

A multi-voiced account of family entrepreneurship research: expanding the agenda of family entrepreneurship

Agenda of family
entrepreneurship

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Abstract

Purpose – This conceptual, multi-voiced paper aims to collectively explore and theorize family entrepreneurship, which is a research stream dedicated to investigating the emergence and becoming of entrepreneurial phenomena in business families and family firms.

Design/methodology/approach – Because of the novelty of this research stream, the authors asked 20 scholars in entrepreneurship and family business to reflect on topics, methods and issues that should be addressed to move this field forward.

Findings – Authors highlight key challenges and point to new research directions for understanding family entrepreneurship in relation to issues such as agency, processualism and context.

Originality/value – This study offers a compilation of multiple perspectives and leverage recent developments in the fields of entrepreneurship and family business to advance research on family entrepreneurship.

Keywords Family entrepreneurship, Family business, Process, Context, Multi-voiced, Multiple perspectives

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

This multi-voiced paper came to life as an open dialogue among entrepreneurship and family business scholars interested in understanding, investigating and theorizing entrepreneurship-related phenomena within business families and family firms. We, A, B and C, invited contributions of short texts reflecting on family entrepreneurship. We asked, “What (topic, methods, issues) do you find most important to study in regards to family entrepreneurship

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and why?” because little is known about *emergence* and *becoming* in the context of business families and family firms. Indeed, we noted this in the Call for Papers for the special issue in which this article resides:

The aim of this special issue is to draw attention to the emergence and becoming of family businesses and the actualizing of entrepreneurial behaviours, identities and projects in already existing family businesses. The Guest Editors encourage submissions of theoretical and empirical contributions addressing the topic of family entrepreneurship with a focus on processes and practices relative to how family members, couples and families do entrepreneurship. Steyaert (2007a, b, p. 453) coined the notion of entrepreneurship to call for more processual inquiries in the field of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is a processual, material, and relational phenomenon (Champenois *et al.*, 2020; Helin, 2011; Helin and Jabri, 2016; Hjorth, 2014; Hjorth and Reay, 2018) leading to the creation of new organizations (Gartner, 1993; Johannisson, 2011). We recognize that “familiness” does not always pre-exist entrepreneurial practices but also emerges through the process of entrepreneurship. We call for more processual inquiries in the field of family entrepreneurship, within an ontology of becoming (Chia, 1995). We think that this perspective of combining entrepreneurship and family business is unexplored and requires further theoretical and empirical explorations.

After receiving the invited texts, we reflected on how to arrange them and decided to organize these contributions within three sections, each dedicated to a particular key aspect of family entrepreneurship: (1) agency, (2) process and (3) context. Each aspect is supported by distinct arguments from scholars representing different disciplinary perspectives. In so doing, we aimed to orchestrate a focused dialogue among texts, making visible commonalities as well as differences in perspectives on family entrepreneurship. Our aim is for readers to be inspired by this colourful, vibrant mosaic of ideas and insights about future directions for research on this topic.

2. Problematizing entrepreneurial agency: who engages with family entrepreneurship?

The neoliberal approach to entrepreneurship theorized the individual entrepreneur as the main protagonist of the entrepreneurial process (Gartner, 1988). This perspective of a separate agent carrying out intentional actions to achieve entrepreneurial objectives is visible in the persistent interest over the last decades for entrepreneurial motivations (Murnieks *et al.*, 2020) and intentions (Donaldson, 2019), assessed at the individual level. Scholars have criticized this over-individualized perspective of entrepreneurial action and offered an alternative, socialized view of entrepreneurship as a collective phenomenon (Iurchenko *et al.*, 2023). The notion of context (Welter and Baker, 2021) highlights the importance of embeddedness (Bichler *et al.*, 2022; Jack and Anderson, 2002) for both founders and their companies, which triggers an interest in collective agency as enacted within entrepreneurial teams (Lazar *et al.*, 2020), networks (Lefebvre *et al.*, 2015) and communities (Buratti *et al.*, 2022). This latter perspective of entrepreneurship, which takes a process approach and a less individualistic view of the phenomenon, fits the context of business families engaging with entrepreneurship, as evidenced in the following contributions.

2.1 Understanding family characteristics: a promising pathway for advancing the study of family entrepreneurship—by Joshua J. Daspit

Family businesses are the most common form of enterprise worldwide (Miller and Le Breton-Miller, 2005). Given their ubiquitousness, the scholarly understanding of family firms has relevant applications and has led to an impressive growth in the field of family business research (Rovelli *et al.*, 2021). As the field has evolved, research has advanced beyond explaining differences between family and nonfamily firms and now has an increased focus on examining family-firm heterogeneity (Daspit *et al.*, 2021).

When considering family firms, the family has a notable impact on the firm (Payne, 2018). Given this level of influence, it is not surprising that the differences among families affect the differences observed in family-firm goals, behaviours and outcomes (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Dyer, 2006; Rogoff and Heck, 2003). Despite the importance of the family, though, our understanding of family differences—and the effects of such differences on the family firm—remains underdeveloped (Jaskiewicz and Dyer, 2017). Even further, less is known about how such differences affect the family's entrepreneurship, which is the process of how family members and families “do” entrepreneurship (Steyaert, 2007a, b).

The family unit often has a fundamental role in supporting or stifling entrepreneurial behaviours (Bettinelli *et al.*, 2014). For instance, families with an entrepreneurial orientation are more likely to create transgenerational value (Zellweger *et al.*, 2012a, b) by, in part, serving as a source of capital for kin and their entrepreneurial pursuits (Estrada-Robles *et al.*, 2021). Further, successful role models in entrepreneurial families can enhance entrepreneurial behaviours (Kenyon-Rouvinez, 2001) while family members who experienced entrepreneurial failure may hinder entrepreneurial actions (Mungai and Velamuri, 2011) [1]. In short, the family impacts the entrepreneurship of its members. Therefore, a better understanding of the differences among families is a promising pathway for unleashing new insights into how families practice entrepreneurship in family firms.

Extending on Payne's (2018) framework, which outlines the linkages between the family and the business, Neubaum (2018) notes that the characteristics of the family and its members are interdependently related to the goals, behaviours and outcomes of the family firm. While such characteristics include, for example, the generation of the family or its collective experience, studying less-commonly examined characteristics remains to be adequately investigated. Specifically, studies that examine racial, ethnic, cultural and/or structural differences among families are likely to yield insights that are both promising and practical.

With respect to minority-related differences among families, the 2020 United States Census reported a notable increase in the nation's diversity: minorities now constitute nearly 40% of the overall population (United States Census Bureau, 2021). Following this trend, the number of new businesses started by minorities has increased; interestingly, though, early insights suggest these businesses grow at a slower rate than non-minority businesses (Headd, 2021). Thus, when applied to family firms, why is it that minority-family entrepreneurship supports the successful launch of an increasing number of new firms, yet minority-family entrepreneurship (at a later stage in the process) hinders the venture from growing at the same rate as non-minority ventures? What characteristics of minority families—and the interdependence of family characteristics with the firm's goals, behaviours and growth—are limiting the growth of their family firms?

Examining issues such as these, which are related to the inherent characteristics of the family, are likely to yield promising insights that benefit our collective understanding of family entrepreneurship. As noted by Steyaert (2007a, b), entrepreneurship “. . . explains how entrepreneurship is always embedded in and sensitive to the streams of the past and the present and is making a creative and critical difference in the realm of the possible [, and] entrepreneurship changes the conceptual focus by [focusing on the] texture of cultural, political and social forces” (p. 471). Thus, by examining the nuanced characteristics of the family that is in control of the family firm, we are likely to gain an increased understanding of whether and how differences in characteristics affect firm dynamics and outcomes, contributing to the advancement of family-entrepreneurship scholarship.

2.2 Becoming of an entrepreneuring family firm: the arenas, actors and mechanisms—by Andrea Calabrò and Mariateresa Torchia

New firms founded by individual family members, couples and families are different from non-family start-ups (Fletcher, 2010) as the family relationships, occurring among those

actors, shape and influence the process of entrepreneurship (Johannisson, 2011) also known as entrepreneurial (Steyaert, 2007a, b). In this article, we contend that entrepreneurship, which points “at the inherent processual character of entrepreneurship” (Steyaert, 2007a, b, p. 453), is different in the family firm context, profiling what is labelled “family entrepreneurship”. Moreover, disentangling how different family relationships shape family entrepreneurship is of utmost importance to understand how to leverage mechanisms to foster family entrepreneurship. In fact, family entrepreneurship is underpinned by an understanding of family entrepreneurship as the act of “becoming”, where identities (Radu-Lefebvre *et al.*, 2021), relationships and dynamics can be understood only in their context of occurrence that are the entrepreneurial practices (Champenois *et al.*, 2020). Thus, to understand family entrepreneurship, it is important to identify who is/are the family entrepreneur/s (Gartner, 1988; Ramoglou *et al.*, 2020) and what really are the relationships among these actors that might impact the process of family entrepreneurship. In addition, it is important to consider that family entrepreneurship can occur at different stages of family firms’ life cycles (e.g. pre-start-up, start-up, family firms and multi-generation family firms). In this way, we can contribute to the debate on family entrepreneurship by (1) identifying different arenas in which family entrepreneurship might occur; (2) connecting those arenas to varying degrees of family relationships among the involved (family) agents of entrepreneurship; and (3) identifying the mechanisms that foster family entrepreneurship for each main arena and actor. To conclude, this approach to family entrepreneurship allows us also to reflect on the stages that precede the constitution of the family firm and allows us to identify the milestones that are needed to be set to move from an individual entrepreneurial activity towards an established and multi-generation entrepreneurship family firm. By doing so, we bring the logic of family entrepreneurship as an act of becoming also in the context of family firms.

2.2.1 *Identifying the arenas for family entrepreneurship.* The concept of entrepreneurship applied to the family business context is useful to understand how entrepreneurship processes occur in the context of family businesses. Notwithstanding, how individual family members, couples and families do entrepreneurship is largely under-explored leaving a big theoretical and practical gap (Kraus *et al.*, 2012). This is astonishing if we think that a key aspect to maintain family firms’ competitive advantage is to successfully transfer the family entrepreneurial spirit from one generation to the other. But how could it be possible to transfer such spirit without knowing the actors, processes and arenas involved in this creation?

To start filling the above-mentioned gap, we identify the arenas where family entrepreneurship occurs. Figure 1 provides a picture of four possible arenas generated by

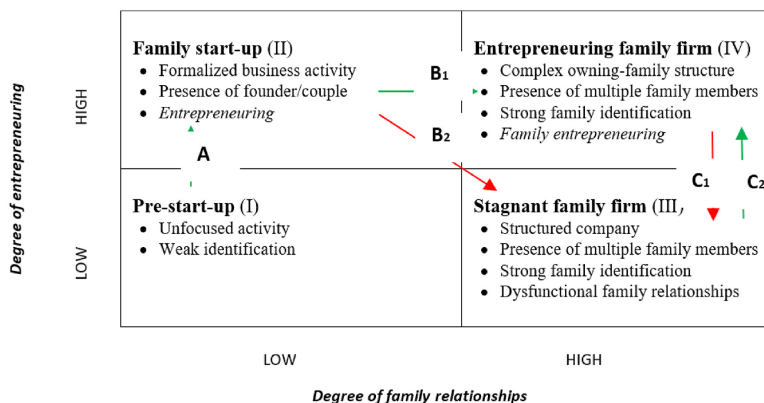


Figure 1.
From entrepreneurship to family entrepreneurship

Source(s): Author’s work

combining the degree of entrepreneuring with the degree of family relationships. The four identified quadrants represent four stages or four organizational types. Hereafter, we will describe the main characteristics of each quadrant.

The *family start-up* (quadrant II) is characterized by a low degree of family relationship and a high degree of entrepreneuring. Family start-up teams often include two individuals being a couple (Ruef *et al.*, 2003) who are important in the process of mobilizing resources. In this stage, the intensity of entrepreneuring is high as the couple is busy in a complex spousal activity (copreneurship) in which commitment, goals and responsibilities are shared in operating a new business (De Bruin and Lewis, 2004). In this stage, the couple “has to deal with the creation of a marriage enterprise, where partners have to adjust to living as a married couple and caring about the balance between work and family” (Minola *et al.*, 2016, p. 401). The couple shares the management responsibility of running a common business (Rutherford *et al.*, 2006). In this stage, there are no blood ties within the couple and the degree of family relationships is still low as there is no involvement of children. Indeed, the couple is not yet a family in the sense of “an intergenerational social group organized and governed by social norms regarding descent and affinity, reproduction, and the nurturant socialization of the young” (White, 1991, p. 7). In this stage, there is an embryonal level of family entrepreneuring. From this point, in some start-up, businesses will fail and many of those that survive may not become “family firms” *per se*, if the couple remains the only family members involved. Start-ups that develop and become a family firm may instead be identified in quadrant III or IV depending on the degree of family entrepreneuring, thus showing a heterogeneous development path from start-up to family firm.

The *stagnant family firm* (quadrant III) is characterized by a high degree of family relationships and a low entrepreneuring intensity. There are multiple family members involved in the ownership, management and/or operations of the business and they might belong to different generations. In this stage, family relationships can create challenges in the entrepreneurship process. Some families are characterized by rivalries, nepotism, shirking and destructive behaviours that stem out of self-interest (Schulze *et al.*, 2003). Sibling rivalry, for example, which has its origin in childhood might cause conflictual and conflicting dynamics over choices and entrepreneurial actions with a consequent detrimental effect on the overall intensity of family entrepreneuring. Sibling rivalry is the competitive relationship between siblings and is often associated with the struggle for parental attention, affection and approval, but also for recognition in the world. Intense sibling rivalry can be dangerous as it weakens the potential of siblings for the family business by reducing collaborations and reciprocal support that are critically essential in family firms (Grote, 2003). Furthermore, parents-children relationships can have a detrimental effect on family entrepreneuring. It happens, for example, when family firm owners employ children who are less able, committed or ethical than the leader expected (Chrisman *et al.*, 2004). Free riding, lying, insubordination are a few examples of situations that create tensions and resentments between parent and children with a detrimental effect on family entrepreneuring.

The *entrepreneurial family firm* (quadrant IV) results from a high degree of family relationships combined with a high entrepreneuring intensity. The complex family structure in this case is beneficial for entrepreneuring. We refer here to situations where the family relationship is based on altruistic behaviour and reciprocity (Lubatkin *et al.*, 2007). When there is a sense of trust in the relationship among the family members, for example, among parents and children or among siblings, there is a prevalence of a collectivistic behaviour which will have a positive impact on entrepreneuring. Parents have an important role, for example, in fostering entrepreneurial intentions through socialization and the transmission of values, knowledge and skills but also through role-modelling and creating positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship (Gimenez-Jimenez *et al.*, 2021). Children are stewards and contribute to the family firm through pro-organizational behaviours (Eddleston and

Kellermanns, 2007). The process of entrepreneurship is thus smoother as interests and actions from family members are aligned toward the same direction.

2.2.2 Mechanisms promoting family entrepreneuring. The suggested four configurations of entrepreneuring family firms give a picture of the possible combinations of family entrepreneuring and family relationships suggesting that the optimal setting for family firm entrepreneuring is the one with healthy family relationships (quadrant IV). We posit that it is possible to move from one quadrant to the other suggesting that all pre-startups in quadrant I could potentially develop into quadrant IV of entrepreneuring family firms (path A→B1); however, that is not always the case if the degree of entrepreneuring decreases. In fact, despite family startups in quadrant II could further evolve and become family firms if the degree of entrepreneuring decreases they would move to quadrant III and become stagnant (path B2). Of course, if the degree of entrepreneuring is then restored, the firms in this group can move to quadrant IV of entrepreneurial family firms (path C2). Finally, the degree of entrepreneuring should be kept high also in entrepreneurial family firms situated in quadrant IV; if they would not continuously engage in family entrepreneuring, they would risk becoming stagnant and moving in quadrant III (path C1). Thus, it is crucial to understand which are the mechanisms and the tools that family firms can use to move towards quadrant IV, become entrepreneuring family firms and make sure to stay there. Hereafter, we are proposing possible mechanisms that could serve the above-mentioned scope and that surely deserve future research and practice-oriented attention:

- (1) *Creating a family entrepreneuring strategy* would help identifying instruments, mechanisms and programs that allow all family members to train, nurture and transform their entrepreneurial endeavour in such a way that the family firm can capitalize on it and make sure that there is a continuous process (family entrepreneuring) through which transgenerational entrepreneurship can be nurtured (Calabrò *et al.*, 2022). Visible outcomes of such a dedicated strategy could be the creation of spin-offs or spin-along that are led by younger family members and that serve as the basis to explore new technologies or markets and also train and develop their entrepreneurial and leadership abilities.
- (2) *Introducing a strategic knowledge management unit* within the family firm would help in collecting, systematizing and sharing all the entrepreneurial ideas, initiatives and experiences that take place within the family firm. This will allow the family firm to develop, from one side, a system that transforms the knowledge and learning arising from family entrepreneuring in information that is then used to make corporate decisions, for example, about new product and market development. Moreover, from the other side, it would contribute to the creation and nurturing of a “family entrepreneuring memory” that future generations could use to get oriented towards entrepreneurial practices with the aim to nurture transgenerational entrepreneurship.
- (3) The *development of ad-hoc family entrepreneuring programs* could support family members (especially members from incoming generations) in developing a strategic education that will support them in the identification, exploitation and management of entrepreneurial opportunities.
- (4) All the above-mentioned mechanisms would foster a higher *legitimation of next generation family members* by helping to integrate their ideas and competences within the entrepreneuring process thus providing the business with entrepreneurial opportunities that can sustain both growth and diversification of the entrepreneuring family firm (e.g. via internal and/or external corporate venturing activities).
- (5) It is also important to promote entrepreneuring initiatives (e.g. innovation labs, entrepreneuring weekend, innovative ideas competition) that help collecting,

systematizing and processing innovative product, process and market ideas and feedbacks arising from non-family employees. In fact, this promotes a culture of open innovation that would support the overall entrepreneurship of the family firm at the different levels. A key factor for the success of such initiatives is to introduce incentives that make sure employees have the right commitment towards entrepreneurship.

- (6) Another important mechanism to consider becoming and remaining a successful entrepreneurship family firm is *leveraging family firm networks*. Indeed, the unique network of relationships possessed by the owning-family (family social capital) is a source of additional knowledge and information and often gives access to resources that can help the family firm to catch entrepreneurial opportunities before competitors and adjust their entrepreneurial strategies before certain industry and/or market dynamics manifest.

2.2.3 Concluding remarks. The aim of this article was to investigate the process of family entrepreneurship by identifying the actors, the arenas and the mechanisms that shape the process of family entrepreneurship within the context of family firms. By combining the degree of entrepreneurship with the degree of family relationships we identify the *pre-start-up*, the *family start-up*, the *stagnant family firm* and the *entrepreneurship family firm* as four possible arenas where family entrepreneurship might occur or not. We further elaborate on the main mechanisms that foster family entrepreneurship and that foster the development of an individual entrepreneurial activity towards an established and multi-generation entrepreneurship family firm. Future studies are needed to further theorize and develop family entrepreneurship and to identify more mechanisms supporting it.

2.3 All are created equal, but some are more equal than others—by Nupur Pavan Bang

Can family entrepreneurship accelerate the adoption of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5), which is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls? Can learnings from specific cases of copreneurs be adopted by entrepreneurship families to solve the deep-rooted societal "wicked problem" of gender discrimination (Eden and Wagstaff, 2021)?

The copreneur—which is a term first used by Barnett and Barnett (1988)—is a specific form of entrepreneurship used to describe couples who open a venture together, "share ownership of, responsibility for, and commitment to an enterprise" and operate at the boundaries of personal relationship and business partnership (Marshack, 1993). Many of the copreneurial practices, if adopted systematically by family firms, will make gender-neutral, family entrepreneurship a way of life for such family firms and help them overcome some of the traditional challenges. A few such practices are given in the following sections:

2.3.1 Visibility and support. The family business literature has highlighted the "invisibility" of women (Salganicoff, 1990). Copreneurship offers women, who are also founders of these ventures, an avenue to make their labour visible. The labour put in by a spouse is an imperative resource for a struggling business (Baines and Wheelock, 1998). Similarly, husband's support for a woman entrepreneur makes it much easier for the woman to handle work-family conflicts. An entrepreneurship family would try and understand the commitment of the entire family towards making a venture by a female family member a success and, if needed, facilitate the buy-in of support for the venture (Auken and Werbel, 2006).

2.3.2 Motivators. Lim and Suh (2019) observe that women are more likely than men to form a venture either alone or with other family members. In her study, Thébaud (2016) stresses that women who have passed up a job in the past due to job inflexibility are more likely to go for self-employment. Weaving in flexibility and a supportive eco-system would encourage women to take bold decisions and commit themselves more to the business.

Additionally, whether playing an active role in the business in strategic decision-making, or taking on softer roles, women need to be trained to play their part well and contribute to the business effectively. Taking courses like economics and management increases female STEM graduates' perception of their human capital therefore reducing the gender imbalance in entrepreneurial entry (Piva and Rovelli, 2021). Therefore, an entrepreneuring family would consciously build in continuous relevant training for the women in their family.

2.3.3 Roles and responsibilities. In copreneurs, the work division was done traditionally, with women handling "woman-like tasks" like bookkeeping and men handling "man-like tasks" like equipment maintenance (O'Connor *et al.*, 2006; Marshack, 1994). However, by doing so, the business misses out on utilizing "feminine competencies" to introduce "feminine kind of innovations" Rinaldi and Tagliazucchi (2021). In a family firm, an entrepreneuring family must remove gender-based roles and allow meritocracy to be the only criteria for division of work at the firm.

2.3.4 Culture and mindset. Division of tasks remains an area heavily dominated by social norms. Local rules and culture in different countries have different motivations for and reception towards women entrepreneurs. Hence, geographical context determines attitudes in copreneurial teams and the ease of women's entrepreneurship. While comparing copreneurs from the United States (US) and Czech Republic (CR), Jurik *et al.* (2019) observe that while tasks do not strictly align with gender stereotypes, men in CR tend to claim business leadership while those in the US gave equal credit to women. The narratives showed that women focused on "blending" business and care while men focused on just business. However, higher involvement of women, higher influence of women and commitment and shared agreement lead to a higher productive team (Hedberg and Danes, 2012). An entrepreneuring family needs to rise above the societal norms and develop a growth mindset towards women.

2.3.5 Succession and fostering entrepreneurship. Family business literature dictates that it is difficult for women to be seen as a successor in their parent's eyes hence they are not even trained for it (Nelson and Constantinidis, 2017). A copreneurial team, because of the role the wife plays in, will also be more open to appointing their daughters as successors and training them just like their sons. This effect is also gendered with girls getting more inspired by mothers and sons getting more inspired by fathers. In consequence, copreneurial ventures are likely to encourage entrepreneurship in future generations, with mothers becoming an inspiration for daughters to foster entrepreneurship. This, over the generations, can possibly play an important role in breaking gender roles and redefining the domestic and work sphere in a business family interface. Family entrepreneuring therefore will therefore be easier for family firms with copreneur teams.

2.3.6 Institutional voids. Managing time between the domestic sphere and work sphere for copreneurial women becomes problematic, especially when the spouse does not help in the domestic task and institutional voids like lack of childcare lead to women having to engage in duties "meant for women". Thus, bringing attention to the role of government and institutional frameworks. In fact, putting in place clear systems such that bringing up a child becomes a "family's" affair, rather than a "mother's" affair, in a family, will encourage many more women in family firms to involve themselves with the family business and thereby bring in diversity of thoughts, ideas and enthusiasm to keep the entrepreneurial spirit of the firm intact.

These findings indicate that, if integrated with the learnings from copreneurship, entrepreneuring families can play a larger role in achieving gender parity at the family firm level. It further has wider social implications. Family firms are embedded in the communities they operate in. They have significant influence over the labor markets and successful business families are often role models for the people of their community, city and even country. When empowered, women from such families can be instrumental in promoting gender equality within their organizations, helping their women employees overcome the challenges that they usually face and encourage a trickledown effect on the society.

2.4 Can family entrepreneurship give us new lenses for approaching family business research?—by Silvia Gherardi

I have always been interested in family business because my entry point in entrepreneurship has been through gender studies, feminist activism, women self-employment and women authoring themselves as entrepreneurs. It is a fascinating field for me because family business appears as a multiple phenomenon and business is reflected on many different planes of reality at the same time: institutional, economic, private, public and social. However, I think that entrepreneurial literature needs a new pair of glasses for approaching family business in a fresh way. I am not arguing for any new definition of the field to add to the existing ones rather I favour a boundaryless conceptualization of family entrepreneurship where multiple challenges may emerge. There is in fact a theoretical problem in the current way of putting boundaries around and circumscribing what may be conceived as the field of family business.

If we take as a reference point an influential definition of the field that appeared in the prestigious journal *Family Business Review*, we read from the editor of the journal Tyge Payne (2018, p. 167) that the field of family business research “represents a large set of interrelated subfields that are bound together by the recognition that families, as owners and operators, can have a unique influence on a wide variety of business activities and outcomes”. What unsettles me in this definition – apart the monolithic and gender-neutral definition of family – is the representation of the field as a set of interrelated subfields. Additionally, if we follow Neubaum (2018, p. 259) “based on such a view, one can easily envision the field of family business research like a multicoloured and multipatterned quilt of constructs, antecedents and outcomes stitched together by the common thread of the family’s involvement in the ownership, governance, and management of their businesses”. Quilting is as much a beautiful metaphor that recalls the humble work of women in economizing domestic resources, as it is a misleading metaphor that reinforces the idea of fragmentation, juxtaposition and separation in the unity of the final phenomenon of family entrepreneurship.

Can we think of an alternative in which the research field is not made up of family + business and which does not force us to have a cross-eyed vision? My argument is that in so doing, we have to replace separation and summation with the idea of entanglement as offered by feminist new materialism (Barad, 2007). To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined or intersected, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Thus, entanglement suggests that in family business research the entities do not pre-exist prior to their involvement, rather entities emerge *through* relationality. What makes family business a distinctive field of research is that the apparatus we build for representing and conducting research on the phenomenon conceives private and public as entangled, family, gender and generations as entangled and institutions and businesses as entangled. How they emerge as distinctive entities depends on the relations in which those elements are enmeshed and from the apparatus the researchers adopt in separating what matters from what is excluded from mattering. For example, how stable can a family positioning be considered, according to age, gender, generation and life-world elements? And can a project for entrepreneuring be considered separate from a project of life?

I propose to consider family business as a field of practices, a field (or a texture) of practices in which agency is circulating and in which several practice elements affect and are affected in the process of becoming, together. Agency is not a property of any actor or element in the field rather it is a temporal flow always deriving from previous practices and imparting to subsequent practices (Hultin, 2019).

With this theoretical framing of the field in terms of a texture of situated practices, family business can be explored (Gherardi and Poggio, 2018) in order to illustrate how gendering and entrepreneuring constitute an entangled process that should be studied processually both at the interaction level – as a situated practice – and at the level of the

effects produced by such practicing in society. Family business as a social practice cannot be studied separately from gendering and entrepreneuring because both are produced and reproduced at the intersections among bodies, discourses and materialities (Bruni *et al.*, 2004). Thus, the gendering of entrepreneurship is conceived as a sociomaterial practice, and both gendering and entrepreneuring are defined as material-semiotic processes that require a critical reflection on the qualitative methodologies deployed for their empirical analysis (Gherardi and Perrotta, 2014). For example, a key theme such as business succession may be framed as a situated practice in which the materiality of business is entangled with the gendering of the family and with the situated ethics of the transformative process that is changing both the business and the power relations in the family at the same time (Gherardi and Perrotta, 2016).

My argument in this brief reflection comes from my experience in empirical research that has been empowered by the concept of entrepreneuring (Steyaert, 2007a, b) that had the powerful effect of introducing a process understanding of entrepreneurship. Moreover, it comes from the legitimation of a becoming ontology that characterizes social practice theories and from my experimentations with a posthumanist practice theory (Gherardi, 2019) that contributes to the nascent field of entrepreneurship as practice (Champanois *et al.*, 2020; Thompson and Byrne, 2020; Gherardi, 2021).

We can say that in the last decade much has been done for renewing family entrepreneurship research, for example, entrepreneurship pedagogy has been challenged (Lefebvre *et al.*, 2021). However, these approaches are not adequate since we still have to fully inquire on how family business can contribute to the challenges of the XXI century, such as ecological sustainability and social justice. If we assume that a matter of concern for family entrepreneuring is life for future generations, then we can also think that family business research is in a good position to shift the focus from self-interested rational economic man to ongoing everyday practices sustaining material life in a post-anthropocentric vision.

3. Investigating the entrepreneurial process: how does family entrepreneuring happen?

The notion of entrepreneurial process has been metaphorically depicted as a journey (Mets, 2022), an adventure (DeTienne, 2010) or a tango (Pattinson *et al.*, 2020). While scholarly textbooks teach the entrepreneurial process as a linear, intentional, causal endeavour, scholars also acknowledge the turbulences occurring during this journey and its unpredictability and surprises which may hinder or delay the accomplishment of entrepreneurial objectives (Edelman *et al.*, 2008). The notions of effectuation (Saravathy, 2009) and bricolage (Fisher, 2012) mirror the idiosyncrasies of the entrepreneurial process for individuals and collectives engaged within such a process. The process of family entrepreneuring also encompasses its own rhythm, detours and tensions, as evidenced in the following contributions.

3.1 Family entrepreneuring as a socially enacted process—by Sarah Jack

My contribution to this Special Issue aimed at this question sat well with me. In addition to finding family entrepreneuring extremely interesting, I found the topic underexplored beyond the call and am excited about the potential opportunities there are for much more work in this space.

3.1.1 Topic. Family entrepreneuring implies a process which is socially enacted. Social enacting requires knowledge of rules, etiquettes and protocols of behaviour and reciprocity that are often based on how family and entrepreneurship work in its social context. Social embeddedness represents the nature, depth and extent of an individual's ties to an

environment, community or society, ultimately shaping social exchange and economic processes. This notion of being embedded in a social context is important because it describes the influence of social structure on the functioning of exchange arrangements (Jack and Anderson, 2002; McKeever *et al.*, 2015).

Coming back to family and fit here, what early sociological literature bring forward is that individuals share a condition of community because circumstances and situations encountered affect how they live their lives. This can manifest as a shared sense of belonging, where understandings of the social structure and what is right and wrong are engrained (Park, 1924). These understandings can be transferred between generations and so are embedded in time and enacted within different time frames, but also through the lived experience where embeddedness means being entwined in the social and economic fabric. This fabric is made up of social connections (Huijbens, 2012; Jack, 2010) and often brings social capital within a place but also a sense of responsibility (Jack and Anderson, 2002; Jack, 2005; McKeever *et al.*, 2015). This gives us some insight into the doing of entrepreneurship – i.e. family entrepreneurship – and that the way it is practiced is about social connecting and social belonging over time and across generations.

Entrepreneurship takes us to a “social ontology of relatedness” (Steyaert, 2007a, b, p. 472). Families are built on individuals being related to each other. As a social unit, family offers the space through which traditions, the spoken and unspoken word, which offer the rules of the game for the family are understood. How these rules, etiquettes and expected behaviours are made up is developed over time. But how they are understood and how stories are told or relayed, who tells them and who changes them is often bound up in the social context but also within the boundaries of place. Steyaert (2007a, b, p. 471) sees the term entrepreneurship as a “travelling concept”. In Steyaert’s (2007a, b, p. 471) view, entrepreneurship helps explain how entrepreneurship is embedded and is “sensitive to streams of the past and the present” and fits with “it’s becoming”. This notion of the travelling concept and becoming sits well with the family. Travelling implies moving from one place to another and in families, entrepreneurship travels between and across generations. It conjures up images of the traveller (family member) moving through space and time, the past, present and future of the family, returning to visit places and social spaces they have previously encountered, are socially connected to, have lived in or experienced in some way at some point in time while at other times facing new challenges for the family and new experiences they have not encountered before, seeking out ways to deal with them in their entrepreneurship to secure the future of the family. We often find ourselves returning to the past because we are bound to it socially. Such connectivity is also brought about through connections over time; connecting the past to the present and the future, its traditions, symbols and stories that represent the business and the family and their history through time. Indeed, the actions families take might be influenced by its traditions and how things are institutionalized. This is where social learning and our ability to reflect become key.

But, the thing about families is that no two families are the same (Bott, 1955). Family relationships are the product of social relations in which family members are embedded, conditioning values and actions, but these are unique to a family (Bott, 1955). So, studying the family as a social system and how this plays out is interesting but also complex (Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2020).

Bott (1955) identified that economic ties “operate more forcibly” (p. 376) between relatives. She showed kinship connectedness gets stronger where relatives help each other get jobs, for example. Bott’s work on connectedness shows that economic forces affect family networks. She describes connectedness to place and what this means for families. Linking Bott’s thoughts to family entrepreneurship, how connectedness plays out in rural or urban settings compared to other settings such as more closed communities is intriguing. The actions people take in a place will primarily be influenced by how they are connected within it. Such social

contextualization and belonging to place and community creates a sense of responsibility (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016). Examples of how this plays out might be where the family, mindful of employee well-being and personal circumstances, supports employees by keeping them in work during times of economic hardship because they have bills to pay and feel a moral responsibility to keep their employees in work, i.e. doing what feels like the right thing (Anderson and Ullah, 2014; Jack and Anderson, 2002; McKeever *et al.*, 2015).

3.1.2 Issues. But this take on family entrepreneuring raises key issues. The first being, how does the role of embeddedness work for family entrepreneuring in small rural communities, urban towns and cities across the world and in its many different cultures for which family entrepreneuring could be critical for survival; how does family entrepreneuring work in practice and how might the rules of the game be defined by families in such communities; how might this influence how family entrepreneuring operates in such places and shape its communities? Aligned with this is the issue of how a family might engage entrepreneuring for longevity and sustainability – social and environmental – for the future of places (Jack and Nordqvist, 2020; Nordqvist and Jack, 2021).

Secondly, how family entrepreneuring works in situations of extreme poverty or in peripheral or marginalized communities? Often less understood is the role of women and yet too often their role is a stabilizing force and one which is in tune with their family's needs? What impact does this have on their role and the ways in which they engage for entrepreneuring? How might they navigate the gendered norms associated with the place they are living in? Linked to this, there is also the situation of fragile contexts which are increasing in number and extremity and in their conditions and adversities, how does family entrepreneuring emerge or re-emerge in these places, especially those which are (or are turned) hostile towards any shape or form of entrepreneurship?

3.1.3 Method. Qualitative research works well for exploring these issues, extending understanding by looking at hard-to-measure aspects (Van Burg *et al.*, 2020) and driving knowledge by setting the practice of family entrepreneuring in the everyday context in which it takes place. Ethnographic methodologies are well suited because they offer the opportunity to become immersed in the world of those being studied to understand everyday life which would not be captured through interviews or survey work alone (Van Burg *et al.*, 2020). What ethnography in its various forms offers is the opportunity to really feel, see, touch, taste and smell the flavor of what is going on.

As well as ethnography in its more traditional form, Van Burg *et al.* (2020) encourage exploring auto-ethnography, video ethnography and digital ethnography and new and emerging forms of ethnography (Rouleau *et al.*, 2014). Auto-ethnography is especially interesting because it can offer the insider's position. However, if auto-ethnography can be combined with techniques, such as ethnography in its more traditional form or in-depth interviewing where other members of the research team can also engage directly in the field, a wider reflection, triangulation and verification of patterns and themes in the data can take place.

Historical techniques are extremely relevant to this subject. Setting the research within its historical context can also show how and why family entrepreneuring might have emerged in the way it did within a particular time. But also offers the opportunity to generate a better understanding of the circumstances and situations faced then that might not be faced now. Historical techniques offer the opportunity to explore archives and draw on the tools and mechanisms used by business historians to unlock the past.

Family entrepreneuring offers the opportunity to make more use of phenomenological interviewing to delve into and generate understanding about the lived experience (Cope, 2005; Hamilton, 2013). Hamilton (2013) describes how a phenomenological approach relies on using a "very open and unstructured form of interview, offering rich insights into the dynamics between family and business over time" (p. 57) but, she argues, that this must be related to the overall context in which the experiences take place. Following the ideas of Hamilton (2013),

this means that initial questions have to purposefully be designed to be very broad and open to encourage respondents to feel comfortable, relaxed and engaged. But also thought through in a way which offers the opportunity to explore the narrative to reveal the differences and/or similarities.

3.1.4 Conclusion. In considering the question, *What (topic, methods, issues) do you find most important to study in regards to family entrepreneurship and why?*, I offer some thoughts and ideas for how we might move forward in this interesting space and thank the editors of this special issue for giving me this opportunity.

3.2 Journey of family entrepreneurship—by Allan Discua Cruz

The call of papers for this special issue asked researchers to consider that family entrepreneurship, at its core, can extend understanding where family and entrepreneurship meet through a processual, material and relational perspective (Champenois *et al.*, 2020) leading to the emergence of new organizations (Gartner, 1993; Johannisson, 2011). Based on such premise, I will attempt to illustrate some of topics, methods and issues that may be important in our study of family entrepreneurship through the metaphor of a journey (Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2021a; Gaddefors, 2007).

Firstly, as a processual perspective, family entrepreneurship gravitates around entrepreneurs embarking either inadvertently or deliberately on a journey into uncharted paths with many detours, roadblocks and with no certainty of success when creating a new business venture. Attention to processes and practices relative to what motivates family entrepreneurs to start the journey, how and why family entrepreneurs adapt to changing circumstances and what factors will enable (or hinder) them to act entrepreneurially are relevant to study. For example, such journey calls to understand further the underlying mechanisms in processes that family members engage into, either reactively or proactively, to create a new business venture to address events or crisis in a family lifecycle (e.g. marriages, infertility, births, illness, divorce, death) (e.g. see (Discua Cruz and Hamilton, 2022; Rosa *et al.*, 2014)).

Secondly, such journey cannot be detached from understanding its surroundings and changing landscape. While studies point out entrepreneurship as a concept that can help understand what entrepreneurs do in a journey characterized as complex, with high levels of uncertainty and unfamiliarity, attention to the contextual factors that allow (or hinder) family members to navigate such complexity, how and why family entrepreneurs leverage diverse resources throughout such journey merit attention. Advancing in the journey may be as dependent on local climate, location, institutional conditions, family members and market demand (Discua Cruz and Halliday, 2023; Spielmann *et al.*, 2021), prompting entrepreneurs to make do with what is at hand, becoming resourceful (Cortez Arias and Discua Cruz, 2018). Moreover, there are many variables that can entice, interrupt or halt such journey such as how families sort contextual elements when creating a firm, such as a worldwide pandemic (Kraus *et al.*, 2020), institutional handicaps (Ojediran *et al.*, 2022) or unpredictable environmental shocks (Morgan *et al.*, 2020) calling to understand the contextual factors that influence family members to act entrepreneurially not only for the benefit of their closest circle but also for their immediate community (Hadjielias *et al.*, 2023) and beyond (Baù *et al.*, 2021), as they embark and navigate such complex and uncertain journey.

Thirdly, family entrepreneurship, as a relational phenomenon requires the company and support of others. Prior studies position family entrepreneurship as a journey that connects ideas, people and actions focusing on what entrepreneurs do (Dodd *et al.*, 2023). The journey may require the participation of several family members through different permutations acting as a team, relying on diverse skills and abilities (Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2017). Family entrepreneurial teams offer an unit of analysis for family entrepreneurship to understand how

different family teams can collectively act in such journey. Such relational dynamics calls to explore further topics such as entrepreneurial identities (Radu-Lefebvre *et al.*, 2021) and entrepreneurial legacy (Combs *et al.*, 2021) which may elucidate further what subsequent generations of family entrepreneurs do.

Methodologically, we should never assume that a particular research method is intrinsically better than the other when studying family entrepreneurship. While some questions will demand the use of statistical data, numerical datasets, sophisticated and stringent statistical analysis techniques to derive factors and differences (Chell and Karataş-Özkan, 2014; Melin *et al.*, 2014), other questions require a closer and prolonged interaction with family entrepreneurs or teams and the processes and practices they engage into to explain what is going on in any particular context or across contexts (Van Burg *et al.*, 2020; Neergaard and Leitch, 2015; Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2021b; Hamilton *et al.*, 2017). While current issues may relate to contextual restrictions in data collection (Tremblay *et al.*, 2021), such methodological diversity is important as both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used at different levels of analysis to understand what family entrepreneurs do (Discua Cruz and Basco, 2018).

Some issues that studying family entrepreneurship may relate to point towards topics such as emotions, conflict and values. Engaging in a journey to create a new business with family members may involve emotions that are difficult to hide when facing unexpected turns, roadblocks or dead ends (Shepherd, 2016; Brundin and Gustafsson, 2013). Conflicts may emerge when family members disagree or when their goals are misaligned as to the best route or direction to take in the journey leading to the emergence of a new enterprise, particularly when crises are faced (Doern *et al.*, 2016). Emotions and values are a very important component in the way people live their lives and thus family entrepreneurship allows a journey that affords family entrepreneurs to integrate them into what they do (Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2021a, b). Finally, the implicit uncertainty involved in the creation of a new enterprise requires often a leap of faith, relying on personal values and beliefs as a guiding mechanism, often rooted in convictions which may not be shared by all family members over time (Astrachan *et al.*, 2020).

Taken together, appreciating family entrepreneurship as a journey offers the opportunity to challenge the perception that families may only engage in the creation of a single venture as the ultimate destination. Family entrepreneurship opens the door to examining the heterogeneity of processes and practices (Thompson *et al.*, 2020), contextual aspects (James *et al.*, 2021) and vehicles (Jones and Giordano, 2020) through which family members act entrepreneurially to create and develop several firms over time, either in sequence or in parallel (Rosa *et al.*, 2014; Rautiainen *et al.*, 2019). Such journey can be engaged repeatedly, supported by the prolonged interaction and shared understandings that families in business develop over time (Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2021a, b), even after the untimely loss of loved ones (Discua Cruz and Hamilton, 2022). Through family entrepreneurship scholars can expand on the factors, the approach and rationale behind ideas, changes and connections that may have more meaning for families that we may have previously believed.

3.3 Family entrepreneurship: a liminal process—by Lucia Garcia-Lorenzo

Family business research has been liminal from its inception. By focusing neither on family nor on business alone and having to account for both financial and non-financial goals while struggling to decide if professionalism and rationality are required to substitute or complement the “non-professional” owners’ behaviour (Short *et al.*, 2016); the field has spent 3 decades striving for a clear boundary between family and business systems. The quest for a common identity and structure for the field has also led to a focus on performance and measurement using agency theory to explain how unwanted behaviours can be avoided and

how agency costs can be minimized (Gomez-Mejia *et al.*, 2001) as well as the resource-based view of the firm (Chrisman *et al.*, 2010) to explore the resource relationship between family and business systems. Even new emerging alternatives such as the socioemotional wealth paradigm, which argues that family businesses can also advance non-financial objectives critical to their management through social capital (Nordstrom and Steier, 2015) is underpinned by systems theory claiming that family and business are two separate systems. The interactions of these two seemingly incompatible systems generate, however, difficult-to-measure, unstructured and liminal spaces and practices.

Family businesses became recently seen as *entrepreneurial ventures where* the sustainability of the *family firm* depends on individual or collective *entrepreneurial behaviours that would also have an eventual impact* on the (Randerson *et al.*, 2015). Current family entrepreneurship research is devoted therefore to studying either the intersection of these three research fields, to generate a new one, that of family entrepreneurship (Heck *et al.*, 2008) or the overlapping spaces generated between the fields. For example, the family embeddedness perspective focuses on the space where entrepreneurship and family overlap (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003), corporate entrepreneurship in family businesses explores the space in between entrepreneurship and family business (McKelvie *et al.*, 2014) and family entrepreneurial teams (Schjoedt *et al.*, 2013) looks at the space where family and family business come together. The assumption is still however that “the family system is quite separate from, though certainly related to, [any] family business [behaviours]” (Heck *et al.*, 2008, p. 322) and that we need to discover the “optimal integration of family and business subsystems” (p. 325). As entrepreneurship is fundamentally a disruptive process developed within liminal unstructured spaces, to understand how it unfolds in family ventures current research needs to go further.

The term “liminal” was first used by VanGennep (1960/2013) to name the middle or transition phase of a three-phase rite of passage that begins with separation (end of previous identity and social position) and ends with aggregation (new identity and social position adopted). Turner (1977) developed the concept, calling this in-between stage “anti-structure”, to stress the opposition of the liminal to clearly articulated and differentiated social structures and boundaries. Liminality removes limits from everyday life, so everything is open to question, with “liminal personae” being “in-between and betwixt” (Turner, 1977, p. 95). Along with dissent, transgression, inversion and even parody, liminal conditions notably include the reflexive contemplation of structures that have been suspended, which enables and inculcates a critical and creative attitude (Thomassen, 2009). Accordingly, liminal spaces can be dangerous, with no sure standards for behaviour, but also spaces where potentiality exists and can be developed (Turner, 1977). In entrepreneurial terms, liminality has been used to indicate transformative spaces that allow entrepreneurs to discover their true selves and where new, possible futures, not yet formed, exist side-by-side with current trajectories (Garcia-Lorenzo *et al.*, 2018). Thus, liminal conditions enable entrepreneurs to develop new possibilities that can ultimately alter current patterns of activity.

Like other entrepreneurs, family entrepreneurs operate at the edge of what they do not know, trying to create new realities through transforming ideas into new ventures (Anderson, 2005, p. 592) and always *aiming* to engage creatively with what is both present and absent in their family ventures. It is particularly in times of change, when old values, symbols and institutions transcend into new ones, that the ability to create, improvise and learn is even more important (Callander and Cummings, 2021). In this context, the concept of liminality enables us to understand how boundaries, gaps and movements between units, positions and systems are not empty spaces between the “clear” structures of family and business, but, rather, spaces of “structural melt-down,” where new organizational forms can be created, played with and experimented with. It is in liminal conditions that family entrepreneurs can use the various “interstices” – the spaces that fall between the cracks of events and systems – to creatively become and do something different.

To understand how entrepreneurs disassemble, experiment with and (re)connect entrepreneurial ideas and practices, we need to look within the so-called creative process view (Sarasvathy *et al.*, 2003), leaving out perspectives that speak of entrepreneurial processes in an entitative and equilibrium-based way. Entrepreneurship as a process puts movement, change and flow first focusing on the inherently dynamic, change-oriented nature of entrepreneurship (Hjorth *et al.*, 2015). Process research helps us situate phenomena in space and time and thereby better understand why and how change occurs (Langley *et al.*, 2013). Such a process lens lends itself in particular to examining entrepreneurship as a highly contextual web of social mechanisms involving numerous entrepreneurial actors (Steyaert, 2007a, b) rather than focusing on the (more static) attributes of entrepreneurs, their behaviours or their ventures. Therefore, to study family entrepreneurship processually is to consider it as “restless, something underway, becoming and perishing, without end” (Hjorth *et al.*, 2015, p. 599); thus, as a disruptive and liminal process.

We need to understand how entrepreneurs navigate the liminal spaces between family and business and explore their contrarian objectives creatively while still operating within commercial and social structures that necessitate a certain amount of conformity. A focus on how disruptive and generative pathways for dissent are generated would help us to understand better the internal tensions between integration and diversity and would encourage dissent and transgression, perhaps preserving a tendency toward the ongoing negotiation of boundaries between family and firm without dissolving those boundaries altogether.

3.4 Family entrepreneurship: concept clarification and widening theoretical engagement—by Jeremy Chi Yeung Cheng

Ongoing disruptions have catalyzed changes in entrepreneurial practices in enterprising families and family businesses. These family institutions have exhibited complex entrepreneurial responses, which cannot be fully explained by linear thinking linking dispositions (e.g. entrepreneurial orientation) and/or resources (e.g. familiness) to entrepreneurial behaviour. Entrepreneurship, the “creative organizing aiming at creating economic, social, cultural and/or ecological value” (Johannisson, 2020, p. 152), offers an alternative lens to explore the complex process of becoming (Chia, 1995), drawing attention to practices leading to change for value creation. Family entrepreneurship recognizes how members of the family enterprise system interact as a collective. Family entrepreneurship has been an understudied topic in the body of entrepreneurship literature (Champenois *et al.*, 2020). Below I propose two lines of research, which can help clarify the concept of family entrepreneurship and bridge this to the wider family business literature.

3.4.1 Process of becoming and becoming of what. The process of becoming challenges the taken-for-granted social entities such as “individuals”, “organizations” and “society”, which are shaped by actions, interactions and orchestrations of relationships (Chia, 1995). Applying to the family entrepreneurship domain, a family institution or a family entrepreneur is not readily “out there” to initiate and lead change. I assert that there are multiple possible “destinations” of becoming: an entrepreneur/family entrepreneur, an enterprise/family enterprise and/or a family/enterprising family and different processes can lead to these “destinations”. It is critical to examine what actions, interactions and local orchestrations successfully reproduce themselves to generate the entrepreneurial practices as a collective versus as an individual and how family and business interact to create enduring entrepreneurial practices. This line of research will have two implications for the family entrepreneurship literature. *Firstly*, the extant literature tends not to differentiate between entrepreneurs and family entrepreneurs, mostly assuming that synergistic practices exist between the entrepreneurs and their family firms. But the process of entrepreneurs becoming

and that of family entrepreneurs becoming could be very different, especially considering how shared cognition and emotion are shaped in the latter. Family entrepreneuring affords the microfoundation to differentiate the two. *Secondly*, like what was suggested in the Call for Papers for this Special Issue, “familiness does not always pre-exist entrepreneurial practices but also emerges through the process of entrepreneuring”, and the same argument shall apply for “enterpriseness” (Frank *et al.*, 2019). Family entrepreneuring shall shed light on how familiness and enterpriseness emerge and are deployed, possibly shaping the structure of practices of family enterprise or enterprising family in the process.

The inquiries of becoming and “becoming of *what*” can advance our understanding of family firm heterogeneity (e.g. Daspit *et al.*, 2021). In established operations, “who we are” usually guides “what we do”. But in my observation in an ongoing study examining the transition from family business to business family, the understanding appeared to be reversed: the process of growing and/or acquiring new ventures different from the family’s legacy business pushes the frontiers of organizational identities. Feeling the developmental pressure of managing multiple identities in the group portfolio, business families becoming renegotiate who they are and gradually craft a business family identity. The business family identity and the portfolio strategy mutually reinforce each other in the transition. Yet not all family businesses experience such a transition, even they are high in familiness and/or enterpriseness. Rather, I tend to see how the (family) entrepreneurs interact with their families and the businesses generate heterogeneous and emergent routes of becoming. Given this, examining the processes of different “destinations” becoming shall contribute to a better understanding of family firm heterogeneity.

3.4.2 Managing the paradox of family entrepreneuring and governing. Entrepreneuring focuses on breaking up and breaking free from routines. Yet, entrepreneuring actions, interactions and local orchestrations of relationships are not entirely arbitrary but are informed by certain formal and informal “rules” that tend to legitimize entrepreneurial acts. This is especially salient in the family business context, where those “rules” may be part of the generative tradition, which can limit or support new value creation (De Massis *et al.*, 2016). Seemingly paradoxical in nature, family entrepreneuring and governing co-exist. Cheng *et al.* (2021) conceptualized family enterprise governance as a sociotechnical practice for collective decision-making and governing involves the processes of sensemaking, storytelling/narrating and learning and development. Incidentally, these governing processes occur in the course of entrepreneuring (e.g. Johannisson, 2011; Rindova *et al.*, 2009; Steyaert, 2007a, b). I assert that family entrepreneuring engages a similar set of processes but doing so as a family collective requires coupling governing practices, which have not been explicitly examined in the literature.

Exploring how family businesses or enterprising families becoming manage the paradoxical tensions in the processes of entrepreneuring and governing can contribute to new insights. A governance system can either control or empower entrepreneurial practices. Family entrepreneurs seeking autonomy often find themselves caught by the arrangements they make to gain legitimacy and access to resources (Rindova *et al.*, 2009). Yet at the same time, a well-set governance system explicating the “red lines” and remedial actions in place when things go wrong can liberate experimentation of the becoming. How to strike the balance between entrepreneuring and governing, especially from the legitimating or authoring perspective (Rindova *et al.*, 2009), may offer a fuller picture of the process of becoming. Entrepreneuring, coupled with governing, can also help explain what constitutes “the routinized” and “the unpredictable” in an entrepreneurial practice (Champenois *et al.*, 2020). How can “the unpredictable” become “the routinized” by institutionalizing them in the governing acts? How can “the routinized” become “the unpredictable” by loosening the governing boundaries? Addressing these questions can have the potential to inform how the structure of practices evolves (Seidl and Whittington, 2021).

Finally, another interesting line of research is about how family entrepreneuring and governing interact in each of the processes of becoming. For instance, sensemaking in a family enterprise system is distributed throughout its family, business and ownership subsystems. Unlike sensemaking in individual entrepreneuring, sensemaking in family entrepreneuring requires orchestrations amongst hierarchies within each subsystem and in the heterarchy of the three subsystems. Holistic governing practices can potentially facilitate exchanges between underlying sensemaking platforms in these subsystems (e.g. board of directors, owner's board and family council), thereby advancing the odds of successful entrepreneuring.

The lens of family entrepreneuring opens vast opportunities for understanding how family businesses and enterprising families survive and thrive in the disruptive era. The proposed lines of research are among a few that can hopefully clarify and deepen our understanding of this inspiring angle of family entrepreneuring.

3.5 Storytelling and family entrepreneuring—by Karen Verduijn

Following this special issue's call for papers, and in particular, the plea to consider focusing more on the *processes* and *practices* in relation to how entrepreneurship is being "done", in this short viewpoint article, I abide by a non-entitative stance, and thus an ontology of becoming (as is also suggested in the call, building on Chia, 1995). This entails that the article will not be about "family business" (entity) but, again in line with the call and a non-entitative stance rather about "family entrepreneuring" (the "entrepreneuring", indeed, owing to Steyaert, 1997).

In particular, I embrace the term to underscore, and thus create room for, understanding the intricacies, the complexities inherent to this intriguing phenomenon. Family entrepreneuring entails complex assemblages, with many interlinkages (not in the last place between family (members) and business (members)). Family entrepreneuring involves an often rich history (Hjorth and Dawson, 2016), and a strong sense of place and space (e.g. Basco *et al.*, 2021). While such elements may point at a sense of stability, this is countered by the inherent "dark side", tensions and conflicts (Webb *et al.*, 2010; Pieper *et al.*, 2013; Kubiček and Machek, 2020; Suddaby and Jaskiewicz, 2020).

Mine, here, is a plea, in particular, for a processual understanding of, and approach to understanding, family entrepreneuring, *via their storying*. In this respect, I acknowledge, e.g. Parada and Dawson (2017), who have analysed family narratives to understand how a collective identity is built, Short and Payne (2020), who underscore the role words and narratives can play in understanding the rich relationships and who argue how the "family business field is uniquely situated to benefit from narrative research" (p. 343), as well as Hamilton *et al.* (2017), who proclaim how "narratives allow researchers to delve into the intricate lives of members of a family in business" (p. 3).

I concur with these contributions with regards to the importance of storytelling. However, the approach proposed here deviates in that it is not so much about family business narratives as research data, nor the storytelling subject "behind" the storytelling (e.g. the storytelling family members), but rather – from that processual, non-entitative stance – about an interest in the *process* of storytelling (Steyaert, 2007a, b), where stories are to be seen as open and indeterminate. Stories provide coherence to the complexity of everyday life, they are embodied and embedded, and as such never "finalized". From this viewpoint, i.e. stories as living, stories are seen as performative. To put it simply, they have effects (Barbera *et al.*, 2018). And as such, they can also become a means to intervene. And that would be my point, my suggestion here: looking at family entrepreneuring via their storying could serve not only to understand the phenomenon better (in particular, the complexities and the intricacies) but can take the shape of an interventionist approach (also see Pieper *et al.*, 2013), a way of

diagnosing “problem areas” (Pieper *et al.*, 2013) (e.g. the tensions and conflicts) and of addressing them. This obviously needs elaborating, and a short dive into a processual storytelling.

Stories, as accounts of lived experience, tend to highlight certain happenings, events or aspects, thus – as a principle – underemphasizing other happenings, events or aspects. The general tendency with storying is thus, indeed, to seek for and provide (more) coherence (than the actual complexities of lived reality). As such, each and every story is “incomplete” and contains “blind spots”; there is dominant, and less dominant storying going on. Whence, the challenge to *move* stories, to make them less coherent by removing (some of that) coherence. Moving (*recomplexifying*) stories is actually not difficult, for the movement is actually already “in” there (see, again, e.g. Steyaert, 2007a, b on the “cat’s cradle”). It is literally a matter of “undoing” the dominating elements, and “finding” the loose ends (for some interesting “techniques” and ideas on how to accomplish this, see, e.g. Boje, 2014).

I am not suggesting radically new insights. I’d actually like to mention some particular extant contributions here. Firstly, Barbera *et al.* (2018), who, referring to business family narratives as legacies, document how such legacies inhibit stable as well as fluid elements, making it possible to shape and reshape them. Adopting narrative performance theory, they show how such legacies can be reframed, such that there are various modes of performance of these narratives. Secondly, Suddaby and Jaskiewicz (2020) stipulate the importance of seeing family traditions as constructs, such that they portray fixed as well as malleable components. They suggest that consequently, by definition, it is possible to reinterpret the “collective memory”. Referring to a rhetorical history (Suddaby *et al.*, 2010), which suggests a much more fluid and bidirectional interaction between past, present and future, they propose “formal workshops in which multiple generations are brought together to work on structured projects (e.g. family histories, commemorative events, family museums) in which the family heritage is made open and available for collective reconstruction” (Suddaby and Jaskiewicz, 2020, p. 239, referencing Balmer *et al.*, 2013). It is this openness that means that stories are not fixed and can come to life again, in a sense, such that it is possible to change the elements, allowing for more, new emphases and more, new storying.

To conclude: the point here is, that family entrepreneurship storying is processual, and as such is prone to change, and to (further) becoming. Concretely, (alleged) coherence is something to “play” with in terms of the storying going on, possibly changing its plot and meaning. This can serve as an intervention with regards to family entrepreneurship, and family storying, but it can also very well serve to move the storying of/in the field of family entrepreneurship.

3.6 Transgenerational entrepreneurship – managing the good and not-so-good of an entrepreneurial legacy—by Eric Clinton

“That is how we do things around here”, a synonymous phrase heard in family firms across the world. The way we do things around here in family firms may be associated with a unique organizational culture (Zahra *et al.*, 2004), customer service offering (Rondi *et al.*, 2021), attitude to investments (Lumpkin and Brigham, 2011) or approach to entrepreneurial activity (Diaz-Moriana *et al.*, 2020). But what if “the way we do things around here” does not serve the best interests of the family firm, what if the values, behaviours or attitudes that have been perpetuated across generations of the family are not only unhelpful but could be deemed toxic practices for the continuity of the business. Whereas much has been written about the positive halo attributes of the entrepreneurial legacy of prior generations (e.g. Jaskiewicz *et al.*, 2015), we know little about the negative attributes of a family’s entrepreneurial legacy nor how next-generation members can break unhelpful norms or routines in their pursuit of transgenerational entrepreneurship.

Transgenerational entrepreneurship are the processes through which a family uses and nurtures entrepreneurial mind-sets and family-influenced resources to generate new streams of entrepreneurial, financial and social value across generations (Habbershon *et al.*, 2010). The legacy of the past is pervasive in the family business context, where the beliefs, attitudes, stories and artefacts of the founder are often handed down across generations (Colli, 2003). This close affiliation to the past has a significant bearing on present traditions and future entrepreneurial aspirations (Suddaby and Jaskiewicz, 2020). While the legacy of the past can provide an initial advantage, it may also generate inertia and resistance to change, if next-generation members are incapable of unlearning inappropriate behaviours, experimenting with new approaches and gaining their own competitive identity. An entrepreneur's stock of knowledge is influenced by their subjective circumstances and prevailing context. In the family business context, Chirico and Nordqvist (2010, p. 6) suggest that a family business culture can often make firms "inflexible, resistant to change and inclined to stick to path-dependent traditions". How can next-generation members selectively retain entrepreneurial legacy influences while developing their own idiosyncratic attributes in response to a changing environment? Research on entrepreneurial learning holds much promise for untangling the legacy baggage and unhelpful practices that can overshadow the transgenerational aspirations of next-generation leaders.

Entrepreneurial learning is a "social phenomenon which occurs in context via a process of co-participation involving "reflecting, theorising, experiencing, and action" (Taylor and Thorpe, 2004, p. 204). Recent research (e.g. Zozimo *et al.*, 2017) has sought to offer greater clarity on the family's influence on the entrepreneurial learning process. In their study of long-lived firms, Clinton *et al.* (2020) suggest "entrepreneurial learning is bi-directional and multi-generational, involving multiple forms of co-participation from family members" (2020, p. 384). They further highlight the need for family members to engage with an unlearning paradox, "a dual process of retaining practices that work and unlearning practices that are non-economical, obsolete, or misleading" (2020, p. 397). Despite recent promising research, our understanding of entrepreneurial learning and unlearning processes in family firms is in its infancy but is a burgeoning field of study as next-generation members grapple with the good and often the not-so-good aspects of their families' entrepreneurial legacy.

3.7 In the questioning of "development": what can we learn from process artists? —by Jenny Helin

Recently, we have seen nurturing exchanges between art and scholarly work. In recognizing that the mixing of diverse ideas, people, materiality and conversations can open up new avenues, we have realized that we have much to learn from artists. In the spirit of gratitude, let me turn to the American artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles.

In the late 1960s, Ukeles became a mother and recognized she could no longer be the avant-garde artist she wanted to be, given all the maintenance she had to carry out. In a rage, in one sitting, she typed the three-and-a-half page *MANIFESTO FOR MAINTENANCE ART 1969! Proposal for an exhibition "CARE"*. The manifesto is divided into two parts. In the first part, she elaborated on what she calls "two basic systems", where she placed "development" and "maintenance" in opposition to each other. In her questioning of why art was focusing on individuality in the form of the hero-artist and on the development of the object of art, she wrote:

Two basic systems: Development and Maintenance. The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?

Development: pure individual creation; the new; change; progress; advance; excitement; flight or fleeing.

Maintenance: keep the dust off the pure individual creation; preserve the new; sustain the change; protect progress; defend and prolong the advance; renew the excitement; repeat the flight.

The problem Ukeles had identified is that society values development, while maintenance takes all the time. This manifesto was not only a call to clash with the patriarchal structures that kept women, just like all maintenance work, hidden, but also a critique of how we understand change.

Is Ukeles's critique familiar? In his seminal piece, "Entrepreneurship" as a conceptual attractor", Steyaert (2007a, b) inquired into what he called a "creative process view". He emphasized that the concept of "entrepreneurship" has major implications for our capacity to rethink "entrepreneurial knowledge, theory, and methods" (Steyaert, 2007a, b, p. 454). However, he continued, in order to bring this reorientation to life, there is a need to move beyond "metaphors of 'development' and 'growth'" (Steyaert, 2007a, b, p. 456). The problem with development-oriented models of process is that they rely on core assumptions of "linearity, causality, predictability and equilibrium", which hinders understanding of what "happens as it happens" (Steyaert, 2007a, b, p. 457).

In short, along similar lines to Ukeles's art manifesto, Steyaert (2007a, b) called for alternatives to the ingrained idea of "development" where he underlined the need for a multitude of approaches to studying entrepreneurship processually. Over the years, a stream of research, from family business as well as entrepreneurship, has contributed to this body of work, which we can today call "family entrepreneurship" (i.e. see the call for papers for this special issue).

In extending this important discussion and contributing to the repertoire of family entrepreneurship research that takes off from something fundamentally different from the idea of development, I will shortly introduce three themes – what I see as three invitations – from Ukeles's work that spans over 40 years of process art.

Firstly, Ukeles's move from "development" to "maintenance" is an invitation to resist and question the forces of power. At the start of the 1970s, she ran a series of performances that critically interrogated conventions and assumptions of how museums are hierarchically managed. To this day, museums are highly managed environments that regulate who has the right to experience art, including groups of employees who are not even in contact with the art. In one performance – "*The Keeping of the Keys*" at Wadsworth Atheneum – Ukeles collaborated with museum security. At different points in time, the museum guards handed over their keys to Ukeles. In this way, she disturbed the conventional order by locking and unlocking museum doors. Sometimes she was alone, sometimes people were locked in or locked out by her actions. Her performances remain striking examples of institutional critique and invite questions about access, authority and power.

Secondly, in Ukeles's radical process view, she "works without leaving behind a product: 'my working will be the work,' as she writes in her manifesto" (Durán, 2019, p. 5). By way of example, in her manifesto, Ukeles names sweeping the floor of the museum "floor-painting." Among similar ways of working, where she does not focus on "things" but rather on the process of conducting her work itself, is her performance "*Touch Sanitation*". Here, she shook hands and thanked each of the 8,500 sanitary workers of the New York Sanitation Department, telling each of them: "Thank you for keeping NYC alive". Thus, Ukeles is not only interested in recognizing the hidden processes that are challenging to uncover, but also in contributing in similar ways. What is there for us to learn, as process scholars, from finding new ways of working where "my working will be the work"?

Thirdly, Ukeles's art practice is anchored in the need to make a difference. In her critique of what art and creation are and can be, she ends her manifesto with a description of an exhibition called "*Care*". For years to come, she worked with a variety of art forms, showing the need for care toward family, city and the Earth. For instance, in relation to the "*Touch Sanitation*" performance, she said:

As an artist, I tried to burn an image into the public eye, by shaking, shaking, shaking hands, that this is a human system that keeps New York City alive, that when you throw

something out, there's no "out". Rather there's a human being who has to lift it, haul it, get injured because of it (highest injury rate of any US occupation), dispose of it, 20,000 tons every day. Our garbage, not theirs (Mierle Laderman Ukeles, in [Philips, 2016](#), p. 216).

In another art initiative, "*The Social Mirror*", she covered a New York City Department of Sanitation truck entirely in mirrored glass; how do we react, when we, at least, have to face ourselves in relation to our own trash, something we have outsourced to invisible others in our modern society?

Writing this at the closing of year 2021, we can only acknowledge that questions around inequality, power and ecology are as important today as they have been throughout Mierle Laderman Ukeles's career. Meeting these challenges requires from us as scholars to move beyond traditional academic boundaries. Through the questions we raise, the methods we set in motion and the activities we perform, we can, just like Mierle Laderman Ukeles, aim to be courageous, curious and make a difference. Artists have much to contribute to that aim. I hope that, in the same way that Ukeles's work resists clear categorizations (she even developed her own artistic genre), we can be inspired to take the freedom we have as scholars to think and act anew.

4. Towards a holistic understanding of context: where does family entrepreneuring happen?

Although the notion of context largely permeates current entrepreneurship scholarship, its conceptualization is still largely limited to a static and spatial understanding ([Welter, 2011](#)). Scholars often acknowledge the country and industry of their empirical investigations, less frequently considering temporal, cultural and institutional characteristics ([Welter et al., 2019](#)) or socio-cognitive aspects of context. A holistic, multi-level and multi-dimensional understanding of entrepreneuring in context(s) ([Baker and Welter, 2020](#); [Welter and Gartner, 2016](#)) is needed to theorize family entrepreneuring, as evidenced in the following contributions.

4.1 How research on family entrepreneuring can push entrepreneurship scholarship—by Friederike Welter

Do we really need a focus on family entrepreneuring to learn about entrepreneuring in family businesses? Isn't this too narrow? By analysing new phenomena within very many different subgroups, entrepreneurship scholars have created novel understandings, but mainly for and within research silos ([Baker and Welter, 2017](#)). Obviously, we cannot be bothered with transferring insights from our subcommunities back to entrepreneurship scholarship. This, however, is required to develop our field further as well as making our research more relevant. In this short note, I will outline a few themes where future research on family entrepreneuring can contribute to pushing the boundaries of entrepreneurship scholarship.

Entrepreneuring refers to the entrepreneurial behaviours and activities of individuals, thus introducing a processual perspective. The concept of family entrepreneuring itself goes beyond the individual and is deeply contextualized. It emphasizes the multiple contexts of entrepreneurial activities together with the agency of those involved. It also reflects the diversity of actors for entrepreneuring: Families are not homogenous; instead, there are manifold forms, from core to patchwork families, spanning generations, cultures and countries. Obviously, combining families and entrepreneuring contributes to a much deeper understanding of the relational and social aspects of entrepreneurship. Family entrepreneuring can be understood as entrepreneurial co-creation of and within families; it is about the becoming and the doing. Therefore, research on family entrepreneuring could provide novel insights into how entrepreneurship is imagined, shared and jointly enacted

within a social group. By focusing on one group of actors (families) as fundamental for entrepreneuring, we can learn much about the “when” of entrepreneuring, that is its temporality and dynamics: How does family entrepreneuring evolve, persist and decline? How does it change over time? When does it emerge? Which events trigger family entrepreneuring? Who triggers it? Who is actively involved, who not? When and why does this change?

Studies on family entrepreneuring also can generate unique insights into what makes places entrepreneurial. We have recently argued for more research on the power dynamics of entrepreneurial places (Welter and Baker, 2021). Family entrepreneuring provides an excellent experimental setting for studying such power constellations and dynamics, over time and across members of the family, probably even cultures and countries: Who takes the helm in family entrepreneuring? Who steps back? Who is talking, listening, listened to without talking or needing to talk? Which voices of the family are not heard; which voices are – deliberately or involuntarily – kept silent?

Next, the past exerts an influence on family entrepreneuring, both the past of families as well as the past of places and cultures. Several themes could be of interest here: In which ways does family entrepreneuring draw on the past? When, why and how are families locked into their past? How can they overcome negative legacies of the past that may hinder their entrepreneuring? Which legacies are stronger: the family past, the spatial past or the cultural past? Some of these questions have been studied in relation to cross-border and informal entrepreneurship, much of which is carried out by families – but not yet theorized and conceptualized as family entrepreneuring.

The editors of this special issue recognize materiality as one important aspect in family entrepreneuring. For me, this also includes the built and constructed environment in which family entrepreneuring happens. It is only recently that I have come across the importance the built environment, that is urban planning and architecture, may have for the nature and extent of entrepreneurship. Buildings, cities and transport means all may involuntarily restrict entrepreneurial activities of certain groups, for example. It would be interesting to explore these questions in relation to family entrepreneuring.

Whether family entrepreneuring always is connected to the creation of organizations as suggested by the editors, I consider an open question. Entrepreneuring carries a value in itself as ample research on informal entrepreneurship has illustrated: For example, enterprising families shuttle across borders to buy and sell goods while at the same time caring for and about their community (Welter and Xheneti, 2015). Increasingly, entrepreneurship scholars point to social and societal value creation as an output of entrepreneuring, posing the question of whether this differs for family entrepreneuring?

Finally, we need more research on the good and bad of family entrepreneuring. The themes I outlined so far also indicate potential dark sides of family entrepreneuring. Just think of the role of various family actors for family entrepreneuring and the influence family conflicts of today and the past could exert in this regard.

The topics I outlined so far also require different research approaches – a good mixture of so-called “quantitative” and other research methods. It would be interesting to check, for example, whether and how big data or machine learning methods can help us understanding the complexities of family entrepreneuring? Methods that I explore at the moment include visual and linguistic approaches. They provide me with a different understanding of how entrepreneurship happens in and across contexts and at different points in time. It is pictures and images and our language that matter; and I believe that research on family entrepreneuring, with its manifold facets, also may benefit from such approaches.

All in all, future research on family entrepreneuring can offer us a much more nuanced picture of the who, when, why, what and how of entrepreneuring, opening up new avenues for

theorizing entrepreneurship beyond families – provided these insights are transferred beyond the family business and family entrepreneurship community. Let's do this, then.

4.2 Family entrepreneurship through the lens of context theorizing—by Rodrigo Basco

Family entrepreneurship is an important research stream that links the field of family business and entrepreneurship, focusing on the processes and practices that family members voluntarily or involuntarily engage in to create, develop and preserve economic activities. Even though efforts have been made so far to better understand entrepreneurship as a practice within family boundaries, the phenomenon of entrepreneurship is contextless. This is a curious paradox because it is important to recognize that the processes and activities toward entrepreneurship occur in a particular time and space. In this sense, context matters for family entrepreneurship because context either constrains or expands the phenomenon of family entrepreneurship.

Following the development of family business and entrepreneurship research, a way to move the investigation of family entrepreneurship forward involves applying a context-sensitive approach (Amato *et al.*, 2022; James *et al.*, 2021; Welter and Gartner, 2016) to incorporate context into research. A context-sensitive approach not only should recognize what the circumstances that surround the phenomenon under investigation are but also the contextual dimensions that shape the phenomenon itself (Krueger *et al.*, 2021).

The basic understanding of the context is context as a container, focusing on the surroundings where processes and practices toward entrepreneurship occur. The *context as a container* lens conceives context as a mere description of what surrounds the phenomenon of family entrepreneurship. It is an important lens to know and understand the phenomenon itself and is useful for developing comparative studies. However, this does not really incorporate context into research. Further, this lens has two main limitations. Firstly, it is not possible to explain why the phenomenon of family entrepreneurship is an uneven phenomenon that occurs across contexts. Secondly, it does not reveal why and how the specificities of the phenomenon emerge across contexts.

Therefore, to address the aforementioned limitations, a shift is necessary to move the understanding of context from the *context as container* lens to a *context as a covariate* lens. The latter lens incorporates dimensions of the context that may influence the phenomenon to explain its variations and specificities. In this sense, institutional, cultural, historical, geographical and temporal dimensions of contexts may provide distinct and new perspectives into family entrepreneurship. The *context as a covariate* lens implies considering the different types of dimensions of contexts to explore why, how and when context constraints or expands family entrepreneurship. Applying the embeddedness framework of contexts (Basco, 2017; Krueger *et al.*, 2021) entails postulating that processes and practices of entrepreneurship are encapsulated into three interrelated categories of contexts.

Firstly, the micro-level of context is related to the family characteristics in which processes and practices occur. Since all families are not alike, family characteristics become the fundamental context surrounding family entrepreneurship. Family culture, leadership, religion and types of relationships between nuclear and extended family members, among others, are the micro-level dimensions of this context that determine the nature of family entrepreneurship. Within the family context, individuals produce and reproduce the processes and activities that shape the phenomenon of family entrepreneurship. Secondly, the meso-level of context is related to close institutions that surround the family through which individuals and families interact, such as business-related institutions (e.g. institutions linked to industries, customers and competitors) and social-related institutions (e.g. social, religious, educational and sports institutions). Each of these meso-level institutions have their own assumptions, values, beliefs and rules that may determine the processes and practices of

entrepreneurship. Finally, the macro-level of context encompasses sociocultural factors, formal institutions and geographic space among other dimensions which account for the general surroundings in which family members are embedded and ultimately define the conditions of family entrepreneurship.

To advance the knowledge of family entrepreneurship through context theorizing, several research questions require further investigation: Do the processes and practices of family entrepreneurship vary across contexts? What are the contextual dimensions that constrain or expand the phenomenon of family entrepreneurship? How do the different contextual levels shape family entrepreneurship? What is the importance of each contextual level in the processes and practices of family entrepreneurship? Why do the processes and practices of family entrepreneurship vary across contexts? Lastly, how do the processes and practices of family entrepreneurship vary across contexts?

Future research should incorporate a context-sensitive approach to investigate the family entrepreneurship phenomenon by interpreting different facets of contexts (Johns, 2006). That is, moving from situational characteristics of context, which is the basic contextualizing research approach of the phenomenon, to context theorizing research approaches that consider the situational strength, situational stimuli and cross-level facets of contexts. The step forward in employing the context theorizing research approach involves incorporating the dimensions of contexts into the research method by applying appropriate qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

Applying a context-sensitive approach to research on family entrepreneurship may contribute to the intersectionality of family business research and entrepreneurship by addressing two research gaps: the existing tendency to produce contextless research and the lack of a theory of family entrepreneurship. Firstly, context-sensitive research enriches existing knowledge about family entrepreneurship by recognizing that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to understanding processes and practices toward entrepreneurship. In this sense, the heterogeneity of the phenomenon is determined by the contextual dimensions in which it occurs. Secondly, the effort to shift research focus from a contextless approach to a context-sensitive approach may help develop a theory of family entrepreneurship. This will be useful in leveraging existing knowledge of the phenomenon by explaining it and predicting when and under what circumstances family entrepreneurship flourishes or bears losses.

4.3 Family entrepreneurship – context is everything!—by Maura McAdam

I am currently musing over the words context and contextualization. It has been said that I love context and for me, context in research (and in life) is not just the background story but it is the story! In fact, entrepreneurship including family entrepreneurship is never conducted in a void; it is never context-less. 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. However, family business researchers to date have failed to be explicit in regards to how they understand and employ context in their particular study. This is worrying as context plays a critical role in new venture creation and a dynamic influence on entrepreneurial propensity, attitudes and actions as it simultaneously provides individuals with entrepreneurial opportunities and constraints. It is also important to note that context is not just about geography but can also refer to socio-economic, political, market and institutional contexts. Thus, a multiplicity of influences shape everyday family entrepreneurship experiences. Within this short research note, I argue that it is impossible to discuss family entrepreneurship separate from the context in which it occurs and in doing so underscore the importance of taking a contextualization approach to family entrepreneurship and the methodological implications of such.

4.3.1 Family entrepreneurship in context. Despite the wealth of literature examining the entrepreneurial function in family firms (Kellermanns and Eddleston, 2006; Cruz and Nordqvist, 2012; Zellweger and Sieger, 2012), portfolio entrepreneurship (Sieger *et al.*, 2011) and trans-generational entrepreneurship (Zellweger *et al.*, 2012a, b), interestingly the debate as to whether family firms are truly entrepreneurial or not still rumbles on. While some researchers have argued that family firms provide a supporting environment for entrepreneurial activities (Zahra *et al.*, 2004; Eddleston and Kellermanns, 2007; Miller *et al.*, 2008), others maintain that family firms are typically conservative and risk-averse (Naldi *et al.*, 2007; Gómez-Mejía *et al.*, 2007). Due to the diversity and often contradictory nature of issues examined at the intersection between entrepreneurship and family business, scholars have sought an integrated theory of family business and entrepreneurship (Randerson *et al.*, 2015). This has resulted in the term family entrepreneurship, which refers to those family firms that consistently engage in entrepreneurial activities including innovation, new venturing and/or strategic renewal across multiple generations (Sharma *et al.*, 2012). As research domain, family entrepreneurship research is interested in the entrepreneurial behaviours of family, family members and family businesses (Bettinelli *et al.*, 2014). For example, recent research by Clinton *et al.* (2021) demonstrates the process by which entrepreneurial behaviours are transmitted, in doing so, they show how the presence of entrepreneurial behaviour enablers acts as catalysts in the perpetuation of these behaviours.

Given the multiplicity of contextual influences that shape everyday family entrepreneurship experiences, it may come as no surprise that family business scholars have struggled to be explicit in regards to how they understand and employ context in their particular study (Johns, 2001, 2006). As such, as a construct, context lacks definitional clarity, consistency about its dimensions and a lack of agreement in how to engage it when conducting family business research. A contextualization approach which harnesses three distinct dimensions, *where it happens*, *who it happens to* and *when it happens* (Welter *et al.*, 2019) may help to provide a more nuanced understanding and a fine-grained application of context in family entrepreneurship research.

Where it happens requires a focus on the complex locations in which family entrepreneurship takes place, which can be distinguished in terms of social, cultural, geographical and spatial contexts. There has been a growing focus on how entrepreneurs interact with and enact contexts-*who it happens to* (Pret and Carter, 2017; Spedale and Watson, 2014; Watson, 2013). I argue that the adoption of a “doing context” lens (Baker and Welter, 2020) is particularly necessary for the family entrepreneurship context in order to highlight the ways in which family businesses co-create and construct their contexts due to their embeddedness in local communities, economies and societies (Baker and Welter, 2020). *When it happens* refers to the differing organizational contexts and organizational configurations that manifest as a result of family business members doing context. Thus, the consideration of the family business as a distinct organizational configuration places attention on individual and family firm level decision-making.

4.3.2 Methodological challenges of family entrepreneurship contextualization. If it is agreed that there is scope for both theoretical and empirical contextual development in the family business field then quite clearly, some attention to method and methodology is necessary. Indeed, there is more research needed to unearth the nuanced experiences of family businesses using novel methodologies that not alone advance knowledge but also have practice-based impact. In particular, the adoption of a contextualization approach to family business research requires methods that allow for the seeing and visualizing of contexts for family entrepreneurship (Tedmanson *et al.*, 2012; Welter *et al.*, 2019). For instance, there have been calls for entrepreneurship research to borrow fine arts photography and visual methodologies from ethnography and visual sociology disciplines to aid the theorizing context (Imas *et al.*, 2012; Welter *et al.*, 2016; Baker and Welter, 2020).

The incorporation of such approaches will help bring to the fore the nuanced perspectives of everyday family business experiences (Tedmanson *et al.*, 2012; Welter *et al.*, 2019; Baker and Welter, 2020).

Another way to capture the everydayness of family businesses is through storytelling. The anecdotal telling of stories is common practice in family businesses, with a lot of these stories transmitted across the kitchen table. Despite the informal setting, such stories are mechanisms by which entrepreneurial values can be transmitted as, “entrepreneurial behaviour . . . is a portable wisdom in stories that can be passed onto others as we walk and talk through life” (Smith, 2009, p. 10). As researchers, we need to look at ways in which we can capture the knowledge that is bound to issues of memory such as narrative inquiry (Polkinghorne, 1995), with narrative – a powerful tool that can capture the emotion of the moment rendering the event active and infused with latent meaning.

4.3.3 Moving forward. A commitment to contextualized research practices will require a “contextual treatment” to our research approaches, methods and operationalization and requires acknowledgment of family business’s inherent complexity, murkiness, messiness and mundaneness. Consequently, adopting a more critical appraisal of how context is positioned within current theorizing around family entrepreneurship offers the potential to progress debate while acknowledging that competing and contrasting contextual influences require clearer recognition.

4.4 Family entrepreneurship: some suggestions to take a step forward—by Alfredo De Massis and Paola Rovelli

The last decades have seen increasing interest in the ability of family firms to be entrepreneurial (Rovelli *et al.*, 2021), in turn advancing family entrepreneurship (Neubaum, 2018; Payne, 2018; Short *et al.*, 2016) – a research field at the intersection of the family business and entrepreneurship fields (Randerson *et al.*, 2015). In this regard, scholars have thus far explored topics including corporate entrepreneurship (e.g. McKelvie *et al.*, 2014), entrepreneurial orientation (e.g. Zahra *et al.*, 2004), exploitation of opportunities (e.g. De Massis *et al.*, 2020), entrepreneurial risk-taking (e.g. Zahra, 2005) and family entrepreneurial teams (e.g. Schjoedt *et al.*, 2013).

Despite the efforts to combine the family business and entrepreneurship research fields (e.g. Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Anderson *et al.*, 2016; De Massis *et al.*, 2020), much more knowledge is needed with regard to the entrepreneurial behaviours, identities and projects pertaining to family businesses. This would allow more deeply understanding entrepreneurship conducted by families – ultimately leading to the foundation of family firms – and entrepreneurship enacted by existing family firms – such as corporate entrepreneurship. In particular, still lacking in this research field is the focus on so-called *entrepreneurship* (Steyaert, 2007a, b), intended as a processual, material and relational phenomenon (Champanois *et al.*, 2020; Hjorth, 2014; Hjorth and Reay, 2018) leading to founding new firms (Johannisson, 2011). Bringing this concept into family business implies looking at the entrepreneurship processes and practices of families and family firms, i.e. *family entrepreneurship*.

While this Special Issue has taken a step toward advancing research on family entrepreneurship, we call for additional efforts from scholars interested in family business and entrepreneurship. Indeed, some basic questions remain unanswered and require a deeper investigation. Some of these include: *What are the dimensions that define family entrepreneurship? How do processes occur and progress in the context of family businesses and enterprising families? Which practices allow family entrepreneurship to succeed? How are these practices defined and who is involved in their definition? How do tensions among family members as well as the desire and need for succession affect family entrepreneurship? How does the anthropological type of the family affect family entrepreneurship?*

More in detail, we identify two interesting research avenues following recent developments in entrepreneurship and departing from the more traditional family business research approaches: (1) *bringing the sector to the core of family entrepreneurship studies* and (2) *adopting a holistic approach to study family entrepreneurship*.

As to the former, the entrepreneurship literature has always assumed the industrial sector in which the firm operates influences any entrepreneurial activity. This also reasonably applies to family entrepreneurship. Indeed, families, family businesses and the processes and practices they enact to conduct entrepreneurial initiatives involve strong interactions with (and are influenced by) their peers, competitors, customers, policymakers and other stakeholders, together constituting the sector. Despite the potential influence and taking into account industry (control) variables, scholars have failed to fully capture the underlying mechanisms through which the industrial sector shapes entrepreneurial phenomena, such as family entrepreneurship, and the processes through which the actors (e.g. family members, family businesses and employees) interact with the sector to establish the processes and practices to successfully exploit entrepreneurial opportunities. Following [De Massis et al. \(2018\)](#), we hence call for more research on the role of the sector in family entrepreneurship, inviting scholars to put the sector at the core of their studies. In this regard, based on the idea that family entrepreneurship urges the family to search and access knowledge from different domains to successfully identify and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities (e.g. [Levinthal and March, 1981](#); [March and Simon, 1958](#)), a scholar might investigate the role of *sector fluidity*, that is “the extent to which information, knowledge, and resources can flow freely across industry boundaries” ([De Massis et al., 2018](#), p. 7). This is particularly relevant not only to theorize and fully understand the role of the sector in family entrepreneurship, but also given the variety of new sectors arising and their increasing dynamicity and interconnection. This approach would also help scholars identify the sector-based entrepreneurial capabilities [2] of families and family businesses that are pivotal in family entrepreneurship.

The second research avenue concerns the adoption of a holistic approach to study family entrepreneurship. Following [De Massis et al. \(2021\)](#), this means considering the variety of assets that families and family businesses create or acquire over time through family entrepreneurship, which generates both financial and socioemotional wealth for the family. Specifically, family entrepreneurship researchers should take into account that families operate in a family-related organizational ecosystem ([De Massis et al., 2021](#)) in which the new firms founded as the outcome of the processes and practices pertaining to family entrepreneurship coexist and operate at the interface of the family and other organizations – called family boundary organizations. As such, research on family entrepreneurship should consider not only the family and the family firm (on which family business research typically focuses; [Neubaum and Voordeckers, 2018](#)) or newborn entrepreneurial ventures, but also the multitude of other organizations that might be part of the family-related organizational ecosystem: family academies, family foundations, family business foundations, family holdings, family offices, family museums, etc. (for a complete overview, see [De Massis et al., 2021](#)). It would thus be interesting to understand how these organizations shape family entrepreneurship through influencing the processes enacted and the practiced defined within the family and the business with the aim of being entrepreneurial. In particular, the variety of actors involved in the family-related organizational ecosystem gives rise to a network of relationships that can simultaneously be a valuable source of information, knowledge and assets – in general, wealth – and complexity, with potentially important consequences for family entrepreneurship. Moreover, although family business restructuring occurs frequently and is important for the prosperity of entrepreneurial families across generations ([King et al., 2022](#)), we know little about how entrepreneurial families leverage on business restructuring in terms of mergers, acquisitions, divestitures, spin-offs, sell-offs, buy-outs to pursue family entrepreneurship and the role played by different business restructuring initiatives in shaping family entrepreneurship.

Nevertheless, advancing research on family entrepreneurship in these directions entails some challenges that call for specific approaches. A first challenge, common in family business research, is the theoretical perspective adopted to investigate the phenomenon. Indeed, different theoretical perspectives might lead to different (and in some cases potentially misleading) interpretations of family entrepreneurship. As such, we suggest scholars adopt multiple theoretical and complimentary approaches when investigating family entrepreneurship and the suggested research avenues, offering alternative perspectives and explanations of the phenomenon, thereby providing a clearer, more complete and comprehensive picture of family entrepreneurship.

From a methodological perspective, scholars might need to depart from the methodologies traditionally employed in the family business field, also taking cue from the entrepreneurship research field. Specifically, the nature and complexity of the phenomenon (i.e. the focus on the processes and practices) and the multiple levels of analysis and actors involved in addressing the two suggested research directions (e.g. firm, family, individual, sector, entrepreneurial process, entrepreneurial practice) contribute to making family entrepreneurship difficult to investigate. While various methods could be adopted, qualitative research and experiments might be particularly useful. These would help to more fully understand how sectors are interconnected and the mechanisms underlying the influence the sector exerts on families, family businesses and the individuals involved in family entrepreneurship. In addition, qualitative research might be useful to fully capture the nature of the relationships between the family (and its business) and the family boundary organizations mentioned, as well as their role in family entrepreneurship (De Massis and Kammerlander, 2020). Nevertheless, quantitative research might also be useful in this regard. Specifically, social network analysis would enable researchers to understand the network of relationships among those that are part of the family-related organizational ecosystem, and the implications of the characteristics of this network on the processes and practices at the core of family entrepreneurship.

Without claiming exhaustiveness, with this brief research note we hope to stimulate the debate among scholars interested in advancing research on family entrepreneurship. We hope that our suggestions – on the potential research avenues and methodological approaches to address them – will help researchers better understand the processes and practices of family and family firm entrepreneurship.

4.5 Research considerations for family entrepreneurship—by Haya Al-Dajani

Despite their conceptual and practical intersections, the disciplines of entrepreneurship and family business remain largely separate research and policy arenas (Holt *et al.*, 2018), albeit recently bridged by the emergent, developing and growing field of family entrepreneurship (Payne, 2018). Building on Steyaert's (2007a, b) entrepreneurship concept, family entrepreneurship is proposed as a shift from family entrepreneurship, to capture the ongoing processes, procedures and practices in *doing* family entrepreneurship. To this extent, this article presents a set of four interconnected research considerations for studying family entrepreneurship and for contributing to theoretical and empirical developments for the proposed shift. The four research considerations are the contextual embeddedness of family entrepreneurship, family model diversity and family entrepreneurship, doing gender in family entrepreneurship and resilience and family entrepreneurship. The article concludes by discussing eclectic research methods for exploring these research considerations and capturing the ongoing processes, procedures and practices in family entrepreneurship.

4.5.1 Contextual embeddedness of family entrepreneurship. Family firms remain the backbone of both formal and informal economies in both the Global North and the Global South and their local embeddedness is widely acknowledged. Yet, much of the family

entrepreneurship and family entrepreneurship research reflects contexts of the formal economies of the Global North only (Calabrò *et al.*, 2019) and disregards the extant contextual diversity in which family firms are locally embedded. Ignoring the diversity of contexts in which family businesses are locally embedded in family entrepreneurship research, wrongly suggests that contextual heterogeneity is unimportant for family entrepreneurship and those involved within it.

Particular to the contextual embeddedness of family entrepreneurship is the unavoidable inter-relationship between the realms of the family and the entrepreneurship. The impact of the context on those involved in the family entrepreneurship can be captured and analysed through a place-based approach that draws on theories of contextual embeddedness to explore how the family business and its relevant geographies are mutually structured and transformed (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2014). This is especially important as contexts are dynamic and changing rather than stagnant.

4.5.2 Family model diversity and family entrepreneurship. To a large extent, the family business research and literature adopted the traditional definition of the family, as a group of two or more people related by blood, marriage or adoption and took for granted the patriarchal, Western, nuclear family model to characterize the family in the family business (Samara, 2021). Doing so has excluded the diverse spectrum of family models including single parent and step parent families, LGBTQ + families, the extended family and other models where marriage, blood relations and adoption do not feature, especially in contexts of the Global South. Acknowledging this diversity of family models and undertaking research within them when researching family entrepreneurship will enrich analyses and frameworks of ownership, succession, legal structures, governance and processes of family entrepreneurship.

4.5.3 Doing gender in family entrepreneurship. It is widely acknowledged that family-business research is greatly lacking in interrogating taken for granted assumptions about gender in family business, “and in particular of work that goes beyond considering gender as a (control) variable for biological sex, or as a problem that concerns women only” (Achtenhagen *et al.*, 2017, p. 26). Avoiding this limitation when researching family entrepreneurship is fundamental especially given how and why gender is done in the family and within its diverse models. To date very few family business and family entrepreneurship studies utilize gender theories to analyse and understand the social construction of gendering in family firms (Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2014). Adopting gender theories will explain the gendering of family entrepreneurship as well as how gender is done during and as a consequence of, family entrepreneurship. For example, exploring how gender of women and men is constructed and legitimized during family entrepreneurship by the entrepreneurs themselves and by their family members and whether or not and how this can be changed through family entrepreneurship and/or other social processes and structures will add great value to entrepreneurship research (Baker and Welter, 2017), as well as family entrepreneurship research.

4.5.4 Resilience and family entrepreneurship. Within the family business literature, resilience has been researched considerably from the organizational and/or business perspective to address growth and succession in family businesses (Chrisman *et al.*, 2011; Conz *et al.*, 2020). However, it has not sufficiently addressed the inter-relationship between the resilience of the family members and that of the family businesses. Which comes first? This can be approached through the adoption of the processual nature of both family entrepreneurship and resilience and is important as it recognizes the agency of the family members and their capitals, especially during crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic which paralyzed the world’s economies. Clearly, resilience is strongly associated with the considerations of contextual embeddedness, family model and doing gender discussed

earlier. As such, it should be approached through this multi-dimensional framework to effectively address its inter-relationship with family entrepreneurship.

4.5.5 Conclusion. To effectively explore the four outlined research considerations and capture the ongoing processes, procedures and practices in family entrepreneurship, revisiting the adopted and applied research methods is needed. The adoption of research methods that acknowledge the indirect and unassuming nature of everyday family entrepreneurship such as interpretivist methodologies that are rarely applied in family-business research and seldom published in leading family-business journals (Nordqvist *et al.*, 2009) is highly recommended. These methodologies include longitudinal research which is ideal for capturing processes such as family entrepreneurship, ethnographies, narratives rather than standard semi-structured interviews and single in-depth case studies. Such methods will effectively capture the inherent nuances of family entrepreneurship and offer a valuable complementarity to the positivist quantitative methodologies that dominate family business research. For family entrepreneurship research to thrive, we need to uncover the unknown rather than keep rediscovering the norm.

4.6 Gendering and contextualizing family entrepreneurship—by Malin Tillmar

Family entrepreneurship represents the merger between family business research and the continually expanding body of knowledge about entrepreneurship. Furthermore, it constitutes an up-and-coming and intriguing field of research (Short *et al.*, 2016; Champenois *et al.*, 2020). The existence of such cross-fertilization and an academic interest in practices provides us with hope that further endeavours of this sort will be pursued in the future. In this short note, I will highlight the need for gender awareness in developing a proper understanding of *family entrepreneurship*. The interrogation of the simultaneous processes of “gendering” and “entrepreneurship” has implications for methodological approaches to family entrepreneurship and for our theoretical understanding of the same.

In the field of family business, it has been recognized that the intertwining of the family system, the business system and ownership form a complex whole (Gersick and Feliu, 2014). For example, the emotional ambiguity that this complexity gives rise to has recently been the subject of some discussion (Randerson and Radu-Lefebvre, 2021). Notwithstanding this, for a scholar of gender and entrepreneurship, I find it puzzling that studies into gendering of family business practices have not gained international impact until relatively recently (Heinonen and Vainio-Korhonen, 2018; Jennings *et al.*, 2013). However, current developments in this field are promising, since we have identified and articulated emergent knowledge about (in)visibility of women (Ahl, 2007; Keskinen and Vainio-Korhonen, 2018; Sundin, 1988), how the male image can be challenged (Lahtinen, 2018), how families are affected by business (Jennings *et al.*, 2013; Dunn and Liang, 2001) and the role of women in succession (Cesaroni and Sentuti, 2018). Nevertheless, I still argue that further studies into how family and business impact each other and how different roles and tasks are differently gendered in these contexts should remain a priority for scholars in the field. A multitude of different studies can be conducted, depending on the line of business, the business size and where the business and the family are situated.

To fully grasp the simultaneous processes of “entrepreneurship” and “gendering” in the context of family firms, I recommend that we conduct ethnographically-inspired studies (Murchison, 2010; Kostera, 2007) that include participant observations (Tillmar, 2019; Gherardi, 2019). Especially if we wish to answer the calls for contextually sensitive studies into entrepreneurship (Welter, 2011). As researchers, we need to be on-site, in the thick of things, where the business and family interaction takes place. Doing so would enable us to experience the processes with all our senses. We need to note not only *what* is said but also *how* it is said. Always of interest is *what is not said*. The primary challenges that researchers

face in such an endeavour are time and access. Ethnographic studies are time-consuming, a factor that may be a deterrent for some researchers. Nonetheless, in my experience, such studies are enriching in terms of developing our knowledge of these processes. Gaining the trust of entrepreneurial families to enable ethnographic access to the boardroom and to BBQs and family dinners is another challenge that the ethnographic researcher must overcome. This challenge is context-dependent, of course. However, trust has been established in previous studies (Javefors Grauers, 1999, 2002). Research ethics, confidentiality agreements and knowing how to process personal information securely are all vital components of such studies. Unfortunately, it seems that we must wait until the Covid pandemic is over before this kind of research can commence in full.

So, I now ask: *In which contexts should we conduct the ethnographic studies on gendering that I have argued for?* Firstly, I contend that large family empires have gained more attention than small-scale and (sometimes) mundane entrepreneuring activities, even though these activities often create something more than mere economic value (Steyaert and Katz, 2004; Rindova et al., 2009). Hence, I argue that ethnographic studies on the gendering of mundane entrepreneuring is highly needed.

Secondly, studies focusing on contexts other than urban have also been called for (Steyaert and Katz, 2004), and in response, research into rural entrepreneurship is on the rise (Pato and Teixeira, 2016; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019). Geographical contexts are gendered and thus can impose different gendered effects on entrepreneuring (Welter, 2020; Tillmar et al., 2021). However, studies on gender and entrepreneuring in rural contexts remain somewhat scarce in the fields of entrepreneurship, family business and family entrepreneuring (see Tillmar et al., 2022, for an exception). Given their relative scarcity, such studies are highly called for because valuable insights can be gained from rural studies (Shortall and Bock, 2015; Bock, 2006a, b).

Thirdly, taking a step back and adopting a global perspective, I contend that we need more knowledge about family entrepreneuring in the Global South. Some studies exist into how family situations and gender affect entrepreneuring in a limited number of contexts (Tillmar, 2016; Monteith and Camfield, 2019; Al-Dajani et al., 2014), but these research results remain scattered and fragmented since the area is still relatively underexplored.

4.7 An open critical invitation to decolonize family entrepreneuring from the margins—by J. Miguel Imas

I want to start this provocative call to embrace a critical approach (e.g. Banarjee, 2022; Weston and Imas, 2018) to decolonize the emerging field of family *entrepreneuring* by reflecting on the report written by Daniel Patrick Moynihan entitled: *The Black family: The Case for National Action* (March 1965).

... it has to be said that there is a considerable body of evidence to support the conclusion that Black social structure, in particular the Black family, battered and harassed by discrimination, injustice, and uprooting, is in the deepest trouble. While many young Blacks are moving ahead to unprecedented levels of achievement, many more are falling further and further behind. (Moynihan, 1965, p. 5).

Moynihan alludes to the precarious state of the African American family unit despite all the achievements since the end of slavery and the start of the civil rights movement. He also describes all the misconceptions and prejudice Black communities suffer from “white” America. Indeed, it can be said, that stereotypes and stigmatization of the African American family (and by extension community) was cemented by this report when he asserts what characterize Black families, in contrast to the strong bonds displayed by European migrant families, is the instability and disintegration of the family unit. This conception of dysfunctionality has prevailed, marginalizing further not only Black individuals but also other minorities in the way

they are perceived and understood. They ghettoized their experiences, stigmatizing them further under poverty, violence and segregation (Wacquant, 2005). In other words, their experiences and societal contributions are marginalized and concealed.

More recently, Zellweger *et al.* (2010) research on *familiness* poses the following question “how does the family contribute to firm success?”. It might be legitimate to ask then whether the authors had in mind *other* than the European family unit, like, the “dysfunctional” Black family described in Moynihan’s report. After all, they do refer to a strong sense of belonging and identity as key and central aspects of family business success. Those “sense-making” traits that Moynihan described the “white” European family epitomized.

Likewise, when Uhlaner *et al.* (2012) proposed their “*entrepreneurship* family paradigm” as a new field of family business research, one can question whether the Eurocentric Judo-Christian family unit is the one assumed in this emerging research. Examining the contribution and the way in which family is, again, defined we found that a Eurocentric construct is applied. Both *familiness* and family *entrepreneurship* share this Eurocentric position (see, e.g. Frank *et al.*, 2016) to assert and validate their constructs, ignoring the life trajectory of *others* such as in my opening reference.

Family *entrepreneurship*, like the preceded literature on entrepreneurship and family business from where it emerged, is driven by Eurocentric theoretical and empirical considerations whereby the notion of “family” reflects traditional Western idea[*s*] of what a family unit represents. Under this paradigm, a “family” is conceived following Judo-Christian and modernist assumptions of a constituted unit that shared (blood), common values, history, resources and an identity. A unit that seems stable and able to share and interact in order to create wealth. We find these Western ideas embedded, for instance, in what Bettinelli *et al.* (2014) considered the cornerstone of family entrepreneurship. Acknowledging that they accept the complexity of defining “family”, especially as this notion has evolved in the Western world (e.g. single family, same-sex parents and so forth), they still emphasize the significant role played by the family unit in instigating entrepreneurial individual behaviour. They go on to suggest that this is achieved through a process of sense-making within the closed and extended family unit, in which future entrepreneurs learned entrepreneurial stories about members of the family.

Both epistemologically and ontologically this continues to “colonise” those whose family “model” may not reflect the same history or traditions. It continues to impose a “truth” on those whose entrepreneurial behaviours and family lives may have been the result of colonial imposition or marginality (Hewitson, 2013). For those of us who question this theoretical/philosophical lineage that oppresses and suppresses the voice of those (barefoot) entrepreneurs (Imas *et al.*, 2012) who are not represented by this processual Eurocentric ontology, our challenge is to re-think family *entrepreneurship* beyond these Western characterizations. That is, we must critically, adopting postcolonial and decolonial approaches (e.g. Prasad, 2012), seek to advance knowledge that accounts for the stories of those who do not subscribe to the tenants suggested by the emerging family *entrepreneurship* models. I am referring to those who primarily live in the Global South or belong to ethnic minorities in Western cities that are continuously stigmatized, exploited and deprived of a voice. They too have families, and they also practice entrepreneurship (Verduijn and Essers, 2013). Yet, most Eurocentric literature ignores them as within the entrepreneurial capitalist grand narrative, they reside at the periphery or simply, they do not exist.

Considering the progress achieved in recent decades in the social sciences to address the inequality and misrepresentation of communities that are from the Global South and who reflect another cosmopolitan vision of development and creation of wealth, which might be more sympathetic, e.g. to address pressing matters such as the environment, or how to live with “less” in a “sustainable” world (e.g. Gould *et al.*, 2019), learning about their forms of family organization becomes essential. Moreover, in order to develop research agendas that can also have a strong societal impact not purely at the “top” but also at the “bottom”, it is important to

critically examine new theoretical ideas that claim to describe entrepreneurial behaviours. We need to pose questions that can address entrepreneurial families who do not comply with the “granted” European version of family.

Finally, why is this relevant for family *entrepreneurship*? Well, if we simplistically continue to see life through Western eyes and continue to imply that Western constructs possess “universal” validity, we will be doing a disservice to science and, in the process continue to “colonise” and “stigmatise” the lives of family entrepreneurs who do not fit this emerging approach.

5. Concluding thoughts

As the intention of this multi-voiced paper was to have a variety of scholars speak to a wide range of perspectives and issues regarding family entrepreneurship, an attempt at a summary of such a diversity of insights would, from our point of view, be a detriment to our original goal. These statements speak for themselves rather convincingly about the importance of a family entrepreneurship approach and the challenges of moving this approach forward. We leave a comparative content analysis of this corpus to others. And we surmise that there may be some value in exploring similarities and differences in the references that our scholars call out as signposts for guidance on approaching family entrepreneurship. Be that as it may, in the process of both developing this special issue and coaxing the creation of this multi-voiced article, we want to re-emphasize a number of ambitions we had in mind when we began this journey in 2020.

The use of the word “entrepreneurship” is to realize that entrepreneurship is inherently a verb; it is a phenomenon that takes place over time and that to study entrepreneurship is to study a process that is always in motion. We expand this by positing that the study of the “family” in family entrepreneurship must always recognize the dynamic characteristics of the family itself. Family entrepreneurship must always have a sense of movement (e.g. [Steyaert and Hjorth, 2003](#)) to capture an essential aspect of its nature. Yet, we tend to get stuck in nouns. We think of organizations rather than organizing ([Weick, 1979](#)). We hold on to particular moments when we know that those moments are fleeting. How long does the present last? We step from the past immediately into the future. We cannot “be” in a process. Yet, we tend to think in a way where the situation is fixed, and we can hold on to a particular moment. Therefore, a challenge that is inherent in this multi-voiced offering is the process of “letting go.” To move forward with family entrepreneurship is to let go of one’s current assumptions of what entrepreneurship and family are, and, to be open to the fluid possibilities of family entrepreneurship, itself.

Notes

1. See the work on family entrepreneurship by [Randerson et al. \(2015\)](#) for additional examples.
2. These are defined as “the capacities (i.e. processes and routines) of an entrepreneurial actor (entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial teams and enterprises) to prospect, develop and exploit opportunities by reconfiguring human, social and financial resources within and across industry sectors” ([De Massis et al., 2018](#), p. 8).

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