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**From cultural differences to cultural globalization: towards
a new research agenda in cross-cultural management
studies**

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From cultural differences to cultural globalization: towards a new research agenda in cross-cultural management studies

Abstract

Purpose – This paper responds to calls for a new *raison d'être* in the field cross-cultural management (CCM) and studies of culture in international business (IB) more broadly. It argues that one way of addressing the crisis of confidence in the field is to develop a line of inquiry focused on corporate-driven cultural globalization. The paper also proposes a theoretical approach informed by IPE and postcolonial theory to avoid producing an ahistorical and Eurocentric form of analysis and outlines a research agenda for future work on cultural globalization.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper draws on relevant research in the wider social sciences to insert cultural globalization into the CCM/IB field's intellectual project. It then situates cultural globalization in the wider international political economy, including the context of (neo)colonialism, to help in developing an approach to the phenomenon that is historically grounded and wary of Eurocentrism.

Research implications – The paper suggests possibilities for renewal by redirecting CCM/IB towards the study of cultural globalization and by encouraging the field to develop a postcolonial sensibility in future research on the phenomenon. The paper also presents a research agenda, calling for studies on the role of four related actors in its development: (1) *MNEs*, (2) *global professional service firms*, (3) *business schools*, and (4) *CCM/IB researchers* themselves.

Practical implications – CCM/IB scholars may be able to reorient themselves towards the phenomenon of cultural globalization and, in so doing, also seize an opportunity to contribute to important debates about it in the wider social sciences.

Keywords: Cross-cultural management, Globalization, Imperialism, Postcolonialism, Multinationals

Introduction

The field of cross-cultural management (CCM) – and the wider discipline of international business (IB) of which it is part – has produced a vast and ever-growing body of studies examining the ways in which “cultural differences” matter in corporate globalization. Concomitantly, there has been a proliferation of literature challenging the field's assumptions and methods (e.g. McSweeney, 2002; Shenkar, 2001) and critiquing its essentialism (Ailon-Souday and Kunda, 2003; Vaara, Tienari and Santti, 2003) and orientalism (e.g. Ailon, 2008; Jack and Westwood,

2009). Unsurprisingly, several scholars have suggested the field has run out of steam and is now “at a crisis point” (Brannen, 2015, p. xxxv) and thus in need of a new research agenda, if not an entirely new *raison d’être*. As Holden, Michailova and Tietze (2015, p. xlv) put it, “[o]ur discipline seems to be at crossroads, possibly implying that cross-cultural management scholars need to rethink and reposition the entire subject area” (see also Söderberg and Holden, 2002). Similar concerns have been raised in the wider field of IB where it is increasingly recognized that the study of culture has become “stuck in a theoretical-methodological rut and more radical thinking is necessary [...] to advance beyond ‘more of the same’ science that simply reiterates repeatedly that culture matters” (Devinney and Hohberger, 2017). In short, the field finds itself in an intellectual cul-de-sac.

In this paper, I argue that a potentially fruitful way forward is to develop a line of inquiry focused on the study of *cultural globalization*. By cultural globalization, I am here referring to collective efforts by multinational enterprises (MNEs) and related actors to create and diffuse norms, practices, identities on a transnational scale in accordance with the imperatives of corporate globalization (Boussebaa, 2020a; Boussebaa and Faulconbridge, 2019). The field of CCM/IB has given limited attention to this issue, which is surprising given the long-standing tradition of international management research tracing the development of MNEs and highlighting their sustained efforts to transcend national-cultural divides through cultural-normative means (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989; Nohria and Ghoshal, 1997). It is also surprising considering the extensive debates in the wider social sciences about the cultural dimension of globalization and the role of international organizations, including MNEs, in producing transnational norms, practices and identities (see e.g. Drori, Meyer and Hwang, 2006; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2012). The problem may be in part due to CCM/IB being locked into an epistemic straitjacket that was originally tied to corporate imperatives and which in many ways continues to frame cross-cultural studies. Regardless, cultural globalization matters – it is integral to corporate globalization – and redirecting CCM/IB towards it would give the field a new lease of life and, importantly, help it contribute to wider debates in the social sciences.

In refocusing on cultural globalization, however, I argue it is important CCM/IB develops an approach to the phenomenon that is informed by IPE¹ and postcolonial theory to avoid producing an ahistorical, decontextualized and Eurocentric mode of analysis. Corporate globalization is rooted in the history of Western imperialism and colonialism and the process has, in the postcolonial era, continued to be mostly driven by dominant (principally Northern/Western) political economies, often to the detriment of societies in the Global South (Banerjee, 2008;

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¹ International Political Economy

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3 Soederberg, 2003; Suwandi, 2019; Wade, 2007). This is, of course, not to ignore processes of
4 resistance and appropriation and the ability of (some) countries in the Global South to challenge
5 the status quo, as illustrated for instance in the case of China (Bickers, 2017). Understanding the
6 cultural dimension of corporate globalization thus requires attention to historical and geopolitical
7 factors. Moving CCM/IB in this direction would help to break the corporate grip on the field and
8 re-focus attention on pressing questions about corporate-driven cultural globalization and the
9 specific role of business-related actors – not least MNEs – in this process.

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17 The paper proceeds as follows. First, I elaborate on my critique of the dominant approach to
18 cross-cultural analysis in CCM/IB. I then draw on relevant research in the wider social sciences
19 to insert cultural globalization into the field's intellectual project. Next, I situate cultural
20 globalization in the wider international political economy, including the context of
21 (neo)colonialism, to help in developing an approach to the phenomenon that is context-sensitive,
22 historically grounded and wary of Eurocentrism. Finally, I outline a research agenda on corporate-
23 driven cultural globalization, calling for studies examining the role of four related actors in this
24 process: (1) *MNEs*, (2) *global professional service firms*, (3) *business schools*, and (4) *CCM/IB*
25 *researchers* themselves. Ultimately, the paper suggests possibilities for renewal by reorienting
26 CCM/IB towards the study of cultural globalization and by encouraging the field to develop a
27 postcolonial sensibility in future research on the phenomenon.

37 **Cross-cultural analysis: an outline and critique**

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39 As noted above, the dominant mode of cross-cultural analysis in CCM/IB is no longer tenable.
40 Here, my concern is not to add to the long and growing list of onto-epistemological, conceptual
41 and methodological critiques and potential solutions (for recent IB-led discussions, see Caprar,
42 Devinney, Kirkman and Caligiuri, 2015; Tung and Stahl, 2018). Rather, my interest lies in
43 pointing to a problem rarely considered in the field: namely, that CCM/IB scholars have
44 consistently approached the relationship between culture and corporate globalization in terms of the
45 former having an impact on the latter, and not vice versa. From its inception, the field has been
46 characterised by research focused on studying “cultural differences” and how they matter. This
47 can be seen in one of the earliest definitions of the field:
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55 “Cross-cultural management is the study of the behaviour of people in organizations
56 located in cultures and nations around the world. It focuses on the description of
57 organizational behavior within countries and cultures, on the comparison of organizational
58 behavior across countries and cultures, and, perhaps most importantly, on the interaction
59 of peoples from different countries working within the same organization or within the
60 same work environment.” (Adler, 1983, p. 226)

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4 Also promoted by Geert Hofstede's landmark *Culture's Consequences*, this approach has given
5 rise to a large body of comparative research on the impact of national cultures on organizations
6 and on various aspects of corporate globalization such as expatriate management, knowledge
7 transfer and global teamwork (see, e.g., contributions in Holden et al., 2015; Szkudlarek,
8 Romani, Caprar, and Osland, 2020). Such work has also inspired a significant and growing
9 stream of IB-related studies of culture. Here, scholars have adopted the notion of "cultural
10 distance" as "the metaphor of choice for cultural differences" (Shenkar, Luo, and Yeheskel,
11 2008, p. 907) in analyzing corporate globalization. Studies have examined the impact of cultural
12 distance on foreign direct investment, modes of foreign entry, subsidiary performance, and
13 international management, among other areas (see e.g. Beugelsdijk, Kostova, van Essen, Kunst
14 and Spadafora, 2018; Shenkar, 2001).

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25 Thus, the study of culture in CCM/IB has been approached in a way that foregrounds
26 "differences" between nations and that then directs attention to analysing the impact of such
27 differences on various aspects of corporate globalization. Allied with this approach is the
28 frequently questioned assumption that cultures equate with countries or nation-states
29 (Baskerville, 2003; McSweeney, 2002; Shenkar, 2001; Tayeb, 1994). Each country is seen to
30 contain a relatively homogenous, largely unchanging culture transmitted across generations via
31 socialization. This is what Hofstede (1980) called the "collective programming of the mind",
32 with national culture in effect operating as a "software" (containing a cognitively constraining
33 cultural system) that is inputted into individuals during their childhood and education. Members
34 of a given country thus come to share the same culture and this is then reproduced at the level of
35 the organization. As companies internationalise, so the argument goes, they inevitably become
36 confronted with the problem of cultural "difference" or "distance" and, in turn, the question of
37 how such problem might be managed or mitigated. The *raison d'être* of CCM and related IB
38 studies has (so far) been, in effect, to shed light on this problem and, in some cases, prescribe
39 solutions to it.

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53 This approach to the study of culture has been useful in challenging the assumption in the pre-
54 CCM era that management (as a set of practices and theories) was "universal". It has (arguably)
55 facilitated the study of varieties of "national" cultures and demonstrated the culturally
56 contingent nature of corporate globalization. Implicitly, it has in effect also highlighted the role
57 of nation-states in shaping the process, thereby usefully helping to debunk the post-national
58 globalization rhetoric of the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. Ohmae, 1990). However, the recognition of
59 the importance of cultural differences has also, unwittingly, led to the fetishizing of one level of
60 analysis – the "national" – at the expense of other levels that are arguably just as important. One

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3 such level is the sub-national one, i.e. the existence of intra-country cultural variation (Au,
4 1999). Here, several scholars argue that the presence of such variation significantly undermines
5 the credibility of cross-cultural studies (e.g., Beugelsdijk et al., 2014; Tung and Verbeke, 2010;
6 see also Hutzschenreuter et al., 2020). Another neglected level of analysis – and my concern in
7 this paper – is the “transnational” one arising from corporate globalization. As noted earlier, this
8 level of analysis has received surprisingly little attention in CCM/IB studies.
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15 In fairness, CCM/IB researchers have become increasingly cognizant of the need to consider the
16 cultural impact of globalization. For instance, Sørderberg and Holden (2002, p. 1008) argue that
17 the CCM approach “does not seem to resonate with firms’ and managers’ experiences of cultural
18 complexity in the business environment that is becoming increasingly globalized” (see also
19 contributions in Holden et al., 2015). Likewise, from a more IB perspective, Birkinshaw,
20 Brannen and Tung (2011, p. 574) argue for “new conceptualizations and interpretations of
21 culture that will enable us to make sense of increasingly complex cultural phenomena. These
22 include such current topics as biculturalism, multicultural work teams and the role of cultural
23 hybrids that are emerging rapidly in light of new workforce demographics”. However, rarely
24 are these efforts taken beyond merely stating that the world is increasingly globalized and that
25 CCM/IB scholars must, therefore, reformulate the field to account for that reality. The question
26 of cultural globalization is typically only mentioned in passing, relegated to “future research”
27 or, at best, simply approached descriptively.
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39 Some studies take the problem more seriously but often do so in narrow reference to consumer
40 “tastes and preferences”, arguing that corporate globalization is giving rise to a global consumer
41 culture (e.g., Cleveland et al., 2016) – in a way reminiscent of Levitt’s (1983) popular
42 “globalization of markets” thesis almost forty years ago. Over the years, several researchers
43 have also stressed the need to examine cultural “similarities” (in a broader sense), not just
44 “differences”, although as Ofori-Dankwaa and Ricks (2000, p. 173) found in their literature
45 review “few researchers seem to have done so. In fact, most authors look for and find
46 differences” (see also Kirkman et al., 2017). A few studies seek to advance the field through the
47 notion of “bi-culturalism” (e.g., Brannen and Thomas, 2010; Caprar, 2011) but largely continue
48 to work from the perspective of “cultural differences”, with bi-culturalists in effect being presented
49 as departures from the norm and useful mediators between different national cultures. Some
50 studies also usefully begin to point in the direction of cultural “hybridization” (e.g. Chanlat,
51 Davel and Dupuis, 2013; Shimoni and Bergmann, 2006), a point to which I shall return below.
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In truth, the field remains suffused with what in the social sciences is referred to as
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“methodological nationalism” (Wimmer and Schiller, 2002), and its analytical procedures

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3 remain almost exclusively geared towards the study of cultural differences, often from a
4 managerial, prescriptive perspective. The growing body of studies on “global leadership”
5 usefully point to the realities of corporate globalization and the resulting transnationalisation of
6 managers’ and leaders’ roles, responsibilities and activities (see e.g. Bird and Mendenhall,
7 2016). However, this work has not fundamentally altered the *raison d’être* of cross-cultural
8 analysis in CCM/IB in that its focus has been on “unearthing and understanding competencies,
9 traits, attributes, and skills associated with effective global leadership” (Bird and Mendenhall,
10 2016). In other words, the gist of “cultural differences” is preserved and attention is then directed
11 at identifying – and indeed often prescribing – characteristics deemed appropriate in
12 managing/leading across cultures. The focus of research remains firmly on the corporate-centric
13 problem of cross-cultural management.
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23 Sociologically oriented, interpretive studies of work inside MNEs provide an important
24 alternative by approaching national cultures as social constructs (Ailon-Souday and Kunda
25 2003; Byun and Ybema 2005; Koveshnikov, Vaara and Ehrnrooth, 2016; Vaara, Tienari, and
26 Sääntti, 2003; Vaara, Tienari, Piekkari and Sääntti, 2005). These studies are highly critical of the
27 CCM/IB’s approach to culture, pointing to its essentialism and its downplaying of politics and
28 human agency. Instead, they encourage us to view cultural differences as stereotypes and/or
29 resources that are produced or drawn upon to create “us” and “them” distinctions,
30 include/exclude others and produce nation-based superior/inferior hierarchies within MNEs.
31 However, such studies in effect also continue to approach the culture-globalization relationship
32 through the “cultural difference” lens, although by adopting a more fluid conception of culture
33 and refocusing on the question of “how individuals deploy cultural difference (or similarity)
34 strategically to achieve their aims” (Ybema and Nyiri, 2015, p. 41).
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46 In sum, the study of culture in CCM/IB remains largely focused on the question of how cultural
47 difference/distance impact on or mediate processes of corporate globalization (see also Levy et
48 al., 2018, for an alternative – Bourdieusian – approach to culture in MNEs). It is unsurprising,
49 then, that the field finds itself stuck in theoretical-methodological rut. In what follows, I argue
50 one way of out of this rut is to redirect the field towards the problem of corporate-driven cultural
51 globalization. That is, what requires scholarly investigation is not so much the various impacts
52 of cultural difference on corporate globalization but rather the project of corporate globalization
53 itself – and its cultural arm. I explore how this might be achieved next.
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Inserting cultural globalization into cross-cultural analysis

There is now a substantial body of literature on cultural globalization in the social sciences.

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3 Here, unlike in CCM/IB research, it is now well established that national borders are porous, that
4 cultural materials transform as they move between countries, and that cultural identities can be
5 as much transnational as they are national or indeed regional or local. Accordingly, when
6 reflecting on culture in a global context, scholars focus attention not on “differences” but rather
7 on transnational spaces, flows and connections and related processes of cultural
8 homogenization, appropriation, deterritorialization, and hybridization (e.g., Appadurai, 1996;
9 Hannerz, 1996; Kraidy, 2005; Nederveen Pieterse, 2004; Ritzer, 1993; Tomlinson, 1999).
10 Cultural differences continue to matter but the point is that the core problem requiring attention
11 is *globalization’s cultural consequences*, not the *impact of cultural differences* as such. CCM/IB
12 has contributed little to this important intellectual project and, perhaps as a result, also largely
13 failed to keep up with its conceptual advances.
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23 Especially relevant here is the institutionalist theory of globalization, also known as the World
24 Society perspective (e.g., Drori et al., 2006). This shows how globalization is not just about
25 global forces being affected or shaped by national cultures, as generally understood in CCM/IB;
26 it is also about culture making at the world level. The core message of the theory is as follows:
27 “Worldwide models define and legitimate agendas for local action, shaping the structures and
28 policies of nation-states and other national and local actors in virtually all of the domains of
29 rationalized social life—business, politics, education, medicine, science, even the family and
30 religion” (Meyer et al., 1997, p. 143). In other words, the “global” does not just adapt to the
31 local/national; it reconfigures it. Cultural causality is thus found outside the nation-state in an
32 emergent world society, with the effect that local/national actors do not merely reproduce
33 national cultures in the face of globalization; they also come to internalise global or transnational
34 norms, practices and identities.
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46 This process of transnational cultural isomorphism is produced by the activities of various state
47 and non-state actors, including intergovernmental organizations (e.g. IMF, World Bank, UN)
48 and, importantly, MNEs, “the private sector’s engine of globalization” (Antonio and Bonnano,
49 2000, p. 56). Reflecting on MNEs, Morgan (2001) usefully argues they may be viewed as
50 “transnational social spaces” that “cannot be reduced to the interplay of pre-existing national
51 groups” (Morgan, 2001, p. 115) and within which “transnational communities” may be
52 emerging. That is, MNEs enable structured cross-national interactions that “lead in the direction
53 of ‘shared understandings’ and ‘shared meanings’” (ibid, p. 118) at the transnational level. The
54 process is both bottom-up (arising from everyday interaction inside the firm) and top-down
55 (firm-driven). Institutional research on the organization of MNEs and related IHRM studies
56 provide useful initial insights into these dynamics, including the ways in which firm-driven
57 cultural standardisation efforts are mediated by national institutional contexts and intra-MNE
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3 micropolitics (see e.g., Geppert and Dörrenbächer, 2014; Boussebaa and Morgan, 2008;
4 Morgan et al., 2003). Moore's (2005) more fine-grained, anthropological study of work in an
5 MNE provides further insights into transnational-national cultural dynamics.
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10 The professions are also recognized to play a critical role in cultural globalization. As "the
11 preeminent institutional agents of our time" (Scott, 2008, p. 219), professionals such as
12 accountants, consultants, lawyers and wealth managers routinely create and diffuse shared
13 norms, practices and identities around the world (e.g., Harrington, 2015; Kipping and Wright,
14 2012; also contributions in Seabrooke and Henriksen, 2017). In particular, research into global
15 professional service firms (GPSFs) shows how these organizations and the various knowledge
16 and staff mobility systems they use facilitate extensive cross-national communication,
17 interactions and flows of people and knowledge across nations (Beaverstock, 2004;
18 Boussebaa, 2009; Boussebaa et al., 2014). The firms also invest heavily in the transnational
19 standardization of work practices, recruitment, training, socialization, and service delivery
20 (Barrett et al., 2005; Greenwood et al., 2010; Jones, 2005; Spence et al., 2015). Training and
21 socialisation are particularly important here, serving to produce transnational corporate-
22 professional identities through "the inculcation of appropriate behavioural norms, cultural
23 values, presentational styles and approaches to professional practice" (Faulconbridge and
24 Muzio, 2012, p. 144). And such work is also facilitated by, and indeed dependent upon, the use
25 of a common (English) language (Boussebaa, 2015a/b; Detzen and Loehlein, 2018).
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39 On the ground, professionals themselves further contribute to corporate-driven cultural
40 globalization by hybridising perceived cultural differences in the course of their everyday work.
41 For instance, the study of Smets, Morris and Greenwood (2012) highlights hybridisation as one
42 outcome of cross-national work inside global law firms. In particular, examining interactions
43 between English and German lawyers, the authors identify the emergence of a hybrid Anglo-
44 German business-professional culture. The authors point to how the two parties previously
45 followed different professional cultures or logics but "[m]ost of the English lawyers over the
46 years have become more German, and most of the German lawyers have become more English
47 in [for instance] the way of doing deals and of transacting" (Smets et al., 2012, p. 884). Thus,
48 intra MNE cross-border work leads practitioners to adjust, adapt, compromise and, ultimately,
49 create and institutionalise alternative – "hybrid" – ways of thinking, being and working (see also
50 Barrett et al., 2005).
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Clearly, it is important not to view such corporate-driven cultural globalization as completely
eroding national (or indeed intra-national) cultural differences. There is recognition in the
aforementioned studies that such differences remain important (see also Muzio and
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Faulconbridge, 2013) and recognition of such differences is indeed the main contribution of CCM and culturally sensitive IB studies. Moreover, it is recognized that the transnational diffusion of norms, practices and identities is often contested, thus requiring research to explore not only how local actors internalise global culture but also how they challenge it through various processes of resistance and adaptation. The key point, however, is that the globalization of culture is a fundamental part of corporate globalization – the two go hand in hand. The increasing adoption of English as a ‘global’ language in business – “corporate Englishization” (Boussebaa et al., 2014) – is perhaps the most obvious or tangible illustration of the phenomenon. It follows that cross-cultural analysis should, therefore, examine not only the impact of cultural difference or distance on various aspects of corporate globalization but also how the latter is constructing norms, practices, identities on a transnational scale (and by implication also supplanting nation-states as the primary source of cultural identity).

Contextualising cultural globalization

My argument so far is that cultural globalization is integral to corporate globalization and that the process should be at the core of CCM research and culturally sensitive IB studies. Redirecting the field towards cultural globalization, however, also requires situating the process in the wider international political economy and, in particular, “longstanding, macro-level processes of colonial and imperial domination” (Boussebaa et al., 2012, p. 470). This helps in appreciating how corporate globalization and its cultural arm are embedded in, and constitutive of, a wider process wherein dominant (mostly Northern/Western) political-economies have been engaged in: (1) capturing markets and exploiting resources worldwide and (2) reshaping the targeted countries to facilitate and support such activities (e.g., Arnold, 2005; Soederberg, 2003; Wade, 2007).

This process, of course, started centuries ago when emerging European colonial powers launched trading companies such as the infamous East India Company and its Dutch and French counterparts. These “predecessors of contemporary global companies” (Davoudi, McKenna and Olegario, 2018, p. 29) went on to dominate, exploit and reconfigure societies in various parts of the world. They were soon followed by professionals such as accountants and engineers to assist in building the cultural-institutional infrastructure necessary for the colonialization and management of the targeted societies (Annisette and Neu, 2004; Boussebaa and Morgan, 2014). This (European-imperial) phase of globalization was followed by another (American-led) wave following the Second World War. The USA emerged as the world’s foremost political economy and leading US firms evolved into “multinational corporations” or “global firms”, which were subsequently emulated by European companies. Initially focused mostly on investing in the

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3 West, managers soon turned attention to the Global South (Barnet and Müller, 1974) and, in the
4 case of GPSFs, to serve Western MNEs overseas (Boussebaa and Morgan, 2014). The process
5 has accelerated in the last few decades with the increasing relocation of certain activities to the
6 Global South, notably Asia, as a means of lowering labour costs at home (Smith, 2016; Suwandi,
7 2019). Initially limited to the manufacturing and retailing sectors, such offshore outsourcing is
8 now also common in the services industry, where “emerging markets have become one of the
9 primary preoccupations of the early twenty-first century” (Boussebaa and Faulconbridge, 2016,
10 p. 113).

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13 Thus, corporate globalization has, in effect, mostly been about Western companies expanding
14 into the world in search of new markets, natural resources, investment opportunities and low-cost
15 labour. This explains – in part at least – why most of the world’s largest MNEs have, until
16 recently, been headquartered in the USA and, to a lesser extent, former European colonial powers.
17 And the process has of course been facilitated by Western-dominated intergovernmental
18 organisations (e.g., IMF, WTO, World Bank) and the Western business professions through the
19 promotion of corporate globalization and the development and enforcing of transnational
20 regulatory regimes geared to opening world markets and maintaining “free trade” arrangements
21 (Arnold, 2005; Boussebaa and Faulconbridge, 2019). This is one reason why critics view
22 corporate globalization as little more than a new form or phase of imperialism, led by the United
23 States, with support from other “G7” partners and segments of local elites within the targeted
24 political economies (Antonio and Bonnano, 2000; Smith, 2016; Suwandi, 2019; Wade, 2007).

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27 Situated in this political-economic context, cultural globalization means more than just
28 convergence or isomorphism among previously distinct national cultures or, put differently, the
29 internalisation by local actors of neutral “transnational” norms, practices and identities. It also
30 signifies Westernisation, starting with the European conquest of America and associated
31 decimation and replacement of local cultures and languages (Todorov, 1982). Following the
32 Second World War, the European phase of Westernisation gave way to Americanization, first
33 in Europe and then further afield in the Global South (Antonio and Bonnano, 2000; Soederberg,
34 2003; Wade, 2007). This process of westernisation means that what is often described as
35 “world”, “global” or “transnational” culture or cultures today typically are largely “extensions
36 or transformations of the cultures of Western Europe and North America” (Hannerz, 1990, p.
37 244; Finnemore, 2006). Supporting and reinforcing westernisation are enduring cultural
38 representations that elevate Western culture(s) while characterising the rest of the world as
39 lacking or problematic and thus in need of reform and requiring Western intervention (Said,
40 1978). Scholars in the social sciences and humanities label these processes as “cultural
41 imperialism” (see e.g. Said, 1993; Tomlinson, 1991, 1997). In practice, processes of reverse
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3 cultural transfer and hybridization are also important, but the key point is that global culture has
4 “centres” and it is generally the case that the peripheries are reshaped so they are congruent with
5 Western (principally American) norms, practices and identities.
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10 Cultural globalization at the level of business – the focus of CCM and IB scholars – may be
11 viewed in the same way: firstly, as mostly a universalisation of Western culture(s) resulting from
12 efforts by Northern political economies to access and reconfigure world markets and resources to
13 suit their needs (cf. Boussebaa, 2020a; Boussebaa and Faulconbridge, 2019). As primary agents
14 of corporate globalization, Western MNEs have been key to this process. In the CCM/IB
15 literature, they are typically portrayed as “stateless”, “denationalised” or “deterritorialized”
16 entities internally integrated via “shared values” (e.g., Nohria and Ghoshal, 1997), thus implicitly
17 promoting a disembodied, neutral conception of cultural globalization (albeit one complicated by
18 “cultural differences”). Yet substantial evidence shows MNEs are not stateless (see e.g.,
19 Doremus, Keller, Pauly and Reich, 1999). As noted earlier, most of the largest have until recently
20 been headquartered in the Global North. Moreover, as comparative institutionalist scholars have
21 long shown, MNEs remain deeply embedded in their home-country socio-political and cultural
22 contexts and tend to universalise home-country practices as they grow around the world (Almond
23 and Ferner, 2006; Kristensen and Zeitlin, 2006). It follows that corporate-driven cultural
24 globalization, to a large extent, signifies Westernisation, particularly Americanization given the
25 historical influence of the USA on the business cultures of the Global North (and now Global
26 South too). As Chanlat et al. (2013) put it, “[w]e cannot deny the rise and influence of American-
27 style capitalistic business culture on a global scale”. Again, this is perhaps most clearly illustrated
28 in the normalisation of English as the language of corporate globalization (Boussebaa et al., 2014;
29 Vaara et al., 2005).
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46 In this context, corporate-driven cultural globalization in effect implies the making or re-making
47 of norms, practices and identities globally in the image and interest of Euro-American business.
48 Illustrating this (at the micro-level) is, for instance, the way Western MNEs work to develop
49 managers and leaders in “emerging markets” through training provided in the West (Dewhurst et al.,
50 2012). Gagnon and Collinson’s (2014) analysis of leadership development at two Western MNEs is
51 useful here. It reveals how, in addition to teaching leadership skills, the programmes prescribed
52 an “English-speaking and ‘western’” (p. 656) leader identity. Similar insights can be found in
53 studies of GPSFs where it is suggested that employees around the world are being moulded into
54 Western (Anglo-American) professionals (Boussebaa 2015b, 2017; Boussebaa and
55 Faulconbridge, 2019). Such efforts also extend to non-managerial/professional groups such as
56 employees within offshore outsourcing companies working for Western MNEs (Boussebaa et al.,
57 2014; Das and Dharwadkar, 2009; Ravishankar et al., 2013). The process is also often associated
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3 with colonial-style forms of stereotyping, i.e. representations of employees outside the West as
4 “inferior” and therefore in need of development and training along Western lines (see, e.g.,
5 Koppmann et al., 2016). Business schools – through the CCM/IB texts and analyses they produce
6 – further contribute to creating such a geopolitical hierarchy by producing cultural representations
7 that often overvalue the West and devalue the “Rest” (Ailon, 2008; Fougère and Moulettes, 2007;
8 Jack and Westwood, 2009; Westwood, 2006).

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15 Of course, this power-laden process of corporate-cultural globalization does not go unchallenged
16 and this is indeed reflected – at the macro-level – in the emergence of MNEs outside the West,
17 first in Japan in the 1980s-1990s and presently in rising powers such as China and India. How
18 such agency manifests itself at the more micro-level is, however, still unclear given the dearth of
19 research on the question, but a few insights can be gleaned from the studies mentioned above,
20 especially those informed by postcolonial theory (Boussebaa, 2015b, 2017; Boussebaa et al.,
21 2014; Das and Dharwadkar, 2009; Frenkel, 2008). One key insight is that Westernization
22 typically results in “hybridity” (Bhabha, 1994) rather than homogeneity, thereby undermining or
23 resisting efforts to make the “other” like “us”. Shimoni and Bergmann’s (2006) ethnographic
24 study of two Western MNEs operating in Israel, Mexico and Thailand provides useful empirical
25 insights into such a process, and we agree with Chanlat et al. (2013, p. 4) that hybridity may offer
26 “the most promising lens in the current global context”.

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37 This said, it is critical that the analysis of hybridity does not lead back to the neutral conception
38 of “hybridization” employed in CCM/IB studies: the latter denotes equality/symmetry, much like
39 the notion of cultural distance does (see Shenkar, 2001), with hybridization in effect being
40 understood as the neutral “blending” of cultures. This approach may be suitable in the study of
41 interactions between relatively equal parties but is difficult to apply to North-South relations
42 given these occur in an asymmetric (neo)colonial context. In this context, hybridity does not
43 merely result in harmonious “hybridization” (Shimoni and Bergmann, 2006) but rather “produces
44 ambivalence, is disordering, and offers spaces for the disruption of asymmetrical authority
45 relations” (Jack et al., 2011, p. 282). In other words, hybridity is enmeshed with power and thus
46 needs approaching as an expression of both “enforcement and resistance” (Frenkel, 2008, p. 933).

56 **Conclusion and agenda for future research**

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58 I have argued that CCM/IB can be enriched and renewed by redirecting the field toward the
59 problem of corporate-driven cultural globalization while also advancing a broadly postcolonial
60 approach to this phenomenon. In so doing, my goal is not to downplay the importance of nation-
states in shaping culture(s) and the impact of cultural differences on corporate globalization but

rather to direct attention to the power of MNEs – and the wider ecology of actors supporting corporate globalization – to construct a world beyond nations. Critical to this endeavour, I have argued, is also the task of historicising and contextualizing corporate globalization to avoid contributing to a disembodied and geopolitically uprooted conception of it. The task, then, is to examine collective efforts by various business-related actors from dominant states to universalise Western/Northern culture(s) while also paying close attention to the ways in which such efforts are interpreted, adapted, appropriated and resisted in various parts of the world. Below, I propose four research avenues or sites for future research on this topic.

1. Multinational enterprises

One obvious area to examine is Western MNEs' role as agents of cultural globalization. As previously mentioned, these organizations are actively involved in the creation and diffusion of norms, practices and identities at the transnational scale. Relevant CCM/IB questions should, therefore, concern not so much how cultural differences affect MNE operations but rather how these organizations contribute to the production of transnational ways of being and doing, and how the process is entwined with (neo)colonial power relations. Studies are required that focus on top-down (firm-driven) cultural management efforts and/or more bottom-up processes.

As part of this, future research might, for instance, examine how and to what extent transnational managerial communities are emerging in MNEs (cf. Morgan, 2001). What forms of practices and identities are associated with such communities? Are they genuinely "global" (i.e. denationalised), or do they simply represent extensions of the cultures of Euro-America? And what forms of resistance, appropriation and hybridity might be involved in their construction? Future research is also needed on efforts to produce "global leaders" or "global managers" via training programmes and other means. In pursuing these avenues, studies might also take a comparative (country or industry) angle to explore various potential contextual influences on cultural globalization inside MNEs.

2. Global professional service firms

Another important set of actors to examine is GPSFs. These initially emerged to serve internationalizing Western companies around the world and now play an important role in cultural globalization through the cross-border coordinating and standardizing work they perform on behalf of their clients (e.g., Barrett et al., 2005). In-depth studies of such work would be very useful. GSPEs also contribute to cultural globalization within their

own organizational boundaries by developing “global” (Western) models of professional practice through various training and socialization practices. How exactly is this achieved and to what effects?

Relatedly, scholars might examine how GPSFs seek to develop “global, cosmopolitan professionals who are detached from national professional regimes” (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2012, p. 143) and what this means in actual practice. GPSFs’ cultural globalizing work also extends beyond themselves and their MNE clients into the world of intergovernmental organizations and transnational professional associations (Suddaby, Cooper and Greenwood, 2007), and this also requires examining. In short, CCM/IB studies are needed on the (cultural) globalizing efforts and effects of GPSFs, an increasingly important subset of MNEs and a major agent of corporate globalization (Boussebaa and Faulconbridge, 2019).

3. *Business schools*

The role of business schools in cultural globalization also requires attention from CCM/IB scholars. Collectively, these organizations have become a global phenomenon and, as part of this, are institutionalising globally shared programmes of study, with the MBA degree being the most prominent example (Moon and Wotipka, 2006). In so doing, business schools contribute to corporate-driven cultural globalization by diffusing “universal” (Euro-American) forms of management knowledge and ways of being a business (wo)man (Alcadipani and Caldas, 2012). CCM/IB scholars would do well to turn attention to how such diffusion occurs in various national contexts while also examining how the process might be contested and subverted at the local level (Cooke and Alcadipani, 2015).

Especially needed are studies exploring increasing efforts by MNEs and accreditation agencies to reposition business schools as active agents of globalization. As the AACSB puts it, “[b]usiness schools are part of a larger system and have a responsibility to take a leadership role in the globalization of business and society—to move from change taker to change maker” (p. 216). To this end, the schools are required not only to forge international partnerships but also to globalize the curriculum, with the AACSB urging “all management educators [...] to lead within their institutions to instill in future managers a global mindset” (AACSB, 2011: xii; see also Ghemawat, 2008). CCM/IB research is required on these demands and their cultural-political consequences, both in the West and in rising powers such as China and India (cf. Boussebaa, 2020b).

4. CCM/IB researchers

Finally, the CCM/IB community would do well to turn attention to its own role in cultural globalization. CCM/IB is now fast becoming a global field, with its researchers not only communicating, working and collaborating across nations but also diffusing globally the very discourse of “cross-cultural management” and, in particular, the “Hofstede doctrine” (Minkov and Hofstede, 2011). Professional associations such as the Academy of International Business and the various conferences they organize around the world facilitate the process. An important question for CCM/IB scholars, therefore, is how this transnational community is being produced, and to what effects. What kinds of norms, practices and identities are being institutionalised at the transnational scale as the field continues to expand globally?

One concern shared across the field of management is its convergence onto “the North American research paradigm” (Tsui, 2007, p. 1353) and associated Englishization (Boussebaa and Tienari, 2020). Referring to CCM specifically, Jackson and Primecz (2019) note the paradox of a community researching and (arguably) defending “cultural differences” and yet also fundamentally monocultural in its scholarly practice and language (also Michailova, 2011). Even more troubling is the continuing use and diffusion of sanitised CCM models that purge racism and inequality from cross-cultural analysis while also subtly (re)producing (neo)colonial stereotypes and reinforcing Western hegemony (Ailon, 2008; Fougère and Moulettes, 2007; Jack and Westwood, 2009; Westwood, 2006). CCM/IB scholars would do well to research such issues and reflect on their role as agents of cultural globalization. Could it be that the CCM/IB community is not only locked into the “cultural differences” straitjacket but also contributing to cultural globalization in ways that (re)produce historical patterns of imperialism and associated global inequalities?

In pursuing these research avenues, it is also important to be mindful of the fact that, as Dicken (2011, p. 14) puts it, “[t]he global economic map is always in a state of ‘becoming’” while also recognising “[t]he new does not totally obliterate the old” (ibid). The last few decades have seen a more polycentric world come into being, with major MNEs from the Global South gradually emerging to compete with Western ones – note for instance that the *Fortune* Global 500 list now includes in excess of 100 MNEs headquartered in China (Fortune, 2019). In some sectors such as the professional services sector, change toward a post-Western world economy has been much slower, with most of the largest GPSEs still originating in the USA or, to a lesser degree, Western

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3 Europe (Boussebaa and Faulconbridge, 2016, 2019) but, still, corporate globalization is
4 increasingly shaped by political economies outside the West. There is a pressing need for
5 research on this development and its implications for the dynamics of cultural globalization
6 discussed in this paper. In the meantime, I hope my analysis can encourage CCM/IB scholars to
7 turn attention to cultural globalization and, in so doing, contribute to renewing the field of cross-
8 cultural management studies.
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