Family firms have a prominent role across countries and industries and are the main organizational form for most ventures worldwide. Family firms are organizations characterized by intertwining of the family and business systems, which gives a special flavor to how decision-makers act and react and to how strategic decisions are taken. In fact, economic and non-economic objectives co-exist in such types of organization, where the family is attached to the stock of affect-related value—also labeled as socioemotional wealth (Gómez-Mejía et al., 2007)—that has been invested in the firm. The tendency to preserve family control and influence, family identification with the firm, and emotional attachment, and the desire to transfer the business to the next generation, are characteristics that make family firms different from other organizational forms. Moreover, those features can vary depending on contexts (Welter, 2011) and cultures (Hofstede et al., 2001). There is indeed a great heterogeneity among family firms due to different degrees of family involvement in ownership and management, business and family governance, organizational size and international scope (ranging from small ventures to multinational enterprises), and industries. Several themes have been investigated within the family business research field, such as leadership succession, business and family governance, innovation, internationalization, role of siblings, corporate entrepreneurship, and the role of women as mothers, daughters, and sisters (Martinez Jimenez, 2009). With specific reference to the role of women in family business, research has suggested that this context gives a special flavor to the legitimation process of women’s leadership (Calabrò et al., 2022). The role of women belonging to a family business is different than that in other types of organizations: on the one side they are legitimized as being part of the business as they belong to the owning family (Campopiano et al., 2017), and on the other they might be exposed to challenges, when entering the corporate world, such as entry barriers, the glass ceiling, and stereotypes (Chadwick &
They often face additional challenges such as struggles with their male siblings, usually considered the natural heirs (Akhmedova et al., 2020; Calabrò et al., 2018). And, even if they make it to the top, they could face double stereotyping; in addition to stereotypes aimed at women, they face the judgment that they attained their role only because they are part of the owning family.

Research suggests that the role of women within these types of businesses is often minimized; they are present but contribute “in the shadows” to the growth and sustainability of the family firm (Haberman & Danes, 2007). Despite some studies revealing that women should have a more official presence on boards of directors starting with the second or third generation of family owners (Sonfield & Lussier, 2004), others indicate that only 23 percent of succession of family firms in developed countries involves women (Ahrens et al., 2015). Further studies also suggest that, within the family firm context, firstborn sons (male primogeniture) are often preferred as natural heirs and thus CEOs of the family business, with a systematic exclusion of daughters. Unfortunately, there is as yet a lack of understanding of the process that leads to the legitimization of women in family firms and of women’s roles within family businesses.

Women within family firms might indeed be exposed to several challenges, especially when it comes to the decision as to who will be the next leader, whether having a female successor is considered an option, and whether they are in fact willing to take over (Calabrò et al., 2018). The familial, social, cultural, and institutional dynamics which take place often lead those “family business women” to renounce their original desire to lead the family firm in order to avoid tension within the family, leaving the firm to their brothers or perhaps exiting it and starting an entirely new type of entrepreneurial activity (Hamilton, 2006).

At the same time, women entrepreneurs running ventures while managing family commitments have become a global phenomenon (Elam et al., 2019). But women face different challenges than their male counterparts, as they are the primary caregivers for children and their families (Shelton, 2006). This can cause work–family conflict, including job–spouse conflict, job–homemaker conflict, and job–parent conflict, which can create even more challenge as women entrepreneurs grow their businesses (Kim & Ling, 2001; Nikina et al., 2013). The ways in which women entrepreneurs manage work and family are understudied to date. Increasingly, women are starting businesses with their spouses or family members, a phenomenon referred to as “copreneurship.” This could ultimately be considered a preliminary phase in the constitution of a family business, where business ownership and operations are shared by dual-career couples (Marshack, 1994). Yet the ways in which these businesses are structured and how they perform is not well understood.
In sum, there is a lack of systematic knowledge about women in the context of family businesses, and about how women as entrepreneurs are managing their families.

This book marks the 12th volume resulting from the Diana Project, established in 1999 to engage in research activities focusing on women entrepreneurs. The book builds on the dialogue catalyzed by scholars working on the field of women entrepreneurship per se and scholars whose work is in the field of family business, and who focus on the role of women in that context. As a starting point, we take the position that the term family can take different meanings depending on the angle of investigation. It could refer, for example, to the original “social bubble” which the woman comes from and in which she might feel secure. It can also refer to the “bubble” created by women getting married. Beyond this distinction, family structure changes across context and cultures; for instance, in North American and North European cultures the family is generally composed of parents and children, while elsewhere, for instance in South European, African, and Asiatic cultures, the frontiers of the family are much broader, including cousins and parents-in-law—often also labeled as extended family.

Therefore, in this introduction we revisit the two sets of literature, proposing a rapid overview of the state of the art provided on respective family impact on women entrepreneurship and women’s place in family businesses, and also showing the research gaps they perceive. In that respect, we also seek to explain how the two sets of literature can nourish each other. We also introduce some selected chapters originally presented to the 2021 meeting of the Diana Project, as well as others that were collected to propose a fresh insight of current research debates on the topic. Most of the chapters suggest that women are still trapped in traditional roles within their own patriarchal families, with emancipation still to come. While working on business ventures, women still note children and education duties as their top priority, far higher up the list than meetings with financers and clients. In addition, there is evidence that women still find it difficult to establish a place in male-dominated family businesses. Women do succeed in pursuing their entrepreneurial goals, but only in some specific contexts. For instance, in contexts where social welfare differs across countries, women have to strategize with their spouses to pursue their entrepreneurial objectives. Further, in other less developed contexts, for example in Lebanon and Syria, women refugees who become entrepreneurs may have to “strategize” against their spouses to pursue their entrepreneurial objectives.

We conclude that further research is needed to better understand many of the challenges and opportunities emerging from these chapters. In particular, we are calling for a better study of what emancipation means for women from different contexts. Second, we are calling for more studies on the impact of the
“meso” level (Brush et al., 2009) and on the context (Baker & Welter, 2020) of these results.

1. RE-EXPLORING THE ACTUAL IMPACT OF THE FAMILY ON WOMEN’S ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND DEFINING WOMEN’S PLACE IN FAMILY BUSINESSES

1.1 Re-exploring the Actual Impact of the Family on Women’s Entrepreneurship

Since the presentation of the first paper on women’s entrepreneurship, in 1977, research has considered women entrepreneurship as a set of practices (Bruni et al., 2004) that are conducted by women, as individuals, who are leading companies, alone or with partners. In that attempt, and because they are women, they face constraints. Primary among the 5Ms identified as characterizing women’s entrepreneurship is the mother role (Brush et al., 2009), which inhibits both optimal levels of involvement in networks that are helpful to ensure the growth of their venture, and investment of the necessary time into their business. Thus, research tends to consider that the family is a burden that prohibits women from pursuing their own careers and expressing their leadership in established organizations (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998; Merluzzi & Phillips, 2022). In that respect, entrepreneurship tends to be presented as key for combining self-professional achievement and family, especially motherhood (Goss et al., 2011). On the other side, and once the venture has been created, research also shows that family, especially when women are also mothers, reduces women’s ability to network properly and to invest the requested amount of time in achieving the ideal level of performance of the new venture (Shelton, 2006).

In such circumstances, spousal support plays a great role (Nikina et al., 2013). However, perceived support differs across women themselves, depending on the role they want to have in society: either being equal to their spouse in role-sharing or choosing to embrace a more traditional role (mumpreneurship) and therefore developing their activity as they please, with their own rhythm (Nikina et al., 2013).

The greatest concern and limitation of this research lies in the fact most studies have been conducted in western societies, specifically in rich clusters of innovation. However, following the call in the second special issue of Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice (Hughes et al., 2012), which was devoted to women entrepreneurship, there is a need to better explore women entrepreneurship across cultures and contexts. This seems relevant if we want to generalize any result that refers to the family’s role in women entrepreneurship, since family structure differs across cultures (d’Iribarne, 2009;
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Sharma & Manikutty, 2005). Moreover, taking into consideration the five components of the construct of “context” (Welter et al., 2016), there is also a need to better consider different family contexts and their impact on women entrepreneurship within the same country, and how family operates on women entrepreneurship across contexts.

1.2 The Role of Women in Family Businesses: How Can the Literature on Women in Family Business Contribute to the Understanding of Women’s Entrepreneurship?

The multiple roles that women play in the family and in the business environment have constantly evolved in the past decades. These roles are embedded in a complex network of family and social relationships and reflect individual expectations as well as social norms. Women who are part of a family business might face advantages and disadvantages in legitimizing their leadership role within the firm. Indeed, women who are part of the owning family generally have more advantages than men in family firms in relation to flexibility in work schedules and job security for maternity leave (Salganicoff, 1990). Some studies also show that being part of a family business provides women with better access to managerial positions in relation to their non-family counterparts (Ramadami et al., 2017). Moreover, parental support and mentoring for leadership are key factors that facilitate daughter succession, as is sharing a vision for the future of the business (Overbeke et al., 2015). Nevertheless, disadvantages arise too, especially when it comes to being promoted in top managerial roles within the family firm. The competition with male siblings often puts them in a subordinate role where mother, sisters, and daughters are supposed to contribute to the family firm by taking care of and nurturing the next generation of family successors. Moreover, they often face barriers in accessing top managerial roles in family firms that are in traditional masculine industries (such as construction and transportation), where male family members are preferred for the leadership post. They are also preferred over male family members in cultures where inherited social norms and overall cultural and historical norms, such as primogeniture, are followed in selecting the firstborn son as the next CEO of the family firm, even if this will be detrimental for post-succession firm performance (Calabrò et al., 2018). It is especially when they experience this glass ceiling effect and systematic exclusion from top leadership roles within the family firm that female family members may give up, in order to avoid escalation of possible conflicts with male family members that could undermine overall family harmony and balance. This is also seen among women belonging to family firms who seek to take over the family firm. Recent research indeed shows that children’s early exposure to a family firm increases intention to take over the family firm, by increasing
the level of their affective commitment. However, this mechanism is valid for sons and not for daughters, suggesting that there is a gendered perspective in the investigation of succession intentions when it comes to family firms (Gimenez-Jimenez et al., 2021).

In sum, while women in family firms might have a privileged position in accessing managerial positions, they still face several challenges in finding a balance between what is best for the family and what is best for their own career plans. They are often seen as being “chief emotional officers” and playing a shadow and/or supporting role for the other family members within the family and the firm. Furthermore, even when they reach top managerial roles, they might be exposed to judgment and stereotyping—both within and outside the organization, they might be seen as “privileged” and as being in such positions only because they are “daughters of,” “sisters of,” “mothers of.” More research and practice-oriented studies are surely needed to overcome these barriers that women in family firms still face.

2. PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK: PROVIDING AN OVERVIEW ON THE IMPACT OF FAMILY ON WOMEN WHILE ENTREPRENEURING

In seeking to start a dialogue between the literature on women entrepreneurship and the literature on family business, we selected 11 chapters that reflect complementary approaches to a common phenomenon: the ways in which women, while entrepreneuring (Rindova et al., 2009), win their emancipation as individuals and, in such an attempt, manage with or without their family. Therefore, the book falls into four different parts, described as follows.

Part I, “Women and Family Business in a Paternalist Context,” is the starting point of the journey. Whatever the country, and even beyond capitalistic contexts, family business remains the dominant entrepreneurial practice. However, the literature states that, whatever the nature of the family business—whether the business is driven by a couple or an extended family—women have long remained in the shadows, with these ventures largely dominated by males. But what does “in the shadows” mean? And how might women take the lead of a family-owned company?

The first two chapters focus on a particular context, which reflects on women’s place in family businesses in a time of succession. The first chapter, by Soumara El Hayek Séfieir, is located within the subject matter of established family businesses but describes how women attending boards of a company held by a family are not necessarily members of that family. In that respect, the author thus first confirms that women who are present in these boards impact strategic decisions of the company, but also reveals that impactful women in these boards do not often come from within the family per se. Women who
come from the family tend to have been overprotected, and therefore lack experience. Other women are taking the lead, especially during succession phases. Chapter 2, co-written by Hedy Yezza and Didier Chabaud, notes that what is happening inside a venture during the succession process is strongly influenced by some aspects of the context, especially the macro-level, and, moreover, the religion of family members. Focusing on a longitudinal analysis on a very long succession process in a Tunisian company that operates in a “female” industry—the nailcare industry—the authors show how the brother uses religious beliefs to justify his legitimacy to take the lead in the venture and how the sisters, who are also seeking to take the lead in the venture, face difficulty in asserting a legitimacy that does not come from “God” and have to refer to different interpretations of the Qu’ran to keep their place.

Part II is titled “Women’s Autonomy and Distance from the Family.” Addressing the difficulty of being better considered among the leaders of a family business, the second part of the book seeks to enter a dialogue. It reveals that women deciding to develop their own venture, not involving their spouse or family, still have to cope with the family, whose members can become a real burden. In that respect, Jasmine Jaim, focusing on the context of Bangladesh, reveals the strong role of the spouse, whose support and adhesion to the project is almost compulsory for a woman to access loan finance for her business. In that respect, the results are consistent with those presented in Part I, revealing the strong role of the patriarchs who often refuse to give a lead role to women either in family business or in stand-alone businesses developed by women. In another context, in Lebanon, Rola El Ali sheds light on the situation of women refugee entrepreneurs. In terms of the support received from NGOs, which claim to support their efforts at emancipation, women are officially the head and the leader of their small venture. However, this hides the fact that such women are often enslaved by their family. In the best case, they carry the entire responsibility for the survival of the family. In the worst case, their entrepreneurial activity is controlled by the spouse or by the spouse’s family.

Looking beyond spousal control, then, Luz Marina Ferro-Cortes, Nancy Matos, and Florence Pinot de Villechenon, considering the case of women entrepreneurs in Latin America, confirm that family environment conditions the innovation capacity of women entrepreneurs: beyond moral support, the extended family environment (spouses, siblings, children) regulates decision making (W/F balance, push/pull) and leverages tangible and intangible resources (knowledge, networking) as the entrepreneurial process progresses.

While the authors have revealed a common pattern among conditions for women in family businesses and for those developing their own ventures, Part III is titled “Leading a Business Within a Family or Making Up with the Family while Leading a Business: Same Fight?” and investigates these similarities more deeply. Do they definitely exist? The previous cases refer to situa-
tions in developing countries, but do we note similar results in other contexts? Considering different contexts and countries, Mona Haug and Gry Osnes sketch a comparison between women leaders in family businesses and women in top positions in big organizations that evolve through male-dominated activity. They reveal that, beyond contexts, these women are trapped in a similar fight: in all these cases, embedded gender images (acting as a proxy for stereotypes and bias) have a significant impact and are partly detrimental. Catalysts built on a sense of autonomy enable a solid experience of authority in challenging obstacles. This experience is facilitated and supported through formal or informal coaching or mentoring.

Focusing on one extreme context of women entrepreneurs evolving in the male-dominated wine industry in Italy, Cinzia Colapinto, Vladi Finotto and Christine Mauracher partly confirm these results. Thus, the boundaries between the post of leadership within an established company and entrepreneurship are thin. These women—who do not have familial connections with the industry—successfully entered the male, family-dominated field by following one of three following strategic paths, namely: geographical displacement as a trigger of the entrepreneurial idea; generational change leading to the use of technology; or generational change leading to a focus on local wines.

Part IV considers “Women’s Practices to Realize Themselves while Entrepreneuring.” Setting aside the two extreme contexts discussed in Part III, in Chapter 8 Kim Poldner, Mónica Grau-Sarabia and William B. Gartner explore the three types of practices which women entrepreneurs develop across contexts, especially in Southern Europe: reconnecting the entrepreneur’s own aspirations with the needs of others; resourcing their human, social, and financial capital by staying close to their origins; and recharging themselves, personally, through reflection and ownership of their situations.

The book concludes our journey by considering how women entrepreneurs manage their entrepreneurial emancipation with their family by reconsidering and reopening the debate on the work–life balance of women entrepreneurs. In that respect, Stacy Brecht investigates entrepreneurs who were working remotely before Covid-19 and, focusing on home-based entrepreneurs in California, highlights that home-based entrepreneurship has different meanings depending on the identity of the entrepreneur: for some males, working from home refers to a temporary situation in place until the venture has sufficient funding to have its own business location. For some males and females, working from home can reflect a lifestyle and willingness to live in a place that offers “fun” and “liberty.” Last, for many women, working from home still refers to the possibility to have both time for children’s education and time for the business, while reducing the costs of the small venture. Among these three categories of entrepreneur, the “life-stylers” are the single category that manage their time in a different manner; the two other categories adopt the
same method of time management as if they were working from a “place of business.”

3. PERSPECTIVES

Each of the contributions in this volume call for further research. First, each chapter sheds light on specific insights that emerge from particular contexts; there is thus a need to better investigate other contexts, not only to generalize identified results but also to gain a better understanding of differences across contexts. For instance, there is a need for better understanding of the signs of spousal control identified in the extreme case of Syrian women refugee entrepreneurs in Lebanon. So far, the real reasons behind such control are underexplored, but there is also a need to better question the extent to which women can really become emancipated through entrepreneurship.

Second, some chapters contain innovative research designs, such as the study of calendars and diaries. The robustness of such research designs should be better grounded and applied to other entrepreneurial contexts.

Third, and last, this book mostly reflects on the traditional family; it would be interesting to consider less standardized cases, focusing on how women who educate their children alone combine it with entrepreneurship in practice. Studying the dynamic of women entrepreneurship within polygamist families, which represent the great majority in some Muslim countries, could also complete existing results and provide a better understanding on the dynamic of women’s self-emancipation. In such an attempt, other less common cases, such as looking at tribal families or considering how women lesbian entrepreneurs develop their family while doing entrepreneurship, could also reveal interesting insights to better understand the dynamic that exists between women entrepreneurship and the family.

REFERENCES


