

**Moving diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) research forward with(in) international business: Addressing blind spots through critical and reflexive management scholarship**

**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose:** We present a scene-setting viewpoint that critically examines various diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) blind spots within the field of international business (IB). These include issues such as social justice, intersectionality, de-colonization, the co-creation of inclusive research practices in indigenous spaces, social dialogue, and the gap between DEI rhetoric and reality. We also contextualize our discussion in terms of the six papers which make up the first part of our two-part special issue on DEI in IB.

**Design/methodology/approach:** We build on existing DEI overview works and comment on specific DEI blind spots. We also discuss the role of positionality as critical reflexive scholarship practice, which we see as an essential step in problematizing structural inequalities. We then discuss six specific areas where DEI blindspots persist within the IB literature and link our discussion to the six papers included in the first part of our DEI special issue.

**Findings:** Addressing the contradictions between the business and social justice cases for DEI requires addressing the ontological contradictions between the two perspectives through problematizing structural inequalities. A key contribution of the paper is also the discussion around positionality in DEI research and the relevance of positionality statements as part of critical reflexive scholarship in support of a socially just DEI research agenda.

**Originality/value:** We discuss the role DEI research plays and can play within the evolution of the IB discipline. We apply a critical management studies perspective to pervasive DEI issues, as well as engage with the topics in the special issue through a unique critical reflexive epistemology which includes our own positionality statements as guest editors and researchers. Our critical discussion and recommendations for future research serve as a kind of *whetstone* to sharpen IB's DEI research tools and in turn for IB to help sharpen DEI research's tools, supporting it to become more socially just.

**Keywords:** *Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) contradictions, DEI blind spots, Intersectionality, Inclusive research, Positionality, Social justice*

# **Moving diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) research forward with(in) international business: Addressing blind spots through critical and reflexive management scholarship**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

When the idea for this scene-setting viewpoint came about and the accompanying special issue call for papers was first publicized in 2022, three of the four seminal works in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the international business (IB) field had not yet been published (e.g., Newburry *et al.*, 2022; Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2023; Van Bommel *et al.*, 2023). These works underscore both the scarcity of DEI research and highlighted the increasing relevance of DEI research for the IB discipline itself. Aside from a few notable theoretical contributions outside the IB domain (e.g., Post *et al.*, 2021; Kraus *et al.*, 2021), Köllen's critical overview in the *Journal of Management Inquiry*, which significantly influenced our call for papers, described the DEI field as "far from well-defined and highly ambiguous" (2021, p. 259). Problematizing both its dimensions and the legitimacy of DEI research, Köllen called for more work on intersectionality and the recognition of DEI research as a set of "values in and of themselves" (*ibid.*, p. 267), not to serve specific business purposes. He further emphasised how DEI research can illuminate the black box of nationality by addressing *origin, heritage, and ancestry* – a pressing issue given the rise of identity politics (Rašković, 2021) and the increasingly politicised nature of IB (Beugelsdijk and Luo, 2024).

We would first like to acknowledge the seminal works that followed Köllen (2021) and preceded ours. The special issue of *AIB Insights*, co-edited by Newburry and colleagues (2021), addressed the dimensionality of DEI research and its challenges from a multi-level perspective. It was the first IB-specific overview of DEI research, notable for its actionable insights – a distinguishing characteristic of *AIB Insights*. Newburry and colleagues (2022) examined the role of various multi-level factors influencing the adoption of DEI policies and proposed a typology of global, regional, national, sub-national, organisational, and team-level influences. Their approach also appeared to be influenced by a seminal macro-level study of the adoption of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT)-inclusive policies, published in *Social Forces* by Gardberg and colleagues (2023). In their concluding remarks, Newburry and colleagues (2022) stressed the need to incorporate *belonging* and *justice* into the DEI discourse and epistemology (see also WEF, 2021). They further highlighted the importance of including missing voices, particularly from Indigenous scholars. As you will see, we have taken this call on board in our special issue through two thought-provoking viewpoints by Indigenous scholars from New Zealand and Australia (e.g., Henry and Leroy-Dyer, 2024) and the South Pacific (e.g., Ofe-Grant *et al.*, 2024).

Following the work of Newburry and colleagues, Fitzsimmons and colleagues (2023) published the first systematic review of DEI research in IB in the *Journal of International Business Studies*, the IB discipline's leading academic outlet. The authors conducted a two-pronged literature review, consisting of a scoping review of 1,618 DEI-related articles in IB using text analysis, followed by a narrative review of 101 key articles. The central premise of their review was that "MNEs are an especially relevant context for addressing and reducing systemic inequalities because of their complexity and political power" (Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2023, p. 1403). As Vaara and colleagues (2021) had already demonstrated, MNEs are not just spaces where identities are negotiated and shaped, but can also act as influential actors in international relations, capable of driving social change (Rašković and Takacs Haynes, 2021). DEI is a large part of such social changes (see, e.g., Ciuk *et al.*, 2023; Glasgow and Twaronite, 2019).

In the first stage of their review, Fitzsimmons and colleagues (2023) found that only 14% of the analysed articles could be classified as IB. Using text analysis software, the authors revealed that the IB discipline has not kept pace with the “meteoric rise” in DEI research, which began in the 1990s and accelerated in two waves during the 2000s and 2010s (Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2023, p. 1407). A second key finding was that, while IB research has focused on a few social categories similar to those in non-IB DEI research – such as gender, nationality, culture, and race – IB articles placed a much stronger emphasis on *nationality* and *culture*. Their findings support Köllen’s (2021) critique of the limited dimensionality in DEI research, with categories like age, disability, sexual orientation, religion, and language diversity remaining significant blind spots. However, Fitzsimmons and colleagues (2023) further stressed that DEI dimensionality needs to be understood dynamically, and not just as mere variety. When comparing the nature and types of DEI arguments presented, they found no major differences between IB and non-IB publications – with institutional diversity and performance arguments leading, followed by moral arguments and arguments centred on resistance to diversity.

In their second-stage narrative review, Fitzsimmons and colleagues (2023) examined the strengths and weaknesses of DEI research in IB and proposed a future research agenda. They argued that IB DEI research “excels at foundational theorizing that models complexity related to heterogeneity (...) across all levels of analysis, ranging from multicultural identities to intra-national diversity” (2023, p. 1413). However, due to the uniqueness of IB theory, we believe there is still significant room for improvement in leveraging the unique place-space-organisation nexus in IB theorizing (Beugelsdijk, 2022). Regarding the identified weaknesses, Fitzsimmons and colleagues make an important observation directly relevant to our special issue: there is little to no contextualisation of DEI research that considers social group power dynamics and, in particular, “the influence of historical and postcolonial relationships” (*ibid.*, p. 1414). We have paid close attention to this blind spot in our special issue, perhaps most noticeably through the viewpoint by Henry and Leroy-Dyer (2024).

This brings us to the third DEI work by Van Bommel and colleagues (2023), published in the *Journal of Business Ethics*. Offering a bibliometric analysis of 2,560 articles dating back to 1957, their findings confirm earlier observations about the focus on surface-level diversity and the narrow emphasis on gender, race, and cultural diversity. Unlike the review by Fitzsimmons and colleagues (2023), nationality plays a lesser role in their findings. This is understandable given their focus was not on IB literature. The bibliometric study by Van Bommel further reinforced the strong performance orientation of DEI research. However, the authors noted that even this focus tends to be limited to financial aspects. Little attention seems to have been paid to social performance, ethical implications, or – somewhat surprisingly – even the “relationship between diversity and inclusion” themselves (Van Bommel *et al.*, 2023, p. 496). Both seminal studies by Fitzsimmons and colleagues (2023) and Van Bommel and colleagues (2023) highlight the dominant focus on the business case for DEI in existing research, which in turn contributes to another important blind spot we have addressed in our special issue – the social justice perspective on DEI (e.g., Vangeli, 2024).

The most striking observation from the bibliometric study by Van Bommel and colleagues was that 90% of the published works were rooted in developed countries. Furthermore, most DEI research could be grouped into three main clusters based on keyword frequency: (1) the *diversity management cluster*, which focuses heavily on affirmative action, human resource management, and workplace issues; (2) the *team diversity cluster*, centred on communication, conflict, creativity, and knowledge; and (3) the *board diversity cluster*, with an emphasis on upper echelons, governance, and social responsibility. In their concluding thoughts, Van Bommel and colleagues called for studying “how organizational diversity affects society” (2023, p. 497). This closely aligns with the DEI-informed social change mandate for MNEs proposed by Fitzsimmons and colleagues (2023).

In the two and a half years since the call for papers for our DEI special issue was first announced, the initial motivation behind organising this issue for *Critical Perspectives on International Business* has remained unchanged. Our aim has continued to be the application of a *critical* management scholarship lens (Boussebaa, 2021; Dörrenbächer and Gammelgaard, 2019; Carr, 2006) to DEI research and the sharpening of the DEI research tools used by IB scholars. To date, critical management scholarship on DEI has largely involved transdisciplinary work between management and organisation studies (e.g., Post et al., 2021; Kraus et al., 2021) and the IB field, with less integration of critical sociology, gender studies, feminist studies, and postcolonial studies. This may explain why the IB field continues to focus heavily on the diffusion of DEI practices across environments (Newburry *et al.*, 2021) and the impact of institutional contexts on them (Köllen, 2021), while still struggling to address the broader social aspects of DEI beyond the business case logic (Ely and Thomas, 2020; Vangeli, 2024).

Before highlighting the major contributions of our scene-setting viewpoint, which synthesises and critically discusses six specific kinds of DEI blindspots illustrated by the six papers in the first part of our two-part special issue, we would like to note that the two-and-a-half-year journey for this special issue took longer because we adopted a more inclusive and developmental approach as guest editors. We also aimed to encourage perspectives from outside traditional IB scholarly communities, fostering cross-disciplinary and methodological learning. Prospective authors first submitted short expressions of interest, each reviewed by at least two reviewers. We then organised individual online paper development workshops for each submission, involving one of the handling guest co-editors and an established third-party IB scholar from leading research universities in North America, Europe, Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. The authors subsequently developed full versions of their papers, which then underwent an average of three rounds of rigorous reviews by expert reviewers from around the world. Regarding the two invited viewpoints from Māori, Aboriginal, and South Pacific scholars (e.g., Henry and Leroy-Dyer, 2024; Ofe-Grant *et al.*, 2024), we ensured their contributions were reviewed by Indigenous peers.

Regarding key contributions, we are proud to offer critical reflections and theoretical guidance on leveraging sociological theories to advance IB's understanding and theorising of DEI issues (e.g., Vangeli, 2024), as well as addressing the issue of intersectionality (e.g., Primecz and Mahadevan, 2024). The latter remains a notable blind spot in DEI research overall (Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2023). In the spirit of inclusivity, we are also pleased that, through transformative cross-institutional open-access publishing agreements, the first two theoretical works by Vangeli (2024) and Primecz and Mahadevan (2024) are also freely available through open access.

In response to calls for the inclusion of Indigenous voices (e.g., Newburry *et al.*, 2022; Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2023), we are pleased to showcase two viewpoints by Indigenous researchers from Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pacific. Their viewpoints offer seminal perspectives on whether the injustices experienced by Indigenous peoples should be part of the DEI discourse (e.g., Henry and Leroy-Dyer, 2024), and how IB scholars can address the epistemic violence long imposed on the South Pacific through appropriate and inclusive research practices (e.g., Ofe-Grant *et al.*, 2024). In inviting these viewpoints, we aimed to follow not only inclusive research principles but also the guidance on de-colonizing Western management research (e.g., Banerjee, 2022; Muzio, 2022) and its methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021).

The final two contributions examine the duality between reality and rhetoric in dual-listed MNEs in the mining industry pursuing DEI policies (e.g., Sasikala *et al.*, 2024) and the role MNEs can play in ensuring worker representation along increasingly complex and opaque

global value chains (e.g., Faroque *et al.*, 2024), where labour exploitation emerges as a specific form of wicked problem (Rašković, 2024a; 2024b).

We do not claim ownership of the ideas presented in these six papers that make up the first part of a two-part special issue on DEI. Instead, we hope our scene-setting viewpoint serves as a call to IB researchers to include positionality statements, regardless of their methodological background, to explore how DEI research can enhance IB theorizing through greater transdisciplinarity, and to offer guidelines for future research on DEI, especially given the increasingly complex global landscape.

In terms of structure, we begin our viewpoint by acknowledging our own positionality as guest co-editors and DEI researchers – a point indirectly highlighted by Vangeli (2024) and more explicitly suggested by Ofe-Grant and colleagues (2024). We then contextualize the relevance of DEI research for the IB discipline and vice versa, particularly through the ongoing discussion of IB's uniqueness as a discipline (e.g., Aguinis and Gabriel, 2023; Beugelsdijk, 2022). While our initial call for papers in 2022 invoked societal engagement through critical management scholarship in a post-Covid-19 world (Dörrenbächer *et al.*, 2021), the increasingly “wicked” and non-ergodic global landscape (see Rašković, 2022; Witt *et al.*, 2021) has since underscored the relevance of DEI ontology and theoretical tools for understanding a new dimension of IB's uniqueness linked to the nexus between place, space, and organizations (Beugelsdijk, 2022). Through the logic of blind spots, we then critically engage with the six articles in this special issue before offering our thoughts on future directions for DEI research in IB and concluding with some final reflections.

## **2. OUR POSITIONALITY**

### ***2.1 Why is positionality so important for DEI research?***

Recognizing the role of researchers in academic work, particularly within IB research where context is central (Reuber and Fischer, 2022) and where we often examine hegemonic power dynamics (Tietze and Dick, 2009; Boussebaa, 2023), it is essential for us to acknowledge our positionality as both guest editors and authors of this piece, following the advice of Roberts and colleagues (2020) and Cunliffe (2003). Such an is based on the fundamental belief that “there is no neutral or apolitical research” (Vanner, 2015, p. 3). We define positionality as the declaration of researchers' standpoints in relation to their research subjects/objects and their worldviews (Rowe, 2014). The latter plays a particularly important role in DEI contexts (Roberts *et al.*, 2020), which are often shaped by identity politics (Rašković, 2021), diverse power relations (Vangeli, 2024), and strong insider-outsider binaries (Ergun and Erdemir, 2010). These binaries can be especially complex when dealing with fluid social categories such as gender, sexuality, and ancestry (Bouma *et al.*, 2023; Yip, 2024), which necessitate a dynamic understanding of context where intersectionality becomes very important (Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2023).

Positionality captures the interplay between space, context, and identity in all types of academic research, especially qualitative research rooted in ethnography (Bayeck, 2022; Holmes, 2020). As the discussion in the next section on IB's contested uniqueness as a discipline will demonstrate, the concept of positionality in IB research extends beyond the centrality of context; it is an integral aspect of critical social theory (Vangeli, 2024). It also intersects with the complex relationships between space, context, and identity, which in IB are closely tied to the multinational enterprise (MNE; Beugelsdijk, 2022; Vaara *et al.*, 2021).

In declaring our positionalities, we aim to be transparent about how our backgrounds shape our worldviews, research philosophies, and identities as researchers (Holmes, 2020; Savolainen *et al.*, 2023), rather than simply accounting for potential biases (Galdas, 2017). By rejecting a positivist worldview (Bourke, 2014) and acknowledging the social construction of

knowledge (Gani and Khan, 2024), we embrace positionality as a critical reflexive practice, not just a methodological principle (Savolainen *et al.*, 2023).

Second, the viewpoint of Ofe-Grant and her colleagues (2024) highlights the importance of reflection in co-creating inclusive research practices and helps us explore the underlying power dynamics within our work (Merriam *et al.*, 2001). This is particularly crucial when conducting research in hegemonic contexts (Gani and Khan, 2024; Le Bourdon, 2022), whether related to domestic gender issues or international worker exploitation. Much of the IB discipline, given its historical origins and focal actors, falls into this category (Boussebaa, 2023; Westwood and Jack, 2007). This is why critical reflexivity is essential in postcolonial debates and is gradually gaining recognition in IB (Vangeli, 2024).

Lastly, by examining our positionalities, we aim to promote academic well-being through the practice of critical reflexivity (Le Bourdon, 2022; Day, 2012; Hibbert, 2021) and encourage others to do the same (Hurd and Singh, 2021). While positionality statements are common in feminist and postcolonial studies, and increasingly popular in psychology, sociology, and international relations (Savolainen *et al.*, 2023; Gani and Khan, 2024), they remain relatively unknown to IB field, even among qualitative researchers. We believe it is time for us, as a community of scholars, to change that, even if it makes us feel a little uncomfortable (Le Bourdon, 2022; Hibbert, 2021) and vulnerable (Hibbert, 2024) at first.

## **2.2 Our positionality statements**

We approached the process of declaring our positionality statements as a critical reflexive practice (Le Bourdon, 2022; Cunliffe, 2003; Savolainen *et al.*, 2023). Following the social identity map guidelines on positionality statements by Jacobson and Mustafa (2019), which reflect the complexity of positionality (Day, 2012), our statements follow a three-tiered structure. Tier 1 addresses the salient social categories that shape our social identities (e.g., social class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, and origin/ancestry). Tier 2 explains how these categories impact our lives, particularly their link to our research interests. Tier 3 provides further affective details tied to the specifics of our social identities (e.g., feelings and passions about certain issues). Together, the statements highlight how the various facets of our identities influence how we approach and interpret DEI issues, as well as how we interact with various stakeholders in our research (Jacobson and Mustafa, 2019). By opening ourselves to vulnerability (Hibbert, 2024), we also hope our positionality statements help co-create a more personal relationship with the readers of our viewpoint.

**Matevž (Matt) Rašković:** As a middle-class Caucasian male in my early 40s, born in socialist Yugoslavia (which later disintegrated due to the failure to sustain a supranational, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious identity), I have always been drawn to social identity questions. My interest in social identity has led me to embrace economic sociology and focus on the non-market aspects of IB through the lenses of social identity theory, socio-cognitive theory, and institutional theory. As a proud gay man who is both dyslexic and is dealing with the permanent effects of Bell's Palsy (i.e., a facial disability), I am particularly passionate about DEI issues and *belonging*. This passion has been shaped by my own search for belonging – first, as a child raised out of wedlock by a single mother who was a primary school teacher; later, as I reconciled my identity as a gay man; and more recently, as a first-generation immigrant to a country marred by colonization. Using social identity to explore human agency and intergroup dynamics, I am also interested in the origins and transformation of social structures and institutions, as well as the interplay between social structures and the agency of actors who inhabit, change, and/or challenge them. While I began as a quantitative researcher, I am now primarily a qualitative researcher, drawn to critical reflexive research and postcolonial thinking. Through my Tongan partner and his family, I am also personally connected to the

South Pacific and its peoples, which fuels my new-found interests in Indigenous worldviews and post-colonial studies.

**Fiona Hurd:** As a Pākehā (i.e., white) New Zealander, I was raised in a single-parent family after the sudden death of my father. My father's death significantly shaped my mother's transformation from Christian housewife to feminist social worker, counselor, and social justice advocate. As a result, I grew up in an environment where we were frequently confronted with inequities and also actively supported others. My academic journey began three months after my mother's death. As a teenage mother, I found myself in a very different life situation compared to many peers. This experience focused my academic path on themes of social justice, equity, and belonging. My later life experiences, including raising a neurodivergent child with significant mental health needs, being in a same-sex relationship, and identifying as *tangata Tiriti* (i.e., a descendant of settlers and bound by the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi as New Zealand's foundational document between the settlers and its indigenous Māori population), have provided further layers to my understanding of DEI in organisations. These experiences have led me to focus my research and teaching on creating organizational spaces for belonging and well-being, often within the frameworks of critical management studies, organization studies, and gender studies. I am particularly drawn to reflexive and collaborative methodologies that focus on the voices of the marginalized, the invisible, or the unheard.

**Theresa Onaji-Benson:** As a Black Nigerian female immigrant, I am constantly confronted with the feeling of being the *other*. This has been my reality for most of my career, navigating a liability of foreignness not only based on race and gender but also on immigration status and country of origin (i.e., living in South Africa and dealing with instances of Nigerian-targeted xenophobic attacks). As the seventh of eight children born to a traditional Idoma family (i.e., a minority tribe in Nigeria), I have always grappled with the need to be heard and seen. I watched my middle-class parents work hard to navigate the challenges of being a minority in their own country, learning through their experiences that success from a position of relative disadvantage requires hard work, discipline, and a constant need to deliver results. My career, driven by the need to perform – first within my family and later in a competitive industry demanding excellence and originality – has subjected me to significant and diverse pressures. This, combined with the liability of newness as an early-career researcher, has led me to explore various research areas to define my identity as a researcher, teacher, and academic citizen. My academic journey began in economics, shaping my inclination toward quantitative research. However, deeper questions about spirituality and purpose have drawn me toward more nuanced approaches, exploring ethics, whistleblowing, and the role of business and organizations in society. These issues excite me, as they offer an opportunity for IB scholarship to think more broadly about its responsibilities to society, moving beyond the instrumental business case that characterizes capitalism to engage more deeply with the realities of both visible and invisible stakeholders.

### **3. TRANSDISCIPLINARITY AND LEVERAGING THE UNIQUENESS OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS THEORY TO ADVANCE DEI RESEARCH**

The recent 'provocations' about whether the IB discipline is (still) as unique as it has historically assumed itself to be (Aguinis and Gabriel, 2023; Hennart and Sutherland, 2022) have reinvigorated IB's ongoing self-criticism about losing momentum as a discipline (Buckley, 2002). These discussions have moved the conversation beyond the often-cited features of context, complexity, and connections as unique aspects of IB research (Dau *et al.*, 2022). While contextual idiosyncrasy remains an important aspect of IB research (Aguinis *et*

*al.*, 2020; Michailova, 2011), it is perhaps more distinct when comparing IB to other management, organization, and business disciplines (e.g., strategic management, human resource management, marketing) than to related fields like sociology, psychology, social psychology, anthropology, or even international relations and political science.

Leading IB scholars have long called for IB research to draw more from disciplines such as sociology, psychology, international relations, and political science (e.g., Buckley and Casson, 2019, 2020; Casson, 2021; Witt, 2019). However, while disciplinary cross-pollination is valuable, it should be seen as a means to an end, not an end in itself. To avoid the pitfalls and unintended consequences of borrowing theories and concepts from related fields (e.g., Rašković and Takacs Haynes, 2021; Vangeli, 2024), or misunderstanding foundational management theories that eventually made their way into IB (e.g., Bridgman and Cummings, 2020; Bridgman *et al.*, 2019), IB researchers should begin by identifying higher-order meta-theories that span different fields, levels of analysis, and sometimes even disciplines (Rašković and Takacs Haynes, 2021). Such meta-theories can catalyze not only interdisciplinary research in terms of concepts, theories, and methods but also foster true transdisciplinarity by involving various stakeholders beyond academia, including practitioners and policymakers, to develop integrated solutions to complex social problems (Klein, 2004). These problems, often labeled as *grand challenges* (Buckley *et al.*, 2017) or *wicked problems* (Rašković, 2022, 2024a, 2024b), require global partnership, which also happens to be one of the UN SDGs. Among such theories, we believe Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Abrams and Hogg, 1990) and Socio-Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986, 2001, 2018) can be particularly powerful.

In response to Aguinis and Gabriel's (2023) 'provocation' on whether IB's uniqueness is solely based on complexity, Beugelsdijk (2022) has nicely articulated the evolving nature of the IB discipline's distinctiveness. According to him, IB's uniqueness as an emerging discipline in the 1960s was initially rooted in its focus on the MNE as its primary research object, particularly in overcoming distance. However, this uniqueness has since evolved considerably. At the core of Beugelsdijk's (2022) argument is the concept of a place-space-organization nexus, through which IB offers a broader understanding of firms in space (*cf.* Casson, 1987). For example, Beugelsdijk views non-IB activities/operations as merely "particular cases" of firms and/or business contexts (2022, p. 2051).

At first glance, Beugelsdijk's arguments may seem unrelated to DEI. However, by viewing distance as a form of diversity (Lumineau *et al.*, 2021; Doh, 2021), his perspective opens the door to the role DEI onto-epistemology can play in the ongoing debate between universality and context specificity across management and organization theory. According to Beugelsdijk, "recognizing diversity in business systems means that IB scholars do not assume there is a one-size-fits-all way to organize and manage a firm" (2022, p. 2056).

Somewhat surprisingly, the concept of *otherness* and the act of *othering* emerge as fundamental ideas in Beugelsdijk's (2022) defense of the IB discipline, since they implicitly connect with *foreignness* and the liability of foreignness as key concepts in IB research (Lu *et al.*, 2022). Linking place with space, Beugelsdijk uses a *here* and *there* logic of places to derive the concept of othering, which he describes as "qualitative disjunctures that shape contextual changes and identity formations across space" (Beugelsdijk, 2022, p. 2056). We believe this also highlights the relevance of social identity and socio-cognitive theories for IB research, even for those less concerned with the growing challenges posed to MNEs by identity politics (Vaara *et al.*, 2021; Rašković, 2021). According to Beugelsdijk, the "concept of being (or perceived to be) different is fundamental to IB research" (2022, p. 2057). While he applies this principle primarily to firms addressing cross-national differences, the logic can also be extended to a range of traditional DEI issues across various levels of analysis (Newburry *et al.*, 2022) and phenomena of interest (Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2023).

#### 4. THE SIX PAPERS IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

Before proceeding with our critical discussion of six specific DEI blind spots in the next section, we first briefly summarize the six papers in this special issue, each of which is connected to at least one of the blind spots we discuss later on.

As the first paper in the special issue, Vangeli's (2024) conceptual paper on transcending DEI contradictions through a Bourdieusian path to social justice is a theoretical gem, offering the kind of critical scholarship rarely found in mainstream IB journals. Leveraging his unique position as an outsider-insider within the European IB community, Vangeli delivers a sharp critique of DEI scholarship in the IB field as a kind of diluted IB-DEI version. For him, much of IB-DEI research is "an illusory triumph due to the blunting of the original SJ-DEI [i.e., social justice-DEI] discourse, preventing the full realization of its normative logic and its radically interventionist purpose (i.e., to remedy deep structural social inequalities, and address their root causes)" (Vangeli, 2024, p. 11).

Drawing from the rich theoretical arsenal of Pierre Bourdieu, one of the leading sociologists of the 20th century who focused on the critical inquiry into power and the reproduction of social inequalities (Rego and Steger, 2019), Vangeli offers a paper filled with theoretical insights that will be valuable not only to DEI researchers but also to IB scholars more broadly. In terms of key takeaways for IB-DEI research, Vangeli demonstrates how IB scholars can apply core Bourdieusian concepts such as *habitus* (i.e., a system of internalized social dispositions guiding action; Lardinois, 2002), *fields* (i.e., structured social spaces centered on specific theoretical or practical issues; Lardinois, 2002), and *cultural/symbolic capital* (i.e., types of social resources acquired or inherited by actors; Lardinois, 2002) to enrich IB-DEI research with a truly actionable social justice ethos.

The second paper by Primecz and Mahadevan (2024) offers a valuable conceptual interrogation of the complexity of diversity, helping us understand it beyond mere variety (Harrison and Klein, 2007). Their paper emphasizes the role of cross-cultural realities in IB and its implications for transcending diversity as a set of 'boxed' categories. Given that cross-cultural management in IB involves navigating differences and understanding multiculturalism (Vora *et al.*, 2019), Primecz and Mahadevan believe that, rather than viewing these differences as problems or challenges, they should be approached through an intersectional lens. According to Primecz and Mahadevan (2024, p. 3): "Intersectionality highlights how multiple factors intersect in shaping complex DEI realities and perceptions." This perspective underscores the role intersectionality plays in structuring people's lived experiences and the power relations that underline them, both socially and politically (Walby *et al.*, 2012). Primecz and Mahadevan (2024) question how should contextual differences be applied when examining DEI in the MNE context and also discuss the risks in IB research and practice when DEI issues are not examined dynamically.

The third paper is a thought-provoking viewpoint by two senior Indigenous female management scholars from New Zealand and Australia. Henry and Leroy-Dyer (2024) begin by recounting deeply personal experiences of discrimination and oppression throughout their academic journeys. As guest editors of this special issue, we naively posed the following question to them: Can/should issues surrounding the oppression of Indigenous peoples and attempts to decolonize academia be addressed under the umbrella of DEI, or do they need to be treated separately? However, rather than providing a definitive answer to our naive question, Henry and Leroy-Dyer (2024) use their viewpoint to highlight the concept of *de-othering* as a cornerstone in addressing social justice issues, including DEI research. In their conclusion, Henry and Leroy-Dyer present two compelling calls to action that, while valuable for DEI research, can also be applied more broadly to other areas of IB and management scholarship: (1) the need to affirm the *other* through scholarship and research that embodies respect, transparency, and inclusivity, and (2) our moral imperative as critical scholars to develop

“counter-hegemonies to empower the diverse, the minorities, the victims of discrimination; to fully support the de-othering and decolonization agendas” (Henry and Leroy-Dyer, 2024, p. 9).

Complementing the work of Henry and Leroy-Dyer, the fourth paper, which is also a second viewpoint, by Ofe-Grant and colleagues (2024), highlights the significant opportunity for the IB field to be more inclusive of the diverse contexts it explores and the methods it employs. This shift would not only improve the understanding of different cultures but also embrace various ontologies (Teariki and Leau, 2024). Drawing on their rich research experiences in the South Pacific and using culturally appropriate research practices, the authors encourage IB scholars to move away from colonized epistememes that distort existing ideologies and to adopt research practices that are often classed as Indigenous. While their work provides valuable insights into one of the least researched and poorly understood regions with growing relevance for IB (Rose *et al.*, 2021), perhaps the most important takeaway is their strong case for *positionality* in co-creating inclusive research. According to the authors, more inclusive research must begin by positioning the researcher’s worldview, acknowledging its impact on the approach to the subject matter and the interactions with research participants – something IB scholars should in particular be mindful of given the nature of our research spanning place, space and time.

The final two papers by Faroque and colleagues (2024) and Sasikala and colleagues (2024), adopt a more traditional IB-DEI approach. Faroque and colleagues (2024) examine the role of multinational buyers in ensuring worker voices are heard along global value chains (GVCs) and in MNEs as global factories. Their qualitative study on the Bangladeshi export-oriented garment industry begins with the premise that social dialogue – enabled by proper representation of workers’ voices and supported by lead multinational buyers holding MNEs accountable – is a valuable tool for promoting industrial democracy (Reinecke and Donaghey, 2021), which is often systematically hindered in emerging markets (Hayter and Lee, 2018). While Faroque and colleagues emphasize the alignment of their research with the UN SDGs, they do not view the barriers to social dialogue as deliberate structural obstacles aimed at reproducing inequalities between capital and labor that MNEs and governments exploit (Stringer and Michailova, 2018; Burmester *et al.*, 2019). Instead, their approach combines institutional isomorphism and institutional catch-up logics applied to emerging markets.

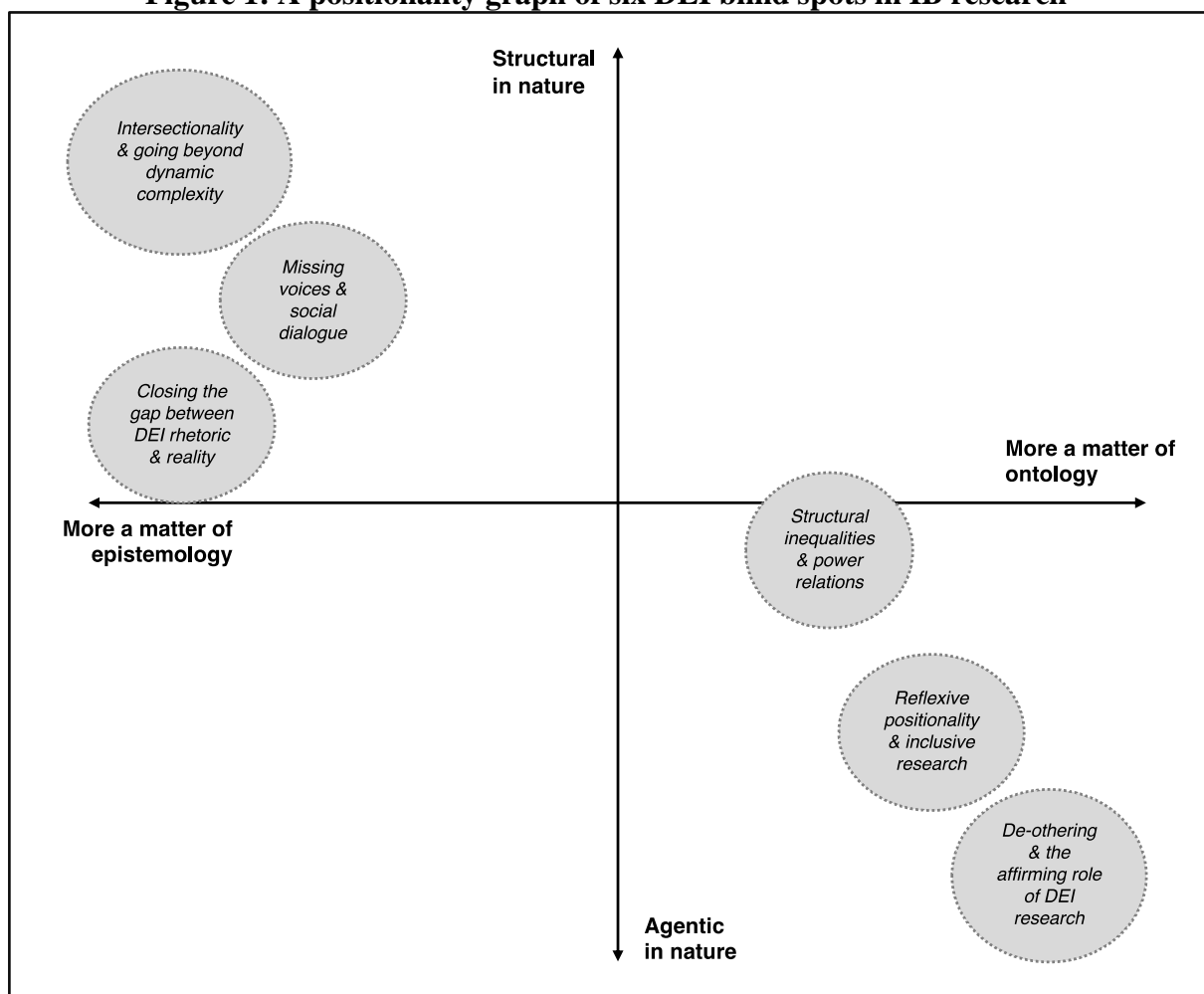
The paper by Sasikala and colleagues (2024) on DEI in dual-listed mining MNEs critically examines how MNEs operating in multiple contexts engage with the ‘others’ in the pursuit of their DEI narratives, outcomes, and corresponding societal changes. Traditionally male-dominated and extractive, the mining industry offers a useful empirical setting to explore power dynamics and interrogate DEI. By applying topic modeling to seven years of Rio Tinto’s DEI efforts and Anglo-American data, the authors systematically investigate the gap between MNEs’ DEI rhetoric and reality, akin to the attitude-behavior gap in psychology. They posit that MNEs should assume a more defined role as political actors driving transnational social change by aligning their DEI rhetoric with actual DEI practices. The key takeaway from this empirical study is that the divergence between MNEs’ DEI rhetoric and reality reinforces social identity disparities, while convergence can help reduce the stigma experienced by historically marginalized groups.

Having synthesized and briefly summarized the six papers in this special issue, we now turn to our own critical discussion of six specific DEI blind spots, followed by recommendations on how to address them and suggestions for future research.

## 5. A CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF SIX BLIND SPOTS IN DEI IB RESEARCH

Figure 1 provides an overview of six DEI blind spots in IB research, identified through our own research experience, the synthesis of seminal works in DEI (e.g., Köllen, 2021; Van Bommel *et al.*, 2023) and IB-DEI research (e.g., Newburry *et al.*, 2022; Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2023) and connected to the six paper in our special issue. Rather than using a simple Venn diagram, we opted for a two-dimensional positionality graph. The horizontal axis captures the epistemology-ontology continuum, reflecting whether a DEI issue is more epistemological or ontological in nature. The vertical axis relates to the underlying social structuration logic behind social phenomena (see Giddens, 1984), distinguishing whether a DEI issue is driven more by existing social structures/of a structural nature or whether it is more determined by/involves actor agency. As shown in the positionality diagram, all six DEI blind spots align along a clear diagonal, with three clustered in the structural-epistemology quadrant and other three in the agency-ontology quadrant.

**Figure 1: A positionality graph of six DEI blind spots in IB research**



Source: The authors' own depiction based on synthesized and critically examined DEI literature.

### 5.1 *Structural inequalities and power dynamics*

The most pervasive DEI blind spot goes beyond the need to move past the business case logic in DEI research (Ely and Thomas, 2020) and highlights the absence of a comprehensive social justice onto-epistemology. For this to occur, DEI research, and IB-DEI research in particular, must first reconcile the internal ontological contradictions between a radical social justice

perspective embedded in activism and IB's existing doxa. As a field, IB is highly hegemonic in nature; despite the recent popularity of non-market strategy research (Sun *et al.*, 2021; Shirodkar *et al.*, 2024), calls for decolonization (Westwood and Jack, 2007; Boussebaa, 2023), and the growing popularity of DEI research within IB (Newburry *et al.*, 2022; Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2023), these efforts still remain largely on the IB periphery.

IB's use of stakeholder theory exemplifies the risks of simply integrating equitable stakeholder management principles into DEI research or applying a moral add-on to DEI issues in IB or elsewhere. Including more diverse stakeholder groups does little to address the wicked nature of a growing number of IB issues (e.g., Rašković, 2022; 2024b) if we fail to problematize the power dynamics between social groups and systematically address the structural barriers they face. Untangling structural barriers, however, requires scholarship-as-activism activism (in a true Bourdieusian sense) and "some form of positive discrimination of underprivileged and disenfranchised groups" (Vangeli, 2024, p. 7).

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (i.e., a system of internalized social dispositions guiding action; Lardinois, 2002) and the underexplored concept of *social class* within IB literature (Aguinis and Gabriel, 2023) can help us theoretically analyze the agentic properties of actors involved in addressing structural inequality. Probing into social class within a DEI context can leverage the theoretical power of habitus and enhance IB-DEI research also through the incorporation of intersectionality, which is as much a structural issue as it is an agentic process. It can provide a dynamic understanding of context, as highlighted by Fitzsimmons and colleagues (2023), for example, through the examination of class struggle of specific actors.

Furthermore, a social justice approach to IB-DEI research can offer also emancipatory potential, potentially freeing the IB discipline from its overreliance on social identity facets and identity politics (Rašković, 2021). This is likely to become even more relevant as the politicization of IB grows (Beugelsdijk and Luo, 2024) and as social identities increasingly shape MNEs and their interactions (Vaara *et al.*, 2021; Rašković and Takacs Haynes, 2021).

## **5.2 Beyond a dynamic complexity understanding of intersectionality**

Given the dynamic nature of DEI issues (Nkomo *et al.*, 2019), DEI categories – such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, age, and other social factors – cannot be viewed in isolation (Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2023; Köllen, 2021). In fact, these categories form a significant part of one's *habitus*, which individuals inhabit and enact daily. In turn, the habitus shapes their agentic behavior by either constraining or enabling certain actions and interactions. Even within the diluted space of IB-DEI research, intersectionality should not be seen merely as the interaction of various social components, where the only type of uncertainty might be the specific outcomes from those interacting social categories. Instead, it must be understood as time- and context-dependent, shaping the interplay of place, space, and time. This approach points to a dynamic and highly contextualized system (Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2023), characterized by continuously evolving equilibria typical of non-ergodic settings with radical uncertainty and quantum-type changes (Rašković, 2022).

Intersectionality also helps explain the struggle and agency of those who are marginalized, oppressed, excluded, or stigmatized as they seek to legitimize themselves in the eyes of various judging publics through a legitimacy-as-perception perspective (Suddaby *et al.*, 2017), which resonates clearly also with a social justice perspective on DEI. Such an understanding establishes intersectionality as a cornerstone of critical sociology (Hill Collins, 2019). Through this enriched and multifaceted lens, intersectionality can easily be integrated into what Eden and Nielsen (2020) refer to as the 4 Ds of IB research: *difference*, *distance*, *diversity*, and *disparity*; all of which are highly relevant for DEI research.

### **5.3 De-othering as the starting point for a socially just DEI research**

Repeated calls from the IB-DEI researchers (e.g., Newburry *et al.*, 2022; Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2023) have advocated for the inclusion of Indigenous voices in existing DEI discourses, as if doing so could alleviate the “triple predicament” of IB-DEI research (Vangeli, 2024, p. 2) – which relates to limited social impact, a challenged legitimacy and ideological pushback. These calls have undoubtedly been influenced by the growing debate in management on decolonizing Western-centric management knowledge (Banarjee, 2022; Munzio, 2022) and attempts within IB to reconcile its hegemonic disciplinary onto-epistemology and history (Westwood and Jack, 2007; Boussebaa, 2023; Zagelmeyer, 2023).

The act of *othering* is a common denominator behind all forms of exclusion, discrimination, and oppression, while also playing a role in Beugelsdijk’s place-space-organization nexus. To Beugelsdijk (2022), the distinction between *here* and *there* across space inevitably produces *othering* (2022), which was institutionalized and weaponized through colonization for devastating purposes (Karelse, 2023). Othering can also turn research into epistemological violence – whether personal or structural (Teo, 2010) – a topic we address in the next DEI blind spot.

As Fitzsimmons and colleagues noted, “IB research tends to emphasize the fundamental ways diversity operates, regardless of its source,” whereas DEI research elsewhere relies on stronger theorizing and distinguishes between “diversity as variation, separation, or disparity” (2023, p. 1414; *cf.* Harrison and Klein, 2007). This more nuanced understanding of diversity seems better equipped to address the hegemonic history of colonization and IB’s role in it (Zagelmeyer, 2023). However, addressing Indigenous issues and decolonizing academia cannot be achieved merely through opening up DEI research to Indigenous voices, as they will not in all likelihood be willing to come. For that to happen, IB-DEI needs to first confront the ontological contradictions between a social justice perspective on DEI and its own hegemonic identity and colonial origins.

To us, as non-Indigenous IB scholars, the calls to include Indigenous voices in IB and IB-DEI research appear to be yet another well-intended business case to enhance the field’s relevance, social impact, and theoretical predictive power. Such calls must be made with consideration of possible unintended consequences and should involve not just critical reflexivity but also historically humility and willingness to re-affirm the ‘other’. IB scholars seeking to explore de-colonization and Indigenous oppression must first recognize that MNEs are not only actors with colonial histories (Robins, 2012) but continue to operate under neocolonial principles even today (Storgaard *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, they also need to develop expertise in critical race theory and the literatures on racism and discrimination, rather than simply borrowing from postcolonial studies and structural inequality lexicons. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, IB researchers should focus on re-affirming Indigenous voices and not simply speaking on behalf or for Indigenous stakeholders. Some stories are simply not ours to tell, as non-Indigenous scholars, regardless of how passionately we might feel about them.

### **5.4 Reflexive positionality: a starting point for any kind of inclusive research**

The ongoing debate on methodological rigor in IB (e.g., Aguinis *et al.*, 2017, 2020) can easily reduce fundamental moral questions in academic research to bite-sized, actionable recommendations on ‘ethical’ and ‘responsible’ research practices (Eden and Nielsen, 2020). While well-intended, such recommendations do not eliminate the risk of IB research becoming a potential vehicle for epistemic or epistemological violence (Teo, 2010; Held, 2020) – through harm often inflicted on non-Western societies and their knowledge systems (Muzio, 2022). This is particularly true for Indigenous peoples worldwide (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021), including those in the Pacific, where research has frequently been conducted *on*, rather than *with* and *for* Pacific communities (Enari *et al.*, 2024).

Co-creating inclusive research practices begins with openness to the other, compelling researchers to think beyond positivism and adopt alternative ontologies (Sinkovics *et al.*, 2009) that challenge Western onto-epistemologies (Banarjee, 2022) and enrich existing theories (Munzio, 2022). However, for that to happen, IB researchers must first learn how to decolonize their methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021), followed by integrating appropriate Indigenous research practices (e.g., Ponton, 2018). Although this inclusion is crucial, one must also consider the potential discriminatory effects it may inadvertently create (Dobusch, 2014), which we have discussed under the first blind spot and the role of addressing barriers to structural inequalities.

### ***5.5 The voices of the exploited and the role of social dialogue***

One cannot engage in social dialogue without having a voice, which is the best proxy for agency. The concept of *voice* plays a crucial role in challenging systems of power and oppression that reproduce inequality and lead to so-called spirals of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). These spirals, linked to exclusion, discrimination, and oppression, occur in IB contexts not only within organizations but also across entire GVCs.

However, in the field of GVC research, social justice is rarely considered (Caspersz *et al.*, 2022), and even less so beyond socially sustainable supply chain management practices (Stephen *et al.*, 2024). The notable exception might be the small but expanding literature on modern slavery within GVCs (e.g., Stringer and Michailova, 2018; Burmester *et al.*, 2019; Dindial and Voss, 2024; Rašković, 2024a, 2024b).

While MNEs remain the lead actors within increasingly opaque GVCs (Kano *et al.*, 2020), they may have limited control over what happens across the GVC (Dindial and Voss, 2024). However, this does not absolve them of their moral responsibilities as lead actors in GVCs and orchestrators of global factory business models (Rašković, 2024b). From a DEI perspective, research on GVCs, which include the silenced, the marginalized, and the exploited, helps us understand not only the role MNEs play as governors of multi-level global governance nexuses (Burmester *et al.*, 2019) but also how they can address the wicked issues thriving in GVCs (Rašković, 2024a, 2024b). It is high time DEI research focuses not just on the MNEs, but cuts across GVCs and global factory networks.

Such research can provide opportunities to explore the systematic reproduction of structural inequalities and to examine them from an intersectional perspective (Arun and Olsen, 2023), contributing to their resolution through social dialogue. Imbuing socially just DEI research principles into GVC research can help advance our understand of a variety of so-called nexus challenges linked to exploitation, which are often wicked in their nature (van Tulder and van Mil, 2023).

### ***5.6 Closing the gap between DEI rhetoric and reality***

Traditional industries, organizational and even social settings, which mirror existing institutional structures and hierarchies, the social cognition of dominant groups, and established norms, provide fertile ground for exploring DEI not only from an institutional or socio-cognitive theory perspective (e.g., Rašković *et al.*, 2024) but also for examining the tensions between business norms and DEI principles across industries as specific *fields* (in Bourdieusian terminology) and communities of practice.

One example is the global mining industry, marred by histories of segregation (e.g., in Australia and South Africa). Sasikala and colleagues (2024) have critically interrogated the influence of structural inequalities and their sustained impact on social change, extending the critical performative literature on DEI to recognize a systemic lens (whether related to race, gender, or ethnicity) necessary to navigate DEI, the global mining industry, and the socio-political realities of various stakeholders. The extractive nature of the mining industry further

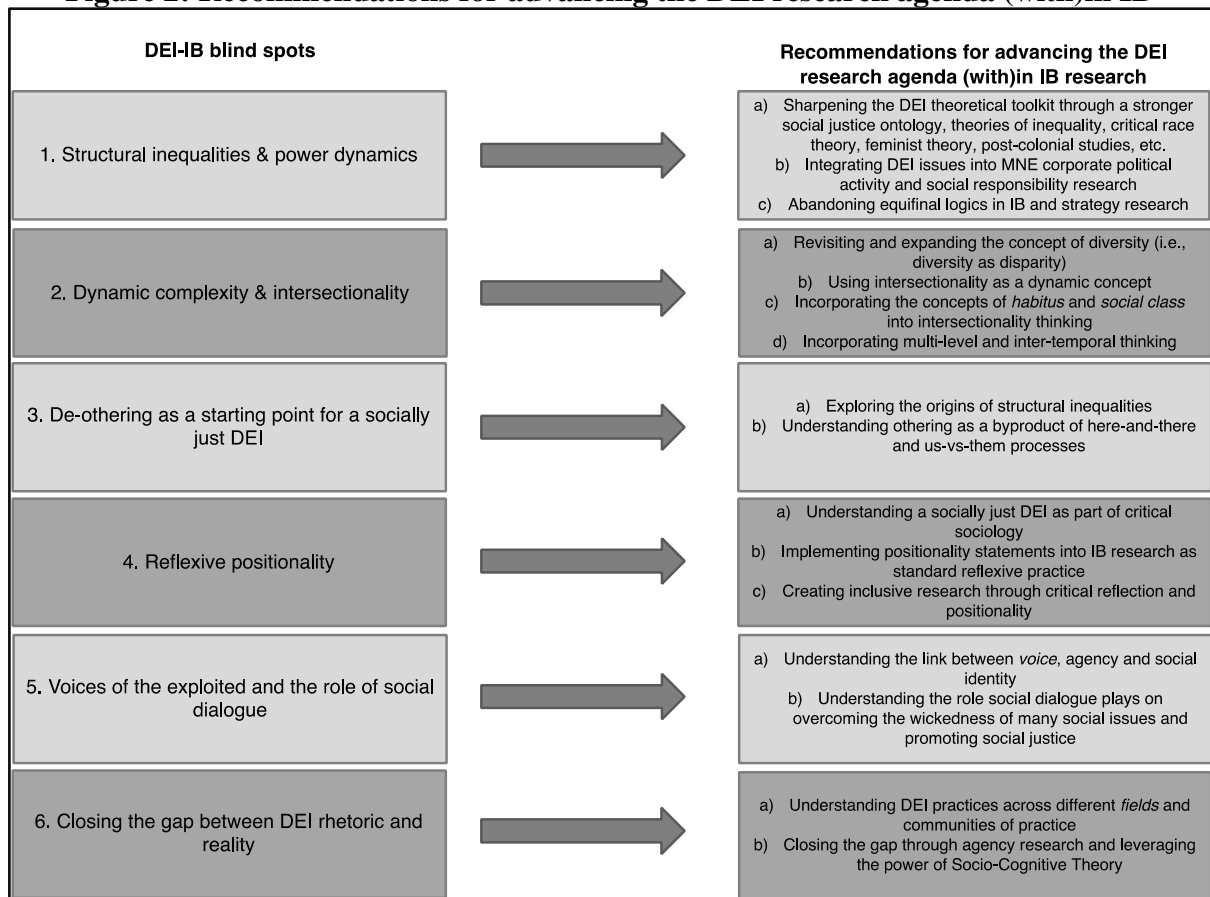
deepens racial, economic, and social divides, again confirming the hegemonic nature of many cross-border business activities. Closing the gap between DEI rhetoric, which often serves various commercial purposes, and reality goes beyond addressing attitude-behavior gaps, political correctness, or a culture of being woke. It often requires considering political histories, colonial legacies, and the social psychologies associated with DEI discourse and practice.

by exploring the triadic co-determination of human behavior through the environment, social cognition, and normative behaviors (Bandura, 1986), Socio-Cognitive Theory offers a powerful toolkit for addressing such issues, where IB research can meaningfully inform DEI research and help better understand some of the tensions and contradictions associated with DEI issues which arise from a duality of business and social justice logics across fields and communities of practice.

## 6. SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING THE DEI RESEARCH AGENDA (WITH)IN IB RESEARCH

Figure 2 provides a visual summary of our key recommendations for advancing the DEI research agenda within IB. It is informed by both our critical examination of DEI blind spots and the recommendations from the six papers that make up this special issue.

**Figure 2: Recommendations for advancing the DEI research agenda (with)in IB**



Source: The authors' own work.

Our primary recommendation for future DEI research (with)in IB research is to sharpen its theoretical toolkit. Simply balancing the DEI business case (Ely and Thomas, 2020) with a social justice perspective will not produce the desired results if we cannot transcend the inherent contradictions and tensions between business and social justice ontologies (Vangeli, 2024). One way for IB scholars to address this issue is by focusing on the sources and

mechanisms of structural inequalities across all levels of society, where MNEs can act as powerful agents for social change (Vaara *et al.*, 2021; Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2023). They do so through values-based non-market strategies, with a dual focus on corporate political activities and strategic corporate social responsibility (Shirodkar *et al.*, 2024). Thus, our advice would be to better link DEI perspectives with the MNEs' corporate political activities and their social responsibility activities.

MNEs are not only important economic engines and political actors but also organizational spaces where social identities are enacted and reproduced (Rašković, 2021). IB scholars should problematize the view of IB as a “multipeak landscape characterized by equifinality” (Beugelsdijk, 2022, p. 2056). This flexible, positivist approach, derived from strategy literature, is at odds with other areas of social sciences and humanities. In a world marked by structural inequalities, equifinality represents a structural privilege of the dominant few, not the many.

This brings us to our second recommendation. Before incorporating theories and concepts from other disciplines – such as theories of inequality, critical race theory, critical gender studies, feminist theory, or postcolonial studies – to sharpen our theoretical toolkits, a good starting point would be to first revisit the concept of diversity itself. Traditionally, diversity in the IB field has been understood as variety, something to be managed as a double-edged sword (Carter and Phillips, 2017). It later came to be viewed as a form of distance (Lumineau *et al.*, 2021; Doh, 2021). While distance frames diversity as separation, other interpretations, such as *disparity* (Harrison and Klein, 2007), are not only useful but also required. For example, understanding diversity as separation helps us better grasp the levels of othering incorporated in social class struggles and divides, which support exclusion, oppression, and discrimination. In this regard, it is encouraging to see that IB scholars are beginning to move beyond concepts like liability of foreignness and liability of outsiders, recognizing that the ‘other’ is a byproduct of here-and-there (Beugelsdijk, 2022) or us-vs-them logics (Rašković and Takacs Haynes, 2021), which reflect implicit hegemonic thinking.

As part of this process, encouraging greater critical reflexivity and incorporating positionality in our research is an important step for IB scholars to acknowledge our own privileges, thereby becoming open to recognizing the otherness that may be embedded in some of our research paradigms and assumptions. We also need to strike a better balance between reflexive and autoethnographic studies and more traditional cross-sectional empirical papers, which will allow scholars to reflect on the development of their own research practices and communities (see Dyer *et al.*, 2024). Although uncomfortable for many, such research practices help normalize the use of critical reflexivity, which is essential for ensuring socially just DEI research.

Beyond developing a richer and more nuanced understanding of diversity, IB-DEI research must also examine where structural inequalities originate, how they are produced and become reproduced through socially structured processes. This can be done by exploring triadic co-determination mechanisms between the environment (i.e., various types of institutions), social cognition (i.e., values, beliefs, and schemas), and normative behaviors, which together drive human agency (Bandura, 2018). Investigating the origins of institutionalized structural inequalities requires both historical methods and a deep understanding of the social nature of institutions (Jupille and Corporaso, 2022). Unfortunately, institutional theory in IB tends to focus more on change and structuration processes, with less attention paid to the origins of institutions (Powell *et al.*, 2012).

Bandura's Socio-Cognitive Theory (1986) and Giddens' (1984) Social Structuration Theory (as the ultimate rejection of positivism; see Turner, 1986) are useful starting points, particularly since they have already been applied in IB contexts to explore the non-market side of IB strategy related to corruption (Takacs Haynes and Rašković, 2021) and populism

(Rašković *et al.*, 2024). A deeper understanding of the different sources of stigma and the mechanisms of stigmatization across societal levels can further enhance our theoretical understanding of exclusion, oppression, and discrimination (see Zhang *et al.*, 2021; Aranda *et al.*, 2023). It can also explain the agency processes playing a part in social identification (see Shteynberg *et al.*, 2022).

While we recognize the importance of contributing critically to the IB DEI research field, there is also a need to translate these insights into IB practice and the day-to-day activities of MNEs as a force for good (Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2023). This issue offers important considerations for MNEs on how to positively address inequalities and discrimination in the contexts in which they operate (see Sasikala *et al.*, 2024).

Calling for a better understanding of intersectionality has become a staple in the discussion and future research sections of DEI research agendas – both within and beyond the IB field. According to Fitzsimmons and colleagues (2023), intersectionality offers the potential for a more dynamic understanding of social context, which could enrich the IB field beyond the realm of DEI. After all, context is central to IB research (Michailova, 2011). Our recommendation regarding intersectionality is to adopt a two-pronged approach, giving equal attention to intersectionality as both theory and methodology (Rice *et al.*, 2019). Theoretically, IB scholars should focus more on social class (Aguinis and Gabriel, 2023) and its connection to structural inequalities. Vangeli (2024) has demonstrated the power of incorporating Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, which explains the world that social actors inhabit and how it shapes their perceptions and responses. However, intersectionality goes beyond capturing the interactions between social categories like gender, race, class, and sexual orientation; it must also account for the influences of colonialism, neoliberalism, and geopolitics (Rice *et al.*, 2019). From a methodological perspective, we recommend looking to the health sciences, which are at the forefront of methodological advances in conducting multi-level quantitative and mixed-methods studies capable of capturing intersectionality.

Our final recommendation is to systematically implement critical reflexivity as a research practice (Guttormsen and Moore, 2023; Cunliffe, 2003) in IB-DEI research. Addressing systemic inequalities and engaging with 'the other' requires the practice of critical reflexivity (Wacquant, 1989), which begins with the researcher's own reflexivity (Berger, 2015). While positionality statements are a necessary, though insufficient, step toward critical reflexivity (Guttormsen and Moore, 2023) and come with certain challenges (Savolainen *et al.*, 2023), we strongly believe they are the essential first step (Hibbert, 2021) needed to explore and understand structural inequalities (Vangeli, 2024). Including positionality statements in DEI research not only promotes more ethical and socially responsible scholarship (Eden and Nielsen, 2020) but also fosters the potential to co-create more inclusive and meaningful research.

## 7. CONCLUSION

We hope that the first part of this two-part special issue on DEI has lived up to the critical nature for which *Critical Studies in International Business* are known. In addressing what Vangeli has so poetically termed the "triple predicament" of IB DEI research (2024, p. 2), the six papers in this issue, along with our critical discussion and recommendations for future research serve as a kind of *whetstone* to sharpen IB's DEI research tools and in turn for IB to help sharpen DEI research's tools, helping it become more socially just. The interplay between the two will hopefully also contribute positively to more disruptive IB knowledge (Tung *et al.*, 2023), not only for a *better* world (Tung, 2023) but also for a more *just* one. Lastly, we would like to thank also all the contributing authors to the special issue, the reviewers, mentors in the initial paper development workshops, and to the critical reader who will pick up or scene-setting viewpoint and will (hopefully) follow our recommendations or challenge our thinking.

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