Guest editorial

About the Guest Editors
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Introduction to the special issue on "Critical reflections on management and organizations: a postcolonial perspective"

It is perhaps a sign of changing times that postcolonial theory has begun to gather momentum even in a somewhat intellectually staid field like business management. The last ten years or so, for instance, have witnessed the publication of a host of postcolonial theoretic writings on management and organizations, including research articles in journals (Banerjee, 2000; Frenkel & Shenhav, 2006; Mir & Mir, 2007; Prasad, 1997a) or in edited volumes (e.g., Prasad, 2003a), and a wide range of scholarly presentations at the Postcolonialism Stream of the International Critical Management Studies (CMS) Conference (the Stream has been convened at each International CMS Conference, held every other year since 1999) as well as at various other academic conventions. In these and other ways, the postcolonial perspective continues to reorient critique in the field of management, and to broaden the terrain of CMS represented by some earlier critical studies of management (see Prasad, 2008). The present special issue of *CPOIB* offers a set of articles that make further contributions to postcolonial theoretic critiques of management and organizations.

It may be useful to note here that, at its core, postcolonial theory is driven by radical critiques of colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism. Inspired and informed by political activists, freedom fighters, and anti-colonial activists from Africa, India, South America and other regions, postcolonial perspectives called for nations emerging from colonialism to 'decolonize their minds' (Ngugi wa Thiong'O, 1981) and to contest the unquestioned sovereignty of Western epistemological, economic, political and cultural categories (Prasad, 2003b). In a broad sense, the postcolonial approach seeks to understand contemporary problems in developing countries through a "retrospective reflection on colonialism" (Said, 1986: 45). As Prasad (2003b) points out, a postcolonial perspective can be intellectually productive in the sense that it can reveal the neo-colonial assumptions that underlie management disciplines, especially international management and cross-cultural management. Neo-colonialism can be understood as a continuation of direct Western colonialism without the traditional mechanism of expanding frontiers and territorial control, but with elements of political, economic and cultural control.

It is not our intention here to provide an in-depth overview of the scholarly terrain of postcolonial theory. Several such overviews of varying lengths already exist (see e.g., Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1995; Gandhi, 1998; Goldberg & Quayson, 2002; Lewis & Mills, 2003; Loomba, 1998; Mongia, 1996; Prasad, 2003b; Williams & Chrisman, 1994; Young, 2001), and the interested reader is invited to refer to these and similar other works. Nevertheless, a short note on postcolonialism as a field of critical inquiry might be of some use to those who are relative newcomers to this area of scholarship.

Briefly stated, postcolonial theory seeks to critique and analyze the complex and multifaceted dynamics of modern Western colonialism and to develop an in-depth understanding of the "ongoing significance of the colonial encounter for people's lives both in the West and the non-West" (Prasad, 2003b: 5). Postcolonial theory points out that modern Western colonialism—a phenomenon with a history of roughly 500 years and a geographical reach that at one point spanned approximately 90 percent of the entire earth (Young, 2001: 2)—is an episode of particular significance in human history. Hence, colonialism is a phenomenon eminently deserving of detailed scholarly investigation. Moreover, colonialism is a phenomenon worthy of thorough study also because of its *ongoing continuation*, in a variety of ways, as neo-colonialism. The time-space assumptions of the prefix 'post-' tend to homogenize different histories and normalize inter-cultural differences. This assumption of temporal distance obscures the continuing unevenness of power relations between colonizer and colonized in the present by prespecifying the path the former colonies must take – the path to "development", "progress" and "modernity" continues the same uneven transfer of resources from the south to the north, this time using the economic machine in addition to the military machine. The term "postcolonial", especially the use of the prefix "post" has not gone unchallenged and critics have pointed out that traces of colonialism in present postcolonial histories of new nation states are often obliterated or retraced in economic terms of "progress" and "development" (Shohat, 1992). Thus, the postcolonialism project while attempting to give voice to "the lost, silenced, dispossessed 'other'" (Muecke, 1992: 10) should also speak of its complicity in contemporary power relations.

However, in addition to emphasizing the ongoing significance of colonialism in today's world, the postcolonial perspective also brings something new and different in the way it undertakes the study of colonialism. Specifically, in contrast to certain earlier Western scholarly approaches that, by and large, adopted Eurocentric perspectives in the course of mostly examining political and/or economic aspects of Western colonialism and neo-colonialism, postcolonial theory stakes a position firmly committed to critiquing Eurocentrism, and gives significant attention not only to political and economic issues, but also to the cultural, psychological, philosophical, epistemological and similar other aspects of (neo-) colonialism. In a nutshell, therefore, postcolonialism may be viewed as a much more comprehensive critique and deconstruction of the constitutive practices and discourses of (neo-) colonialism.

As is commonly known, it was mainly with the publication of Edward Said's masterpiece, *Orientalism* (1978) that postcolonial theory began to gain recognition within Western scholarly circles as a major new perspective for radical critique. In this highly influential study, Said (1978) minutely dissected the Western discourse of Orientalism relating primarily to Middle East and Islam, and made the case that Western colonial domination went hand in hand with the construction—across a range of activities

including specialized scholarship, general thought, as well as institutionalized practices of administration, education, journalism, diplomacy and so on—of an elaborate hierarchy of binary oppositions positing a fundamental "ontological and epistemological distinction" (p.2) between the Occident and the Orient.

Such a structure of hierarchical binaries (e.g., civilized/savage, developed/ undeveloped, modern/archaic, nation/tribe, scientific/superstitious, and so on)—in which the Occident was coupled with privileged terms like 'civilized' and 'modern' while the Orient was linked with terms like 'archaic' or 'superstitious' that denoted inferiority— served to produce a representation of the Orient, or indeed even of the entire non-Western world, as something *ontologically inferior* to the West, and hence needing firm Western supervision, guidance and assistance for becoming fully civilized, and developed/modern. In so doing, the ideological discourse of Orientalism sought to justify modern Western colonialism as a moral and redemptive project intended to *help* the non-Western peoples all of whom were supposedly lagging behind in the linear March of World History. At the same time, moreover, by seemingly becoming an integral part of the broad belief system and 'common sense' of the West, the hierarchical binaries embodied in the discourse of Orientalism also came to hold great significance for the identities of Western individuals,

In addition to Edward Said's signal intellectual contributions (e.g., Said, 1978, 1993), the overall conceptual framework of postcolonial theory has been significantly shaped by the pioneering work done by scholars like Ashis Nandy (1983, 1995), Homi Bhabha (1994), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1987, 1999). Whereas Nandy's writings are primarily concerned with investigating the psychology of colonialism, Bhabha has widely theorized on issues of colonial ambivalence, hybridity and mimicry, and Spivak has extensively examined complex themes relating to feminism, philosophy, culture, literature, and history. Propelled by the intellectual efforts of these and other scholars, postcolonial theoretic work has literally mushroomed during the last several years, and now stretches over an extraordinarily wide range of topics including, *inter alia*, feminism (Lewis & Mills, 2003; Mohanty, Russo & Torres, 1991), globalization (Appadurai, 1996; Banerjee & Linstead, 2001; Pieterse, 2004), history and historiography (Chakrabarty, 2000; Guha, 1997), Indigenous issues (Banerjee, 2000; Banerjee & Linstead 2004; nationalism (Bhabha, 1990; Chatterjee, 1986, 1993), philosophy and epistemology (Mignolo, 2000; Mudimbe, 1988), race issues (Banerjee & Osuri, 2000; Osuri & Banerjee, 2004; Gilroy, 2000), science (Nandy, 1988; Prakash, 1999), sustainable development (Banerjee, 2003) and a variety of themes in management and organization studies (Banerjee, 2001; Frenkel & Shenhav, 2006; Mir & Mir, 2007; Prasad, 1997a, 1997b, 2003a, 2006).

Given the wide range of interests animating the broad postcolonial oeuvre, it is not surprising that the general terrain of postcolonial theoretic scholarship is marked by intense debates and extraordinary heterogeneity. The heterogeneity of the field is seemingly deepened even further on account of wide divergences in the ways in which different strands of postcolonial scholarship mobilize and/or relate with other critical approaches like Marxism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, and the like. Despite these and other differences, however, what may be seen as lending overall unity and coherence to the various streams of postcolonial scholarship is their unwavering commitment to the intellectual and ethical project of subverting Eurocentrism and 'provincializing Europe'

(Chakrabarty, 2000; Prasad, 1997a). It is this very ethical and intellectual commitment that seems to inform the articles included in this special issue.

The papers in this special issue reflect different aspects of contemporary issues in postcolonialism. In terms of postcolonial geographies the papers cover regions as diverse as Africa, Australia, China, India, Jordan, Malaysia, Poland and the United Kingdom. Postcolonial histories include narratives that describe the construction of modern market citizens in Malaysia, the transition from socialism to capitalism in Poland, colonial overtones in relationships between multinational corporations and subsidiaries in India, the history and construction of corruption discourses in Africa, Eurocentric themes in the construction of Chinese capitalism and Chinese human resources management, the relationship between mining companies and Indigenous communities, cultures of bureaucratic governance of Indigenous communities and Indigenous sovereignty in Australia, hybridity and diversity in voluntary sector organizations and the changing role of women managers in Jordan.

The first three papers in the special issue describe different aspects of the 'post'-colonial status of Indigenous communities in Australia. The foundational pillars of colonialism were based on the construction of Indigeneity as the binary opposite of modernity and development. However, as the three papers argue, in the postcolonial era the rhetoric of development continues to be informed by colonial modes of governance. For example, Richard Parsons problematizes the 'rhetorical elevation' of Indigenous communities to 'stakeholders' and argues that stakeholder or community engagement while appearing to empower Indigenous communities may continue to promote colonial modes of development. In his discourse analysis of community engagement at two Australian minerals corporations, Parsons describes how Indigeneity in terms of respect and relationship to land played a key role in Indigenous perceptions of understanding and experience of community engagement. Development and management discourses were central to corporate constructions of community engagement and Indigeneity. Indigenous and corporate participants had differing understandings of concepts like 'development', 'business' and 'industry'. Consequently, in the corporate worldview normative assumptions underlying notions of 'stakeholders' and corporate social responsibility were strategically deployed rather than reflect alternative ethical positions in terms of land use or development.

Patrick Sullivan describes the construction and influence of a culture of bureaucracy that pervades the governance of Indigenous people in Australia. He shows how a 'bureaucratic imagination' determines patterns of action and existence for Indigenous people where representations of Indigenous life become the 'raw material of bureaucratic industry'. The material effects of Indigenous policy are often directed to sustaining bureaucratic relations determined by hierarchical flows of information and discourses of accountability in the public sector. This complex inter-bureaucratic encounter runs the danger of 'bureaucratic involution' where the creation and articulation of policy becomes paramount often at the expense of implementation.

Deirdre Tedmanson analyzes the political and juridical reactions arising from a death in police custody of Mulrunji, a Palm Islander man. She argues that the violence of Australia's colonial past continues to inform its postcolonial present in the material and discursive structures that frame Indigenous-non Indigenous relations in Australia. Drawing on contemporary notions of sovereignty, Tedmanson argues that the death of

Mulrunji was an exercise of sovereign power in creating what Agamben calls a state of exception or a 'hybrid space of indistinction' that was expanded into a declaration of a state of emergency to control the riots that followed.

From postcolonial Indigenous struggles we then move to the power dynamics that frame discourses of neo-liberal development and knowledge production in postcolonial nation states in Asia and Africa. Vanessa Chio provides a postcolonial perspective of neo-liberal economic development policies in Malaysia, particularly in the context of knowledge transfers and the production of 'modern market citizens'. Drawing on insights from postcolonial deconstructions of development she highlights the interconnections between knowledge and power and the modernist assumptions that contribute to the active reconstitution of local subjects. Based on ethnographic data she shows how knowledge transfer is less a process of skills acquisition and more an outcome of power relations that actively produces local subjects.

Bill de Maria traces the neocolonial assumptions that frame contemporary discourses of economic development particularly in the way concepts of corruption are deployed in the distribution of western aid in Africa. Arguing against 'monochromatic definitions' of corruption de Maria shows how the 'Corruption Perception Index', developed and popularized by Transparency International is an inherently flawed measurement index because it measures proxies of corruption while eliding cultural variations. Western 'ownership' of corruption in Africa ignores the effects of poverty and hunger on corrupt practices and positioning corruption instead as 'greed based'. Western notions of corruption as manifested by the Corruption Index are accepted uncritically by African governments and donor organizations and is an example of neocolonial practice that entrenches western economic and geopolitical interests.

Raza Mir, Bobby Banerjee and Ali Mir problematize the notion of organizational knowledge, particularly in the historical experiences of power differences and economic imbalances that underlie 'knowledge transfer' between multinational corporations and their subsidiaries. They describe the results of an ethnographic study of knowledge transfer between a US multinational and its Indian subsidiary and argue that much of the interaction reflected older relationships in the era of colonialism. Their analysis points to a colonial understanding of knowledge that highlights disjunctures between theoretical descriptions of knowledge transfer and the empirical realities of MNC-subsidiary relations. Their findings indicate that relations at the workplace are the sites of class struggle and alienation and at times reflect relations of imperialism and cultural dislocation.

Aspects of cultural imperialism that accompany neo-liberal reforms, especially in the case of language, can be seen in several 'transitional economies' in Eastern Europe, Martyna Śliwa discusses the social changes taking place in Poland following the collapse of socialism and the transition to a market economy. Arguing that 'language acquisition' can be seen as imperialist practice, Śliwa traces the 'polices and practices of linguistic imperialism' where the increasing importance of English in Polish society has created new divisions. Yet in the context of post-socialist Poland there are marked differences in the way English was deployed as part of the British Empire's 'civilizing project' in the former colonies of Africa and Asia. While at different historical periods the use of Russian and German was imposed on Polish society, market imperatives appear to influence the widespread influence of English in post-socialist Poland.

Qi Xu provides a critical analysis of S. Gordon Redding's *The Spirit of Chinese Capitalism.* She traces the Eurocentric themes that inform the anthropological construction of Chinese subjects. Qi Xu shows how Redding's production of knowledge about the Chinese is located in a Western normative framework using Western economic categories and organizational structures to understand Chinese businesses. As she points out in so-called comparative management studies the production of the object of knowledge often results in a loss of particular situated knowledges. The 'master templates' of Western normative categories uncritically and unproblematically reinforce notions of atomized individuals and autonomous selves that position Chinese subjects as deviants from the norm where 'our theory' is used to understand 'their culture'. Qi Xu offers a potential alternative approach to comparative management that can avoid objectification, place 'conversation before vision' and 'ethics and justice before knowledge.

Continuing the critique of representation of 'the Other' Lenis Lai-wan Cheung describes the 'one-way dialogue' that tends to frame interactions between Western expatriate and local managers in multinational corporations located in China. In a qualitative study of Human Resource Management practices in foreign corporations operating in China, Lenis Cheung finds evidence of 'asymmetrical understanding' between Chinese and non-Chinese managers. Her analysis shows that Chinese managers are expected to be knowledgeable about Western business and cultural mores but Western managers are not expected have a similar level of knowledge and understanding. Bringing more Chinese voices into the interaction between Chinese and expatriate managers may lay the ground for more meaningful dialogue. Drawing on notions of self from both European and Chinese perspectives Cheung shows how miscommunications arise from asymmetries in cultural understanding and argues that meaningful dialogue can occur only when both Chinese and expatriate managers have equal rights to 'give voice'.

Amal al Kharouf and David Weir describe an empirical study of employment patterns of women in Jordan. Attempting to disentangle Western stereotypical positions about the role of women in the Middle East, the authors argue that western values are implicit and complicit in charactering many women in the Arab world. Rather than dismiss entire Arabian societies as 'neo-patriarchal' their analysis revealed that in many cases the influence of family on the kind of employment that Jordanian women undertook was not restricted to fathers and husbands but included mothers and daughters as well. Contrary to western stereotypes the influence of family was often 'supportive and facilitative' rather than 'repressive and stifling'. Summary descriptions of neo-patriarchy do not capture the complex and evolving social realities faced by women managers in Jordan and neither do simplistic binaries of 'traditional' and 'modern' or 'developed' and 'under developed'. The authors argue there is a need to challenge established Western frameworks of understanding the role of women in economic development in the non-Western world.

Schwabenland and Tomlinson attempt to apply concepts from postcolonial theory to understand the dynamics of power, control and resistance within organizations. In particular they explore how notions of hybridity, which was one marker of the colonizer-colonized encounter, could be used to explain power dynamics in implementing a workplace diversity policy in the voluntary organization sector in the UK. While

hybridity in the colonial encounter was an outcome of power relationships it did not preclude the possibility of opening up a cultural space that could 'entertain difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy (Bhabha, 2003). Schwabenland and Tomlinson describe the emergence of hybrid forms of organizing in the voluntary organization sector as well as the problems arising from the 'business case for diversity' and the 'dynamics of coercion and control' experienced by managers.

It is our hope that the articles in this special issue inspire and provoke critical reflections on management practice. To quote Paul Rabinow (1986) there is a need to 'anthropologize the West' to show how organization, practices and knowledge become translated into universal categories despite their European origin. Perhaps 'provincializing Europe' to borrow a phrase from Dipesh Chakravarty can reveal the historical peculiarity of taken-for-granted universal truths and allow the emergence of human narratives that interrupt and defer the universalizing and totalizing discourses of management and organization theory in an attempt to reclaim historical difference.

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