

## **Transnational Migrant Entrepreneurship, Gender and Family Business**

### **Abstract**

Despite increased academic attention paid to migration flows in Europe, the gendered nature of transnational migrant entrepreneurial journeys within the family business context remains under-researched. We address this gap by investigating how transnational spaces enable women to challenge the dominant ideas about their roles, and claim legitimacy by developing branches of their family business abroad. Reporting extensive longitudinal evidence collected over a seven-year period, we showcase four biographical narratives of women operating transnational family businesses in the UK, which originated in Eastern Europe. Adopting this novel longitudinal approach, we provide insights into how these transnational migrant women entrepreneurs exercise individual agency to overcome structural constraints by developing strategies which prioritize their own business aspirations without fully sacrificing their family ties.

**Keywords:** family business; transnational migrant entrepreneurship; gender; transnational spaces; biographical narratives

## **Introduction**

Within the contours of transnational entrepreneurship research (Portes, Haller and Guarnizo 2002; Terjesen and Elam 2009; Urbano, Toledano and Ribeiro-Soriano 2011), there remains a paucity of scholarly attention paid to family businesses in general (Villares-Varela, Ram and Jones 2017) and the role of gender in particular. This is surprising given recent calls for a more nuanced understanding of the ‘heterogeneity of the context in which family firms operate’ (Wright, Chrisman, Chua and Steier 2014: 1042). We contribute to this research stream by focussing on transnational spaces as conduits for family business development taking place across national borders in at least two geographical locations (Drori et al. 2009; Urbano et al. 2011). Furthermore, whilst the number of women engaged in migration flows in Europe and throughout the rest of the world continues to increase, research to date neglects to explore fully the role of gender, underscoring men’s roles whilst failing to give credit to the role of women within transnational enterprises (Villares-Varela 2017).

Although women have been supporting family businesses for centuries (Minoglou 2007), women’s roles have tended to be gendered, unconsciously incorporated and reproduced within family businesses. Consequently, invisibility is synonymous with the narrative relating to women in family business (Cole 1997) with such invisibility due, in part, to the dearth of research attention afforded to them (Hamilton 2006). In addition, traditional gender ascribed norms, which define the professional and domestic responsibilities of women and men (Rowe and Hong 2000), have resulted in family business women assuming roles that are typically informal, loosely defined and generally unpaid (Danes and Olson 2003). This is even more so in the case of women in transnational migrant family businesses, who are often depicted as uneducated, illiterate and passive (Pio and Essers 2013).

Within this paper we focus on migrant women, who are operating in transnational family businesses, which originate in Eastern Europe and have recently extended operations to

the UK. These women are what Brzozowski, Cucculelli and Surdej (2017)'s refer to as transnational migrant entrepreneurs, in that they operate between home and host countries and crucially are recent arrivals to the new, host country. It is important to note that they differ to transnational diaspora entrepreneurs, who, whilst engaging in similar activities, represent second and third generation migrants (Elo 2016). The transnational migrant entrepreneurs who are the focus of this paper, by setting up business operations in the UK extend the geographical scope of their pre-existing family business operations from Eastern Europe. Therefore, we contend that these family businesses are transnational, operating in both home and host countries across 'dual social fields' (Drori, Honig and Wright 2009: 1001).

Despite recent large flows of migration to Western European countries over the past decades, within a UK context, 'new' migrants (Barnes and Cox 2007; Jones, Ram and Villares-Varela 2017) have rarely featured in contemporary debates (Barrett and Vershinina 2017). Within these such debates, detailed accounts of transnational migrant women operating family businesses remain even fewer (Hearn, Jyrkinen, Piekkari and Oinonen 2008; Marques, Santos and Araújo 2001). We address this gap in the literature by highlighting the important role of transnational spaces as conduits for women to challenge the dominant ideas about their roles, and claim legitimacy by developing branches of their family business abroad (Voigt-Graf 2004). By adopting a longitudinal biographical narrative approach (Halkias and Caracatsanis 2016), we showcase how women operating family businesses across transnational spaces negotiate and overcome gendered societally imposed norms emanating from their homelands.

Within this paper, we make the following theoretical contributions. First, we contribute to the transnationalism literature by demonstrating how women through extending family businesses across transnational spaces, reclaim their individual agency and overcome gendered societal norms in relation to entrepreneurial activity as well gender determined feelings of inferiority. Theoretically, we expose how transnational spaces have emancipatory potential

with regards to enabling these women to reclaim agency (Giddens 1988; Sorti 2014). Within the structural constraints of their homelands and the family businesses embedded there, the agency of these women was previously rendered impossible. However, exerting their agency enables these transnational migrant women business owners to prioritize their own business aspirations without fully sacrificing their family ties. Second, through our acknowledgement that family businesses are heterogeneous and are bound by context (Fletcher 2011), we offer insights into how family businesses operate transnationally, which has rarely been previously examined. Finally, we emphasise the need for better appreciation of the role of gender not only within the family business context, but more importantly, within family businesses operating transnationally through our empirical focus on the under-researched role of women in extending family businesses across transnational spaces.

The paper is structured as follows: we commence by outlining the rationale for our theoretical framework followed by a discrete analysis of the key constructs —the intersection of gender with transnational migrant family business. The following section presents our methodological rationale and method; this is followed by critical evaluation of our four biographical narratives. Finally, we put forward our contributions to theory, which coalesce at the intersection of transnational spaces, migrant family business and gender.

### **Transnational Migrant Family Business**

Whilst studies on migrant forms of entrepreneurship have underscored the value of the ‘home country’ in the lives of many migrant entrepreneurs (McKenzie and Menjivar 2011; Wilding 2006), interestingly transnational migrant entrepreneurs can be defined as ‘social actors who generate networks, ideas, information, and practices for the purpose of seeking business opportunities or maintaining businesses within dual social fields’ (Drori et al. 2009: 1001) of home and host countries. However, at this juncture, it is necessary to distinguish transnational

migrant entrepreneurs from transnational diaspora entrepreneurs. As Brzozowski, Cucculelli and Surdej (2017) indicate, transnational migrant entrepreneurs operate between home and host countries and have recently migrated. In contrast, transnational diaspora entrepreneurs, whilst engaging in similar activities, are indeed second and third generation migrants (Elo 2016). Whilst the literature on transnational migrant entrepreneurship has highlighted the duality of the everyday experiences of entrepreneurs operating across transnational spaces (Brzozowski et al. 2017; Drori et al. 2009; Igrashi 2015; Thai 2012; Yamanaka 2005), to date very little is known about the intersection of transnational migrant entrepreneurship and family business.

#### Families

are central to migrant-owned businesses with regards to the provision of family labour (Sanders and Nee 1996) and much needed loyalty and flexibility (Jones et al. 2017). Migrant-owned firms utilise their social positioning, ethnicity and culture (Koning and Verver 2013) to enable the positive accumulation of social capital from within co-ethnic networks (Drori et al. 2009) and from within the family unit (Arregle, Hitt, Sirmon and Very 2007). Therefore, central to our approach is the recognition that family relationships arise from a complex patchwork of human interactions, involving personal and wider family interests and unintended consequences, particularly pertinent to family businesses in which family members operate across transnational spaces. As Steier (2007: 1106) states, ‘many entrepreneurs are embedded in a social context that includes a family dimension. For these entrepreneurs, family represents a rich repository of resources: economic, affective, educative, and connective’. Despite this, the role of women in family businesses in general and migrant family businesses in particular remains under-researched (Villares-Varela 2017). To address these issues, we are informed by a structuration perspective (Giddens 1988) whereby structural factors have been seen to lead to an accumulation of disadvantages for certain societal groups, defined for instance by gender, race, social class and ethnicity. Within the field of migrant entrepreneurship, Rath and

Kloosterman (2000) provide a clear overview of these issues. However, more recently, Cederberg and Villares-Varela (2018) and Sorti (2014) specifically call for the development of theory of action, in order to better understand the role of individual agency within entrepreneurial activities across diverse groups. In responding to this call, we refer to agency as ‘active decision-making’ (Brettell and Kristoffer 2007: 384), or as factors that relate to individual characteristics (Rath and Swagerman 2016). Furthermore, the agency of individuals is intentional (Billett 2006; Cederberg and Villares-Varela 2018) and how individuals advance their agency represents a means to generate legitimacy for themselves within wider societal structures. Given our aim to investigate how transnational spaces enable women to challenge the dominant ideas about their roles, and claim legitimacy, we now turn to exploring how gender is conceptualised in the literature of transnational migrant family businesses.

### **Gender and The Transnational Migrant Family Business**

Rather than seeing the family merely involving blood and legal ties binding individuals together (Brannon, Wiklund and Haynie 2013: 108), family in this paper is understood as a socially constructed group (Von Schlippe and Frank 2013) with interconnections spanning country boundaries. The heterogeneity of family businesses includes recognition of the participation, consciously and often subconsciously, of specific individuals, such as parents, siblings, relatives, spouses, romantic partners and children (Nordqvist and Melin 2010), and the importance of how family businesses are perpetuated across multiple generations (Ward 2016).

Central to these processes is the gendered perspectives of the role of women, which to date remain under-researched, particularly in the context of transnational family businesses (Villares-Varela 2017). The dominant narrative tends to ignore the contextual influence of mainly patriarchal systems within which these family businesses operate, and the influence that gender may have on the way family businesses function. Such ‘gender blindness’ (Marlow and

Dy 2017) is often the outcome of family dynamics, which are deeply embedded within these businesses (Aldrich and Cliff 2003). Notions of solidarity, attributed to family members working in family businesses generally hide the underlying patriarchal relations and inequalities thereby disguising the role of women within family businesses (Campopiano, De Massis, Rinaldi and Sciascia 2017; Hytti, Alsos, Heinonen and Ljunggren 2017; Nelson and Constantinidis 2017). As such, the socially constructed invisible role of women in family businesses becomes replicated and reproduced across generations (Danes and Olson 2003). Indeed, invisibility continues to be a persistent feature of narratives pertaining to migrant women in family businesses, who are for instance unable to escape precarious employment as a result of their husbands, parents and brothers having control over their earnings (Villares-Varela et al. 2017). As such migrant women in family businesses continue to be depicted as victims, often viewed as uneducated, illiterate and passive (Pio and Essers 2013) rather than as individuals able to exercise their agency in order to change their circumstances (Villares-Varela 2017).

Within a nascent but burgeoning literature on women's involvement in family businesses (Campopiano et al. 2017), there exists three key strands deserving attention in this paper. First, women's presence in family businesses as visible actors can be explained by higher levels of formalization (Heinonen and Stenholm 2011), however the rigid rules and norms in terms of gender roles remain disadvantageous for women (Rothausen 2009). Second, critically, Lerner and Malach-Pines (2011) state that women's skills and social capital negatively affect their participation in the family business. Regarding governance issues, Van den Berghe and Carchon (2003), using an agency theory perspective, argue that within the father-daughter relationship, fathers will always prioritise the performance of the family business in contrast to their daughter who may not. Third, extant literature seeks to examine the role of culture as a contextual factor affecting women's role within family businesses

(Overbeke, Bilimoria and Perelli 2013). Gherardi's (2015) study in Northern Italy, depicts women as merely non-paid "help-mates" thereby re-iterating the embedded nature of gendered roles in constructing social categories that define women and their work practices. Despite these existing studies, the majority of scholarly attention on the role of gender within family businesses has focused on family businesses operating solely in one institutional space, rather than family businesses, operating across transnational spaces.

In the preceding discussion, we have illustrated that within transnational migrant entrepreneurship domain, limited scholarly attention has been paid to family businesses. Moreover, despite family businesses playing a critical role within migrant and transnational businesses, the role of women in such firms remains under-researched. Existing studies highlight the perpetuation of gendering within family businesses, in which women's roles are rendered invisible within embedded hegemonic, patriarchal structures. However, within this paper, we challenge such ascribed understandings, by arguing that transnational spaces enable transnational migrant women entrepreneurs to exercise individualized agency in order to challenge the imposed structures in which they live and work. We now turn our attention to methodological considerations underpinning this research.

### **Methodology**

Given our research aim, this paper adopts a qualitative interpretive methodology. By seeking to give 'voice' to women's lived experiences (Brush, De Bruin, Gatewood and Henry 2010), our chosen research design aligns with the call for more feminist sensitive research methodologies (De Bruin, Brush and Welter 2007). In keeping with such methodologies, we sought to conduct research 'with' or 'for' as opposed to 'about' women (Sprague 2016). Our four women participants formed part of a larger research project focussing on the everyday life experiences of migrants from Eastern Europe and their business aspirations in the UK. Out of twenty-three women business owners, only four women, those included in this paper, during



the research process indicated the importance of the family businesses in their home countries, in which they played a role prior to deciding to migrate to the UK. Table 1 outlines the composition and characteristics of the family businesses, which participated in this research.

### **INSERT TABLE 1**

Our enquiry drew longitudinal evidence from four biographical narratives, which were constructed over a seven-year period. We followed Halkias and Caracatsanis's (2016: 5) recommendation that empirical study of female immigrants' ability to develop new business ventures requires a "longitudinal or retrospective approach to include business life-cycle issues as well as biographical narration". In particular, biographical, longitudinal narrations enable the drawing out of common themes as well as recognition of temporal issues emerging from the life trajectories of both the researcher(s) and the participants. Such an approach was deemed appropriate in the unveiling of the dynamic and ever-changing characteristics of family relationships, in addition to the socio-cultural and economic contexts in which family business operate (Kevill, Trehan, Easterby-Smith and Higgins 2015). By constructing narratives over a seven-year period, involving multiple data collection points referred to as waves (See Table 2), we were able to engage with the four women and other family members on multiple occasions. We deciphered the meanings and the processes, through which women operating across transnational spaces, make sense of their activities, roles and the multiple transnational contexts in which they operate. In response to calls for greater methodological rigour (Debicki, Matherne, Kellermanns and Chrisman 2009), we engaged in a thorough analysis of the narratives. In so doing, we did not view the narratives as merely descriptions of "real" events (Warren 2004: 8) but rather as sense-making devices, constructed by the storytellers to aid an interpretation of their past life experiences. However, it is important to note that this

interpretivist methodology (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016) has the potential for an element of post-rationalization and self-presentation. Within the narratives, our respondents expressed strong attachment to the family business and defended business decisions. However, we see these processes as imperative in understanding the coherent and ongoing story of these individuals and their socially constructed identities and roles (Giddens 1991).

### **Research Context and Sample**

Context is critical to the examination of how transnational migrants operate businesses (Welter 2011). As researcher, research site and participants are intertwined, the researcher needs to be conscious of the importance of providing a full account of all salient dimensions (e.g. social, historical, political, economic, geographic etc.) of a setting as they are integral to the research process. Thus, context is much more than just a passing reference to the particular domain or setting in which a study has been conducted or as a means of justifying unusual and /or unique findings or to report theory-free research (Zahra and Wright 2011). Instead it is a critical, pervasive and dynamic influence on entrepreneurial propensity, attitudes and actions (Welter 2011). In short, ‘rather than being treated as a control variable, context becomes part of the story’ (Zahra and Wright 2011: 72).

In the UK context, over recent years, there has been an influx of migrants not only from war-torn countries (Edwards, Ram, Jones and Doldor 2016) but also from new EU member-states as well as other non-EU European countries. In this paper, we focus on the experiences of women migrants from the former Soviet Union, in particular from Russia, Ukraine and the Baltic states of Lithuania and Latvia. Whilst there has been some scholarly attention paid to the importance of socialist legacies (Smallbone and Welter 2001), for new migrants entering the UK from newly-accessed EU states in Central and Eastern Europe (Vershina, Barrett and Meyer 2011), little is known as to what extent such cultural legacies of a socialist past

reproduce gendered norms within the new institutional setting of the host country, namely the UK.

In order to explore this research gap, we adopted a purposive sampling strategy (Pratt 2009), whereby four family firms, operating in the UK, encompassing family members; founders and owner-managers remaining in the home countries and their siblings or children, now operating branches of the family business in the UK were selected. In order to corroborate contextual information about the family business, we undertook background interviews with the members of their family. Our sample was developed using well-established contacts with Eastern European migrant groups and community organisations within in the UK. For the purposes of this paper, we adopt Hollander and Elman, (1988: 152) definition of a family business whereby a family business is defined “as a business that is owned and managed (i.e., controlled) by one or more family members”.

In order to identify women migrants for inclusion in this research, it is important to recognize the historical influence of the socialist past within our explorations of family businesses emanating from Eastern Europe. During the period of socialist rule, private ownership was prohibited (Rehn and Taalas 2004) meaning that family businesses, within a formal context, could only emerge following the collapse of socialism across Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. An emergent stream of literature (Welter, Xheneti and Smallbone 2017) highlights the relevance of context, including institutional and economic factors impacting on societal transformations, enabling and often constraining enterprise and family business activity. Indeed, Remennick (2016: 2) calls for research highlighting the changing situation for women in Eastern Europe as ‘gender relations in immigrant families of traditional background have become more egalitarian as women enter labour markets and improve their education’. In particular, Remennick (2016) welcomes a focus on the family business context in this examination of gender, particularly for Eastern European migrant women, given the inherent and perpetuating conflict between

women's newly acquired roles as breadwinners, and their deference to men in their family.

## **Data Collection**

Unstructured interviews with the participants were utilised in order to generate rich insights across time and to construct biographical narratives of four women operating transnational family businesses in the UK, which originated in Eastern Europe. Interviews were conducted in both Russian and English by two members of the research team, who were fluent in the English and Russian word. Within this research project, the researchers were aware of their roles not as passive actors, and as such there was recognition of the intertwined nature of the researcher, the research site and the participants. Furthermore, the longitudinal nature of this research study aided the development of rapport and trust, which in turn facilitated the emergence of rich, biographical narratives. As such, it is critical to acknowledge researcher reflexivity within this form of research method (Golombisky 2006).

The unstructured informal interviews took place between 2008-2015 in waves (Miles 1979). These interviews were guided by a number of broad themes including individual's migration history; a brief history of the family business; its development and their personal input into it; and the respondent's current role within the family business, including their relationships with fellow family members (Vershina et al. 2011). Critically, we chose to engage in several points of interaction with our participants across the span of the seven year period in order to gain a richer and deeper understanding of the changes and transformations taking place in our participant's business, family and personal lives. We did not ask specific questions about the gendered roles of individuals. Instead, we used a narrative approach to examine the 'complexity of multiple experiences and social presentations' (Horowitz 2012: 1). As a result of spending considerable time in the field, we generated field notes, in the form of written notes, which complemented material collected during the interviews.

Participants specifically asked for the conversations not to be recorded due to the sensitive nature of the wider research project. We adhered to this wish and also anonymized all names of participants and their family businesses. The amount of time spent in the field with the women facilitated the opportunity for these individuals to reflect on their personal experiences in light of growing up and being associated with the family business in the host country and subsequently developing a branch of the business in the UK. During the research process, in an effort to ensure within-method triangulation (Bekhet and Zauszniewski 2012), in addition to interviews and informal conversations with these four transnational women migrant entrepreneurs on multiple occasions, the researchers also engaged in on-site observation of daily work routines and also family interactions within the business setting. Subsequently, our in-depth longitudinal qualitative enquiry, generated data from multiple sources, including internal documents, field notes and interviews with female migrant family members (see Table 2). Through this process, narratives emerged showcasing how gender, culture and migration history interplay with roles within family and business (Hamilton, Cruz and Jack 2016). Table 2 presents information on participants, their respective family businesses, data collection points and the nature and focus of conversations held.

## **INSERT TABLE 2**

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis was carried out by two members of the research team who were both highly familiarized with the narratives. Data analysis was an iterative, non-linear process during which data was compiled, disassembled and reassembled (Yin 2013). To ensure consistency of coding, we developed a coding manual, which included definitions of each category and examples (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch 2011). Coding sample text, checking coding consistency and revising the coding manual is an iterative process and, as such, was

continued until sufficient coding consistency was achieved by the research team (Zhang and Wildemuth 2009). Coding was undertaken on data from multiple sources, including internal documents, field notes and interviews with female migrant family members. We followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps to thematic analysis. The final data structure from all of these sources is illustrated in Table 3 which summarizes the key themes upon which the presentation of our biographical narratives is based.

### **INSERT TABLE 3**

#### **Our Biographical Narratives**

##### ***Svetlana – ‘The world will never value me until I value myself’***

Svetlana is a Latvian national and has lived in Birmingham for seven years. She is married to an engineer. Their two children live in Latvia with her mother. Svetlana owns a printing company with a branch now in Birmingham. The business was started by her father in Latvia ten years ago, where she previously worked. When she worked in the family business for her father, he never expressed interest in any of her ideas for expansion. During the first wave of interviews, Svetlana recalled how her mother when she worked in Latvia made jibes about her ‘being more interested in being a businesswoman than being a mother’, thus illustrating the embedded nature of female subordination within the home country's context and her entrepreneurial ambitions being suppressed.

However, when Svetlana decided to move to the UK, her father started to ask her to source new UK clients for his business. Initially, she did not want to do this, as she wanted to set up a fully operational branch of the business herself but she received very little support for this. She had always known that she had business acumen but never felt that she had the opportunity to realise her ideas in the family business in Latvia. Svetlana realised that her

family wanted to her to remain as the silent daughter who could be useful in earning some more money for the family business but nothing more.

During the later waves of data collection, Svetlana, reflected on the rollercoaster last few years of her life, and revealed how she felt ‘relief’ when she arrived in the UK. In Latvia, she had always known that she had the ability to run a business but felt constrained by family barriers, both explicit and implicit. Svetlana explained that although ‘my family of course is still there, they haven’t gone away’. Nevertheless, they have minimized their control over her. In the preceding interview, Svetlana had been emotional when she explained how she had insisted on setting up the branch of the family business in Birmingham. Although her parents told her the business would fail, she had persevered. The branch now is a success. Svetlana makes money and is proud that she can now send remittances to her family. Also, she has invested in the family business back home, as a result of this the client base has expanded and become more international. In her family, she learnt that ‘money talks’. Whilst her mother used to berate for not spending enough time with her children, in the final waves of interviews, Svetlana expressed how since earning money, such comments from her mother have ceased. During the multiple waves of data collection, which took place within the seven year research period, Svetlana spoke about becoming more empowered and how her voice has become increasingly listened to within family discussions. Moving to the UK enabled her to overcome difficulties and adversities within the family and also the silencing of her voice she faced as a woman. Now her father cannot stop telling people how the family business has gone transnational and how his daughter has been instrumental in this.

### ***Liza – ‘Finding the courage to become who I am’***

Liza is a Ukrainian and has lived in the West Midlands for nearly ten years. Liza comes from a traditional Soviet family. During the first wave of interviews, Liza talked about how her

father worked in the Army and her mother worked as a kindergarten nurse. Liza studied marketing at university and dreamed about starting her own business. Liza had tried to set up a small interior design business online but this was unsuccessful. Her father died, and Liza took sole responsibility for looking after her ailing mother, which prevented her from developing her business. Indeed, Liza felt that her entrepreneurial aspirations were ignored. Liza states that although her older brother, Aleksei, gave moral support, he never spent time helping their mother. Aleksei was given money by their parents to develop his car business and Liza helped out when she could. Their father had always instilled the importance of the man as 'breadwinner' and the woman as 'caretaker' of the children. Such traditional values have stayed with Liza, 'I love Aleksei and I understand why he didn't help with looking after mother. Aleksei had his own family responsibilities, trying to develop his car business'. Liza had internalised the societal expectations of female subordination and kept her personal dreams silent.

When her mother died, Liza realized that she did not have anything holding her back in Ukraine. An opportunity arose to come to the UK through a friend, Mariya, who was in the UK and invited Liza to join her. Initially, Liza learnt English at evening classes and working for Mariya. However, Liza realized that there were opportunities in the UK to develop her brother's business. She started exporting cars to her brother's firm in Ukraine. In the second waves of interviews, Liza explained how happy she felt recalling the first Skype call with her brother about the business idea. He would never have guessed that his little sister would be interested in cars, despite helping him previously in Ukraine. At first, Aleksei was reluctant and sceptical. 'He has always looked down at me as a little girl. A business plan was a real surprise to him!' With the passing of time, Aleksei began to see the opportunities, and realised that sourcing stock from the UK was very beneficial to his business. In a follow-up interview, Liza talked about registering the business in the UK and how a real partnership with her brother



has developed. Liza realised that second hand cars in UK are very cheap because the market internally is saturated. However, she knew that demand in Ukraine is huge. As such, their business exporting cars took off, using Alexei's networks of middlemen in Germany. Liza now employs four people and is proud of her achievements. Liza explains that her business provides 'money to send home for presents for her nephew and niece in Ukraine' yet she feels that her business is more than just making profit. It has meant realising her personal entrepreneurial ambitions. In the final wave of interviews, Liza was proud that 'she can stand on her own two feet' without the support of her husband, who she married four years ago. Furthermore, she recalls with pride how her brother has now incorporated some of some of the operational procedures she has introduced into the UK branch within the family business at home. He sees her not only as family, but also as a business partner. They are already planning to expand operations to Ireland. She has grown in confidence as she has to overcome pre-existing societal norms and expectations from her homeland and upbringing. Whilst Aleksei used to see Liza as his little sister, now she feels equal to him. He now calls her for advice, not just on the family car business but on other business matters. He also introduces her to potential customers which has helped their business in the UK to prosper further.

***Luda - 'Glue that patched the family back together'***

Luda is Lithuanian and has lived in the UK for eight years. Luda is married and has two boys who live with their grandmother in Lithuania. In the first wave of interviews, Luda recounts her childhood, informing how her family had several grocery stores in Vilnius which she worked in as she grew up. She enjoyed helping her parents. Whilst studying branding at university, Luda turned to her parents and outlined her plans for developing the family business. Luda recalls the glare that her father gave her for daring to 'question' the way the family business was run. Moreover, her older brother, Maksim, was afforded more authority

in managing the family business. Luda was silenced and the silencing from her family members continued. Luda and her husband decided to migrate to the UK. In the second wave of interviews, Luda expressed that she anticipated the negative reactions of her family to this decision; not only was she the black sheep for suggesting ideas about the family business, but now she was talking about migrating to the UK. Surprisingly, she recalls, ‘they didn’t hit the roof’. The only thing her father said was ‘I’ll give you six months and you’ll be back home’. Remembering this comment so freshly in her mind, Luda says she felt even more motivated to migrate in defiance of her family’s wishes.

In the third wave of interviews, Luda now runs two grocery stores in Leicester, importing products through her family business in Vilnius. Luda could not stop smiling when she recalled how ‘the penny started to drop’ with both her father and also Maksim upon realizing the money she was earning. ‘I was the silly little girl daring to tell her parents how to run their business’. In the last two years, Luda has started to export some UK branded products to her family shops in Vilnius. They have been a huge success and provided good profits for her parents back home. Luda explains how she has used both Lithuanian and also Polish supply chains to keep the costs down and make a good profit. In the final wave of interviews, Luda was incredibly proud that she had managed to set up a solid business, despite the early constraints from her family. She sees her business endeavour as the ‘glue’ that holds her family together. ‘When I first came to Leicester, my mother scolded me for leaving my children with her in Lithuania. Now she realizes that all is good. She spends her time watching grandchildren grow up and her daughter is earning good money for the family’.

### ***Yuliya - ‘Finding internal strength’***

Yuliya is Russian and has lived in the UK for over ten years. In the first wave of interviews, Yuliya spoke at length about how she came to London as a student and met her husband Max,

a Lithuanian. They have two children and work in a branch of Max's family business, which they set up in the UK a few years ago. This decision was not an easy one to make for Yuliya. Yuliya's parents had pleaded with her to return home to Russia after finishing university. They had provided both financial and emotional support for her in the UK, but wanted Yuliya to also be eternally grateful to them for that. Yuliya recounts how her father had found her an appropriate job within his friend's business in Russia. However, Yuliya's worldview had changed whilst at university. She did not want her father to control every step in her life. She had met Max but also she had realised that she wanted to become independent financially. In Lithuania, Max had set up a web-hosting business in the late 1990s, employing over twenty people, including three of his extended family members. When Max moved to the UK, he had set up a branch of the business, without consulting with anybody. After meeting Yuliya, she had soon become one of the Directors of the UK business. In a follow-up interview, Yuliya recounts the disputes which emerged with Max's family in Lithuania about ownership of the business. Although Max had set up the business back home, his parents and his uncle had provided the money. Max was bombarded with phone-calls from his parents and his uncle accusing him of not consulting with them and explaining how his uncle had plans for his son to take over the family business from Max. In a later interview, Yuliya expressed that she can now see how this period of change has made her relationship with Max stronger. The fact that they stayed together and established the UK branch of his family business shows their immense dedication to the business and loyalty for one another. Yuliya was very proud of her husband. She knew how his family had tried to interfere in their marriage and in their business. She knew how Max's parents and his influential uncle had thought that she was taking 'Max's ear' away from them and manipulating family firm control. They did not want to recognise Yuliya's contribution to the business. In response, Max had always defended Yuliya which had given her self-confidence. As she says, at work 'Max sees me as his business partner. It is not

important that I am his wife or whether I am a man or a woman, he can see what I bring to the business'. Yuliya does not feel invisible anymore. In contrast, she feels that her voice is listened to and respected.

Recently, Yuliya and Max have invested large monies into the family business in Lithuania, buying office space and recruiting young software developers. They realised that there is huge demand in the UK for these services, but outsourcing them to Lithuania where wages are much lower, would be profitable. They turned to Max's parents and his uncle and they proposed that Ivan, Max's uncle's son would lead the operation back home. Such a move has worked commercially but also settled family discord. Yuliya has a great working relationship with Ivan. They are already thinking about setting up another office in Estonia.

In the final wave of interviews, Yuliya explained how through time her relations with her parents have improved. Her parents now respect their daughter, and tell relatives and friends back home about their daughter who is a business owner in the UK and is also raising two daughters. Yuliya is happy that she is viewed as a business person in her own right now, not only as 'Daddy's little girl'. She now feels empowered.

## **Discussion**

In terms of the theoretical implications of these narratives, there are a number of emerging insights that echo existing knowledge of how migrant family businesses function. Our findings demonstrate the continuance of embedded patriarchal familial relations in family firms operating in post-socialist spaces (Remennick 2016). Our four in-depth biographical narratives demonstrate the embeddedness of female subordination and invisibility (Pio and Essers 2013), the perpetuation of societal gender blindness (Marlow and Dy 2017; Villares-Varela 2017), and the sustained silencing of women's voices within the 'home' institutional context.

However, crucially, our narratives showcase how despite these constraints from their home countries, these four women managed to find ways to overcome the embedded societal expectations placed on their gender. Through the proactive processes of migrating to the UK, settling and then setting up branches of existing family businesses, these women have exercised individual agency (Sorti 2014) to drive forward the family businesses transnationally.

### ***Overcoming Female Subordination and Invisibility***

We uncovered novel and counterintuitive findings that inform our theory development. As a consequence of globalization, and the resulting opportunities offered by transnational enterprise development (Bagwell 2008; Brzozowski et al. 2017), these women have challenged existing conceptualizations of their roles within their families as well as within the wider society. Indeed, they become ‘Jacquelines of all trades’ (Tegtmeier, Kurczewska and Halberstadt 2016) by running a business while fostering their familial relationships through reciprocal arrangements whereby the family provides childcare and the daughter sends remittances to invest in the family business based in the home country (McKenzie and Menjívar 2011). The refashioning of their maternal identity involves a recognition and incorporation of the mother’s ability to engage in entrepreneurial activity and become a ‘breadwinner’ (Remennick 2016; Yamanaka 2005) as well as her participation in more traditional “mothering” activities such as childcare (Thai 2012). Our biographical narratives demonstrate that transnational spaces indeed have the potential to act as emancipatory avenues for women to not only overcome existing constraints and develop their own entrepreneurial activities but also act as vehicles for these women to redefine their positions within their families and family businesses. Such a redefinition is intentional (Billett 2006) and also provides legitimization of their newly found roles as businesswomen within their families and family businesses. Furthermore, transnational spaces act as a catalyst in accelerating this legitimization process for

women, who perhaps otherwise would not have achieved this if they had decided to stay in their family business in the home country.

### ***The Emancipatory Potential of Transnational Spaces***

The richness of the data generated through our four biographical narratives showcases the heterogeneity of composition of family businesses (Wright et al. 2014) in today's globalised world and the prevalence and recognition of 'families' within family businesses (Randerson et al. 2015). Moreover, by adopting this more inclusive perspective on family business, we highlight the scope and opportunity to shine a light on the role of mothers, daughters, wives and sisters within family business arrangements. Moreover, our data highlights the critical importance of context and the need for studies not to limit focus on one institutional setting, as previously argued (Welter et al. 2017; Welter 2011), but rather to uncover patterns across transnational spaces (Drori et al. 2009). Such an approach will illuminate spaces for entrepreneurial women to challenge and overcome the existing conceptualizations of their roles. One might argue that the transnational space may represent a level playing field for women, similar to the role of online enterprise, outlined in Dy, Marlow and Martin (2017), by diminishing the constraints of familial ties. Whilst existing theory underlines how the new host environment may indeed impose other constraints on migrants, nevertheless, our findings demonstrate how women are able to utilise individual agency (Cederberg and Villares-Varela 2018; Sorti 2014) to achieve their business aspirations and in doing so, overcome existing constraints.

### ***Transmission of Cultural and Familial Values across Transnational Spaces***

It is critical that the stories of these transnational migrant women are given holistic consideration and not viewed only as an 'escape' of implicit and embedded gender stereotypes

by emancipation from the dominant patriarchal structures in place (Remennick 2016). We find that the embedded nature of cultural and familial values are of continued significance to these women, which underscores the critical intersection of gender, migration histories and family relations (Essers and Benschop 2009; Hytti et al. 2017). Our narratives generate insights into how women gain credibility and legitimacy through their entrepreneurial endeavours (Marlow and McAdam 2015). Our empirical findings also highlight that in concurrence with developing their businesses in the UK, these women act as the glue that binds their families together. As such, we uncover the unexpected finding that emotional family ties and finance based reciprocity can have a cohesive influence on family members despite such members being dispersed across transnational spaces. We showcase how these daughters, wives, sisters and mothers develop ways to shed patriarchal ascribed feelings of inferiority, while also uncovering a way to contribute to their families and gain respect and visibility (Pio and Essers 2013) as credible businesswomen within the family and wider society.

## **Conclusion**

In recent years, the influx of migrants to the UK from Eastern Europe has attracted much scholarly attention (Barrett and Vershinina 2017; Roman 2014), including studies focusing on how transnational migrants attempt to develop entrepreneurial ventures in the new host country. However, within this nascent body of knowledge, there has hitherto been a dearth of academic scrutiny of the gendered nature of transnational migrant entrepreneurial journeys especially within the family business context. This paper addresses this research gap by investigating how transnational spaces enable women to challenge the dominant ideas about their roles, and claim legitimacy by developing branches of the family business abroad. Accordingly, we focussed upon transnational women migrant entrepreneurs operating branches of family businesses in the UK, which originated in Eastern Europe. Aligning with

this focus, we adopted a longitudinal qualitative approach, involving four biographical narratives collected in waves over a seven-year period, in order to explore how these women migrant family business owners were able to negotiate gendered societally imposed norms across transnational spaces. This longitudinal stance revealed the importance of transnational spaces in acting as arenas in which women have the opportunity to reclaim their voices and shed their invisibility. Whilst previously their voices had been suppressed, the transnational spaces in which they now operate, enable them to re-negotiate gender determined feelings of inferiority.

Within this paper, we make the following theoretical contributions. First, we argue that transnational spaces can act as a conduit for female members of the family business to challenge existing patriarchal structures, embedded within the family business values. We highlight the critical importance of the process by which these women exercise individual agency. Furthermore, developing the work of Giddens (1988) on structuration and the inter-relationships between structure and agency, we find that transnational spaces remove specific structural constraints and at the same time enable women to unleash their individual agency in respect to entrepreneurial endeavour. Our participants find ways to gain confidence, respect, legitimacy and credibility as businesswomen, from their family members back home. Such a paradigm shift evoked by self-realization during the development of their entrepreneurial ventures in the UK, would not have been achieved without the acceptance and support of the family business based in their home country. Second, we provide a more nuanced understanding of family business heterogeneity by illustrating how context, and its spatial and institutional influences across transnational spaces, affects family businesses and their members. We argue that family business is never context-less (Fletcher 2011). Hence, we extend the theoretical understanding of the critical role of spatial contexts within family business research (Wright et al. 2014) to include transnational spaces. By accommodating spatiality in the analyses of migrant entrepreneurship, this paper showcases



the critical role of transnational enterprise as a space in which women can realise their business capabilities. Third, in acknowledgement of Nelson and Constantinidis's (2017) call for better accommodation of gender within family business research, we provide novel insights of the intersections of family business research with gender and migration history. Indeed, by focusing our attention upon four biographical narratives of women operating transnational family businesses in the UK, which originated in Eastern Europe, we were able to look beyond the normative ascriptions of gender stereotypes that define women's roles in family businesses as silent and invisible (Pio and Essers 2013; Villares-Varela 2017). Indeed, such an approach (Siggelkow 2007) enabled us to uncover the proactive engagement of women in driving their family businesses forward across transnational spaces. More importantly, we reveal that as a consequence of these women developing the family business across transnational spaces, such efforts have the potential to generate and maintain close family relations.

Finally, methodologically, by adopting a longitudinal, biographical narrative approach, rarely adopted in scholarly work in this area, we showcase how utilising such approaches can give participants 'voice', and in doing so can generate much-needed insights into the under-researched role of gender within transnational family businesses. Our discussion suggests multiple avenues for future work to address some of the limitations of this study. Within this paper, we have exposed the emancipatory potential of transnationalism spaces for female transnational migrant entrepreneurs. As such, there is the opportunity for future research to adopt entrepreneurship as a emancipation lens which can unpack this further (Jennings et al. 2016; Rindova et al. 2009). Second, future research could adopt an intersectional lens (Crenshaw 1997) to examine in more depth the multifaceted nature of gender at the intersection of space, history, migration and family based settings, which is currently lacking in transnationalism and family business research. Third, further studies could look across different

nationalities and ethnicities, as well as across disparate social classes in various societies, and across different generations, in order to examine the influence of gender on the development of transnational enterprise and potentially the importance of temporal dimensions. Finally, although the use of longitudinal biographical narratives offers an opportunity to discover new insights about how family businesses function across transnational spaces, nevertheless, it is also important to acknowledge the importance of researcher reflexivity within this form of research method (Golombisky 2006).

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**Table 1: Composition of Family Businesses**

<b>Participant Nationality</b>	<b>Nature of Family Business</b>	<b>Members of the Family in Home country</b>	<b>Members of the family in the UK</b>	<b>Original Family Business When Established and by whom</b>	<b>Branch in the UK established and their role</b>
<b>Svetlana</b> Latvian	Printing Company	Child, Child Mother, Father, Sister Tatyana ( in Latvia)	Husband Based in Birmingham, UK	By Father in 1998	In 2007 Director of UK branch
<b>Liza</b> Ukrainian	Car Sales Company	Father (deceased) /Mother (deceased) Brother Aleksei, Aleksei's Wife and their children (In Ukraine)	Husband Vladimir in Birmingham, UK	By brother Aleksei in 1995	In 2005 Director of UK branch
<b>Luda</b> Lithuanian	Grocery Stores	Child, Child, Father, Mother, older brother Maksim, younger brother Artem (in Lithuania)	Husband Based in Leicester, UK	By Father in 2003	In 2008 Director of two UK stores
Yuliya Russian	Web-design Business	Mother and Father (in Russia), Husband's parents and Uncle (in Lithuania)	Husband Max (Lithuanian), Child, Child, in Sheffield, UK	By husband and his uncle in 1990s	In 2004 Co-Director

**Table 2: Interactions with Participants and their Family Business Members**

<b>Nature of the Family Business</b>	<b>Members of Family Business participating in interactions</b>	<b>Interviews undertaken with / Period of engagement</b>	<b>Data Collection Waves</b>
<b>Printing Company</b>	Svetlana	<b>2008-2014</b> Svetlana Husband Sister Father and Mother in business	<b>Total: 7 waves</b> 3 waves 1 wave 1 wave 2 waves
<b>Car Sales Company</b>	Liza	<b>2008-2015</b> Liza Husband Brother Aleksei and his Wife in business	<b>Total: 5 waves</b> 3 waves 1 wave 1 wave
<b>Grocery Stores</b>	Luda	<b>2009-2014</b> Luda Husband Brother Maksim in business	<b>Total: 5 waves</b> 3 waves 1 wave 1 wave
<b>Web-design Company</b>	Yuliya	<b>2009-2015</b> Yuliya Husband Husband's parents in business Husband's uncle in business	<b>Total: 6 waves</b> 3 waves 1 wave 1 wave 1 wave

Table 3: Data Coding Structure

Participant's Story	First order themes and Illustrative quotes	Second order themes
<p>Svetlana's story</p> <p><b><i>"The world will never value me until I value myself"</i></b></p>	<p><b>Societal expectations</b> - <i>'being more interested in being a businesswoman than being a mother'</i></p> <p><b>High level of expectations on UK branch</b> - <i>'my family could only see the pound sterling signs'</i></p> <p><b>Moving abroad</b> - <i>'relief' coupled with sense of freedom I felt when I arrived in the UK'</i></p> <p><b>Importance of cultural and familial relations</b> - <i>'my family of course is still there, they haven't gone away' and 'money talks'</i></p> <p><b>Reciprocal arrangements</b> - <i>'Mum looks after my two boys, and now that I can send money back, it is all ok'.</i></p>	<p>Subordination of women and their invisibility</p> <p>Societal gender blindness</p> <p>Realising self-worth</p> <p>Learning to manage family relationships through emotions and financial reciprocity</p> <p>Family based reciprocal arrangements of childcare provision</p>
<p>Liza's story</p> <p><b><i>"Finding the courage to grow and become who I am"</i></b></p>	<p><b>On woman's and man's role</b> - <i>'the man being the 'breadwinner' and protector and the role of the woman was to bring up the young'</i></p> <p><b>Who looks after the elders</b> - <i>'I understand why he didn't help with looking after mother much. Aleksei had just got married and had his own family responsibilities'</i></p> <p><b>Challenging the stereotypes</b> - <i>'He has always looked down at me... A business plan was a real surprise to him!'</i></p> <p><b>Managing the familial relations</b> - <i>'Money to send home for presents for her nephew and niece in Ukraine'</i></p> <p><b>Realising self-worth</b> - <i>she wasn't just a 'girl from the village'</i></p>	<p>Existence of embedded patriarchal familial relations in family firms</p> <p>Driving business ambition from the UK</p> <p>Gaining Confidence</p> <p>Finding a voice</p>
<p>Luda's story</p> <p><b><i>"A glue that patched the family back together"</i></b></p>	<p><b>Over-stepping the mark</b> - <i>'I was made to feel like a traitor for daring to 'question' the family business'</i></p> <p><b>Not having a voice</b> - <i>'I was the silly little girl daring to tell her parents how to run their business'.</i></p> <p><b>Not being taken seriously by family</b> - <i>'they didn't hit the roof .... I'll give you six months and you'll be back home'.</i></p> <p><b>Change in perceptions about her abilities</b> - <i>'the penny started to drop'</i></p>	<p>Having no voice heard within the 'home' institutional context</p> <p>Realising that things needed to change</p> <p>Moving abroad to realise her business aspiration</p> <p>Gaining confidence</p>

	<p><b>Societal expectation of roles</b> - <i>‘When I first came here, my mother scolded me for leaving my children with her’</i></p> <p><b>Financial reciprocity</b>- <i>‘Mum spends her time watching her grandchildren grow up and her daughter is earning good money for the family’.</i></p>	Supporting family back at home financially
<p>Yuliya’s story</p> <p><b>“Finding internal strength”</b></p>	<p><b>Family’s support with strings attached</b> - <i>‘It was anticipated that I would return home, and when I did not, I realised that there were strings attached’</i></p> <p><b>Disapproval of the choice of husband and marriage</b> – <i>‘He was Lithuanian, not from our circle’</i></p> <p><i>‘Max’s family did not like me, and saw me as trouble’</i></p> <p><b>Choosing to take control</b> – <i>‘Max and I wanted to run the business from the UK, we wanted to be in control ourselves.’</i></p> <p><b>Complexity of family relations</b> - <i>‘Max’s uncle was particularly unhappy, as all our efforts were being thwarted by the bickering of the family in Vilnius’</i></p> <p><b>Gaining credibility through her business</b> – <i>‘Parents now respect me and tell the relatives and friends about their daughter who is a business owner and a great mother’.</i></p>	<p>Embedded nature of subordination of women and daughters</p> <p>Imposed feelings of guilt and being ungrateful</p> <p>Gaining credibility in the eyes of family members</p> <p>Learning how to manage complex familial relations at a distance</p> <p>Becoming a “Jacqueline of all trades”</p>