

Enterprising women in the past?

An inquiry into histories of women in business and theories of entrepreneurship

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Abstract: Among other things Covid-29 pandemic has exposed the precarious position of women as economic actors. Many experts and commentators who have observed the impact of the pandemic on women's welfare, frame its negative effects as a return to the «dark» past.

I argue our understanding of the history of women's involvement in business, and in particular their role as business leaders is very limited. In this paper I demonstrate that neither recent strain of gender-sensitive business histories of women with its "from below" approach, nor entrepreneurship theories grounded on Joseph Schumpeter's notion of innovation provide an adequate lens for the study of women's agency as heads of large-scale enterprises. To fill in this gap, I propose a different theoretical premise, based on ideas of Max Weber and organization-oriented conceptualizations of entrepreneurship developed by Heinz Hartmann.

My perspective is developed in context of my PhD project «Women of prayer and profit: a collective biography of the Morozov female business executives in post-reform Russia». This study investigates the agency of female executives in family firms in the second half of 19th century Russia. Specifically, it examines implications of class, gender and religion on female economic agency.

Introduction

Since COVID-19 pandemic had begun more than a year ago it has been widely acknowledged that women's welfare was disproportionately affected in comparison to men. For instance, recent analysis conducted by the consulting firm McKinsey & Company revealed that 54% percent of job losses globally can be attributed to women, while they comprise just 39% of global employment.¹ Reversal of gender equality gains is often described as a threat of returning to the past. The estimates of this predicted setback may vary from five to ten years, as suggested by Facebook's operating officer Sheryl Sandberg,² to almost seventy – according to UN Women Deputy Executive Director Anita Bhatia.³ Regardless of the accuracy, these references paint a grim picture of women's economic agency in the past. These references to the past may also suggest that we understand women as historical economic actors quite well, but this is not exactly the case.

As my own research illustrates, even defining the activities of women on the past poses problems. My study concentrates on female executives in Russian family firms in the second half of the 19th century: Evdokia Morozova ([–] –1866) managed a cotton mill alongside her son; Maria (1830–1911) and Varvara (1848–1917) Morozovs led textile firms *Savva Morozov's Son & Co* and *Tver' Manufactory Partnership* after their late husbands. Both Maria and Varvara Morozovs were majority shareholders and occupied the posts of executive directors. The aim of my project is to understand women's agency as executives and implications of

¹ Madgavkar et al. 2020.

² Bowman 2020.

³ Lungumbu & Butterly, 2020.

class, gender and religion on entrepreneurial action. My decision to discuss these women in the context of entrepreneurship always prompts questions whenever I present my work. So, they were not passive shareholders? Can we talk about these women as entrepreneurs? Or maybe owner-entrepreneurs? Did they take any risks? If you want to concentrate on their administrative decisions, how about calling them managers? etc. The fact the language of business and entrepreneurship history research struggles to accommodate actors like Morozovs is a symptom of a larger problem. In this paper I argue that neither recent strain of gender-sensitive business histories with its “from below” approach, nor entrepreneurship theories grounded on Joseph Schumpeter’s notion of innovation provide an adequate lens for my study. I propose a different theoretical premise, based on ideas of Max Weber and organization-oriented conceptualizations of entrepreneurship developed by Heinz Hartmann.

Gender-sensitive business history: in search of *invisible* women

Studies, which discuss women’s role in the economy can be found as early as 1924, marked by the publication of Elisabeth Anthony Dexter’s *Colonial Women of Affairs*.⁴ Yet, arguably the latest gender-sensitive strain of business history originates in the late 90’s. To grasp the essential theoretical premises of this paradigm, I am going to focus on the seminal work by Angel Kwolek-Folland *Incorporating Women* and 1998 summer issue of *Business History Review* edited by Philip Scranton. This issue was a result of a series of conferences organized at Center for the History of Business, Technology and Society (Hagley Museum & Library) by Scranton and Roger Horowitz, the Associate Director of the Center, two years earlier.⁵ These conferences were meant to promote discussion and implementation of new trends in business history. One of the first speakers was Kwolek-Folland,⁶ whose paper was not published in the issue, but it would be safe to assume that ideas she presented at the conference are reflected in *Incorporating Women*, which was also published in 1998. Articles that did appear in the issue were written by Wendy Gamber and Kathy Peiss along with a commentary by Joan Wallach Scott.

Introduction to *Incorporating Women* began with Kwolek-Folland’s criticism of biases, expressed by business historians. She claimed that mainstream business history has formulated its standard subject as a big rational corporation, a viewpoint, most powerfully articulated by Alfred Chandler.⁷ Historians, who adopted Chandler’s approach, never attempted to challenge or even to reflect on limitations of this standard. As a result, according to Kwolek-Folland, businesses led by women (and other underprivileged groups for that matter), which tended to be small and short-lived, escaped the attention of researchers. These enterprising groups were rarely viewed as entrepreneurs, with economic significance of their profit-seeking activities deemed irrelevant. For Kwolek-Folland this framework was in need of revision, as she argued all economic actors deserve to be acknowledged and understood. She suggested a holistic study of all the roles women could

⁴ Dexter 1924.

⁵ Scranton & Horowitz 1997; Scranton 1998.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Chandler 1977; 1990.

occupy within a business *together with* how these roles were affected by legal and social conditions of the given period. Thus, the study of women in business was meant to achieve two pragmatical goals: a) to undermine the power of restrictive legislation and patriarchal notions and provide a case for historical female agency; b) to undermine the exclusionist practice of business history as a discipline.⁸

Wendy Gamber's essay echoed criticisms of Kwolek-Folland, but her vision of the discipline's future was formulated in much more concrete terms. What was only implied in Kwolek-Folland's agenda for women in business history was explicitly put by Gamber: "studying the history of women in business (especially in the nineteenth century) means studying the history of small business, indeed the history of *very small business*".⁹ An inspiration for this premise is clearly reflected in the title – *Placing Nineteenth-Century Businesswomen in History* – which referenced an essay by Gerda Lerner, one of the pioneers of women's history. Notably, *Placing Women in History*, a manifesto proclaiming new directions for the studies of women, took issue with history writing which focused on women of achievement. Lerner described it as "compensatory" history, since it aims to simply compensate for the lack of women among the celebrated historic figures. According to Lerner, by elevating "deviant" experiences of these women, experiences of the "mass of women" become unjustly obscured.¹⁰ Following Lerner, Gamber suggested a strong focus on small businesses, for business history had to finally address the role of the majority of enterprising women instead of a few extraordinary individuals. Similarly, Peiss in her suggestions for gendering 20th century business history stressed the importance of taking into account women's small business ventures, especially those capitalizing on "female" expertise like real estate sales.¹¹

Gamber's and Peiss' insistence on small business research was obviously inspired by Philip Scranton himself. His groundbreaking analysis demonstrated the contribution of small-scale and artisanal manufacturing to the prosperity of large industrialized firms, which seriously undermined progressivist narrative of U.S. business history.¹² Accordingly, Scott justified significance of women's small-scale enterprises by referencing Scranton: "[h]is story undercuts the master narrative of small to large, traditional to modern. If following his lead, we identified a large sector of petty-entrepreneurship [i.e. conducted by women] that did not quite fit existing categories and yet generated income, we could ask why this activity has been largely excluded from the history of business? <...> [F]ocusing on women exposes the insufficiency of that story by calling attention to the structural organization of the market and its historical representation".¹³ Thus, all three essays question progressivist and masculine nature of business history, which inclusion of women's modest endeavors is destined to overcome. Presenting arguments congruent to critiques of Kwollek-Folland, they

⁸ Kwolek-Folland [1998] 2002, pp. 1-12.

⁹ Gamber 1998, 192.

¹⁰ Lerner 1975, 5.

¹¹ Peiss 1998

¹² See, e.g., Scranton 1991.

¹³ Scott 1998, 248.

reassert the dualistic character of women-centered research, its aim to reshape our vision of past *and* present.

It is apparent that the project of inclusion of women in business history indebted a lot to new social history's demand for "mass" and "marginalized" subjects, while cultural turn inspired scholars to analyze and contest the language of the field itself. Resulting practice meant identifying how legal restrictions influenced women's involvement in business, what strategies they employed and what sectors of the market they tend to occupy. In order to fulfill this purpose historians amassed data on female enterprises from various administrative records, such as censuses, trade directories, insurance and credit records, as well as newspaper ads.

Some research in spirit of Scranton highlighted the part women's ventures played in industrializing economies, while other sought to explain women's confinement to small scale production with structural limitations. In the words of Hannah Barker, whose study of female middling sort in Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield was tied to urban development of these cities: "businesswomen are presented here not as footnotes to the main narrative, but as central characters in a story of unprecedented social and economic transformation".¹⁴ Similarly, Alison C. Kay in her work about female entrepreneurs in 19th century London stated that according to 1851 census 70% employers had less than five workers, which made a strong case for exposing small businesswomen as notable contributors to the economy of the leading industrial city.¹⁵ On the other hand, Gamber argued that with the spreading of machine production of garments and new forms of distributions such as department stores, millinery and dressmaking was labeled unskilled and outdated, while its practitioners as irrational, causing these businesses to fail in the early XX century;¹⁶ Sparks noted the decline of business prospects for women since 1870's as the West coast integrated into the national economy;¹⁷ Lewis indicated a monetary "glass ceiling" beyond which female businesses could not expand, as banks rejected their credit requests.¹⁸ More broadly, feminist scholars were interested in women's agency and the basic structure/ agency problem, that is, to what degree human actions are determined by structural and institutional forces or one has the freedom to navigate the constraints.¹⁹ Emblematic of this debate is discussion of the impact of separate spheres ideology.²⁰ Within business history some researchers suggested prescriptive rather than descriptive nature of separate spheres revealing clever ways women broke with or exploited societal expectations, whereas other pointed out if not separate but segmented spheres, demonstrating increased presence of women business-owners in sectors, associated with "feminine" expertise.²¹

¹⁴ Barker, 2006, 3.

¹⁵ Kay, [2009] 2012, 2.

¹⁶ Gamber 1997.

¹⁷ Sparks 2006.

¹⁸ Lewis 2009.

¹⁹ Montenach & Simonthon 2013, 3-4.

²⁰ See Kerber 1988; Vickery 1993.

²¹ See Beachy et al. 2006.

All in all, this literature offered ample evidence from various time periods and national contexts²² that the ways in which gender was constructed did influence the market, and despite all legal and socio-cultural restrictions women did, in fact, play a part in the economic development. Nevertheless, in 2019 a call for papers issued by Business History for a special issue *Gender, Feminism and Business History*, claiming that “Despite the changes provoked by feminism and greater recognition of material and symbolic importance of gender relations, business history as a field maintains a largely gender-free and feminism-free centre”.²³ In particular this issue encouraged to address the persistence of the ‘great man’ narrative, that is, overwhelming amount of uncritical heroic stories of savvy and brave men, founding large enterprises. This appeal is certainly not unique. Feminist entrepreneurship scholars have inserted that ‘entrepreneur’ and ‘entrepreneurship’ in academic and popular literature possess traits of as a masculine concept rather than gender neutral.²⁴ Within business history this trend can be exemplified by the article collection *Women in Business Families*, edited by Jarna Heinonen and Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen, who manifest “challenging the heroic male image of entrepreneurs” as one of the book’s chief aims.²⁵

So, what happened? Why this this gendered intervention failed to establish itself as a consensual part of the mainstream? Apparently, the paradigm discussed above failed to effectively challenge the heroic aspect of entrepreneurship. One possible cause is the recurring way to describes these actors as “silent”, “unexceptional”, or “invisible”.²⁶ Recovering women’s precarious enterprises from historical obscurity, redefining seamstresses, confectioners, laundresses, shop keepers, even sex-workers as legitimate businesswomen and entrepreneurs – *was* radically challenging the corporate-bias of business historians. Not to mention that records of such activities were indeed difficult to find, as women were often “hidden” behind their male relatives. Yet, this representation does not give women as much power as the concept of entrepreneur projects in our collective imagination. As Susanna Fellman once noted, emphasis on small businesswomen’s disadvantaged position renders their experiences as less respected than men’s: “This gives the reader an impression that all these [business]women would have selected the career as a wife and a mother if they could have. But one could also ask whether at least some women of the time actually wanted to have an employment and they enjoyed working life and independence it gave”.²⁷

Scholars of women in business, writing in the 90’s and 00’s, would often use the terms entrepreneur, business owner, proprietress and manager synonymously, avoiding preoccupations of non-gender sensitive scholarship with drawing distinctions between these terms. It is easy to understand why: categorizing economic activities underscores feminist agenda of including marginalized groups and their enterprises regardless of size,

²² See, e.g., Yeager 1999; Beachy et al. 2006; Ulianova 2009; Craig 2016; Heinonen, & Vainio-Korhonen 2018.

²³ See, <https://think.taylorandfrancis.com/business-history-si-gender-feminism/> accessed 30.9.2019.

²⁴ Ahl 2004, 2006; Hamilton 2013.

²⁵ Heinonen, & Vainio-Korhonen 2018, 3; 33-95.

²⁶ See, e.g., Petersson 2006; Lewis 2009; Craig 2016; Khan 2016.

²⁷ Fellman 2011, 186. This remark was made in relation to Kay [2009] 2012, but in my view can be extrapolated to other similar studies.

profitability or longevity into business history writing. Notably, Angel Kwolek-Folland maintained that acknowledging consistent and organized presence of women in the economy would change the meaning of entrepreneurship, and other concepts business historians operate with such as risk, success, and innovation. However, the only concept she explicitly redefined was business, which she formulated as “engaging in economic activity in a market to seek profit”²⁸ – a formula aiming towards neutrality and broadness.

While historians of women in business rarely engaged with theoretical debates around entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship and organization scholars expressed increasing interest in history and historical methods. In light of this new literature it is worth posing: how do enterprising women fit into theoretical frameworks of historical entrepreneurship studies?

“Expansion” in entrepreneurship theory and the study of women

Entrepreneurship studies field was never homogenous and attracted scholars from various disciplines: economics, social sciences, management studies, economic and business history. Still scholars identify periods, when a particular discipline dominated the discourse.²⁹ Since 1970’s the majority of research was conducted within management studies, which were exerting their influence through the network of newly established business schools.³⁰ This literature understood entrepreneurship as a new venture creation, which also connected it with the field of small business research. Broadly, it focused on identifying personal traits or entrepreneurial behaviors that lead to establishment of new firms.³¹ The new millennium, however, is marked by the increasing calls for more contextual and longitudinal approaches to the studies of business, organizations and entrepreneurship, which has been already dubbed as “historical turn”.³² Another notable trend that seeks to broaden the scope of activities which can be associated with entrepreneurship, understanding it more as a social practice, and thus inviting migration of scholars and methods from social science disciplines.³³ In my opinion, it is possible to sum up these new developments as an expansive trend: after decades of specialization the field is now moving towards broadening its subject, time scope and increase the relevance within other disciplines. In this section I attempt to outline the relevant contributions to this expansive trend and major consensuses this field espouses, and then question the adequacy of these approaches to the study of enterprising women in past.

For the purposes of this section I am not attempting to produce a comprehensive response to all current entrepreneurship theories, but rather pinpoint some common ideas and implications. In general, interest in creating entrepreneurship theories increased, to the extent that some scholars have voiced concerns about journals being too theory-heavy, and

²⁸ Kwolek-Folland 2002, 5.

²⁹ Landström & Benner 2010.

³⁰ Landström & Benner 2010; Swedberg 2000.

³¹ See Gartner 1985; 1988.

³² See Cassis & Minoglou 2005; Bucheli & Wadhvani 2014; McLaren et al 2015; Álvaro-Moya & Donzé 2016; Wadhvani 2016; and a special issue of *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, 2020; 14.1, titled *Historical Approaches to Entrepreneurship Research: Investigating Context, Time, and Change in Entrepreneurial Processes*.

³³ Landström & Benner 2010, 34-35, 38-39.

empirical research less prominent.³⁴ Most new theoretical frameworks about entrepreneurship tend to agree in viewing entrepreneurship as functional³⁵, that is, entrepreneurship is defined through activities, entrepreneurial processes, rather than entrepreneurial traits or types of organizations.³⁶ Degree of expansiveness might vary. For instance, Shane and Venkataraman explicitly limit their discussion to the for profit entrepreneurship, yet they maintain that entrepreneurship should not be limited to new venture creation, but rather consider discovery and exploration of new opportunities regardless of the firm's age.³⁷ In contrast, Rindova, Barry and Ketchen encouraged studies the incorporate into "entrepreneurship" – "a broader set of actions (e.g., activities, projects, and processes) intended not only to create new wealth but also bring about new states in relevant economic, social, institutional, and cultural environments".³⁸ What remains constant in these is the emphasis on novelty or innovation – a clear legacy of Joseph Schumpeter.

The importance of Schumpeter for entrepreneurship research is hard to overstate, with his ideas becoming commonplace. Yet, one recent strain of publications, which can be associated with a group of business historians led by Dan Wadhvani and Geoffrey Jones, builds upon Schumpeter with particular rigor. Whereas majority of references direct the reader to Schumpeter's early work, specifically, to his conceptualization of innovation in relation to entrepreneurship;³⁹ Wadhvani and Jones also rely on his later work, where he argues for a stronger link between economic theory and history, which allows them to frame the historic turn as "Schumpeter's plea". They emphasize that Schumpeter regarded entrepreneurship to be the driving force of economic change, which can be adequately understood only in retrospect.⁴⁰ Famously, Schumpeter defined entrepreneurship as an activity, "carrying out the new combinations"⁴¹, specifying in his later work that it is not necessarily embodied by a single person but also an organization.⁴² This process of discovering new combinations of resources which introduced novel ways of value-creation Schumpeter called "creative response", which eventually results in "creative destruction" of the existing supply and demand structures.⁴³ Thus, Wadhvani and Jones's attempt to shift the field of entrepreneurship research away from the 'heroic' histories of persons or companies, inspired by early Schumpeter. Instead of these isolated accounts they suggest to study entrepreneurship processes in connection to the bigger picture of economic change. One article in particular, co-authored by Wadhvani and Lubinski, defines this paradigm as new entrepreneurship history (NEH) – the "study of the creative processes that propel

³⁴ Bygrave 2007; Chandler & Lyon 2001.

³⁵ See Casson 1982; Casson & Godley 2005; Shane & Venkataraman 2000; Rindova et al. 2009.

³⁶ See Gartner 1988.

³⁷ Shane & Venkataraman 2000.

³⁸ Rindova et al. 2009, 478.

³⁹ Swedberg 2000, 15.

⁴⁰ Jones & Wadhvani 2008; Wadhvani 2010.

⁴¹ Schumpeter [1934] 1996, 74.

⁴² Wadhvani 2010, 348; Swedberg 2000, 17.

⁴³ Jones & Wadhvani 2008; Wadhvani & Jones 2014

economic change”.⁴⁴ Among the entrepreneurial processes they identify are recognition of the new opportunity, allocation of resources to pursue it and its legitimization.⁴⁵

However, NEH’s appeal to history is not limited to Schumpeter, nor it is the only expansive feature of this framework. What they observe to be missing from entrepreneurship theories is discussion of entrepreneur’s complex relationship with time. To compensate this gap, Wadhvani and Lubinski draw from the work of Reinhart Koselleck and his ideas about historical time. Briefly, according to Koselleck, historical time is structured through the difference between experiences and expectations, which started to arise in modern times. Experience, he wrote, is a dimension of the past in the present, which informs the actions of historical actors. Experience directed towards the future transforms into expectation. Whereas in premodern times past, present and future were fused together, modernity views time as movement towards the future, characterized by changeability and newness. In modern times lack of experience is compensated with increased expectations about the future.⁴⁶ Adapting these ideas to entrepreneurship, Wadhvani and Lubinski indicate the connection between experiences and expectations in entrepreneurship, without the referencing the dramatic shift to future-oriented modernity. NEH rejects the notion that entrepreneur is simply bound to act by the economic conditions of the present. Rather he or she enacts the vision of the future, which is related to interpreted pasts.⁴⁷ As a discipline which deals with time, NEH scholars see history and its methods to be the most adequate tools to tackle temporality of entrepreneurship. In other words, the question for them is “how entrepreneurship was possible?” and “how it unfolded?” instead of “who is entrepreneur?”.

Historization of entrepreneurship not only achieves a nuanced view on temporality of entrepreneurship, but also entrepreneurial agency. Mainstream business history schools assume agency unfolds in accordance with a larger force – either economic rationality (new economic histories of business), organizational efficiency (Chandlerian business history) or institutional codes (New Institutionalism).⁴⁸ Essentially, they make entrepreneurship impossible in Schumpeterian sense: one could never act truly creatively if all actions are somehow predetermined. What Wadhvani and others have recognized is that the narrow notion of agency anchored in market and economy does not reflect the social and cultural context in which entrepreneurship occurs. Consequently, they propose to consider manifestations of agency beyond these boundaries. The major step they undertake in this direction is to challenge the basic assumptions. They reject pursuit of profit to be the default goal of entrepreneurship. In their view what entrepreneur is really pursuing or desires to build is a certain vision of the future. It may be a future with bigger profits, but most crucially, they add “entrepreneurial action may be motivated by a range of notions of future value, including the pursuit of civic, environmental, esthetic, academic, and industrial forms

⁴⁴ Wadhvani & Lubinski 2017, 769.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Koselleck 2004, 255-275; Olsen 2012, 220-226.

⁴⁷ Wadhvani & Lubinski 2017, 777.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

of worth”.⁴⁹ Precisely this peculiar and multifaceted construction of the future in the past, they believe, requires historical inquiry.

I outlined the main ideas of NEH in such detail to demonstrate a finer example of both expansive trends: historization and the broadening of the scope themes and actions relevant to entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, it does suggest a strong distinction of entrepreneurship from other economic activities. Being a Schumpeterian theory, it relies on innovation. There is a particularly revealing passage, which shows the power of applying innovation as an analytical concept: “[f]or an economic actor today rather than a century ago to conceive of mass manufactured and marketed cars produced on assembly lines can in no way be considered an act of entrepreneurship”.⁵⁰ Without the word itself this statement implies that entrepreneurship is impossible without innovation. Despite the calls to view entrepreneurship of historical perspective, the historical evolution of innovation is never discussed by entrepreneurship scholars. In the following paragraphs, I will argue that reflection on this history, reveals significant limitations for interpretations of the past based on innovation.

Appreciation of innovative behavior and its capacity to prompt technological progress are the core elements of Schumpeter’s theory. When the Austrian economist began publishing his works, the discussion about the impact of technological change on employment and on economics in general had already reemerged in the aftermath of the Great Depression.⁵¹ Even so, Schumpeter became undoubtedly the most influential advocate for implementation of innovation and specifically technological innovation as an analytical concept. What’s important to note, that association between ideas of progress and economic growth with entrepreneurship, technology and change was made only in the 20th century. Earlier theories of entrepreneurship were supply-sided: economists formulated entrepreneurship in terms of production and distribution of goods and services, in other words, regulating supply rather than creating demand.⁵² In fact, before discussion of innovation and its capacity to bring “creative destruction” could enter economics, innovation as a concept had to undergo a dramatic semantic shift.

Innovation began to be formulated as a positive phenomenon only in the 19th century.⁵³ Earlier it was primarily used in a pejorative sense in political and religious debates. Innovation was evoked to convey disastrous effects of change and encourage respect for old times and traditions. In that context arguments in favour of change had to be rhetorically presented as either return to the old order or described as slow, gradual change.⁵⁴ Rehabilitation of innovation belongs to the series of conceptual shifts first described by Reinhart Koselleck. Over roughly a hundred years from mid 18th till mid 19th century, which he called *Sattelzeit*, perception of time experienced a dramatic re-orientation towards the

⁴⁹ Wadhvani & Lubinski 2017, 776.

⁵⁰ Wadhvani & Jones 2014, 195.

⁵¹ Godin 2008, 33.

⁵² Hébert & Link 2006.

⁵³ Godin 2015.

⁵⁴ Godin 2015, 75-133; 138-143.

future.⁵⁵ Accordingly, change began to be viewed as future-oriented, productive rather than destructive, while innovation was redescribed as a useful instrument to achieve new society and new political order.⁵⁶ Even so, this shift was not instantaneous, so old notions of innovation persisted in some form, nor was “good” innovation adopted in various discursive realms simultaneously. The spread could be traced from realm of religion and politics via utilitarianism to applied arts, technology and science, but, as was noted earlier, has not entered economics until 20th century.

History of innovation as a concept reveals that it was not widely associated with entrepreneurial behavior before Schumpeter. As a consequence, I argue, when entrepreneurship historians, who rely on Schumpeter, select cases of innovative behavior before 1930’s, they do it retrospectively. In other words, they assign innovative qualities to actions, which were not necessarily regarded as such by the actors themselves. In one passage Wadhvani is almost explicit about this ahistorical aspect of innovation-informed view of entrepreneurship: “[Schumpeterian entrepreneurship] reflects the dynamic and disruptive connotations that we typically associate with entrepreneurship *today*”.⁵⁷ That implies that entrepreneurship can be identified as long as it is recognized as such from the contemporary viewpoint.

Appreciation of “disruptive connotations” as a necessary feature of entrepreneurship is also revealing a contemporary bias. Indeed, nowadays *disruption* has become a buzzword, especially prominent in tech start-up rhetoric. This rise in popularity is attributed to Clayton M. Christensen and his elaboration of Schumpeter’s creative destruction, which he called disruptive innovation – the idea that established firms and technologies may be displaced by an inferior and cheaper product, initially targeting a new customer base, but eventually taking over the market.⁵⁸ Recently disruptive innovation was criticized in popular essays and academic articles as a business-model and as a rhetorical tool. Lepore pointed out that since publication of Christensen’s *Investors Dilemma*, companies that he painted as obsolete giants persisted, while many disruptive start-ups failed.⁵⁹ Levina in her research of tech healthcare start-ups remarked that disruption rhetoric antagonizes the existing structures with its promise of revolutionary change, in the meantime obscuring the socio-economic consequences the collapse of these structures might bring.⁶⁰ Similarly, Daub observed that disruptive companies tend to convey the industry, whose status-quo they promise to challenge, as a monolith, while in reality it consists of scattered and decentralized arrangements.⁶¹ In Scrantonian fashion he wondered: “[d]id big taxi companies once dominate personal transportation, or did thousands of individual cabbies who were barely

⁵⁵ Koselleck 2004.

⁵⁶ Godin 2015, pp. 156-176.

⁵⁷ Wadhvani 2010, 344. Italics mine.

⁵⁸ Christensen [1997] 2013.

⁵⁹ Lepore 2014.

⁶⁰ Levina 2017.

⁶¹ Daub 2020.

making ends meet?”.⁶² All authors express caution at the ways disruption rhetoric devalues continuity and incremental change.

Applying novel analytical concepts to historical material is commonplace. We productively employ gender, class, transnational entanglements as analytical tools to better understand the past. Yet, without recognition of concepts’ limitations there is a danger of forcing the values of our time into the past. As I mentioned earlier, historians of women’s small businesses reacted to the image of business history, distorted by the excessive emphasis on large corporations and the processes relevant to them. In case of innovation several significant limitations must be taken into account. Certainly, thanks to historians of women in business, we know that women were active participants in business ventures during the age of separate spheres and earlier, but it won’t be an exaggeration to say that very few women (and men, in fact) could be innovative in their business pursuits in Schumpeterian sense.⁶³ Even though women gained more and more means to do so in the 20th century, innovation still acquired gender-biased interpretations.⁶⁴ Widely acknowledged by business historians of women, this bias was not reflected upon in the recent entrepreneurship theories discussed above.

NEH’s suggestion to reconstruct the motives of innovative behavior from historical context does allow scholars to avoid anachronistic assumptions about the past value of innovation itself, while broad interpretation of entrepreneurial realms offered by Rindova et al. does expand the scope of innovative behavior. Yet, these theories still encourage us to make distinctions between “entrepreneurial” individuals and practices and “business as usual”, which when applied to the past would inevitably result in gender-skewed narratives and distorted image of the past.

Hartmann’s formal authority: an alternative to Schumpeter?

To overcome this impasse historians of women in business might – and that is precisely what they did – avoid engaging with entrepreneurship theory altogether. However, I would like to propose a way to incorporate recent theoretical developments, which in many ways expand horizons of the discipline, while offering a premise more adequate for historical studies of women.

In overviews of early entrepreneurship theory along with Schumpeter one can come across discussion of Max Weber,⁶⁵ who suggested it is related more to direction of economic action in the form of capitalist organizations rather than economic activity of particular individuals.⁶⁶ Some scholars do acknowledge that entrepreneur’s relationship to the firm is

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Selective bias of Schumpeterian framework has been also criticized in a recent study on entrepreneurship in Victorian England and Wales conducted by Bennett et al. (2020). To study entrepreneurship at whole-population level these researchers have adopted a very broad definition of the phenomenon: “the process of decision making to draw together resources to produce an economic output of goods or services” (p. 5). Likewise, entrepreneur is defined as “the proprietor who is responsible for the business at a given point of time” (p. 5).

⁶⁴ Alsos et al. 2016; Alsos et al. 2013.

⁶⁵ See Swedberg 2000; Wadhvani 2010.

⁶⁶ Swedberg 2000, 26.

important to consider – after all, historical evidence about entrepreneurship is often based on the archives of firms not individual.⁶⁷ Yet, Weber is seldomly mentioned as an inspiration for theorizing about entrepreneurship or producing definitions. Wadhvani and Lubinski surveyed the articles in *Business History Review* to collect mentions entrepreneurship between 1954 and 2015: among twenty-six articles eight refer to Schumpeter, six to Casson, one to Stevansson, and none to Weber.⁶⁸ Nor can one find references to Heinz Hartmann (b. 1930), a sociologist of business, who developed his conceptualization of entrepreneurship on Weberian rather than Schumpeterian premises. His major works explored power structures, self-representations and collective interests of German entrepreneurs of the postwar years and in American firms in Germany.⁶⁹ Originally from Germany, Hartmann conducted his doctoral research at Princeton University in 1950's and belonged to a circle of scholars, contributing to the journal *Administrative Science Quarterly*⁷⁰ – one of the main channels for newly established field of Organization Theory.⁷¹

Although, like many OT scholars researching modern industrial organizations at the time, Hartmann was drawing from Weber's essays on bureaucracy, he escaped the influence of Talcott Parsons's English translation of Weber. Parsons interpreted Weber's ideas in voluntaristic fashion: he understood rationality of bureaucracy to be directed towards efficiency, with Weber's ideal-type organization, rather than being the most plausible model, assuming a prescriptive meaning.⁷² Crucial divergence can be found in Parsons' translation of *Herrschaft* as imperative coordination and later as leadership.⁷³ Later critics of Parson remarked that this concept should be interpreted in the context of debates about the nature of domination in the society, particularly as a response to Marxian perspective.⁷⁴ Weber argued that in order to persist hierarchal structures need to maintain a perceived consensus, based on values, a process he termed legitimation.⁷⁵ Thus, Weber's *Herrschaft* should be understood as conditional. Parsons, meanwhile, regarded administrative staff in Weber's model to be submissive, rather than merely compliant.⁷⁶ With tension eliminated from Weber's theory, OT authors, many of whom were Parsons' disciples, presented ideal (in their work to be read as desired) organizations as wholesome mechanisms, which evolve along a pre-determined track to achieve the highest possible efficiency.⁷⁷

Ideas of Hartmann, who for obvious reasons did not to rely on Parson's interpretation, diverged from the mainstream scholarship. This difference probably resulted in his relative obscurity, at least in the English language literature. Another possible explanation for Hartmann's lack recognition is the timing of his main works. By 1959, when his *Authority*

⁶⁷ Casson & Godley 2005, 33.

⁶⁸ Wadhvani & Lubinski 2017, 773-774.

⁶⁹ Hartmann 1959; [1963] 2013.

⁷⁰ Sorge 2000.

⁷¹ Shenhav 2003, 195-196.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Weber 1947; Parsons 1960.

⁷⁴ Weiss 1983, 242-243.

⁷⁵ See, Weber 1968, 3-62, 212-301.

⁷⁶ Weiss 1983, 244.

⁷⁷ Shenhav 2003, 199.

and Organization in German Management was published (German translation of which was titled *Der deutsche Unternehmer* – the German entrepreneur), interest towards entrepreneurship has started to wane. A year earlier the flagship institution for entrepreneurship studies – Research Center in Entrepreneurial History at Harvard University had to shut its doors due to lack of financial and institutional support. The Center’s journal *Explorations in Entrepreneurial History* went out of publication until 1963, when it was revived as *Explorations in Economic History*, signaling a reorientation towards neoclassical economic theory and quantitative methods.⁷⁸

In contrast to his American colleagues, Hartmann acknowledged the tension Weber implied to exist within organizations. Using Weber’s notion of legitimation as a starting point, he attempted to explain how domination occurs in enterprises. To do this, he introduced the notions of functional and formal authority.⁷⁹ Hartmann agreed with Weber that authority – the power to claim obedience from subordinates – is delegated along hierarchical chain from the topmost executive. He did not suggest, in Parsonsian fashion, that all links in this chain are submissive to the ultimate superior. On the contrary, he specified that middle managers possess a certain degree of independence, which they claim on the basis of their expertise and competence. This kind of limited, yet independent authority Hartmann calls functional.⁸⁰ The ultimate authority, which serves as the source for constraint for functional authority, Hartmann calls formal and assigns it to the entrepreneur.

To defend the use of the concept, Hartmann juxtaposes his Weber-informed definition with Schumpeter’s. He points out that distinction Schumpeter makes between management and entrepreneur resembles that of Weber: both Schumpeter’s manager and Weber’s bureaucratic official perform routine administrative functions in contrast to entrepreneur who represents a dynamic force in capitalism.⁸¹ However, the difference is significant. While at the core of Schumpeter’s entrepreneurship is innovation, for Weber, and later for Hartmann, it is power. In simple terms, Weberian entrepreneur is the head of the organization, the one who makes central decisions and directs bureaucracy. While Weber acknowledges that entrepreneur can possess bureaucratic features, it is precisely his ability to escape bureaucratic conformity, that makes it possible for enterprises to evolve:

Superior to bureaucracy in the knowledge of techniques and facts is only the capitalist entrepreneur, within his own sphere of influence. He is the only type who has been able to maintain at least relative immunity from subjection to the control of rational bureaucratic knowledge. In large scale organizations all others are inevitably subject to bureaucratic control...⁸²

Hartmann develops his concept of formal authority drawing from Weber’s ideas about legitimacy and entrepreneur’s role. He asserts that formal authority, that entrepreneur as the head of an organization claims, needs to appear legitimate to his/her subordinates: “[i]ts primary characteristic is that it is justified by reference to certain non-rational foundations,

⁷⁸ Jones & Wadhvani 2008, 503-504; Landström & Benner 2010, 26-28.

⁷⁹ See, Hartmann 1959 (1); 1959 (2).

⁸⁰ Casson and Godley discuss a similar idea pertaining to the concept of intrapreneurship (2005, 34).

⁸¹ Hartmann, 1959 (2).

⁸² Weber 1968, 225.

notably ultimate values, tradition or charisma”.⁸³ In other words, formal authority is accepted on belief. Hartmann viewed formal authority to be more stable than functional. Indeed, formal authority may appear static, unquestionable, significantly, it is not so. Hartmann clarifies: “This acceptance is not automatic. The authority holder has to convert his subordinates or legitimize himself in terms of current beliefs. He will lose his authority when his subordinates’ belief is abandoned”.⁸⁴ Thus, formal authority is not an inherent quality of entrepreneur, rather should be achieved and maintained in order to sustain the power and control over the organization.

I regard this conditionality to be essential to formal authority and consequently entrepreneurship. Hartmann himself was not particularly preoccupied with the problem of sustainability of formal authority, he concentrated on stable organizations in his empirical research. Nevertheless, it is possible to imagine formal authority as a series of re-affirmations rather than a one-time initiation, in other words, as a process. Such continued re-affirmation of formal authority is evident in the case of family firms, which although tend to be stable, as the families are much more interested in long-term survival of the enterprise, are still “notoriously conflict-ridden”, being especially vulnerable around succession stage.⁸⁵ This can be further exemplified by the cases when women obtain control as a result of succession and as a result face long-lasting challenges either from other family members⁸⁶ or authorities.⁸⁷ Such examples demonstrate that sustaining formal authority comes at a cost, obstructs business pursuit.

What does Hartmann’s view on entrepreneurship contributes to theories informed by Schumpeter? As I remarked earlier, Schumpeterian paradigm is built around the concept of innovation, whose bias being unregistered and perhaps unintended, perpetuates its exclusiveness despite the efforts to expand its scope. On the other hand, this paradigm does not attempt to incorporate any forces undermining entrepreneurship, any trade-off. Innovation, which is not successfully commercialized would not be considered an innovation, merely a clever invention.⁸⁸ This voluntaristic interpretation does not reflect the reality of marginalized actors, who have to navigate social and cultural obstacles in order to pursue their envisioned futures. Once sustaining formal authority is regarded as an entrepreneurial process, a process that which may disrupt the pursuit of opportunities and change, enterprising women (and other actors, which are excluded from mainstream narrative) are starting to emerge. Furthermore, Hartmann’s notion of functional authority offers a way to describe women’s role in family business. Functional authority allows to account for the role women played in maintaining the family fortune in a respectful way,

⁸³ Hartmann, 1959 (2), 438.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Colli & Rose 2008.

⁸⁶ See, e.g., Keskinen et al. 2018.

⁸⁷ See, e.g., Raschka 2006; Filatova 2014.

⁸⁸ Parsons & Rose 2010.

avoiding the separate spheres tropes such as labeling women's contribution as "help" rather than "work".⁸⁹

Concluding thoughts

Among reports about pandemic's devastating effects on women, some suggest that there is a silver lining. A recent article in the Washington Post has claimed that in U.S. entrepreneurship is on the rise, and women are taking part.⁹⁰ Among brand-new entrepreneurs interviewed for the story were a woman, who pursued her dream of starting a wig-making company after being laid off; a Zumba instructor, who delayed her plans to open her own studio in favor of online classes; and two young mothers, who found a way to make money from home with a marketing consulting agency. The overall tone of the article is positive, even celebratory towards these women, yet there are sinister reminders of the reasons driving their decisions: financial necessity, lack of other employment opportunities, increase in house-keeping and childcare responsibilities. This story is a mere perfect reflection of the picture business historians paint about the women of the past.

Gender-sensitive business history has undoubtedly moved the discipline in new directions. I share the conviction expressed by Angel Kwolek-Folland and other historians of women in business that in addition to bringing forth women as significant economic actors of the past feminist historians must aim to overcome the biases of business language, which only appears to be neutral. Yet, I do not believe that the focus on small business is the only way to avoid "compensatory" history. Moreover, new quantitative research on 19th century demonstrates that female founders and partners in large-scale enterprises were not in fact that rare or economically insignificant.⁹¹

The impact women as leaders of big firms is poorly understood, and as I argued in this paper, Schumpeterian theories of entrepreneurship do not provide an adequate basis for this task. Instead I propose to use the Weber/Hartmann framework that does distinguish entrepreneurs as a creative force but ties them more strongly to the enterprise they need to sustain in order to pursue their vision. Moreover, I suggest considering sustaining formal authority as an essential entrepreneurial process.

Despite my arguments against innovation-mindedness of recent entrepreneurship frameworks, they still suggest clever ways to approach enterprising women. The most illuminating premises include:

- Complex temporal agency. Entrepreneurship expands beyond the present context and involves a pursuit of a certain future, which stems from interpretation of reality based on values and motives to be reconstructed.

⁸⁹ Kerber 1988, 28.

⁹⁰ Zimmerman 2021.

⁹¹ Aston & Di Martino 2017; Byker & Gregg 2019.

- Multiplicity of motives and forms of value (not only launching products, searching for new markets, but also charity or social infrastructure, for instance).

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