyond the public-private division is not simple (Pateman 1989; Phillips 1991, 1993). The risk of that division is the perpetration of a mechanism of exclusion and victimization, which does not go so far away from the Marshallian notion of citizenship. Some feminist theorists tried to overcome that risk by developing a new conceptualization of human agency. It is not simply the capacity of free choice, but it is also a "conscious capacity" (Lister 1997:38) where self-esteem and power become the cornerstones for combating victim feminism and oppressive male-dominated institutions at the political, economic and social level. Wolf (1993:57) specifically proposed a "genderquake", demanding that "women begin to see themselves as potential agents of change with many resources, rather than helpless victims". Her position contributed to expand the feminist debate on the category of women. Who are we? This simple question, asked by Rich in her famous essay "Notes Towards a Politic of Locations. Blood, Bread and Poetry" (1987), spread out the discussion, where Black feminist critiques have played and play an important role (Walker 1974). The necessity of historicizing and locating the political agency of women became an antidote against universal formulations of gender oppression, citizenship and human agency (Mohanty 1988). Lister (1997) attempted to go beyond those formulations, elaborating her own citizenship's formula, which distinguished between: 'being a citizen' and 'act as a citizen'. The first implies the enjoyment of citizenship rights, necessary for agency, political and social participation. The latter instead involves the fulfillment of the full potential of citizenship as status. Combining the notions of citizenship as status and practice, Lister aimed to involve in the definition of citizen also all those people who do not fulfill the potential of the citizenship status, because of their *differences*.

The feminist proposals described above challenge the Marshallian citizenship and its inherent patriarchal dynamics. These dynamics are based upon **gender relations**, which influence the definition of politics in the private and public sphere. The exploration of gender relations in both spheres is fundamental for understanding how women, men and gender are depicted in political

discourses, such as the EU female entrepreneurship policy. In the next section I present the theoretical concepts I used for the analysis of the EU female entrepreneurship policy: gender as analytical category, gender relations, gender politics and gender regimes.

## **2.2 Gender relations and gender regimes: exploring politics using gender as analytical category**

Inspired by feminist scholars I explored EU equality agenda and EU policy for female entrepreneurship adopting the analytical category of gender (Scott 1986). This category is generally used in political and social studies according to four different approaches: gender refers only to women, the consequences which stem from the lack of gender analysis are exposed, women are studied as a special case, full integration of the analysis of gender (Walby 1997). Apart from the last approach, the previous ones reproduce a strong separation between the private and the public. Those approaches, indeed, have a restricted conception of gender politics, which refers to the gender of the actors involved, without paying attention to the transformations in gender relations. In this research I adopted the last approach, looking for the gender nature of political aims.

Gender, hence, is an analytical category which cannot be ignored in the exploration of politics, since it sets specific kinds of relations, gender relations, which in the context of a given institution defines gender regimes. Gender relations exist in every institution and they are structured in three different ways: by the division of labor, by power and by emotions (Walby 1997). They structure at the same time gender regimes, in which sexual politics affect social practices and vice versa. Gender regimes are related to a specific gender order, where the macro-politics of gender are central, since they influence institutional and state power together with the formation of gender itself. From here stems the importance of theorizing the relations between gender and state, as a changing dynamic across time and space. Walby (1997) gave a great contribution in that direction through a deep analysis of what she called the system, form and structure of patriarchy. She identified six structures of patriarchy - household production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the State, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions – and she distinguished between two main types: private and public. The private-domestic gender regime is based upon “household production as the main structure and site of woman’s work activity and exploitation of her labor and sexuality and upon the exclusion of women from the public” (Walby 1997:6). The public gender regime instead is based “not on excluding women from the public but on the segregation and subordination of women within the structure of paid employment and the State, as well as within culture, sexuality and violence” (Walby 1997:6). The six structures are important and they are interrelated – in different ways - with

other dimensions, such as class, age and ethnicity in both gender regimes. Private and public gender regimes are not fixed, they can coexist and transform themselves. Since gender relations and institutions influence each other through specific gender regimes the role of politics is central. As stressed by Walby (1997), in order to analyze how gender regimes and gender relations affect each other, it is important to separate the type of gender regime from the degree of gender inequality. For overcoming gender inequalities welfare state, as a gender policy, plays a key role in the definition of gender relation in the private and public sphere. In the next section I discuss how welfare state politics influence gender relations and women access to citizenship.

### **2.3 Welfare state and employment**

Among gender politics the welfare state plays a key role. In contemporary society more women than men are recipients of welfare state benefits, a phenomenon which have been analyzed by many feminist scholars (Pateman 1992, 1998). Most of those analyses begin with the critique of the traditional notion of welfare state in democratic society. The welfare state is generally defined in opposition to the warfare and its aim is to provide resources for social rights of democratic citizenship. In this context – strongly rooted in the Marshallian paradigm – independence is the central criterion for citizenship. The notion of independence far from being universal refers to a specific subject, the male subject, and to his capacities: the capacity to bear arms, the capacity to own property and the capacity for self-government (Pateman 1998:248). Since women lack those capacities they are not independent and their access to citizenship is compromised. It reveals the patriarchal construction of citizenship, which relies on the private-public distinction. In this context women, together with all the people who lack male capacities, are defined as ‘social exiles’ through which the state defines itself in opposition to the family. The public-private division is also sexual, and it affects both state policy and welfare state.

Since the last decades of the XIX century welfare policies based upon the traditional public-private dichotomy reinforced the patriarchal structure both of the family and the state. They followed a common path where paid employment is determinant for accessing full citizenship. Welfare measures were introduced to support and protect poor people, because of their deficiencies in the economic, hence, public sphere. The logic behind those measures is to compensate some omissions, but at the same time they reinforce the subordination of those who fail to conform to the given definition of independent citizen. People outside the capitalist job market are the first to fail, and women are among them. Their unpaid job in the household was taken for granted by politics, which at the same rely on it. The first welfare politics were based upon the dichotomy male-breadwinner and housewife, reinforcing the patriarchal structure of the welfare and the state. Since

the 1960s we assisted to a progressive differentiation of welfare states, which to a certain extent always presupposes the women's unpaid work in the household (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999, 2002; Kremer 2007; Lovenduski 1996, 1999, 2005). The claims for gender neutral politics and specific welfare provisions for women, rather than overcoming persisting dichotomies, contributed to re-present the Wollstonecraft's dilemma<sup>3</sup>. In the patriarchal citizenship realm women have only two alternatives: becoming (like) men and so full citizens, or they continue to work as women in public and private without achieving full citizenship. Not even the patriarchal welfare state can help women to become full citizens, since it presupposes their unpaid job in the private sphere. This situation prevents any democratic constitution of the state and citizenship, feminists warned. Only through a reconfiguration of un/paid job, public-private and in/dependence full citizenship may blur its burdens towards all the social exiles.

What is the situation in the EU context? What kind of gender relations and gender regimes characterize the EU? These are the underpinning questions of the three sub-levels of my research, which I present in the following chapters.

## **Conclusions**

In order to understand if EU female entrepreneurship policy is othering women we need first to understand how women, gender and gender equality are framed in the EU. As described in Chapter 1 the EU entrepreneurial discourse is characterized by male bias, which is rooted in the male-breadwinner model. This model is based upon the Marshallian paradigm of citizenship, which – as stressed by feminist scholars – is characterized by unequal gender relations rather than un-problematized universalism. Gender, gender relations in the public and in the private sphere and gender regimes are the main theoretical tools I used in my research for answering the research questions. I explored the use of gender as analytical category, gender relations and gender regimes in the EU context at three levels: legal, political and empirical. In the next chapter I explain how this multi-layered investigation took place.

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<sup>3</sup> The Wollstonecraft's dilemma refers to the strategic problems encountered by feminist movements – since the XIX century – in claiming gender equality. According to Pateman (1992:20) the “dilemma arises because, within the existing patriarchal conception of citizenship, the choice as always to be made between equality and difference, or between equality and womanhood. On the one hand, demand equality is to strive for equality with men (to call for the rights of men and citizens to be extended to women), which means that women must become (like) men. On the other hand, to insist, like some contemporary feminists, that women's distinctive attributes, capacities and activities be re-valued and treated as a contribution to citizenship is to demand the impossible; such difference is precisely what patriarchal citizenship excludes”.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

*“Researchers disclose how they studied their topic, but not why”.*  
(Hesse-Biber and Yeser 2004:13)

#### **Introduction**

Is the EU strategy for female entrepreneurship othering women? In order to answer to the research question I investigate the EU gender equality agenda, the EU policy for female entrepreneurship and opinions of policy makers, experts and women networks interested in gender equality and female entrepreneurship. These three distinct areas constitute the three sub-levels of the research, which I explore using a post-structural feminist approach. This approach involves both the theoretical and the methodological framework of the research. In the previous chapters I focused on the theoretical frame, while in Chapter 3 I present the research methodology. In this chapter I firstly locate my research methodology in the feminist debate about methodology, and secondly describe my experience as a feminist researcher dealing with female entrepreneurship at the three research sub-levels.

#### **3.1 Feminist approaches to knowledge: challenging androcentrism and positivism through a post-structural feminist perspective**

The feminist debate about knowledge is characterized by the lack of consensus on what feminist research exactly is. This absence of common agreements may be considered a weak point, preventing feminist theories from finding better affirmation in the academia. Yet on the other side this ‘weakness’ may also be considered an advantage, which distinguishes feminist research from traditional male-mainstream research (Hesse-Biber and Yeser 2004; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). Despite the lack of consensus on what is feminist research, feminist approaches to knowledge have specific characteristics, such as attention to issues of difference, awareness of power relations during the research process, contestation of positivist epistemology, feminist ethic<sup>1</sup>. The attention to issues of difference is the heritage of second wave feminist movements, which contested the exclusion of the Others - starting from women - from the Western male-centered

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<sup>1</sup> Researches driven by a feminist ethic focus on power relations outside and inside the research process. This focus is extremely important since it allows the researcher to be aware of the power relations that may obscure connections between data and concepts (Ackerly and True 2010:205).



political, social, economic discourse. This exclusion interests also the construction of knowledge, which is based upon a positivist epistemology and permeated by gendered bias (Stanley 1990). Positivist epistemology - defined as the 'scientific method' - relies on a deductive approach to knowledge, where objectivity and neutrality have to be respected. The positivist researcher is an objective knower, who believes in the existence of an objective reality, which can be explained through quantitative variables, identified by empirical observations. As stressed by feminist scholars the positivist approach to knowledge is characterized by masculine and androcentric bias, which have othered and silenced women in the name of scientific objectivity.

According to Halpin (1989) scientific objectivity is a general process of othering, which absolutizes rationality through the exclusion of emotions and feelings from the process of knowledge. This exclusion is related to the dichotomy of gender stereotypes within culture, where reason is assumed to be a masculine characteristic, while emotions a feminine one. These assumptions define hierarchical relations in the process of knowledge, reinforcing androcentric bias while preventing the discovery of “subjugated knowledge” (Foucault 2003). Feminist scholars worked on eradicating such bias, starting from the critique of positivism and the inclusion of women’s experiences in the process of knowledge. That inclusion is critical and crucial, because it raises many questions on feminism/s, women’s issues and the category of woman/women. The debate upon those questions is opened and it is important to stress the following guidelines: there is no just one feminism but many feminisms, there is no universal and homogenous category of woman but different women, with different interests, needs, experiences and questions. The feminist critiques of positivism vary along a multifaceted spectrum, where Harding’s critique represents a significant point (Harding 1993). Her concept of “strong objectivity” highlighted the power relations within the process of knowledge, which in the positivist epistemology are based on specific assumptions: subject/object split, rational/emotional dualism, dichotomous research approach (research/researched, research question/context of discovery). Positivism requires those assumptions because its aim is to produce a “view from nowhere” (Sprague and Kobryniewicz 1999:27). This approach affects the production of knowledge, which - in the positivistic realm - does not give space to the subject location of the researcher, who is not aware of her/his own position during the process of knowledge. The concept of strong objectivity, instead, pushes the researcher to disclose her/his own subject position within the process of knowledge. The researcher is part of that context and s/he needs to disclose her/his subject position throughout the research process (Haraway 1988). This disclosure is contested by mainstream research studies, because of its possible relativism (Stanley 1990). Feminist scholars answered to that critique developing the concept of feminist objectivity, which simply means “situated knowledge” (Haraway 1988; Harding 1993). This concept changes the binary opposition between objectivity and subjectivity, claiming

that knowledge is partial, situated, subjective and influenced by power relations. The first power relation is the one between the researcher and the researched, which in positivism is structured in terms of dominance and subjugation.

Feminist researchers developed alternative methods and methodologies<sup>2</sup> in order to avoid the reproduction of hierarchical power relations in the research process, looking for the access of different voices. These methodologies and methods are driven by the premise that there is no universal truth but many partial truths, according to the experience of othered positions. Those positions are not just the positions of women, but they are characterized by a complexity of positions, where differences – such as race, class, gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality - intra-act and inter-act intersecting each other<sup>3</sup>. For the analysis of othered positions, feminist scholars first added women and other minorities into the research sample. Therefore they developed a different epistemology, where oppressed and marginalized standpoints can speak. Feminist standpoint epistemology stressed the necessity of using peripheral and subaltern positions in the dominant discourse as the starting point for feminist research, which strongly underlined the relationship between politics and knowledge. People who are located in peripheral and subaltern positions, indeed, have a dual perspective, which allows them to be aware of their experience as oppressed, while developing their own perspective of their oppressors. Feminist standpoint epistemology is rooted on that dual perspective, which refuses any claim of universal truth, while embracing multiple subjectivities (Collins 2000; Naples 2003). These characteristics represent also a challenge for feminist standpoint epistemology, which was accused of relativism and questions regarding the knowledge building. It was accompanied by new emerging epistemologies and methodology, influenced by post-structural, post-modern and post-colonial theories. Those theories share the will of bringing the Other into the research process, in order to deconstruct meta-narratives. In this research I adopt a feminist post-structural perspective both in the theoretical framework and in the methodology, by overcoming the positivism division between theory and methodology. The research intent is to explore power relations within the dominant discourse on female entrepreneurship. How did my exploration take place? In the following section I describe how my research proceeded.

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<sup>2</sup> In this respect feminist scholars have underlined the distinction between methods and methodology (Ackerly and True 2010; Stanley 1990). The research method refers to tools that aid the research, such as interviews and survey; it is a “technique for or way of proceeding in gathering evidence” (Harding 1987:2). According to some feminist scholars there are not ‘feminist methods’, but feminist scholarships and methodologies. The research methodology, indeed, refers to the theories and analysis of how research does/should proceed.

<sup>3</sup> Intersectional analysis tells us that analytical categories of differences, such as gender and ethnicity are not distinct (Steinbugler et al. 2006).

### 3.1.2 Post-structural feminist methodology and the EU entrepreneurial discourse

For exploring gender relations within the EU dominant discourse on female entrepreneurship I adopted a post-structural feminist approach at the theoretical and methodological level. At both level I engaged with reflection and self-reflection about theories, methodologies, topics, questions together with the wish of not reproducing hierarchies during the research process (Sultana 2007). The focus on female entrepreneurship and the category of women is both a research and political tool, through which I want to explore the risk of othering women entrepreneurs in the EU discourse. This exploration includes two set of analysis. Firstly the analysis of EU official documents related to gender equality, entrepreneurship, female entrepreneurship. Secondly the analysis of the research questionnaire (Annex 1) answered by European networks, bodies and experts involved in the promotion of gender equality and female entrepreneurship in Europe. The methods used to analyze those sources are driven by post-structural feminist theory and methodology, through the adoption of critical discourse analysis (Baxter 2003).

The adoption of that theory, methodology and methods was driven by the will of exploring gendered power relations in the entrepreneurial discourse, which is male-centered as described in the Introduction. The term ‘discourse’ in this context refers to the “practice that systematically forms the object of which they speak” (Foucault 1972:49). Discourses are forms of knowledge, which determine power relations within all text, spoken interactions included. Post-structural feminism and critical discourse analysis see discourses as interrelated with concepts of power, not only in a negative way, but also as determining discursive and social relations. In male-centered discourses women are shaped as the Other subjugated to the patriarchal hegemonic domination. Post-structural feminist scholars focused on the gendered construction of discourses, without denying women’s embodied and lived experiences. They focused on diverse forms and practices of gender differentiation that take place in every discourse, starting from the deconstruction of female subjectivity as fixed and subordinated in patriarchal structures (Irigaray 1985; Kristeva 1984; Mitchell 1974). The process of deconstruction helped feminist scholars to challenge the fixed notion of women as the universal victims of male oppression, revealing the differences across the category of women (multiply positions). That process was also criticized because it may erode unity inside women’s movements, while avoiding the analysis of power relations within a post-structural feminist perspective (Hartsock 1990).

Self-reflection hence is at stake in the process of research and knowledge production, in order to avoid marginalizing, silencing and othering tendencies. Being aware of those tendencies is significant especially for research projects centered on subjugated voices/knowledge. Bringing those voices/knowledge to light – said Foucault (1980) – allows othered groups to engage more

effectively with power, in terms of agency, expression and self-empowerment. Discourses, indeed, are powerful tools which offer opportunities of transformation and resistance. Post-structural feminist theory wants to give voice to silenced women perspectives, by challenging hierarchical gendered relations of the phallogocentric discourse. This transformation requires the critical analysis of current discourses, in search of new vocabularies, that allow women to express themselves without limitations (Devault 2004). I engaged this exploration at three research analytical sub-levels, paying strong attention to the use of gender as analytical category, gender relations, gender regimes and power relations developed within and across each sub-levels. But there are also other power relations to be considered: the relations between the research, me, and the researched topic, female entrepreneurship. In the next section I locate myself as feminist researcher dealing with the topic of female entrepreneurship, describing the implications of my location at the three research sub-levels.

### **3.2 Locating myself: power relations and sharing knowledge in the research process**

The adoption of a post-structural feminist perspective implies reflection and self-reflection about theories, methodologies and subjects involved in the research process. Since every process of knowledge is located in this section I describe my own subject position. The research is framed within my personal path of work and studies, where the EU, entrepreneurship and feminist studies play a key role.

Since 2009 I have been working for two Italian websites, Fasi.biz and Euractiv.it. The first one focuses on financial opportunities for Italian enterprises, NGOs, public administration and individuals. The second one is the Italian version of Euractiv.com, a European website dedicated to European policies. For Fasi.biz I analyze European, national and local documents (such as the European gazette and regional gazettes) and press release, while writing articles and synthetic informative schedules. For Euractiv.it, instead, I focus on EU policies and events which are particular relevant for the Italian context. Since 2010 I work for both website part-time (26-30 hours per week) through telework. This way of working has its own characteristics, since it allows workers to spend more time outside the traditional workplace, but it implies a different organization of work relationship and everyday life. Thanks to part-time telework, indeed, I manage to continue my studies, attending the Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies. The master represents the academic framework of my research, which is at the same time influenced by my experiences as an Italian part-time woman teleworker in the financial and EU sector. During my working hours, indeed, I work also with financial opportunities for women entrepreneurs and the current debates on gender equality issues, such as positive actions, gender quotas and gender

discrimination. Because of my working knowledge on female entrepreneurship I decided to explore it using the academic research tools I acquired through the master. My decision was driven by the will of countering the process of othering women entrepreneurs by specific policies.

The combination of information and tools from my work and research field was characterized by a reciprocal exchange of knowledge between the work and academic sphere. There were both advantages and disadvantages in that exchange. My working knowledge, for instance, helped me to define the research field, but at the same time it was based upon misleading assumptions. Those assumptions refer especially to my knowledge about the EU and EU gender equality policy, which I questioned during the research process in different ways. My job gives me the possibility of knowing the last news regarding female entrepreneurship and gender equality in the EU. This baggage of knowledge is extremely precious for the research, but it can be risky at the same time, since it may make me take for granted certain topics. I found out, for instance, that I assumed participants to know EU documents for promoting growth, gender equality and female entrepreneurship. During the research process this assumption of mine was challenged. As we will see in the upcoming pages only participants directly involved in policy making know those documents, while the other participants are not aware of them. Another assumption of mine referred to the EU: what is the EU? Since I everyday work with this topic I assumed everybody knows what the EU is. Thanks to a suggestion of my supervisor I became aware of this other assumption of mine, which I decided to question during the research process asking to the research participants what the EU is and what they think about EU gender equality policy. Their answers are framed within my analysis of the EU gender equality legal framework and female entrepreneurship policy, respectively the first and second research sub-level. Before engaging with these sub-levels I describe how the research was conducted at every stage: legal, political and empirical.

### **3.3 Research sub-levels: legal, political and empirical**

At the first research sub-level I analyzed the EU equality legal framework, looking for gender relations and gender regimes at stake in the EU context. This exploration is based upon the analysis of EU directives and norms - from the 1950s until 2013 – related to gender equality in the public and private sphere. I hence investigate EU policy for women's employment, education, training and reconciliation between family and job. I paid great attention to these political sectors since, as described in the Chapter 1, family, job and education are crucial elements for understanding female entrepreneurship. Women entrepreneurs are subjected to specific gender relations both in the labor market and in the family. Compared to men entrepreneurs women entrepreneurs have to face the double burden, which stems from gender regimes. In Chapter 4 I investigate gender relations and

gender regimes in the EU, in order to understand how women are defined in the legal context for gender equality: are women othered in the EU legal framework for gender equality?

I continue the research investigating the same question at the political level (Chapter 5). At this research sub-level I explore the EU strategy for female entrepreneurship dealing with EU official documents and tools for female entrepreneurship. Are these documents and tools othering women? In order to answer to this question I decided to combine my analysis of the EU strategy for female entrepreneurship with the lived experiences of policy-makers, experts and women's organizations interested in gender equality and female entrepreneurship. I explore their voices at the third research sub-level, with the intent of confronting their personal experiences with the findings of the first and second research sub-levels. This combination of data will be presented in the final conclusion of the research.

## Chapter 4

### Gender equality and the EU: beyond the equal treatment approach?

*“Without that explosion of feminism, it is unlikely that we would know be concerned with the origins of the article 119 or its subsequent development”.*

*(Hoskyns 1996:25)*

#### Introduction

In this chapter I explore gender relations and gender regimes in the European gender equality legal framework. Since gender equality politics changed across the years I start presenting the historical 'evolution' of the gender equality legal framework of the EU, from the Treaty of Rome until the Amsterdam Treaty. This historical overview allows us to understand the economic, social and political factors that influenced the affirmation of specific gender relations and regimes in Europe, where gender inequalities between women and men still persist in the public and the private sphere. The adoption of an equal treatment approach for promoting gender equality at the European level changed in the last decades, thanks to feminist scholars, politicians and movements. They tried and are trying to introduce a gender mainstreaming approach in EU agendas, beyond the labor market. It is a challenge, which requires the adoption of both positive actions and gender politics in the economic, social and political sectors. In every sector women continue to face visible and invisible obstacles – vertical and horizontal segregation, glass ceiling, dual burden - which I explore looking at the gender relations among employment, family, welfare states in the EU.

#### 4.1 The EU legal framework for gender equality: spill-overing gender equality from the market towards the household

Though the principle of equal pay was introduced in the European context with the article 119 in the Treaty of Rome (1957)<sup>1</sup>, it was only a decade later that the EU women's policy was born. The founding moment is represented by two active struggles that women engaged in the 1960s and 1970s, in the common intent of pushing Member states in implementing the principle.

The principle of equal pay was already defined in other international documents such as the ILO Convention and the UN's declaration of human rights, which were followed by the European Coal

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<sup>1</sup> In 1997 article 119 was amended by article 141 of the Treaty of Amsterdam. Article 141 obliges each Member state to ensure that men and women receive equal pay for equal work. It is broader than domestic legislation and has the effect of extending legal rights.

and Steel Community. The definition of the principle in such terms was the result of long negotiations, where France was directly involved<sup>2</sup>. Because of those disagreements<sup>3</sup> the principle was finally moved from the economic section of the Treaty to the social one (van der Vleuten 2007). This move is of great importance since it predicted the progressive extension of EU engagement from mainly economic functions towards broader functions. The claims of the second-wave feminism contributed to that expansion, underlining in front of the European Court of Justice the lack of implementation of the European gender equality provisions by Member states. The actions of the second-wave feminism prepared the ground for women's empowerment, first lone women, then supported women and system women within the EU context (Hoskyns 1996:10). Feminist activities hence influenced the European community's initiatives proposed in the 1970s, as I will discuss in the following sections. At that time women's rights were officially recognized also at the European level through three directives: equal pay, equal treatment at work and equal treatment in social security.

The **equal pay directive**, adopted in 1975, was the first binding instrument - a sort of 'European law' that national governments had to transfer at the national level through their own legislative acts - which pressured Member states in implementing article 119 (Hoskyns 1996; van der Vleuten 2007). The approval of the directive was influenced by the European Court of Justice decision on the case *Defrenne I* (case 80/70)<sup>4</sup> and international pressure, caused by the International Women's year.

The **equal treatment directive** (1976) was the second binding European act for increasing women's participation in the labor market. The directive referred only to the public sphere, even though the need to reconcile paid work with family and domestic responsibilities became more and more urgent (Hoskyns 1996:101). This topic became even more crucial during the debate for the directive on equal treatment security, since social security systems in most of the Member states were linked to the employment situation of citizens. As a consequence people, mostly women engaged in unpaid caring, had only derived rights, which created situations of dependency and discriminations for many women (Hoskyns 1996:109). The directive – adopted in 1978 with the

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<sup>2</sup> France was the only State member that already signed the ILO Convention; its insistence on the equal pay agreement was linked mainly to economic reasons, such as the risk of competitive disadvantages in the European market.

<sup>3</sup> They mainly focused on the meaning of equal pay for equal work. In 1961 the Commission provided its official interpretation: equal work does not necessarily have to be identical work. But as revealed by a Commission report on the implementation of the article 119 in 1961 the application was still inadequate in the Member states.

<sup>4</sup> In, 1970 Cuvellies and Vogel-Polsky presented at the European Court the case of Sabena stewardesses who were excluded from the pension regulation of the airline company. Though the Court decision was negative, it affirmed that Article 119 has a direct effect and member state had the obligation to respect the article.



longest date for implementation<sup>5</sup>, six years – covered only the “surface aspects of women’s disadvantage in social security” using an ambiguous gender neutral terminology. The special provisions for women reinforced their domestic role and the division between the public and the private sphere, in favor of a public gender regime.

The previous directives represents the core of the developing gender equality agenda of the EU which - since the 1980s - could count upon the support of institutional women’s networks and organizations, such as the European network of women (1983), the Advisory committee on equal opportunities for men and women (1981), the Centre for research on European Women. Those networks together with national feminist movements and women’s national organizations sustained the definition of three action programs for equal opportunities of women 1982-1995 prepared by the Women’s bureau in the EC defined. The aim of the programs was to reinforce equal treatment standards such as pensions, parental leave, self-employed women and positive actions, which were declined and excluded from the previous directives. The first step for the implementation of the programs was the directive on **equal treatment for self-employed** (1986) adopted under the influence of women farmers. Despite the adoption of the previous directives, a report on equal opportunities published in 1986 by the European community revealed the presence of stereotypical attitudes towards women within the European structure. Indeed the European social policy continued to focus mainly on topics related to the free market, such as free movement, health and safety at work. In this context the equal treatment policy was considered an integrative and supportive instrument, which was necessary to improve the economic performances of the European market. Facing the lack of a proper gender equality agenda, in 1984 and 1988 the EP women’s committee prepared two reports on the consequences of that lack, emphasizing the need of political intervention beyond the labor market (gender violence, childcare). As a consequence in 1991 a Council resolution and a Commission **recommendation on sexual harassment at work** were adopted, even though their legal force was not strong enough. The following year the Council adopted the **directive on the protection of pregnancy**, combining equal treatment with health and safety approaches. In 1996 - after the consultations with supranational representatives of employers and trade unions - the Council adopted also the **parental leave directive**. Both measures continue to portray “the double-edge nature of legal provisions which emphasize women’s separate sex/gender identity in situation where the surrounding circumstances remain virtually unaltered, and men’s lifestyles and control of power have hardly been challenged” (Hoskyns 1996:150). At the same time those legal provisions highlighted the need to encourage women in decision-making and more political intervention on equal opportunities issues. In 1997 the EP adopted the **part time work directive** after long discussions with employer organizations and trade unions, both of which

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<sup>5</sup> Also the three phases implementation was removed in order to limit supranational monitoring.

did not help to high the gender issues standards in the EU legislation. In the same year, the Amsterdam Treaty<sup>6</sup> was adopted and article 119 became article 141, with some changes required by the consequences of some juridical cases<sup>7</sup>.

#### **4.2 The equal treatment approach: between positive actions and gender mainstreaming**

The previous overview on European law for gender equality shows – despite the historical changes described above - the recurrence of a specific approach by European institutions towards gender equality. The EU promotes and assures equal opportunities among women and men following an equal treatment approach, based upon the principle of equal treatment or equal access. This approach is rooted in Mary Wollstonecraft's thought and liberal feminism (Rees 1998) and it lacks a serious analysis of gender relations in public and private and of different segregations (women, class and minorities). In order to overcome the weakness of the equal treatment approach the EU adopted two main strategies, **positive actions** and **gender mainstreaming** (Donà 2006), **thanks to the influence of single women and women organizations** .

**Positive actions** were introduced at the European level<sup>8</sup> in 1984 with the recommendation 84/635/EEC on the promotion of positive action for women<sup>9</sup>. Since their introduction positive actions were at the center of a transnational debate, in which the European court of justice was asked more than once if positive actions should be included in the equal treatment directive. Compared with the equal treatment approach positive actions focus more on the equality in outcomes (substantial equality) than equality of access (formal equality). They represent temporary privileges for a specific minority, whose aim is to affirm substantial equality among community's members (De Sando 2009). In gender equality agendas positive actions involve the adoption of women targeting measures, which could provide women with the necessary instruments to overcome unequal starting positions in patriarchal society. In the EU the introduction of positive actions progressively increased since the 1980s thanks to three major policy initiatives (Rees 1998): 1) the adoption by the European institutions of action programs (Progress, Daphne) and pilot projects regarding women's issues, together with the creation of ad hoc networks of experts and advocates (Fe:male network, Equal opportunity Unit, FEMM Committee); 2) the European Court of

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<sup>6</sup> The Amsterdam Treaty introduced the co-decision procedure which created more opportunity to promote gender equality measures, since Member states cannot longer adopt directives against the EP's will.

<sup>7</sup> The most important juridical cases were *Kalanke* (case 450/93) and *Marshall* (case 409/45). In both cases the European court of justice was asked if positive actions were compatible with the equal treatment directive (Aeberhard 2011; van der Vleuten 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Positive actions were first introduced in 1930s in the USA to stop unfair labor practices against union organizers, members and war veterans (Aeberhard 2011:441).

<sup>9</sup> The recommendation regards the elimination of gender inequalities at the workplace and in gender roles through as hoc measures in favor of women in Member states.

Justice's decisions over positive discriminations - mainly in the *Kalanke* and *Marshall* cases - which have reaffirmed the Member states' right to adopt positive discrimination schemes under EU law (Ellis 1998); 3) the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty (1992), which - with its pillar devoted to Justice and Home Affairs issues - opened up space for a broader EU intervention on violence against women<sup>10</sup>. Thanks to those initiatives EU became systematically more favorable to women's issues beyond the labor market. Positive actions were adopted in different fields, from the workplace to vocational training, with particular attention to women's representation in political bodies and management positions. In this last area the EC proposed specific measures, the gender quotas, for increasing the number of women in company boards. This stimulated a vivid debate in all Member states<sup>11</sup>. According to some feminist scholars gender quotas may represent a feminist solution to women's underrepresentation in patriarchal structures, since they challenge male power positions (Lombardo and Meier 2006; Stratigaki 2005). However their effects may be also opposite, if gender quotas are not framed within a gender mainstreaming strategy. The risk on the gender quotas rhetoric is the degendering and depoliticizing of women's inequalities in the public and the private sphere. The reduction of gender inequalities to the achieving of specific target figures may miss the real feminist aim, which concerns the transformation of phallogocentric power relations. For this reason gender mainstreaming is needed.

The concept of **gender mainstreaming** in the EU appeared for the first time in 1989 in a working paper of the EC. It was mentioned also in the third term action program for equal opportunities for women and men 1991-95, but it became 'effective' only after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (van der Vleuten 2007:167). The conference favored the introduction of the 'mainstreaming article' (article 3.2) in the Amsterdam Treaty. Gender mainstreaming is based upon sexual difference politics, which acknowledge women's diversities (from men and among women) instead of assimilating women within patriarchal structures (Rees 1998:40). Gender mainstreaming is a transversal and long term political strategy for gender equality based upon the engendering process of policy making (Mazey 2001). It represents the last phase of the European history for gender equality, which considers women's inequalities not as a mere economic problem but as a democratic one (Donà 2006:35). But gender mainstreaming has its weak points (Lombardo and Meier 2006; Stratigaki 2005). It is a strategy with an 'ambiguous profile'

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<sup>10</sup> In the previous European context this area was not included, since it did not concern economic issues; violence against women was ruled only at the national level by Member states.

<sup>11</sup> In November 2012 Viviane Reding, the EU Justice Commissioner, set out draft legislation asking governments and the EP to approve rules for a 40% in order to boost the numbers of women in executive positions in EU companies. In March 2013 Sophia in't Veld, Dutch member of the EP (ALDE), presented a resolution calling on the EC intervention to assess national measures taken so far, and if it finds them inadequate, to table a legislative proposal to introduce quotas to step up corporate board quotas to 30% by 2015 and 40% by 2020.

since it promotes the introduction of gender equality perspective into all policies relying on soft policy instruments. This ambiguity was exploited by politicians and stakeholders to reduce the impact of gender equality provisions in European policies (Liebert 2002; Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000).

Gender mainstreaming is a ‘complementary strategy’ which sustains, but does not replace, previous gender equality policies such as equal treatment legislation and positive actions. Compared to positive actions, gender mainstreaming represents a strong challenge for the political system, since it introduces a gendered perspective to all phases, not only at the “delivery phase” as positive actions (Stratigaki 2005). One may argue that the application of a gendered perspective to all policies is a more radical approach than the traditional equal treatment approach. However the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming relies on positive actions, in order to tackle “the accumulated inequalities between the sexes” in gender hierarchies (Stratigaki 2005).

In current EU public policies and national gender regimes the combination of positive actions and gender mainstreaming reduces discriminations and inequalities, towards their reciprocal reinforcement. Gender mainstreaming expands the aims of gender equality policies, limiting the process of othering target groups within power structures. Nevertheless there are still some obstacles, which limit the effective implementation of a proper gender mainstreaming strategy. Those obstacles reside in the manipulation of the concept of gender mainstreaming performed by male-centered decision making bodies and individuals. Gender mainstreaming, indeed, challenges the traditional gender distribution of power, threatening personal interests and power positions. Despite the existence of institutional mechanisms, ad hoc bodies and gender equality networks, central policy documents (annual programs, budgets and legislation) are still rooted in patriarchal structures, which fails to include gender equality in the debate and action (Lombardo 2005; Perrons 2005; Shaw 2002). As a consequence gender inequalities are still an everyday reality in Europe, characterized by gender barriers in the public and private sphere. In the upcoming sections I explore those gender barriers and gaps in specific fields – family, welfare state and employment looking at their reciprocal interactions.

#### **4.3 Family and welfare state: the resisting male-breadwinner model**

In the analysis of welfare regimes the interaction among the trilogy state, market and family is determinant in order to understand what kind of gender relations and gender regimes characterize one country. Scholars traced a map of the principal welfare regimes that we may find: social democratic welfare regime, characterized by low level of class and gender inequality and universal entitlement to welfare benefits; liberal welfare regimes, where the relations among state, market and

family are ruled by the capitalistic market and the state provide a “safety net” only for those who fail to participate in the labor market; corporatist or conservative welfare state regimes, where welfare benefits are connected to the breadwinner wage (Esping Andersen 1990; Kofman and Sales 1996; Korpi 2000; Leibfried 1993; Lewis 1992, 1998). Those regimes are based upon specific gender relations along the public-private axis, which affects lives of men and women. In the EU we can find different welfare regimes, which share common paths, such as the adherence to a male-breadwinner model and the strong interrelation between economic policy and social policy<sup>12</sup>. In social democratic regimes, such as Sweden, the dual earner pattern of work-family relations prevails, but gender equality is not a reality yet. In liberal and corporatist welfare regimes, instead, the male-breadwinner model is strongly prevalent. Great Britain is an example, where the state spends few resources for social care, which workers can buy on the free market according to their needs. Italy, Spain and Portugal fall in the corporatist welfare regime, where public social benefits are assigned by the state to the male breadwinner, who is the *pater familia*.

All the regimes rely on a specific gender division of labor, where men are assumed to work full time in the market, while women take care of the household. In welfare state scholarship, care was framed within the private sphere, where women are in charge of the unpaid reproductive work. The entrance of women in the job market seems to have broken that traditional division, but as stressed by feminist scholars it changed the private care work into public care work, since jobs in day-cares, schools and hospital are mainly covered by women (Walby 1990). In order to better explore the implication of care work in welfare states and gender regimes, Lewis (1998) developed the analytical category of “social care”, referring to the care of children and elderly. The provisions of social care vary across Member states but the persistence of cash benefits rather than service benefits represents another a common pattern, linked to the characteristics of the neoliberal European market. Due to European integration policy, welfare states are becoming increasingly mixed and states are playing the role of service regulators rather than service providers. Those trends will have negative implications for women, since in neoliberal agendas welfare states rely more on informal care. If the European social policy – mainly based on earning related schemes – follows this trend, the double burden for European women will increase, missing all the gender equality aims.

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<sup>12</sup> Kofman and Sales (1996) identified different levels of the model: strong, modified or and weak. What changes in each level is the nature of social provisions, which affect the gender division of labor in the market and in the household. Though in certain countries, such as Sweden, the rate of worker women has increased women are still the main recipients of social benefits provided by the state in order to compensate earning loss.

#### **4.4 Employment: the gendered European labor market, between vertical and horizontal segregation**

European employment policy – especially after 1990s – was defined focusing more on the employment rate rather than unemployment rate (Rubery et al. 1999). This change in policy-making increased the visibility of those outside of the labor market to policy-makers, who started looking at them not as hidden labor resource but as “fully involved in non-wage activities, primary domestic work” (Rubery et al. 1999:13). Hence women as category are at stake. Within the employment framework women’s right to employment are equal to men’s rights, in theory. Nevertheless as stressed by Rubery et al. (1999) in EU documents there is no reference to the outcome of the application of this principle.

Another critical point is the gender blindness of employment rates, which becomes a really poor guide in the analysis of women’s relationship to the labor market. The relationships vary from country to country but some common patterns exist: women’s employment rate is lower than men’s one, women in Europe are more likely to be unemployed, the majority of part-time jobs is covered by women, women workers prevail in specific sectors, they are more likely to have atypical and flexible contracts, they earn less than men and they experience horizontal and vertical segregation. These common patterns are interrelated with economic and structural characteristics and processes, such as the temporal structure of jobs, their sectorial distribution (Daly and Klammer 2005). According to the temporal structure in all Member states part time jobs are engendered in women’s terms. According to sectorial distribution women’s employment rate is higher in the service sector and the public sector. The expansion of service sector facilitates female employment in most of the European countries, but not necessarily high female employment. Though women's employment is higher in the public sector, women face horizontal and vertical segregation both in the public sector and in the private one. There are national differences in the extent of gender segregation, but all Member states share that pattern, which is furthermore linked to gender pay gaps and gendered economic politics. Those politics are based upon the idea of the free market as a social and political construct disembedded from the social context. In the liberal free market people forms a unique stock of “unattached individuals with independent preferences and choices” (Rubery et al. 1999:192). The free market is not the place where formal equality of opportunity ensure equal employment opportunities to equal human beings; it is a social institution among others which influences and is influenced by organizations (households, firms, states), cultural and political norms. The absence of those analyses in current European policy-making reinforces the false universalism of the male-breadwinner model and the lack of understanding of women's employment. Domestic life and employment in Europe, indeed, are organized around an implicit

social contract with two components - gender contract and employment contract – which favor gender inequalities in the public and private sphere, such as the glass ceiling in decision-making, management and education (Cohen et al. 1998; Powell 1999; Powell and Mainiero 1992; Ragins 1999; Wirth 2001). Those inequalities are widened by wage flexibility, work flexibility, atypical employment and the restriction of social protection to full time employment. Without the immediate recognition of the gender dimension of the labor market and the role of the household/family system gender equality risks to remain a utopia in Europe.

#### **4.5 European gender equality policy: towards a feminist agenda?**

The introduction of gender mainstreaming with the Amsterdam Treaty and the European employment strategy<sup>13</sup> contributed to fill in gender gaps just until a certain point, due to the loss of specific reference to gender in the Employment guidelines<sup>14</sup> in favor of mainstream equality (with specific attention to minority groups). The main problems reside in the patriarchal oppositions and resistance to feminist goals implied in the strategy, especially when there is a strong ‘agenda-setting’ approach rather than an integrating one.

Lombardo and Meier (2006) analyzed the extent to which a feminist reading of gender mainstreaming is incorporated in the EU political discourse. Looking carefully at family policy and gender equality politics they noticed the recurrence of a gender-blind approach, which reproduce unequal relations between men and women in public and private, with great disadvantages for women. The EU family policy concerns reconciliation and women’s access to the labor market. Women are considered as a homogenous group, while men are not addressed (Hoskyns 1996). In EU gender inequality politics, instead, the European rhetoric defines women's underrepresentation as “a waste of human resources” (Lombardo and Meier 2006:158). The focus on numbers and data reduce the feminist potentials of gender mainstreaming, facilitating the proliferation of a non-feminist agenda and non-binding rhetoric. In order to become transformative and in line with feminist aims gender mainstreaming requires a deep understanding of the gender inequalities' process. This understanding need a more “holistic perspective” (Perrons 2005:406) which encompass not only the economic politics (productive work) but also social policies and the private sphere (reproductive work). The first step towards a deeper analysis of gender mainstreaming is the recognition of the gendered rhetoric of European economic politics.

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<sup>13</sup> The European employment strategy is inspired to the European strategy 2020 and it is based upon three pillars: job creation, dynamics of labor markets governance of employment policies (Casey 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Council Recommendation 2010/410/EU on broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and of the Union.

## Conclusions

The European gender equality agenda passed through many changes in the last decades, but – as described in the previous pages – the effectiveness of the gender mainstreaming strategy is limited due to the persistence of the equal treatment approach in all sectors. From employment to education patriarchal and male-centered bias are still dominant, because of the lack of proper feminist agendas in the policy making process. Though gender equality, positive actions and gender mainstreaming are becoming more popular within the EU political arena, their aims are manipulated by policy-makers and stakeholders, in order to reduce and cut their feminist potentials. The idea of the free liberal market as a place for equal opportunities remains the core of the EU legal framework also in terms of gender equality. Women's employment rate is politically and strategically relevant in order to improve the competitiveness of the European market, which is considered a place of equal opportunities. The idea of the universal free citizen permeates the EU policy, which is blind to gender differences. This blindness favors the predominance of the male-breadwinner model, whose structure damages gender equality in the public and private sphere. As a consequence women continue to face inequalities and discriminations in Europe, because of their otherness. The white independent bodily able man is still the 'brick' upon which EU builds its policies. In the public sphere this situation determines the underrepresentation of women in specific sector and positions, the widening of the gender pay gap, the perpetuation of vertical segregation, horizontal segregation and glass ceiling. In the private sphere it reinforces the dual burden and traditional gender roles, where reproductive and care work remains a women's prerogative.

In the next chapter I focus on women's entrepreneurship, a sector which becomes of great interest in the EU context especially after the beginning of the economic and financial crisis.



## Chapter 5

### Female entrepreneurship in the EU: towards gender equality or a political ghetto?

#### Introduction

In the EU 30% of all entrepreneurs are women<sup>1</sup>. In order to increase the number of women entrepreneurs the EU developed an ad hoc approach, which is the result of the EU policy for growth and employment and its strategy for gender equality. This approach defines the EU policy for female entrepreneurship as an in-between political space. In Chapter 5 I analyze this in-between political space with the aim of understanding if it risks of creating a new political ghetto, where women entrepreneurs and female entrepreneurship are defined as Other. Before starting that analysis I want to locate the EU data in the global context, where - according to the last Women's Report by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2010) - across the 59 economies studied the majority of the economies have more men than women entrepreneurs. Looking carefully at the level of early-stage entrepreneurship, a similar phenomenon is observable in every region of the world<sup>2</sup>. In the EU, for instance, early-stage women entrepreneurs are 5% while men entrepreneurs are more than 10%. In USA we find a similar gender gap (women entrepreneurs are more than 10%, men entrepreneurs are 15%). The only region where the gender gap is less extended is Sub-Saharan Africa. In Chapter 5 I explore the EU gender gap between women entrepreneurs and men entrepreneurs starting from the analysis of the way in which female entrepreneurship is framed within the EU discourse, exploring four EU documents (Europe Strategy 2020, Small business act, Entrepreneurship action plan 2020, Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015) and two EU networks for promoting female entrepreneurship (European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors, European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs).

#### 5.1 Female entrepreneurship in the EU: an in-between political space

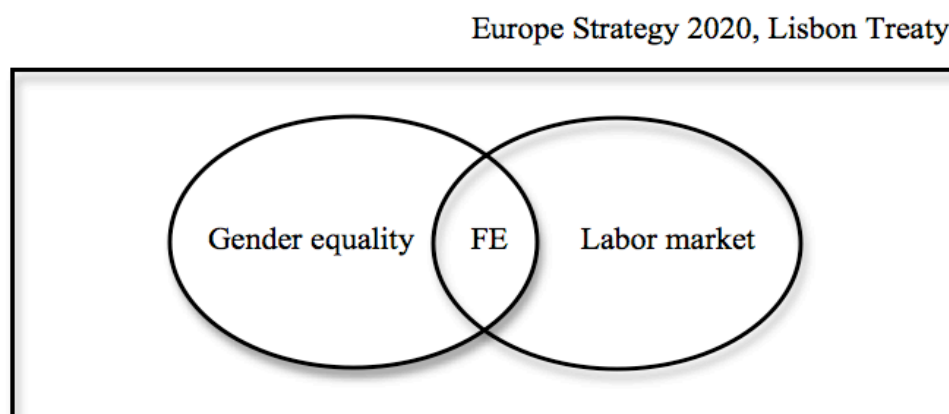
The female entrepreneurial discourse in the EU context is framed in a specific way that needs to be analyzed. In Chapter 4 I gave a general overview of the European legal framework for gender equality. We can consider it a specific area of the EU policy, where gender – as analytical category – is employed in relation to women, whose inequalities and subordinations in the public and private sphere require political interventions. In this frame gender equality policy constitutes an ad hoc set

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<sup>1</sup> EC data (April 2013, <http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/promoting-entrepreneurship/women/>)

<sup>2</sup> Global report 2012 of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor.

of strategies, measures and actions that the EU defined to compensate inequalities and fill in gender gaps. We experienced a progressive expansion from the focus on economic inequalities towards other fields, such as sexual harassment. That expansion represents a step forward the mainstreaming of gender equality at the EU, national and local level. Nevertheless many obstacles are still present, as described in Chapter 4, which reveal the weakness of the EU gender equality legal framework. That weakness is even more evident when it comes to female entrepreneurship. Female entrepreneurship policy is structured as an in-between political space, an intersection between the gender equality political sphere and the labor market political sphere (*Figure 1*). Those spheres are inscribed in a broader frame, characterized by the Lisbon Treaty<sup>3</sup> and the Europe Strategy 2020.



*Figure 1 - Female entrepreneurship policy in the EU*

This specific way of framing and defining female entrepreneurship policy is related to the EU political approach to gender. In the EU political discourse gender enters the discussion when the focus is on gender inequalities between women and men. The responses to such inequalities focus more on gender differences rather than gender disadvantages, shaping legal provisions and interventions in which gender difference is conceived in negative terms. This approach is problematic because despite the ad hoc legal provisions for women it does not question the centrality of men as norms' setters, whose authority relies on the depiction of women as deficient (Rhode 1992:197). On the other hand when gender disadvantages are included in the political discourse they are considered through a comparative approach, where the equation 'Man: norm=Woman: Other' is not contested but reinforced. In this equation sexual difference between men and women as opposing categories is central, a centrality that obscures not only differences among women but also the possibility of conceiving difference beyond binary oppositions.

<sup>3</sup> The Lisbon Treaty – signed in on 13 December 2007 and entered into force on 1st December 2009 - amends the two treaties which form the constitutional basis of the EU: Maastricht Treaty and Rome Treaty.

In this chapter I investigate the dynamics and limits of this approach, analyzing the most relevant and recent EU official documents for female entrepreneurship: the Europe Strategy 2020, the Small business act, the Entrepreneurship action plan 2020, the Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015 and the EU networks for promoting female entrepreneurship (European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors, European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs).

## **5.2 Europe Strategy 2020, Small business act, Entrepreneurship action plan 2020: women entrepreneurs, towards gender equality or a political ghetto?**

**Europe Strategy 2020** is the EU's ten-year growth strategy which - following the Lisbon treaty – was launched on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2010 by the EC to tackle the economic crisis. The Strategy promotes a “smart, sustainable and inclusive” growth through seven flagship initiatives, based upon the following targets:

- 75 % of the population aged 20-64 should be employed;
- 3% of the EU's GDP should be invested in R&D;
- the "20/20/20" climate/energy targets should be met (including an increase to 30% of emissions reduction if the conditions are right);
- the share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree;
- 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty.

The main aim of the strategy is the transition towards a “new economy” where the creation of new jobs and the growth of economic performances are the cornerstones for the success of the EU project. In the EC official communication about the Strategy gender equality is defined as an EU value among others – such as social and territorial cohesion and solidarity, respect for the environment, cultural diversity - upon which the EU can count in order to succeed in terms of growth and competitiveness. In the Strategy gender equality mainly refers to gender equality in the labor market with a specific reference to “work-life balance” in the flagship initiative “An agenda for new skills and jobs”:

*“At national level, Member States will need: [...] To promote new forms of work-life balance and active aging policies and to increase gender equality” (COM(2010) 2020 final, p. 18-19).*

In the other flagship initiatives there is not specific reference to gender equality, which is generally associate with women, while in the first target of the Strategy there is a specific reference to

women:

*“The employment rate of the population aged 20-64 should increase from the current 69% to at least 75%, including through the greater involvement of women, older workers and the better integration of migrants in the work force” [COM(2010) 2020 final, p. 10].*

This target has to be carefully analyzed since it defines women, older workers and immigrants in terms of otherness, within the context of the EU labor market, which is no neutral. The EU job market, as described in Chapter 4, is defined through a phallogocentric discourse, which assumes the male-breadwinner to be the norm. In order to acquire its authoritative status the male norm requires the subordination of the Others who - through their peripheral otherness - allow the norm to obtain its central hegemonic power within the discourse. The previous sentence is based upon a male-centered discourse, where women, older workers and migrants are included for structuring a hierarchical economy, where otherness constitutes the bottom of the phallogocentric pyramid of power. Women, older workers and migrant must be integrated in the work force, where they represent a minority because of their differences (gender, age, ethnicity). These differences are included in the male-centered notions of work force, labor, job market and employment, which are based upon patriarchal gender relations. These relations are not questioned in the Europe Strategy 2020 where the patriarchal hierarchical structure is still present. In the Strategy this structure reinforces not only the otherness of women, elderly and immigrants, but also their status as victims, inefficient and dependent citizens, who fail to conform to the norm. Their status of victims is defined in relation to the economically independent male-breadwinner, whose characteristics are assumed to be normative. Those characteristics refer mainly to the public sphere, where working hours in the labor market become the key of access to citizens' rights.

In the Strategy no specific reference is made to female entrepreneurship, but to entrepreneurship as a driving resource for promoting smart growth. This way of framing and conceptualizing entrepreneurship is problematic, since it reproduces a determinant vision of entrepreneurship and of the entrepreneur within the context of the free liberal market. The critiques of feminist scholars revealed the gendered and unequal underpinnings of the traditional conceptualization of entrepreneurship, which reproduce a male-centered discourse. The entrepreneur defined and reproduced by that discourse is the risk taker who manages to develop new services and products taking market opportunities, while creating growth and quality jobs. Entrepreneurship is assumed to be an economic tool, through which universal and abstract individuals can introduce new ideas and innovations into the labor market.

A similar way of framing the entrepreneurial discourse is adopted in the **Small business act and Entrepreneurship 2020 action plan**. The **Small business act** - approved in 2008 by the EC - reflects the political will of recognizing the central role of small and medium enterprises in the

EU economy, according to the principle 'Think Small First'<sup>4</sup>. This principle is re-affirmed in the **Entrepreneurship 2020 action plan**, adopted in January 2013 by the EC. In both documents entrepreneurship is defined as an economic tool for the success of the EU single market, in terms of competitiveness and social cohesion. In the Small business act we find more explicit description of what is the role of entrepreneurs in the EU context: entrepreneurs are those economic agents/actors who manage to “reap opportunities from globalization<sup>5</sup> and from the acceleration of technological change”, while taking risks (COM(2008) 394 final, p.3). It is a general definition which - despite its precision compared to the Europe Strategy 2020 - is based upon the same assumptions, where the white male-breadwinner continues to be at the center of the entrepreneurial discourse. His centrality is even more evident in the Small business act when it comes to gender equality and family business:

*“Entrepreneurship potential needs to be better exploited. There is a continuing gender gap in terms of entrepreneurship, which translates into fewer women entrepreneurs. This adds to an unexploited potential for entrepreneurship among immigrants [...] The EU and Member States should create an environment within which entrepreneurs and family businesses can thrive and entrepreneurship is rewarded. They need to care for future entrepreneurs better, in particular by fostering entrepreneurial interest and talent, particularly among young people and women, and by simplifying the conditions for business transfers.”* (COM(2008) 394 final, p.5)

Women - as in the Europe Strategy 2020 - are defined as a targeted group together with young people and immigrants, who need to be sustained by ad hoc policy in order to develop their entrepreneurial potential. Also in the **Entrepreneurship 2020 action plan** women - together with seniors, migrants, unemployed, young people and disable - are defined as underrepresented demographic groups within the entrepreneurial population, for whom the EU has to open up specific paths. Focusing on women those ad hoc paths should make women aware of “business support programs and funding opportunities”, such as the European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors and the European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs, which will be presented in the upcoming pages. In the document there is also a specific reference to the EC proposal (2012) for improving the gender balance in boards of publicly listed companies. This proposal should increase the number of women in senior management positions, who:

*“could serve as a role model for other women in general. The visibility of bigger number of successful professional women will show other women that they have chances of success on the labor market”* (COM(2012) 795 final, p. 23).

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<sup>4</sup> The Small business act applies to all independent companies which have fewer than 250 employees (99% of all European businesses).

<sup>5</sup> For further discussion on globalization, counter-globalization and alter-globalization see Hoofd 2012.

The focus on gender equality in quantitative terms - together with the targeting of specific groups - is problematic in both documents, because it favors the adoption of compensative politics. They may be useful to reach the short-term aim (raise of EU competitiveness) while reinforcing a political discourse based on otherness, victimization, deficiency and inadequacy of the Others. Focusing on female entrepreneurship, the risk of othering women entrepreneurs through ad hoc policy is at stake. Why? Because ad hoc policy risk to focus on the obstacles that women entrepreneurs encounter in their own business in terms of deficit and not in structural terms. Ad hoc policy represents a first step towards the mainstreaming of a specific policy, in this case EU gender equality policy. Nevertheless if they are not properly interrelated and connected together with other politics, they risk to generate a new political ghetto, where difference will continue to be defined in terms of otherness (Peris-Ortiz et al. 2012). The possibility of the creation of a political ghetto in the EU for female entrepreneurship cannot be ignored. Currently the EU policy for female entrepreneurship does not represent a political ghetto yet, but because of the ad hoc approach towards women and gender rather than a gender mainstreaming approach it has the potential of framing a political ghetto. This ghetto may be helpful for women to overcome gendered obstacles in the job market, but it will hardly reduce patriarchal gender relations in the EU context.

### **5.3 Gender and female entrepreneurship: structural barriers encountered by women entrepreneurs and EU support networks**

The current European strategy for the promotion of female entrepreneurship is framed in a political discourse where gender equality is still not mainstreamed but introduced in the political debate in a specific way, as described in Chapter 4. This mode frames gender equality as a tool for helping women to reach the level of men, more in quantitative terms than qualitative ones. In the EU documents about gender equality, the female entrepreneurial discourse is structured by the following key arguments:

- entrepreneurship as a relevant career option for women;
- underrepresentation of women entrepreneurs (30% of all entrepreneurs in the EU are women);
- obstacles encountered by women entrepreneurs in the labor market;
- reconciliation between family and career.

In the **Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015**<sup>6</sup> for instance, the EC stressed the importance of promoting female entrepreneurship through the removal of the barriers encountered by women. Those barriers are not described in the document, but in a previous report commissioned by the EC<sup>7</sup>, where we can have a first idea of the main obstacles encountered by women entrepreneurs:

- **contextual obstacles:** women's educational choice, women's horizontal and vertical segregation, gender stereotypes;
- **economic obstacles:** difficulties in accessing finance;
- **soft obstacles:** lack of access to relevant technical scientific and general business networks, lack of business training and of role models.

Those obstacles are similar to the barriers described in female entrepreneurship researches in Chapter 1. The extent of these barriers varies from country to country, together with political interventions. The report focuses on 14 Member states, where - despite local differences (percentage of women entrepreneurs, percentage of women innovators) - women entrepreneurs experience similar barriers (educational segregation, employment horizontal segregation, employment vertical segregation). The political instruments introduced at the local level for overcoming those barriers refer mainly to soft obstacles, without any specific intervention for contextual and economic obstacles, which, according to the report limit the possibility of considering entrepreneurship "a viable career option".

In the last years the EU developed some instruments for overcoming those obstacles, such as the European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors and the European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs. These networks support women entrepreneurs in tackling the gendered barriers encountered in the public sphere, while challenging male-centered entrepreneurial discourse, as described in the next section.

#### **5.4 EU networks for women entrepreneurs**

The **European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors** was launched on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 2009 and is made up of around 270 entrepreneurs coming from 22 European countries. The Ambassadors promote entrepreneurship among women by engaging and speaking to groups in

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<sup>6</sup> The Strategy was adopted on 21 September 2010 by the EC for improving the place of women in the labor market, in society and in decision-making positions both in the EU and the world.

<sup>7</sup> *Evaluation on policy: promotion of women innovators and entrepreneurship* commissioned by the DG enterprise and industry of the EC, Final Report submitted by the EEC (GHK, Technopolis), 25 July 2008.

schools, colleges, universities, conferences, business networks and employment initiatives. After one year from the launch of the network 150 ambassadors participated in a total of 141 national kick off meetings and other inspirational events and workshops, reaching more than 7.600 participants resulting in a high visibility among the target audience. The Ambassadors also appeared in the media and in January 2011 they published their own manifesto<sup>8</sup>, where they addressed some of the barriers cited above. In the manifesto reconciliation of family and work, access to credit and meritocracy are at the stake, as political strategies for promoting female entrepreneurship not as Other than male entrepreneurship but as new lifestyle, characterized by a new female narrative beyond the traditional stereotypes.

For overcoming some of the soft barriers encountered by women entrepreneurs in 2011 the EC launched the **European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs**. It promotes female entrepreneurship in 31 European countries thanks to its members, who provide advice, support, information and contacts regarding existing support measures for female entrepreneurs, while sharing good practices. According to the first activity report<sup>9</sup> an increasing number of countries adopted specific programs to support women's entrepreneurship for longer periods, mainly through the implementation of positive actions and gender mainstreaming in general programs for entrepreneurship. Since the gender gaps are still at stake, the report identifies five priority areas for future work:

1. strategies for exchange of best practices according methods and tools to support women's entrepreneurship;
2. supporting and exchanging knowledge about research on economic impact from women's entrepreneurship;
3. growth, growth factors and sustainability of women's entrepreneurship;
4. mentoring, coaching and consulting support;
5. access to finance and working capital.

Those areas are not so different from the topics discussed in the Ambassadors' manifesto. In the report strong accent is put on the exchange of best practices and knowledge among the members of the network (soft obstacles), together with the need of improving women entrepreneurs' access to finance (economic obstacles). Are those the 'only' obstacles met by women entrepreneurs in the EU? What can be done to overcome them without othering women? In order to explore possible

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<sup>8</sup> European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors, Manifesto, Florence - Italy, 20 January 2011.

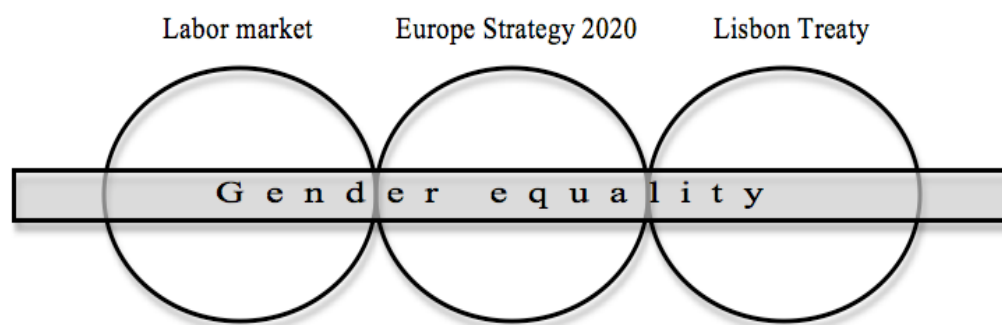
<sup>9</sup> European Network to Promote Women's Entrepreneurship - Activity Report 2011, December 2012.



answers to those questions I involved in the research process EU and national policy-makers, EU and national networks, experts in female entrepreneurship. I will explore their answers in Chapter 6.

## Conclusions

From the analysis of the EU documents what mainly emerges is the presence in the EU context of specific obstacles, which limit the increase of women entrepreneurs. Those obstacles are gendered and structural within the EU social, political, cultural and economic context, where women still experience inequalities in the public and private sphere. For promoting female entrepreneurship the EU developed different tools that - in order to overcome the gendered obstacles - need to be framed within a gender mainstream framework. Within this framework gender equality becomes a transversal aim (*Figure 2*), which pertains every sector of the EU policy, from economy until social inclusion.



*Figure 2 - Gender mainstreaming*

This transversality requires a strong and broad political engagement from all EU institutions, which should give more space to gender equality in every sector of the EU policy. Confining gender equality just to specific programs, committees and documents is not the right direction to take, since the risk of othering women is around the corner. For promoting female entrepreneurship, for instance, the EU may consider to develop a gender mainstreaming approach starting from the revision of the documents analyzed in Chapter 5. This approach - where gender equality is a transversal aim rather than a confined one - look at women and gendered barriers not in terms of victimization and deficits but in terms of potentialities and possibilities, towards the achievement of one's own aim in a context where difference is defined in positive terms rather than negative.

## Chapter 6

### Women entrepreneurs as the Other: questioning EU patriarchal policy

#### Introduction

Is EU female entrepreneurship policy othering women? In Chapter 4 we saw how an EU gender blind approach of the EU towards gender equality depict women as the Other, according to a private-public sphere division rooted in the Marshallian paradigm and male-breadwinner model. That division is even more evident in the EU political framework for female entrepreneurship, where – as analyzed in Chapter 5 - the presence of soft, economic and contextual obstacles limit women participation to the European market as entrepreneurs. In order to better explore the implications of the process of othering in the EU strategy for women entrepreneurs I decided to involve into the research (third sub-level: empirical level) experts, policy-makers and networks interested in gender equality and female entrepreneurship. In the present Chapter I explore their opinions and perspectives regarding women entrepreneurs' othering in the EU. I start by presenting the way in which I involved the respondents and how I analyzed their answers. Then I investigate respondents' ideas on the concepts of entrepreneur, entrepreneurship, focusing on differences and inequalities among women and men entrepreneurs in the private and public sphere. I explore once again the topic of gender quotas together with the participants, asking for their opinions. Finally I asked them to propose new interventions for reducing the process of othering in the EU context. For analyzing participants' answers I will apply the theoretical tools presented in Chapter 2, focusing on the gender relations explored at the legal and the political research sub-levels.

#### 6.1 Involvement of the research participants

In this section I describe the way in which research participants were involved into the research process, starting from self-reflection about the process itself. The research process is a site of power relations, where the researcher and the research participants bring in their own voices in different ways. The researcher has the power of defining the research territory, making decision regarding the topic, the questions and the answers s/he wants to present at the end of the research. As a researcher I am aware of this selecting and controlling side of the power relation between the researcher and the research subjects. That awareness pushed me to look at the same time at my role and the role of the research participants, within a frame of situated knowledge (Haraway 1988). There was a dual intent: reducing vertical relations while producing and sharing knowledge. Thanks to this approach

I learned more about specific aspects of gender equality and female entrepreneurship in the EU thanks to the answers of the research participants, who were involved in the research through a ‘process of selection’ influenced mostly by my job experiences. The research participants, indeed, are EU and national policy-makers, experts of female entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs’ organizations and networks. They were involved through a snowballing sampling, which started from my previous knowledge of policy makers, experts, networks interested in female entrepreneurship.

I contacted the research participants via e-mail, sending 188 e-mails, most of which did not find any answer (134). Some e-mail addresses were wrong or not more in use despite that they were reported in EU official web-sites (20); other people decided not to participate in the research claiming they were not directly involved in the topic or too busy (7). At the end 27 participants confirmed their interest in the research, but just 14 answered to the questionnaire via e-mail (13) and on the phone (1). I continued to be in touch with the 14 left, who asked to be informed about the research results. In all cases the involvement of each participant started with an e-mail sent by me, where I presented the research topic (with an abstract of 200 words), the research framework and myself.

*Table 1- Research participants*

N°	Name, surname, label	Gender	Organization	Country
1	Anette Svenningsen	woman	European House of Quality A/S	Denmark
2	Anonymous		National organization	
3	Anonymous		International organization	
4	Anonymous		International network	
5	Anonymous		European organization	
6	Anonymous		National organization	
7	Barbara Rita Barricelli	woman	Researcher in Computer Science at West London university, member of Girl Geek Dinner Milano	Italy
8	Elisabetta Sani	woman	UnioncamereToscana	Italy
9	Francesca Rescigno	woman	Bologna university	Italy
10	Maria Lustrì	woman	Ministry of economics	Italy
11	Morena Menegatti	woman	freelance journalist, member of Girl Geek Dinner Milano	Italy
12	Mr Cravero	man	Business Europe	EU
13	Rosa Maria Amorevole	woman	Emilia Romagna Region	Italy
14	Tina	woman	freelance science journalist	USA, Netherlands

In the beginning I sent e-mails just in English, while at a second stage I decided to send e-mail in Italian to the Italian participants. This decision was taken after positive responses from some Italian participants, who – I did not expect – demonstrated great interest. My knowledge of the Italian entrepreneurial structure helped me to involve Italian respondents, which I noted were interested in the research also because it will be presented in two universities, one of which is Italian. Involving participants from other countries was more difficult, also because of by my restricted knowledge of non-Italian national structures of female entrepreneurship. The involvement of EU representatives and organizations, instead, was difficult because of the intense activities of EU institutions. Some European institutions, such as the European institute for gender equality or the chair of the FEMM Committee of the EP, replied explaining that they were too busy for taking part in the research. Other European actors, such as the European women lobby, explained that the research topic was not properly among their interests, but they suggested me to contact other experts. Great enthusiasm and support, instead, was demonstrated by a representative of the Italian Ministry of economics, Maria Lustrì, FEMM Committee and Girl Geek Dinner Milano, one of the Italian sections of the Girl Geek Dinners, an informal organization that promotes women in information technology industry in 23 countries. Those last participants helped me to promote my research among their contacts and online, using social networks. The majority of the participants decided to answer the questionnaire via e-mail, while a minority chose a phone interview. The questionnaire in both cases was the same. It is composed of a two sections: the first one is for general information regarding the participants (name, surname, job position, job organization, how to be named in the research); the second one is composed of 18 questions regarding the concept of entrepreneur/entrepreneurship, differences among women and men entrepreneurs, personal experiences in promoting female entrepreneurship, knowledge and ideas of EU gender equality policy, ideas suggestion for future political action, suggestion for the research (Annex 1). The answers have not word limits and the participants are asked to add whatever they consider relevant for the research. Some of them, for instance, sent me articles, documents and studies that they considered relevant for the research. Participants were also free to not answer to all questions and to ask me questions. In this last case it was of great interest a question posed by Mr Cravero, representative of Business Europe, who asked me: “What do you mean with the term othering?”. That question made me consider how the perception of the term othering varies according to the gender of the participants. Mr Cravero was the only man I managed to involve in the research. How did it happen? My aim was not to involve ‘only’ women, but during the involvement process I noted that in the majority of the cases EU policy makers, networks and organizations in charge of or interested in female entrepreneurship are mainly women or run by women. Those findings made me

think of two kinds of implications. On the one side the overrepresentation of women in this sector can be empowering; on the other side it can reinforce the female entrepreneurship ghettoization as Other than male entrepreneurship.

None of the women participants asked me clarification regarding the term othering. This fact made me suppose that among women the process of othering is part of a consolidated and lived knowledge, which is barely known and recognized by EU and national institutions. This supposition was confirmed by the answers of the research respondents, which I present in the next section. The majority of the participants as we will see in the next section wanted to be named and the majority of the participants also asked to receive the research results. Those decisions are mainly related - apart from personal interest of each participant - to the possibility of presenting the research in Italy at the roundtable for the internationalization of female entrepreneurship, coordinated by the Italian Ministry of economics. The will of being named (by name, surname, title, etc...) is also connected to the role played by the participants in their own environment (EU, national and local institutions). Mr Cravero, for instance, was the only one who asked to be named with a gendered title, 'Mr', while Tina asked to be named only by her first name. Among the participants five persons did not want to be named. Their decision is related to their working position in national, European and international organizations and their personal ideas on the topic of female entrepreneurship. Their arguments, indeed, differed from the official positions of the national, European and international organizations they work for, with the risk of putting them in a dangerous position. As a researcher my ethics pushed me to respect and protect their anonymity.

By claiming or not claiming their name the participants claim their own voice or anonymity in the research context and EU context where - as stressed by the majority of the respondents - gender equality is not a reality yet. Why? My plausible answer to that question is multi-layered. It is indeed characterized by a political level and imaginary level. At the first level we find two plausible answers: the presence of specific barriers encountered by women entrepreneurs (Chapter 5), which, as we will see in the next section, were recognized by the majority of the respondents; the absence of strong political interventions by the EU. However it is not just a question of barriers producing gaps, which need to be filled in. The question, indeed, affects also the so called imaginary level - in Lacanian terms - where gender plays a key role (Muller and Richardson 1982). It is at that level where concepts, such as entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, are framed not in 'neutral' but in gendered terms. In order to explore both levels I asked to the research participants questions related to the political level and imaginary one. The questionnaire starts with three questions related to the imaginary level: *What is entrepreneurship? Who is an entrepreneur? Are there any differences among men entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs?* It continues with a question regarding the participation to

projects/initiatives/studies for promoting female entrepreneurship. Then the respondents are asked to reflect more on the political level, with particular attention to: gender inequalities among men and women entrepreneurs in the EU and in Member states, EU and national strategies for gender equality, perception of the EU, gender quotas. The questionnaire ends with four questions concerning gender equality proposals, general remarks about the research and follow-up (Annex 1). For the analysis of the questionnaires I applied critical discourse analysis, a method already applied at the political and legal research sub-level. At the empirical level this method helped me to explore how participants use language and construct discourses about entrepreneurship and gender relations.

The will of working on both levels is connected to: the lack of critical analysis on engendering concepts in EU documents analyzed in Chapter 5; the persistence of gender inequalities among women entrepreneurs and men entrepreneurs; the desire of reducing those inequalities through political actions. That desire pushed me to extend my will of political change to people directly committed to female entrepreneurship and gender equality. Their contributions were fundamental for the research, since they helped me to answer to the research question. I analyzed their answers looking for continuities and discrepancies with the analysis of EU gender equality agenda and female entrepreneurship policy, explored in Chapter 4 and 5. In order to investigate those continuities and discrepancies I analyze the respondents' answers starting from the symbolic/imaginary level towards the political one, where the main focus is on gender gaps and gender quotas. The analysis concludes with participants' proposals for fostering gender equality in the entrepreneurial sector.

## **6.2 Women and man entrepreneurs: differences and inequalities in the public and private sphere**

Research on entrepreneurship revealed the persistence of gendered stereotypes in the entrepreneurial discourse, which involves both academic literature and policy making. Those stereotypes favored the affirmation of strong male-centered notions of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs, at the expenses of any kind of diversity and multiplicity (Heilman and Chen 2003; Peris-Ortiz et al. 2012). As stressed by feminist scholars (Bruni, Gherardi and Poggio 2004; Stevenson 1990) the uncritical reproduction of gendered stereotypes in the entrepreneurial discourse risks to reinforce an androcentric hierarchical structure, where women entrepreneurs represent the Other at the bottom of the phallogocentric pyramid of power. At the same time feminist studies on women entrepreneurs underlined the necessity of reflecting more on the concepts of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs adopting a gender perspective, since some women consider themselves entrepreneurs but not “in the male sense of the word” (Stevenson 1990). Two questions

are hence at stake: what is entrepreneurship? Who is an entrepreneur?

In EU documents described in Chapter 5 there are no precise definitions of those concepts (apart from a general definition of the ‘entrepreneur’ in the Small business act), which are depicted as important economic resources for the EU market. They are both framed in a gender ‘neutral’ way, which becomes explicitly gendered when it comes to the application of the principle of gender equality. In this case gender is connected with women, the gender which needs to be supported in order to reach male equal level (Scott 1988b). A similar approach was adopted by the majority of the research participants in answering those questions. The concept of entrepreneurship is generally framed in an economic context, characterized by paid work, “business” and “profit”. That context refers to the liberal public sphere, where “products” and “services” are exchanged among producers and consumers, in an abstract equal space. The concept of entrepreneurship is hence linked to a specific environment, which - as described in Chapter 2 - is structured according to gender relations, in favor of the male-breadwinner model and women’s subordination.

However entrepreneurship requires also specific characteristics, necessary for the creation of a new economic activity in the labor market, as stressed by some participants. Are those characteristics gendered?

In order to explore this question we have to consider the imaginary level within which entrepreneurship and its characteristics are framed. For the majority of the participants entrepreneurship is related to creativity in starting a new business, courage in risk taking and independence:

*“Will of doing, creating, building”* (my translation).

Maria Lustrì,  
responsible for financial monitoring and innovation contract at the Italian ministry of economics

*“In accepting the risk and the propensity to independence”* (my translation).

Elisabetta Sani,  
Unioncamere Toscana

At a first glance these characteristics may be considered gender-neutral, since they may be applicable to all entrepreneurs. However it is not. Business creativity, risk-taking and independence are the basic skills required by the Marshallian citizen and the male-breadwinner model for acquiring the status of citizen. These entrepreneurial characteristics are based upon a male-centered symbolic/imaginary order, which limits new declinations of the concept of entrepreneurship and entrepreneur.

Among the answers, just the definition of entrepreneurship by an anonymous participant challenged the traditional male-centered one. In the anonymous answer, indeed, we find the idea of “horizontal” skills, such as technical, communicative, emotional skills. Horizontal skills are rarely included in the entrepreneurial discourse, which is male-centered. Communication and emotions in male-centered structures are gendered in feminine (non-male, negative) terms (Yetim 2008), required in order to stress the hegemony of ‘male’ characteristics, such as rationality and independence, while excluding women from the public sphere. The inclusion of those ‘feminine’ characteristics in the traditional male-centered concept of entrepreneurship opens up space for a re-conceptualization of the concept itself, towards the inclusion of women’s ideas and experiences of entrepreneurship beyond traditional stereotypes.

Those stereotypes are based on gendered assumptions and social constructions, where entrepreneurship and the entrepreneur are defined in male terms, according to a masculine ideal (Nelson and Duffy): the *homo economicus*, the white Western independent male-breadwinner, who - with his rationality, self-esteem, courage in taking risk - manages to start-up his own business. That gendered stereotype relies on its counter gendered stereotype, the caregiver, which is defined as a feminine ideal. When the boundaries between these gendered ideals are blurred, gendered landscapes change, both in the public and private sphere. Women entrance in the labor market, for instance, transformed the organization of the job market, the family and the welfare state together with the relationship among them. These changes were and are analyzed by feminist scholars (Chapter 2) by paying great attention to the concepts of equality and difference. The interrelation between these concepts had and has great success in feminist scholarship, which tried and is trying to challenge binary thinking beyond opposing dialectics. This approach is fundamental for the analysis of strongly male-centered concepts, such as entrepreneurship and entrepreneur, where women’s experiences have a confined space. In the attempt of including women entrepreneurs’ voices in the entrepreneurial discourse, first studies on female entrepreneurship were comparative (Chapter 1). It means that they focused more on differences and similarities between men and women entrepreneurs, rather than exploring gender relations and social constructions at the basis of the entrepreneurial discourse. That approach – adopted also by some feminist studies – did not challenge the binary thinking in both research and political discourses, which consider men the centre of the discourse and women the counter-side, the Other, the different who – for being equal – have to conform to the male norm. Within this dynamic, equality has a ‘positive’ connotation, while difference has a ‘negative’ one (Scott 1988a). This dynamic reinforce hierarchical power relations, rather than favoring the transition towards a more equal society. Equality, indeed, is a relational concept, which - if not accompanied by a critical analysis of the relations involved - can reinstate exclusion and subordination. Then gender equality policy based on a binary and opposing approach



to the relation between equality and difference – like the current EU approach for female entrepreneurship (Chapter 5) - may risk in perpetrating women's subordination. Rather than focusing on quantitative data about the number of men and women entrepreneurs it would be more useful to re-work critically on the concepts of entrepreneurship and entrepreneur, as I proposed to the research participants. The answers to the question *Who is an entrepreneur?* share a common characteristic: the entrepreneur was defined using the neutral term “person” and/or using male pronouns – especially in Italian - but with a gender ‘neutral’ intent:

*“A person who is willing to “go for it”, spend a lot of hours in order to bring the idea to market”.*

Anette Svenningsen,  
CEO of the European House of Quality A/S (Denmark)

*“Una persona in grado di creare, innovare o migliorare un settore specifico”<sup>1</sup>*

Francesca Rescigno,  
professor of public law at Bologna university

Some respondents – such as Elisabetta Sani - in order to reinforce their answers reported official definitions from the Italian civil code, where male-centered definitions are assumed to be the norm. These definitions refer to the “organized economic activity” performed by the entrepreneur in the labor market for the purpose of producing goods and services for profit” (my translation). These definitions reinforce once again the phallogocentric symbolic/imaginary order, where women entrepreneurs must conform to male-centered definitions, in order to be recognized as entrepreneurs. Among the respondents just one, Tina, a USA freelance science journalist living in the Netherlands, did not give a gender neutral definition of the entrepreneur: “someone who starts his or her own business”.

For the majority of the respondents innovation, economic organization, time planning and risk taking are the main characteristics of the entrepreneur, who - apart from being an innovator - has to be able to realize his/her entrepreneurial project within the economic market, the place of production. That place is a site of gender relations, where gender differences are at the origin of gender inequalities. Indeed, one may argue that men and women entrepreneurs are different because of their entrepreneurial behavior and attitudes (Yetim 2008), but when these differences are framed within an androcentric discourse they portray women entrepreneurs as the Other of men

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<sup>1</sup> “A person who manages to create, innovate or improve a specific sector” (my translation).

entrepreneurs. The critical point is the way in which these differences feed inequalities, preventing women from being entrepreneur beyond the binary thinking.

In order to explore that critical point I asked the research participants about the presence of any differences and inequalities among men entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs: *Are there any differences among men entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs? Are there any inequalities among men entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs (ex: in education, access to financial instruments, conciliation between job&family, etc...)?*

The answers to the question about differences can be divided in two sets: 1) answers where the respondents have stressed women specific characteristics as entrepreneurs; 2) answers where the respondents focused on the difficulties and barriers encountered by women in the economic market. According to the first set of answers women entrepreneurs are different from men entrepreneurs because of their different approach to money (avoid lending money), job organization (women prefer to have a global vision of the situation, more purposes and good time planning for the management of work and private life, where the use of Internet become relevant), enterprises dimension (women mainly run small business) and attitude (they are more practical and solidarity among them):

*“The perception of what is innovative, what may be needed in specific contexts and how to bring ideas into practice is certainly affected by gender. I tend to think that also risk inclination is in some ways rather different in female and male entrepreneurs. However, nowadays the gender binary is no more representative enough of the human population; you might want to take into account how concepts like gender and sexual identity are evolving”.*

Barbara Rita Barricelli,  
researcher in Computer Science at West London university,  
member of Girl Geek Dinner Milano

*“Dimensional (usually women manage smaller companies) mainly” (my translation).*

Rosa Maria Amorevole,  
equal opportunity counselor of Emilia Romagna Region

*“In definition, no, but I think a higher percentage of women become entrepreneurs through the Internet than of men because they are more likely to work from home because of children”.*

Tina,  
freelance science journalist

Compared to men entrepreneurs women entrepreneurs perceive innovation and risk in a different way, and their 'role' as women entrepreneurs is far more complex from the male's one. Women entrepreneurs, indeed, have to cope their entrepreneurial role with their role as women in a patriarchal society, where family life relies on the non-paid work of women, as wives, daughters, mothers, sisters, and etc... In that context the answer by an anonymous participant is exemplary:

*“For women entrepreneurs, the company is often considered a "child" to care for and grow with dedication and responsibility” (my translation).*

The “child” metaphor is strongly related to double burden experienced by women in the public and private sphere. Women's double burden was stressed by different participants, such as Elisabetta Sani, who underlined a significant difference between men and women entrepreneurs: “a man entrepreneur is an entrepreneur, a women entrepreneur is a business woman and a woman” (my translation). This difference refers to the gender roles played by men and women in the public and private sphere. Men are assumed to work just in the private sphere, while women are required to work in both spheres for reaching male equality status. This kind of gender relations are still a reality in EU, where women entrepreneurs are asked to conform to patriarchal stereotypes. In order to overcome these stereotypes we have to look at gender inequalities and barriers encountered by women entrepreneurs in accessing the market.

The research respondents discussed these topics in the second set of answers to the question regarding differences and by answering to the question about inequalities. In both cases gender inequalities refer to the difficulties encountered in the access to financial instruments (Klapper and Parker 2010) and in the reconciliation between work and family. Francesca Rescigno - professor of public law at Bologna University - and Morena Menegatti - freelance journalist, member of Girl Geek Dinner Milano - in their answers described the Italian context, where women “have more difficulties in conciliating work and family time” (Francesca Rescigno). Because of these difficulties women generally decide to “leave their work to take care of children or are stopped in their careers due to their children” (Morena Menegatti). This situation reveals the persistence of patriarchal gender relations and gender regimes, not only in the Italian context. The majority of the respondents, indeed, underlined how family tasks and responsibility are still strongly gendered in women's terms. What changes from country to country is the presence or lack of government intervention in supporting women's reconciliation of work and family. The lack of “government help” in conciliating work and family time is one of the main reasons which pushes women to leave work for taking care of their children, more as a forced decision rather than a free choice. In this sense the answer of Anette Svenningsen - CEO of the European House of Quality A/S (Denmark) - had a strong significance: “I have chosen not to have children because I like my

job more”.

Her answer revealed the obstacles and costs that women have to pay if they want to enter in a male-centered context, such as entrepreneurship. In the entrepreneurial context family responsibilities and patriarchal gender relations reduce women's opportunities of starting their own business. The double burden experienced by women is still a reality in the European context, characterized by hegemonic patriarchal culture, lack of adequate gender mainstreaming policy and traditional gender roles (Walby 1997). In Europe “society is strongly casted and hierarchical and it excludes the feminine part that represents the critical thinking”, stressed Maria Lustrì, responsible for financial monitoring and innovating contract at the Italian Ministry of economics. Women are still underrepresented in different sectors, such as politics, top management positions and entrepreneurship, where patriarchal stereotypes and gender relations favor women's subordinations and gender inequalities. In order to challenge these stereotypes and inequalities the importance of gender as analytical category must be recognized in the private and public sphere. In Chapter 4 and 5 we saw that in EU gender is used as analytical category just in relation to women, the Other which must to conform to the male norm in the public sphere (job, politics) while taking care of female tasks in the private sphere. This approach is based more on equal treatment rather than on gender mainstreaming. Respondents' answers are framed within the EU treatment approach but they also challenge it, asking for a move towards a gender mainstreaming approach. In the majority of the answers what strongly emerge is the request of more attention and intervention in favor of both female entrepreneurship and gender equality:

*“In entrepreneurship, like in other fields, female opportunities and careers are affected by family responsibility. Conciliation between work and family may be reached with government help, but also through a deep change of education systems that still today tend to encourage male career (especially in STEM) against the female one. I am not directly aware of inequalities related to access to financial instruments. On the contrary, in what follows I will present some examples of financial programmes aimed at helping female initiatives”.*

Barbara Rita Barricelli,  
researcher in Computer Science at West London university,  
member of Girl Geek Dinner Milano

*“Women are more likely to be limited in their time away from home because of their family obligations”.*

Tina,  
freelance science journalist

The increase of women entrepreneurs in the public sphere cannot be achieved by removing just soft and economic obstacles in the public sphere; it requires political a significant change in gender

relations and gender regimes. This change must involve a serious engagement towards gender mainstreaming, where gender inequalities and differences are not considered just in quantitative terms.

Among participants' answers to question about differences and inequalities just Mr Cravero, representative of Business Europe, used a strong gender quantitative approach, without any focus on focus neither on female characteristics nor on difficulties and barriers encountered by women entrepreneurs: "we acknowledge that women entrepreneurs are in smaller number than men entrepreneurs". His answer stresses the quantitative difference between men and women entrepreneurs, as acknowledged in official EU documents analyzed in Chapter 5, without any critical perspective, unlike other participants did. This difference may be related to his position as a formal representative of a European business organization and his gender, two power dimensions which may have affected his different position. He recognized the double burden experienced by women entrepreneurs as a "question of negotiating with the partner", while "access to finance is crucial for creating a company or something" for women. Mr Cravero's approach to the double burden - as an individual issue related to women's different way of being entrepreneurs - is critical, since it does not question the male-centered concepts of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs. This approach, adopted also by the EU in its legal framework for gender equality and female entrepreneurship, risks to reinforce the confinement of the reconciliation topic among women's issues as Other than men's issues. This approach risk to other women entrepreneurs, by turning female entrepreneurship in a political ghetto and by reducing the possibility for a gender mainstreaming approach. This last approach, as underlined in Chapter 4, challenges the traditional dichotomous thinking towards a gender equality agenda where gender equality is not only a women's issue, but a transversal aim for a more democratic and equal society. How to move towards a gender mainstreaming approach? First of all it is necessary to reduce gender gaps, barriers and inequalities. In the next section I analyze respondents' opinions to these topics in the entrepreneurial sectors, focusing on EU current strategy for promoting female entrepreneurship.

### **6.3 Female entrepreneurship and gender equality in the EU: economic, political and informative gaps**

At the European level - as described in Chapter 5 - there are different strategies in place for supporting female entrepreneurship. At the national and local level those strategies are implemented through ad hoc initiatives, as underlined by the research participants. These initiatives - although they vary from country to country - are generally coordinated by national bodies and local entities, such as Ministries of economics, Chambers of commerce, Regions, associations of women

entrepreneurs and sectorial entrepreneurial organizations. Those programs - such as Be Win Program, coordinated by Unioncamere Toscana - help women entrepreneurs in acquiring better and more business skills (educational programs) or financial advices for start-ups. Despite these initiatives some respondents stressed the lack of uniformity in the application of the European strategies for women entrepreneurs, due to the absence of national coordinators, adequate control, monitoring and information:

*“It must be more information and incentives at every level for increasing employment and female entrepreneurship” (my translation).*

Francesca Rescigno,  
professor of public law at Bologna university

*“Currently there is no national coordination or an agency that deals with female development. In the guiding principles for growth and development there is no reference to the gender gap in economics, or any reference to the inclusion of female entrepreneurship in government actions. There are sporadic and isolated initiatives in some regions, Unioncamere and enterprises associations” (my translation).*

Maria Lustrì,  
responsible for financial monitoring and innovating contract at the Italian Ministry of economics

Focusing on the lack of information the majority of the research participants whole or part of the EU strategies and instruments for female entrepreneurship: Strategy Europe 2020, European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs, Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors, Entrepreneurship action plan 2020. The European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs, Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors, Entrepreneurship action plan 2020 are the most known, especially by institutional members and members of Chambers of commerce, such as Maria Lustrì, and Mr Cravero. The lack of national coordinators, adequate control, monitoring and information – the majority of the respondents stressed - make the EU strategies for women entrepreneurs less efficient, mining at the same time the global vision of the EU. The EU is generally perceived by the respondents as a ‘positive’ tool for promoting female entrepreneurship, but on a ‘soft level’. Indeed, when it comes to decision concerning the financial planning of the EU female entrepreneurship is stepped aside. “The problem - Elisabetta Sani underlined - is that the great ideal attention to female entrepreneurship is often not accompanied by sufficient resources” (my translation). The absence of stronger intervention by EU for supporting women entrepreneurs was underlined by the majority of the respondents. That absence made many participants being in favor of stronger political

interventions, such as gender quotas. Since in the context of the EU the current debate about gender quotas is becoming more and more popular - also in the media - I asked to the research participants what they think about them, focusing on the EC proposal for gender quotas in company boards. Before analyzing respondents' answers on gender quotas I want to focus on the terminology I used in posing the question about gender quotas:

*In order to increase the number of women on company boards the European Union is promoting affirmative actions. What do you think about them? Are they a good instrument for achieving gender equality?*

On purpose I did not use the term gender quotas but affirmative actions in English and 'azioni positive' in the Italian version. This choice is related to my previous background in political science, which as influenced my research together with the decision of using a technical terminology rather than a more popular one. The majority of the respondents understood the technical terminology used in the question, apart from one anonymous participant, who asked if the reference was to women quotas. Mr Cravero, instead, underlined that this technical terminology is not used in official EU documents, where the expression gender quotas is preferred. Why? According to him this choice is related to the EU will of not evoking a USA terminology. His argument made me think about the terminology of my research, in which I use both terms, affirmative actions and gender quotas. Why? Because I think is important to know and to share both the technical and popular term, in order to contextualize the application of political tools in every historical, political and geographical situation.

#### **6.4 Gender quotas: a 'strong' tool towards gender equality?**

EC proposal for gender quotas in company boards is one of the rare tentatives of adopting a strong measure for gender equality in the European context. Positions on this topic vary from country to country, where - despite national differences in terms of women's representation - a common gender gap in company boards is shared. The research participants' answers portrayed on a micro level the most critical and crucial points of the gender quotas debate. By definition affirmative actions are supposed to be temporary reverse discriminations in favor of a specific minority - women in company boards in this case - which needs support in order to be equal to the majority members.

Gender quotas - as described in Chapter 4 - are controversial because on one side they try to establish substantive equality within a specific context, while on the other side they do not question the structure of that specific context. If they are not framed within a gender mainstreaming strategy they tend to become leveling out instruments rather than substantive equality instruments,

rooted in the traditional binary dialectic between equality and difference. Some respondents, such as Anette Svenningsen and Mr Cravero, for instance do not like gender quotas because they may focus just on women's quantitative representation rather than qualitative one, without producing the expected spill-over effect. Other participants, such as Maria Lustrì, Tina and Rosa Maria Amorevole (equal opportunity counselor of Emilia Romagna Region), considers affirmative actions a "necessary" instrument - more because of its strength rather than its efficacy - and a "great opportunity" for promoting "social equality". This inherent ambiguity of gender quotas for some participants has to be clarified through ad hoc report and monitoring activities.

Going beyond a positive or negative approach to affirmative actions, the general idea is that they are 'strong' instruments, useful to move towards gender equality in all Member states. This move is towards a specific kind of gender equality which for the majority of the respondents does not mean simply 'to reach the level of men' in quantitative terms. "Merit" and freedom of choice beyond the "double burden" play a key role for moving towards gender equality: "a woman should be free to reach whatever "level" she desires, according to her expertise, skills and education", Barbara Rita Barricelli, researcher in Computer Science at West London university, member of Girl Geek Dinner Milano, stressed.

From respondents' answers a different approach to equality emerged. It relies on differences and inequalities in gender relations as a starting point for the improvement of gender equality policy in the EU. Indeed, when gender equality agendas focus more on equality rather than differences they risk to reproduce and reinforce gendered assumptions, as described in the previous sections. Since equality is a relational concept it cannot be disconnected from its specific context, where gender relations are at stake. Respondents generally underlined the absence of a critical analysis of these power relations in EU context, where merit and personal skills should be recognized equally among all citizens and workers:

*"The direction has to be the one of equality and merit"* (my translation).

Francesca Rescigno,  
professor of public law at Bologna university

*"I think it is more effective, although more complex and longer, to work on the context. Gender equality should be the effect of other changes, not a direct target, if you know what I mean. I do not believe much in top-down decision (for example by imposing quotas), but in the opposite direction (change of cultural context that makes perceive as natural the presence of gender quotas on boards and institution). But it is a long road anyway"* (my translation).

Elisabetta Sani,  
Unioncamere Toscana



As a consequence women still continue to experience gender discriminations in the public and private sphere. For overcoming these discriminations the research participants proposed different solutions, from the adoption of affirmative actions in different contexts to the introduction of gender equality education programs in school. These proposals are considered useful tools for promoting a proper “cultural change” in society. Gender discriminations and inequalities, indeed, are perceived as structural characteristics, which affect not only the job market but also the broader European context, characterized by cultural, social, economic and political differences.

## **6.5 Proposals for promoting female entrepreneurship in the EU**

Since the research aims to contribute to the “cultural change” I asked to the research participants what their proposals for promoting female entrepreneurship in Europe are. The answers are related to the critiques presented above (lack of information, coordination, strong gender equality instruments, financial resources).

Among the proposals business education and financial support for women entrepreneurs play a key role. As proposed by Francesca Rescigno, Elisabetta Sani and Rosa Maria Amorevole financial interventions through funding and financial tools for women who want to run their own business are necessary for overcoming the ‘economic obstacles’ described in Chapter 5. These tools - as suggested by Morena Menegatti and Mr Cravero - should be combined with intervention in the educational sector, in order to overcome soft obstacles (see Chapter 5) and to improve women’s business knowledge. However the introduction of financial and educational interventions has to be framed within the EU context, characterized by contextual obstacles, such as women’s horizontal and vertical segregation, gender stereotypes and double burden. In order to overcome those obstacles research participants proposed broader information and awareness through the media of women entrepreneurs’ stories, actions for the reconciliation of family and job, creation of monitoring and coordinating bodies for female entrepreneurship.

Respondents’ proposals are similar to the proposals presented by the European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors and the European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs for improving female entrepreneurship in the EU analyzed in Chapter 5. These proposals reflect the strong need to overcome gendered barriers through a specific political approach, where gender mainstreaming is central.

## **Conclusions**

In the present Chapter I explored research participants' ideas and opinions about EU female

entrepreneurship policy, focusing on gender relations in private and public. From the analysis of respondents' answers what mainly emerges is the presence of specific obstacles, which – limit the increase of women entrepreneurs and their business. Since those barriers are gendered and structural, overcoming them requires interventions at two levels: the political one and the symbolic/imaginary one. Intervention at the political level implies the adoption of stronger measures such as gender quotas in the public sphere, where women continue to experience vertical and horizontal discriminations, while living below the glass ceiling. Gender quotas need to be accompanied by a general commitment towards gender mainstreaming, where reconciliation of family and work constitutes the first step for gender equality. Those political strategies can be effective together with a deeper change in the EU, which has to be done at the symbolic/imaginary level. As emerged from the analysis of EU documents (Chapter 5) and respondents' answers (Chapter 6) entrepreneurship and entrepreneur are still male-centered concepts, upon which policy – also gender equality policy - are structured. That male-centrality affects both the political and symbolic/imaginary level, preventing gender equality to become a reality. Women entrepreneurs, indeed, continue to be a 'minority' compared to men entrepreneurs because of the patriarchal gender relations upon which the EU is based. In order to challenge patriarchy we need to work from two fronts, by introducing gender equality actions on one side and by re-visioning gendered concepts on the other side. This double-front working may open up spaces for a more inclusive idea of entrepreneurship and entrepreneur, where difference/s rather than equality become the common denominator of political intervention. This approach - characterized by gender mainstreaming - may represent a good tool for avoiding the risk of othering women entrepreneurs. I will analyze the possibilities offered by this approach in the last Chapter.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusions

#### Introduction

Are EU female entrepreneurship policies othering women? In order to answer this research question I engaged with an exploration at three different sub-levels: legal, political and empirical. At each research level I investigated gender relations, gender regimes and the division between private and public sphere, with the attempt of understanding if the EU entrepreneurial discourse depicts women entrepreneurs as Other than men entrepreneurs. At all levels women continue to represent an apart category from the male one, upon which the ideal EU citizen is based. Together with migrants, young and old people, women constitute a targeted group of EU social and economic policy. This policy - despite its will of promoting a more inclusive idea of social and economic growth in the European context - frames women as a separate category in need of help because of its deficient otherness. The category of women is considered a monolith in opposition to the male, heterosexual, rational, independent, bodily-able, white and Western norm, according to the Marshallian paradigm of citizenship (Chapter 2). This paradigm is based on binary oppositions, where difference and otherness are conceived in negative terms. This approach is risky, since it produces and re-produces political ghettos, which reinforce rather than contest dominant hierarchical discourses. In the EU female entrepreneurial discourse this approach is even more evident, since both public and private sphere are involved. In this last Chapter I first summarize the main findings of the research at the three sub-levels. I then propose some recommendations for preventing, reducing and limiting the risk of othering women entrepreneurs in EU policy for female entrepreneurship.

#### 7.1 Legal level: resisting the male-breadwinner model

From the adoption of article 119 in the Treaty of Rome (1957), the EU policy for gender equality changed a lot. As described in Chapter 4 the EU moved from a prevalent equal treatment approach towards gender mainstreaming, thanks to the commitment of feminist movements and single women. Despite this move, gender equality is not a reality yet in the EU, where women experience gender discriminations and violence. *Why?* Because of the dominance of patriarchal male-centered gender relations, which characterize cultural and political discourses. At the legal level this patriarchal dominance is evident from the way in which gender, as an analytical category, and women, as targeted group, are considered and defined in policy. Gender is mainly adopted as analytical category in relations to women, with particular attention to their underrepresentation in

the public sphere. As analyzed in Chapter 4, the EU improved its strategy for gender equality, from directives related just to gender equality at the workplace towards provisions against sexual harassment. This improvement cannot be denied, but it is still gender-blind because of the lack of a strong and commune commitment for mainstreaming gender in EU policy.

The persistence of the Marshallian paradigm of citizenship and the male-breadwinner model influences the EU legal framework for gender equality, which constitutes a separate political area rather than a transversal one. The EU agenda for gender equality, hence, is an 'exclusive' sector, characterized by patriarchal gender relations and a strong division between public and private spheres. This 'exclusive' approach towards gender equality - which we can call 'gender spheres division approach' - does not question neither the Marshallian paradigm of citizenship nor the male-breadwinner model, at the expense of women's subordination in public and private.

EU family policy and employment policy, for instance, are both based upon the double burden experienced by women, which - despite its acknowledgment in some EU documents (Chapter 5) - represents still a separate topic, a women's concern. The EU gender spheres division approach is hence based upon women's othering and it is characterized by: the recognition of gender inequalities in quantitative terms, without any exploration of gender relations at stake; ad hoc policies for compensating women's deficient otherness; gender bias and assumptions, which influence policy making.

The policy developed by the gender spheres division approach may be useful for filling in gender inequalities and gaps in quantitative terms, but not for reducing the process of othering.

## **7.2 Political level: the in-betweenness of female entrepreneurship policy**

In the EU female entrepreneurship policy represents an in-between political space (Chapter 5), which takes place at the cross road of the equality political sphere and the labor market political sphere. This in-betweenness is the result of the gender spheres division approach adopted by the EU for gender equality.

As analyzed in Chapter 4 the EU legal framework for gender equality does not question the male-breadwinner model, reinstating strong patriarchal divisions between public and private sphere. Women entrepreneurs, indeed, must cope with their multiple roles in both spheres, where their gender difference – as women - is defined in opposing terms to the male norm. In the public sphere women entrepreneurs have to deal with strong male bias, because of the strong androcentricity of entrepreneurial sector. In the private sphere they have to perform their gender role of unpaid caregiver, according to patriarchal stereotypes, which are difficult to eradicate. This difficulty is linked to the EU approach towards female entrepreneurship, an important economic resource that

must not be wasted.

The EU looks at women entrepreneurs as precious human capital, which must be used in order to increase European competitiveness. For promoting female entrepreneurship the EU developed different instruments (Chapter 5), which focus mainly on soft and economic obstacles encountered by women in accessing the entrepreneurial sector. This focus is a first step towards the increase of women entrepreneurs. In order to succeed it has to challenge also contextual obstacles, such as horizontal and vertical segregation, gender relations and stereotypes in private and public. If the EU does not intervene in these specific obstacles, the current female entrepreneurship risks to become a political ghetto. This political ghetto will reinforce the definition of women as Other, preventing any possible change towards non-patriarchal gender relations in public and private sphere.

### **7.3 Empirical level: women entrepreneurs**

From research participants' answers (Chapter 6) the persistence of soft, economic and contextual obstacles experienced by women entrepreneurs was confirmed. The answers came from 14 research participants - policy-makers, experts and stakeholders interested in gender equality and female entrepreneurship across Europe – who answered via email and phone calls to a semi-structured questionnaire. What strongly emerged from participants' contributions is also the gendered and structural nature of these obstacles. Women entrepreneurs have less access to credit and more responsibility in the household compared to men entrepreneurs. Why? Because their roles as entrepreneurs and women challenge patriarchal gender relations at two levels: the political one and the imaginary one.

The majority of the respondents defined the concepts of entrepreneurship and entrepreneur referring to the dominant male-centered entrepreneurial imaginary. At the same time they acknowledged gender inequalities experienced by women entrepreneurs in their role as entrepreneurs and women in the public and private sphere. Because of these inequalities respondents claimed more political interventions in reducing the gendered and structural obstacles encountered by women entrepreneurs.

Among the proposals for reducing those obstacles there are gender quotas, reconciliation of family and work, the need for a concrete cultural change, which must involve the imaginary level as well. It is a cultural and political change towards a specific kind of gender equality, where binary oppositions and the process of othering are replaced by a non-negative approach towards difference/s.

How to move towards this cultural and political change? I present some recommendations in the

next section.

## **7.4 Recommendations**

The current EU strategy for female entrepreneurship is characterized by the gender spheres division approach, which - as described in section 7.1 - characterizes the general EU legal framework for gender equality. This approach is based upon patriarchal gender relations in the public and private sphere, two areas which are defined by oppositions. Both spheres are gendered according to a male-centered economy, where the role of economic production is dominant. This dominance relies on the unpaid reproductive work performed in the private sphere by women, who, in order to enter the public sphere, are required to conform to the male norm. Women's conformation to the male norm is accompanied by the reproductive work performed in the private sphere, which - rather than being a women's sphere - is an area of the Other. This dynamic is reinforced by current EU gender equality policy and, as a consequence, also by EU female entrepreneurship policy. In both policies women are defined as the Other to the male norm, upon which the Marshallian citizen and male-breadwinner model rely on. The othering of women in both areas is rooted in patriarchal gender relations, public gender regimes and gendered division between the public and private sphere. The persistence of the othering process undermines the entire EU gender equality agenda, which is supposed to overcome gender inequalities in favor of an equal society. A cultural and political change is hence needed. The question arises: how to stimulate it?

First of all by moving towards a gender mainstreaming approach. This approach (Chapter 4) extends the aims of gender equality policies to all political sectors, limiting the process of othering. It relies on the adoption of stronger measures, such as affirmative actions, and is characterized by a general commitment for gender equality in the private and the public sphere. In order to properly move towards this approach the EU has to use gender as an analytical category in different arenas of its policy-making. As cited above, the analytical category of gender enters the EU political discourse just in relation to women, reinforcing a gender spheres division approach and the othering process. Gender should become a proper analytical and political dimension. It should be used not just for comparing quantitative data (how much do women earn compared to men?), but as a political tool for structuring gender mainstreamed policies. At the moment some European institutions, such as FEMM Committee and the 'European institute for gender equality', already adopt gender as an analytical category, but their great work does not find proper space in the EU 'hard' politics, such as economic decision-making. Their role is more of monitoring and advice rather than policy-making. This situation results from the restricted space assigned to gender,

gender politics and gender research in the EU. The situation diverges from country to country. In Scandinavian countries, for instance, gender policies are more mainstreamed than in Southern European countries, where the analytical category of gender is not properly applied nor in decision-making neither in research. What the EU lacks, hence, it is a stronger and commune commitment for the recognition of gender as an analytical category.

Secondly, we need to reduce and overcome gendered oppositions between the public and the private sphere. Their dichotomous relation affects and interacts with EU economic and social policy, where the othering of women as unpaid caregiver and double burden workers is reinforced. The move towards a non-dichotomous relation between both spheres requires a double intervention, at the political and imaginary level. If we continue to depict and consider women as Other than men because of their sexual and gender differences we will not challenge the current patriarchal state. Hence we need a different approach towards difference, not in terms of otherness but in positive terms, as suggested by Scott (1988a).

The dichotomous relation between the private and the public sphere is the product of the Western philosophical tradition, which conceives difference in relation to equality. This relation is based upon two poles: equality is the positive pole, while difference is the negative one. This positive-negative relation is recurrent in all Western thinking, until post-structuralism, which started to contest it. In the footsteps of post-structural scholars and especially post-structural feminist scholars I propose another dynamic, in which difference is not the negative pole. It is not a matter of where to start first, but of how to relate concepts. Difference, and in this specific case gender difference, is what makes the relation possible, a relation among differences rather than a relation between equality and difference. This approach to difference represents the theoretical basis for re-visioning gender relations between public and private, where productive and reproductive responsibilities may be re-defined in non-male centered terms, non-female-centered, on the basis of men and women differences. These differences, which involve not only gender, may be the basis for a less androcentric discourse in EU policy, entrepreneurship and female entrepreneurship policy included.

Finally, combining the previous proposals, we would manage to change the Marshallian paradigm of citizenship. The adoption of gender mainstreaming approach, together with the use of gender as analytical category, the non-dichotomous approach to public-private division may challenge the phallogocentric structure of the Marshallian citizenship paradigm. This paradigm, as explored in Chapter 2, is gendered in male terms, according to patriarchal power relations in the public and private sphere. In Chapter 4 I presented the critiques of some feminist scholars to it, among which I want to underline the potentiality of the FEM project (Halsaa, Roseneil, Sümer 2012). The project proposal is based upon the six dimensions of citizenship - political, social,

economic, multicultural, bodily and intimate - which allow us to re-vision gender relations and gender regimes in public-private, beyond the male-breadwinner model. Especially the multicultural, bodily and intimate dimensions question the Marshallian paradigm, opening up space to a different conceptualization of citizen and citizenship, no more based upon the Western, independent, white, bodily-able, rational and heterosexual man. These three dimensions expand the borders of who is a citizen, including gender, ethnicity, sexuality, sexual orientation and the body as important co-dimensions of citizenship. This innovative approach towards citizenship is based upon a non-dichotomous approach towards difference, with the purpose of challenging the othering process, like the one experience by women entrepreneurs in Europe.

In order to contest this process I propose a collective engagement for a concrete cultural and political change, in favor of difference/s, as basic bricks and cement in building of every EU policy.



## Annex 1

### Research questionnaire (English)

The research questionnaire has been composed on the basis of the literature and the documents analyzed during the research process

“Female entrepreneurship in the European Union: are gender equality policies 'othering' women?”

Utrecht Universiteit, Università di Bologna  
Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies in Europe  
Viola De Sando

#### General information

Name:

Surname:

Job position:

Organization/company you work for:

Country:

Do you want your name and surname (or just one of them) to be shown in the research?

#### Questionnaire

There is no limit of words. Feel free to contact me for further explanations or if you want to clarify some aspects via e-mail or on the phone. You are welcome to add more information apart from the questions.

1. In your opinion what is entrepreneurship?
2. Who is an entrepreneur?
3. Are there any differences among men entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs?
4. Have you ever been part of projects/initiatives/studies promoting female entrepreneurship? If yes describe it/them.
5. Are there any inequalities among men entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs (ex: in education, access to financial instruments, conciliation between job&family, etc)?
6. In your country are there any national strategies/programmes/initiatives to support women entrepreneurs?
7. Are those strategies/programmes/initiatives efficient? Try to explain why they are in/efficient.
8. What is your perception and own ideas about the European Union?
9. The European Union has developed different actions in order to increase the number of women entrepreneurs in Europe (only 30% of entrepreneurs are women nowadays). Among those actions there are:
  - Strategy Europe 2020,

- European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs,
- Female network,
- Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors,
- Entrepreneurship action plan 2020.

Do you know any of those actions? If yes describe how you have known them and explain what do you think about it/them.

10. In order to increase the number of women on company boards the European Union is promoting affirmative actions. What do you think about them? Are they a good instrument for achieving gender equality?
11. What do you think about gender equality policies adopted in your country and in Europe?
12. Reaching the 'level of men' in the public sphere is a good goal or should we work in a different direction?
13. Are gender equality policies in Europe promoting equal rights among men and women in the public and private sphere? Try to explain your point of view.
14. What your country and European Union lack to increase the level of gender equality?
15. What are your proposals for promoting female entrepreneurship in your country and in Europe?
16. What do you think about this research?
17. Do you have any suggestions? What would be a plausible 'next step' for the research?
18. Would you like to receive the conclusions of the research?

Thanks for your collaboration.

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## Research questionnaire (Italian)

Il questionario di ricerca è stato composto sulla base della letteratura e dei documenti analizzati durante il processo di ricerca

“Imprenditoria femminile nell’Unione Europea: le politiche di eguaglianza di genere definiscono le donne come *altro*?”

Utrecht Universiteit, Università di Bologna  
Erasmus Mundus Master’s Degree in Women's and Gender Studies in Europe  
Viola De Sando

### Informazioni generali

Nome:

Cognome:

Posizione/mansione lavorativa:

Organizzazione / azienda per cui lavori:

Paese:

Vuoi che il tuo nome e cognome (o solo uno di essi) compaia nella ricerca?

### Questionario

Nelle risposte non vi è alcun limite di parole. Non esitate a contattarmi per ulteriori spiegazioni o se volete chiarire alcuni aspetti via e-mail o al telefono. L’aggiunta di ulteriori informazioni al di là delle domande è ben accetta.

1. Secondo te in cosa consiste l'imprenditorialità?
2. Chi è un imprenditore?
3. Ci sono differenze tra gli imprenditori uomini e donne imprenditrici?
4. Hai mai fatto parte di progetti / iniziative / studi per la promozione dell'imprenditorialità femminile? Se sì, descrivili / e.
5. Ci sono disuguaglianze tra imprenditori uomini e imprenditrici donne (es.: in materia di istruzione, accesso agli strumenti finanziari, la conciliazione tra lavoro e famiglia, ecc)?
6. Nel tuo Paese ci sono strategie nazionali / programmi / iniziative per sostenere le donne imprenditrici?
7. Si tratta di strategie / programmi / iniziative efficienti? Provate a spiegare il motivo per cui sono in / efficienti.
8. Quali sono le tue percezioni e idee in merito all’Unione Europea?
9. L’Unione Europea ha sviluppato diverse azioni al fine di aumentare il numero di donne imprenditrici in Europa (solo il 30% degli imprenditori sono donne al giorno d'oggi). Tra queste

azioni sono:

- Strategia Europa 2020,
- Rete europea di mentori per le donne imprenditrici,
- rete Fe:female,
- Ambasciatrici per l'imprenditoria femminile,
- Piano d'azione per l'imprenditorialità 2020.

Conosci queste (o alcune di queste) azioni? Se sì descrivere come li hai conosciuti e spiegare che cosa ne pensi.

10. Al fine di aumentare il numero di donne nei consigli di amministrazione l'Unione Europea sta promuovendo le azioni positive. Cosa pensi delle azioni positive? Sono un valido strumento per il raggiungimento della parità tra i sessi?

11. Cosa pensi delle politiche di parità di genere adottate nel tuo Paese e in Europa?

12. Raggiungere il 'livello degli uomini' nella sfera pubblica è un buon obiettivo o dovremmo lavorare in una direzione diversa?

13. Le politiche di uguaglianza di genere in Europa stanno promuovendo le pari opportunità tra uomini e donne nella sfera pubblica e privata? Cerca di spiegare il tuo punto di vista.

14. Cosa manca al tuo Paese e all'Unione Europea per aumentare il livello di parità tra i sessi?

15. Quali sono le tue proposte per la promozione dell'imprenditorialità femminile nel tuo Paese e in Europa?

16. Cosa pensi di questa ricerca?

17. Hai qualche suggerimento? Quale potrebbe essere un 'passo successivo' plausibile per la ricerca?

18. Vuoi ricevere le conclusioni della ricerca?

Grazie per la collaborazione.

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