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Introducing the eventful temporality of historical research into international business

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ABSTRACT

Historical research represents an alternative understanding of temporality that can contribute to greater methodological and theoretical plurality in international business (IB) research. Historians focus on the importance of events within their historical context and structure their accounts through periodisation, assume that the temporal distance between the past and present determines the temporal positionality of researchers, and seek to reconstruct past events through historical sources, which require critical interpretation. Historical research provides an alternative methodological approach to temporality, context, and distance with relevance to a range of IB theories.

1. Introduction

International business (IB) scholars are increasingly debating the significance of time and context in studying global phenomena (Delios, 2017; Griffith et al., 2008; Plakoyiannaki et al., 2019; Shenkar, 2004; Teagarden et al., 2018; Tsui, 2004). How history matters (Jones & Khanna, 2006; Welch et al., 2016; Welch & Welch, 2009) and how it can contribute to the development of IB theory are related issues that have seen increased debate in IB (Buckley, 2009, 2016; Buckley & Fernandes Pérez, 2016). As Jones & Khanna (2006) point out, at its inception, IB paid close attention to the evolution of international firms (Vernon, 1971; Wells & Fagre, 1982; Wilkins, 1974). However, the fields of IB and business history often address different questions and employ different methods. Historical scholars, for example, use archival, primarily qualitative, research. IB scholars primarily use quantitative, though increasingly also qualitative, methodological approaches (da Silva Lopes et al., 2019; Jones & Zeitlin, 2008; Perchard et al., 2017; Rugman, 2008). This distinction is increasingly challenged by both camps (Buckley, 2016; Burgelman, 2011; Kobrak et al., 2018; Shenkar, 2004) and an ‘historic turn’ (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004), similar to the growing interest in historical approaches in other fields, appears to be underway.

Not all research that elects a temporal or processual lens and pays close attention to contextual aspects is necessarily historical. Even so, such research traditions share assumptions of phenomena as embedded in a place and a time that cannot be abstracted away for interpretation

(Cornelissen, 2017; Plakoyiannaki et al., 2019; Pratt, 2008; Welch et al., 2011). Yet historical approaches remain remarkably obscure to non-historians, in part because the discipline of history has a craft tradition of learning by doing rather than by elaborating replicable procedures (Decker, 2013; Gaddis, 2002; Rowlinson et al., 2014). Whilst this is changing (Van Lent & Durepos, 2019), a clear sense of how history’s take on temporality differs from other qualitative longitudinal approaches is still missing.

Much like process studies, historical research (mainly) does not employ cross-sectional research designs. Instead, history favours an ‘eventful temporality’, which posits that ‘unexpected and inherently unpredictable events can undo or alter the most apparently durable trends’ (Sewell, 1996, pp. 262–264). We refer to eventful temporality as the temporal assumptions underpinning historical research designs. In this article, we set out its key features, which differ from better known qualitative longitudinal practices, such as process studies. Our two research questions are: How does historical research differ from process studies? And: How does eventful temporality contribute to the understanding and conceptualisation of time in IB research? We develop a methodological framework that integrates historical research with IB. It is based on a set of epistemological assumptions, theories of structure and causality, and a concept of time that is fundamentally theoretical in nature: ‘Any methodological strategy... brings with it general constraints that are, properly speaking, theoretical’ (Abbott, 1992, p. 435).

The following section provides an overview of how IB and related

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fields have discussed the integration of historical research. We focus on contributions developed from historical narratives based on archival sources, as these are considered a hallmark of rigorous historical research (Bansal et al., 2018). These debates have established the theoretical basis for introducing historical methodology in management and organisation studies (Maclean et al., 2016; Rowlinson et al., 2014). Further exploration of the different theorisation of time in history has only just begun and coincides with an emerging interest in the role of time for organisational theorising more broadly (Ancona et al., 2001; Decker et al., 2021; Shipp & Jansen, 2020). In the following section, we develop the theoretical underpinnings of eventful temporality through a structured comparison of historical and process studies using a widely recognised and well-developed qualitative longitudinal approach. Here, we draw on two recent examples in international strategy research that rely on historical narratives from archival sources. The final section of this article outlines the potential of historical research and eventful temporality for IB, particularly how their key features offer new avenues for introducing more temporal and processual analyses in the field.

2. Integrating archival research and historical narratives into IB

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the future direction of IB research has seen significant debate in the field, starting with Buckley's (2002) challenge that the field is no longer producing novel and meaningful work. Conceptual pieces and reviews have identified new directions (Buckley et al., 2017; Griffith et al., 2008), yet strident criticism of IB has continued (Delios, 2017). Solutions and future directions have variously pointed towards a greater focus on phenomena (Buckley et al., 2017; Doh, 2015), their context (Michailova, 2011; Poulis et al., 2013; Tsang, 2013; Tsui, 2004), qualitative methods (Delios, 2017; Welch et al., 2011; Welch et al., 2013), and time (Eden, 2009; McAuley, 2010; Plakoyiannaki & Saren, 2006; Welch & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2014). Interest goes beyond just adding questions of timing or speed to established IB theories (Eden, 2009). There is a call for more process-based approaches, qualitative research, and an engagement with scholarly work beyond IB, including business history (Buckley, 2009; Shenkar, 2004; Welch & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2014).

These reviews of IB usually focus on publications in its core journals. However, calls for more interdisciplinary (Buckley et al., 2017) and phenomenon-driven research (Doh, 2015) highlight the need to consider research published outside the established IB journals, with strategy research identified as a particularly significant 'competitor' for IB (Shenkar, 2004). Since Jones and Khanna (2006) call to renew the field's engagement with history, several articles have explored key concepts in IB from a historical perspective in IB journals. What these contributions share is a primary focus on IB concepts or theories underpinned by a synthesis of published historical studies (Buckley, 2016; Cantwell et al., 2010; da Silva Lopes, Casson, et al., 2019; Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Kobrak et al., 2018; Verbeke & Kano, 2015). Rather than presenting historical narratives based directly on archival sources, these authors generally summarise the results of their previously published research. Thus, IB journals prefer to publish history in the form of a synthesis of existing pieces of historical research, which separates historical accounts from their evidentiary and methodological basis. This can lead to an uncritical acceptance of historical reconstruction as a realist account of 'how it really was'. If historians are merely the ventriloquists of the past, accounts of the past cannot be challenged or revised. Yet historical research can offer a different temporal perspective on long-run processes such as internationalization (Amdam & Benito, 2022). Increasingly, insights from historical research are considered alongside other streams of IB research (Rammal et al., 2022).

Other areas of business and management studies have seen a more pronounced 'historic turn' (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004), which provides a theoretical foundation for introducing historical research approaches. For example, the editors of the *Academy of Management Journal* have highlighted in an editorial the 'key principles of historical analysis: a

preference for authentic archival data over retrospective material, comprehensive source criticism, and researchers' reflexivity in constructing the narrative' (Bansal et al., 2018, p. 4). They notably remarked that 'the value of these analyses in making us see the social, cultural, and institutional construction of organizational and managerial phenomena in historical context [...] historical analysis recognizes the temporal and spatial historical embeddedness of organizational phenomena' (Bansal et al., 2018, p. 4).

The integration of history into management research does require attention to some specific tensions that arise at the intersection of different research approaches. Maclean et al. (2016) highlight the importance of 'dual integrity': combining the theoretical fluency of social scientific thinking with the empirical veracity of history. Rowlinson et al. (2014) outline four research strategies which focus on how theory is embedded in historical narratives. Other reflections on how historical research can be introduced into various fields and debates similarly highlight the diversity of possible approaches (Coraiola et al., 2015; Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014; Suddaby & Foster, 2017; Vaara & Lamberg, 2016). However, how this may translate into methodology has not been adequately addressed (Decker et al., 2021; Van Lent & Durepos, 2019). Consequently, management journals often expect historical research to conform to dominant templates and practices that do not reflect good historical research standards.

Historical research is predicated on an eventful temporality that presents novel methodological practices to qualitative scholars interested in time. Differences in research methods shape and ultimately restrict how a field conceptualises research questions and develops theoretical contributions. A limited repertoire of dominant methods can hold back the intellectual contribution of a field (Abbott, 1983). In disciplines such as IB that have prevalent methods (Nielsen et al., 2020), new phenomena are often explained using existing methods and theories, without attempts at discovery and intellectual novelty. But existing approaches may not always be enough to consider some of our contemporary challenges, such as the coronavirus pandemic, which is not without historical precedent (Delios et al., 2021). Our discussion of eventful temporality outlines its role in broadening IB's theoretical scope towards more plurality and new insights.

3. Eventful temporality and process studies

Historical approaches are frequently discussed in relation to longitudinal research and process theories, with which they share many common features. Burgelman (2011) views qualitative longitudinal research as a bridge between the particularist concerns of historical research and the more reductionist approach in IB research. Other scholars view historical methods as inherently adverse to the kind of generalisation required for management research (Leblebici, 2014). Nevertheless, management scholars have developed multiple frameworks to integrate historical research into organisational theorising, as discussed in the previous section.

Our focus is on eventful temporality as a methodological framework that extends existing qualitative longitudinal methods (Hassett & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2013). We focus on process studies because they are amongst the most developed qualitative longitudinal approaches (Hassett & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2013; Langley, 2009). Process scholars have identified historical methods as potentially valuable for tracing processes backwards through data collection via archival research, citing verifiable sources, and data analysis and presentation through narrative (Langley, 2009). Such a comparison highlights both the differences and the potential complementarity between historical and process studies.

Our comparison focuses on four key characteristics that differentiate historical and process approaches (see table 1). These characteristics emerged from our understanding of history as a potential source of theoretical, conceptual, and methodological knowledge relevant to IB. This follows a call for more 'historiographical reflexivity' (Decker et al.,

Table 1
Approaches to history and process.

	Historical research	Process studies
Status of Events in Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events as units of analysis • Definition of event depends on temporal scope of narrative • Periodisation: periods defined by the wider context & focal organisation; periods are fuzzy and overlap • Stories comprise multiple sequential events that depend on the outcome of preceding events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events as units of analysis • Events constituted through their relationship to other events • Temporal bracketing: definition based on the focal organisation/theoretical framework & clearly demarcated from previous and subsequent bracket • Processes comprise sets of events organised in temporal brackets
Role of Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical contextualisation: the interaction between (1) events at different levels, with (2) contingent and indeterminate processes • Context: period effects that shape different organisations in similar ways at a similar time • Generalise stable processes from changing contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context: the surroundings of phenomenon at higher levels of analysis • Complex but analytically separate from focal processes • Context: aids interpretation of processes as a foil for generalisation
Role of Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporal distance between past and present • Temporal positionality of researcher: explicit and evident in design and analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuity of time • Temporal positionality of researcher: implicit as a constant invisible observer
Data Collection & Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archival source interpretation • Archival sources: unique and noncirculating • Primacy depends on closeness in time to event; reflects temporal positionality of researcher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inductivist grounded theory variants • Interviews, observations, documentation: ongoing & evolving, or retrospective • Primacy depends on closeness to researcher; reflects the positionality of a constant observer

2021). The first characteristic, *status of the event in the analysis*, focuses on the structure of explanations; that is, events and sequences structured by either temporal bracketing (process) or periodisation (history). We draw here from scholars in history (Mink, 1978), historical sociology (Abbott, 1983, 1991, 1992; Sahllins, 1991; Sewell, 1996, 2005) and process studies (Langley, 2009; Pettigrew, 2012). The second characteristic is the *role of context* in process studies and history. In process studies, context is defined as the surroundings of the object of study, whilst in history, context interacts with the narrative in unpredictable and contingent ways.

The third is the *role of time* that makes eventful temporality distinct from process approaches—in particular, the notion of temporal distance between the present and the past (Decker et al., 2021; Gadamer & Fantel, 1975; Stutz & Sachs, 2018; Wadhvani & Bucheli, 2014; Wadhvani & Decker, 2017). The fourth characteristic is *data collection and data analysis*, and we outline their key differences. We elaborate on how these elements are embedded in historical research by drawing on two exemplars: a historical approach used by Lubinski and Wadhvani (2020) and a hybrid approach as used by Perchard and MacKenzie (2021) that draws on process studies tools in combination with historical methods.

Lubinski and Wadhvani (2020, p. 405) explicitly identify their account of the political strategies of German multinationals in India as an analytically structured narrative that is ‘focused on the conceptualization of economic nationalism’ (for a discussion on analytically structure narrative, see Rowlinson et al., 2014). Lubinski and Wadhvani’s historical case begins with Germany’s defeat in World War I (in 1918) and ends after the close of World War II (in 1948). Perchard and MacKenzie (2021) narrate the history of the British Aluminium Company (BAC)

from its rise in the nineteenth century to its demise in the twentieth century, focusing on the nature of the top management team and how its social similarity to elites in the British government disadvantaged the company and ultimately contributed to its strategic lock-in and demise. We summarise the two exemplars in Table 2.

By analysing these two exemplars we can deduce standards from practice rather than only from explicit statements. This is particularly important in a craft-based discipline like history (Rowlinson et al., 2014). We selected these two articles because they are excellent recent examples of IB historical research based on primary archival sources that trace a long-term process through narrative. Both focus on themes relevant to IB research and nonmarket strategy. Lê and Schmid (2020) have identified Lubinski and Wadhvani (2020) as a particularly innovative methodological contribution due to its reliance on historical narrative, critical source analysis, and deep embeddedness in historical context. Perchard and MacKenzie (2021) highlight the potential to integrate historical research with process approaches. Both Lubinski and Wadhvani and Perchard and MacKenzie focus on the importance of understanding specific events in drawing out theoretical conclusions. Some of these events could not be fully anticipated by people and organisations, such as the two world wars, for example.

Table 2
Summary of the two exemplars.

	Lubinski and Wadhvani (2020)	Perchard and MacKenzie (2021)
Topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • German multinationals in India, 1918–1948 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • British Aluminium Company, 1894–1982
Theoretical Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonmarket strategy • Economic nationalism & geo-political jockeying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonmarket strategy • Strategic homophily & path dependence
Status of Events in Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of structured history • Periodisation: fuzzy phases that overlap chronologically • Periodisation: defined by both global history and conceptual stages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hybrid of temporal bracketing & periodisation • Temporal bracketing: defined by focal organisation & distinct main temporal brackets • Periodisation: most significant bracketed phase (lock-in), subdivided into fuzzy & overlapping periods
Role of Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis at international, national & firm-levels • Historically embedded • Eventful: two world wars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multilevel historical analysis: individual, organisational & contextual • Contextualized & historically embedded • Eventful: hostile takeover
Role of Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implicit temporal distance • Case selection justified through hindsight • Theoretical focus on nationalism & multinational strategy • Historical case combines several highly nationalistic & historical actors within a period of increasingly protectionist policies • Hindsight informs narrative, highlighting the ‘impeccable’ timing of firms’ decision-making (in retrospect) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implicit temporal distance • Case selection justified through hindsight • Theoretical focus on path dependence & strategic homophily • Historical case exhibits strategic homophily and has available long-run data • Hindsight employs temporal distance in narrative to ‘presage problems to come’
Data Collection & Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefer primary sources/ social documents over secondary/narrative sources • Data collection from eight archives in four countries • Historical narrative presents data interwoven with interpretation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefer primary sources/ social documents over secondary/narrative sources • Data collection from six archives in three countries • Historical narrative presents data interwoven with interpretation

Note: Authors’ elaboration from Lubinski and Wadhvani (2020) and Perchard and MacKenzie (2020).

3.1. Status of events in analysis

Eventful temporality and process theories share a focus on sequences of events (see Table 1). Sewell (1996, p. 262) describes history as fundamentally eventful, and defines events as empirical phenomena that have the power to significantly transform structures. Yet this definition is far from widely shared. Despite their centrality to historians, ‘hardly any concept is less clear’ than events (Mink, 1978, p. 199). Rather than view events as the raw material of historical narratives, Mink (1978, p. 201) questions such empiricist definitions and instead highlights that what constitutes an event ‘depends on a particular narrative construction which generates the event’s appropriate description’. Thus, events depend on the structure and scale of the narrative presentation.

This conception of events is shared with process studies, which conceives the world as composed of ‘events and experiences, rather than substantial entities’ (Langley et al., 2013, p. 5). In both traditions, the event represents the primary unit of analysis (Welch et al., 2016). Such events are constituted through their relationship to other events and can be broken down into smaller events through analysis (Cobb, 2007). For example, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic at the end of 2019 and its subsequent spread across the globe in 2020 is doubtlessly a critical and transformative event affecting many social, economic, and cultural processes. On closer examination, this crucial event and decisions around it comprises numerous other events and decisions taken in different countries, by various organisations, and at different times.

This illustrates that the definition of ‘an event’ is not independent of the temporal scope of the narrative but is part of a larger sequence of events that underpin historical narratives. Such narratives are not always chronologically sequential; sometimes they are logically sequential. They can combine complex processes systematically in a ‘syntax of events’ that creates a temporal ‘topography of evidence’ (Mink, 1966, pp. 39–40). Abbott (2004) defined such syntactic explanation as a programme of research that finds concrete and systematic explanations for past events and processes. Such explanation takes place in terms of stories, defined by an ordered sequence of events from which historical researchers can generalise (Abbott, 1983).

Focusing on an ordered sequence of events means that the before and the after make a difference (i.e. an event can affect subsequent events; Abbott, 1983; Sewell, 1996). This strict ordering of events also means that only proximate events can influence subsequent events (i.e. it should be evident how one event affects another event). If events are too far removed in time from each other, and there is no apparent connection through intervening events, then the ordering of events ultimately means no precise generative mechanism is present. These conditions define the sequential dependency of historical accounts (Abbott, 1983). Sequences of events are essential to both process and historical studies, but sequential dependency is specific to historical practice.

Langley (1999) introduced temporal bracketing as a strategy for theorising from process data (see Table 1). Temporal brackets are successive and distinct from each other; they do not overlap; and the boundaries are not fuzzy. They are typically defined based on the focal organisation rather than its broader environment, contextual occurrences, and trends. Temporal brackets become ‘units of analysis for replicating the emerging theory’ (Langley, 1999, p. 703). Whilst Langley also referred to these temporal brackets as periods, historians commonly refer to temporal brackets as periodisation. However, we find that the two practices differ in crucial ways.

Periodisation embeds the account in the historical context and can play relatively fast and loose with standard clock-time; for example, the ‘long’ nineteenth century (1789–1914) and the ‘short’ twentieth century (1914–1989). Here, time is not a generic concept as clock-time or completely individualistic as the notion of ‘kairos’ or experienced time; it is the socially constructed world of events and their interpretations. Thus, historical periodisation is not the same as chronologies because it represents ‘divisions of social time and space [...] defined from sources and the historiographical context in the process of research and writing’

(Rowlinson et al., 2014). Indeed, historical periodisation can be somewhat fuzzy, indistinct, overlapping, and specific to the type of phenomena considered.

3.1.1. Eventful temporality in practice

We draw on our two exemplars to illustrate the differences and complementarities between periodisation and temporal bracketing (see Table 2). Lubinski and Wadhvani’s (2020) analytically structured narrative does not explicitly state that they employ periodisation; however, as one of the defining features of this narrative strategy, this is implied. Lubinski and Wadhvani first provide an overview spanning from the German defeat in World War I (1918) to just after the end of World War II (1948), which include a series of barely chronological and overlapping stages. The timeframes defined in Fig. 1 are numbered in order of presentation in their article, illustrating how the authors jump in time or overlap events as they follow the argument, not the timeline. This is common in historical narratives employing periodisation.

Perchard and MacKenzie (2021) describe their approach as temporal bracketing, but they also used elements from periodisation. Their narrative is conceptually structured by the idea of path dependency—a well-known process theory that defines three critical phases for analysis. The last phase (temporal bracket of lock-in) is subdivided into ‘lumpy’ periods of varying lengths (see ‘Status of Events in Analysis’ in Table 2). These periods overlap with previous key phases (see Fig. 1). In their article’s final section, they present a summary account of the entire time period of the study. The influence of process theories means that temporal brackets are sharply defined, sequential, and based on the focal theoretical framework. Within the crucial lock-in bracket, Perchard and MacKenzie use historical periodisation.

Our first example illustrates the classic approach to periodisation, and the second highlights a hybrid approach that combines periodisation and temporal bracketing.

3.2. Role of context

Context is generally considered the surroundings that ‘help to illuminate the phenomena’, typically referring to analyses above those under investigation and implying a hierarchical multilevel relationship (Cappelli & Sherer, 1991, p. 56; Michailova, 2011). As a field, IB defines itself through the inclusion of context (Teagarden et al., 2018); and context matters to research in many different ways, such as boundary conditions (Meyer, 2015), temporal context (Hurmerinta et al., 2016), greater sensitivity to indigenous research (Tsui, 2004), and the importance of contextualized research for theorisation (Welch et al., 2022). In contrast, historical context is understood as temporal and interacts with the sequence of events (see Table 1). Thus, historical context is conceived as contingent interactions that influence sequences of events which cannot be isolated or individually assessed. On the one hand, historical contextualisation (Wadhvani & Decker, 2017) and historical embeddedness (Vaara & Lamberg, 2016) seek to embed a sequence of events in space and time. On the other hand, historical contextualisation establishes how outcomes are contingent on contextual interactions: ‘The consequences of a given act are not intrinsic in the act but rather will depend on the nature of the social world within which it takes place... Historians assume that the social logics governing past social worlds varied fundamentally’ (Sewell, 2005, p. 10). Contingency is an inherent property of ‘indeterminate processes and events’ (Ermakoff, 2015, p. 65); it comprises several elements, such as period and sequence effects, process interactions, chance, and individual agency (Hall, 1999).

Process theory acknowledges that complex interactions of a process with context can lead to unexpected and messy outcomes (Langley et al., 2013; Langley & Tsoukas, 2011). However, examples of how context matters to process theorising are mainly changeable foils on which to observe relatively constant processes (Gehman et al., 2018; Langley et al., 2013). Context provides a test of the generalisability of a process and how widely applicable a process model is across different contexts

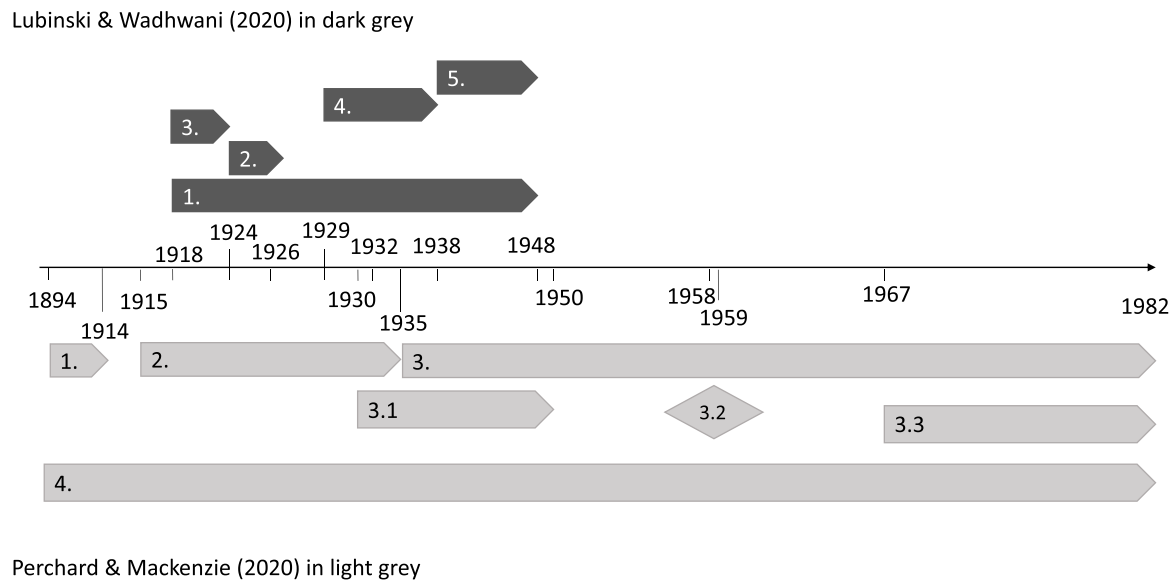


Fig. 1. Periodisation in the exemplars.

(Pettigrew, 1985). Pettigrew (1997, p. 339) places ‘time and history [...] at the centre of any process analysis’, and later extends the definition of context from background variance to an interactionist field of analysis (Pettigrew, 2012). This aligns with historical practice in several ways: (1) sequential dependency focuses on the interaction between events in time; (2) nested contexts differentiate between intra-firm and external contexts—although our two exemplars demonstrate other options; (3) other processes occur at the same time and affect the process observed; and (4) accidents illustrate the contingent nature of any process. This holistic understanding of complex interactions makes it possible to identify causal mechanisms in the interplay between process and context (Abbott, 1983; Pettigrew, 2012).

3.2.1. Historical contextualisation in practice

Both exemplars of historical research emphasise the importance of context throughout (see Table 2). Lubinski and Wadhvani (2020) employ Vaara and Lamberg’s (2016) historically embedded approach. Lubinski and Wadhvani highlight context throughout their narrative; for example, when outlining the importance of symbolic partnership in German companies’ selection of Indian stakeholders associated with nationalist movements. Elsewhere, they emphasise the importance of India as a growing international market both before and after World War II. The pattern they identify is based on theories of nationalism, which explains why, despite significant transformations in the international and domestic environments, German companies continued with similar political strategies in India throughout this period. Lubinski and Wadhvani highlight complex interactions and relate nationalist rhetoric and practice to the context of both home and host country. These contextual aspects influence the evolution of firm-level capabilities in strategy formation and draw on the symbolic and multilateral terms of international politics.

Whilst accidents and contingency are not as evident in Lubinski and Wadhvani (2020), Lubinski (2018), in another publication that draws on the same dataset, highlights that context can also surprise and disrupt actors’ strategies. Here, she focuses on the content of the rhetorical strategies employed by German multinationals to exploit nationalism in India in terms of German Nazi ideology at home. Germans proposed their Aryan ancestral homestead was India, and thus German companies in India were fellow Aryans. Initially a successful rhetorical strategy, this came undone in the face of Hitler’s increasingly racist speeches, which ultimately led to greater scepticism of such corporate claims of a joint Aryan community. Here, multiple levels of context disrupt successful

strategies at somewhat unpredictable junctures. Eventful temporality, then, refers to an account of processes that prioritises events as crucial inflection points. This may include how events can disrupt otherwise successful strategies and processes.

Perchard and MacKenzie (2021, p. 983) ‘underline the imperative of comprehending’ processes within their ‘socio-historical context’ to understand the complexity of strategic decision making in terms of the relationship between organisations and their social milieus. They describe this relationship as recursive, with organisations engaging with their external context, which then impacts them over time. They contrast their approach to the use of history in the wider corporate political activities literature, which ‘has demonstrated tendencies to use history selectively as contextual padding’ (Perchard & MacKenzie, 2021, p. 996). Rather than a thin account of context that serves little purpose in the analysis, their narrative highlights the actions of other organisations that influence the focal company (such as international competitors and government decisions). Such contextual factors change over the extended time of their study. However, the mechanism of ‘strategic homophily’, which describes the close socio-cultural alignment of the top management with domestic policymakers, remains remarkably stable across the different periods. They draw out this pattern as a critical process that can be generalised in terms of theories of path dependency.

Perchard and MacKenzie (2021, p. 995) explicitly recognise the multifaceted nature of change through their ‘multi-level organizational historical analysis’, encompassing the political, economic, and socio-historic factors firms use in their strategic decision making. This illustrates how historical approaches conceive of context not as a setting but as nested levels (e.g. politics, economics) that comprise relationships influencing the outcome of a process. Again, Perchard and MacKenzie successfully merge historical methods with established process studies techniques to theorise based on the stability and continuity of a recurring pattern of events across quite different temporal contexts.

3.3. Role of time

History studies the past from the vantage point of the present, which affords a specific conception of time. We use the term *time* here to denote an ontological concept, but we focus more on the epistemological notion of *temporality*, or ‘one’s understanding of time’ (Hurmerinta et al., 2016, p. 808). The assumption that past and present are distinct and separated by temporal distance is fundamental to eventful temporality (Stutz &

Sachs, 2018; Wadhvani & Decker, 2017), and requires researchers to position themselves against the temporal dimension (Wadhvani & Bucheli, 2014). Temporal distance highlights that the past can only be researched from the vantage point of the present (see Table 1). This consideration of the temporal positionality of the researcher is unique to historical research and has no direct equivalent in process studies (Decker et al., 2021).

Hence, historical research designs can be distinguished from longitudinal ones because historical methods seek to reconstruct past events and processes from a perspective of hindsight (Wadhvani & Bucheli, 2014; Wadhvani & Decker, 2017). This is inherent in the definitions of the past. What happened before the present? (Wadhvani et al., 2018). What happened in the past, as reconstructed from sources? (Megill, 2007). Yet, beyond simply defining the *past* and *history*, it is only rarely acknowledged that this temporal dimension requires theoretical consideration (Decker et al., 2021). In historical theory, temporal distance means that the past is portrayed as inherently different and thus separate from the present (De Certeau, 1988; Schiffman, 2011). Exploring the past from a temporal distance foregrounds how different the past is from the present (Gadamer, 2013) and requires an appreciation of unfamiliar settings and social dynamics, which is not dissimilar to IB research on different cultures and institutional environments.

Temporal distance is a critical concept in historical research that describes how the past is portrayed in terms of present-day concerns. Fig. 2 highlights how temporal distance and positionality are central to eventful temporality: sequences of events and historical contextualisation are ultimately conceptualised from the vantage point of the temporally distant present. This is achieved through the methodological practice of archival source interpretation, which will be discussed in the next section.

Temporal distance is directional because engagement must always be from the present to the past. However, interpretations of past events are subject to change over time and differ amongst scholars who use alternative theoretical frameworks to study the past. Thus, temporal distance reminds us that scholars continuously reinterpret the same historical events in terms of their present. This harnessing of temporal distance and hindsight is specific to eventful temporality (see Table 1).

3.3.1. Temporal distance in historical research designs

Whilst temporal distance underpins all historical approaches, seldom is it explicitly developed (Decker et al., 2021). Our exemplars nevertheless reveal how temporal distance is relevant to practice. Lubinski and Wadhvani (2020) do not expressly reflect on temporal distance, but instead justify the suitability of an empirical setting, particularly the combination of colonial India and German multinationals in the interwar period. Their focus is on the influence of nationalism on global strategy, and this historical setting brings together several highly nationalistic actors and protectionist policies. Within their narrative, they draw on temporal distance to remark on the ‘impeccable’ timing of their firms’ development of political capabilities and intelligence collection—again, something that could not be known to the firms’ managers at the time (Lubinski & Wadhvani, 2020, p. 411).

Perchard and MacKenzie (2021) first outline the importance of their constructs (i.e. path dependence and strategic homophily) and the need to understand the underlying mechanisms over an extended time period. They then reflect on the case of BAC as a suitable empirical setting: The company was known to exhibit characteristics of what had been described as strategic homophily, and data was available over a long period (80 years). Significantly, BAC failed as a company, which raises theoretically important questions about the nature of strategic homophily and what the literature assumes to be beneficial to a firm. Perchard and MacKenzie consistently point out that their historical approach allowed them to draw out contextual factors more effectively than other research approaches by tracing the impact of the two world wars and changing global conditions. Thus, they contribute to the understanding of path dependence. For example, they call on temporal distance to

highlight the broader impact of World War I on British businesses’ relationship to the state and to ‘presage problems to come’ (Perchard & MacKenzie, 2021, p. 987).

In summary, both exemplars employ temporal distance when explaining the selection of historical cases and in leveraging hindsight in their interpretation of events and decisions (see Table 2).

3.4. Data collection and analysis

Eventful temporality prefers a different type of evidence than process studies: The focus is on sources instead of data. Sources are ‘found’, in the sense that historical researchers, except for conducting oral history or interviews, must rely on identifying and interpreting evidence that has survived from the past. Such evidence is evaluated and interpreted through source criticism and verified by reference to their precise location in an archive. By contrast, data is ‘constructed from specified replicable procedure for analyzing a predefined and delimited set of sources’ (Rowlinson et al., 2014, p. 260). Sources are usually, though not always, kept in archives compiled by organisations specialising in collecting and preserving unique records of historical significance. The term *source* implies an epistemic attitude that is not generally employed for data: one of critical and sceptical evaluation (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020) and a degree of interpretive distance (Mees-Buss et al., 2020). The validity or credibility of the analysis of such records is predicated on the ability to check its *verifiability* instead of the *replicability* of the methodological process (Langley, 2009; Rowlinson et al., 2014). Welch (2000), Ventresca and Mohr (2002), and Buckley (2016) have highlighted the potential uses of archival records in IB and management research more broadly.

Qualitative researchers are often ‘wary of using historical data’, because they consider it to be secondary and not sufficiently rich as compared with primary qualitative data raised by the researchers themselves (Rowlinson et al., 2014, p. 255). In management and business research, any secondary documentary evidence may liberally be referred to as archival, without appreciation for the discrete nature of archival collections. Consequently, ‘qualitative organizational researchers seem to assume that historical sources mainly consist of published narrative texts, such as books, magazines, and newspapers’ (Rowlinson et al., 2014, pp. 256–257). Any collection of documentary material compiled by management researchers is labelled as an ‘archive’ (Ekman et al., 2014; Pant & Ramachandran, 2017). Historians, however, use the term to refer to archives as organised public or private collections of frequently unique materials of historical value. The International Council of Archives (2020) highlights that such records are mainly contemporaneous and not consciously created as historical documents (i.e. they are not histories), but they are no longer required for their originally intended use (e.g. correspondence, internal memos, and reports).

Archival sources are ‘unique, noncirculating social documents’, meaning that there may be only a single copy that can only be consulted in a specific archive, often only with special permission (Rowlinson et al., 2014, p. 256). It can be problematic to rely only on published historical accounts, as they hide the messy and constructed nature of primary archival research and are subject to ‘narrative contagion’ (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 115). This is because historical accounts follow narrative conventions in telling a story (Dobson & Ziemann, 2009; White, 1973). These narratives may be uncritically imported as if they were unproblematic accounts of what happened in the past, rather than interpretations of the historical sources that survived in an archive (Decker, 2013; Megill, 2007; Trouillot, 1995).

To illustrate this distinction, we compare two more IB articles based

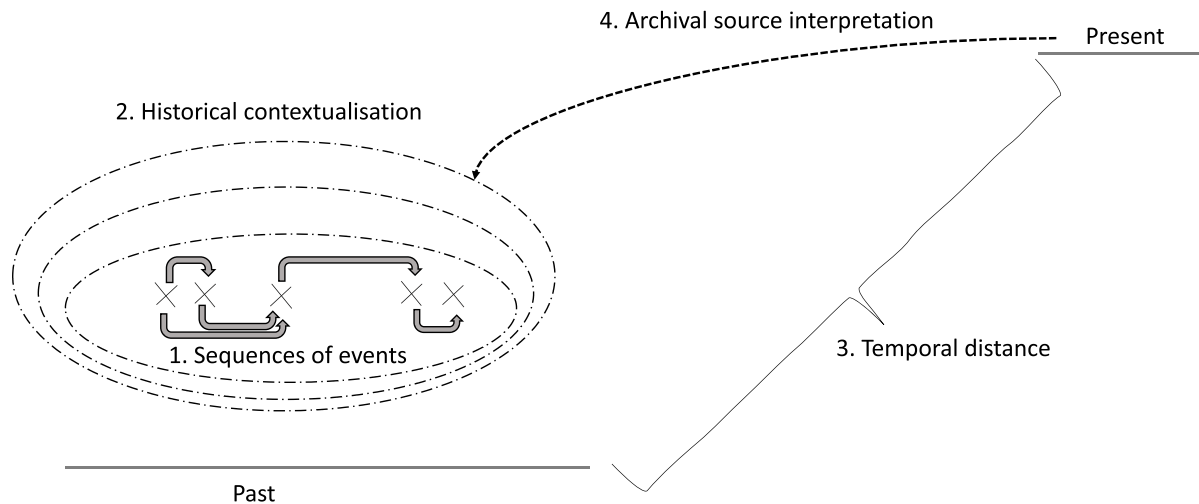


Fig. 2. Eventful temporality.

on archival sources. Pant and Ramachandran (2017) draw on data from company documents to study the evolution of Hindustan Unilever's identity statements over several decades. The authors never identify the documents they consulted or the location of their sources, but most likely they were published Annual Reports and Accounts¹ available in some library collections or through online databases. Had they accessed the same records from a business archive, they may have more detailed internal documents outlining the process of writing these statements and potential contextual correspondence about them. Speeches do not arrive fully formed but are the outcome of a social process of negotiation and revision. Compare this to the data collection in Minefee and Bucheli (2021), who collected documents on Shell from two archives in two countries (Shell's own archive was closed). These files were unique: they were not available digitally and had never been referenced to answer similar prior research questions. The authors triangulated these sources with interviews with former Shell executives. They also provided details on how they critically analysed them for purpose, authenticity, and accuracy.

When qualitative researchers code data, they consider each piece of data as having equal value; hence, the number of instances can be added together to quantify qualitative data (Pant & Ramachandran, 2017). Interpretive research practices outlined by Mees-Buss et al. (2020, p. 14) and Van Maanen et al. (2007, p. 1148) describe 'ah-ha moments' and 'epiphanies', respectively, in response to specific pieces of information in their data. Similarly, historians have long focused on the 'flash' or 'shock' of unexpected details in the archives (Stoler, 2009, p. 181). Historians highlight the importance of focusing on sources crucial to their understanding of events and as part of a systematic evaluation of different types of sources (Decker & McKinlay, 2021). Welch (2000, p. 207) highlighted that the 'value of this interpretive process of archival research lies ultimately in its capacity to strengthen the temporal dimension.'

Two factors are key to critical source analysis: closeness in time to the event described in the source, and degree of future orientation (Howell & Prevenier, 2001). Most types of internal business correspondence are close in time to the events to which they refer. They are commonly referred to as primary sources, or alternatively as social documents (Decker et al., 2021). Secondary sources are more distant in time to the events they recount, and more obviously concerned with

managing reputation, for example corporate histories, speeches, annual reports and accounts, and other forms of communication to shareholders and stakeholders. Secondary sources are also referred to as narrative sources. Both a business's internal records and its external communications are relevant in historical research. The former is normally considered more valuable than the latter because they are more likely to be primary sources related to business processes. Ultimately, past events can only be reconstructed through the evidence left behind (Decker, 2013; Trouillot, 1995), and historical research relies on source analysis to explain this evidence (Megill, 2007).

Here, source interpretation reflects the temporal positionality of researchers, who prioritise records closer to the event and further removed from themselves. Process studies (and many other qualitative research traditions in the social sciences) prefer data closer to the researcher's experience of the research site, and ideally data raised directly in the course of their investigation (see Table 1). This is reflected in the terminology of primary and secondary data versus sources. Primary data is generated by the researcher, whereas secondary data are the documents and other materials found at a research site. On the other hand, in historical research, primary sources are the social documents closest to the events studied, and secondary materials are mostly narrative sources created with a future reader in mind.

Archival source interpretation is a unique historical practice, and its relevance has been remarked upon for qualitative analysis of interview data (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020). It also shares some fundamental epistemic attitudes with interpretive research more broadly. Silverman (1989), for example, suggested that researchers need to expand their analytical gaze by actively questioning how, why, and where data were produced. These are key questions that underpin much of archival source interpretation (Howell & Prevenier, 2001; Kipping et al., 2014). Barros et al. (2019) similarly emphasise the importance of reflexivity in dealing with archival records by interrogating them rather than just piecing the past together from fragments.

3.4.1. Archival source interpretation in practice

The use of archival sources and their interpretation is evident in our two exemplars. Both Lubinski and Wadhvani (2020) and Perchard and MacKenzie (2021) prefer social documents in their accounts (see Table 2). They reference their respective sources, they draw inferences from within the narrative, and they follow the methodological standard of verifiability (Langley, 2009; Rowlinson et al., 2014).

Perchard and MacKenzie (2021) drew their primary historical sources from six archives in three countries. In line with common historical practice, their interpretation is interwoven with the presentation

¹ In the UK and many other domiciles, publicly listed companies are required to publish "Annual Reports and Accounts" for their shareholders and the wider public.

of data in the historical narrative itself. Lubinski and Wadhvani (2020) visited eight archives in four countries. They summarise organisational learning over several years to interpret its relevance: 'It became increasingly apparent to German MNEs [multinational enterprises] that non-British origin could be cultivated into a political advantage in the context of growing anti-colonial sentiments' (Lubinski and Wadhvani 2020, p. 409). Perchard and MacKenzie (2021, p. 988) similarly identify the contextual factors that provided a generative mechanism and a significant driver of path dependency: 'This stage, therefore, marks out the key historical phase in which the context of wartime cemented the proximity to government and established both the pattern of strategic homophily in the attempt to align for advantage and behavioural bias'. In terms of using primary archival sources and the interweaving of data presentation and interpretation, both case studies closely follow historical practice.

4. Discussion

Eventful temporality presents an alternative to more established qualitative longitudinal approaches. The importance of the status of events in the analysis, the role of context and time, and distinct data collection and analysis techniques have the potential to expand the relevance of qualitative research in IB. In particular, it expands the notions of: contextualized explanation in IB (Welch, 2000; Welch et al., 2011); context as an analytical space of interactions (Abbott, 1983; Pettigrew, 2012); and contingency (Ermakoff, 2015). Welch et al. (2011) have advocated contextualized explanation as an alternative to positivist approaches to case study methods. Eventful temporality is both *contextualized* and *interpretive*. It is contextualized in its design, in the sense that context is not just the relevant environs of a phenomenon but also a field of complex and contingent interactions shaped by sequential dependence. Eventful temporality is interpretive in its analysis of sources by virtue of temporal distance, thus interpreting past occurrences through the conceptual and theoretical lenses in the present. This combination provides a rich and complex understanding of context to IB research.

We next outline the implications of adopting this approach in IB in terms of the role of time, its impact on theories and concepts (such as internationalisation, nonmarket strategy, and institutions), and the scale of qualitative longitudinal research.

4.1. Historicising the role of time

Both temporal distance and critical sources interpretation provide an alternative to inductive research templates (Mees-Buss et al., 2020). The focus on temporal distance as a vantage point from which to research the past is unique to historical approaches (Decker et al., 2021). It enables reflection on the changeable perspective of the present (Gadamer, 2013), revealing new insights for scholarly communities and disciplines. Temporal distance is a tool that enables contemporary knowledge to be challenged and revised, and thus offers an essential avenue for reevaluating existing theories in terms of origin and continued usefulness.

IB theories are often presented as timeless (Welch et al., 2016) and as generally applicable (Tsui, 2004), despite the significant ways in which they are embedded in the temporal and geographical contexts of their creation (Jones, 2021). Many underlying concepts and variables are themselves historical. Vernon's (1966) product life cycle model is perhaps one of the most striking examples, reflecting as it does a mid-twentieth-century world in which the United States is the predominant foreign investor and consumer market, and the model cannot account for contemporary global value chains in a multipolar global economy. The same holds for some elements of the original Uppsala model (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977), which now appear outdated, particularly the constraint of insufficient market knowledge in an increasingly globalised and digital world (Welch et al., 2016). Nevertheless, key elements such as organisational learning and commitment

continue to be important mechanisms in foreign expansion (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009).

Yet, historicising the role of time in IB theorising can help elaborate on more general themes. Hurmerinta et al. (2016), for example, highlight the concepts of time compression as having changed the environment for international business in fundamental ways. The sense that time is accelerating is not new, but has extensive historical precedent. The German poet Goethe had complained already in the eighteenth century about the unbearable acceleration of time that society was experiencing (Koselleck, 1985). Thus, eventful temporality allows us to understand that IB theories are created *in* time and that some phenomena or perceptions may be *beyond* time. Eventful temporality is therefore more general and significant for theorising than previously thought.

4.2. Temporal distance and cultural distance

The key historical concept of temporal distance shares similarities with the foundational IB concept of distance. The notion of distance was extended beyond the geographic and economic by Johanson and Vahlne (1977), who described it as psychic distance. It has been further expanded into institutional distance (Kostova, 1999) and cultural, administrative, geographic, and economic distance (Ghemawat, 2001). Whilst considered a 'much-loved' concept in IB (Zaheer et al., 2012, p. 18), distance has also seen significant criticism. Shenkar (2001) highlighted some shortcomings in the interpretation of distance by IB scholars; for example, that distance is not always symmetrical. A recent debate focused on whether and how to integrate conceptualisations of diversity into current theorisations of distance (Doh, 2021; Kostova & Beugelsdijk, 2021; Lumineau et al., 2021).

These debates, however, consider distance as the object of study. In other subjects, such as ethnography and history, distance is considered from an epistemological perspective: something fundamental to research paradigms and practices. In organisation studies, Van Maanen (2011, p. 4) reflected on the cultural distance that underpins the writing of ethnographies as decoding 'one culture while recoding it for another'. The concept of distance as the representation of events or phenomena in a framework comprehensible to another group also applies to temporal distance. Carlo Ginzburg, an influential cultural historian, has equated temporal distance with the ethnographic categories of *etic* and *emic* perceptions of culture. In the context of historical research, *emic* understanding refers to a contextualized account that seeks to reconstruct how events were perceived in the past (Levi, 2012). Yet Ginzburg (2012) emphasises that historical practice requires this *emic* perspective to be matched by the *etic* perspective of the researcher in the present, separated from the past by temporal distance. The researcher's temporal positionality in the present is not limited to hindsight; it reflects theoretical frameworks and research questions available to the researcher that could not be considered by the historical actors and organisations.

Psychology offers a related view of temporal distance and how people can form abstract mental models of things they do not, or cannot, directly experience (Lieberman & Trope 2008). As Trope & Liberman (2010, p. 440) point out: 'Although we cannot experience what is not present, we can make predictions about the future, remember the past, imagine other people's reactions, and speculate about what might have been'. Different types of psychological distance are construed as distant from the self in the here and now; and the more distant, the more abstract the mental models become. Trope and Liberman (2010) emphasised that distance does not necessarily mean that models become more simplistic, but they may be subject to greater levels of interpretation by associating them with other events or with evaluative statements.

This definition of distance from the self in the here and now encapsulates some of the differences between social scientific and historical practice. Primary and secondary data in the social sciences refer to how distant the data collection is from researcher. Primary data is directly observed and collected by the researcher, whilst secondary data is

collected at a remove in space and time from the researcher. This is different in historical practice, which was fundamentally shaped by the methodological innovations of Leopold von Ranke in the nineteenth century, who introduced source criticism. Rather than understanding the past from the perspective of a present-day grand theory, Ranke placed historical documents at the centre of enquiry. Using primary sources close in time and space to the events they report on became a key methodological tool in overcoming the temporal distance to the past. With it came a less abstract and ideologically focused account of the past, as primary sources enable historical researchers to think about the past as closer in time and space than it is objectively.

Temporal distance in this sense introduces a new methodological approach to IB that goes beyond the existing concepts of time and distance as objects of research. It considers both as integral to our understanding of the positionality of researchers in time and space, and how the methodological tools we choose address the constraints that are inherent in all research. This is a fundamentally different epistemological position from that of the researcher-centric model that underpins the distinction between primary and secondary data. It foregrounds the importance of events, chance, and expectations, and how the individuals and organisations researched actually thought about their own position in time and space. This shift in perspective offers new theoretical perspectives to IB by focusing on different units of analysis, such as events, decisions, and processes, and on the long-term legacies that shaped the international economy and the international organisations that we now take for granted.

4.3. Internationalisation theory through the lens of eventful temporality

Recent calls to integrate more history into IB have explicitly focused on internationalisation theory, such as Buckley's (2016) methodological primer, Hurmerinta et al. (2016) call for more pluralist and contextual research, and Welch and co-authors' (Welch et al., 2016; Welch & Welch, 2009) affirmation that history matters (see also Jones & Khanna, 2006). These are especially important because of the rising interest in bringing process approaches and temporality into internationalisation research. The calls share a focus on events as units of analysis as well as a holistic rather than episodic understanding (Welch & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2014). The understanding of time in internationalisation process studies is complementary to eventful temporality. For example, some authors have conceptualised time as having two dimensions: horizontal (or chronological) and vertical (or reference) (Hurmerinta et al., 2016; Jones & Coviello, 2005). This corresponds directly with what historians consider as the sequence of events (horizontal) and context (vertical).

Nevertheless, eventful temporality contributes a richer conceptualisation of context to internationalisation process theories than vertical time, which simply refers to co-occurring events. For example, historical context considers the interaction between events at different levels (e.g., internal and external to organisations, or organisational, national, and international); between processes affecting each other in contingent and indeterminate ways; and as period effects shape different organisations in similar ways at a similar time. Such insights rely on capturing the interpreted and subjective nature of processes and decisions, such as internationalisation, and how we can account for contingency as part of this process (Welch & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2014).

Indeed, important determinants of such processes may go beyond individual participants' awareness, knowledge, or control. Mutch (2016, p. 1184) demonstrates how an organisational routine developed differently in three Christian Church denominations, on account of 'factors which are beyond the immediate control or even knowledge of the participants'. He highlights the importance of placing organisational practices and decisions in their historical context, because methodologies focused only on raising data from organisational members (e.g. interviews or surveys) cannot identify such influences. This may be of

particular relevance for internationalisation theory, as this is a complex process with myriad factors, many of which may be invisible to an internationalising organisation—or at the very least, more difficult to anticipate (Ritvala et al., 2020). Buckley (2021) identified managerial expectations as a potentially significant factor in cross-border investment decisions, but it has not seen much research so far. The rush to invest in China in the 2000s, followed by several high profile exits, is one example of how managerial expectations can explain international entry and exit. Studying such expectations can help create a less linear and more contingent understanding of process (Welch & Welch, 2009).

4.4. Nonmarket strategy

Another area of research relevant to IB, and with which business historical work is closely aligned, is nonmarket strategy. This is defined as the 'social, political, and legal arrangements that structure the firm's interactions outside of, and in conjunction with, markets' (Baron, 1995, pp. 47–48). Frynas et al. (2017) highlight the lack of interdisciplinary integration in the field, including in history. Nonmarket strategy deals with the different expectations that multinational corporations (MNCs) face in host and home economies, which Kostova and Zaheer (1999) have described as multiple levels of organisational legitimacy. Minefee and Bucheli (2021, p. 990) find that historical research has the potential to open the "black box" that permits us to navigate the decision-making processes of the MNC and its subsidiaries internally and study those decisions within the different contexts'. They highlight the importance of visual rhetorical strategies for nonmarket strategy, which has seen relatively little research to date. Here, business history can contribute to nonmarket strategy scholarship into how visual rhetoric establishes and maintains legitimacy (Decker, 2007) and how rhetorical strategies may draw on imagined historical affinities (Lubinski, 2018). History itself can become a powerful legitimisation device when employed in the form of rhetorical histories (Suddaby et al., 2010). And whilst research in this area is proliferating (Aeon & Lamertz, 2021; Ge et al., 2022; Hatch & Schultz, 2017; Smith & Simeone, 2017; Suddaby et al., 2021), it has not been explored for nonmarket strategy.

The importance of historical contextualisation is not limited to understanding the evolution of international strategies in their proper temporal context. Firms develop strategies in response to particular opportunities, and these have cumulative effects; that is, those unique initial conditions powerfully shape the type of resources that firms develop (Stinchcombe, 1965). In a recent comparative study on the long history of entrepreneurship education in the United States and Germany, Wadhvani and Viebig (2021) draw out the different historical contexts that shaped the legitimacy of entrepreneurs in both countries and the long-term legacy that continues to shape such education today. Historical contextualisation presents opportunities for further research into such cases of coevolution (Cantwell & Brannen, 2011; Child & Rodrigues, 2011; Madhok & Liu, 2006; McGaughey et al., 2016). The literature on nonmarket strategies and corporate political activity may benefit significantly from historical approaches due to the covert nature of effective political activities (Boddeyn et al., 1994). Unobtrusive methods such as archival research (Welch, 2000) are better suited to researching the development and execution of opaque strategies (Cappellaro et al., 2021; Grey, 2014; Nix et al., 2021).

4.5. Historicising institutions

Nonmarket strategy scholarship has also been criticised as being 'hobbled by a thin account of institutions and their effect on business performance, especially in understanding the impact of institutional differences across jurisdictions and the impact of these differences on performance' (Doh et al., 2012, p. 27). Institutions are inherently historical in nature (Suddaby et al., 2014). Nevertheless, institutional theory often favours ahistorical measurements and ignores the importance of embedded values within institutions (Mutch, 2018).

Cuervo-Cazurra et al. (2019) highlight that more research is needed, not just on the interaction of different dimensions of institutions but also on how they affect strategy in terms of a firm's home and host economies.

Bucheli et al. (2019) demonstrate how Chilean business groups shaped their home economies even after pro-market reforms. Despite operating in a pro-market, open economy, MNCs entering Chile needed to connect with existing business groups to be successful. It is not just past co-evolution that is path-dependent or 'fateful' (Sewell, 2005, p. 11): changes in the institutional environment do not necessarily obviate past institutional arrangements. Instead, they continue to shape home and host economies in the long-term in ways specific to the historical context because they represent values and power dynamics inherent in institutional frameworks.

How something evolved historically continues to determine its current form (Mutch, 2018). Significantly, historical narratives provide detailed and rich accounts, connecting theoretical concepts to sources of meaning, which shift depending on the context. A more historically sensitive definition of institutions might replace the atemporal and generalised 'the rules of the game' (North, 1990, p. 3) with 'societal phenomena, animated by core values that are immanent in practices' (Mutch, 2018, p. 256).

4.6. Expanding the scale of qualitative longitudinal research

Eventful temporality offers alternatives to the methodological constraints of many process studies in management and organisation studies, which predominantly rely on ethnographic- and interview-based data collection (Gehman et al., 2018). These methods significantly limit the length of the time period under investigation, and thus the size of the process they can consider (Kimberly, 1976). Even though Langley et al. (2013, p. 7) maintain that the scope of a process study is defined by the 'number of temporal observations' rather than the number of years, qualitative longitudinal research that stretches several decades is relatively rare in practice. These methods are also usually document-based rather than archival in the historical sense (Ekman et al., 2014; Fletcher, 2008; Pant & Ramachandran, 2017; Zander & Zander, 1996). Replacing the detailed and in-depth observation of qualitative methods that grasp holistically critical long-term processes with primarily quantitative approaches sacrifices much of what process research can bring to IB.

Historical research routinely covers long time periods, usually several decades, in rich and detailed narratives developed from archival records that can have a fly-on-the-wall immediacy unmatched by other types of public documents. Qualitative longitudinal researchers rarely use the primary sources available to IB scholars, even though such sources allow in-depth case studies to scale up in terms of the time covered (for a recent exception, see Minefee & Bucheli, 2021). Frynas et al. (2017, p. 568) highlighted the potential contribution from historical evidence in studying the 'long-term cooperative interactions and reciprocity by the actors involved'. Welch (2000, p. 198) considers archival data as an opportunity to add 'empirical depth' and explain 'processes of change and evolution'. This need not be in isolation from other methodological developments. The extended case method, for example, is another contextually focused and historically sensitive methodological approach (Nguyen & Tull, 2022). Beyond individual case studies, set-theoretic approaches (Fiss, 2007; Ragin, 1987) provide contextual and multilevel research designs (Hartmann et al., 2022), which have been employed in conjunction with historical research (Decker et al., 2020). By shifting the scale and scope of qualitative longitudinal research towards longer-running, larger, and inherently more complex international questions, IB could engage better with research increasingly defined by global challenges (Jones, 2021) and build on existing work that develops the theoretical and methodological implications of historical approaches for business and management research (Decker et al., 2021; Hargadon & Wadhvani, 2022; Maclean et al., 2016; Rowlinson et al., 2014; Vaara & Lamberg, 2016).

5. Conclusion

Despite increased interest in historical research in IB, it is still unusual to see articles published in the field's most prominent journals based on primary archival sources, a hallmark of rigorous historical enquiry. In this article, we introduced the key features of an eventful temporality that can expand the methodological repertoire of IB research. Eventful temporality describes the historical research design's temporal assumptions: status of events in analysis, the role of context and time, and data collection and analysis. Methodological diversity is essential for theory development, and by outlining the alternative understanding of temporality in historical research, we contribute to both the methodological and theoretical repertoire in IB.

As a distinct approach to qualitative longitudinal enquiry in IB, historical research contributes several insights by combining contextualized with interpretive elements, including a more historical understanding of the role of time in research. Internationalisation process theory would benefit from the richer concept of context, which offers a framework to engage better with non-linear understandings of time (Lamb & Liesch, 2002) and the contingent interaction of events and processes (Welch & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2014). For research on nonmarket strategies and beyond, eventful temporality offers (1) a practical approach to research on opaque or covert political strategies; (2) a rich and historically sensitive understanding of institutions; and (3) new insights in terms of visual and rhetorical strategies of MNC legitimacy. Archival source interpretation, finally, can extend the temporal scale of in-depth qualitative longitudinal research. Whilst these significant contributions have seen more widespread development outside of IB, they can expand the methodological and theoretical diversity and relevance of IB research.

6. Managerial relevance

Managers compare past experiences and events in order to better understand present-day issues. This is especially the case when there are clear analogies, such as the Global Financial Crisis and the Great Depression, or the coronavirus with the flu pandemic, and the impact these have on society and business. Historical analysis offers a more systematic and evidence-based approach to making sense of complex events and processes from a diverse and incomplete set of data where more standardised analytical procedures may fail to provide useful answers. Historical thinking enhances managerial interpretation and judgement in complex situations without clear and obvious solutions.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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