RETRACTED Postcolonial interventions and disruptions: Contesting cultural practices

Abstract
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Postcolonial interventions and disruptions: Contesting cultural practices

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Abstract
Postcolonial theory, with its interpretations of race, racialization, and culture, offers us a set of powerful analytic tools to meet the epistemological challenge of giving voice to subjugated knowledges and the capacity to address and uncover social relationships within organizations. In particular, it opens up new ways of framing issues within organizational practices, enabling us to imagine new possibilities and practices. This paper suggests that the integration of postcolonial perspectives into cross-cultural management and its theorizing enhances and enriches its discursive import. The paper also attempts to sketch out a methodology to ground the intricate relationship between culture, practice, and organizations.

Keywords
culture, inequity, methodology, postcolonial, race, research

Organizational, business and management scholarship and research has shifted considerably over the past few decades. There was much debate surrounding the comparative value and rigor of different methodological approaches and their ensuing paradigms. Thomas Kuhn (1970) for example showed that scientific research and claims reflect deep theoretical (and often unstated) commitments of the worldview of which the scientist may be unaware and which occasionally becomes the subject of debate. In his view, we are constrained by the prevailing paradigm which, however, sometimes changes in important ways and consequently affects our perceptions, views, and practices. This ‘paradigm war’ has permeated much of social science practice and is indeed discernible in organizational research (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Of late, management and organizational research encounter a new breed of critical and emancipatory
scholarship derived from critical traditions such as feminism, Marxism, critical theory, postmodernism/poststructuralism, cultural studies, queer studies, and postcolonialism.

The current move toward critical inquiry has been influenced by a call for an infusion of ‘new’ and subjugated knowledges into management scholarship (Boje et al., 1996). In part, this is driven by the business imperative of operating, working, negotiating, and managing internationally diverse environments in a globalized economy (Adler, 1997; Mead, 1994). At the same time, there is a growing assertiveness amongst practitioners in ‘developing’ economies, e.g. from Asia, rendering the dominance and supremacy of ‘western’ science and practices problematic. Conventional and mainstream research (cf. the work of Hofstede, amongst others) has pointed out that many of the concepts derived and applied in business and management research privileges a homogeneous ‘individualistic’ ‘West’ counterposed with a homogeneous ‘collective’ Asia, and yet as we drilled down to what constitutes ‘Asia’ and the ‘West’, we find that there are many distinct graded differences. Stuart Hall (1992) makes the point that the ‘West’ is an idea or concept, a language for imaging a set of complex stories, ideas, historical events, and social relationships. It functions in ways which (1) allow ‘us’ to characterize and classify societies into categories, (2) condense complex images of other societies through a system of representation, (3) provide a standard model of comparison, and (4) provide criteria of evaluation against which other societies can be ranked. These procedures become coded into systems of knowledge, classification, and representation, enabling different traditions to be retrieved or reformulated in different contexts as discourses, and are then played out in systems of power and domination (Bernstein, 1971). Its representation, of course, can be clearly seen in the work of Said’s Orientalism which has challenged mainstream orthodox understanding of literature, representations, truth, power and knowledge. Postcolonial scholars have sought to expand on these different vectors and map out some of the (mis)representations of the colonial and neocolonial world. Through its emphasis as an interrogative device and as a reflexive mirror, postcolonialism allows us access into the shifting and inconsistent operations of intersecting oppressions and marginalization. Although postcolonial discourses are still marginal but growing considerations within management research (Frenkel and Shenhav, 2006; Khan et al., 2007; Prasad, 2003; Westwood and Jack, 2007), there is a growing recognition that postcolonial perspectives can provide valuable insights in revealing some of the ‘missing’ ingredients that underlie management disciplines and practices. For example, the clearing of tropical rainforests to ensure supply of beef and other cash crops for the world food market can be read as another ‘invasion of the third world’ in a postcolonial frame. It necessitates a reconsideration of local indigenous cultural and social practices and their dislocations within a global economic and political system. At the most basic level, a postcolonial perspective would mean that metropole and postcolony are examined in the same ‘analytic frame’. But we would go beyond a recommendation of analytic symmetry and inclusion, and seek to understand the ways in which ‘management science’ and reason are implicated in the postcolonial provincializing of ‘universal’ reason, the description of ‘alternative modernities’, and the recognition of hybridities, borderlands, and in-between conditions. We would, moreover, argue that the study of management and science has much to offer a postcolonial critique that has hitherto concentrated on literary representations, a ‘textualism’ that often has the effect of erasing the materiality and specificity of neocolonial encounters. Postcolonialism, as many have argued, maintains that continuity of uneven power relations between the colonized and the colonizer remains.

Benedict Anderson (1991) claims that nations are ‘imagined’ as people within a ‘nation’ are convinced of the comradeship of unknown fellow national compatriots, believing these relationships to be equal and free of exploitation. This imagination fuses disparate elements into an
imagined totality, the nation. In management and business practice, we too are inflicted with this imagination. In the popular press, we are enthralled by the market and its rendition of globalization. We are told ‘the world is flat’, although of late many have recanted and now recognize that this is not necessary so. However, in international business and management literature, the flat earth theory still applies and remains dominant, as I have noted. In this paper, I seek to (re)cover and recuperate some of subjugated and submerged knowledges via a postcolonial lens. I seek to show how management and organizational research remains wedded to a provincial view, a Euro-American tradition which continues to privilege their ‘particular’ voices and traditions, often ignoring inequality and exploitation within the scholarly community. This ‘forgetting’ and the imagined scholarly community it creates and maintains continue to reify, legitimate, and legitimize a particular form of rationality, and in practice, lead to further subordination and colonization of other and alternative forms of understanding and practices within the area of international management and business practices. Can alternative voices be heard, be recovered, and how can they be engendered?

In this paper, I seek to examine and explore alternative ways, voices, and rationalities. In so doing, I seek to go beyond Bakhtin’s (1981) language-based heteroglossia to rearticulate it as a site of struggle for the legitimacy of working from different cultures, disciplines, and worldviews and its attendant effects on organizations and management. The result is an exploration of postcolonial forms of organization as well as its culture. This has profound implications on cultural practices within organization and management discourses and practices and within the discipline of cross-cultural management, it challenges and extends basic and taken-for-granted axiomatic beliefs. As such, the paper begins with an overview of cross-cultural management before moving to examine the theoretical and epistemological foundations of postcolonialism. The paper then seeks to translate this framework into a methodology which would impact significantly on a critical cross-cultural management research and practice.

Cross-Cultural management: Searching for cultural literacy

As the economy becomes increasingly globalized, firms seek to strategically adapt and enhance their competitive advantage in various locales. A new battery of skills, including fleet-footed, literate, adaptable, sensitive employees responsive to global trends and cultures, is called for. Given this premise, the quest for cultural literacies and competencies become important business strategies to manage cultural chaos and complexities. In positing culture as a key and central component in the toolkit of successful international managers, businesses naturally assumes that culture is just another set of competencies that can be acquired, and as such, becomes no more than the instrumental means to an end. Indeed, this instrumental/technical and practical telos is the imperative guiding training and international management/business courses at universities and via private providers. There is the unassailable belief that there are somehow simple, formulaic, and duplicable responses which will enable us to master and manage cross-cultural relationships and effect desirable outcomes. This ‘training’ typically focused on skills learnt from an ‘anthropology of manners’ catalogue – of determining and somehow being able to understand this set of cultural characteristics (Hall, 1955; Morrison et al., 1994) – which then enables managers to negotiate their way out of ‘cultural’ predicaments.

Cultural literacy provides us with what Giddens (1984) has called ‘practical consciousness’ – the skills to navigate and manage our everyday lives and business without having to think about it. Culture which has been ‘foreign’ to the logic of the productive system needs to be tamed, managed,
and pressed into the service of business logic. In promoting this discourse, particularly that of diversity management, firms appear to be responsive, willing to act against prejudice, and be progressive agents for change. Yet a change in organizational semantic does not alter definitions constructed historically, nor does it necessarily facilitate socialiability and change within organizations. Coordination, tasks, and performances continue to be central and paramount to organizational success and its logic.

Zygmunt Bauman (2000) perceptively noted that current business organizations meet their objectives by ‘melting’ traditional forms of capitalism through intrinsically maintaining the elements that constitute exclusion and possibly disruption. In the present context, culture is to be managed and prejudices, bias, and histories are suborned to the business project of growth; culture’s more challenging features needs to be contained if not erased historically and politically. As such, cross-cultural management becomes an avenue and a ‘new’ technology to eliminate the ‘cultural’ barriers that obstructed the expansion of capital and the maximization of profits. Therefore to think critically about management and its cross-cultural components, we therefore need to rethink present forms of global (re)structuration. This requires an unpacking and deconstruction of culture and effacing culture as a critique of this new ‘globalization’ thrust.

Postcolonialism: Searching for roots

The spectacular proliferation of postcolonial theory during the past two decades has produced a stimulating and increasingly amount of literature, traversing various disciplines. Starting from its ‘home’ in literary studies, it has traveled and populated history, education, sociology, and now even business and management literature, particularly in international management and international business. This fractious school of cultural criticism is usually found and treated under the rubrics of ‘development administration’, ‘minority and diversity discourse’, and ‘resistance literature’. It was inflected by the domination in the 1980s of the cultural scene by a host of ‘posts’—poststructuralism, postmodernism, post-Marxism.

Definitionally, postcolonialism refers to theoretical and empirical work that centralizes the issues stemming from colonial relations and their aftermath (Cashmore, 1996). Its concern extends to the experiences of people descended from the inhabitants of those territories and their experiences within ‘first-world’ colonial powers (During, 2000). It ‘names a theoretical and political position which embodies an active concept of intervention within such oppressive circumstances. It combines the epistemological cultural innovations of the postcolonial moment with the political critique of the conditions of postcoloniality’ (Young, 2001: 57). Despite this, its coherence and logic has been the subject of much reflection and criticisms. Its exegesis and pedigree manifests a distinct interdisciplinary character. It draws on diverse disciplines (Manlove, 2001), and any attempt to tie the disparate strands of postcolonialism into a single unified entity, paradigm, or ‘thing’ is ‘nigh impossible’ and to do so is to subject it to ‘a form of epistemic violence’ (Dutton et al., 1999: 122).

Why is postcolonialism significant? Although not a unified field, several central themes, race, ethnicity, nation, subjectivity, identity, power, subalterns, and hybridity, can nonetheless be associated with postcolonial theories (Barker, 2000). Overall, the project of postcolonialism centers on theorizing the nature of colonized subjectivity and the various forms of cultural and political resistance, including deconstructing the representations of ‘the Other’ through the concepts of domination and resistance (Bhabha, 1990, 1994; Mudimbe, 1988; Spivak, 1990). The much-cited work of Edward Said (1978), which ushered in the discourse of ‘postcolonialism’, has
been referred to as ‘single-handedly inaugurating a new area of academic inquiry’ (Williams and Chrisman, 1994: 5; see also Spivak, 1990) is one such example. In this work, Said focuses on the ‘variety of textual forms in which the West produced and codified knowledge about non-metropolitan areas and cultures, especially those under colonial control’ (Williams and Chrisman, 1994: 5). Following Said, others have sought to extend his analysis and while postcolonial interventions are clearly discernible and vibrant in discussions in history, humanities, and the social sciences, business and management research appeared to have been largely quarantined from postcolonialism’s challenge. In order to offer further background and for those not familiar with its constructs, several of the central themes of postcolonialism are discussed in the following sections.

Understanding race, racialization, and culture: The sign of the ‘norm’

Considerable theoretical challenges exist inherently in the concepts used to categorize and signify ‘difference’. Race, culture, and ethnicity are frequently used, sometimes interchangeably, to denote ‘difference’ (and often) with little consistency in when any one of these terms is applied. A postcolonial reading of management practices and its theoretical moorings would depart from what has become the common mode of exploring ‘difference’ (i.e. a culturalist focus on culture as a relatively static set of beliefs, values, norms, and practices attached to a discrete group sharing a common ethnic background) by pointing to the politics of race, particularly in sustaining ‘colonizing’ relationships. This of course interpellates our understanding of multinational and transnational firms and implicates us in international management practices as researchers and practitioners. Herein, considerations of power and privilege are inevitable and so are ideas of justice, injustices, and the cartographies of power, jurisdictions, business logics, and practices. Hence Nike and Bhopal become key signifying ‘postcolonial’ moments through which the focus of the ‘other’ becomes dominant and is posed onto the dominant multinational, subjecting the ‘multinational’ to greater surveillance and accountability. It also brings into questions institutional practices, arrangements, and an awareness why certain business and management practices may be privileged across space and time (see Wong, 2008).

Constructions of race are central in postcolonial thought. Originally denoting a biological origin and a focus on physical appearance, race is now understood to be a social construction defining, structuring, and organizing relations between dominant and subordinate groups (Henry et al., 2000). As a constitutive element of our common sense, race is a key component of our taken-for-granted reference schema through which we get on in the world; people continue to be grouped according to what are considered physical racial attributes. Individual psyches and relationships among individuals are shaped by race; collective identities and social structures are racially constituted and race persists as a central aspect of everyday life. Races, however, as argued by some, do not exist outside of representation but are formed in and by it in a process of social and political struggle, i.e. they are made (Barker, 2000; Hall, 1997). This ‘racialization’ as Miles sees it is ‘a process of delineation of group boundaries and of allocation of persons within those boundaries by primary reference to (supposedly) inherent and/or biological (usually phenotypic) characteristics. It is therefore an ideological process’ (Miles, 1989: 74). Racialization, in effect, suggests a social process of delineation and is inherently political. In the European context, ‘race’ is inflected through essentially a ‘minority’ and/or ‘immigrant’ discourse which Spivak sees as a ‘new Orientalist’ discourse (Spivak, 1990: 68).
As with race, the construct of culture carries a range of meanings. It is ‘one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language . . . and has come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought’ (Williams, 1976: 87). Earlier meanings pertaining to the process of tending something, usually crops or animals, or to the idea of civility are still held within the notion of culture (Williams, 1981).

In international management, culture is commonly understood as a template or blueprint for human behavior, grounded in the values, beliefs, norms, and practices of a particular group that are learnt and shared (Hofstede, 1991). In practice, this interpretation most often translates into culture being interpreted as identification with a particular national, ethnic, or religious background and is clearly discernible and demarcated. For Clifford Geertz, culture is not just patterned conduct, a frame of mind which points to some sort of ontological status ‘to which social events, behaviours, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context’ (Geertz, 1973: 14). Geertz suggests that culture cannot be read as a fixed entity or rather one emanating from a set list of attributes but rather it is fluid, amorphous, providing the means through which an understanding of ‘differences’ is framed and developed over time. Culture is thus public, social, relational, and contextual. However, the reductionistic and functionalist view of culture, one of marking out differences, classifying, codifying, and then representing it as discrete, distinct, and a homogeneous entity interacting with others, has prevailed and pervades everyday discussions of international business, e.g. in self-help and self-teaching books on ‘Doing Business in . . .’ in bookshops. In this approach, culture is treated as no more than static products or facts, providing us with a rendering of the fragments of cultural beliefs and practices of a cultural community. It is unable to account ‘for cultural variation across individuals or regions at the same point in time’ (Crawford-Lange and McLaren, 2003: 134), and how cultures may evolve through discursive practices. We engage in constructing a complex and diverse system of meanings which allow us to interpellate meaning and intent in different contexts. This dynamism is absent from many cultural accounts of cross-cultural and international management research and literature. These writings also ‘failed to address the continuing hierarchies of power and legitimacy that still existed among these different centers of cultural authority. By exoticizing (cultures), it even colluded in their further disenfranchisement’ (Donald and Rattansi, 1992: 2).

This ‘culturalist’ perspective is still dominant and exercises considerable influence within international business and/or management circles. Culture has, I have suggested, become a widely used metonym for ‘difference’ within international management/business research, without an appreciation of the ways in which the concepts of culture and race operate in tandem, most often with race as silent subtext to discourses of culture. Solomos and Black have termed such forms of recoding as ‘metonymic elaborations’, explaining that ‘racisms may be expressed through a variety of coded signifiers’, one of them being the coding of race as culture (Solomos and Black, 1996: 26). Common applications of the construct of culture may draw on historical, static, and colonial notions of race, immigrants, and/or minorities and, in so doing, reinforce long-standing patterns of domination and inequities. For example, the easy classification of people into cultural and ethnic groups itself is evidence of a racialized application of culture, based on the assumption that discrete groups exist and can be used for explanatory purposes. Solomos and Black (1996) suggest that the central feature of such encoding is that social groups are fixed, made natural, and confined within a pseudo-biologically defined culturalism. Often these groupings follow nationalistic boundaries, such as ‘Chinese’ or ‘Indian’, which in themselves reflect and draw on colonialist and historical images. Along with these racialized/minoritized systems of classification, certain ethnic groups also may be given increased attention, particularly for those practices that were considered exotic,
interesting’, or ‘different’. The setting apart as exotic, interesting, or different is indicative of the creation of Other. Othering is an act of representation by which identity is assigned, human existence is categorized, people are characterized according to certain criteria (such as worldview or similar anthropological construct), and experiences are homogenized. The roots of Othering lie in imperial exploitation and the colonial project, where identities such as ‘the West’, ‘European’, and ‘White’ conflated with conceptions of rationality, civilization, and Christianity to produce images of barbarism, paganism, and savagery through binaries such as naked/clothed, oral/literate, and technologically backward/advanced (Rattanasi, 1994). These images continue today with constructions of Other as childlike, passive, or exotic. We see, then, residuals of the evolutionary meanings of culture that rearticulate colonial images of Other and reinforce existing relations of power.

Equally important as these representations of Other are representations of ‘us’). In most management theorizing, ‘White’-dominant culture is the norm, universalistic, rationale and indeed the benchmark for good international business and management practice. As the 1997 Asian financial crisis unfolded, Asian nations were frequently depicted as ‘corrupt’ and exhorted to be like the ‘West’, particularly with its more ‘robust’, ‘modern’, ‘transparent’, and ‘more accountable’ corporate governance systems. But as recent global events have shown, corporate governance practices in the ‘putative’ West are equally frail. More recent accounts of the global credit crunch similarly reinforce this observation. Sadly, this is not systematically interrogated and the view of ‘western’ systems and practices as ‘normal’ and superior needs to be critically unpacked. Diverse voices, if present, are still channeled through dominant ‘western’ loudspeakers or their meditative interlocutors, and ‘western’ notions of objectivity, rationality, and science silence, disqualify, and/or subsume alternative meanings and worldviews to particularistic instances and worldviews, and hence are not universally valid. This lack of ‘internationality’ is clearly evident in academic meetings, conventions, and literature (Westwood and Jack, 2007). There is the need to reflexively explore and engage our academic communities to both break down and expand the community through traversing boundaries of space, discipline, language, and worldviews. The problematic nature of voice, rationality, organization, and the wider context of organization and society need to be (re)interrogated, reimagined, just as the ideas and nature of management and organization themselves need re-engaging.

Emancipating management?

Racialization and representation are powerful mechanisms through which domination and subordination are enacted. Postcolonialism, suggests Robert Young (2003), engenders different ways of understanding the world, an understanding based on ‘insurgent knowledges . . . and seek to change the terms and values under which we all live’ (Young, 2003: 20). In other words, postcolonial theory is generally seen to contain emancipatory ideals. Elsewhere Young has argued for the ethical aim of postcolonialism:

If there has been one major argument that has dominated postcolonial studies since Edward Said’s Orientalism, it is that academic work, whether it claims scholarly detachment or not, always forms part of a larger social and political nexus: the only question is towards which ends its own interventions are directed. Our responsibility, as academics, writers and intellectuals, for which we are accountable, is to link our work to the many issues of injustice and inequality operating in the world today and to direct our work towards the righting of such wrongs and the transformation of the systems that produce them. (Young, 1999: 30)
This involves recognizing how the things we say and don’t say, think or don’t think, teach or don’t teach, are deeply connected to the ways our nations and institutions engage with other in the larger global context. It also involves challenging misrepresentations of others without resorting to essentialism and engaging in analysis of how we as scholars are inscribed in very structures of power we study and in which we participate. Westwood and Jack (2007) argue that there is a need to change these structural practices and recognize power as enacted or exercised. For management and organization scholars, postcolonialism raises questions of how groups deploy particular kinds of identities and representations to achieve particular political goals. Academic practices often mean that many of us are confined in our academic briefs and this is especially true for management scholars. We crave recognition and science and objectivity, and difference or individuality are often erased or neutralized – or, if not, are regulated to a narrow and marginalized discursive space where they can be monitored and constricted by dominant mainstream structures and ideologies, e.g. critical management studies group at the Academy of Management. At best, these movements are ‘reformist’ and, at worst, add legitimacy to the dominant ‘pluralistic’ and ‘dominant’ discourse of a ‘liberal’ and flexible management practice. This adds further legitimacy to management’s claims of being open, flexible, and practical and, indeed, has shorn management (at least within the discipline) of its ‘ideological’ content.

A certain tension has therefore developed as to the role of activism within postcolonialism, particularly that of voice. As academics, its rules and practices govern our daily lives – reason, rationality, and objectivity all grant us academic legitimacy and, more often than not, even those from the margins end up playing the game to secure academic legitimacy. We submit through adopting and paying suitable homage to the ‘grand masters’ and echo in often sanitized and salubrious tones these master narratives. Colonial ideologies and discourses remain dominant and, to paraphrase Bhabha, are ‘signs’ conferring ‘wonder’ on the participants. This might be because, as Dirlik (1999) notes, the more radical beginnings of postcolonialism are largely forgotten in contemporary conceptions of postcoloniality, especially as the field has typically been subsumed into academic settings such as English departments.

Along similar lines, others have critiqued the reduction of relations of colonial power to the rules of language, concluding that postcoloniality has ‘deferred the question of the political in its emphasis on discursive analysis’ (Burman, 2001: 114). In so doing, textuality has been favored over social action when academic professionals, as ‘victims in proxy’, claim solidarity with the disenfranchised. As Figueira explains: ‘[A]t work here is the age-old problem of the engaged intellectual and the pretense that academic criticism can function as a political act and “textual culture” can displace “activist culture”’ (Figueira, 2000: 249). Concomitant with this is ‘the problematic of organisation’. In academia, US dominance means that ‘international’ manuscripts are often discriminated against, e.g. through the constant refrain to engage with the dominant literature (which are typically American and English-based). Other non-western journals are deemed to be of less rigor and of lesser value and can be easily discounted (this is most evident in research rankings and the citation index), marking the ‘death’ of local insights and journals. This ‘disciplining’ function is self-perpetuating, constrains behavior, sustains the illusion of freedom, and ‘maintains discipline and subverts new practices, and points of view’ (Elmes and Moussa, XXXX: 39–40). They lose sight of the extent of control they exercise, seen or unseen, and what is worse is their sense of parochialism and insularity. This practice often blocks a free interchange of multiplicity of ideas and perspectives and, of course, also extends to our everyday organizations and the hegemonic structures that govern power relations in cultural production processes (Ahmad, 1992).
The possibility of achieving emancipatory aims is thus a contested issue for postcolonial scholars, and many have asked how a postcolonial perspective might assist us in the analysis of how we either help sustain or question inequities and injustices. In business and management, it enables us to ask questions such as: how might we theorize about culture in ways that account for the realities of shared meanings within groups while leaving an ‘openness’ that allows for shifting identities and realities based on the intersectionality of other organizing features such as sexual orientation, class, gender, age, and so on? How do we make sense of difference in ways that do not succumb to racialization, Othering, and reinforcement of existing power inequities? These questions are not ephemeral concerns but real and affect people in organizations and also in the structuring of organizational relationships in firms and across countries. Such questioning allows us to deconstruct and give voice to subjugated knowledges, and enlarge and foster social justice through an uncovering of social inequities.

In the area of culture, some postcolonial theorists like Homi Bhabha have sought to integrate themes such as contingency, partiality, and indeterminacy into their discussions of culture. Bhabha, for example, suggests that culture is not ‘pure’ but contaminated or ‘hybridized’ and effectively enables a ‘third space’ by drawing on what he refers to as ‘incommensurable’ forms of culture to bring about something ‘new and unrecognisable’ (Bhabha, 1990: 211). This ‘third space’ which Bhabha identifies, sees culture as partial and less epistemologically bounded but rather a place of enunciation and negotiation. As such, it allows people to not only negotiate for themselves new space but also to position them in this new space. Inevitably, this new positioning can challenge and disrupt prevailing hierarchical relationships, e.g. in colonial histories, in multinational practices, and the evolution of expatriates and cross-cultural management training and practices. When the contingencies elicited through the intersections of classifying categories such as class, caste, religion, nation, gender, sexual orientation, and so forth are added to effects of migration, globalization, and acculturation, endless possibilities for the production of new identities and cultural forms result, and cross-cultural management indeed becomes more evident as but a prop in maintaining ‘colonizing’ encounters. The kinds of discursive systems through which worlds are divided and people categorized is the ‘Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority … (which depends on the “positional superiority” of the West)’ (Said, 1978: 3, 7). For example, in international management and business literature, ‘other’ voices’ are kept in neatly differentiated categories, e.g. sections on Asians, Chinese, Japanese, Latinos, and Africans, and so on, instead of being a central and core component of the literature.

From theory to method

Perhaps the greatest challenge in our call for a postcolonial management and/or business research lies in the translation of its theoretical tenets into a method of research. When importing theoretical perspectives into the practice domain of research, one is often left with little specific direction regarding how to conduct research. In this case, the most common application of postcolonial theory is that of discourse analysis, typically as a subset of literary critique, of the politics of marginalized texts and cultures. While discourse analysis is gaining some popularity within business research, the application of postcolonial theory needs to go beyond discourse analysis to include critical inquiry in the ethnographic tradition. This is in keeping with the interdisciplinary nature of postcolonial theory. More importantly, it incorporates a political practice; it attends to the micropolitics and macrodynamics of power. While attending to power relations is certainly a methodological theme of other brands of research (e.g. feminist research), a postcolonial framing
rests on an overarching mindfulness of how domination and resistance mark intercultural encounters at individual, institutional, and societal levels. Thus, postcolonial research inevitably explores at some level the two meta themes of race (with its adjuncts of colonization, ethnicity, hybridity, intersecting oppressions, and so forth) and power (in its various expressions). These co-joined themes are read throughout the research project, both in the substantive focus of the inquiry and throughout the research process itself. Postcolonial research scholarship pursues, then, these matters of how contemporary constructions of race, ethnicity, ‘minorities’, and culture continue to rely on colonialis images and patterns of inclusion and exclusion within business, organizational, and management settings. Careful attention to the social and historical positioning of the researcher vis-à-vis research participants is also paramount to the postcolonial project.

There is an obvious caveat here that must be dealt with. Certain epistemological implications arise from a stance that takes on race and power as pre-existing meta themes; the danger of theoretical imposition is undoubtedly at the forefront. For example, when a researcher’s interpretive lens includes postcolonial theory regarding the processes of racialization and racism, s/he may ‘read’ racism where participants do not. How does one mediate between people’s understandings and the need for ideological critique and transformative social action without becoming impositional? (Lather, 1991). There is an inherent contradiction in acknowledging the intensely subjective and local nature of everyday reality while at the same time holding an explicitly political vision of the structural conditions that lead to particular social behaviors, especially when such political insights are not shared by research participants. It seems that a solution, albeit open-ended, to this problematic of theoretical imposition lies in a praxis-orientation toward research in which room is created within researcher–researched relationships for questioning taken-for-granted assumptions and practices. Dorothy Smith’s (1987) work suggests a possibility; the researcher takes on the role of social analyst and interpreter, and helps bridge individual subjectivities in the realm of the everyday and the organizing social forces (Smith, 1987: 161). While the researcher, according to Smith, holds final interpretive authority, as postcolonial scholars, I would argue that we need to try to keep a sensitivity in our interpretations, allowing for tensions to remain between the interpretations of participants and researchers, particularly as we question who has the dominant voice in our scholarship. In the final analysis, the researcher must take a reflexive stance in examining the particular dialectic between theory and research. As Patti Lather explains: ‘[D] ata must be allowed to generate propositions in a dialectical manner that permits use of a priori theoretical frameworks, but which keeps a particular framework from becoming the container into which the data must be poured’ (Lather, 1991: 62).

‘For the first time in human history’, declared Antony Giddens, ‘self and society are interrelated in a global milieu’ (Giddens, 1991: 32). Economic and cultural globalization have vastly increased interactional opportunities worldwide, opening up unlimited possibilities for individual growth and development. In addition, the boundaries of sameness and differences are greatly challenged. Inherent in contemporary postcolonial efforts is the tension between self and society, the local and the global, the particularities of the hybrid moment and the universality of the colonial experience. This ability to understand and explain the nature of the relationship between self and society, the contextualization of subjectivity, allows us to make sense of our own and others’ way of life. The global, the national, the social, and the individual are closely connected; they shape and reshape each other in a synergic relationship where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This relationship is interactive, dialectical, the impact of which may vary widely within an individual at different times, places, and situations.

A feature of postcolonial scholarship is its central focus in situating this human experience (e.g. everyday reality) in the larger contexts of mediating social, economic, political, and historical
forces. As such, this focus allows it to create a meaningful and practical standpoint to assist us in bridging micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis. In her contribution on feminist theory, Smith explains the contribution of standpoint theory in this way,

... beginning from the standpoint of women locates a subject who begins in a material and local world. It shows the different cognitive domains structuring our realities... as a bifurcation of consciousness, with a world directly experienced from oneself as center (in the body) on the one hand and a world organized in the abstracted conceptual mode, external to the local and particular places of one’s bodily existence. (Smith, 1987: 84)

The point of entry in this type of inquiry becomes the everyday world and links the particular setting and experiences ‘to the generalized and generalizing relations of the apparatus of ruling and of the economy’ (Smith, 1987: 147). To begin with the everyday world acknowledges the socially constructed nature of knowledge and experience. An explication of the rich details of the everyday world maintains the agency of people and avoids objectifying their experience. Most notably, starting where participants start, telling the story from their standpoint, seems essential to developing scholarship that does not continue to silence or render invisible the perspectives of the very people to whom we are trying to ‘give voice’. At the same time, Smith’s notion of standpoint does not privilege the knower but instead emphasizes the socially organized nature of knowledge. In sum, postcolonial ethnography aims to explicate the actual, though often invisible, social processes and practices that organize people’s everyday experience from a standpoint in the everyday world. Within business, organizational, and management settings, a postcolonial perspective seeks to bring together individual standpoints with group-based social histories and experiences to understand how individuals are active in producing and shaping social relations and are, in turn, shaped by these same relations. This process is therefore paramount and no longer privileges culture as static and/or as a product but involves an active production and construction of identities.

The third feature of a postcolonial research method suggested here is the deliberate decentering of dominant culture so that the worldviews of the marginalized become the starting point in our knowledge construction. Here, I suggest, a postcolonialist practice calls for more than the study of an anthropological Other divorced from social, political, and historical context. Instead, a postcolonial commitment results in the weaving of the perspectives and experiences of those marginalized in our society into the very fabric of our business world. Core to the postcolonial movement is the question raised by Gayatri Spivak: ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ (Spivak, 1988: 25). At its most basic level, postcolonialism demands the right to speak rather than being spoken for, and to represent oneself rather than being represented or, in the extreme cases, rather than being erased entirely. The onus on us as business and management scholars is thus to make possible the articulation of subaltern perspectives in order to make our knowledge representative not only of the dominant majority, but also of those who have until now found themselves on the margins. We can do this by hearing as writers/scholars in their own right management and business colleagues from non-western, non-northern origins; of course, there are ‘captive minds’ amongst non-western and non-northern scholars (Alatas, 1972). I would argue that we can no longer justify including only English-speaking participants in our research if we are serious about the epistemological implications to our knowledge; this also extends to the framing of conferences (even a critical management studies forum) and the non-marginalization of postcolonial themes or issues. A further opportunity for giving voice to previously subjugated voices is the liberal use of polyvocality in research through strategies such as purposive sampling for diverse groups of participants with a
range of experiences, listening carefully to the accounts of these participants, and using their verbatim stories in written reports. We are and need to be challenged to a critical examination of the lived experience of those marginalized, and that which structures their experience.

One of the outcomes of this imperative has to do with the debate over representation and ‘the right’ to ‘speak’ (Alcoff, 1991–2; Spivak, 1988). A basic question has been posed by scholars as to the legitimacy of speaking positions and whether there are truly ‘authentic’ voices. Some have argued that studies in the field of ‘race’ are best undertaken by minority scholars; others have argued that such matching of researchers with the researched results in marginalizing certain types of research, making, for example, racism only a concern for racialized groups and even mimicking colonial thinking (Figueira, 2000). I take the position here that, rather than pursuing the legitimacy of our roles as researchers based on one aspect of one’s social identity (i.e., ‘whiteness’), one’s legitimacy as researcher is based on one’s ability to explicate the ways in which marginalization and ‘racialization’ operate. In this project, we must therefore be particularly mindful of the implications of continued production of knowledge from dominant positions. Indeed, the postcolonial celebration of ‘differences’ can and does assist contemporary capitalism to extend their market reach through further commodification of its products and brands; this is apparent in ‘hybrid’ offerings, e.g. in different parts of the world where there is some localization of products. Firms and companies can also credibly claim that they do so as responses to the needs and desires of local customers or markets, and via ‘global branding’, e.g. United Colours of Benneton amongst others, construct a ‘de-fanged’ economic consumption imperative. As I have indicated, this project, rather than emancipatory, can be domesticated and repositioned, and is indeed reconciliatory and congruent with ‘liberal’ free-market practices and principles.

Although I have argued that a postcolonial research method carries ‘race’ as a meta theme, I am not suggesting that race holds the trump card over all other oppressions or marginalizations. Rather, I see intersectional analyses as a key distinctive of a postcolonial scholarship. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) emphasizes that intersectionality is not about additive analyses of oppressions but rather about seeing the oppressions of racism, classism, and sexism as interlocking categories of analyses. She expands the conceptualization of oppression to include a complex matrix of domination in economic, political, and ideological spheres that cannot be reduced to either/or dichotomies. Collins insightfully observes that, depending on the context, an individual may be an oppressor and an oppressed simultaneously (e.g. a ‘white’ woman may be penalized by gender but privileged by race). Similarly, Rose Brewer (1993) argues that race, immigrants, class, and gender cannot be understood apart from each other; each is embedded in the contexts of the others. Acknowledging the interrelatedness of race, class, and gender provides important insights for postcolonial inquiry and guards against incomplete and simplistic analyses. For example, some men acted as oppressors in some situations, drawing on gender discourses to demean women irrespective of ethnicity; but the same men also were in oppressed positions within an organizational system that favors those of the dominant majority. The phenomenon of being oppressor and oppressed at the same time points to the intersectionality of these organizing constructs and to the coexistence of multiple identities. The complex intersections of these multiple subjectivities and their logic remain understudied in cross-cultural and international business and management literature. Indeed, if the persistence of colonization and exploitation are to be acknowledged seriously within international institutional contexts, academic institutions and practices would have to be radically rethought and reworked, particularly in terms of knowledge and their effects, including the discourse of management.

The final feature of a postcolonial research method is its open commitment to critiquing the status quo and building a more just society. I point earlier to an activist or emancipatory intent; here
I briefly map out the methodological direction resulting from such a claim. As researchers within a practice discipline, management, organizational, and business scholars understand the aim of research as changing practice, improving management, and so forth. The difference from this general commitment to change or improvement is that the social change associated with a post-colonial praxis has to do with critiquing the status quo and the maldistribution of power and resources in ways that contribute to a more just society. Thus, management inquiry within the larger genre of an emancipatory research paradigm is committed to moving beyond the description of what ‘is’ to providing prescription for what ‘ought’ to be, and raises our level of investigation from matters of the individual to consider of larger sociopolitical forces impacting on the common good. Praxis begins with the researcher as s/he engages in reflexive critique of the research process itself (e.g. the relationships formed with participants, the influence of the researcher’s positionality, and the dynamics of power at work) and the nature of the knowledge being constructed (Chatterji, 2001). This type of reflexivity may well result in new insights and personal change for the researcher (Lather, 1991).

A characteristic of postcolonial scholarship, I have suggested, is a strong research–theory dialectic that brings a particular interpretive lens to the research that recognizes that each life is shaped by history. This lens frames how questions are formulated, who is included in the study, how data are interpreted, the meanings derived from the data, and how research findings are communicated and applied. While the research is not limited in the kinds of questions we ask, the questions are framed from a particular epistemological perspective. That is, the postcolonial lens always takes into account the context in which each is situated, and analyzes how gender, race, class, and historical positioning intersect at any given moment to organize experience in the here and now. The application of this analytic lens would therefore be as appropriate to a ‘white’ man included in a research study, as it would be to a black or colored woman, even though one would anticipate that very different issues would surface in this analysis given their historical positioning. Toward this end, a postcolonial perspective is inclusive and should be designed to incorporate and include all possible stakeholders even before the research begins.

**Conclusion**

Managerial discourses combine two ideological vectors, globalization and ‘orientalism’, to create a sense of horizontal forms of relationships across borders, as among equals and also in reproducing its discourse of coordination, efficiency, modernity, and progress. They seek to efface a one best way towards managing and certainly without any cultural reflexivity. Frenkel and Shenhav (2003), for example, suggest that the hidden assumptions of management and organizational theory in effect structure the world and how it is experienced. Although particular and local, managerial discourses (often from the ‘West’) therefore seek to universalize and relegate all other views to specific cases but render their own specificities as the norm. These exclusions deny other knowledges and rationalities and also obscure the relevance and centrality of the colonial project. For example, cross-cultural management and international business texts recommend to businesses how they should deal with culture and cultural issues. Typically, these prescriptions privilege a view of culture, promoting it inadvertently as the preferred and superior model – with its economic benefits, knowledge, technology, and skills – which others should seek to emulate. Contemporary analyses of culture, as I have indicated, have relied on this seemingly rational, ‘natural’, and universalistic model. They often failed to present these views as a ‘western’ and therefore particularistic view. In the process, history and politics of the Other is muted, if not erased, and global capital
takes on a universal spectral form, and is assumed to act in the interests of all through its capacity to increase productivity which then impacts on growth and poverty reduction. This neoliberal discourse is prevalent and is the basis of much business literature on competitive advantage.

Much cross-cultural management research remains anything but cross-cultural (Chuang, 2003; Kim, 2002; Miike, 2003); it is far from its aspirational goals of diversity and plurality. To be truly ‘cross-cultural’, we need to understand ‘the processes . . . by which peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society, global society’ (Albrow, 1990: 9). These processes are played out daily as people struggle to construct their own subjectivity and self-identity amid the centrifugal and centripetal pulls of globalization. This requires us to open up the fields of research, constructs, and methods and be open to alternative practices. In this paper, I have suggested that a postcolonial approach can be useful as a counterpoint and complement to received wisdom in organizational and management research. In particular, it points to ‘underdeveloped’ and/or mute voices and helps us to understand why ‘local’ knowledges may be marginalized in favor of dominant ‘western’ discourses. By uncovering ‘new’ facts, concepts, and practices, postcolonial practices therefore enable promising new and important routes of enquiry and knowledge production and creation. In the realm of culture and cultural practices, this requires a critical engagement and deconstruction of simplistic, enumerative, dualistic approaches. This requires us as practitioners and educators to review our past and present practices of teaching ‘culture’, recognizing that our theoretical concepts and constructs, research material and methodology, are partial and, hence, limiting. Such an approach, I suggest, could expand and enable us to reimagine a new scholarly community which is transdisciplinary and transgeographical, capable of producing new knowledges and disrupting contemporary hierarchies of knowledge and making sense of a more chaotic rather than flattened world. This dialogue needs to be more inclusive, more open, and recognize that diverse voices and contexts would considerably alter the nature and scope of the field of cross-cultural management research and practices. As such, I would argue that a postcolonial injunction is not just a matter of pointing to ‘silences’ alone or the exclusion of a particular issue or groups of people but that it is a ‘standpoint’ position which involves a rethinking of relations with these issues and groups and seeking to identify what are the forces or practices that excluded and/or occluded them in the first instance. This is not therefore an added-on feature or supplement to ‘learning’ management but rather involves a systemic and persistent reworking of the received heritage of management theory and practices, including those that cross cultures and are comparative and international.

Notes

1. It is often argued that cross-cultural trade is a new process and phenomenon. But as Curtin (1984) has shown, this is not the case. What is new, however, the scope, speed and intensity of global trade today. Globalization theorists like Robertson (1992) and Harvey (1989) amongst others, have pointedly referred to these processes. This is however not to say that international business and management literature have adopted a critical perspective (see Westwood and Jack, 2007)

2. As explicated by Alatas (1972), the captive mind is the product of higher institutions of learning either at home or abroad, whose way of thinking is dominated by Western thought patterns in an imitative and uncritical manner

3. This phenomenon has been widely discussed in Fanon’s works (e.g. 1965) and also that of Albert Memmi (1965). Fanon is known to have drawn on Sartre’s insights.

4. This can be seen as a normative stance and rather prescriptive and not in accord with ‘poststructuralist’ and postcolonial invocations. Whilst postcolonialism intentionally seeks to question the silences of dominant
discourses and inevitably can be about uncovering mechanisms of domination, postcolonial scholars also seek to restore and recover voices; in that sense, it is also recuperative and obviously invokes new norms. This dialectic is clearly a problem and I have sought to raise this challenge later in the paper.

5. There have been many critiques of postcolonialism. See Ahmad (1993) and Dirlik (1999) amongst others for such examples. Perhaps the most interesting turn is that by Spivak where she mounted a sustained attack on postcolonialism itself in her Critique of Postcolonial Reason (1999) and the more recent Death of a Discipline (2003), where she in effect parts way with postcolonial approaches. I am unable to offer a full critique here but suffice to say that I have been critical of many of the postcolonial approaches which in my mind are a reconstitution of dependency theory and world systems theory although dressed in literary garb.

References


Résumé

Interventions et perturbations postcoloniales : contestation des pratiques culturelles

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La théorie postcoloniale, avec ses interprétations de la race, de la racialisation et de la culture, nous offre un enchevêtrement d’outils analytiques puissants nous permettant de répondre au défi épistémologique consistant à donner, d’une part, voix à des connaissances subjugées et, d’autre part, de la capacité à répondre et mettre au jour les relations sociales au sein des organisations. Elle ouvre en particulier de nouvelles façons de formuler des questions au sein des pratiques organisationnelles, nous permettant ainsi d’imaginer de nouvelles possibilités et pratiques. Cet article suggère que l’intégration de points de vue post coloniaux à la gestion interculturelle, ainsi que sa théorisation, accroît et enrichit sa teneur discursive. Cet article s’efforce aussi de dresser une méthodologie afin de fixer la relation complexe entre culture, pratique et organisations.
后殖民的干涉和分裂：

Loong Wong

后殖民理论解释了种族、种族化和文化，为我们提供了一套有力的分析工具来面对认识论方面的挑战，即使用被征服的知识和能力来应付和揭露组织内部的社会关系。尤其是，这个理论开发了新的方法，将问题置于组织实践的框架中，让我们能设想出新的可能性和实践。本文提出将后殖民理论的观点与跨文化管理进行融合，并将之理论化以强化和丰富其思辨的意义。本文还试图拟定一个方法论，来为文化、实践和组织之间的错综复杂的关系奠定基础。