Preface and acknowledgments

There is nothing new about big economic entities acting on the global stage, or economic interests being pursued beyond the borders of individual states in an organized way. Still, we can say that there is growing interest in the way in which economic interests are pursued today via multinational corporations (MNCs), and not just for economic reasons. MNCs play a key role in global politics, which of course is a result of the processes of globalization we have experienced in recent decades, many foundations of which were laid in the years after World War II. This globalization has unfolded to such a degree that the academic study of MNCs has not kept pace with economic, social and political developments, and the many and diverse roles performed by these large corporations. The central purpose of this book is to address this analytical ‘lag’.

We started work on pulling together this collection in Baltimore in February 2017 during the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association. Over lunch, we discussed the role of global business as a political actor and agreed that despite many years of academic attention, the subject was unfortunately still side-lined in the field of politics and international relations. We also agreed that the focus remains far too much on states and their governments. MNCs figure as executors, modifiers, or underminers of state power, as key players in markets, as entities that serve elite interests and so on, but where was the literature on them as political actors in their own right? It exists, to be sure, and there are some quite wonderful studies done by other authors. Yet, it is hardly voluminous. So, we wanted to make a contribution to the existing literature in order to shed more light on the political behavior of MNCs.

The question was how best to do so. As the then Chair of Research Committee 38 (RC38) on Politics and Business of the International Political Science Association (IPSA), Karsten Ronit suggested to John Mikler that this forum could be used as one of the relevant vehicles for the identification and dissemination of research on the topic. The initial conversation leading to this joint project went something like this:

Karsten: You know John, IPSA runs several panels on politics and business at its biannual World Congress, and since you are an expert on MNCs, it would be great

if you could organize some panels. There is, in fact, a tradition starting in the 1980s of bringing out edited volumes as a result of these panels.

John: Sure, but you know it takes time and I have many other things on my plate. I'm finishing a whole book on *The Political Power of Global Corporations*, and I need to do this before thinking about what comes next! Plus, I would prefer not doing it alone. It's always great to bring others together with similar interests, to collaborate on such projects, and that includes you. So, why don't we do it together?

Despite also having quite a full research agenda, Karsten found it hard to decline the kind invitation, just as John found it hard to resist Karsten's challenge, and our partnership for the project was born.

We started thinking about bringing others on board, and IPSA was actually the ideal vehicle for doing so. As John stepped up into the role of Chair of RC38 when Karsten stepped down to Deputy Chair later in 2017, we started to think about panels we could organize with the theme of this book in mind. The result was that several of the papers leading to chapters in this book were presented on RC38 panels at IPSA's 25th World Congress in Brisbane in July 2018. Also around this time, Karsten was a Visiting Fellow with the Department of Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney, so this was a wonderful opportunity to move the project forward.

As we did so, one of our main ambitions has been to combine different perspectives on MNCs. We both have different perspectives as well as specializations in politics and business, but a key premise we agreed on was that business, not least manifested by MNCs, is not just another group in society. Today, business is a key *force* in market economies and important roles are attributed to private enterprises as vital drivers in development and welfare. These are factors that offer particular opportunities for business influence on governments and regulations, sometimes to such a degree that action is not even necessary. Because of the roles played by business, its most visible actors can also be targeted for having excessive influence and for not serving the public interest. The result is that the practices of MNCs are often particularly in the public spotlight.

Another ambition of this book is to analyze and theorize the role of MNCs from a holistic perspective. The political dimension of MNCs' behavior cannot be analyzed in isolation from their place in the market, but more than that, their political actions need to be studied in relation to many other actors in their environment. In other words, as a series of interrelated pathways of potential influence. Because MNCs have different properties, face different conditions, and operate in different environments, each of these pathways are not always equally important and equally activated. Therefore, MNCs cannot just 'strategize' and behave in a manner defined simply by their interests and resources. Their behavior is also shaped by these environments and pathways.

As with many other book projects, the completion of this volume has taken a little longer than expected. But the process has been made more enjoyable with the support and advice of the wonderful contributors to this collection, as well as many more friends and colleagues than we can name here. We would like to thank all those who attended the IPSA panels in Brisbane where some of the initial ideas that led to this work were first presented, and the incredible team at Edward Elgar Publishing, particularly Alex Pettifer and Rachel Downie. Also, members of the Australian International Political Economy Network who have offered constructive criticism as well as advice. Our thanks go to people with whom we have discussed the different ideas behind the project and whose feedback and suggestions were invaluable, particularly Madison Cartwright, Tom Chodor, Lindy Edwards, Susan Engel, Shahar Hameiri, Kelly Gerard, Neil Harrison, Stewart Jackson, Aynsley Kellow, Marieke Louis, Diarmuid Maguire, Adam Morton, Susan Park, Nicola Phillips, Volker Schneider, Rodney Smith and Amos Owen Thomas.

Finally, it must be noted that as the book's manuscript was delivered in early 2020, the world was being severely hit by the COVID-19 pandemic that paralyzed our societies. The result was that the last stages of writing and editing were strangely expedited by unfortunate circumstances that enabled us to spend more time with the manuscript, while engaged in various kinds of online teaching. We hope and trust that by the time this book is published, durable solutions have been found to stop or counter its effects.

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