

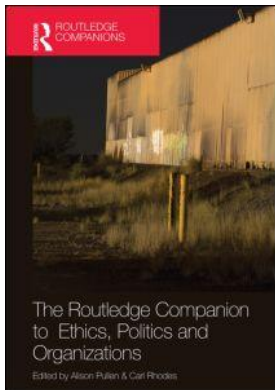
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The politics and ethics of difference in organizations

Pathways to the same that is impossible

Robert Westwood

Locating politics and ethics in the postcolonial

It could be argued that the postcolonial, and that which seeks to explicate it, postcolonialism, is almost entirely about politics and ethics. However, postcolonialism has been accused of neglecting politics, ethics or both. For example, Drichel (2007) suggests that “ethical questions remain largely unexplored in postcolonial studies” and have only recently been broached theoretically. The latter is telling since whilst ethical theorization may be less overt, an ethical project is certainly visible within postcolonialism throughout. For example, for Fanon and others resisting the colonial and pursuing decolonization was an ethical project. The political nature of colonization and decolonization, and of postcolonialism and the postcolonial, is perhaps more apparent; although what form the politics takes is debated (Brydon, 2006). In his encyclopedic ‘Introduction’ to *Postcolonialism*, Young (2001) traces the political through every aspect of its development. Virtually from its onset the colonial project was opposed and not just by the colonized, but at home, from within the compass of the colonizing powers. Anti-colonial theory – symbiotic with postcolonial theory Young avers – was articulated along three trajectories: the humanitarian, the liberal and the Marxist. As he points out, it is fallacious to represent nineteenth-century Europe as lacking in self-criticism and with an unremittingly hegemonic imperialistic impulse. The empire was contested from the beginning, as far back as Bartolomé de Las Casa’s anti-colonial tract in 1542 (Young, 2001: 75) and elsewhere throughout the colonial era (Porter, 1968) and beyond.

Devadas and Prentice (2007: 3) suggest that “A very schematic look at the history of this field [postcolonialism] manifestly demonstrates the centrality of politics to the concerns of post-colonial critique.” Like Young (2001), they too note the political inherent to the foundational works of Fanon (1952, 1961/2004), Memmi (1965) and Césaire (1953/1972) and suggest that later works such as that of the Subaltern Studies collective (Guha 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1987), and of Spivak (1993, 1999), Bhabha (1994a) and Mbembe (2001) all “affirm the centrality of politics to the postcolonial project” (Devadas and Prentice, 2007: 3). They are, however, chary

of representing the postcolonial politics in this way since it “collapses the two main trajectories of conceiving politics that dominate within postcolonial critique – a postcolonial politics of materialist critique and a postcolonial politics of textual and cultural critique” (ibid.). This is a bifurcation that has long harried postcolonialism and fractures the discourse (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). It remains visible in postcolonially informed critique in management and organization studies (MOS) with textual critiques such as that by Westwood (2001, 2006) contrasting with more materialist critiques such as that by Imasato (2010) or Banerjee (2000). Postcolonialism is accused by some materialists of being apolitical, idealist, dehistoricized and disengaged from real socio-material conditions (Ahmad, 1992; Lazarus, 1999; Parry, 2004). However, it is hard to look at the work of those arrayed on the cultural/textual side – Said, Bhabha and Spivak – and find them guilty of dehistoricizing and disengagement, or of being devoid of politics or ethics. Bhabha (1994a) abhors the bifurcation suggesting it rests on an unsustainable and politically immature distinction between ‘theory’ and ‘politics’. There may well be important theoretical issues to debate here, but those in pain and poverty on the receiving end of an exclusionary, exploitative world order will not forgive us for dithering and gaming as we abstractly promote one form of critique or another. Indeed, Mir et al. (2006: 181) suggest that “Postcolonial theory has the advantage of being able to deal simultaneously with issues of economic and cultural difference, of exploitation as well as representation.”

An alternative attack comes from a different quarter in suggesting that due to the changes wrought by globalization postcolonialism has an *irrelevant* politics. This is a critique mounted most notably by Hardt and Negri (2000) but also by Brydon (2006). Whilst acknowledging postcolonialism’s contribution to a “global politics of difference”, Hardt and Negri (2000: 142) assert that in the global present, wherein difference is pervasive and normalized, it no longer has political purchase. With Empire replacing the Imperial order of things, power has been ‘decentred and deterritorialized’ whereas postcolonialism remains anchored to “the world of modern sovereignty . . . a Manichean world, divided by a series of binary oppositions that define Self and Other, white and black, inside and outside, ruler and ruled” (ibid.: 139). They consider Bhabha’s treatment of difference and hybridity to be a high point in that opening up of a politics of difference; but also its limit. Devadas and Prentice (2007) offer a twofold counterpoint. First, whilst recognizing the shifts to which Hardt and Negri refer, they see postcolonialism as capable of responding to them. Second, the critique of the limits of Bhabha’s working of hybridity rests on a narrow reading of hybridity as a ‘politics of addition’, a “mixing and fusion . . . [which] gives birth to new forms of amalgamation, rather than contestation” (Young, 1995: 21) and that fails to challenge hegemonic order. But, hybridity has other possible readings. For Bhabha, hybridity is not mere blending, but the formation of a new space that disrupts and destabilizes categories of difference and hierarchical identity binaries. However, Devadas and Prentice do accept that whilst postcolonialism has concocted a “celebratory concept of difference”, it has not remained (politically) mindful of how that also actually produces exclusions and abject others whose difference is not celebrated or welcomed and which are mere adjuncts to the calculations of a global system. They make a call for a reconceived engagement of postcolonial studies with ‘the politics of difference’.

This prelude gets me to where I want to begin which is the recognition that the politics and ethics of difference and identity are central to postcolonialism. From Fanon’s (1952) agonized account of the crippling of the psyche of the colonized, to Ngugi’s (1981) struggles to decolonize the [African] mind; Glissant’s (1990) celebratory poetics of creolization and relational identity through *Antillanité*; Guha’s (1997) attempts to resurrect the subaltern; Spivak’s (1985, 1987) processes of othering and worlding; Bhabha’s (1994a) exegesis on hybridity, ambivalence and the politics of the third space; to Alatas’s (1974) castigation of the *trahison des clercs* and the

mechanisms of intellectual captivity, wherever one cares to look the intersection of politics, ethics and identity are centre stage in postcolonialism. A traversal of the whole terrain of identity politics in postcolonialism would be impossible here, let alone politics and ethics in all their guises. Rather I aim, following Devadas and Prentice's call, to focus more narrowly on a crucial aspect of the politics and ethics of identity, the politics and ethics of difference. The extensive and sophisticated work on the politics and ethics of difference within postcolonialism provides resources for the interrogation of the politics and ethics of difference within the domain of MOS; particularly with respect to where the engagement with difference is most central, in diversity management (DM) and in those sub-fields of International, Cross-Cultural and Comparative Management (ICCM). I will argue that wherever and whenever an encounter with difference occurs, complex dynamics are set in train and a politics and ethics of difference are encountered, none the less in organizations. Encounters with difference are inherently problematic and engender complex and typically deeply ambiguous strategies and practices. Numerous strategies have been proposed that intend to solve the problem: but perhaps it is insoluble.

Pathways to the same that is impossible

Encounters with difference

Encounters with difference and, in particular, the otherness of difference, are an affront, a threat, an unpalatable irruption. Difference is a potential lesion in the fragile tissue of meaning and order that Self constructs. It is a lesion that must be stitched up, healed, absorbed – or else quarantined, isolated, cast out – or ablated, burnt off, eviscerated. It can be kept at bay by labelling it alien and beyond engagement; outside our boundaries and order of things. Here difference is constituted as the radical, unassimilable Other. Or else, if difference is allowed, then most often it will be constructed into a hierarchical binary within which Other is inferiorized. Yet still, the Other can be absorbed, assimilated, integrated – returned to the Same.

Confrontations with difference occur in all spheres of life and all modes, but here I focus on encounters with difference within organizations and in MOS. We are frequently informed that multiplicities of difference are more pervasive in organizations today and that “rendering difference manageable in organizations has become a key issue for both practitioners and empirical research” (Ahonen et al., 2013). This ‘making manageable’ is related to the ideology and practices of multiculturalism and DM and to a presumed ethics of “social justice, equality and anti-discrimination” (ibid.). Encounters with difference are also said to have been amplified with globalization and are to the forefront in international business and management and are a focus within the (sub-)fields of ICCM (Jack and Westwood, 2009; Westwood, 2006).

DM has become a veritable industry for practitioners and a rich vein for management researchers (e.g. Konrad et al., 2006). Mainstream DM commentary has celebrated diversity and made a business case for it whilst research has sought ways of enhancing manageability and deriving positive organizational outcomes. Increases in organizational diversity are linked to and parallel globalization dynamics. One response to this amplification has been to celebrate diversity, often relating it to humanistic multiculturalism. Another is the production of ‘knowledge’ about diversity, which often results in the construction of categories of difference: gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and so on. Indeed, DM is criticized for reproducing such categories whereby diversity tends “to be structured along the lines of difference and inequality between the historically privileged [categories of whiteness, masculinity and management] and disadvantaged groups” (Kalonaityte, 2010: 32) This induces a retrogressive practice

in which organizations are complicit in maintaining the status quo and in the reproduction of disadvantaged and privileged identities and unequal distribution of resources and opportunities (Zanoni and Janssens, 2004). DM research also tends to individuate and decontextualize the issue, seeing diversity as something that can be solved by individuals or teams (Ahonen et al., 2013). The same is broadly true of ICCM where a diverse workforce is seen as a managerially solvable issue, and the asymmetries of global economic power that generate current labour markets are eschewed and an ideology of humanistic multiculturalism invoked (Mir et al., 2006). More critically informed DM and ICCM research questions this individuation, the unpacking of diversity from the power relations within which it is constituted, the inherent essentialization, and the presumption of manageability (e.g. Ahonen et al., 2013; Prasad, 2006; Zanoni and Janssens, 2004). It is argued that DM needs to be understood as “forms of knowledge and discursive practices that are co-constructed through relations of power, and that constitute self and other; researcher and subject; and sameness and difference” (Ahonen et al. 2013: 1).

Prasad (2006: 125) argues that the postcolonial informs DM since the “colonial encounter significantly shaped Western perceptions of ‘otherness’ (e.g. other races, ethnicities, cultures, religions, etc.), perceptions that largely continue to survive” and that there is an imprint of ‘colonialist schizophrenia’. He reminds us that power structures and relations within contemporary western organizations are inextricably tied to the hierarchical binaries produced in and through the colonial project. Any genuine attempt to enable workplace diversity needs to deconstruct those binaries; however, they are sustained by the conditions of postcoloniality and by white, male, heteronormative structures of privilege.

As noted, postcolonialism’s analysis of the politics of difference and the constructions of the Other has a long lineage extending back to Fanon, Césaire and others, but is seminally represented by Said’s (1978) coruscating analysis of the imaginary representation of the West’s Other through orientalist practices. The continuation of orientalist practices in the representation of the Other in MOS has been well documented (e.g. Coronado, 2012; Fougere and Moulettes, 2007; Westwood, 2001, 2006; Jack and Westwood, 2009). In representing the Other, appropriative, essentializing and othering practices are enacted and the Other constructed as an imaginary located within hierarchical binaries that privileges the West and denigrates the ‘Rest’. Any such practice is political because such knowledge claims are inescapably socially and historically situated, interested and constructed. Argyrou (1999: 30) argues “The decision to study a particular Other or a certain aspect of Otherness is motivated, albeit mostly unconsciously, by the social and political concerns that anthropologists share with members of their own societies.”¹ We can only perceive, apprehend and talk about the Other from within our own situatedness and so the Other is always a construction out of Self. In that sense the Other is unknowable and we can only construct a ‘fiction’ about them. As Sardar (1999: 4) maintains, within Orientalism there is no real attempt to know the Other, instead “Orientalism is thus a constructed ignorance, a deliberate self deception, which is eventually projected on the Orient.” The representations it delivered “were deliberately concocted and manufactured as instruments to ‘contain’ and ‘manage’ these [other] cultures and civilizations”. Also pursuing a Foucauldian position, Ahonen et al. (2013), as noted, insist that DM must be understood within relations of power that constitute categories of diversity to facilitate governmentality. Thus a similar mode of argument is discernible: organizations have no real desire to know diverse others, they are interested in constructing an account for themselves that renders diversity manageable.

The Other, then, is produced only in relation to Self and as a way of defining and bolstering Self. Within Orientalism this was a discursive practice enacted to facilitate the colonial project by defining the oriental other as inferior to self thus justifying the interventionist/salvationist colonial mission. As Drichel (2007: 9) suggests, “These images of otherness not only guaranteed

that the other was known (and thereby rendered ‘safe’) but also that empire had its (inferior) other which would reflect its own superiority.” It has been argued that in ICCM a similar dynamic is discernible wherein western researchers scrutinize the management and organization practices of others in order to “deliver ‘knowledge’ to Western audiences, primarily to enable those who need to economically transact with the other to better manage and control them and so enhance Western economic, and by extension, political and cultural, power.” (Westwood, 2006: 96). In such a process western universals are promoted and the other is essentialized and located in hierarchical binaries. Western approaches to business and management are valorized whilst those of others are diminished.

There is a risk of constructing self–other relations in a totalizing and unidirectional manner. Bhabha (1994b) was very conscious of this and sought to ameliorate it through his treatment of the Self–Other dynamic. He saw the stereotype as a discursive strategy that seeks to fix the Other by applying a ‘sign’ of cultural, racial or historical difference. It is a strategy vital to any colonial/neo-colonial project since such fixity is necessary as a form of knowledge that purports to offer the knowable and determinable – and so manageable. However, the stereotype is inherently unstable and must always be “anxiously repeated” to sustain the semblance of fixity. This is an aspect of an inescapable *ambivalence* that eschews closure, keeps in motion self–other relations and representations, and unsettles colonial discourse and simple binary structures. The need to repeat is destabilizing since the repetition is never complete and exact. Similarly, Fanon recognized that mimicry never produced an exact copy – there was always an excess in which the mimic exceeded the original. Furthermore, Bhabha insists on the interaction inherent to encounters with difference and that in that interaction a Third Space is created and hybridities formed that also disrupt simple binaries. Frenkel and Shenhav (2006) provide an account of such hybridity in relation to the emergence of MOS. I shall return to the ‘strategy of ambivalence’, but for now it takes us closer to the core dilemma, a dilemma that is multifaceted and which has adjacent dilemmas. We will approach this through different trajectories.

Circling dilemmas in search of solutions

The representational problems besetting the social sciences crystallized within anthropology in the ‘crisis in representation’ (Marcus and Fischer, 1986) which precipitated calls for intensified reflexivity. If the social scientist cannot work outside the frames of power within which research is conducted, cannot represent the truth of the other, and cannot avoid reductive categorizations and essentialisms, then reflexivity seems the only solution. But reflexivity has come under critical scrutiny. In challenging the illusions of ‘transparent reflexivity’ Rose (1997) offers a rather bleak assessment. She argues that the relationship between a researcher and the researched can only be constituted as either one based on an ‘objectified distance’, or on ‘sameness’ wherein the researcher and researched occupy the same position. For Rose the former is unacceptable and the latter impossible. The options for understanding across difference are snookered. Furthermore, reflexivity rests on the assumption that the workings of power within and constitutive of research relationships are identifiable and comprehensible – often they are not.

I might suggest a fresh crisis in the social sciences, including MOS, marked by the inability to resolve the dilemmas inherent to self–other dynamics in our confrontations with difference – in organizations and elsewhere. For example, Nagar and Geiger (2007) note that with doubt cast on the possibility of representing the other, some feminist researchers have either abandoned fieldwork altogether as unethical or adopted forms of ‘reflexive identification’ (with the researched). Nagar and Geiger (2007: 267) are not happy with either strategy and, like Rose, maintain that discussions of reflexivity have “reached an impasse”. For them the dilemma is

overtly political – how can we produce knowledge of others “across multiple divides (of power, geopolitical and institutional locations, axes of difference, etc.) in ways that do not reinscribe interests of the privileged?” and how can such knowledge be “tied explicitly to a material politics of social change?” (ibid.: 268).

The dilemma is expressed somewhat differently in relation to postcolonialism by Meffan and Worthington (2001: 133) in terms of how to represent the other from outside of European colonial discourse and without reproducing “colonial representational violence”. That is “How does one write of and for the Other without representing the Other as an object knowable to and interpretable by the colonial gaze, the imperial eye/I?” (ibid.). This revisits concerns addressed by the Subaltern Studies project (Guha, 1997) and by Said (1978). The violence inherent to colonial representational practices has long been in the regard of postcolonial theorists. It was Spivak (1998) who introduced the term ‘epistemic violence’ to refer to the knowledge–power nexus and its effect in constituting the colonial subject as Other and ablating its subjectivity. The problem of escaping epistemic coloniality and of the requirement to refract accounts of others’ business and management systems through western theory and discourse has been aired in MOS (Alcadipani and Reis, 2011; Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Westwood, 2001; Westwood and Jack, 2007).

Developing on this, Guhin and Wyrzten (2013: 235) refer to “three overlapping forms of violence at risk in producing knowledge in an imperial field of power”, noting how one becomes the platform for the other. The first is the ‘violence of essentialization’ and Said’s analysis of orientalism is an exemplar. This form has been examined in MOS as part of the critique of its ethnocentric/orientalist representational strategies (e.g. Coronado, 2012; Westwood, 2001, 2006). Kalonaityte (2010) also sees essentialized identities as endemic in DM and as impeding proper understanding of diversity. The second is the epistemic violence noted above wherein western epistemology invades, occludes, marginalizes or destroys others’ epistemology and constructs the other within its power–knowledge nexus. This form has been examined in relation to the intrusions and dominance of western epistemology vis-à-vis the non-western world in general (e.g. Connell, 2007; Mignolo, 2000) as well as within MOS as referenced above. Guhin and Wyrzten (2013: 236) offer the ‘violence of apprehension’ as a third form arguing that even work that avoids crude essentialisms and epistemic violence and pursues careful and nuanced knowledge production leading to more ‘accurate apprehension’ of the other, such knowledge can “still be used directly and indirectly to consolidate power and to enact physical and symbolic violence on the ‘other’”. The violence of apprehension implies a flattening out and simplification of more nuanced and hybridized (and so accurate) knowledge into essentialized forms deployable by policy makers and others to make visible, manage and control. Prasad (2012) notes an equivalent erasure of complexity and difference, creation of fixity, and neglect of the *processes* by which this is achieved in constructions of race in organizations. He notes the failure to acknowledge the multifacetedness, complexity and fluidity of individuals and their identities in DM. The same can be said for other ‘analytic dichotomies’ or binaries, such as heterosexual–homosexual, man–woman. So for Prasad (2012: 569) the dilemma takes the form of asking how we can work politically to redress inequalities and “engage in a discourse of diversity without reinscribing the dichotomous ethos of essentialism?” Ahonen et al. (2013) also bemoan such tendencies in DM. The upshot is that “diversity . . . effectively functions to fix sameness. The articulation of difference through categories and technologies of diversity enables the unarticulated sameness to occupy its unstated position of centrality” (ibid.: 17). This circulates us closer to the central dilemma, the reduction of the Other, of difference, to the Same – and the impossibility of the Same.

Clearly, western epistemology has essentializing tendencies to create hierarchical binaries and reductive categories. We could say that essentializing is the making of the Same through

a particular economy of signification. Difference is flattened out through being compressed into the general and universal. It is an epistemological practice that “de-differentiates and offers up categories that smooth over differences and constitute sameness” (Jack and Westwood, 2009: 171). It would seem that whenever we seek to represent the Other we efface uniqueness and reconstitute the Same. For some this constitutes an ontological problem since the fixity of categorizations such as ‘homosexual’, ‘Asian’, ‘black’, ‘able-bodied’ become accounts of being. As Said (1978) noted, orientalism constructs imaginary differences which position the Other ontologically as binary opposites that do not share the same humanness. Such binaries become entrenched in discourse and sedimented as knowledge. They require constant reiteration otherwise they come into question and *ipso facto* so does the West’s own identity (and superiority). However, the process of repetition introduces uncertainty and instability and keeps the possibility of alternative meanings and resistance open.

In colonial or neo-colonial encounters the other is constructed through difference, as other than self, but is always constructed in relation to self and made “entirely knowable and visible” (Bhabha, 1994b: 71) and in that the difference of the other is disavowed and recuperated to the Same. However, the claim to know the other is based on an imaginary, a reduction and an essentialization, and the construction can only be sustained through repetition the very fact of which undoes the supposed unity and fixity. The reproduction of the Same, whilst desired, is impossible. There is always something that exceeds the presumption to know the other, but that something is what is disavowed. The disavowal is necessary to self else their own identity constructions are at risk and by extension so is the whole power frame enabling the hierarchical epistemological and ontological structures in the first place. For Bhabha there is a Lacanian psychoanalytic aspect to self–other relations in which the other is both feared and desired – so inducing a tension and a fetishization. Because the other is constructed through the self, whatever is imagined about other is a reflection of self and so the imaginary ontologically stable and coherent other is mirrored by a fantasy of a stable and coherent self. In the colonial (and postcolonial) context the self needs this fantasy of coherence to provide the agency for order and control. The fetishism seeks to “construct a fixed, arrested and stable imaginary Other to satisfy the desires of the Self. It is a fetishism constituted by the oscillation, the ‘play’, between the desire for affirmation of the Same or sameness and the anxiety associated with difference and a sense of lack in self in the face of that difference, that Otherness” (Rhodes and Westwood, 2007: 74). The attempt at fixity is undone by a fundamental tension, ambivalence and movement: by the failure to reproduce the Same, and the disavowal of difference.

The toute autre and the indigene

Part of the horror of colonization is the displacement, marginalization and sometimes destruction of indigenous populations; processes that continue under conditions of postcoloniality (and which belie the term). Part of the project of postcolonialism is to re-voice the indigenous and work to facilitate a more positive location for them in the order of things. There have been moves to restore indigenous epistemology and knowledge to a more legitimate and privileged place both in general (e.g. Cajete, 2000; Chilisa, 2012; Denzin et al., 2008; Smith, 1999) and within MOS (e.g. Alcadipani, et al. 2012; Holtbrugge et al., 2013; Westwood et al., 2014). Such moves in relation to the Māori of New Zealand have been noteworthy (e.g. Henry and Pene, 2001; Prichard et al., 2007; Smith, 1999). Settler colonies provide an interesting context for self–other relations in society and its organizations.

In a fascinating exploration of the ethics and politics of difference in the postcolonial conditions of New Zealand/Aotearoa, Drichel (2007) notes that government policy of biculturalism

reproduces the binary distinction constructed in colonial times between indigene and colonizing settler. In so doing the policy “preserves, in perhaps purer form than elsewhere, a sense of the original *colonial* distinction between self and other in *postcolonial* times. Because ‘the other’ so very evidently constitutes the ‘political bottom line’ in postcolonial New Zealand, the question of how to think about, or conceptualize, a *postcolonial* otherness distinct from its undesirable colonial antecedents is pressing here” (Drichel, 2007: 5). This offers another articulation of the core dilemma in an eminently practical and overtly political context, one with organizational ramifications beyond government policy.

Drichel places this in the broader context of postcolonialism’s struggle to adequately address the issue of the representation of otherness within discourses infected by the colonial which either contain this otherness in stereotypes or cancel it out altogether (ibid.: 4). The dilemma is, how can modes of representation be enacted that do not construct the Other only in relation to self, revert to the regime of the stereotype, and reduce the Other to the Same, but which rather allow the absolute otherness of the Other to be affirmed? This echoes Meffan and Worthington’s (2001: 133) concern with representations that result in “a violent reduction of the Other to the order of the same”. For Drichel the issue is how the “*postcolonial* distinction between Māori and Pakeha² can be prevented from falling back into the *colonial* distinction between self and other” (Drichel, 2007: 4). Critical in the case of Aotearoa, but relevant more generally, is that indigenous Māori are “fiercely protective of their ‘otherness’ from the Pakeha mainstream” (ibid.: 5). This returns us to an apparently ontological question; the being of the Other independent of and without refraction through the knowledge regime of the self. This is an issue at the heart of orientalism and of attempts to resist epistemic coloniality, both broadly and within MOS. It is also a call for what Levinas (1969, 1989) refers to as the “irreducible singularity of the other”, the other as unassimilable; a call that resonates with Bhabha’s (1994a: 74) notion of the ‘untranslatable’ Other, and Spivak’s *toute autre*, a wholly other that cannot be captured by self’s ontological categories. This absolute other is for Spivak (1999) an ‘inaccessible blankness’, opaque to Self’s regimes of knowledge, and incapable of being assimilated to the sameness of Self. This all suggests the impossibility of understanding difference, of knowing the Other, without making representations that are barbarous. As Spivak (1993: 83) says “it is not possible for us as ethical agents to imagine otherness or alterity maximally. We have to turn the Other into something like self in order to be ethical.”

For Levinas, viewing concern for the ‘irreducible singularity of the other’ as an ontological question is wrong since it takes us away from the ethical. He sees Western philosophy’s preoccupation with the ontological as a violent appropriation that always reduces the Other to the Same. The will to comprehend results in the ‘consumption’ of the other; an ingestion into the knowledge regimes of the apprehending ‘knower’. It is a violation of alterity since it amounts to “grasping being out of nothing or reducing it to nothing, removing from it its alterity” (Levinas, 1969: 43–44). For Levinas, ethics rests precisely in our responsibility to this unassimilable other, not to the Other as represented in our ontological categories. As Guenther (2009: 168–169) puts it:

The Other to whom I respond does not bear alterity as an attribute correlated to specific differences such as race, class, culture, or religious commitments . . . To grasp alterity in terms of concrete, observable differences would be to reduce an ethical concept to an ontological one, thus limiting my responsibility in advance to those who possess the appropriate qualities for commanding a response. For Levinas, I am not responsible for the widow, the orphan and the stranger as people of a certain kind or members of a certain social group; rather, I am responsible for the impoverished, abandoned and naked face of anyone, no matter who they are or what they have done.

It is the ‘knowing ego’ that reduces Other to the Same, that “reduces the structures of the world to the structure of the self, thus ‘consuming’ exteriority and abolishing alterity” (Drichel, 2007: 9). It is the Self’s, or in geopolitical terms the West’s, pursuit of knowledge of the Other that instantiates forms of epistemic violence and moves away from ethics. Whether it be in relation to organizational diversity or difference encountered in international management and business, it is the vampiric thirst for knowledge that ingests Otherness, but actually sucks out its alterity rendering it unknowable. It seems that if I want to know you as Other I must destroy you – where is the ethics in that? Ethics rests, Levinas insists, on the recognition that self only exists in relation to other. As noted elsewhere, “This is not a relationship whereby difference is subsumed into or known by the self (as in ICMS),³ but rather one of ‘infinite responsibility’ to the Other – an Other who can never be known in the intensity of its own particularity and to whom one is responsible without the expectation of reciprocity” (Rhodes and Westwood, 2007: 78). It seems I must ‘let knowledge go’ in the name of ethics.

Returning to the emblematic situation in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Drichel asserts that the politics of identity manifest in biculturalism (and multiculturalism) demands representation, but since representation, following Spivak, includes both ‘proxy’ and ‘portrait’, we re-encounter the apprehending, knowing ego that ‘portrays’ the Other and so erases their alterity. For Levinas this is an ethical violation since the demand is to assume responsibility for categorical constructions, not the irredeemably other. For Drichel (2007: 15) “Political representation – the representation of ‘the other’ in a bi- or multiculturally refracted mainstream – is therefore achieved only at the cost of ethics.” The same can be said for DM wherein it is the reconstruction of the categories of difference that is elevated (Ahonen et al., 2013), and for ICCM where categorical others are constantly appropriated and essentialized (Jack and Westwood, 2009). An ethical encounter needs to be outside of the will to know and the categorizations of a knowing ego. The will to know and the politics of knowledge push aside ethics. In Levinasian ethics the other is not apprehendable or knowable; indeed ethics lies in not seeking to know but in being responsible for the other *regardless* of who or what the other is. A ‘Pakeha’ is not responsible for a ‘Māori’ and vice versa, and an ethical response to a Māori does not rest on the categorization ‘Māori’. A Pakeha/Māori ethical response is to be responsible for the other whatever they are. The Pakeha/Māori’s otherness is not assimilated or apprehended, is not reduced to the same. Biculturalism/multiculturalism withers away. It should be noted that a relational view of self and a relational ethic is commonly asserted with respect to the Māori in particular and to indigenous worldviews more broadly along with alternative epistemological traditions (e.g. Cajete, 2000; Sizoo, 2010; Smith, 1999; Williams et al., 2012).

Eurocentric humanism and other ways to be human

The ideology of multiculturalism, foregrounded in DM and ICCM, often rests and draws upon humanism as a putative ethical stance. However, an ethics centred on Eurocentric humanism has been critiqued by poststructuralists, anti-colonialists and indigenous theorists. European humanism informed colonial discourse and provided a motive and mechanisms to “transform the ‘raw man’ (native) into a ‘real man’” (Kumar, 2011: 1560). Postcolonialism’s critique, Kumar (ibid.) suggests, “generally held that the colonized native had always already been ‘human’, but had simply been disfigured (Orientalism, for instance) as the ‘not-yet-human’ in the discourses of European humanism”. He argues that within postcolonialism two responses to humanism can be discerned.

The first response he associates with Fanon and others and he refers to it as ‘alter-humanist’ or ‘radical humanism’, which “positively enables the coloniser’s ascribed otherness” (ibid.: 1559).

Fanon (1961/2004) called for a ‘new’ man and a new humanism for the marginalized outside of European humanistic discourse, reasserting the radically other – an alter-human – and challenging the homogenizing and universalizing tendencies of European humanism. He exposed the violent, dehumanizing and genocidal consequences of these European conceptions of the human for the colonized. He urged people to “leave this Europe which never stops talking of man yet massacres him at every one of its street corners, at every corner of the world” (Fanon, 1961/2004: 235). For some a critique of Eurocentric humanism centres on resisting European insistencies on what it is to be human and post-Enlightenment conceptions of an integrated, independent, agentic, sovereign subject. Spivak (1987: 202), who asserts “an affinity between the imperialist subject and the subject of humanism”, also argues that a subject effect is constituted through heterogeneous and discontinuous discursive configurations and that this is antithetical to humanism which “requires a continuous and homogenous cause for this effect and thus posits a sovereign and determining subject” (ibid.: 204).

The second response, which Kumar associates with Said, Spivak, Chakrabarty and Bhabha, is termed variously ‘critical’, ‘consolidating’, ‘inclusive’, ‘residual’ humanism. Others also see humanism reappearing in various guises within postcolonialism (De Gennaro, 2003). Said’s contrapuntal reading, Bhabha’s hybridity and other “cosmopolitan configurations” or ‘solutions’ are present as forms of ‘residual humanism’ – “humanism that recedes into liberal humanist thought” (Kumar, 2011: 1560).

Kumar’s interest is in indigenous responses, particularly to the traditional humanism lurking in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). However, the issues resonate with Māori aspirations to sustain their otherness as noted by Drichel and with other indigenous aspirations including those related to indigenous MOS and the right to speak for themselves and write back in relation to their organization and management practices. Resonant too with resisting the humanist assumptions within multiculturalism and DM. Kumar (ibid.) asserts that the UDHR exhibits ‘residual humanism’ that “sets out to rescue the (non-)human other”. He informs that indigenous activists (e.g. the Indigenous Peoples Movement – IPM) are opposed to traditional, integrationist humanism and to the UDHR, which they see as an ideological extension of colonial humanism (Wright, 2001) and ensnared in the ideology of the sovereign subject. Indeed, Cheah (2004: 153) suggests it trades in language that has no philosophical or theological meaning in non-European cultures and is akin to a neo-colonial missionary project. The IPM insist that they do not need saving nor their humanity restored; they need to be self-determining and able to re-authorize “the other human that the indigene already is” (Kumar, 2011: 158). Indigenous ‘humanism’ affirms different ways to be human and distances itself from those limited and limiting conceptions of the human embedded in Eurocentric humanism. It asserts an indigenous, relational way of being human that can exist alongside, not subjacent to, a European way of being human. Humphries and Verbos (2014) make a similar claim with respect to a relational ethic that underpins Māori ways of organizing human relationships and human relations with the environment, ways more benevolent and harmonious than those underpinned by the dominant logic of the centre. The IPM also reject that being human depends upon the notion of the sovereign individual and affirm a radically communitarian view of the human. The UDHR is another example of the encroachment of the same and erasure of difference. We have seen in some of the critical DM literature a similar desire to resist the universal and the recuperation to the Same. Some go as far as suggesting that seeking to manage diversity – like trying to manage cultural/ethnic difference and multiculturalism – violates or assaults difference and is, in effect, a reduction of human diversity (Ahonen et al., 2013; Costea and Itrona, 2006).

The impossibility of the same

Provocatively, Argyrou (1999, 2002) asserts that there has never been a crisis of representation in anthropology, not even in the times of heterodox⁴ anthropology *après* Marcus/Fischer. He starkly asserts at the start of his book:

the best guarded secret in the discipline is that there has never been a crisis in ethnological representation . . . No such crisis has ever befallen the discipline because the most fundamental ethnological representation – the representation without which there would be no anthropology – is questioned by no one . . . The representation is none other than Sameness.

(Argyrou, 2002: 3)

Argyrou discerns the same return to liberal humanism, with its universalism and aspiration for a unified common humanity, in even postmodern-inflected anthropology that others discern within postcolonialism and discourses of multiculturalism and DM. He argues that despite the supposed celebration of difference in anthropology, an underlying belief persists that “all societies embody the Same cultural value and worth” Argyrou (2002: 1). He sees the anthropological project as fundamentally one of the reproduction of the Same. It is important to note that the same impulse is apparent in ICCM (Jack and Westwood, 2009). However, Argyrou goes further in pointing to the paradox that although anthropology always moves towards the Same, it always fails: the Same is an impossibility. Indeed, he starts the book by informing the reader that it is about “the impossible” and that ethnographers persistently grapple with the impossible, only to fail: but then they must persist despite inevitable failure (Argyrou, 2002: 1). The arguments are dense and thrive upon contradiction and paradox.

A central contradiction rests upon anthropology’s⁵ assumption that people are shaped differentially by different cultures and so its stock-in-trade is the examination of such difference. However, at the same time, and as impelled by a liberal humanist ethos, most anthropologists today are unwilling to endorse racist or ethnocentric viewpoints which explorations of difference risk. They eschew such endorsements and so affirm that ultimately all people and cultures are the same. The presumption of difference encounters its limits, shies away from any assertion of difference that might be interpreted as racist or ethnocentric, and returns to the Same. He argues that any assent to racism or ethnocentrism would be an acknowledgement of an arbitrary and meaningless world, and this is unpalatable, and so the return to the Same is a return to meaning and order – of sorts.

Argyrou maintains that Sameness is an “ethnological *a priori*” (1999: 31) in the sense that Sameness is the ‘condition of possibility’ for all of ethnology’s representations since the field needed to move beyond colonialist assumptions of the Other as less or other than human, and affirm the basic ‘psychic unity of mankind (*sic*)’. However, the drive to Sameness is always undercut. Ethnocentrically inflected taxonomies, categorizations, essentialisms and hierarchal binaries emerge at every point. There is always a reproduction of difference and typically a difference of inferiority. That this is so in part arises from the very fact that it is the gaze of the western anthropologist (but also MOS scholar, sociologist, psychologist, etc.) that is cast upon those of the non-West together with the assumption that such a gaze will deliver knowledge somehow inaccessible to the ‘native’. The western anthropologist is the omniscient producer of knowledge, the native the myopic dupe. The claim to know privileges and differentiates from those who are ignorant about themselves and instantiates a difference that inferiorizes the Other. This ‘speaking for’ and inferiorizing the other has been a feature of ICCM from its

beginnings with Harbison and Myers (1959), through pervasive Hofstede-an-informed analysis and on to the GLOBE project (House et al., 2004) and beyond.

For Argyrou the problem arises from a clash between two alternative views of social reality or modes of representation. The first is the representation of Sameness which, as noted, he sees as a priori and metaphysical. The second is a posteriori and empirical and relates to all the representations of Otherness that anthropology produces. Under the presumptions of heterodox anthropology such representations are necessarily considered as socially and historically situated, constructed and 'fictive'. They cannot be viewed as real representations of real others, but as imaginaries constructed by self and in relation to self's interests. As Argyrou (1999: 31) argues "The 'crisis', then . . . emerges because the empirical contradicts the transcendental. Indeed, in a very important sense, the entire history of ethnology can be read as a persistent attempt to demonstrate Sameness in the face of the *a posteriori* representations that contradict it."

Confronting this 'ethnological problem', anthropology has responded with three 'strategies of mediation'. The first is to locate "manifestations of the self in other societies" (Argyrou, *ibid.*). Most often this takes the form of locating some characteristic that is present in the other culture, but in a deficient or inferior form. For example, it has been common in the ICCM literature to examine the assumed universality of organizational leadership, but to disparage the leadership of the other as paternalistic, authoritarian or despotic. Another example is that from Weber to Redding (1990) and beyond, Chinese (and other non-western cultures) have been acknowledged to have complex organizational forms, but ones deficient relative to the rationality and impersonalism of western forms. The second strategy is the obverse of the first in that it works through the location of aspects of Otherness in western societies. An example here might be the (re-)emergence of the spiritual within western MOS (e.g. Edwards, 2004). The third is to address Otherness directly and "its aim is to demonstrate that although Otherness has form, it lacks content or, to put it another way, its content is the Same despite its different form" (Argyrou, 1999: 31). Through a close reading of a series of classic anthropological texts, Argyrou shows these strategies to be persistently present. He suggests that no one and no paradigm has "succeeded in mediating the conflict between Sameness and Otherness without compromising the former" and no person/paradigm "has not been found, to a lesser or greater extent, guilty of the ultimate ethnological transgression – ethnocentrism" (*ibid.*: 33). The essential paradox is restated by Argyrou (*ibid.*: 34): "ethnology divides the world because it strives to unite it. This brings me to the impossible – Sameness."

The impossibility of Sameness arises because it can never be demonstrated and every attempt to do so is undone.

For Sameness to manifest itself, anthropologists must define difference as that which does not know itself, for if difference knew itself it would cease being different and would become the same . . . The limit of Sameness, then, is this: it can manifest itself only on the condition that it creates difference – on the condition, that is, that it destroys itself in emergence – which is another way of saying that it cannot be demonstrated.

(Argyrou, 1999: 34)

Argyrou then asks: why does anthropology persist in the pursuit of the impossible; endeavouring to uphold Sameness when all its representations produce difference? His answer is somewhat convoluted and metaphysical. First, if we attain a perspective 'outside the world' we can locate one transcendent Sameness; the radical finitude of life. Realization of this compels recognition of the irrelevance of the differences we so fret about, but also that life overall is arbitrary, absurd and meaningless. This is unpalatable, not least because we are obliged to accept

racism and ethnocentrism as manifestations of the arbitrary and the absurd. So confronted we go in search of meaning; we leave the confrontation with the Same and go in search of the differentiations and categories that we hope/believe provide meaning and holds at bay the meaningless abyss. Our search for meaning constructs difference and creates the Other. Sameness has nothing to do with epistemology, “It is a metaphysical ontology of the order of magico-religious systems, itself a system that makes anthropological lives meaningful and hence something that must be and is placed beyond all empirical questioning” (ibid.: 36). There is a will to meaning that affirms Sameness even in the face of all those representations of difference that unravel it. “Sameness can manifest itself only on the condition that it destroys itself – on the condition, that is, that it creates difference. Thus, the stage is set for a vicious circle in which attempts to demonstrate Sameness produce difference that must be and is reckoned with only to be reproduced further down the road” (ibid.: 37). There is a “will to secure Sameness, but this is not simply or even mainly a will to power or a will to truth. It is above all a will to meaning – a desire for an ethically meaningful, that is, socially unified world” (ibid.).

Argyrou’s position might be considered bleak and pessimistic. Perhaps it is, and he offers little by way of solution. He urges anthropologists (and others working with difference) to be more reflexive, but not in the sense typically intended. We must acknowledge that we are ‘playing a game’, an academic game of knowledge. But, he reminds us, this is also a game of power and so materially consequential. If we continue to play we will *ipso facto* continue to construct fictions of difference; we will continue to construct the Other, and the Other as an inferiority. Speaking to those *othered* through this game Argyrou says:

The only way to put an end to this game . . . is to play it better than the players themselves. The only way to undermine the power of Western definitions of the world that burden the rest of the world is to beat the powers at their own game . . . play enough or as much as necessary to expose it for what it really is – only a game – a game not because it is innocuous but because it is arbitrary and cannot be grounded anywhere.

(Argyrou, 2002: 6–7)

All discourses are defeasible, and for all their arrogant pretensions every western discourse in fact rests on nothing: “there is no Western discourse that cannot be exposed in its groundlessness and arbitrariness – that cannot be disenchanting and demythologized” (ibid.: 9). There is no *logos*, no foundation that guarantees meaning. Argyrou wants to expose this and enable those othered through the West’s power and dominance to “laugh at the grandiose claims of Western discursive power” (ibid.: 8). He wants to expose the ineluctable arbitrariness of western discourse and power and to:

remind Others what they already know: that it is naïve, to say the least, to think that one small group of societies, in an insignificant part of the world, during an infinitesimal (in the wider scheme of things) time-span has reached such a level of enlightenment as to decide for all of us what it means to Be.

(Argyrou, 2002: 8)

There are two problems here. One is that although Argyrou is talking about the discourses of ethnology/anthropology and attempts to represent the Other and confines his exposing strategies to that, he knows the complicity of anthropology in other forms of power and discourse. The embeddedness of anthropology in the colonial project and its part in the reproduction of the unbalanced socio-economic and cultural order of things within global capitalism has been

well explicated (e.g. Asad, 1973; Gledhill, 2000). Given that Argyrou has made much of the relationship between knowledge, discourse and power, it is disingenuous to uncouple the power effects of anthropological discourse.

So how is the impoverished, exploited and othered person of the peripheral Global South to respond to this exposure? With laughter presumably. The othered has doubtless laughed at the presumptions and fictions of anthropological representations. How those Samoans laughed at Margaret Mead's rendition of their sexual mores. They might even have laughed at Freeman's alternative account and his reduction to the Same. As they giggled they might also have reflected upon the poverty and dependence they confront. Their ancestors might read with a wry grimace an Oxfam (NZ) account which begins:

Palm-fringed beaches and turquoise seas may give the impression of an island paradise, but Samoa's poverty is on a par with sub-Saharan Africa. It is classified by the UN as one of the world's least developed countries.

(Oxfam, 2013)

The second problem is that those on the receiving end of this discursive power are invited to also play the game so as to expose the arbitrary and the ungrounded. But then how are they to respond to this invitation? The arbitrary and meaningless, although risible at one level, are frightening and unpalatable at another; as Argyrou insists. Would not these others also go in search of meaning and embark on discourses that inevitably construct difference and equivalent fractious hierarchical binaries to those visited upon them? It would seem that we do not end up with comforting Sameness, but a recycling through difference in a kind of horrid Occidentalism and ethnocentrism. However, instead of critiquing him for not offering the comfort of a solution and bemoaning an unresolved paradox perhaps we should reflect on the tyranny of the solution and the politics and ethics attendant upon that.

The fetish of the solution: towards a spoiled ending

In this chapter I have deliberately circled around paradox and dilemma. I began with a problem, that of the encounter with difference and ways of responding to and representing that. According to the conventions of which I, as an academic of the western academy, and this text, as a product of the publishing machine of the western knowledge industry, are typically bound, I should now offer you a solution. But I am going to resist that.

It is not that solutions have not been forthcoming. One is to apply the Regime of the Same – in some respects this is the path of various humanistic solutions to human problems, such as those inherent to the ideology of multiculturalism. This seems unsatisfactory; even, as Argyrou suggests, impossible. As I have also noted, transparent reflexivity was broadly touted as a solution, but is increasingly seen to have limits. For instance, one conceptual difficulty with it is that it presumes a visual notion of being reflexive that repeats the self–other dynamics explored earlier. From within postcolonialism various other solutions have been offered, from Said's 'contrapuntal reading', through Spivak's 'strategic essentialism' to various forms of dialogism and mutual engagement. Each has been challenged and such critical readings seem to always lead to further aporia.

The contemporary impulsion to find a solution (to anything and everything) is pervasive. Perhaps it emerges from the will to meaning that Argyrou notes. However, there is a Politics of the Solution in that political agency requires solutions and political capital is derived from locating one. The same politics of the solution is rampant in organizations; indeed I would argue

that an ideology of the solution infests organizations and is the *sin qua non* of management. I am not naively suggesting that organizations should forgo the search for pragmatic solutions to practical problems, but I am questioning the fetishization of the solution and the apparent – culturally and historically situated – belief that a solution can be found for everything. I take this to be widespread within the West and to derive from the development of certain specific values, beliefs and ideologies that are embedded in the European tradition. In particular, I locate it in the elevation of human agency and reason to the level of the presumed capacity to take on everything and every problem and solve it emergent in the Enlightenment (Boyne and Rattansi, 1990).

Of course there is a risk of sliding full-tilt into essentialisms here and hurtling down into yet another vortex of dilemmas. Sidestepping that, and in the spirit of the insistence on meaning that the tradition has impelled, it can be argued that the fetish of the Solution has the conditions of its emergence in particular circumstances and ideas fomenting through ‘The Enlightenment’. These ideas include *inter alia* increasing rationalism, materialism and empiricism. I do not have space to explore this and recognize that the whole notion of the ‘enlightenment’ is contested (e.g. Edelstein, 2010). However, this heterogeneous but interpenetrated set of ideas do appear to paint western modernity with a distinct patina of human agency and efficacy, and the belief that through the application of human reason and scientific method there is no human or material problem that cannot be solved. This has an analogue in the classic anthropological literature itself wherein ‘values orientation theory’ argued for cultural differences in relation to values associated with five core spheres of human life (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck; 1961). One of these concerns human relationships with the environment in which mastery (as opposed to harmony or acceptance) is seen to be a western, particularly Anglocentric, orientation; although other western value orientations such as individualism, and future/present and ‘doing’ orientations are also of relevance and have been applied to organizational contexts (Carter, 2000; Russo, 2000).

Is it possible to conceive of and articulate an ethics and a politics that is not based on the fetish of The Solution? Again, there is not space to pursue this, but I might just offer a tease by way of a spoiled ending. If, as I have argued via Levinas, we need to let go of knowledge to retain ethics, is there an ethics that avoids the search for and imposition of a solution – which always seems to imply a return to the political and to power? Is there an ethics of acceptance, of silence even, that allows the other to exist in their absolute otherness and within which self is not compelled to seek category or representation? There is of course: certainly within Buddhism, but also within other religious and cosmological systems that, incidentally, are at radically different points to the West on Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck’s values orientation dimensions. One also gets closer to this within the holistic cosmology and relational view of self and relational ethics of many indigenous belief systems. I will leave you that tease and lapse into silence.

Notes

- 1 Argyrou here, and elsewhere, is referring to anthropology, but I believe in terms of the issues being addressed in this chapter there are parallels with other social sciences, including MOS. In general this chapter arrives at MOS via deliberations and analysis in adjacent disciplines/fields.
- 2 Māori term for the white settler or non-indigenous New Zealanders.
- 3 International and Comparative Management Studies.
- 4 Argyrou uses the term ‘heterodox’ to refer to poststructuralist, postmodern positions in anthropology.
- 5 At all points anthropology could be substituted by other social sciences including MOS.

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