



Telos  
ISSN: 1317-0570  
ISSN: 2343-5763  
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Universidad Privada Dr. Rafael Belloso Chacín  
República Bolivariana de Venezuela

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Telos, vol. 25, núm. 3, pp. 972-991, 2023

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Disponible en: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=99376074032>


DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36390/telos253.25>

## Pasando de generación en generación: la empresa familiar latinoamericana es la Tierra de Tamara

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36390/telos253.25>

Recepción: 10 Junio 2023

Aprobación: 04 Septiembre 2023

Publicación: 15 Septiembre 2023



Acceso abierto diamante

### Resumen

Este artículo indaga la historia de tres generaciones de emprendedores latinos –abuela, madre e hijo– con negocios familiares que flanquean ambos lados de la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México. A través de generaciones existe el efecto “La Tierra de Tamara”. Para eliminar la ambigüedad, las narrativas de estas empresas familiares cambiaron a través de generaciones, transformándose de historias de efectuación a historias de causalidad. La abuela que vive en México encarnó la efectividad al “caer en” sus oportunidades empresariales. Su historia es la de un emprendimiento necesario, porque otras oportunidades no estaban disponibles para ella. La historia de la hija exhibe una mezcla de planificación e improvisación. Aunque la hija tenía un deseo latente de emprender, esta oportunidad se convertía en una opción viable para ganarse la vida que reflejaría sus intereses intelectuales. En la última serie de viñetas, encontramos al nieto emprendiendo el negocio para lograr su sueño. A lo largo de generaciones, los emprendedores pasan de ser personajes de una gran narrativa a convertirse en autores de su propia historia. Este artículo será de interés para los investigadores de empresas familiares, particularmente en el emprendimiento latinoamericano y latino, los estudiantes de emprendimiento y los estudiosos de la narración de historias.

**Palabras clave:** Family Business, Entrepreneurship, Tamara-Land, Narrative, Empresa Familiar, Emprendimiento, Tamara-Land, Narrativa.

### Abstract

This article indagates the story of three generations of Latino entrepreneurs –grandmother, mother, and son—with family businesses that flank both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. Across generations the “Tamara-Land” effect exists. To disambiguate, the narratives of these family businesses changed across generations, morphing from stories of effectuation to ones of causation. The grandmother living in Mexico embodied effectuation by “falling into” her entrepreneurial opportunities. Her story is one of necessity entrepreneurship because other opportunities were unavailable to her. The daughter in the story exhibits a mix of planning and improvisation. Although the daughter had a latent desire to pursue entrepreneurship, it became a viable option to earn a livelihood that reflected her intellectual interests. In the final series of vignettes, we find the grandson pursuing entrepreneurship in order to achieve his dream. Across generations, the entrepreneurs shift from characters in a grand narrative to becoming authors of their own story. This paper will be of interest to researchers of family business, particularly in Latin American and Latino Entrepreneurship, students of entrepreneurship, and scholars of storytelling.

## Introduction

To date, stories of intergenerational family businesses with a focus on cross-border U.S.—Mexico entrepreneurship are underexplored. Although there are ample studies of family business and entrepreneurship in Latin America (i.e. Brenes et al., 2006; Nordqvist et al., 2011; Ferro-Cortes et al., 2022) as well as in the United States (i.e., Magrelli et al, 2022), their focus has been primarily on the business, and not the people who have created those businesses (see Basco et al., 2019 for a review of the focus on the business in lieu of the people in family business). We recite the story of three generations of entrepreneurs who have migrated and conducted business across the U.S.—Mexico border. In doing so, we discovered these unique businesses and settings highlight alternative ways of viewing the "family" within a family business.

To elucidate ways in which family businesses change across generations, we utilize the theory of Tamara-Land, inspired by Kriznac's (2006) long-running play and the serves as the bedrock of Boje's (1995) antenarrative theory. Antenarratives are a key component of the Tamara-Land story because they illuminate internal thought processes and undercurrents of behavior. Furthermore, they are important because individual stories are antecedents of the grand narrative of family business.

After defining Tamara-Land, we review more dominant perspectives in family business literature. The principle point we accentuate is that family business literature, particularly within a Latin American context, centers on the businesses in lieu of the families behind the businesses. This includes an examination of succession problems (Molina, 2020), family/non-family tensions (McAdam et al, 2020), sweat equity and pressure to join the family business (Krultz, 2022), and family conflicts with identity and the extended self (Pelly, 2017a). We finalize this section by explaining ways in which the family business evolves across generations and businesses, similar to how the audience experiences the Tamara-Land play differently across iterations.

Following the methodology section, we introduce the interweaving vignettes of the story. The family business members recap their story with vignette titles in italics, and the academic voice is voiced with vignette titles in bold. The discussion section follows immediately thereafter, and paves the way for future conversations with respect to family business. The conclusion summarizes the article's principal findings.

## A Visit to Tamara-Land

Stories are a method through which organizational members make sense of their organizational lives (Hansen and Kahnweiler, 1993; Boyce, 1995; Brown, 1990). Unfortunately, stories of everyday occurrences are frequently supplanted by grand narratives and controlled by either a manager or a larger institutional dominator (Engstrom, 2012; Boje, 1995). These grand narratives stifle one's ability to think differently or reflect upon "what otherwise might be" (Frandsen et al., 2020). Fortunately, life is composed of "petit recits" (Derrida, 2002), and these "little tales" embrace the fact that individuals narrate and make sense of their stories in pieces, with frequent interruptions (Boje, 1991).

Boje (1995, 2011) explores the roles of these micro stories, known as antenarratives. The antenarrative is a simultaneous beneath, before, beyond, between, becoming, and bet (Boje et al, 2022). This embrace of antenarratives allows us to capture recorded and unrecorded events. In other words, it allows us to "unmask" a story to uncover its truths in pure form in lieu of how it is pretexted (Pelly and Fayolle, 2022).

Bertolt Brecht explored how to unmask a story in theater. He asserted the existence of a 4th wall – an invisible boundary in which actors behaved as if an audience was nonexistent, sitting silently and unable to engage with the story unfolding before them (White, 2004). The embracing of antenarratives razes the 4th wall, providing a more interactive approach to experiencing a story.

One of the most notable examples of antenarratives shattering the 4th wall is found in the play Tamara by John Kriznac (2006). This is Los Angeles' longest-running play and invites the audience to actively participate in the story's plot and their own meaning-making. Tamara is one of the most notable examples

of how relationships can alter over time as individuals interact with a performance (Burkitt, 2018) that resembles a palimpsest in which individuals can interact with a text across iterations (McMorran, 2007).

In *Tamara*, the audience is not separated from the play but is invited to chase actors in their storytelling among multiple simultaneous recitations and plots as the characters reveal their complicity in countless subplots. The audience engages in a flaneur style (Berdet, 2012) of wandering from room to room, exploring competing antenarratives, within a luxurious mansion with a time set of January 10th, 1927. The overarching (Lyotardian) grand narrative of *Tamara* is to entrap the audience within the fascism of Mussolini. A major appurtenance contained within the grand narrative is that Gabriele d'Annunzio, a war hero, poet, patriot, and womanizer is under virtual house arrest by Mussolini, who feels threatened by d'Annunzio's fame and influence. The Polish painter and spy, Tamara de Lempicka, is summoned to the house to paint d'Annunzio's portrait. The interplay between the characters obfuscates meaning as the audience follows the timeline of the stories and the characters they selected.

*Tamara* acknowledges the problem of entanglement that is difficult to address in academic writing and in life practices. Our personal and professional living stories (within place, time, and their own aliveness) are a vital opportunity through which we create embodied meaning. The issue with everyday occurrences contained in living stories is their frequent supplantation by grand narratives (one plot, one author, one denouement), typically controlled by a manager, or by another institutional dominator. This displacement of living stories by Lyotardian grand narratives creates a prison for the mind, stamping out an appreciation of differences, and suppressing the embodied-reflexive desire to seek a common collaborative space. This engaged mentality results in separation from our potential audiences.

Boje (1995) explores the roles of these microstoria, or antenarratives. To tautologize, the antenarrative is a simultaneous beneath, before, beyond, between, becoming, and bet (Boje et al, 2022). Typically, we only see an individual's completed narrative. This implies the storyteller has created a plot (with a beginning, middle, and end), and with a theme to glue the components together, including a message or moral at the conclusion (or possibly the beginning). This results in the underlying currents (or the antenarratives of beneath, before, beyond, between, becoming, and bets) descending into invisibility, and is problematic because meaning is born within the silent spaces between words.

## Dominant Debates in Family Business

from one generation to the next? By the same token, there is considerable discourse on how to define core "family members" and their roles (Chua et al., 1999). For example, do family members include siblings, in-laws, close friends, etc. (Colin, 2009; Santiago, 2011)? Different stakeholders in a family business form an extremely complex ecosystem (McCollom, 1992). Moreover, is the place of business a "family member" (Emblidge, 2021)? To build upon stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2001) – should customers be included as part of the family business?

There is a perception that family businesses benefit from longevity (Tapies & Moya, 2012; Zellweger, 2017). As a result, debates float back and forth on whether businesses should be updated or stick with tradition (Lorimer, 1903; Semler, 1993). Family businesses may not necessarily be repositories of the most efficient practices; rather, they match the expectations of customers and local communities.

Most family members work tirelessly and without compensation via sweat equity (Davis et al., 1997; Potts et al., 2001) to ensure the family's reputation remains intact (Beck & Prugl, 2018; Sageder et al., 2015), substantiating the fact that the family is very much part of the family's extended self (Ahuvia, 2005). This extended self (Pelly, 2017b) is an important part of the family business – family members are integral to support the network of the owner of a nascent family business (Sorenson & Bierman, 2009). Notably, the inability to separate personal and family success can lead to stories of family members exploiting one another, which may lead to a cycle of misery and basic survival. It could be equated to a story of modern-day slavery, a trend that is also observed in Latin American family businesses (Miers, 2000).

All of the aforementioned discussions on family businesses avoid the black box and do not explore with sufficient depth the antenarrative of family business – the struggles of the individual family members. In contrast to mainstream literature, we illustrate that family business should not merely be described as a business with multiple family members struggling with their business identity and accompanying succession problems (Lambrecht, 2005). Instead, we are viewing this paper from the angle of one family and its members as they oscillate across the U.S.–Mexico border and through multiple lines of business.

The parallels between multi-generational family businesses and Tamara-Land are striking. Acclimating to the Tamara experience (and family businesses more generically) is a multi-stage experience. During the initial performance, the guest is pulled and pushed by both characters and setting. Upon attending subsequent performances, participants are able to assume additional agency to the point of constructing their own story and controlling the narrative.

## Methodology: The Co-Constructed Multi-Generational Autoethnography

This writ has used a unique methodology: the co-constructed multigenerational autoethnography. In order to understand this methodology and its relevancy for this manuscript, we deconstruct the terms "co-constructed", "multi-generational", and "autoethnography", and explain why the multigenerational approach to autoethnography is apropos in this particular case.

Autoethnography is composed of three foundational elements – "auto" or self, "ethno" or culture, and "graphy" or study. This type of methodology is built upon an individual being uniquely qualified to describe his or her experiences (Pelly, 2016; Rambo, 2005) that they may be extrapolated to broader social, cultural, or theoretical phenomena (Ellis et al, 2011). This writing style differs from more conventional Cartesian-Newtonian styles of writing that prioritize objectivity (Pelly, 2017a). Alternately, autoethnography highlights the unspoken, unsaid, the antenarrative, the paths that proceed action, and their accompanying rationales (Pelly and Fayolle, 2020).

Embracing antenarratives accords us the opportunity to capture events and fantasies that do not come to fruition, allowing us to deconstruct a story instead of supporting a grand narrative. These cognitive avenues prioritize process over an endpoint, facilitating the generalizability and relatability of a text because antenarratives switch the expertise from author to reader; in other words, readers draw their own conclusions by interpreting and choosing among antenarratives. Switching the expertise to the reader is critically important in the study of family business, since struggles are oftentimes more relatable than grand narratives of success (Pelly and Roberson, 2022). The post-modern orientation of autoethnography emphasizes the reader in lieu of the author as sense maker; in other words, there is no population, sample size, or conventional methodological analysis techniques because we allow the audience to write their own "notes on the margins" as they decipher meaning from the text (Pelly and Roberson, 2022).

Antenarratives embrace the entire story and not just its visible components, differentiating autoethnography from conventional ethnography because ethnographers normally prioritize visible actions and not the unsaid or imagined (Pelly and Fayolle, 2020). Furthermore, to capture the autobiographical nature and the rich emotional content of the personal stories, literary techniques utilize emotion, common language, and metaphors.

This autoethnography is co-constructed (Snoeren et al., 2016; Frandsen et al., 2020), and does not differ from organizational autoethnographies (Doloriert and Sambrook, 2020; Herrmann, 2017). There are three authors of this work – the mother, the son, and the researcher. The mother (Claudia) conducted interviews with her mother (Maria, or the grandmother). Claudia wrote Maria's story and composed her (Claudia's) own tale of entrepreneurial journey. The son (Abraham) authored his entrepreneurial narrative. Finally, as the academic voice, I conducted interviews with both mother and son to fill in gaps within their stories and to create a more polished read. I segregated longer stories into a series of storytelling vignettes that mirror antenarratives (or the rooms in Tamara, each of which are identified by italicized titles). In other words, the storytelling vignettes are structured as a stream of consciousness to mirror the Tamara-Land experience. Interspersed between the storytelling vignettes are bold titles that



designate theoretical vignettes. In these vignettes, I structured theoretical explanations of the story via finding common threads. These theoretical vignettes are not designed to provide a monopoly of interpretation but rather to open the door for the reader to generate conclusions that fit their particular profile. After writing the vignettes, I returned the paper to the mother and son to ensure their stories were accurately represented.

This methodology is relevant for this manuscript because it is not the story of a single person or business, but of a multigenerational family enterprise that traveled from Mexico to the U.S. Consequently, we were creative with respect to our use of autoethnography in order to capture the story in its entirety. The grandmother was unavailable for the interviews; thus, the mother scripted her story as well as the grandmother's. The son was next to write his story. We used retrospective recall, since none of the events of the story were recorded in real time. We utilized retrospective recall along with the accompanying separation from the experiences to promote intellectual stimulation and to learn from this co-constructed multi-generational autoethnography in profound ways that real-time participation cannot provide (Semler, 1993).

### *Grandmother's Generation*

Maria was born in the El Mulato municipality of Ojinaga, in the State of Chihuahua, Mexico, on October 11, 1950. As of this day, El Mulato's population is 35 (yes, 35, not 35,000), with people ranging in age from infants to elderly. Maria is the fifth child out of eighteen siblings. She was born in a one-room house and went to school barefoot, only completing elementary school (the 6th grade). She was unaware of her poor economic situation because everyone around her experienced the same circumstances.

In the late 1960s, a teacher was sent to El Mulato to complete his internship. My mom met him, and after a year of courtship, they married. Once my dad completed his internship, they moved to the big city. This city was his hometown of Chihuahua, which was the capital of the state of Chihuahua. The big city was overwhelming and expensive, so Maria started a small business to contribute to household expenses.

Her business idea was not dissimilar from that found across the sharing, gig, and platform economies – she re-sold merchandize. Her job was as a middle woman; she would travel to El Paso, TX to buy clothes and sell them back in Chihuahua.

She did that for ten years. She had a list of clients with their sizes and favorite colors, and she kept an extensive inventory of goods on hand to satisfy spontaneous buyers. The trips to El Paso were time-consuming and expensive, especially going over the border. Carrying so many clothes back was also a trying task. On trips, she would balance filling orders and buying clothes to anticipate future orders and new customers.

It was not an easy business, and the margins were razor-thin. The time she spent going to El Paso was time spent away from family. She always had to have enough cash on hand to buy her inventory. Sometimes, her customers could not pay at all or not all at once. For those whom she trusted, she would allow some of them to pay her in installments. She would collect the payments by walking to their homes or by taking the bus. Those trips to collect the "coffee drip" of payments cost her time walking and money for bus fare.

It was a hard way of making money, but it was one of the few avenues where she could contribute to her household. In those days, with her limited education, and status as a woman and housewife, she had few opportunities.

Soon thereafter, she divorced her (then) husband and moved to Ciudad Juarez with five children of her own. I (Claudia) am the oldest one; the smallest one was months old.

## **Tamara-Land Populated with Effectuators**

The first time an individual chooses to attend the Tamara play, they find themselves totally out of their element, discombobulated at best. Piercing the proscenium is a challenge for any audience member, but especially for neophytes, because they are expected to fundamentally shift roles. They are no longer passive members in the audience, but proactively attempt to write their own story. First endeavors will be clumsy

at best, because the actors pull the audience in multiple directions. Participants are wowed by both the setting and accompanying luxury dinner, as well as the unusual context of 1920s Fascist Italy.

In this vignette, our heroine, Maria, is the classic definition of an effectuation-based entrepreneur (Sarasvathy, 2001). She begins with a generalized aspiration (to provide for her family), that mirrors entrepreneurial forms or abstractions (Pelly, 2017b). Like the audience member pulled through the proscenium, she, too, is pulled into entrepreneurship. Though most individuals prefer paid employment due to its stability and higher financial outcomes, especially in the Latin American context (Amit et al., 1995), Maria was forced into entrepreneurship out of necessity.

Maria's story as the novice entrepreneur mirrors that of women across the world, particularly in Latin America. Many lack access to education which is more commonplace for their male counterparts (Bernat et al., 2017). Secondly, there are certain biases against women in the workplace in Latin America, most acutely in rural areas (Flores-Novelo et al., 2021). Thirdly, male counterparts are occupied with their full-time employment. In contrast, many Latin American women living in rural areas find they have time at home and are spurred by the need to find alternative ways to earn income for their families (Sarfaraz et al., 2014).

In the initial vignette, we see that Maria looked at her internal resources—income to invest, time to monetize, connections to leverage within the community, and an ability to perform sales. Combined, this translated into the created opportunity of reselling clothes bought across the border. It was not her original intent to start this specific business, but rather to start a business in a general sense.

Moreover, she was willing and able to experiment. Although she never had a formal business plan, she was able to metaphorically dip her toe into the waters of entrepreneurship, one resold article of clothing at a time, until she developed a repertoire of practice (Shepherd and Haynie, 2009). She learned how to interact with customers, how to maintain inventory, how to conduct basic accounting, and how to improvise on recompense when needed.

Maria's story mirrors that of the new proscenium piercer – the first time we visit Tamara-Land we are uncovering pathways to this new form of meaning-making – we are barely capable of making sense of it and are following the first character or opportunity that presents itself to us. *Hamburger Time*

Maria made the decision to start over again. She was in a new city, couched between Ciudad Juarez and El Paso, so re-selling merchandise was no longer feasible due to the fierce competition for remerchandising. This geographical change exacerbated the difficulties of maintaining inventory, acquiring inventory, and collecting money from customers.

She began a new business—a hamburger stand. Her idea was born after she began seeking employment. Sadly, jobs within large companies remained out of reach. Luckily, a neighbor hired her to help prep food for a neighboring restaurant.

After speaking with her neighbors and their customers, my mom learned that she could open her own hamburger stand within a couple of months – this included purchasing the stand and completing the limited amount of government paperwork. She was able to use many of her previous skills in merchandising.

In this iteration of family entrepreneurship, she not only benefited from her expertise, and was able to enlist help from her family. Her children quickly became experts at making hamburger patties, chopping ingredients, taking customer orders, and making supply runs. With the help of her family and her own business acumen, her business became successful.

A couple of years later, one of Maria's acquaintances told her about a vacancy inside a mall food court. She jumped at the opportunity to expand her business. She first found a buyer for her hamburger stand – an older lady from the area. After training the buyer, she was ready to purchase her new establishment.

Her little restaurant inside the mall was called "El Bandido." She sold burritos, hamburgers, and Mexican plates. By selling 150 sodas, most of her expenses would be covered. The rest of the sales could be profit!

She stated that being able to have such a profitable business was because of her dedication to service and food quality. She spoiled all her clients, even those with minimum orders, such as "Do you want to taste it?"

Do you want for me to add salsa in it?; and, More beans, or less?" Moreover, she took care of her employees and made sure they felt appreciated.

## **Return to Tamara**

In this iteration, we see a return to Tamara. The role of the audience as a participant in lieu of a passive vessel has been accepted; simply stated, Maria now sees entrepreneurship as a viable career option. She has shifted from an understanding of entrepreneurship in a pure prosaic sense (Engstrom, 2012) to one of recognizing her core capabilities (Prahalad and Hamel, 2003) in customer service and in recognizing opportunities – an almost Kirznerian approach to entrepreneurship (Kirzner, 2015). We see that she was searching for opportunities and hustled with a neighbor to provide food for a local restaurant. In her "learning by doing" (Allen, 2007) approach, she discovered that she, too, could open a hamburger stand.

The hamburger stand mirrored the merchandizing business; however, in this iteration she explored ways to integrate her family into the business. This marks the beginning of a transition from "Maria's" business to a true family business.

Maria continues to improvise until a new opportunity presents itself – the restaurant in the mall food court. It could be said that her customers came to the restaurant because they enjoyed her company as much as they did her food, similar to Sarasvathy's "Curry in a Hurry" experiment (Sarasvathy, 2001). She recounted how appreciative both patrons and employees were when they felt valued. Maria's altruistic desire as a restaurant owner emulated that of when she was a merchandiser—she constantly interacted with her customers in order to learn their preferences and make adjustments and refinements. Her behavior shifted from pure improvisation to adapting skills from one context to another.

This transition from being an entrepreneur by chance, necessity, and improvisation (effectuation) to actively pursuing an opportunity, mimics the behavior of the repeat audience member of the Tamara play. Initially, they are overwhelmed by the experience, but slowly they acclimate to the play and begin to follow storylines of their choosing. In essence, they eliminate competing antenarratives and focus on the remaining choices.

## ***Influencing the Second Generation of Entrepreneurs***

At fifty-one my mother remarried and moved to El Paso with her second husband. Together they decided to buy an old house. However, without existing financial credit my mother and her husband had to use owner financing to purchase the home. They vowed to stop shopping for an entire year and use the savings to reduce the mortgage on the house.

She once mentioned that making money was hard, but that budgeting was harder. It is a lesson that I (Claudia) have always kept in mind. That is how my interest in having my own business began. She was very good at running her own business. Her talents in entrepreneurship enabled her to buy her first house and pay off the mortgage in five years.

## ***The Start of the Second-Generation Entrepreneur***

I (Claudia) was fortunate to have inherited a talent for finance and budgeting from my mother. When my (then) husband opened his law firm, I knew that, like my mother, I would have the opportunity to quasi-intern in an entrepreneurial venture. My mom helped her neighbor with a local restaurant in food preparation, but my task was to manage the finances of my (then) husband's new business.

One of the things I learned was how much my skills were complementary to the success of the firm. My (then) husband was a great attorney, and went out of his way to help the less fortunate. However, his skills in organizing the law office left much to be desired. I thrived in managing his finances, optimizing his human resources, establishing a record-keeping system, creating budgets, keeping the books, making sure clients paid, etc. Indeed, my talents were not far removed from those of my mother – I began



understanding the ins and outs of a business in the broadest sense. I had two exemplars to learn from in both my mother and (then) husband.

Despite our joint successes, it was not quite enough for me to be part of his business – I wanted to start my own. I didn't realize it at the time, because I never thought of why I chose to be an entrepreneur instead of an employee with a nine-to-five job. As an employee, I did not find enjoyment or have a feeling of excitement. I didn't just want to make someone else's business better, I wanted to be my own boss. Every time I started a new initiative in my (then) husband's law firm, I felt excitement – and I craved more of that excitement.

With time, I learned that feeling of excitement came from developing an idea and translating it into a business. I found it to be more comforting. I believed it was because I saw my mom enjoying being an entrepreneur and being courageous in her journey.

## Looking for Something More

In this vignette, we see that Claudia's transition to entrepreneurship mirrors that of her mother. She begins by helping her (then) husband with the administrative tasks. She and her mother shared a certain trait– mastery of accounting and finance. Although she was unable to utilize her abilities to the fullest working in her (then) husband's office, the business acumen she acquired in her mother's family business resurfaced. However, she wanted more – she wanted to shift from being the writer of someone else's story to writing one of her own.

Like the repeat visitor to the Tamara play, Claudia begins to take charge of the story. After piercing the proscenium, she was no longer content to merely follow the suggestions of the other characters in the play; instead, she seeks to forge her own path. It is unclear how this path will look; however, she knows it will be different than the ones she pursued while helping her (then) husband.

## *Start of a New Journey*

I (Claudia) began flipping houses after my divorce. When I was married, I was involved in the demolition, construction, remodeling, and financing of properties that my (then) husband and I owned. After my divorce, I saw the opportunity to start over again - but this time by myself. In the beginning, it was not just scary, it was terrifying. I was on my own and had to use my own resources to develop properties. I knew that if I failed, it would be so much worse than just losing a job – I would lose my ability to support myself and my family. Yet, with time and practice, I gained confidence. Each house presented its own problems as well as its own lessons.

My first investment decision came when I had to decide to either develop land awarded to me after my divorce or to sell it. After calculating my return on the investment, I opted to sell the land. With the profits of the sale, I purchased my first property. Once I purchased it, my second big decision was to determine if it was going to be a rental property or if I was going to sell it. That decision would determine my operating budget. I decided to flip the house, so I created a list of remodeling costs.

I wish I could say it was easy, but nothing was further from the truth. My budgets were not always accurate the first time through. I would usually underestimate costs as well as not always anticipating the surprises lurking behind walls, in basements, and under floors. While mistakes were made, I never made the same one twice. As I met individuals on both sides of the El Paso/Juarez border region, I learned more and more – my mind was like a sponge.

## Choosing Among Antenarratives

At the beginning of the entrepreneurial journey, future choices are unlimited. Think of the antenarratives and the endless number of different ways to select the order in which to view the Tamara

play. However, with a little bit of preparation (or practice in entrepreneurial ventures) and before curtain call, some choices or antenarratives can be eliminated.

Each house flipping represents an iteration of the immersive experience of Tamara – each with its own lessons and challenges, and each aids the entrepreneur or audience participant in moving closer to understanding the grand narrative, while simultaneously crafting a unique interpretation.

### ***Advantages of Cross Border Latino Entrepreneurship***

My experiences as an entrepreneur were very different from my mother's. Although one commonality we shared was that I repeatedly crossed the border while I was house flipping, the cross border iterations were different. I spent time learning the building codes and techniques in the U.S. and Mexico. This enabled me to spot design discrepancies in the houses I bought in the U.S. I can tell immediately if the house was built according to standards in Mexico, which are different from those in the U.S. I also know how to bring them up to U.S. code.

My ability to straddle both sides of the border has enabled me to get the best prices on materials, but also get the best labor from each side of the border. I was impressed with the amount of institutional support available to support small business owners in the U.S. Whether it is governments, universities, or chambers of commerce, there are always groups that provide advice, as well as grants and other types of resources not normally available in Mexico. Community members are also cheerleaders for successful entrepreneurs in the U.S., which is vastly different from my experiences in Mexico.

I was also surprised by how my role as a woman was different in the U.S. than in Mexico. In Mexico, my mother and I both felt that it was a disadvantage to be a woman – especially since being an entrepreneur is breaking the mold. In the U.S., many of the men who encountered me seemed surprised that I was running the operation – and their usual response in the beginning was shock and compliance. I didn't have to fight to get the job done as I did in Mexico.

After countless houses have been flipped, I am proud to say that I have made a good life for myself and my family. I have created jobs in my community and I have served as a role model for my children.

### **Successfully Writing Her Own Story**

The ability to successfully straddle two countries enabled Claudia to pierce two proscenia. She has migrated from the conventional Tamara-Land to enjoying two different performances and writing the stories for each.

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### ***The Next Generation of Family Business Entrepreneurship***

My name is Abraham. I was born in El Paso, Texas. My parents both immigrated to the United States at different times. My father immigrated to the United States in 1976 and my mother immigrated to the U.S. in 1994. Growing up, the law was my life, and my father's law firm was my everything. It was my library, playground, and daycare. Even after I started school, when the school day ended, it wasn't straight home after school, but straight to the office. My father ran his own immigration law firm while my mother handled the finances. My mom had previous experience from helping run the burger restaurant with my maternal grandmother; therefore, my dad asked her to manage his books.

Growing up in a law firm never seemed odd; it was the norm. I was running around while my dad was speaking with clients, and my mom handled the day-to-day operations. While other kids were reading Dr. Seuss's books, I was reading legal guides on immigration status or other legal maneuvers for immigration matters. Previously, he had tried his hand in different areas of the law such as family, business, and

insurance, yet he took to immigration. "If you don't have the facts, find better facts, you don't have the law, find the better law"; it's a mantra my father uses in his business and sometimes in life.

The business had its good days and its bad days. The best days included when we were able to move a bigger office and handle more clients. The bad days were when the economy was in recession and the first people to get stiffed are the attorneys. Yet my dad never talked about the finances of the business for a long time. My dad never told me how much he made. It wasn't until I was 18 years old that I learned how much revenue he made and how sometimes the margins were thin.

For most households, Saturdays are a day of rest and sleeping in; in ours, it wasn't. Saturdays were another day at work; I have memories of going with dad to get coffee or him teaching me how to make it for him as well as the clients. I spent many years in that office and still do.

Currently, I work part-time as an office runner. I joke with most people that I am the lowest end of the hierarchy in the office but I have never felt like that. Most people at the office know who I am, and I don't like acting like the son of the boss. Instead, I go to work, do what is needed of me and accomplish whatever is asked of me. My dad loves the fact that I come in and help him out, but most importantly, I get to see him. I may have grown up in an office but it doesn't mean he was always there. My dad's business, like others, is seasonal. There are months of high volume and months of low volume. In those months of low volume, he travels a lot. One day, he'll be in Dallas, the next day, in Des Moines. It never bothered me, but it took a toll on him. After a few days of travel, he'd go to the office, take a shower and get back to work. The phone always rang and still does - even on Christmas Day. I always get a laugh knowing at 6 a.m. there will be a client hoping to speak to him.

Currently, I am majoring in Criminal Justice. I want to go to law school and possibly enroll in a JD/MBA program. The reason is that I like both business and law. Growing up, the only way I could get my dad out of the office was to ask him to watch a movie. One of the movies he showed me was Oliver Stone's classic, Wall Street. As a kid, I thought it was a movie of wonders and the power of being part of something bigger than yourself. People saw Gordon Gekko's "Greed is Good" as an example of what is wrong with being a corporate raider; I saw it as genius and marveled at it. Throughout the movie my dad explained the different securities concepts and the functions of the public market.

However, as I got older, I taught myself through YouTube tutorials, online articles, and books about Wall Street and other entrepreneurial figures. One of the jokes I make with my dad is about the IPO of Tesla. As an 11-year-old I remember telling him, "Dad you got to invest, this company is the future" he looked at me like a miniature Bud Fox on a sales call. He brushed me off and said it was too risky and I couldn't trust it. Every time I got close to get-rich-quick schemes, my mom as the responsible adult would come in and bring us back to reality.

Possibly pursuing the entrepreneurial journey wouldn't be entirely thanks to my dad, but also to my mom. My mom has always had an eye for business and knew how to keep the business afloat, even if failure was abound. My mom thought of moving into a bigger building to handle more clients; she was also the one to diversify the profits between them. At a young age, my parents began buying as much property as they could. Whether it was a lot or an old building, once they had a property, they were in lock step. After the divorce my mother has done well for herself.

Occasionally she'll give me an odd job here or there to have some extra money in my pocket. This includes tasks such as maintenance or any manual labor that can help her. My mom will take me with her to job sites, material warehouses, and other trips that are part of her business. Even once I had to fill up my car with trash to take to the local dump; there were awful smells, but it has taught me a lot. She's taught me some basic business lessons that I am sure will serve me well in life.

## Final Vignette

In this final vignette, we see the totality of entrepreneurship. The third generation has become so socialized to the idea of entrepreneurship that other forms of employment do not appear as part of the

mindset. To reason with the Tamara analogy would be akin to an individual only seeing performances that pierce the 4th wall but being confused when they see a more conventional movie in a traditional setting.

Abraham has been socialized into an entrepreneur career path which has been infused with his metaphorical DNA. With two parents serving as examples of successful entrepreneurs but with very different choices of pathways, Abraham embraces the skills of both parents. His particular pathway appears to be a future attorney with an eye for managing his office as well as lucrative investments. As the loop closes, he has moved away from an effectuation-based mindset to one of causation; he sees his opportunities and is prepared to embrace them.

## Discussion

The Tamara-Land story reveals interesting findings that merit further study relevant to cross-border Latino entrepreneurship. First, it illustrates the changes that occur across generations in family entrepreneurship. Specifically, we see an intergenerational shift from improvising to planning. Second, we see that external or governmental institutions are less relevant to entrepreneurial success than the family as an institution – hence, reframing Gartner's famous "Who is the Entrepreneur is the Wrong Question" (Gartner, 2002). Finally, this article opens the door to viewing entrepreneurship not as the story of succession problems (Molina, 2020), but of enhanced self-actualization across generations (Carland et al, 1995).

Conventional research shows that iterations across an industry or product life cycle indicate that movement frequently shifts from product innovation to process innovation (Rink and Swan, 1979). Alternatively, entrepreneurs move from improvisation to planning as they progress in businesses, especially as they develop their core capabilities (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990). However, most studies focus on a single generation or a single entrepreneur (Nordqvist et al., 2011). What we have seen in this story is the movement from improvisation to planning across three generations. Although this approach is relatively novel in studying family business, it is not new in studies of socialization (Checkel, 2005), whereby behavioral norms of populations are changed over the course of decades. This opens the door for comparative studies of behavior in family businesses as they move within families, in lieu of any particular business or business model.

Another finding of this paper is the shift from the individual perspective of the entrepreneur (as well as the type of business) to a focus on the family. We observed that the main characteristic of these individuals was not that their businesses shared similarities, but they shared a passion for business, specifically entrepreneurship. This paper has been less about a story about individuals and/or their specific types of business or industries, and more about how the relationship with entrepreneurship changed across generations.

Finally, much of the family business literature focuses on issues of succession (Molina, 2020). These include a dilemma about family members who do not wish to assume the mantle of the entrepreneur (Lorimer, 1903) and squabbles over the inheritance or shares of the family business (Handler, 1994). In this case, there was neither pressure to assume the family business, nor was there an inherent expectation. Instead, the characters in this story were exposed to entrepreneurship more generically and were allowed to assume a path of their choosing. This ability to choose has resulted in the nature of the entrepreneurial activity changing across generations. In the case of Maria, entrepreneurship was a means of survival, and she took advantage of the opportunities that were available. For Claudia, entrepreneurship was also a means of earning an income; however, she had a transition period of entrepreneurial training and was able to choose a business that suited her interests and abilities. Finally, Abraham is able to choose the pathway of starting his own business because it is his dream to do so; he is so socialized into the entrepreneurial lifestyle that other career pathways seem less desirable. In this multi-generational family business, the shift moves from economic necessity to self-actualization.

## Conclusion

As Walter Benjamin described the flaneur type of behavior in the arcade (Benjamin, 1999), in which the individual wanders from shop to shop in a quest for sensemaking, entrepreneurs wander from venture to venture across generations and across countries. Consimilarly, the Tamara play encourages participants to wander from room to room, weeding out antenarratives as they attempt to understand a grand narrative (Boje, 1995). We have illustrated that this type of wandering is germane in the study of family businesses as they create sensemaking across generations.

It is our hope that we can use this framework to illustrate the merits of exploring family business in a more open-ended way, including businesses in Latin America and in the U.S. In lieu of seeking grand narratives, perhaps we focus on sharing and enjoying the journey with our co-authors. I (the research author) have greatly benefitted from learning about the experiences of Abraham, Claudia, and Maria. Not only has writing this story educated me with respect to their story, but it has also shown the difficulty in theorizing about family businesses. There are simply too many variables – generational differences, changes in the country, unique institutions, and differences in the types of businesses.

This story serves as an inspiration to aspiring family entrepreneurs who are migrating from one country to the next, especially from Mexico to the U.S. Changes in residence can provide unexpected opportunities for starting new businesses. As we have seen across generations, our entrepreneurs have used small business ownership to generate personal livelihoods, stimulate the local economy, and provide avenues of self-actualization. What is even more significant is that these family members did not share business models. However, there were two common threads. Firstly, all family members benefitted from cross-border interactions – Maria engaged in cross-border transactions with her re-merchandizing business; Claudia benefited from cross-border building knowledge as well as labor and supply pools; and, Abraham has spent most of his life immersed in immigration law. Secondly, all generations had an interest in entrepreneurship in lieu of a focus on a specific business. This message of enthusiasm for family business may encourage entrepreneurship educators to focus on general entrepreneurship as opposed to a particular empirical setting.

## Interest conflict declaration

N/A



### Authors contribution

Author	Concept	Data curation	Analysis/ Software	Research/ Methodology	Project/ sources	Supervision/ Validation	Initial write	Final editon
1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2	X			X			X	X
3	X			X			X	X

## Financing

N/A

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## Información adicional

*How to cite::* M. Pelly, R. D.; Millan, C.; Millan, A. (2023). Moving from Generation to Generation: Latin American Family Business is a Tamara-Land. *Telos: Revista de Estudios Interdisciplinarios en Ciencias Sociales*, 25(3), 972-991