

## Call for Papers for a Special Issue of *Business History*

### **“International Business, Multi-Nationals, and the Nationality of the Company”**

(latest submission by 15 January 2019, early submissions appreciated)

Business historians have stressed the international dimensions of business for a long time. Research on multinational enterprises (MNE) including the Free-Standing Company (FSC) belongs to the important contributions of Business History to the fields of international business, strategy, and management. The very question of “nationality” and which “nationality”, always present in the background, is rarely directly addressed even though national dimensions including politics evidently pervade international business activities. Corporate structure, corporate governance, and international branding are the most obvious but not the only fields in which “nationality” matters in international business. With Brexit, Trumpism and the re-nationalization of the political discourse within larger parts of Europe “nationality” that once was supposed to have lost its relevance in the global economy returns back to the agenda of international business in terms of political risk.

Most relevant is the issue of “nationality” for the MNE, of course. And the internationalization literature from Perlmutter, Dunning, and Johanson and Vahlne to Matthews thematises the issue of the “nationality” of the home country and the host country in different ways. Recent work deals more fundamentally with the relations between the nation-state and the MNE. Most researchers follow, however, a seemingly ‘unproblematic’ legal construction of “nationality” in terms of the seat of the headquarters that is usually assumed to be the centre of ownership and control. An exception to this is research on the FSC with capital and headquarters in a home country and business activities only in distant locations, most often overseas colonies. Here, and also for business groups, corporate “nationality” is particularly difficult to determine since basic firm functions such as corporate finance and managerial control are dependent on the place of legal jurisdiction, formal headquarters, and firm registration. However, more detailed analysis shows that in very many cases the place of registration, the residence of shareholders, and the “nationality” of management are separate issues. Today, increasingly nationalist politics makes this visible.

Historical approaches allow studying corporate “nationality” in an internationally comparative perspective and over time. By tracing firm behaviour in different political environments, both geographically and in terms of time, historical research can unpack the mechanisms through which “nationality” works and can be used. The company’s national identity, always a construct and like the broader concept of corporate identity a matter of communication

and perception, is influenced by its legal nationality, the location of its headquarters, the nationality of its shareholders and directors, the places of production, and attributions of nationality for example to its products. Historical research on the firm's evaluation of the costs and benefits of "nationality" and on actors' rationale for choosing, constructing, and designing "nationality" for commercial and strategic purposes helps explicate the evolutionary process in which companies address issues of politics, risk, and legitimacy.

With the Special Issue we want to connect to the international business and strategy literature that indeed identifies different patterns of internationalisation over time but most often does not consider historical change of the political-economic environment (and of the company) as a particular object of analysis, whereas historians might be more strongly interested in how entrepreneurial activity was carried on, the circumstances under which it was constructed, how it developed and how practices, strategies and narratives changed over time. Also the question of how a firm's nationality is perceived and represented in the host country or at its place of origin is relevant in many ways, for instance for political decision makers and for consumers.

**In order to develop these ideas, contributions to the Special Issue should engage with the following broad topics:**

- What explains the location of MNEs, FSCs, and business groups, the location of their activities in other countries and their choice of "nationality"? What is the impact of financial and fiscal aspects, what is the impact of political and other factors?
- Decisions of whether to use branches, to set up subsidiaries, or to use independent companies in order to operate within a "host" country are often explained with favourable or unfavourable institutional arrangements. Do the "nationality" of the company going abroad and the respective host country (or countries) – the image and reputation of the firms' countries – as well as particular historical conditions, matter for internationalisation strategies?
- Companies interested in doing business abroad need to negotiate for example with governments and bureaucracies. How does the "nationality" of the firms in question affect these relationships? And how did these relationships change, for instance, in the era of decolonization when many Western companies regarded newly independent nations not only as a source for raw materials but also as promising markets?
- In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, new emerging market multinationals are going global. Do they take new approaches and in how far are their internationalisation strategies particular?
- "Nationality" also serves as managerial device creating competition between international branches of a MNE, for example in terms of productivity or labour costs. There-

fore, in case of take-overs but also in case of relocation of corporate activities, employees and their trade unions often contribute to constructing “nationality”. How do they shape, how do they conceive of “nationality” of the firm and of investors?

#### Submission instructions

This special issue welcomes contributions to the theme **International Business, Multi-Nationals, and the Nationality of the Company that** cover crucial aspects of the outlined research agenda and should be based on original research and innovative analysis.

The maximum length of the paper should be 9,000 words (including graphs and tables). The papers should not be under consideration by another journal. All proposals should be submitted by **15 January 2019** via [ScholarOne](#), using the drop down menu to indicate that they are submissions to the Special Issue on **International Business, Multi-Nationals, and the Nationality of the Company**. All the articles will be peer reviewed and, therefore, some may be rejected. Authors should ensure that their manuscripts fully comply with the publishing style of formatting regulation of *Business History* ([Instructions for authors](#)). Authors may be asked to use an English language copyeditor before final acceptance.

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