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An Assemblage-Theoretic Perspective on the Internationalization Processes of Family Firms

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Much scholarly attention has been paid to the internationalization of family firms. In this paper, I contend that our knowledge remains limited because of a dominant focus on decision making. I problematize this dominant focus in the literature, propose assemblage theory as a new lens through which to examine family business internationalization, and draw attention to new research questions constructed around the conceptualization of internationalization as a destabilizing influence on family firm logics and routines. In doing so, I pay particular attention to processes associated with internationalization triggers, geographic distance, cultural differences and the family firm as an unfamiliar market actor, and to temporal considerations associated with these processes.

Introduction

Increased scholarly attention is being paid to the internationalization of family firms, and there are recent, comprehensive, and thoughtful reviews on this topic by Fernández and Nieto (2014), Kontinen and Ojala (2010), and Pukall and Calabrò (2014). These reviews illustrate that prior research spans multiple theoretical frameworks, multiple empirical approaches, and data from multiple countries. However, they also illustrate that research findings are inconsistent, incomplete, and insufficiently grounded in the international business literature. It is therefore not surprising that they conclude that our knowledge in this area is disappointing. Kontinen and Ojala state that "current research on family business (FB) internationalization offers very limited knowledge on the processes and strategies that make FBs unique in their internationalization" (p. 106). Four years later, Pukall and Calabrò made the same assessment and highlighted the "inconclusiveness of findings related to the effects of family ownership/involvement on aspects of internationalization" (p. 112). Fernández and Nieto assert simply that "research on internationalization in family firms still has a long way to go" (p. 419).

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The disappointing level and quality of cumulative knowledge is not due to a scarcity of studies or a truncated time period: Pukall and Calabrò (2014) include 72 articles published over a 22-year period in their review. Nor is it due to inadequate quality: most of the reviewed articles have been published in reputable, refereed journals and their research questions and findings are credible. I contend in this paper that the reason why research in this area, collectively, is limited is because scholarly attention is focused on family firm internationalization as a strategic decision, which eclipses other important aspects of the phenomenon.

Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) differentiate between "gap-spotting" and "problematization." They state that spotting, creating, and filling gaps in an existing body of literature is the prevalent way to construct research questions, and claim that this gap-focused practice rarely challenges the underlying precepts in the literature, thereby reinforcing existing conceptual frameworks. They propose a methodology labelled "problematization," which aims to identify new research questions based on interrogation of these underlying precepts and the articulation of alternate precepts. In using Alvesson and Sandberg's problematization approach to propose a new theoretical framework for conceptualizing the internationalization of family firms, I challenge the predominant conceptualization of internationalization as strategic decision, introduce assemblage theory as a new theoretical lens to complement current theoretical perspectives, and illustrate how an assemblage theory lens draws attention to new types of research questions associated with the internationalization of family firms.

Specifically, this paper contributes to our scholarly understanding of family firms in two important ways. At a broad level, it contributes to the family firm literature by introducing a new theoretical perspective, based on assemblage theory (DeLanda, 2006a, 2006b; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), which shifts the focus of analysis from variance to process, from stabilizing factors to destabilizing factors, and from agency to distributed agency. With respect to the research domain of the internationalization of family firms, I examine four destabilizing factors associated with internationalization—triggers, geographic distance, cultural differences, and being unfamiliar as a market actor—and propose new types of research questions related to them.

Prior Research on Family Firm Internationalization

To examine prior research, I followed three steps articulated by Alvesson and Sandberg (2011). The first step is to delineate the domain of literature to be investigated. Since there are no path-defining studies in this field, I followed their suggestion to draw on authoritative summaries, and focused primarily on the perspectives provided in the review articles by Fernández and Nieto (2014), Kontinen and Ojala (2010), and Pukall and Calabrò (2014). Although I acknowledge the possibility that the reviews might be biased, this seems unlikely given the high degree of convergence across their findings. I supplemented the reviews by examining research published after they were published. In the second step—identifying the implicit precepts within this domain—I paid attention to the language used, flaws in logic, and incongruities between this body of literature and other literatures. This examination revealed that a key precept underlying research in this domain is the conceptualization of family firm internationalization as strategic choice. Much of the literature links factors such as the extent of family ownership and management (the most frequently studied independent constructs), with cognitions that influence decisions about foreign market entry, such as long-term orientation, and aversion to risk and/or debt and/or loss of control.

In the third step of the problematization approach, I identified three ways in which a decision making framing of family firm internationalization constrains research in this area. The first constraint is that a focus on the decision to enter or exit a foreign market either ignores or sidelines the *process* of doing so. Given that internationalization is inherently a process that occurs over time (see Welch & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2014), it is not surprising that the scarcity of process-based research on the internationalization of family firms has been decried in all three review articles.

Second, and related, framing internationalization as an entry decision tends to be associated with a lack of attention to post-decision outcomes. Indeed, while the three reviews criticize the scarcity of studies linking internationalization and firm performance, they do not question that internationalization is beneficial. This is consistent with the literature as a whole. The family-related constructs viewed as aligned with internationalization tend to have favorable labels, such as altruism, patient capital, and long-term orientation, while the family-related constructs viewed as misaligned with internationalization tend to have unfavorable labels, such as isolation, lack of managerial capabilities, unwillingness to accept outside expertise, and fear of losing control. It is difficult to read this literature without encountering the presumption that high quality family firms internationalize (and more), while lower quality firms either do not enter foreign markets at all, or internationalize little.

However, internationalization has been shown in past research to be unrelated to firm performance (e.g., Hennart, 2011). While the risks of internationalization have been recognized in the family business literature, the discussions tend to emphasize trade-offs between business advantages and risks to the family—such as the loss of socioemotional wealth (e.g., Gómez-Mejía, Makri, & Larraza-Kintana, 2010) and the desire to maintain family harmony (e.g., Scholes, Mustafa, & Chen, 2016)—with respect to decision making and there has been little study of post-entry outcomes on the business or the family. Indeed, family firm internationalization is almost exclusively framed by (first) foreign market entry; the word "exit" appears in none of the review articles even though internationalization is often sporadic (Kuivalainen, Saarenketo, & Puumalainen, 2012) and there is a high rate of foreign market exit (Bernard & Jensen, 2004). For example, export sales make up only 4% of total revenue of Canadian exports with fewer than 500 employees (Seens, 2015, p. 3) and over half of new exporters in Canada stop exporting within one year (Chen & Yu, 2010).

Third, a framing of internationalization in terms of decision making constrains research by de-emphasizing the existence of multiple actors and the tensions that are likely to ensue during to the inherently disruptive activities associated with internationalizing and deinternationalizing. There is some suggestion of such conflict in prior research. Oon, Prabhu, and Singh (2015) argue that internationalization is more destabilizing for family firms than for nonfamily firms because of stronger and more persistent imprinting. In a rare study that considers internationalization as an independent variable rather than a dependent variable, Singla, Veliyath, and George (2014) show that internationalization-governance relationships are weakened in family firms where blockholders have both ownership and management control, which can result in a loss of wealth for nonfamily shareholders. Lu, Liang, Shan, and Liang (2015) find there is a negative relationship between the internationalization of family firms and their profitability, which is reduced or reversed by improved governance; having fewer family members on the top management team and a more active and independent board. Such changes are likely to be disruptive to the family and the firm. While the literature recognizes that there may be tensions and conflicts between family and business interests—due to "the paradoxes caused by the involvement of family in business" (Sharma, Chrisman, & Gersick, 2012, p. 5)—and that decision makers make trade-offs, explicit study of tensions and conflicts associated with the internationalization of family firms, and how they are managed has been largely neglected in the extant literature.

Thus, examining prior research on family firm internationalization from a problematization perspective suggests that a valuable complement to existing theoretical approaches to the research domain is one that takes into account the temporality and dynamics inherent in the constitution of both the focal market actors (family firms) and the focal behavior (internationalization). In particular, the framework should be able to provide (a) process-based explanations, (b) explanations of post-entry outcomes, and (c) explanations involving tension and conflict among family firm actors. In the next section, I describe how a theoretical lens based on assemblage theory (DeLanda, 2006a, 2006b; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) meets these requirements. In doing so, I move away from the "decision" and "entry" focus of prior research, and define research on the internationalization of family firms more broadly as research focused on cross-border activities of family firms.

Assemblage Theory as a Theoretical Lens for the Study of Family Firm Internationalization

Widely Used Theoretical Frameworks for Family Firm Internationalization

Table 1 compares theories that are widely used to analyze the behavior of family firms and the internationalization of firms in terms of the extent to which they meet the three requirements identified at the end of the previous section. Family firm theories, such as agency theory (e.g., Chrisman, Chua, & Litz, 2004), stewardship theory (e.g., Davis, Schoorman, & Donaldson, 1997), and socioemotional wealth (e.g., Gómez-Mejía, Haynes, Núñez-Nickel, Jacobson, & Moyano-Fuentes, 2007), explain family firm decisions and outcomes by focusing on decision criteria such as goals, motives, expected losses, and expected gains. All of these theories recognize the possibility of tensions or conflicts within the family firm of a broad nature (e.g., competing interests) and posit normative mechanisms to remove them, but only agency theory models tensions or conflicts directly. However, none of the theories provide process-based explanations of post-decision outcomes. Thus, while they are enormously valuable in understanding the decisions made by family firm decision makers, these theories are less useful in generating new types of research questions associated with the issues that surfaced in the problematization of the extant literature on family firm internationalization.

Similarly, well-known theories of international business, such as the eclectic paradigm (Dunning, 1980), internalization theory (Buckley & Casson, 2009; Verbeke, 2003) and the Uppsala model (e.g., Johanson & Vahlne, 2009), are limited in satisfying the three requirements shown in Table 1. The first two of these theories were developed to explain the existence and decisions of multinational enterprises, and they explain variance, rather than process, in decisions based on a set of decision criteria. The Uppsala model is explicitly a process model based around learning, and explains the nature of successive foreign market entries, but there is little scope to model family firm heterogeneity outside these paths. The eclectic paradigm recognizes the interdependency of firm-level decisions (Buckley & Casson) and all of these theories make room for less than optimal outcomes, but none of them provide a theoretical basis for understanding instability, tensions, or conflicts associated with the internationalization of family firms. Again, while these theories have been, and continue to be, of critical importance to understanding how and why

Table 1

A Comparison of Assemblage Theory With Well-Known Family Firm Theories and International Business Theories

Summary of theory	Key concepts	Requirements of theoretical framework from problematization: Provides a process-based explanation	Explains postentry outcomes	Models family firm tensions and conflict
Assemblage Theory: Entities are made up of independent components that interact to (de-)stabilize the whole	Component homogeneity; boundaries; coherence; stabilization and destabilization	Yes	Yes	Yes
Family Firm Theories				
Agency theory: Family firm decision makers are opportunistic and pursue personal interests	Goal alignment; decision making	No	Limited	Yes
Socioemotional wealth: Family firm decision makers are loss averse with respect to threats to socioemotional wealth	Socioemotional wealth; family control; decision making	No	Limited	No
Stewardship theory: Family firm decision makers make decisions in the firm's interests	Intrinsic motivation; identity; decision making	No	Limited	No
International Business Theories				
Eclectic paradigm: Decision makers select foreign markets and entry modes to exploit global competitive advantages	Ownership advantages inducing internalization; location advantages of countries; decision making	No	Limited	No
Internalization theory: Decision makers internalize transactions, setting boundaries where benefits of more internalization of foreign markets are offset by costs	Intra-firm flows of knowledge and products; transaction costs; decision making	No	Limited	No
Uppsala model: Decision makers learn from market entries and so sequentially enter markets that are more "psychically distant" and with higher commitment	Liability of foreignness; liability of outsidership; learning	Yes	Limited	No

firms internationalize, they are less useful in generating new types of research questions consistent with the issues that surfaced in the problematization of the existing literature on family firms.

Assemblage Theory as a Theoretical Lens for Family Firm Internationalization

As a complement to existing theoretical perspectives, I draw on assemblage theory (DeLanda, 2006a, 2006b; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) to reveal new lines of inquiry on the internationalization of family firms. Assemblage theory has recently been used in marketing to explain the stabilization or destabilization of socially constructed entities such as communities (Thomas, Price, & Schau, 2013) and brands (Parmentier & Fischer, 2015). As described in the following paragraphs, and summarized in Table 1, an assemblage-theoretic perspective offers a new way to think about family firms and satisfies the three requirements surfaced through problematization.

An assemblage ontology views the world as constituted by entities called assemblages, which are made up of heterogeneous components. For example, a family firm can be conceptualized as an assemblage consisting of heterogeneous components related to the family and the business, such as employees, customers, warehouses, products, local communities, holiday rituals, founding narratives, values, and governance practices. As can be seen from this list, components play roles in the assemblage that vary from purely material (e.g., people, machines) to purely expressive (e.g., narratives, beliefs). Unlike a systems theory approach, where the family firm "system" is defined by component subsystems (e.g., Habbershon, Williams, & MacMillan, 2003), the components of an assemblage are not fixed. For example, a family firm assemblage remains intact even while individuals join or leave the family firm, or a sales office is opened or closed. Moreover, assemblage components exist independently of the "whole" and can be part of multiple assemblages. For example, an individual might be a manager in a family firm and a member of a town council, but exists independently of the firm and the town assemblages. This multiple and overlapping membership is relevant when studying family firms, because it is consistent with identity conflict within them (e.g., Shepherd & Haynie, 2009) and with multiple logics shaping family firm behavior (e.g., Reay, Jaskiewicz, & Hinings, 2015).

Assemblages are dynamic: they are characterized by change and do not reach a stable equilibrium. Assemblage components interact with each other in ways that destabilize and (re)stabilize the assemblage, through processes that change its composition and the boundaries (DeLanda, 2006a, p. 12). An assemblage is *stabilized* through processes that increase its internal homogeneity and coherence, and therefore sharpen its boundaries, such as those involving routines and shared values. An assemblage is *destabilized* through processes that decrease its internal homogeneity, therefore opening its boundaries, such as those involving learning and conflicting beliefs (DeLanda, p. 50). In drawing attention to changing boundaries, an assemblage-theoretic perspective highlights an aspect of family firm internationalization that should be central to scholarly inquiry but is sidelined in other theoretical perspectives. Quite simply, activity associated with internationalization changes the scale and scope of the territory encompassed by the family firm. Thus, studying family firm internationalization through an assemblage-theoretic lens involves paying attention to destabilizing and restabilizing processes associated with this changing territory.

"Process" in assemblage-theoretic studies typically involve multiple, recurring interacting processes, rather than a single process. For example, Parmentier and Fischer (2015) illustrate that brand destabilization occurred through three intertwined processes. In this case, they explained a downward trajectory in audience enchantment with a brand, but it is not necessarily the case that processes lead to a directional trajectory. For example, Epp and Velagaleti (2014) show how parents assemble and reassemble childcare arrangements through ongoing tension-minimizing processes. Li (2007) shows how community forest management, as an assemblage of diverse actors, objectives, and institutions, is stabilized and restabilized through six processes that hold these disparate elements together. Therefore, an assemblage theory lens can be used to study upward or downward trajectories of family firms' internationalization activities or recurrent processes that maintain them: the commonality is the lack of stasis.

Moreover, because the components of an assemblage are not subsumed into the larger entity, assemblages are characterized by distributed agency. For example, components that make up a community forest management assemblage include government officials, agricultural experts, conservationists, activists, and donors (Li, 2007). They have heterogeneous positions, stakes, and interests and act independently of the whole. This is similar to the diverse stakeholders that make up a family firm.

Thus, viewing a family firm as an assemblage provides a conceptual lens that is very different from those of extant theoretical approaches. The focus of analysis is shifted from variance to process, from stability to instability, and from agency to distributed agency. A family firm is considered a provisional entity, destabilized by processes that decrease its internal coherence and (re-)stabilized by processes that increase its internal coherence (see Anderson & McFarlane, 2011). The research focus is on the emergence or "becoming" that ensues from these processes, rather than a final state, and on explaining this emergence in terms of assemblage components that connect and interact. In the following section, I develop a conceptual model of family firm internationalization based on assemblage theory and highlight new types of research questions to which it draws attention.

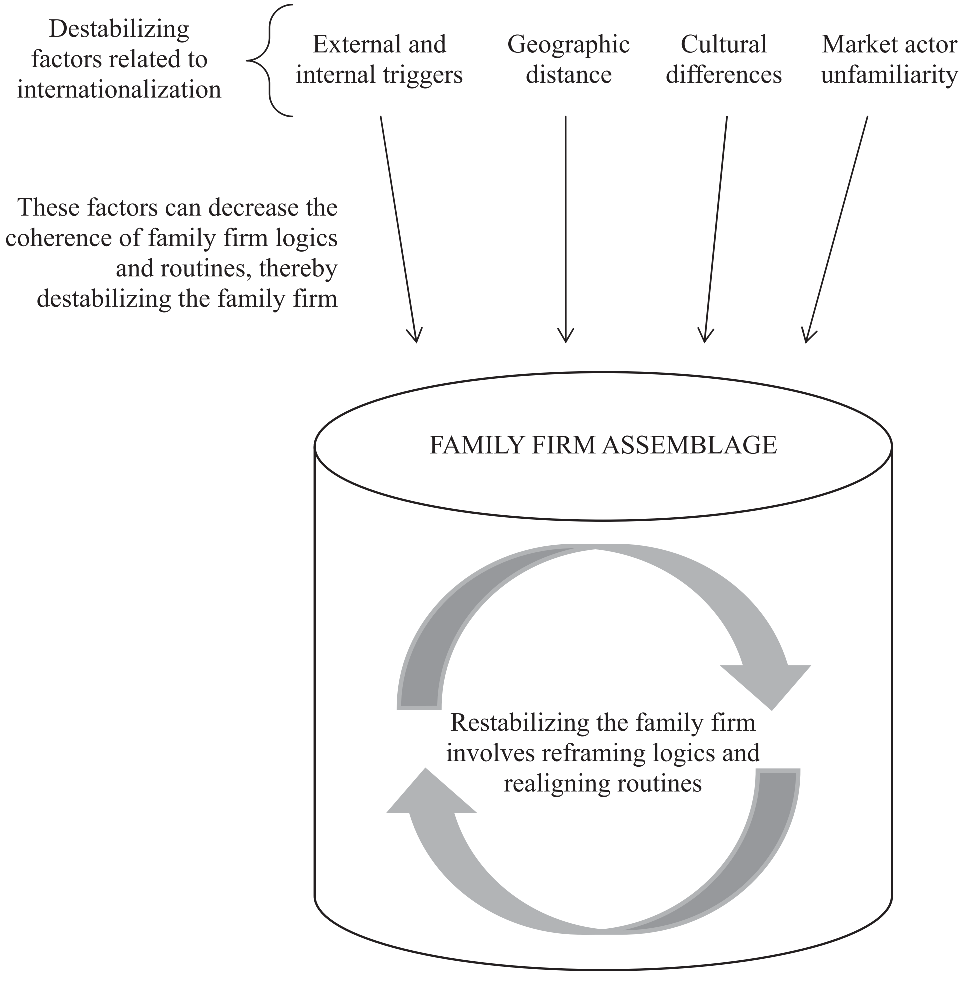
New Research Questions From an Assemblage-Theoretic Perspective

Figure 1 provides a conceptual model of family firm internationalization developed with an assemblage theory lens, highlighting four factors that are likely to destabilize family firm logics and routines, based on prior research on the international activities of both family firms and nonfamily firms. Logics are defined as the commonly held values and beliefs that guide the behavior of actors (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Family firms are characterized by hybrid logics: the family, business, and community logics that encompass the norms, values, and goals of a family firm and guide family firm behavior (Jaskiewicz, Heinrichs, Rau, & Reay, 2016; Reay et al., 2015). Organizational routines are defined as repetitive, recognizable patterns of interdependent actions involving multiple actors (Feldman & Pentland, 2003).

As shown in Figure 1, the initiation of new international activity is destabilizing to the family firm assemblage to the extent that: (a) triggers for changes in international activities are incoherent with family firm logics, (b) internationalization increases the geographic distance spanned by the family firm, (c) internationalization increases the cultural diversity of the family firm, and (d) internationalization renders the family firm unfamiliar as a market actor. These factors are destabilizing because they increase the heterogeneity of assemblage components by opening the boundaries of the family firm assemblage and establishing ties with new, intersecting assemblages. Their potential impacts are summarized in Table 2. New research opportunities for family business scholars stem from investigating the processes associated with these destabilizing factors, and how they may vary across family firm assemblages of differing natures. New research opportunities also stem from examining how family firm assemblages are restabilized through processes that increase coherence among assemblage components, and how these processes reframe logics and realign organizational routines, which, in turn, impacts the subsequent interpretation of internationalization triggers. In the remainder of this section, I examine these opportunities for research in more detail.

Figure 1

An Assemblage-Theoretic Model of the Internationalization of the Family Firm



Triggers

Prior research has documented that discussions about internationalization—and presumably de-internationalization, although the retraction of international activity is rarely studied—stem from triggers. Externally generated triggers are often serendipitous or unplanned (Crick & Spence, 2005), such as gaining knowledge of a new agreement opening up trade to foreign rivals (e.g., Michael-Tsabari, Labaki, & Zachary, 2014), an unsolicited order from a foreign country, a chance meeting of a potential partner in a foreign country, and changing demand when supplying the foreign operations of a domestic customer. Triggers can also be generated from within the family firm assemblage. For example, they can be a result of internal attentional processes that highlight a discrepancy between aspirations and performance (Pukall & Calabrò, 2014). Alternatively, they can

Table 2

Destabilizing Factors Associated With Increased Internationalization Suggesting New Areas of Research

Destabilizing factor	Possible impact on family firm that opens up new research questions
Trigger to (de-)internationalize	Clash with existing family firm logics and routines
	Need to retreat from unsuccessful foreign market entries
Geographic distance	Need to establish and manage personnel over greater distance and more time zones
	Increased geographic scope and changed nature of community involvement
	Change to heritage narratives
	Increased reliance on nonfamily managers and leaders
	Reduced socialization opportunities for family members
	Need to incorporate internationalization in career paths and succession practices
Cultural differences	Greater need for cultural and foreign language training within family
	Greater need to adapt products/services, marketing practices and narratives
	Greater need to understand norms and practices related to favors and corruption
Unfamiliarity as a market actor	Need to manage a potentially lengthy position-building process in foreign markets
	Increased reliance on nonfamily managers and leaders
	Increased need to be seen as an attractive network partner
	Pressure to strengthen technological advantage
	Pressure to strengthen family firm governance arrangements
	Increased participation in international industry-related communities

stem from introduction into the firm of new ideas about growth and risk, for example, by a new generation of family leader (e.g., Graves & Thomas, 2008), outside directors (e.g., Arregle, Naldi, Nordqvist, & Hitt, 2012), or external investors (e.g., George, Wiklund, & Zahra, 2005).

From an assemblage theory perspective, the extent to which triggers are destabilizing to a family firm assemblage depends on the extent to which the ideas about internationalization are consistent with existing assemblage components, such as shared beliefs, resource stocks, and practices. When there is a lack of coherence, triggers are expected to be destabilizing, and associated with greater conflict, negotiation, and inaction (DeLanda, 2006a). While there is extant research on the meanings associated with new internationalization (e.g., Jones & Casulli, 2014; Lamb, Sandberg, & Liesch, 2011) it is focused on a single actor in a firm. From an assemblage theory perspective, a fruitful area for family firm scholarship lies in understanding how internationalization triggers are processed when there is heterogeneity within the firm and distributed agency. The focus on destabilization also highlights that it is relevant to study how exits—or the cessation of international activity—are triggered, and the processes through which the family firm is reassembled in retreat from foreign markets.

Geographic Distance

Changing the geographic scope of the family firm is likely to destabilize the family firm assemblage. Covering a wider geographic scope of activity involves physical and often temporal separation, which can create friction for businesses and impede information flows and the firm's monitoring ability (Boeh & Beamish, 2012). In addition, the family firm's community logic (see Reay et al., 2015) can become destabilized. As the geographic scope of a firm's activities increase, it is likely that its "community" will shift from a local level to a national or even an international level. Participation in international standards organizations and at international conferences enables firms to gain the technical expertise, the networking opportunities, and the worldwide recognition that facilitates internationalization (Couper & Reuber, 2013). Given that many family firms remain meaningfully tied to the location or "terroir" of their origin, the processes that facilitate and hinder a shift in community logic is a relevant avenue for future research. Further, many family firms leverage their heritage in their marketing activities (Micelotta & Raynard, 2011), and it would be interesting to study the stabilization and re(stabilization) of such heritage narratives as companies disperse geographically.

A wider geographic scope requires establishing and managing far-flung personnel, which requires increasing the importance of having nonfamily specialists manage new markets and/or distributing family members into new markets. Longer residences outside the family's home country are likely to reduce shared socialization opportunities (e.g., schools and holidays). From an assemblage-theoretic perspective, family firm researchers can study how business and family routines are reassembled across distances; what facilitates or impedes this reassembly; and how socially constructed collective beliefs, such as family values and considerations of socioemotional wealth, are affected. A valuable study to examine in this regard, although it focuses on family practices related to consumption, is that by Epp, Schau, and Price (2014), who use an assemblage-theory perspective to investigate how families assemble practices over distances resulting from divorce, commuting, and military service.

One practice that is expected to be particularly affected by changes in the geographic scope of the firm is succession. Although it is important for incumbents and successors to establish long-term supportive relationships (Long & Chrisman, 2014), they are likely to be more difficult to establish over spatial and temporal distances. Further, while international assignments have the potential to provide the training, autonomy, and future opportunities that a next generation of management can take advantage of, internationalization is risky and difficult, and the outcomes for managers of foreign operations (family or non family) may be disappointing. Indeed, research on expatriate assignments in nonfamily firms indicates that managers feel that their international experience is undervalued and their career prospects would be better if they had not taken the assignment (Bolino, 2007). Not only could negative effects of foreign sojourns impact succession in family firms directly, it could also impact the subsequent willingness of family members to take on international assignments. Thus, internationalization is likely to disrupt relationships among family members and career paths, and there is opportunity for family firm researchers to provide a richer understanding of the processes involved in this destabilization and any subsequent restabilization.

Cultural Differences

Internationalization can destabilize a family firm assemblage when cultural differences need to be accommodated. Greater cultural distance is related to a greater "liability of foreignness" (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Zaheer, 1995). It is also expected to be related to perceptions of "what constitutes differentness" within family firm logics (see Williams & Grégoire, 2014). It seems likely that language differences play a role, and, in particular, the proficiency of the firm with English as a "lingua franca" (Cuypers, Ertug, & Hennart, 2015). Thus, it is expected that greater cultural differences are destabilizing to the extent that they are associated with new requirements for cultural and language training within the family and the family firm. We know little about such learning processes, their temporal dimensions, and their outcomes, and this is something that family firm researchers can investigate. An interesting question, for example, is the extent to which cultural and language training requirements hamper the ability of family firm members to manage international activities, therefore leading to a decrease in family management over time as a firm becomes a multinational entity. This is consistent with research showing that having nonfamily leaders is advantageous when public family businesses pursue a global strategy (Banalieva & Eddleston, 2011); however, the new questions suggested by an assemblage-theoretic lens relate to the processes through which families accede responsibility for this growth-oriented aspect of their business.

The extent to which learning is required is at least partially determined by the structure of the industry in which a family firm operates; in particular whether the firm operates in a global or a multidomestic industry (Kobrin, 1991; Porter, 1986). Global industries (for example, medical devices) are characterized by high R&D requirements, global technological standards, and minimal market barriers, with firms competing on an international basis. On the other hand, multidomestic industries (for example, food) are characterized by high market barriers, such as country-specific regulations and consumer tastes and preferences. Firms compete on a country-by-country basis and so there are greater country-specific learning requirements. Thus, it may be that family firms operating in global industries accede responsibility for foreign market activity to a lesser extent than those operating in multidomestic industries.

Related, cultural differences are also destabilizing to a family firm assemblage to the extent that there is a need to adapt to local markets. Family businesses tend to replicate the original business when expanding and scaling what they already do (Salvato & Corbetta, 2014), but internationalization often requires learning how to adapt products/services and marketing practices especially in multidomestic industries, where adaptation may be required on a country-by-country basis. Adaptation is likely to be particularly destabilizing for family firms with a strong organizational identity. Cayla and Peñaloza (2012) find that an enduring organizational identity can limit foreign market learning, because it can lead organizational actors to discredit, ignore, and reject inconsistent information. In attempting to preserve the character of their firm, managers in firms with strong identities reproduce existing cognitive and behavioral patterns and resist the necessary adaptations to foreign markets. Thus, interesting research questions for family business scholars relate to the processes that destabilize and restabilize logics and routines related to the local foreign markets. Along these lines, Haley and Boje (2014) show that the narratives associated with a multinational business involve global and local storytelling. This suggests that researchers can fruitfully examine both how family firm narratives change over time as the firm does business in more foreign markets, and the processes that facilitate or hinder their adaptation.

Another aspect of cultural differences of relevance to family firms relates to favors, and the possibility of corruption. Corrupt practices vary across countries (Cuervo-Cazurra, 2006; Martin, Cullen, Johnson, & Parboteeach, 2007), as do the nature and ethicality of favors, defined as "an exchange of outcomes between individuals, typically utilizing one's connections, that is based on a commonly understood cultural tradition, with reciprocity by the receiver typically not being immediate, and its value being less than what would be considered bribery within that cultural context" (McCarthy, Puffer, Dunlap, & Jaeger, 2012, p. 27). Given the importance of a favorable company reputation to family members (Deephouse & Jaskiewicz, 2013), it is expected that family firm stakeholders prefer to do business in a country with familiar ethical norms, expectations, and standards, and that a lack of familiarity with norms surrounding favors and corruption destabilizes existing family firm logics and routines. Favors are not always undesirable: they can facilitate the accomplishment of business objectives in countries with weak formal institutions (Puffer, McCarthy, Jaeger, & Dunlap, 2013). However, accepting and offering them adeptly may need to be added to the routine repertoire of some family firms, and refraining from accepting and offering them may need to be added to the routine repertoire of other family firms, depending on the cultural differences in this respect between their home country and the locations of new international activity. These are important issues that scholars should address by examining family businesses from culturally diverse countries in order to understand the variation in behavior. Although these questions are of general interest to international business scholars, family firm researchers are well situated to shed light on them because of the embeddedness of favor networks in family networks (McCarthy et al.).

Unfamiliarity as a Market Actor

Internationalization destabilizes a family firm assemblage to the extent that the family firm becomes an unfamiliar actor in a new market. Although this is an aspect of operating in new markets, Johanson and Vahlne (2009) distinguish between the liability of foreignness, stemming from cultural differences per se, and the liability of outsidership that stems from being outside relevant business networks in foreign markets. They emphasize the length of time it takes to develop trusting relationships, recognizing there are often failed attempts along the way, and argue that "foreign market entry should not be studied as a decision about modes of entry, but should instead be studied as a position-building process in a foreign market network" (Johanson & Vahlne, p. 1415).

A long and costly position-building process is likely to result in tensions and conflicts among family firm stakeholders who have differing expectations regarding internationalization payoffs, and so an interesting avenue for research is to examine how family firm logics and routines are reassembled through this position-building process. One possibility is to shorten the process by incorporating outsiders into the family firm assemblage. In other words, not only may outsiders reduce cultural differences, they may also provide network advantages. Again, the study by Banalieva and Eddleston (2011) is relevant: family leaders tend to have close regional network ties but not international network ties, and so family leadership is beneficial when family firms pursue a home-region focus whereas nonfamily leadership is beneficial when they pursue a global focus. However, bringing outsiders into leadership positions explicitly to set up alliances with unknown partners has the potential to create tensions among family stakeholders and destabilize the assemblage. Family business scholars can study the processes associated with such destabilization, and subsequent restabilization in order to provide insights with respect to their gains, losses, and effectiveness.

The networking practices inherent in internationalization shift the focus of inquiry from the family firm as decision maker to the family firm as potential network partner, and the need for the firm to be perceived as an attractive network partner. One aspect of attractiveness is innovativeness: it is expected that family firms with a technological advantage will be a more desirable partner because they are more apt to be industry standard-setters and provide unique products and services (see Banalieva & Dhanaraj, 2013). Another aspect of this attractiveness is trustworthiness, and so a consideration of governance is warranted. A family firm with weakly formalized governance arrangements may understand other family businesses in the same situation and "trust" that they are dealing with a like-minded company (see Graves & Thomas, 2008), but it may be more difficult to establish trust—and therefore more destabilizing—when potential partners have discrepant levels of formal governance structures. Conversely, given that organizations tend to engage in transactions with organizations of similar status (Podolny, 1994), an interesting avenue of research for family business scholars is to consider the possibility that border-spanning relationships among family firms may exhibit status orderings based on socially constructed meanings of trust, and, in particular, the meanings associated with governance.

Family firms that are considered strong actors in foreign markets are better able to attract high-quality partners in these markets, and, in particular, the multinationals that conduct their activities according to global norms and provide high status references (Couper & Reuber, 2013). Attracting such partners is desirable because it can lessen the cultural differences associated with operating in foreign markets; however, it often requires strengthening the firm's innovativeness and governance arrangements and these adjustments may destabilize current logics and routines. Moreover, as has been stated, the need to be seen as a technological trailblazer can result in a shift in community logic, with greater attention paid to more commercially oriented international community involvements, such as with international industry associations or global standard-setting bodies. In order to understand family firm internationalization, we need explicit study of the multiple and overlapping shifts in family firm logics and routines that come from these imperatives to build positions in foreign markets.

Conclusion

This research contributes to our scholarly understanding of family firms in two important ways. First, this paper opens the door to new types of research questions by distancing the discussion of family firm internationalization from the current literature and offering a new theoretical lens that highlights different, although complementary, avenues for future research. I have outlined how each of the impacts of destabilization listed in Table 2 suggest new research questions that can enhance our understanding of important issues associated with the disruptions that family firms face when participating through trade in an increasingly global world and how they are adjusting to these disruptions. In doing so, I de-center decision making as a research focus and identify scholarly opportunities that arise from viewing internationalization as inherently destabilizing to family firms. I also incorporate diverse threads of the international business literature, countering the criticism that research on the internationalization of family firms is insufficiently grounded in this literature. It should be noted that in claiming the value of this theoretical perspective, I am claiming that it is relevant to the internationalization of family firms, but I am not claiming that it is relevant to the internationalization of *just* family firms. Internationalization is likely to involve the destabilization and restablization of logics and routines in other kinds of firms.

Given that restabilization processes can reframe the meaning of what it means to be internationalized and can realign family firm logics and routines with new international activities, internationalization at one time is expected to impact subsequent internationalization decisions. It is important for scholars designing an assemblage-based research project to understand that such temporal relationships are likely to be subject to two types of dynamics. The first of these is adjustment time. Hutzschenreuter, Voll, and Verbeke (2011) show that having to adjust to greater cultural differences in an international expansion results in slower subsequent international expansion. This finding is consistent with assemblage theory because the need for adjustment stems from the destabilization of logics and routines, and greater destabilization is likely to require greater restabilization. Indeed, it is expected that international activities involving greater geographic difference and greater unfamiliarity as a market actor are also followed by a longer adjustment period. Thus, the processes underlying a foreign market entry are likely to be influenced by previous foreign market entries (see also Bingham, 2009), suggesting that family firm researchers should study multiple foreign entries of a firm over time.

Path dependencies are the other type of dynamic expected to impact subsequent internationalization decisions. Early and frequent experience with an organizational change increases its reoccurrence (Amburgey, Kelly, & Barnett, 1993). In addition, experience with internationalization reduces frictions due to surprises and the costs of ignorance, and increases open-mindedness in sensemaking and a search of local knowledge (Orr & Scott, 2008). Interpreting these path dependencies through an assemblage-theoretic lens suggests that routines associated with change per se may become stabilized in the family firm assemblage over time. Thus, the destabilization associated with internationalization is likely to be more profound when internationalization occurs rarely and later in a family firm's life. This suggests that family business researchers may gain different insights when studying firms that internationalize later in life compared with those that internationalize early.

A second, more general, way that this research contributes to the family business literature is by diversifying its theoretical repertoire though the introduction of assemblage theory (DeLanda, 2006a, 2006b; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Although this is a new theoretical perspective in this research domain, it is one that has much potential for two important reasons. The first reason is that is well suited to the multiplicity of agents inherent paradox (Sharma et al., 2012), and hybridity (Jaskiewicz et al., 2016) embedded in family businesses, because it is based on contradictions, tensions, and conflicts within a whole that is made up of independent and interacting parts. The second reason is that it provides a theoretical lens that is inherently processual. Although process-based research on family businesses is only infrequently published, attention to "how and why things emerge, develop, grow or terminate over time" (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Van, 2013, p. 1) is valuable when the focal construct—the family firm—is inherently dynamic. Indeed, even though family firms are heterogeneous, it may be that examining "how" things are done can reveal more profound differences between family firms and nonfamily firms than focusing on what decisions are made. Therefore, while assemblage theory is not intended to substitute for other theories relevant to family firms, it does provide a complementary theoretical basis for opening up new avenues of inquiry that explicitly takes into account the distinctive qualities of family businesses.

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