



Advancing postcolonial organization studies

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Against the Grain: Advances in Postcolonial Organization Studies edited by A. Prasad. Frederiksberg: Copenhagen Business School Press, 2012. £38.00. 320 pp. ISBN 9788763002431

Although they may be created by and subject to different epistemological and axiological orientations, processes of organizing from around the globe are increasingly meeting and merging as communication and travel technologies become faster and more accessible. Despite this contextual hybridity, ‘most of management research—including, most of critical management research—continues to be overwhelmingly Eurocentric’ (p. 20). In his edited collection *Against the Grain: Advances in Postcolonial Organization Studies*, Anshuman Prasad seeks to expand the vantage point(s) of critical organization studies by ‘unsettling, disrupting and displacing (the logics and trajectories of) the Western discourse of management, and giving radically new meanings and directions to the theory, research and practice of management’ (p. 22). Prasad’s collection provides both an excellent starting point for scholars who are only beginning to explore postcolonial studies, as well as a broad overview of current work on the topic for those already invested in it. I have drawn three main themes from the text: interrogating and exploring organizational processes, deconstructing power-laden terms or tropes and critiquing neocolonial representations.

For many authors in this book, it is important to address ‘the organization as a process’ (Nuijten, p. 188), because ‘[i]n many situations, organizing practices become structured or patterned in unexpected and often invisible ways’ (p. 188). Kalonaityte focuses her attention on one manifestation of organizational process by critiquing Eurocentric Swedish adult education programs aimed primarily at Arab-Islamic women, and the way that such programs construct these women as ‘absolute victims of Orientalist cultures’ (p. 117). In a different vein, Schwabenland explores non-Western organizational processes by tracking the creation and development of a goddess—*Swachh Narayani*—by an Indian non-governmental organization, and how the goddess’ complex symbolism works in concert with local culture in a way that is inconceivable under traditional Western management frameworks. However, Nuijten reminds us that Western scholars must be reflexive in examining non-Western organizational practices. She specifically warns of the ‘myth of collective organizing’, a ‘common neo-colonial perception permeating development debates’ based on the idea ‘that what are believed to be *deviant* organizational practices in Western societies ... tend to be *the rule* in non-western cultures’ (p. 181). In her analysis of the Mexican *ejido* sector, she offers a stepping stone from the complete non-Western analysis of Schwabenland to other scholars’ hybrid contributions.

The intersections and disjunctions between differing cultural processes of organizing are explored in a variety of ways in this collection: Mirchandani, Maitra and Sangha look at the hybridization of Western and Indian practices/identities in Indian call center work; Panoho and Stablein

examine the meeting of Pākehā (non-indigenous) and Māori approaches to government health work in New Zealand; Tedmanson probes the way Australian governance interacts with Anangu Aboriginal governance and Sullivan explores best practices for the Australian government in engaging with Aboriginal peoples. The work of these chapters functions at various levels—from individual identity formation to national policy—and assumes different perspectives. Variations in level, scope and perspective reveal the versatility of postcolonial theory as it relates to organizational processes.

Postcolonial theory and criticism can also be used to deconstruct specific discourses running within and through organizations. Four chapters in this collection take that focus, and respectively address: ‘the veil’ in the Scandinavian workplace (P. Prasad), African ‘corruption’ (De Maria), ‘capacity building’ in Anangu Aboriginal communities (Tedmanson), and Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (Fougère and Moulettes). These authors examine the power of terms, pointing at particular ways that discourse structures what can be known in relation to a particular cultural group or geographical space. Although in his chapter De Maria poses the question, ‘Is African “corruption” real?’ (p. 219), ultimately the realness of these discursive constructions does not matter as much as the material consequences they have, and the ways that they obscure alternative ways of knowing.

For instance, De Maria concludes that discourses of African ‘corruption’ reinforce a Western individualist framework, and exclude collectivist values in governance. Relatedly, the idea that ‘capacity building’ is necessary to Anangu Aboriginal communities discursively positions the Anangu people and their values as ‘*the problem*’ (Tedmanson, p. 249) and negates their traditional systems of governance. In P. Prasad’s analysis, Muslim women are interpreted through the veil and its attendant imaginary as threats to the stability of Scandinavian culture. Finally, Fougère and Moulettes find that Hofstede’s cultural model ‘normalizes the idea of historical determinism and stability’ (p. 279), denying the fluidity of cultural systems.

Finally, authors in this collection also use postcolonial criticism to analyze neocolonial representations within organizational systems. Shroeder and Borgerson, for one, explore the way that ‘representation creates knowledge’ (p. 47) by examining how music has constructed Hawaii as an exotic yet familiar paradise in a way that makes it imminently consumable to the US mainland. In a different vein, Coronado analyses management textbooks, finding that the way cultures are represented tends to flatten global power hierarchies, and justify intervention by the dominant. In both these chapters, understanding the politics of representation is foundational to future steps in shifting the discourse.

In three ways, this text truly contains what it claims: advances in postcolonial organization studies. First, the collection highlights geographical areas of postcolonial study that are often marginalized and overlooked. Africa and Latin America rarely figure prominently in postcolonial studies (for notable exceptions see Misoczky, 2011; Nkomo, 2011), and their inclusions in this text are quite impactful and important, debunking neocolonial myths regarding Africa (De Maria) and Mexico (Nuijten). Second, the book represents a large range of foci and theoretical issues: from governance to culture, workplaces to discursive spaces and representation to embodiment. Even theoretical lenses on the margins of organization studies such as postcolonial feminism, whose ‘interventions into management and organization theory are still in their infancy’ (Kalonaityte, p. 116) are included within this text. Third, the collection examines complex Western/non-Western liminal, overlapping spaces. Opening space for not only creative, non-Western forms of organizing, but also analysis of the possibilities, limitations and contradictions inherent in hybrid organizational spaces, the collection takes postcolonial theory and organizational analysis on to exciting new ground.

However, the move on to new ground is in some ways tentative. For instance, although including a couple chapters regarding Africa and Latin America is a step forward, more work needs to be done. Specifically, even though De Maria examines a discursive regime that applies to ‘Africa’ as a whole,

it speaks to a lack of regionally specific studies *within* Africa. Rather than critiquing the homogeneous representation of Africa as a whole in the future, postcolonial organization scholars would do well to address how communities and peoples differ, as part of disrupting that representation.

Second, the book overall seems to offer a fractured—and sometimes contradictory—idea of postcolonialism. Prasad begins the book by stating that postcolonial theory has a ‘distinctively radical edge’ (p. 14), but in some chapters this radicalness does not come through. Particularly, Sullivan’s chapter on how the Australian government should relate to Aboriginal peoples seems to work from a ‘post-colonial’—as a temporal marker—rather than ‘postcolonial’ perspective. For instance, although Sullivan claims that ‘[i]nstitutions for the delivery of services and development programs should adhere to universal standards of good management first and foremost’ (p. 96), other authors argue that ‘formulaic and standardized development models deny the reality of poor people’s lives and delink the working of local organizations from their complexity and specificity’ (Nuijten, p. 185). For most postcolonial scholars, ‘universal’ concepts are generally problematic. Although contradiction is an inherent part of hybridity, and thus postcolonial work, the question remains: In order to maintain its ‘distinctively radical edge’ (p. 14), how critical does postcolonial work need to be?

This question ties into a third lacunae left in the wake of this volume: the absence of chapters specifically focused on theory-building. All of the studies included, other than the introduction, are empirical or critique-based. Even beyond the book—with the exception of Prasad and Prasad (2003)—little work has specifically been done to theoretically examine what organization studies can augment or challenge in postcolonial theory writ large, and what postcolonial theory can augment or challenge in organizational theory. Although this may seem like a sizeable gap, it points to the necessity of further postcolonial work in critical organization studies. And for any scholar beginning or continuing to do such work, *Against the Grain: Advances in Postcolonial Organization Studies* provides a theoretically inspiring, methodologically varied and thematically intriguing place from which to start.

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Managerialism: A Critique of an Ideology. T. Klikauer. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 368 pp. £65.00. ISBN 9781137334268

In 1941 Burnham published his book *The Managerial Revolution*—which is not only the first, but also one of the best critical analyses of the new power elite of managers and the ideological and institutional frameworks that managers have implemented in order to cement their power and