



Masking subversion: Neocolonial embeddedness in anthropological accounts of indigenous management

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability and sound ecological management of the natural environment, allied to the expanding body of work on managing tacit and explicit knowledge, has led to an increased interest in the contribution which anthropology can make to the practical adaptation of indigenous environmental knowledge and practice to the improvement of organization in western societies. In an exemplary ethnographic study of an indigenous beaver trapper belonging to the Cree Nation, Whiteman and Cooper introduced the concept of ecological embeddedness. Their study could be considered a model that reverses the traditional practice of viewing managers as though they were primitives and applying concepts employed in studying native communities to organizations. They consider indigenous practitioners as managers, identify their management practices, and then reconsider contemporary management practice towards the environment in this light. They argue that to be ecologically embedded as a manager is to identify personally with the land, to adhere to beliefs of ecological respect, reciprocity and caretaking, actively to gather ecological information and to be located physically in the ecosystem. The present article provides a critique of Whiteman and Cooper's argument and explores the ways in which, at the same time as it is purportedly represented, indigenous thought is masked and thereby subverted. We argue that much of their theorizing – as in so much anthropological accounting – is rooted in neocolonial thought and despite the authors' claims, a so-called

'indigenous land ethic' has limited, if any, relevance to current management theory and practice. This is because such a land ethic is disembedded from the indigenous consciousness of their own economic, social and political history; and similarly for its reception requires a similar disembeddedness in the receiving culture – which then applies a loose analogy or even caricature of indigenous behaviour to its own practices. Such a consciousness remains, therefore, unreflexively embedded in its own neocolonialism. We argue that these problems are not confined to Whiteman and Cooper's work, but are, to a greater or lesser degree, found in a wide range of anthropological accounts and constitute a problem with which the field is still struggling. To import these features into organizational theorizing without recognizing the deeply problematic nature of contemporary anthropological practice can only produce a reductionist and romanticized picture of native ontologies.

KEYWORDS anthropology ■ ecological embeddedness ■ indigenous ■ management ■ organization ■ postcolonial

The master's tool will never dismantle the master's house.

(Audre Lorde)

Western anthropology's fascination with the Other has a long and troubled history. Intimately linked with the projects of colonialism and development, anthropology as a science served to generate knowledge about 'other' societies and cultures, knowledge that was often used to govern and colonize the Other (Wolfe, 1999). The anthropological method, with its corresponding epistemological and ontological assumptions, became popular in other disciplines as well, including organization studies. With the demise of direct colonialism the new paradigm of the postcolonial era was one that proffered indirect rule and promised local autonomy. There was a corresponding paradigm shift in anthropology – from 'an all-encompassing developmental hierarchy to a plurality of relativized and self-sustaining sociocultural isolates' (Wolfe, 1999: 43). However, as we argue in this article, many anthropological investigations in the so-called postcolonial era, despite their disavowal of colonialism, continue to be informed by colonial thought.

'International management' and 'cross-cultural management' are fertile areas of research and have been so for some time. In an increasingly global era informed and configured by neo-liberal economic thought, the need for

greater knowledge about 'other' markets and consumers is of paramount importance. The fact that the definition of who or what constitutes the 'international other' depends on who is asking the question often gets lost in much of the research on international management. So called 'knowledge transfers' and knowledge appropriation seem to proceed unproblematically and much of this research is characterized by a narrow functionalist approach in the construction of the Other – whether they are other markets, institutions, national governments, consumers or 'international' or 'host country' employees. In this article we use insights from postcolonial theory to critique and subvert the unquestioned sovereignty of categories and representations produced by western social science. While it is true that the epistemological assumptions of prevalent modes of inquiry have come under criticism in recent times by developments in critical theory, postmodernism and post-structuralism (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Clegg et al., 1996; Kilduff & Mehra, 1997), much of this criticism is strangely silent on the colonial and neo-colonial assumptions of knowledge production (Prasad, 2003). In this article we attempt to reveal the problematic nature of the knowledge production process, particularly in the context of non-western cultures.

The recent attention given to developing sustainable and ecologically sound management (at least insofar as it makes commercial sense) in the management and organization literature, coupled with the enormous activity in techniques of managing knowledge in its explicit and tacit forms, has led to a resurgence of interest in the contribution which anthropology can make to the appropriation, translation and adaptation of indigenous environmental knowledge and practice for the improvement of First World organizations. In this article, we critically examine one study which attempts such a translation from an empirical study of an indigenous 'manager' in order to highlight problems, perhaps insoluble ones, with the practice of anthropology and the transmission and translation of subaltern indigenous knowledge and values into alien, and dominant hegemonic, cultural contexts (Spivak, 1988a).

The anthropologist seeks out indigenous sources or message givers, i.e. those who are observed and studied – and appropriates their message, inevitably betraying them in the process, and yet because of the distortions of the translation process also betrays the message hearers, delivering, at best, partial truths and forms of fiction (Linstead, 1993). Nevertheless, heard or unheard, the message has moral and political consequences as long as both givers and receivers are persuaded that a genuine message exists, and behave accordingly, because the balance of knowledge and power to act on the message is always unequal between givers and hearers. As Crapanzano (1992: 4) argues, anthropologists are always to some extent 'shielded by fictions of objectivity, neutrality and distance', whilst the moral and political

consequences of their role provide 'the determining undersong' of their investigations.

For Crapanzano, it is the anthropologist's ability to become open to the varieties of otherness and reflect them in ways which force members of their own culture to assume different perspectives, to question the assumptions they make about selves and others and the nature of our respective worlds which is their most valuable critical contribution. But the anthropologist's ability to experience broken categories or social ruptures and achieve insight through them is often driven by a desire to achieve unity and clarity even when frustrated. This desire, which Crapanzano (1992) considers to be characteristic of western thought, is typified by Ernest Gellner (1988: 29, emphasis in original):

Cultures are not cognitively equal, and the one with which alone anthropology is possible cannot really be denied a special status. The nature and justification of that pre-eminence is a deep and difficult matter. But it springs from something far more important than the arrogance of an imperial class. It is linked to the very possibility of *reason*.

Although Gellner does not fully specify what he means here by reason, his defence of western thought nevertheless cuts his version of anthropology off from all those varieties of anthropology which require openness to the other as a pre-requisite of inquiry; which realize that reason and value are not easily separated; which recognize that reason and reasoning are not identical, and acknowledge that a capacity for reason is characteristic of even the most primitive societies although it is valued and distributed differently (Crapanzano, 1992). Yet as Crapanzano argues, even though the surface of anthropological argumentation might suggest that Gellner's views are anathematic to most anthropology, they are nevertheless implicit in much of what contemporary anthropologists say and write, where the authority of the author casts a shadow from 'above and behind those whose experience he purports to describe' (Crapanzano, 1992: 69).

In this article, we examine how colonialism continues to cast its shadow in this postcolonial era and how neocolonial assumptions continue to mask and subvert the perspectives of indigenous peoples whilst ostensibly trying to achieve the very opposite by reading a rare and exemplary study of the practices of what the authors call indigenous 'managers' engaged in practices which display 'ecological embeddedness'. The study which we critique signals a new departure in the relationship between anthropology and organization studies, in which indigenous practitioners are viewed as models

of management in relation to specific local features which may, or ought, also to be of significance to corporate managers. In this case, it is the specific relation of indigenous peoples to the land and the ecosystem upon which the authors build their argument.

In their important and ground-breaking article Whiteman and Cooper (2000) presented the results of an ethnographic study of an indigenous beaver trapper belonging to the Cree Nation of northern Quebec, Canada.¹ Arguing that indigenous value systems have a lot to offer western management systems, they presented the concept of ecological embeddedness – ‘the extent to which a manager is rooted in the land’. In this article, we challenge Whiteman and Cooper’s position and argue that the theoretical and methodological approach that underpins their text is problematic in several respects, which it has in common with other anthropological writing, but most particularly in that it ignores histories of colonialism with which indigenous peoples have had to contend. Moreover, despite the authors’ claims, a so-called ‘indigenous land ethic’ has at best limited, if any, relevance for current management theory and practice and at worst, serves as another example of neocolonial practice involving knowledge appropriation from indigenous communities – telling stories of the other which function metaphorically or allegorically for the message receivers with the hope that they might also deliver them functional benefits. Indigenous value systems need to be taken seriously and with respect, but we argue that this must entail a reflexive awareness of the ideological and historical conditions out of which and against which these systems have developed and struggled for their continued existence, and in interaction with which they have adapted, rather than solely the ecological systems within which they are situated.

Our critique has three parts. First, we examine the political, ethical and epistemological assumptions that inform ethnographic investigations of native peoples and discuss the implications of such practices for constructing indigenous identities and the politics of representation involved. Second, we perform a critical analysis of the implications of transferring knowledge obtained from indigenous communities to illuminate western notions of ‘sustainability’ and ‘sustainable management’. Third, we question the authors’ claims that knowledge of indigenous ecology would lead to more ‘sustainable management practices’ in contemporary organizations. Finally, we argue that despite the argument to have uncovered a new concept of ecological embeddedness, this can only occur as a result of *disembedding* the indigenes from their own social and economic history. The authors, not untypically of anthropological writing including that which attempts to be reflexive, have reproduced and yet overlooked the situation of their own *neocolonial* embeddedness.

Why study how indigenous peoples are studied?

A postcolonial perspective

A comprehensive review of the complex literature on postcolonial theory is beyond the scope of this article. We point interested readers to relevant studies in the field (cf. Banerjee, 2000, 2003; Chakrabarty, 1992, 2000; Gandhi, 1998; Loomba, 1998) and concentrate here on identifying those of its features which are relevant to the way in which we deploy it in our argument. Postcolonialism, as Prasad (2003) points out, is not a unitary, functionalist or bounded theory. In contrast to the dominant theoretical approaches that inform contemporary social science, postcolonial theory operates from a position of visible political interest arising from radical critiques of colonialism, imperialism and neocolonialism. Postcolonialism explicitly addresses issues of justice, freedom and emancipation, concepts that some strands of postmodernism dismiss as archaic and anachronistic. Inspired and informed by political activists, freedom fighters, anticolonial 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, 1986, 1989) and to contest the unquestioned sovereignty of western epistemological, economic, political and cultural categories (Prasad, 2003). This approach was operationalized in a variety of disciplines such as history, anthropology, sociology, Black studies, literary theory, cultural studies, history, philosophy and political science. Organizational theorists, however, with a few exceptions have tended to neglect postcolonial theory. Explicit political agendas have always resided in an uneasy position in the discipline of organization studies and postcolonial theory is no exception. The few studies using a postcolonial framework have examined how contemporary notions of 'development' and 'progress' are informed by colonial practices (Escobar, 1995; Esteva, 1992), the types of colonial discourses that inform organization-stakeholder relationships (Banerjee, 2000), and postcolonial readings of organizational control (Mir et al., 2003), organizational culture (Cooke, 2003); workplace resistance (Prasad & Prasad, 2003) and cross-cultural studies in management (Kwek, 2003). In terms of its use in our discipline, postcolonial theory can serve as a powerful foil to subvert the 'objective', 'scientific' claims that privilege western forms of knowing. Critical management scholars have focused on the emancipatory possibilities of defamiliarization in developing a new understanding of the received knowledge in any field in terms of subject positions created by an explicit acknowledgement of the epistemological and ontological assumptions of that knowledge. As Prasad (2003) points out, a postcolonial perspective can be productive in the sense that it

can reveal the neocolonial assumptions that underlie management disciplines, especially in the field of international management and cross-cultural management. Neocolonialism can be understood as a continuation of western colonialism without the traditional mechanism of expanding frontiers and territorial control but with elements of political, economic and cultural control.

Bearing this in mind, we can turn to Whiteman and Cooper, who begin their article with a brief but highly relevant section titled 'Why study indigenous peoples?' They argue that because 'indigenous value systems' are different from conventional western frameworks the former group's 'management practices' are more successful from an environmental perspective. There is a conflation here with an apparently universalizing discourse of what constitutes 'management practice' with the management practices of indigenous peoples. Thus, a Cree beaver trapper is constructed as a 'manager' in the same discursive space as managers in western corporations – indeed they are for the most part regarded as isomorphic. This is a form of displacement that is both decontextualized and ahistorical.

The conflation may arise from whom or what the authors mean by the term 'manager'. If by the term they mean someone who manages their daily life of work and family then it is true that a Cree trapper, like a bus driver in Rio de Janeiro, a software engineer in Bangalore or a tenor saxophonist in Memphis is a manager in that broad sense of the term. However, the term manager, at least as deployed in both the discipline of management studies and the practice of organizational management, is used in a more specific context and cannot be separated from specific organizational forms such as the modern corporation or the government bureaucracy. These are the realities of life for those customarily designated as 'managers' in management discourse. *Institutional* (rather than simply *social*) embeddedness is as significant for modern managers as Whiteman and Cooper argue ecological embeddedness is for indigenous managers.

For us institutional embeddedness has two aspects. First, managers are physically embedded in an environment of buildings, offices, systems and manufactures just as surely as indigenous managers are embedded in the natural environment. The fact that this man-made environment displaces the natural environment makes it no less real or authentic as a source of subjective identity. Second, as Meyer and Rowan (1977) pointed out, physical structures house formal structures which become valued and enacted – institutionalized – through myth and ceremony. Such institutions play a major part in the construction of social meaning. Educationally, socially, economically, politically and legally modern identity is formed in a complex and sophisticated interlocking of institutions just as much as an interplay of

subjects – indeed the very term civilization refers to the essentially urban and civic nature of the formation of such subjectivity.

This is one of many areas where Whiteman and Cooper display insufficient self-reflexivity as ethnographers. There is no acknowledgement of the relations (unequal in so many senses) between ethnographer and subject or the subjectivities that this exchange produces – either of the ‘ecologically embedded native’ or the dis-located participant-observer (Clifford, 1988). In short, anthropologists are odd compared with most members of modern communities because they are only institutionally embedded for that part of their time when they are not errant in the field. However, hovering as they do between the emic and the etic, they are never ecologically embedded either.

But this dislocation does not mean that anthropologists have not and do not perform a function for their own cultures relative to the effective management of indigenous peoples. Indeed, the history of the study of indigenous peoples by western researchers has always been constituted by colonial modes of representation in which ‘theories’ of Aboriginality or Indigeneity arise from the specificity of power relations (Clifford, 1988; Clifford & Marcus, 1986). A parallel can be drawn from Said’s (1979: 2–3) study of Orientalism in which he argues that the fixing of difference is a crucial characteristic, a ‘style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and “the Occident”. . . . Orientalism (is) a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient’. This cultural production of the Other results in the naturalization of the knowledge of the Other and it is this cultural hegemony that sustains asymmetrical power/knowledge relations by providing the West with a ‘flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand’ (Said, 1979: 7, emphasis in original). It is from this privileged position that dichotomies of advanced/backward, developed/undeveloped, modern/primitive are constructed and managed. In his landmark work, *Orientalism*, Said (1979: 3) demonstrated how European culture ‘was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively. . . . European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self’.

Knowledge production about the Other reinforces the positional superiority of western knowledge even in this postcolonial era. As Ngugi wa Thiong’o argues, knowledge gained through colonization is used in turn to colonize the minds of the natives. Western forms of knowing are rarely critiqued especially in the production of knowledge about the Other – even

cross-cultural research in organization studies suffers from the same bias. There is little reflexivity on the part of most researchers studying non-western cultures on the complexities that underlie conceptualization of time, space, subjectivity, knowledge, or power. Stuart Hall (1992) describes the process of western knowledge creation functions in ways that allow an 'objective' characterization and classification of societies using what are assumed to be value neutral and 'scientific' categories. In other words, the world is knowable only through European categories. Of course only certain types of people located in specific academies that privilege a particular form of knowing are allowed to do this. A system of representation of other societies and cultures is then discursively produced. This system provides both a model of comparison and criteria of evaluation against which other societies can be ranked (Hall, 1992; Smith, 1999). Knowledge production about the Other has proceeded in this fashion in various disciplines of the social sciences, including organization studies. Whiteman and Cooper's research on the Cree 'manager' has also followed the same pattern and it is the assumption of the flexible positional superiority of a particular knowledge system, along with its problematic conclusion, that produces a particular form of reality for the objects of study that we want to critique.

Whiteman and Cooper do not at any point in their article address the problematic nature of ethnographic authority nor do they recognize the discursive nature of anthropological practice – a discursive practice that 'encodes and reproduces the hegemonic process of colonial settlement' (Wolfe, 1999: 3). Ethnographic authority has always been a key factor in the construction of settler-colonial discourse whether in the Americas, Africa, Asia, Australia or New Zealand, involving a range of authorities such as historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, biologists, ecologists, criminologists, psychologists – in short, all of Foucault's usual suspects. These authorities produced a steady stream of knowledge about Aboriginality, knowledge that was readily available for appropriation and expropriation in order to construct official definitions and categories to manage and regulate Aboriginal life and develop policies and programmes to deal with 'the Aboriginal problem' (Wolfe, 1999).

Muecke (1992) describes three themes that underlie the study of indigenous peoples by European researchers: anthropological, romantic and racist. Practices that emerged from the *anthropological* 'discovery' of the native are aptly described by Radhakrishnan (1994) as the 'I think therefore you are' syndrome. Here 'objective' knowledge of the native was produced by the canons of anthropology based on descriptions of totemic rites, rituals, kinship patterns and other formulations that are characteristic of the tribe of European anthropologists. The Other here was a projection

of Eurocentric pre-occupations, albeit not simplistically so. This objective knowledge was primarily used to facilitate *managing* the native, with the objective of improving the governance of those peoples who inhabited areas where the colonizers wished to reduce the levels of interpersonal risk attached to the appropriation of indigenous economic resources (Banerjee, 2000, 2001).

The *romantic* discourse is characterized by stories of the 'passing' of a 'barbaric and primitive' yet 'noble' race, who had lived in perfect harmony with nature before European contact. Consequently, the first half of the 20th century saw a sharp rise in ethnographic studies of indigenous peoples, to record and inscribe their ways before they became 'extinct'. However, as Clifford (1988) points out more than a few 'extinct' peoples have returned to haunt the western imagination – the Australian Aboriginal peoples in particular, despite the efforts of the policies of successive administrations in the last century to render them obsolete, giving rise to such phenomena as the 'lost generation' of 'stolen children'. The romantic genre is also important to national ideology because it is consistent with the legitimating illusion that nation states like Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States were not founded on homicide and theft (Wolfe, 1999). Echoes of romanticism appear in the idea of an 'authentic' or more authentic version of the native within the native population itself, as shown in Whiteman and Cooper's references to the snowmobile and other technologies having replaced the traditional forms of hunting, trapping and 'walking out'. This desire for what Wolfe (1999) calls 'repressive authenticity' is probably more reflective of the ethnographers' desire to construct the authentic indigene by attracting attention to authentic and traditional symbols without realizing that indigenous peoples all over the world have always used post-contact technology to sustain their communities – whether it be four-wheel drives, harpoon guns or dynamite (Clifford, 1988). As Wolfe (1999) argues, to understand repressive authenticity, we should examine the process by which someone is rendered inauthentic, and exactly who is being redefined in these terms – historical indigenous people who do not embody the 'authentic' construction. The construction of authenticity along with its binary opposite of the inauthentic indigene has both genetic and cultural applications – the anthropological obsession with the 'full blood Aborigine' is an example of the former and identity politics surrounding current discourses of indigenous land rights of the latter. However, what is present but remains unarticulated and its effects unexamined at each moment of assertion, enactment or denial of indigenous identity, is the sum of settler-colonial histories that frame this process (Wolfe, 1999). As

Pecora (1989: 265) states this framing occurs as part of the circuit of writing and reading, a process which involves:

The illusory elision of the distinction between the ethnographic 'text' and the 'text' created by the other; the inevitable inclination to mistake the text written by others for the others themselves and to privilege that text above any number of 'external' factors – from material want to geo-political coercion – with which they struggle; and finally the transformation of others into deeply embedded 'styles of feeling' which reveal themselves as increasingly reified existential concepts.

The concepts that emerge from Whiteman and Cooper's ethnographic study suffer from similar theoretical flaws resulting in a tendency toward abstraction, generalization and ahistoricity in their conclusions. Thus, there is more than a hint of disapproval (tinged with some regret for loss of authenticity) when describing Cree practices of using snowmobiles instead of walking.

The *racist* discourse constructed and represented indigenous peoples based on their racial difference from Europeans. Thus, all indigenous practices, including present-day social issues, such as alcohol and drug abuse, are explained in genetic terms. The prime objective of this discourse was to use knowledge of indigenous practices to facilitate *assimilation* – the re-education of native peoples so that their 'inferior' cultures might be absorbed and superseded by the colonizers' culture. This might even, as we noted in the case of Australian Aborigines, extend to the forcible removal of offspring from their parents to be brought up as white children; as recognized by the United Nations this is a form of genocide (Banerjee & Linstead, 2001). We do not argue that Whiteman and Cooper propagate such an argument – indeed the nostalgic tone of their article is rather against such assimilation and they seem themselves to have little sympathy with 'briefcase Cree' who indulge in political negotiations. Yet on more than one occasion they leave room for assimilationists to feel comfortable. Although the Cree lost a massive part of their tribal homelands when the Hydro-Quebec flooded 4500 square miles of land in the 1970s, and were 'rapidly centralized into village communities', Whiteman and Cooper dismiss the importance of this by merely noting its 'significant social and environmental impacts' (2000: 1268). Their excuse for this is that 'the Cree still self-identify in traditional ways – they are a hunting, trapping and fishing people' (2000: 1268). Yet, interestingly, their right to these traditional pursuits is maintained only by the consent of those who have displaced them from their traditional home-grounds as part of the 'compensation package'. They have been written into white discourse as a footnote.

Ironically, given their unwillingness to acknowledge the oppressive dimensions of Cree experience, Whiteman and Cooper feel it necessary to point out that the Cree are not perfect – their tallymen have been known to steal, to be competitive, to boast and to be sexist. At a macro-level they have been known to over-hunt and break their own rules and behave unsustainably. This gives them a great deal, coincidentally, in common with western managers, and particularly those involved in the recent corporate scandals in the USA, although on a much smaller scale. The Cree, though different from us, are human. Whiteman and Cooper nevertheless seem to feel it necessary to find an excuse for the absence of completely virtuous homogeneity in the Cree. This they seem to put down to the interventions of the market economy into the subsistence economy of the Cree – which though accepting the necessity of a dual economy system at the present time plays into the hands of racists and assimilationists by giving the question of homogeneity credence at all (Clifford, 1988), whilst simultaneously tending to demonize the market, thus giving critics grounds to dismiss Whiteman and Cooper's arguments on both counts.

Can anthropology be critical?

Whiteman and Cooper clearly intend that their argument should be a critical one, although it lacks the reflexivity which Marcus and Fischer (1986) in their seminal text argue is a prerequisite for anthropology as cultural critique. It is no secret that anthropology was used throughout the 19th and 20th centuries to aid in the management and incorporation of Aboriginal groups and colonial indigents worldwide, as an aid to the processes of absorption, assimilation or adaptation by which those groups would gradually become a part of the colonizer's culture (Attwood, 1989; Elkin, 1944). Development anthropologists still experience problems over the use and misuse, and even the ownership, of the knowledges they produce of native peoples, although the beneficiaries of such knowledge are today more likely to be global corporations than colonial governments (Banerjee, 2003). The intimacy of the two narratives of colonialism and anthropology continues in this postcolonial era: whereas the end of direct colonialism has shifted to indirect rule and promoting local autonomy, a corresponding shift in developmental anthropology is marked by a focus on plurality of 'relativized and self-sustaining sociocultural isolates' (Wolfe, 1999: 43). This shift from 'evolution to synchrony' can be seen in Whiteman and Cooper's study: the objects of anthropology, the Cree, are detached from a history in which they are being incorporated into European/North American colonial structures and presented as fragmented

spatio-temporally isolated societies. This 'cultural or synchronic relativism' approach, however, continues its hegemonic mode of representation while rendering transparent the hegemony of previous evolutionary or developmental approaches. As Wolfe (1999: 53) states:

As rendering hegemony transparent, relativism should be seen not as a retreat from imperialism but as its consolidation. Thus evolutionism emerges as an expansive or conquering narrative and synchronic relativism as a containing or consolidating one, as a symptom of the completion of Europe's global expansion. . . . Whilst the evolutionist paradigm constructed a rationale for domination that accounted for the deaths of refractory savages, synchronic relativism recruited living subjects for colonial society by disqualifying them from a mythical parallel realm. Though one excluded and the other included, therefore they had the identical effect of eliminating the non-social.

Whiteman and Cooper display no awareness of this anxiety, however. Their analysis of Cree 'environmentalism' displays an atomized, fragmented artifice that masks the practical expropriation of settler-colonized indigenes, 'an ideological effect produced by a synchronic mode of representation' (Wolfe, 1999: 52). Thus, the Cree are constructed as self-generating entities, neither transformed nor dependent on the society of their colonizers and their 'environmentalism' is represented as a prescriptive ideal of an abstract, coherent and self-sustaining society that denies the material impact of colonization. Consequently, this discourse in which the natives are categorically externalized disguises the process of settler-colonial incorporation while constructing what Wolfe (1999: 179) calls a 'de-economized *homo superorganicus*'. 'Indigenous ecology' thus becomes represented as an abstract but pristine fountain of knowledge (to be appropriated unproblematically), separate from indigenous economy and society. A postcolonial critique of this argument explicitly makes the scientific, non-political act of western anthropology political by showing how imperialism and colonialism act as discursive fields of knowledge. It is critical of the way in which knowledge from indigenous communities has been and continues to be 'transferred' to non-indigenous sites without any regard to how that knowledge has been collected or represented. This 'trading the Other' as Smith (1999) calls it has been going on since colonial times and does not show any sign of abating. As Smith (1999: 89–90) argues:

Trading the Other is a vast industry based on the positional superiority and advantages gained under imperialism. It is concerned more with

ideas, language, knowledge, images, beliefs and fantasies than any other industry. Trading the Other deeply, intimately, defines Western thinking and identity. As a trade it has no concern for the peoples who originally produced the ideas or images, or who how and why they produced those ways of knowing. It will not, indeed cannot, return the raw materials from which its products have been made. It no longer has an administrative Head Office with regional offices where indigenous peoples can go, queue for hours and register complaints which will not be listened to or acted upon.

Although they developed almost unchecked for the best part of the last century, the ethnographic practices of European anthropologists have come under criticism for more than 30 years with growing awareness of the political and epistemological constraints of colonialism on fieldwork (Clifford, 1988, 1997). Criticisms of the authority of ethnographic study have, as we have noted, called for increasing reflexivity among ethnographers, especially in writing the results of their field notes. This is an area where Whiteman and Cooper fall conspicuously short: the political and ethical tensions that underlie ethnographic investigations of indigenous peoples are not visible at all in their analysis which presents 'the Cree' as abstract, ahistorical 'others'.

The failure of Whiteman and Cooper to acknowledge the ironies of anthropological field research is apparent in the style with which it is presented, in which problems of representing the activities, cultures and meaning systems of others are unremarked. Thus the authors' account (actually Whiteman's field diary) is presented as a true account of 'realities' of the field and the categories which the authors generate from Whiteman's own textual account are treated as though they were the categories which the natives themselves would develop – the account is therefore treated as the natives' own account, the author becoming native by proxy. Their text thus illustrates the elision of the distinction between the ethnographic 'text' and the 'text' created by the other and the tendency to privilege that text above 'external' factors such as from material want or geo-political coercion with which the natives struggle, as Pecora (1989) argues and which we noted earlier.

This is evident in the article's tendency toward general, abstract and ahistorical conclusions. The conclusions of the article, far from being 'scientific', are four propositions which, despite the apparent arguments of parts of the text to the contrary, reduce the complex inter-relation of economic, cultural and political forces which have made the Cree what they are today and what they are dynamically becoming to a series of projections of

individual psychological states. Indeed, here not only are the Cree appropriated, but the critical potential of anthropology itself is appropriated into a functionalist psychologism which does nothing more than reproduce the type of self-alienating epistemology which is at the heart of the problem of thinking of self and environment as separate. As Chakrabarty (2000: 37) argues:

The narratives often bespeak an antihistorical consciousness, that is they entail subject positions and configurations of memory that challenge and undermine the subject that speaks in the name of history.

This seems to be exactly what happens in Whiteman and Cooper's narrative – the Cree are not presented as having a history which may be read in any alternate way to that which Whiteman and Cooper present and adapt, very heavily, to their purposes in producing a generalized Cree subject-position for the functions of their argument.

Like Spivak's subaltern, the Cree is the anthropologist's native who can only have a *quoted* existence in a larger statement that belongs to the anthropologist alone. We talk about them; occasionally we quote them; but in the end we author them. This subject can only be spoken for and spoken by the transition narrative, which will always ultimately privilege the modern as its place of settlement. As Wolfe (1999) argues, there can be no *innocent* discourses about indigenous peoples and despite attempts to include the 'indigenous viewpoint' as Whiteman and Cooper claim to have done, these views are always submitted to anthropological language thus succumbing to the categories, oppositions and associations that have developed in a colonial context. The so-called 'dialogue' in Whiteman and Cooper's ethnographic study is hopelessly imbalanced – this one-way dialogue expresses the natives' points of view only under conditions not of their choosing and the authors show recognition neither of this nor of the impact of any of these dialogues on anthropological theory. Any reference to colonial encounters in their study remains firmly rooted in the past, thus rendering expropriation as a past event rather than an ongoing practice. The ethnographic study of the 'post-colonial' Cree produces an ideological effect that positions both researchers and readers as global citizens of a consensual culture, which thereby revalorizes itself (Wolfe, 1999).

But increasing the effectiveness of colonial subjugation was not the only use to which anthropology could be put and two common means of developing a critical relation between knowledge generated in 'primitive' communities and modern knowledge forms emerged over the years (Marcus & Fischer, 1986).

The first of these forms, *defamiliarization by cross-cultural juxtaposition* is empirical rather than epistemological. Knowledge-based, it uses the substantive facts about another culture as the basis for probing into the specific facts of a subject of criticism at home. Margaret Mead pioneered this kind of study in comparing adolescence in Samoa with adolescence in the USA in order to critique the accepted view that western adolescence was *naturally* a time of stress and rebellion. The organizational culture movement, in some of its manifestations, rests on a more generalized version of this approach, viewing organizations as tribes with their own distinctive rites and rituals. The focus of this critique is *modes of organizing*. However, using native thought in this way is vulnerable to the charge of appropriation – that western anthropologists steal and adapt ideas from native cultures in ways which benefit the West but have no benefits for the ‘owners’ of those ideas; it is also, in Mead’s case especially, subject to the charge of romanticism – interpreting the actions and beliefs of others as consistent with one’s own critique of one’s own culture. Whiteman and Cooper’s arguments clearly partake of this and over-simplify the issues as well, particularly in their equating the Cree practice of ‘walking out’ with Peters and Waterman’s management by walking around – this is kitsch anthropology and kitsch management theory at its most reductionist, and indeed sentimental (Linstead, 2002). The critique is thus disarmed as in rendering the native practice relevant and palatable, it loses its critical power.

The second critical form, *defamiliarization by epistemological critique* arises from the nature of anthropological work – that anthropologists go from their own cultures out to distant, even far-flung communities and bring back both conceptual and material exotica that surprise, puzzle and even disturb us. As Marcus and Fischer (1986: 138) argue, the challenge here is to bring ‘the insights gained on the periphery back to the centre to raise havoc with our settled ways of thinking and conceptualization’. The power of these insights rests on the acknowledgement of the fact that we live in a reality that is as culturally constructed and non-natural as ‘they’ do, and once this fundamental unity is recognized, the significance of substantive differences can be addressed in a more balanced way (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). Indigenous concepts then are seen, not as being ripe for appropriation, but as an occasion for interrogating our own *modes of knowing*.

We would also add a third category of critique to those of Marcus and Fischer, which we shall call *defamiliarization by ontological introspection*. This involves a consideration of the spiritual dimensions of the other culture and its assumptions/beliefs about the nature of materiality and immateriality, as a mirror for the surfacing and interrogation of our own similar assumptions. This introspection shows deference to Aboriginal or indigenous value

systems, stressing that there are no easy or formulaic solutions to the problems of being. Approaches which suggest that such thought could or should be functionally adapted to the 'improvement' of management or organizational practice are often quite antithetical to the character of the thought itself as they rob it of its immanent qualities. Indigenous thought, although it may often be considered to be primitive, is, as Lévi-Strauss demonstrated, often highly complex and rarely self-evident. The problem with this approach is that if the version of the other culture is simplified, then so must be the resulting critique – which means it is either taken on board in a watered down way, a kitsch simulation of cultural ontological imperatives just as much as didgeridoos from Eastern Europe on sale in England complete with 'Aboriginal' designs, are a cheap fake of a culture's symbolic artefacts (Linstead, 2002). Whiteman and Cooper perhaps attempt to achieve ontological introspection, but unfortunately, because of their lack of reflexivity, ideological and historical consciousness, end up producing kitsch critique. It is perhaps this limited ontological introspection that allows them to categorize indigenous knowledge, a knowledge with markedly different epistemological and ontological assumptions than western science, for subsequent packaging and transfer to western contexts without understanding that the basis of indigenous knowledge production is intensely local, not global.

Implications for (western?) management

The concentration on the local and the appearance of speaking for the Cree makes it difficult for Whiteman and Cooper to make much of a case, except by analogy, when it comes to assessing the implications of the Cree storyline for modern managers. Indeed they fail to relate their findings either to anthropological studies of managers (Bate, 1997; Linstead, 1993, 1997; Linstead et al., 1996) or in any great depth to the theoretical conclusions of anthropological studies of indigenous ecological understandings. They claim instead to identify certain organizing concepts – a sense of being a place, reciprocity, ecological respect, ecological caretaking, the earth as teacher, being ecologically experiential, and being physically located in the ecosystem or 'management by walking out'. Attempting to make comparisons with rich data about only one side of the dyad is perilous at any time, and Whiteman and Cooper seem to be unaware that it is not necessary to study indigenous *managers* in other cultures to discover the ecological beliefs of that culture, as distinct from its ecological practices, as if they are truly *cultural* phenomena they will be much more widely distributed. Indeed, anthropologists have already told us a great deal about the types

and varieties of ecological beliefs and attitudes to nature which indigenous people hold.

Of course, we need to be wary about accepting universal, uncontested concepts of 'nature', and ironically Whiteman and Cooper's article could have had the potential to emphasize this had they been able to take a different route with their data. Although a detailed exploration of the various meanings of nature is beyond the scope of our article here given the historical, geographical and cultural complexities that inform its meanings we should stress that we do not use the terms 'nature' and 'environment' interchangeably. The transformation of nature (depicted in European traditions as a 'wild, untamed', often hostile force) into environment (more 'manageable' and goal-directed) is one of the hallmarks of modernity in which domination of nature becomes a key indicator of human progress rather than a transformation of the relationship between humans and nature (Macnaughten & Urry, 1998). One consequence of conceptualizing nature as environment is the abstraction of singularity from the multiple meanings of nature. As Macnaughten and Urry (1998) argue, modernistic conceptualizations of nature do not reveal its contested meanings: from nature as landscape, as an object of scientific scrutiny, as threatened and in need of protection, as a resource-providing system, or as a source of spiritual renewal. Nature is thus made more 'real' when it becomes the 'environment', something that is separate from social and cultural practices and that can be managed to produce discrete, observable and measurable outcomes.

An unproblematic universal notion of nature conceals the diversity of contested natures in different societies. Macnaughten and Urry (1998: 2) argue that current discourses of nature and the environment all assume the existence of a singular 'nature' rather than emphasize that it is 'specific social practices, especially of people's dwellings, which produce, reproduce and transform different natures and different values'. Consequently, valuation of nature, whether in economic, social or cultural terms differs depending upon the context in which such valuation occurs, and thus an abstract, singular universal valuation of nature, a fundamental characteristic of western science, is problematic. Assessing market preferences for nature is based on invalid assumptions, as McAfee (1999: 133) argues, 'contrary to the premise of the global economic paradigm there can be no universal metric for comparing and exchanging the real values of nature among different groups of people from different cultures, and with vastly different degrees of political and economic power'. Whiteman and Cooper's study displays what Macnaughten and Urry (1998) call 'environmental idealism', an analysis of nature by examining the range of 'values' held by people about nature. These environmental values are assumed to be stable and

consistent without contextualizing the temporal and spatial arrangements of people's lives.

The managerial implications of Whiteman and Cooper's discussion are particularly problematic and naïve – indeed they really have not been sufficiently thought through. There is a facetious note at the end of their article where the second author states that 'he understands that his attachment to catch-and-release fly fishing is inconsistent with the spirit of this study'. Whilst acknowledging the humorous nature of the comment, some interesting questions emerge. If the assertion of the authors is that (western) managers need to be 'ecologically embedded' to practise 'sustainable management', then the implication is that managers who do enjoy fishing as a sport, and are thus ironically disengaged, cannot be 'ecologically embedded' and thus will engage in 'unsustainable' practices.

What, we might ask would an 'ecologically embedded' manager who can 'walk out on the land' look like in a modern organization? How ecologically embedded would such a manager need to be for her organization to be 'sustainable'? How long would such a manager need to walk the walk? Given the hectic worklife most managers in organizations face would a 15-minute power walk in the woods (a not inconsiderable task in downtown Los Angeles, Tokyo or Mumbai) be necessary and sufficient for 'walking the land'? Could this speedy spiritual experience be able to find a spot in a manager's daily schedule between appointments with customers, lawyers, accountants, senior managers and colleagues? Inspired perhaps by one of the authors, might a 15-minute power fly fishing experience (not for sport but for sustenance obviously) without modern technological equipment provide the necessary spiritual resource for a manager to make 'environmentally responsible' decisions? Or perhaps a little less tongue-in-cheek, we might worry whether Whiteman and Cooper are likely to advocate ecological weekend or week-long retreats to environmentally 're-embed' managers. Business Process Re-embedding would not be too far away and in the absence of a critically reflexive dimension to Whiteman and Cooper's argument we can see little to prevent it, because such a quick fix approach to environmental issues would be typical of the modern environmental movement in the West. It is hard to believe that a power walk, or even a week's sojourn in the woods is suddenly going to make a manager more 'ecologically embedded' because this is the knowledge obtained from an ethnographic study of an indigenous 'manager'. Although the authors caution against romanticizing indigenous ecology, they seem to propose a similar packaged spirituality or designer tribalism for modern western managers without displaying an understanding of the complexities involved – as one of their own informants puts it 'it doesn't mix'.

Therein lies the problem with the authors' leap into the managerial implications of their study. Posing in the guise of *traditional* ecological knowledge lie remnants of *colonial* thought and a quick-fix approach to modern environmental problems. As the authors' informant himself mentions, trapping is a 'full-time job' and what the authors are proposing is a travesty of the indigenous environmental ethic – a full-time modern manager trying to be ecologically embedded quickly and without much effort. Perhaps, like knowledge (indigenous or otherwise), a little ecological embeddedness is a dangerous thing.

If, as we have suggested, the authors had tried to link their arguments with recent literature on sustainability, their approach might have provided some interesting contrasts. In fact, they show little recognition of existing literature on individual environmental concern, research that goes back more than 40 years. How their findings relate to other research on environmental concern or corporate environmentalism would have provided interesting insights. Moreover, if their point was to describe the importance of indigenous ecological knowledge for managers in modern corporations, there is a remarkable lack of integration with current research on corporate environmentalism, apart from a passing reference to 'environmental decision-making'. How would their themes relate to themes of organizational sustainability or sustainable development, described by a leading corporate environmentalist as requiring not emotions but 'cold rational business logic'? (Robert Shapiro, ex CEO of Monsanto Corporation quoted in Magretta, 1997: 81). What assumptions of corporate environmentalism and sustainability are challenged by indigenous ecology and how can these be resolved?

Whiteman and Cooper also seem to advocate 'sustainable management practices' as some kind of universal panacea. Sustainable, we might ask, for whom? Official discourses of sustainable development also focus on social justice and human development within the framework of social equity and the equitable distribution and utilization of resources (Banerjee, 2002). However, sustainability, as Redclift (1987) points out, means different things to different people. Although theories of sustainability sometimes stress the primacy of social justice, the position is often reversed where 'justice is looked upon as subordinate to sustainability, and since neither sustainability nor social justice has determinate meaning, this opens the way to legitimizing one of them in terms of the other' (Dobson, 1998: 242). The terms sustainability and sustainable development are used interchangeably in both academic and popular discourses and the concept is promoted by 'situating it against the background of *sustaining a particular set of social relations by way of a particular set of ecological projects*' (Harvey, 1996: 148, emphasis added). Thus, the debate about resource scarcity, biodiversity, population

and ecological limits is ultimately a debate about the 'preservation of a particular social order rather than a debate about the preservation of nature *per se*' (Harvey, 1996: 148).

So what scope exists for a more responsible and accountable anthropology, especially if it is to contribute to rethinking organization and management studies? One way forward would be to take into account the total social process in which the discipline participates rather than try and isolate an 'environmental ethic'. Constructing a superorganic indigeneity without considering historical and economic factors is a denial of indigenous peoples' historical productivity (Wolfe, 1999). A majority of anthropological research on indigenous ecology involves a dislocation of the economic, social and environmental spheres of these communities. Thus, Whiteman and Cooper's notion of ecological embeddedness is in actual fact a *disembeddedness* of indigenous economic and social life, leaving behind an atomized residue constructed as the 'indigenous environmental ethic' with questionable benefits to western managers. As Wolfe (1999: 179) argues, ritual and kinship patterns of colonized indigenous cultures became residual after the separation of the economic from the social and environmental, since they did not function to reproduce the dominant sphere. Thus 'appropriated into settler-colonial discourse, this innocuous remainder provided *homo superorganicus* with its empirical alibi, a truncated life-world whose continued coexistence need not pose any threat'. The colonial nostalgia in this case is not about creating the precolonial indigene as the subject 'really was', but rather an 'imaginary, precolonial subject who is no more than a fantasy that the colonizers entertain about themselves, in which the colonized are discursively recruited to fulfill the colonizer's own ancestral wishes' (Wolfe, 1999: 208).

Colonialism did not appropriate a particular historical indigeneity, but replaced it with its own mythical construction contingent on the displacement or disembeddedness of the empirical indigene within civilization. Thus, any process involving 'sharing' knowledge about indigenous ecology must be submitted to a critical scrutiny and must involve an appraisal of theories and analyses that inform how knowledge is obtained, constructed and disseminated (Smith, 1999). Indigenous communities have provided a fertile ground for research for academics for more than 300 years. As one of the most researched groups of communities in the world the benefits of knowledge construction to the communities themselves have been questionable at best and downright disempowering in many cases. As objects of study, indigenous communities have been under the microscope for hundreds of years as western researchers have sought to frame the 'indigenous problem' and apply solutions. It is now time to reverse the lens and focus on who is

looking through the microscope to see if different kinds of questions can be asked: Who is defining the research problem? For whom is the study worthy? How will the community benefit from the study? To whom is the researcher accountable? A critical approach to studies of indigenous peoples is less concerned about the objects that constitute otherness than in understanding the process of construction and representation. Thus, the researcher draws attention not to the objects of study or to the native informant but to the relationships of power that underlie the complex relationships between the presenter and the represented, the knowledge producer and knowledge object, the cataloguer and the catalogued, the ethnographer and the subject/object. In the process of 'identifying the Other', who is doing the identifying and who is being identified? Why does the Other need to be identified? For what purpose? How are the parameters of otherness defined? What kinds of subjectivities are being formed in the process? These questions must be examined in the context of colonialism and imperialism in any knowledge-producing project involving indigenous communities, which is what we argue in the article. And we only have to look at experiences of colonialism, dispossession and genocide of indigenous peoples to see the dominant effect this knowledge-power nexus produces. What renders this particular knowledge production, appropriation and distribution process imperialistic is the nature of disciplinary practices it produces. These discursive practices reproduce knowledge through practices that are made possible by the structural assumptions of that knowledge (Clegg, 1989), thus establishing what Said calls the 'flexible positional superiority' of western knowledge.

Indigenous communities in different parts of the globe are acutely aware of the tensions and problematics that arise from their being the subjects of investigation for the benefit of western science, and in many cases have developed appropriate research protocols to protect their communities. This is a type of 'cultural ethics' that develops indigenous codes of conduct for researchers working in these areas (Smith, 1999). For instance, the charter of the Indigenous Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests signed in Penang asserts the collective rights of indigenous communities to intellectual and cultural property and demands participation by indigenous peoples in the management of research projects. Article 45 of this charter states that 'all investigations in our territories should be carried out with out consent and under joint control and guidance' (Smith, 1999: 119). Similar protocols have been developed by indigenous communities in different parts of the world.

Maori researchers in New Zealand have developed a code of research ethics based on the guidelines proposed by the New Zealand Association of

Social Anthropologists and the American Anthropological Association. Some Maori researchers take an even more radical approach arguing that the research paradigm in Maori communities, *kaupapa Maori*, must be informed by traditional beliefs and ethics, while also developing resistance strategies aimed at promoting self-determination and empowerment (*tino rangatiratanga*) for Maori communities (Henry & Pene, 2001). Henry and Pene (2001) identify several definitions of *kaupapa Maori* research from the literature. These include:

Research which is culturally safe, which involves mentorship of *kaumatua* (elders), which is culturally relevant and appropriate while satisfying the rigor of research, and which is undertaken by a *Maori* researcher, not a researcher who happens to be *Maori*.

(Irwin, 1994: 27)

Research by *Maori*, for Maori and with *Maori*.

(Smith, 1995: 11)

Kaupapa Maori challenges a universal approach. It must be able to address *Maori* needs or give full recognition of *Maori* culture and value systems.

(Reid, 1998: 71)

Whiteman and Cooper downplay these issues to the point of disappearance and assume a relatively seamless, unproblematic knowledge appropriation and transfer process. Ethnographic authority and the positional superiority of western science mask the fact that representation of indigeneity is a political act and transforms what is inherently a political act into a non-political one with a veneer of scientific neutrality and benevolence. This lack of recognition of flexible positional superiority of the power-knowledge nexus is typical of academic research on indigenous issues. Despite its avowed good intentions, academic knowledge about indigenous knowledge can never be innocent – as Wolfe (1999: 213) argues, ‘it is too deeply enmeshed in a historical relationship through which one’s power is the other’s disempowerment’. Thus it is not sufficient for ethnographic research to show how indigenous world views are different from western world views, rather the emphasis should be on who has control over indigenous forms of knowledge and the implications for indigenous knowledge in a global intellectual and cultural property rights regime (Smith, 1999). Whiteman and Cooper whilst cautioning against romanticizing indigenous hunter-gatherer ways of life point out that ‘the standards of living and life spans of many

people were low and short by current Western standards' (2000: 1266). What they fail to address is that standards of living and life spans of indigenous peoples all over the world are still 'low and short by current western standards', a socio-economic consequence of colonization that is conspicuous by its absence in their analysis. A more critical agenda for anthropological research relevant to organization studies would not only focus on the agency of the colonized but the total economic, social, cultural and environmental context of inscription. It would directly challenge the dominance of the western academy and its institutional forms, universities included. Academic institutions, as Spivak (1988b: 210) has pointed out, are 'workplaces engaged in the ideological production of neocolonialism' despite the influence of critical perspectives from post-structuralism and post-modernism. These institutions have historically been, and in many cases still are, complicit with colonial conditions by participating in the knowledge/power nexus especially through representations of, or by speaking for, indigenous peoples. A critical agenda would also make explicit the relationships between knowledge, research and imperialism with the aim of promoting critical self-reflexivity amongst researchers and the researched alike so that we can be constantly vigilant that knowledge gained through colonization of indigenous peoples does not become a more sophisticated mode of colonization.

Note

- 1 Whiteman's fieldwork is in many ways remarkable and we would not wish to downplay that fact here. The immense problems of access, especially for a young white woman, and acceptance as an 'apprentice' to a senior Cree tallyman who travels across a substantial land area managing traps and hunting should not be underestimated. The arduous nature of the tasks Whiteman had to perform and the conditions – long days, sub-zero temperatures, walking and snow mobiling long distances – would cause many a seasoned fieldworker to baulk. Similarly, the motivations behind the fieldwork are in many ways admirable and the detailed recording of personal experience is meticulous. Indeed, were it not for the high quality of the research and its very persuasive expression in the AMJ article, it would perhaps not merit such thorough critique.

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