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Introduction: the political economy of managerialism

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ABSTRACT

As a set of ideas and practices, managerialism has arguably become a powerful behavioural logic shaping a range of processes and outcomes of governance in the world economy. Yet IPE has yet to directly interrogate managerialism as a distinct object of analysis. In this special issue, we bring together a range of authors to explore how managerialism reveals a set of complex histories, agents, and implications that are not self-evident and carry direct relevance for how we understand the global economy. Our main contention is that managerialism is not simply a technical means for the pursuit of policies, but has come to shape the very ways in which policy, and governance more generally, are conceived and conducted. Across a range of cases and fields, we dissect the emergence of the managerial logic, along with how it produces uneven mutations, ruptures, and forms of resistance. In doing so, we reflect upon the requirements for developing a political economy of managerialism.

KEYWORDS

Managerialism; governance; history of ideas; power; ideology

1. Introduction

Strategic Planning. Results-Based Frameworks. Key Performance Indicators. Reputational Risk. Public-Private Partnerships. The vocabulary of management speak has become familiar to many of us over recent decades. Twenty years ago, the OECD argued that ‘a major cultural shift’ was underway, defined by ‘a new paradigm which attempts to combine modern management practices with the logic of economics, while still retaining the core public service values’ (OECD, 1998, p. 5). Normalised in certain areas, strongly contested in others, managerialism has become increasingly common within the organisation of global governance. A cluster of expressions, some popular, others more academic, have tried to encapsulate this transformation, such as ‘administrative reform’ (Aucoin, 1990), ‘national competitiveness’ (Porter, 1990), ‘new public management’ (Hood, 1991, 2007; Lynn, 2006), and ‘entrepreneurial government’ (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Mazzucato, 2013). They reflect the ways in which the rise of ‘public management’ has challenged the traditional separation established between private and public

governance. Among common justifications, the managerial vision is claimed to enhance efficiency, expand markets, and provide employment opportunities. Today, one can observe how managerialism continues to transform entities that have a stake in the world economy, including states, firms, international institutions, and non-governmental bodies (Locke & Spencer, 2012; Dardot & Laval, 2014; Davies, 2014; Hanlon, 2016). In other words, managerialism has arguably become a powerful behavioural logic shaping a range of processes and outcomes of governance.

If such debates are visible within a variety of issue areas and complexes, it remains surprising that International Political Economy (IPE) has not directly interrogated managerialism as a distinct object of analysis. Where IPE authors have discussed themes associated with the political economy of managerialism, such engagements have tended to be limited or oblique, without any major theoretical or empirical investigation. Three reasons could be offered for this distancing or neglect. First, the study of management theory and practice has historically been housed within other disciplinary fields, notably management studies, public administration, and organisation studies.¹ Within this scholarly division of labour, IPE has been seemingly content, consciously or otherwise, to cede academic territory to these adjacent areas. Second, one could suggest that some IPE researchers read management as something largely preoccupied with the 'internal' and 'mechanical' features of organisations, particularly corporate enterprises. It has not helped that management is criticised at times as a 'lightweight' intellectual endeavour. Management studies, and the popular business management literature in particular, have often been dismissed for reproducing an uncritical discourse on capitalism which, in turn, has arguably suppressed levels of IPE interest. Third, even where managerialism has been noted in IPE literatures, the subject has often been subsumed under what is seen as broader concerns with neoliberalism, neoclassical economics or, more abstractly, as an expression of contemporary bureaucratisation (Graeber, 2015). Managerialism can thus appear as a subordinate theme concerned with the narrower question of how specific agendas are implemented or put into practice. In all these ways, therefore, the topic has rarely been tackled head on in IPE and tends to pass underexamined.

We argue here, by contrast, that the political economy of managerialism deserves its own analytical spotlight and is worthy of serious attention by IPE researchers. Within this special issue, we bring together a range of authors, in and around IPE, to explore how managerialism reveals a range of complex histories, agents, and implications that are not self-evident and carry direct relevance for how we understand the world economy. From tracing the wider history and rising status of managerial ideas and the promotion of key frameworks, such as risk and performance management; to exploring how management consultants shape the choices and organisational design of governmental and non-state actors, the articles in this special issue showcase the manifold ways in which managerialism carries concrete impacts.

Our main contention is that managerialism is not simply a technical means for the pursuit of policies, but has come to shape the very ways in which policy, and governance more generally, are conceived and conducted. The authors of this special issue highlight how managerial ideas and practices have redefined the priorities of economic policies (Linsi) and contributed to the reshaping of welfare states and public service provision under neoliberalism (Nunn; Whiteside; and Knafo).

Managerialism has profoundly reconfigured practices in the internationalisation of production (Baglioni, Campling and Hanlon; Moore and Joyce) and contributed to a significant reshaping of the very project of development (Sharma and Soderberg). In doing so, this special issue raises important questions about the changing nature of the political spaces found in international organizations (Seabrooke and Sending) and highlights how forms of resistance become themselves wrapped up in the political imperatives set by these new managerial templates (Eagleton-Pierce).

To provide the context for this special issue, the following introduction consists of four sections. First, we outline the analytical treatment of managerialism in IPE, pointing to the limited contributions and insights seen so far in the existing literature. Second, given that managerialism is often an unclear and slippery term, with meanings that can be appropriated in a variety of ways, we critically unpack and question some core modalities of the concept. This move is necessary to contest how managerialism is often cast in universalist terms and open the space for a reflection on its wider politics. Such initial conceptual mapping also serves to inform and organise a number of the subsequent articles. The third section proposes alternative ways in which the authors have considered managerialism to be related to either larger trends in the history of capitalism, recent neoliberal conditions, or as a more autonomous set of practices. The final section reflects on what is at stake politically in this engagement with managerialism. Throughout the discussion we showcase how the authors assembled in this special issue reveal why IPE should consider managerialism as a major object of analysis in the study of the global economy.

2. The study of managerialism in IPE

The early works in IPE on managerialism were tied to the study of transnational corporations. Management was considered mostly as a means to account for why firms developed transnational networks. Although not explicitly interested in managerialism, Stephen Hymer (1970) discussed the hierarchy of decision-making within large firms, from Marshallian roots to the multidivisional and multinational firm of the modern period. From a different perspective, Raymond Vernon explored the notion of business strategy in *Storm Over the Multinationals* (1977). Building on his earlier *Sovereignty at Bay* (1971), the book examined the wider ties between states and firms, notably through the product life cycle model but also in reference to leadership issues and national corporate cultures.

By the 1980s and 1990s, the concern had shifted to the constitution of international or global forms of authority. Susan Strange was at times preoccupied with the category of managers in the world economy and what she argued was an ‘emerging managerial technocracy’ (Stopford et al., 1991, p. 22). Her work shed light on the new authority of the corporation and their management in the global economy. She pointed to the importance of large management consultancy houses, the increasing role of risk management across different institutions (Strange, 1988, 1996), and remarked on how corporate managers negotiate cultural complexity across borders (Stopford et al., 1991, pp. 196–199).

These themes were explored further by a critical IPE literature, often working within a Marxist or neo-Gramscian tradition where ideas about managerialism surfaced under different guises. Most significantly, Robert Cox (1987, pp. 358–360)

helped to open up research focused on the so-called ‘transnational managerial class’, a group which he argued includes not only corporate elites, but officials in national and international agencies tasked with economic policy, along with a wide range of other experts and specialists (including management consultants and business educators) (also see Cox, 1993; Gill, 1995).² In turn, Kees van der Pijl (1998) helped to extend such thinking, both historically and sociologically, suggesting that managerial cadres were constituting themselves as an authoritative group across private and public institutions. Such players tend to view themselves as thoroughly modern subjects, with a fascination towards ‘steering’ change and directing the future, along with a corresponding orientation to whatever is the dominant rationality of the period (van der Pijl, 2005, 2012). Similar to Strange, and with a gesture towards themes examined by authors in this special issue (Seabrooke and Sending, Whiteside), van der Pijl anticipated how key agents of managerialism were growing in authority: ‘consultancies and their equivalents are in effect laying the groundwork for a system of global governance’ (van der Pijl, 1998, p. 162).

These authors gave hints at how managerialism could be considered as an object of interest for IPE, but discussions of this managerial disposition in IPE remained limited. Despite alluding to the growing influence of managers and agents of managerialism, little was done to reflect on and historicise managerial practices and their impact on governance at various levels of the global economy. In the past twenty years, this situation has partially improved when considering two groups of literature. A first set of authors draw on the lineage of earlier IPE debates to explore how private authority configures and constitutes itself in the world economy. There is now greater recognition of corporate managers, and their consultants, in matters of governance. For instance, Louise Amoore (2002, 2006) argues that consultancy, accounting and auditing firms, such as McKinsey & Company, are inherently political actors who, in the process of selling their ‘technical’ managerial expertise, become almost extensions of states and international organisations. As she suggests, IPE should thus be concerned with ‘how the firm itself is being made and remade through pervasive management discourses and, in turn, how these represent the global political economy to us in particular ways’ (Amoore, 2006, p. 63). Among feminist IPE analysis, connections between forms of masculinity and managerial cultures have been productively explored, ranging from the factory floor to financial trading desks (Elias, 2008; Griffin, 2013). Such insights can be coupled with wider IPE accounts on business power in global governance (Hall & Biersteker, 2002; May, 2006, 2015; Fuchs, 2007; Ougaard & Leander, 2010; Momani, 2013), as well as the field of ‘global private politics’ which explores how firms acquire regulatory capacity and shape international standards across different policy domains (Perry & Nölke, 2006; Büthe, 2010; Büthe & Mattli, 2011).

A second set encompasses a range of authors who have addressed topics linked to the political economy of management, even if such arguments have not been explicitly anchored by the concept or history of managerialism. Here, one can highlight research on particular notions, themes, and patterns which we suggest carry a managerial imprint, including: Fougner’s (2006, 2008) analysis of the norm of competitiveness in the context of Michael Porter’s work with the World Economic Forum; the evaluation of risk management, particularly in light of financialisation trends (Dannreuther & Lekhi, 2000; Lockwood, 2015; Baines, 2017); writing on ‘global benchmarking’ and the political economy of numbers (Broome

& Quirk, 2015); the wider culture of professional networks (Seabrooke & Henriksen, 2017); as well as references to the rise of New Public Management, particularly within the study of neoliberalism (Harrison, 2005; Peters, 2012; Best, 2014; Davies, 2014). We would suggest that across these diverse research enquiries, managerialism can be proposed as a crosscutting problem which carries important ideational and institutional implications for the global political economy. However, even within these debates, managerialism is too often approached tangentially as a subordinated theme used to illustrate broader issues. IPE scholars tend to read managerial phenomena as extensions of more traditional concerns, with the result that managerialism is rarely taken as an object of study in its own right.³

The paucity of in-depth thinking on managerialism has thus entrenched a disciplinary divide which has seen IPE researchers focus on broader patterns of governance while leaving other fields to address questions related to concrete managerial practices. When engaging topics that concern managerialism, IPE scholars often privilege other systems of knowledge in order to gain perspective on what they study, notably neoliberal theory or neoclassical economics. The result is a proclivity to take-for-granted managerial techniques as being somehow straightforward extensions of neoliberal forms of governance. In this process, management is too often treated as being primarily concerned with the mundane implementation of policies, operating at a lower level of organisational activity. By contrast, we argue that one can only grasp what is involved politically in these transformations by taking managerialism on its own terms. For this notion does not simply constitute a loose pejorative term. Rather, it points to a more complex socio-political phenomenon.

3. Why managerialism?

This special issue takes managerialism, rather than management, as its main focus. Such an orientation stems from our interest in the politics of these practices and the ways they are actively promoted in various areas of social life. Management, as a term, has a more general connotation tied to modern administration. It covers a broad set of practices and can be variously understood as a particular class of individuals who administer organisations; as a body of knowledge, skills, and competencies; or as a wider set of behaviours. By contrast, the expression managerialism is sometimes invoked to signal the rise of a managerial class and the mainstreaming of a related ideology (Locke & Spender, 2012; Cunliffe, 2014; see for instance, Drucker, 1973). Managerialism thus refers to programmatic movements characterised by the self-awareness of their proponents and what is often a proselytising disposition. They have historically been tied to ideas and practices that initially developed in the United States but which were widely diffused in the twentieth century to have a profound impact on the global political economy. These approaches involve certain ways of representing the social world which are often legitimated by casting concerns in universal terms. When effective, such representations are translated into material interventions in particular institutions, potentially reshaping behavioural patterns and norms (Grey, 2017). In a basic sense, therefore, the concept of managerialism points to the processes through which management ideas and practices spread across space and time.

This emphasis speaks directly to what we see to be one of the biggest obstacles to the study of managerialism: the reification and normalisation of managerialism as a form of power that one would expect from dominant actors in the global economy. The rhetoric that fuels managerialism can often reinforce this impression when its champions promote their managerial practices as a form of common sense. Managerialism often appeals to basic universal concerns in order to legitimise its politics in seemingly irrefutable terms. Its core discourse lives off a deceptively simple premise: problems can be improved or even resolved if they are better managed. In this respect, *manageability* has been built as a normatively desirable form of social action (Grey, 1996, 2017). Reduced to an elementary sense, managerialism presents itself as *a belief that the world should and can be managed, involving ideologies informed by instrumental rationality, and techniques directed towards the control of organisations and other social outcomes*. From this perspective, it is difficult not to see management as a somewhat transhistorical practice, a product of modernism and its aspiration for a rational ordering of the world. This apparent rational grounding of management explains why critiques themselves have often seen this desire as emanating from the structural conditions of an expanding capitalist system or the rise of the bureaucratic state, even when it is recognised that the ‘orientation to manage’ (Kallinikos, 1996, p. 37) is a more complex historical phenomenon.

This normalising perspective has therefore reinforced three basic propositions about managerialism that can at times appear unassailable. The first is that managerialism is grounded in a major call for ordering that appeals to a human desire for ontological security and continuity (Giddens, 1991). Managerial knowledge claims to promote the reduction of ambivalence, ambiguity, and uncertainty, often through treating such conditions as inherently threatening (Bauman, 1991). In this respect, managerialism appears to tap into a latent anxiety by offering the promise that a confusing world should be tamed and, in turn, that mastery can be achieved by deploying management ideas and practices. To proponents, managerialism becomes ‘an optimistic, almost romantic creed’ (Pollitt, 1993, p. 1). Embedded within the epistemic foundations of modernity, this core assumption of manageability often has a taken-for-granted quality. It builds on a certain modern conception of agency; that is, an autonomous self, detached from the environment, yet able to act on the external world (Kallinikos, 1996; Townley, 2002; also see Roberts, 1984; MacIntyre 2014[1981]; Luke, 1990).

The second proposition is that managerialism essentially consists of the deployment of rational instrumentalism as a means to address this need for ordering. Scholars often point out that managerialism encompasses theories, models, and frameworks which carry a Weberian imprint of formal or instrumental rationality (Edwards, 1980; Watson, 1994). This instrumental rationality emphasises calculation, deliberateness, and predictability in order to formulate the most efficient relationship between means and ends (Weber, 2013[1922]). Whether this efficiency is actually accomplished is an empirical question, but the ideological consistency of seeking efficiency is a hallmark of managerialism.

The third proposition is that managerialism fundamentally boils down to a problematique of control (Clegg, 1981; Beniger, 1989; Chau et al., 1989; Reed, 1989; Otley et al., 1995; Berry et al., 2009). The history of management thought since the nineteenth century is then summarised as a process of wrestling with

methods of control operating at systemic, organisational, and individual levels. Control is imagined and practiced through various interrelated mechanisms and techniques, which are often concerned with functional specialisation, compartmentalisation, and the monitoring of tasks. In critical perspectives, particularly those shaped by Marxism, the problem of managerial control is defined as an effort to stabilise and mystify dehumanising class relations between privileged cadres (managers) and an exploited group (workers).

The saliency of these three themes may be partly due to the fact that managerialism has been contested at multiple levels. For the attempt to cast managerialism in terms of order, instrumental rationality and control arguably reflects the challenges faced by its proponents when seeking to legitimate their practices. There have been substantial debates over the extent to which these managers succeed in their declared or implicit aspiration for control (Ferguson, 1994). Protests, miscalculations, accidents, and mundane ignorance inevitably blur the deceptively straight lines of managerial reason. Indeed, questioning the presumed effectiveness of managerial practices, and thus further opening up the category itself, is a theme which is critically probed by a number of authors in this special issue (Moore and Joyce, Nunn, and Eagleton-Pierce). We would therefore concur with others who have argued that managerialism contains tensions and contradictions within itself and is often ‘perennially failing’ to accomplish its objectified ends (Grey, 2017, p. 27). Despite frequent promises and high expectations at the outset of initiatives, managerial practices often stumble through cycles of crisis, innovation, and reform (Power, 2004). Such patterns may be acknowledged by relevant parties and audiences, and can be accompanied by scepticism and cynicism. Yet the need to be *seen to be in control*, at the very least, serves as a powerful underlying motivation for reproducing managerialism and its key discursive modalities. As MacIntyre (2014[1981], p. 124) suggests, managerial expertise often creates an ‘illusion’ of social control. Such problems of legitimation have, in turn, fuelled the self-reflexive nature of management in its attempts to lay claims to a given expertise or professionalize its practices.

Moving beyond the generic pretensions of managerialism, contributors to this special issue problematise the phenomenon as a set of historically situated projects understood either in class, ideational or discursive terms. They insist that one should be careful to not take-for-granted how proponents of managerial practice present their activities, even if we are critical of such pursuits. For while the themes of ordering, instrumental rationality, and control may constitute important baselines to understand managerialism, we should be cautious about crafting the ideological properties of managerialism into an overly neat package. The goal here is not to dismiss the idea that rationalism or the desire for control are central to management – something that would be difficult to deny – but rather to question the problematic framing that results from underspecified accounts of managerial processes in IPE. In particular, by appealing to the same universal register as the one deployed by the apostles of managerialism, scholars too often risk levelling the field in ways which make it hard to historicise or relativise managerialism as a distinct social practice and understand its specific historical forms.

Challenging the idea of managerialism as a secular logic, the contributors to this special issue reveal how managerialism can often direct our gaze towards efficiency-based concerns when it is in fact redefining larger priorities and agendas of

governance. Managerialism has become increasingly intertwined with the design of policy, helping to determine objectives of governance or shaping the very process of decision-making. In this respect, our concerns with managerialism speaks directly to the remaking of global governance in ways that are often underestimated in the literature, precisely because managerialism is too often cast as a presumed apolitical ‘tool of efficiency’ to pursue a given objective. By directly connecting our analysis with enduring IPE research themes, we argue that the study of managerialism is vital to an understanding of the politics of the global economy.

4. Towards a political economy of managerialism

In this move to historicise managerialism, this special issue advances a new agenda of research for a political economy of managerialism. This, we argue, can help us to reflect upon how managerialism is related to its broader socio-economic context. In particular, a key axis that organises the interventions in this special issue is how authors conceptualise managerialism in relation to capitalism or neoliberalism. The contributors make three types of arguments about managerialism which, in certain discussions, can be found overlapping to different degrees. A first type of argument resituates managerialism within a broader understanding of the dynamics of modern capitalism and its evolution. From this perspective, managerialism is understood as a set of practices intended to reinforce the logic of commodification and the creation of new opportunities for profit, or as part of a wider disciplining process deployed in the interest of capital. This first framing works well to shed light on the power relations that managers enforce and the dynamics of domination and alienation they engender (Braverman, 1974). Such a perspective thus casts managerialism primarily as a practice of control and/or exploitation, with an objective to explore the intimate relationship of current managerial practices to specific phases of capitalist development.

The advent of scientific management in the late nineteenth century (Hoskin & Macve, 1994) is often a key historical reference point when charting approaches that examine the relationship of managerialism to capitalism. Scientific managerialism was most famously associated with Frederick Winslow Taylor, who became known for his studies aimed at optimising work stations and minimising non-productive time through planning and careful organisation. Scientific management was tied to the rapid growth of the American corporation which saw the rise of middle managers who often came with applied expertise, notably in engineering and accounting (Chandler, 1977). These managers were employed to help with logistical and workplace organisation. They sought to legitimise their work with the establishment of business schools which accredited management as a distinct professional body of expertise (Khurana, 2007). Taylorism is commonly taken as the prototypical form of managerialism with its emphasis on control through standardisation and benchmarking to achieve efficiency gains. Scientific managerialism became more generally understood as the use of science for organising the workplace more efficiently, a movement which was also tied to the rise of human resources. In turn, such thinking became associated with principles taught to new cadres, and generalised (aspiring to be a ‘science’) for how to police labour and deal with various welfare and democratic forces from an elite perspective (Hanlon, 2016).

As various contributors to this special issue argue, it is important to focus on the legacy of scientific managerialism not only because it helps to bring out the disciplinary nature of managerialism but also because it enables us to better specify what are the novel features behind the redeployment and reconfiguring of managerial practices on a global scale. Here, it is argued there is much to learn by examining the specific features of accumulation under neoliberalism to grasp the new purpose of these managerial practices.

For Moore and Joyce, the practices of managerialism have been intensified by the rise of platform capitalism (Srnicsek, 2016; Zuboff, 2019). With the development of new information technologies, managers have been able to dissect and rearticulate in more precise and intense ways the practices of scientific managerialism and the control over labour. The model of platform work managerialism encompasses, among significant features, an algorithmic allocation of work and the use of digital tracking technologies to enforce and control the labour process. It thus highlights how new technologies enable practices of scientific management to be refreshed and reconfigured for the current era of capitalism.

Baglioni, Campling and Hanlon are keen to characterize managerialism as an entrepreneurial function that relates to corporate governance and which should be distinguished from public governance. For this reason, they insist on the importance of distinguishing managerialism from neoliberalism. While the latter represents a structure of governance that is based on intensifying processes of commodification and competition, the former signals a means by which competition can be delivered within value chains. Distinguishing between them helps us better grasp the nature of managerialism as a tool of control, but also the reason why, in the current context, managerial practices have fared so well. What was initially concerned with organising the division of labour has thus been fleshed out into a broader practice of standardisation which helps managers to exert further control over value capture. It has fuelled a process of ‘concentration and control’ of knowledge production to the benefit of elite actors within the socio-economic class hierarchy.

A second type of argument made by the contributors puts the emphasis on the distinct relationship of managerialism to neoliberalism. Although early phases in the evolution of managerialism through the twentieth century are each important on their own, recent studies have often focused on developments since the 1980s and 1990s. Scholars have emphasised the turn to quality management, benchmarking, the audit culture, performance management, among others agendas and tools, as being part of a neoliberal project (Power, 1997; Bruno & Didier, 2013). These developments have had a strong impact on the public sector and the rise of public management, with managerialism sometimes being interpreted as a practice that promotes new forms of corporate empowerment (Fougner, 2008; Davies, 2014).

In Nunn’s article, there is a recognition that echoes of modern performance management can be found prior to the mainstreaming of neoliberalism, such as in the early twentieth century workplace or in post-WWII conversations led by Peter Drucker, the management theorist. However, Nunn argues that the managerial imprint has become more pronounced in the neoliberal era as he shows with the case of active labour market policies (ALMPs). He suggests that ALMPs can be understood in relation to wider New Public Management (NPM) public sector reforms from the 1980s, particularly in reference to Anglo-Saxon countries.

In their article, Sharma and Soederberg point to the way in which global risk management has promoted new practices of valuation that have been decisive in justifying the greater involvement of transnational corporations in projects of development. These have underpinned what they see as a new governance approach aimed at consolidating and legitimising 'the role of business as an active development agent, whilst depoliticizing the social and environmental disruptions tied to this arrangement'.

Such analyses help to highlight one of the distinctive features of the rise of managerialism: the way in which it has profoundly transformed the public/private divide. As Sharma and Soederberg argue, this has somewhat inverted the traditional assumptions about which agents are entrusted with public missions and the resources that are associated with them. Similarly, Whiteside discusses the rise of public private partnerships to show how managerialism has played a key role in normalising the involvement of private contractors by recasting public sectors from service providers into commodity purchasers. In exploring these themes, our contributors show how managerialism has further problematised the enduring jurisdictional confrontation between the public and the private, both discursively and institutionally.

Examining the growing influence of management consultancies in the making of the global development agenda, Seabrooke and Sending's article explores how the new forms of managerialism have been tied to professional practices. As they show, managerialism has promoted a distinctive cultural frame which values abstract templates, as well as a kind of short-termism, such as seen in the 'work to contract' trends in International Governmental Organisations (IGOs) they document. These are often crafted to elicit further work by avoiding controversial suggestions and generating growing dependency towards consultants.

A third type of argument being made by contributors to this special issue highlights the ways in which managerialism constitutes a discrete set of ideas, cultural frames and technologies that, although operating in a capitalist environment, have a certain autonomy and should be analysed on their own terms. This initial differentiation is then often used as a means to highlight the counterintuitive nature of managerial practices, which are too often normalised in the IPE literature (Knafo et al., 2019). The objective of these discussions is, therefore, to consider the role of specific institutions often neglected in IPE, such as business schools (Linsi, Hanlon, Knafo) or management consultants (Seabrooke and Ole Jacob; Whiteside; Eagleton-Pierce).

Instead of taking the scientific management of the early twentieth century as its benchmark for thinking about managerialism, scholars who adopt this focus often turn to the rise of management science in the postwar era, a period which featured the profound renovation of business schools and the dramatic development of new optimisation techniques. From this time, we see a more abstract and generalist form of action which focuses on strategic questions, rather than the more applied concerns of scientific management. It reflects a growing interest in quantification and mathematical modelling and a growing belief in the idea that management represents a *general* expertise that can be considered independent of any specific field of operations. Writings on this aspect often target a 'management by numbers' which increases the gap or the conflicts between top management and other stakeholders within firms or organisations (O'Sullivan, 2001).

As Linsi's article highlights, the current era has been shaped by ideas that cannot be easily slotted into the neoliberal paradigm. The political commitment to attract foreign direct investments as a strategy of economic growth is a case in point which, Linsi argues, highlights the specific role of business studies and managerial ideas in shaping the agenda of neoliberalism. As he suggests, such thinking enabled a profound shift away from the traditional emphasis on national producers, a priority that went against the conventional emphasis on national industries which had long been characteristic of economics.

For Knafo, the current forms of managerialism reflected in the rise of new public management should not be directly read as the product of the growing influence of corporations. They stem from a long lineage rooted in key innovations made by the US defense sector following the experience of the Second World War. These new technologies were intended to formalise and support decision making and were geared towards a practice of policy making based on performance assessment. They set the stage for a convergence of governance with management.

Finally, Eagleton-Pierce argues that managerialism can be situated in relation to long-standing organisational concerns around instrumental rationality and the desire for control. In respect to his particular focus on the origins of performance management or results-based management, he suggests that the legacy of this thinking can be found in both corporate and public sector environments from the 1960s and 1970s, in the process problematising a presumed neat fit between managerialism and neoliberalism. When applied to the case of international NGOs in global development, Eagleton-Pierce suggests that performance managerial agendas became more prominent from the 1990s onwards. He suggests that governments, international organisations, and private consultants were all important players who helped to normalise managerialism within major transnational NGOs.

5. Political struggles in the age of managerialism

This special issue aims to highlight why and how managerialism deserves to be interrogated by IPE theorists as a multifaceted object of analysis with important political consequences. We aim for the issue to constitute a stepping stone for a broader reflection on the ways in which managerialism dovetails or clashes with other major systems of ideas in the global economy; on how it is appropriated and mobilized by different social forces and agents for different ends; on the complex processes of translation as these ideas circulate from one social field to the next; as well as the diversity in managerial practices across countries, sectors, and institutional spaces. It is our belief that many of the key political struggles of our time are increasingly mediated by managerial institutions and discourses that help shape what is politically at stake in the global political economy.

As the articles in this issue show, managerialism is increasingly setting the parameters for what is considered to be a legitimate political intervention and has helped diffuse corporate ways of doing things which narrow the policy agenda. This is a point strongly made by Seabrooke and Sending who examine the ways in which consultancy houses have fuelled a general trend towards managerialism in IGOs. As they show, the generalization of this abstract managerialism has curtailed the policy or development space, narrowing which ideas are considered

authoritative and restricting who has a voice in the processes that govern these organizations.

Similar to Seabrooke and Sending's interest in managerial cultural frames, Eagleton-Pierce's study of NGOs in the field of international development is also concerned with how the turn to managerialism 'reflects a more pervasive anxiety about institutional comportment and how to appear to others as a "modern" organisation'. He charts how managerialism rose from being a marginal phenomenon in the 1980s to something that was increasingly viewed as 'fundamental', or even 'existential', from the early 2000s. Through the particular case of Oxfam, he argues that the rationale for performance management is manifested and concretely operationalized through an agenda on monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL). Eagleton-Pierce explains how and why the spreading of this form of managerialism unfolded *via* attention to both structural tendencies, such as funding policies in donor governments and IOs, as well as internal debates within Oxfam. He documents not only the ways in which this normalisation process evolved, but also the critique and resistance it provoked from NGO workers and analysts.

In the process of mediating social struggles over the global economy, managerialism has transformed the nature of political struggles and how agents conceive of what is at stake in political struggles over the future of the global economy. In Nunn's research on active labour market policies (ALMPs) he argues that performance management agendas tend to lead to centralised control dynamics within bureaucracies that have a stake in such policy games. He suggests that the relative distributional form of the welfare state is being reshaped through justifications derived from a managerial sensibility. By analysing how consultants and public sector managers vie for the authority to shape the performance management of labour markets, Nunn argues that managerialism is implicated in 'significant social harm' for those precarious workers caught up finding work in the such systems.

One of the big concerns in this managerial formatting of decision making and political discourse is the way in which it closes off forms of public accountability. Whiteside, for example, shows how managerialism has helped leverage the public sector activities on financial markets in ways that conceal the investments of the public sector and the costs of relying on private contractors. She captures how managerialism has thus become a key vehicle for the involvement of private firms and organisation in the public sector and more generally in the process of policy making.

Similarly, concerns with accountability are central to the field of development which, Sharma and Soederberg argue, is too often neglected by work on managerialism. As they point out, the global risk management agendas in the World Economic Forum (WEF) has empowered major corporations to legitimately participate in the practices of governance of international development. Their article documents how the rise of risk management – with its appearance of progress, order, and predictability – offers a vehicle for major firms to downplay their own historical role in negative socio-economic trends and outcomes. In short, they argue that the WEF discourse on risk management tends to reproduce a harmonious and ahistorical view of the subject matter, without adequate attention to how business seeks to replenish its particular legitimacy within hierarchical systems of power.

Managerialism has also fuelled the rise of a new managerial class that has been increasingly influential. For Knafo, the rise of managerial governance should be understood as a means to facilitate decision making at the top of organizations, for example in the making of policy, rather than in reference to those at the bottom, as was the case with the Taylorist focus on restructuring the labor process. Understood in these terms, the study of managerialism places the emphasis squarely on the rise of managerial decision makers and the way they conceive of strategy and policy in managerial terms. In that regard, it is important to realise that we may be fighting the wrong battle in assuming that governance is currently focused on extending and intensifying market rule in all aspects of society (c.f. Peck, 2010). As our gaze continues to be transfixed on the market pressures that are too often said to be driving change, we lose sight of the rise of a managerial class that is profoundly transforming the nature of governance and capitalist accumulation. In the process, we often take-for-granted the script according to which managers have no real alternative to the managerial policies they implement because of growing market pressures. Turning the spotlight back on decision makers is therefore key.

In sum, as these contributions show, we view managerialism as having a serious, transformative effect on the global economy and its political dynamics. By examining the qualitative shifts that the dramatic expansion of managerial ideas and practices have brought about in recent decades, we mark out managerialism as an object of research that deserves to be interrogated on its own terms. When dissected, managerialism reveals itself as a set of problematic histories, social relations, and political economic consequences that are not self-evident. Like a prism which refracts light into different wavelengths, the study of managerialism needs to track how it has spawned a rich variety of forms. We would particularly encourage further scholarship which connects and compares how managerialism has been practiced in many parts of the world, including beyond Western centres (Dar & Cooke, 2008; Girei, 2017). IPE should be part of this larger conversation with other academic fields that have a stake in understanding the geographical spread of managerial logic. By constructing this special issue, we argue that IPE can be better placed to account for some of the puzzling features that have been associated with the rise of neo-liberalism, most notably the various ways in which actual practices of governance have challenged idealised depictions of free markets. More generally, the critical study of managerialism provides a productive lens to reflect on dominant institutional and discursive features of the global economy and the active role of agents of governance who create, facilitate, or struggle against managerial reason.

Notes

1. There has been, for example, a rich literature on these themes in critical management studies, see for example Alvesson et al., 2011; and Alvesson & Willmott, 2012.
2. The more widely used concept of 'transnational capitalist class' can be treated as synonymous with 'transnational managerial class', but some authors, such as Sklair, (2001) and Budd, (2013), have preferred to retain a distinction, reflecting debates between neo-Gramscianism and Marxism.
3. For additional, notable exceptions see Schwartz, 1994; and Thrift, 1997.

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