When the Subaltern speak.

Post-colonial perspectives on management: serving whose agenda?

Calas and Smircich (1999) identified postcolonial analysis as one of the “four contemporary theoretical tendencies” that were likely to offer a way forward for management and organization studies (MOS). Westwood (2006) interrogated more specifically international business and management studies (IBMS) discourse via postcolonial theory. His analyses reveal that IBMS deployed similar types of universalistic, essentializing and exoticising representations to colonial and neo-colonial discourse.

The same author (Westwood, 2006) has offered a postcolonial critique of international business and management studies (IMBS) and a manifesto for further critique (Westwood and Jack, 2007), setting out principles to challenge the orthodoxies of the discipline that “has persisted with a limited and limiting paradigmatic location within structural functionalism and with attendant conservative commitments in terms of ontology, epistemology, methodology, ethics and the politics of research practice” (Westwood and Jack, 2007). Whilst recognizing that such critique has already been undertaken, and that such principles may not be totally new (e.g. Banerjee and Linstead, 2001; Prasad, 1997, 2003;), Westwood and Jack spell out critiques and principles “in polemical form precisely to provide a provocation that we hope will animate the field” (Westwood and Jack, 2007: 261). This provocation arose our interest, yet we thought it could go further, following a different path.
This paper takes up Westwood’s (2006) interrogation and shows that such exploration has just begun. It initiates a critical analysis of IBMS theories and discourses formulated by the “Subaltern”. We notice that some international “development” and IBMS scholars, no matter their field of research and origin, follow a “post-development” paradigm (Escobar, 1995) according to which “development” is the “implementation of neo-colonial policies aimed at exploiting peripheral countries” (CMS Call for paper, 2013). Yet, we argue that Western scholars and practitioners disregard the possibility that some of these once “peripheral” countries (and populations) may have now moved to center stage and use such discourse to their advantage. We thus pose the question of the potentially ideological and strategic character of some ‘Subaltern’ discourse and practices as reflected by studies in IBMS and MOS, but also nation-states policies and/or corporate initiatives from those countries and populations (e.g. China and India). We argue that, while Western scholars and practitioners still reason as if the Subaltern had remained unchanged for the last decade(s), such is not the case and the latter (or some of them) may have been crafting some alternative discourse on “development” and turned postcolonial discourse to their advantage. We argue that the empirical and academic field of research on IMBS including its postcolonial stream may now have moved beyond the situation described and critiqued by these authors. We picked upon Westwood (2006) and Westwood and Jack’s (2007) critiques and principles and pushed them forward, critically interrogating the status quo and discussing how the field may be reconfigured already. Our goal is not to pointlessly confront the ideas developed by postcolonial thinkers, which are crucial and fruitful for a reflection about IBMS and MOS. However, like Jack et al. (2011: 275), we believe that there is “an interrogative space that needs to be deepened, broadened and re-asserted in order to contribute to the development of a more critical and heterodox examination of organizations and organizing”. Seeking to deepen the critical assessment of international management theory and practice, we intend to
contribute to the debate about postcolonial studies and to the evolution of the field. Our main argument is that Subaltern scholars and practitioners may have moved to “less subaltern” positions within the field, and can now sometimes take advantage of this new position. Specifically, we drew on Westwood’s (2006) critical issues to frame our interrogation and discussion and argue that:

1) **Orientalist representational practices**: Subaltern discourse deploys homogenizing, essentializing and exoticising representations and tends to turn over traditional/colonial “hierarchies” (North vs. South, West vs. East);

2) **Silencing the other**: Subaltern discourse tends to silence dissonant voices, from their own lines or from others (is genuine knowledge the aim or rather the generation of representations enabling the East/South to construct an orientation that serves its interests?);

3) **The politics of knowledge**: Subaltern, Eastern/Southern discourse is increasingly present in the international press and science which strengthens the dissemination of its representational practices;

4) **The location of the researcher and reflexivity**: Western / Non-Subaltern are requested to show reflexivity and challenge their own ideological stance and practices but we wonder whether non-Western scholars and practitioners always do. Some seem to use research debate to push forward political or business purposes.

5) **Business, imperialism and globalization**: Companies from ‘developing’ / Subaltern countries may take advantage of Subaltern discourse and ethnicity for strategic purposes against non-Subaltern/ Western competitors. At nation-states level, this discourse may be manipulated to defend alternative modes of “development” and capitalism, replacing some form of imperialism (West=>East or North=>South) with another (eg. South=>South).
This paper, as an extension of Westwood and Jack’s initial “provocation” (2007), aims at fostering more debate in the community of researchers but, as noted by Westwood (2006: 92): “postcolonialism is complex, extensive and diverse and a paper such as this cannot presume to be comprehensive and will be limited to pointing to some major areas of potentially valuable critique”, namely the five points mentioned above. Besides, like Westwood’s critique, “it will not attempt to review/summarize the extant postcolonially-informed literature critiquing IBMS” (for an extended review, see Jack et al. 2011) but simply “acknowledge that literature, gesture to its contribution and draw selectively upon it for illustrative purposes” (Westwood, 2006: 92).

1. Still ‘Subaltern’? Critical issues in the reconfiguration of the field, discourse and practices of postcolonial IBMS

1.1. Orientalist representational practices: Subaltern discourse deploys homogenizing, essentializing and exoticising representations and tends to turn over traditional/colonial “hierarchies” (North vs. South, West vs. East)

For the past twenty years, non-Western scholars have published several books and articles about national or regional values. Those works convey images and visions about countries or regions that are not free from ethnocentrism or exoticism and where traces of homogeneization and essentialization (resulting from a description of culture as a second nature) can be found. Writings about China and India seem to be a good example to start with. As Jack et al. (2011: 276) noticed: “A book declares there is an India Way (Cappelli et al., 2010), and that a collection of distinctive management practices explain the superior economic performance of Indian corporations and the Indian economy in recent times. However, discussion of what precisely distinguishes these management practices is relegated to exhortations of trusteeship based on what are deemed Indian cultural values in an echo of The Post-Confucian Hypothesis (Bond, 1988; Redding, 1990)”. The debate on the existence
of Chinese values emerged from the early 1980’s, notably with studies conducted by Bond (1986) and the subsequent development of the Chinese Value Survey (CVS). Bond and his colleagues (Chinese Cultural Connection, 1987) highlighted discrepancy between results obtained by ethnic Chinese and Western students in surveys measuring value perceptions. Bond (Bond, 1988; Bond and King, 1985; Bond and Pang, 1991) therefore intended to develop a survey that would include both universal values and specific Chinese values, derived from a Confucian ethos (Hofstede, 1991) so far “buried” under Western perceptions of their lack of importance in Chinese culture (Bond, 1986). However, one can easily notice that “Chinese” values are essentially positive. The items correspond to a generally accepted Confucian ethos emphasizing in particular self-development and obedience to preserve social stability. The CVS and related surveys measuring some specific “Chinese” traits have been tested on samples in China (P.R.C), Taiwan (Yuan and Chen, 1998), Singapore (Chang et al., 2003) and (ethnic Chinese students in) Australia (Matthews, 2000), suppressing local differences to propagate the idea of a transnational “Chinese” identity – or “Chineseness” – defined by common Confucian values. Similarly, scholars have long investigated the “genuine” management specificity of India. In 1980, Sinha wrote a book defining “nurturant leadership” based on the figure of Mahatma Gandhi and Indian epics. More than twenty years later, Chakraboty (2004) reasserted the specificity of Indian managers and the figure of the “transformed leader”, rooted in the Indian philosophy and spiritual corpus of Hinduism. Kumar (2004) also showed that the specificity of the Indian negotiation process, deeply rooted in two cultural concepts (“brahmanical idealism” and “anarchical individualism”). Although these studies had perhaps less impact than Bond’s, all these scholars acknowledge the existence of an “Indian work culture” or “I-management”1.

1 The term was invented by Chaudhuri (200). The author suggests the existence of a « I Theory » (related to Ouchi’s Z theory (1981), highlighting the specificities of Japanese management) based on the sacred texts of Hinduism (Vedas in particular).
The interest toward Chinese/ Indian values and Chineseness/ Indianness seems to coincide with the economic rise of China and India and, as a consequence, the growing interest toward so-called “Chinese Capitalism” (Hamilton, 1996; Redding, 1990), “Confucian capitalism” (Kahn, 1979), “India Way” (Cappelli et al., 2010), and so on, glaring alternatives to declining, Western ones. Although there is no denying that the rise of Asian economies such as India and China needs to be studied not only by Western "outsiders" but also by "indigenous" researchers (Holtbrügge), it should be noted that it is not exempt from homogenization and essentialization. For example, although Indian studies acknowledge (and praise) the diversity of that country in terms of culture, languages, and populations, they nevertheless average out the country remembering that 80% of the population is Hindu, and that commonalities can be drawn. In so doing, many essentialize the so called “Indian culture” to the precepts of Hinduism (a religion with no dogma and a variety of worship practices, Jaffrelot, 1996). Spivak (1987) mentions this problem and invokes the notion of “strategic essentialism”, a strategy that a (ethnic, national or cultural) group can use to represent itself, ignoring disparity in the group. Spivak shows that it could be beneficial for the group to temporarily 'essentialize' and simplify the group’s identity to achieve certain goals. Similarly, Dirlik (1997) argues that the genuineness of Chinese values and the paradoxes which seem to emerge are seldom questioned. To what extent should these countries, cultures, etc. be homogenized, simplified and essentialized? until when? Are heuristics still needed for Westerners to understand those countries? Besides, very few authors seem concerned about the impact essentialization could have in those countries. Azm (1981) and Kanwar (2005) denounced the consequences of what they called “Orientalism-in-reverse” (i.e. the Subaltern re-interpretation of some essential characteristics developed by the Orientalists to prove the ontological superiority of the “Oriental”/ “Arab” mind over the Occidental one). For example, books about India (targeting a western audience) tend to posit Hinduism as the pillar of
“Indian management”. In a country where religious tensions are constant, such naïve reduction could fuel dramatic local repercussions. Could it be not interpreted by some local nationalists as another proof of Hindus’ superiority? Past events during the BJP (nationalist party) governance (1998-2004, and currently in power in some powerful states in India such as Gujarat), such as the rewriting of history books in favor of Hindus, have shown that the red line is easily crossed. More generally, Kanwar (2005) examines the relationship between nationalism and Orientalism and coins nationalism as a kind of “Orientalism-in-Reverse”. She shows that the nationalists accepted the Orientalist formulations of a “glorious” Indian past and its decline (primordialism). Nationalists asserted spiritualism as the core of Indian traditions and “constructed a hiatus between the “interior” spiritualism of the East and the “exterior” materialism of the West. The dichotomy between East and West continued to articulate a distinctive identity (p. 64). If this image of a “spiritual” India was an element of power struggle between the colonizer and the colonized, it is still at stake currently in the nation branding that India has developed (see the campaign “Incredible India” in 2002).

Regarding China, as Goxe (2012) shows, from a political standpoint, “the increasing popularity of Chinese values and “Chinese Capitalism” may be considered in relation to regional political agendas, perhaps as a new form of “Asianism” or “New Confucianism”. The emergence of a “Chinese” model shall first be considered as an evolution of a discourse on an Asian model based on “Asian values”. According to Milner (1999), political champions of “Asian values”, such as Mahathir Mohamad in Malaysia or Lee Kwan Yew in Singapore, have promoted the existence of transnational values well before the 1980s and developed a complex combination of arguments and assertions capable of causing considerable confusion. Such arguments implicitly suggest that a major international shift is underway, involving the rise of “the East” and the fall of “the West”. The opposition between East and West can be understood as a renewal – or evolution – of “Asianism”. “Asian values” and the shift toward
“Chinese” values, capitalism, management or innovation should be understood as a construct created with a certain intention in a certain political context. Lee (2000) alludes to a number of examples to illustrate this claim: Singapore and Malaysia have intentionally stressed on Asian values to represent their cultural singularity and secure national identity and unity. South Korea had similar experiences during Park Chung-Hee’s Third Republic, and debates about “Korean-Style Democracy”. Confucian values have also long been hailed by the Taiwanese government as a means to resist the socialist regime on the mainland. Dirlik (1997, pp.306-309) remembers that, from 1992 to 1996, when conferences on Chinese entrepreneurs where “the rage”, ethnic Chinese presence at these conferences was a prominent feature, if they were not the organizers themselves, some of the conferences being held by the governments of Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong, dealing specifically with the topic of Confucianism and modernity and promoting the idea of Chinese capitalism. According to Camroux and Domenach (1997) the advocacy for “Asian values” aims at creating a myth (‘success by virtue’) and supporting a discourse on identity. This myth and discourse, the building of “Asian values” deeply impregnated by traditional Chinese-Confucian values, can but strengthen China's political influence on the regional and global political stage. Asia and “Asianism” have provided China with some leverage toward Western nations, particularly the United States. Support from Asian neighbors may in particular represent a backfire to a possible banishment, a support for China’s return to the international stage, for its support or “benign neglect” toward rogue allies (e.g. North Korean nuclear test and detainment of American journalists in 2009, sinking of a South Korean warship by what officials called a North Korean torpedo in 2010) and its stance on Taiwan.

Consequently, indigenous and PC research may have got caught up in the game of IBMS and deployed their own representations of themselves and their societies. Westwood (2006) reminds us that “(Said’s) Orientalism provided powerful evidence of the complicity between
politics and knowledge” (Young, 1997:127) and that PCT has repeatedly analyzed the imbrication of Western science in the colonial project (e.g. Harding, 1996). We contend that such complicity and imbrication may also serve Eastern / non-Western agendas and that emerging (or already emerged) Eastern science is also imbricated in political projects other than colonialism, its emergence going together with that of the East. We consider that “indigenous” research epitomizes this point in particular. If we fully agree, as Westwood (2006:97) shows, that western methodologies, theories and methods are thought to be applicable across the world regardless of context and that indigenous research is needed, and more generally with PCS that there are orientalist representations of “the Rest”, we want to apprise about the limits and dangers of this posture and that PCS used in a IBMS context should display reflexivity (see 1.4).

1.2. Silencing the other

Subaltern discourse tends to silence dissonant voices, from others or from their own lines (is genuine knowledge the aim or rather the generation of representations enabling the East/South to construct an orientation that serves its interests?).

Spivak asked in her seminal paper, “Can the Subaltern Speak” (1994) and has repeatedly questioned whether the Subaltern could actually find a way to auto-represent, or whether they were condemned either to silence or to being represented by others in distorting, appropriative and exploitative ways. As Westwood (2006) shows: “a significant part of postcolonial critique is revealing the exclusionary practices of Western power/knowledge regimes and resurfacing those silenced and marginalized”. The (Eastern, southern, subaltern) other is often silenced through not being able to auto-represent whilst some (Westerners) claim to speak on their behalf (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). Thus, PCS have for long been concerned with the problem of “speaking on behalf of” others and have helped denounce this position. Along
with Subaltern / postcolonial studies, indigenous research aims at demonstrating the specific, unique, and/or endogenous character of “indigenous” phenomena, concepts, etc. (that always “happen” to be non-Western ones) in contrast to a “generic global” one (that, conversely, is typically regarded as “Western”, “Anglo-American” or “European”). Those researches also (usually implicitly) claim to contribute to substitute or supersede the “imported” components of the West and offer alternative frameworks.

Beyond these commendable intentions and calls for pluralism and diversity in MOS and IBMS, it appears that, at least part of those researches strive to “emancipate” (Tsui, 2004) from dominant theories and paradigms. “To emancipate” means, literally, “to free from restraint, control, or the power of another”, “to release from paternal care and responsibility and make sui juris” or “to free from any controlling influence (as traditional mores or beliefs)” (Merriam-Webster dictionary). Research being conducted by human beings who are themselves not devoid from reason and personal strategies, we contend that this emancipation may also reflect individuals’ agendas and struggle to free themselves from the “paternal care” of Western theorists and establish or strengthen their own legitimacy and authority. It is worth noting that indigenous research scholars seldom consider it worthwhile asking “Who” should undertake such researches. Li (2012) and other scholars’ (Tsui, 2004; Meyer, 2007) assume that indigenous research implies “a local perspective”, “a cultural perspective in terms of unique cultural assumptions as well as values distinctive from other cultures” (Li, ibid.: 855), and that such perspective would be particularly insightful, but this assumption is seldom (if ever) questioned. Indigenous researchers would lack solid training (Tsui, 2004), incentives to publish and self-confidence (Meyer, 2006), research infrastructures, and so on. Li (2012) adds that they also suffer from “insider’s blind spot”, a lack of cross-cultural sensitivity, which can be attained by being “equally knowledgeable about the distinct perspectives from the West and the East”. Non-indigenous / Western scholars could “also play a key role if they were
knowledgeable about (Western and non-Western, e.g. Chinese) culture and history (Meyer, 2007)” (Li, 2012: 865) but they are still very few. In other words, indigenous research is, and should be, performed by indigenous (non-Western) people, the help of non-indigenous (Western) scholars being desirable but unnecessary. Thus, westerners are asked to remain silent and to focus on their own geographical prerogatives. The postulate of Gayatri Spivak in her seminal essay “Can the subaltern speak” is often highlighted: it is impossible (and notably for French intellectuals who mainly refers to Deleuze and Foucault) to imagine a power and a desire which would shelter the Other, no-name Subject of Europe.

This position of “silencing the West” has been denounced by many scholars in various disciplines (political science, sociology and anthropology). For Assayag (2007: 230-231), it incites the Westerners/ European to remain silent, whereas the non-Europeans, with this identity, would be authorized to express and represent themselves a “subalterns” (objects of discourses but never subject). The Subaltern / non-Westerners would therefore possess the exclusive right to represent the “radical otherness”, as if their assignment to the European territory and to this “identity” discredited straightaway their discourses. According to Assayag (and others such as Bayart, 2010; McLennan, 2003; or Moore-Gilbert, 1997), this position could lead to an inverted “cultural racism” (Appiah, 1991, claims that no “truth” should be linked to a territorial or ethnic identity).

This radical position calls for interrogations. Once said that the Subaltern should be able to speak, which methods should be used? Are some authors in MOS and IBMS not engaging in some form of “Western bashing” and, conversely, now overly glorifying alternative non-Western frameworks, concepts and perspectives? Those who present non-Western alternatives as superior to Western ones, if not as avenues for the salvation of business, here and there, are as dogmatic as those who neglected these approaches and directly or indirectly imposed their own in the first place. If, indeed, we (scholars) see novel perspectives arising from non-
Western, formerly Subaltern, areas and populations, we definitely have to remain aware that these are neither better nor worse than existing ones and that most neutral attention and reflexivity should be applied to critically assess potential contributions. In other words, we contend that assessment of scientific works and contributions had better not be based on moral or political judgments and agendas. Acknowledging that some populations have been neglected, despised, and/or subjugated was a first and necessary stage. Yet, acknowledging the existence and merits of these populations, cultures, practices, etc. does not have to be done by contrast to Western ones, or creating new hierarchies.

Last but not least, silencing western voices is only one aspect of the whole process of silencing. The predominance of the “Holy Trinity” (Said, Bhabha, Spivak) when talking about the deconstruction of western imperialism lets no other option than using and quoting these authors. AbuKhalil (2001: 100) explains that “Muslims who would ignore it (Said’s work) will be doing so at their own peril”. Are there not dissonant voices from other Subalterns? Can dissonant voices be heard? More research would be needed to explore these questions…

**1.3. Political and research(ers’) agendas**

**The politics of knowledge:** Subaltern, Eastern/Southern discourse is increasingly present in the international press and science which *strengthens the dissemination of its representational practices*.

We can first question the fact that “Western science” would still be totally dominant. “In spite of some advances (e.g. in the coverage of international issues in the AMJ) there is ample evidence from a range of surveys to show that IMBS is still primarily conducted by scholars from the developed West, and even then more narrowly from an Anglo-American, North European location” (Westwood and Jack, 2007: 251). We can but acknowledge this fact. However, we also observe a “catch-up effect” and an evolution in terms of: the provenance
and institutional locations of authors, their samples, the knowledge that they draw upon. Although a majority of authors are indeed Westerners and/or based in Western institutions, we argue that the quantitative and qualitative advances of the “East” in MOS and IMBS are likely to be more significant than is currently considered. Quantitatively, the rapidly increasing number of articles published in top-end journals, the multiplication of special issues, the creation of international conferences, the general theme of the largest international conference in management (AOM 2011: West Meets East: Enlightening, Balancing, and Transcending), dedicated streams, tracks, workshops, forums, academic associations and journals (e.g. Management Organization Review published by the International Association for Chinese Management Research and edited by A.S. Tsui) dedicated to the scientific study of business or management in the East easily demonstrate the vitality of the field. Qualitatively, the contributions of renowned “Western” scholars (e.g. J. Child, 2005, 2009, 2011; J. Barney, 2005; or J. March, 2005) and the ascent of key “Eastern” thinkers who take on authority and facticity also gives more momentum to the rise of Eastern science. The presidential gallery of the Academy Of Management illustrates the progression of some prominent Eastern (by birth, origin or education) scholars in the last decade, as four Presidents of the leading academic association in the field were Asian (by birth, origin or education): M-J. Chen (2013), A. Tsui (2012), T.W. Lee (2008) and R.L. Tung (2004). The four of them published on management in the East, cross-citing each others (e.g. Lee, T.W. 2002. The management of people in Chinese enterprises. In A. S. Tsui & C.M. Lau (Eds.), The Management of Enterprises in the People’s Republic of China. New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers), mentoring junior researchers (e.g. colloquiums and workshops in Asia), chairing international conferences dedicated to Asian research / Research in Asia, and so on. For example, A.S. Tsui “spearheaded the founding of the International Association for Chinese Management Research (IACMR) in 2001 with a mission to advance management
research in and on China. In conjunction with IACMR and its missions, she established the journal Management and Organization Review, dedicated to publishing research on Chinese management” (AOM newsletter, October 2008²). Quantitatively and symbolically, eastern science and scientists are far from being the “underdogs” of their Western counterparts. Yet, Westwood and Jack (2007:253) note that “tallies of the demography of academy members or article authors are by no means a guarantee that those persons are pursuing indigenized research or theorization, or that they function from within a perspective or paradigm that is an alternative to the Western orthodoxy [...] Many feel professional, careerist or institutional pressures to refract their research and thinking through a Western academic lens”. As a consequence, “to have what they want to say accepted and given legitimacy in the Western academy non-Western authors are impelled to refract their work through the theoretical lens of Western knowledge systems thereby transducing and distorting their indigenous perspective.” (ibid.:253). However, if the “Western academy” is itself increasingly determined by Eastern scholars (see above), is such “distortion” still prevalent? Again, more research would be needed at least to investigate this question.

1.4. Reflexivity

The location of the researcher and reflexivity: Western / Non-Subaltern are requested to show reflexivity and challenge their own ideological stance and practices but we wonder whether non-Western scholars and practitioners always do. Some seem to use research debate to push forward political or business purposes.

One of the cornerstones of post-colonial theories is to promote self-reflexivity as a prerequisite for any researcher who would like to get involved in this paradigm. Reflexivity exists when scholars engage themselves in explicit self meta-analysis (Finley, 2002: 209).

Describing the canon of post-colonial thought, Shome (1996: 45) explains: “The importance of a postcolonial position to any scholarly practice is that it urges us to analyze our academic discourses. (...). This means that in examining our academic discourses, the postcolonial question to ask is: To what extent do our scholarly practices—whether they be the kind of issues we explore in our research, the themes around which we organize our teaching syllabi, or the way that we structure our conferences and decide who speaks (and doesn’t speak), about what, in the name of intellectual practices—legitimize the hegemony of Western power structures?”. For Shome, a postcolonial perspective requires first a personal position (intellectual commitment) and a method (how to make it). The personal position consists in acknowledging the “situatedness” (Contu and Willmott, 2003) of the researcher or, in Gupta and Fergusson’s words (1992), “being there” as an ontological imperative. The method is based on our ability to question our representation of the world in our daily activities and on the re-examination of western theories in terms of their theoretical assumptions, as such theories have been produced based on positions of power based on the duality of West/Rest, and on the reproduction of intellectual domination (Said, 1978).

Many have criticized the “orthodoxies” of MOS and IMBS. For example, Westwood and Jack (2007) articulated principles to challenge those orthodoxies to help scholars in (international) management and business studies scholars embrace post-colonial theory and to allow an interrogation of the ontological, epistemological, methodological and institutional resources dominating the field. Their critique argues that “IMBS has persisted with a limited and limiting paradigmatic location within structural functionalism and with attendant conservative commitments in terms of ontology, epistemology, methodology, ethics and the politics of research practice” and “persisted with a limited methodological repertoire that has provided a narrow research trajectory” (ibid.: 261). We contend that these principles / critiques, true for “Western” literature and scholars (in MOS and IMBS) may also apply to “Eastern” ones, the
latter not being, so far, more reflexive than the former and, thus, likely to suffer from similar weaknesses.

Westwood and Jack (2007) argue that “we” (Western scholars) ought to provincialize what we think we already know, that is “locating and revealing the historical, political, cultural and ideological partialities and limitations of Western knowledge, thus showing it to be not a superior form of knowledge, but a particular form amongst many others”. An answer to this call (among many others) is supposed to be found in “indigenous research” studies. An increasing number of non-Western scholars and practitioners have claimed that post-colonial management studies, like management studies in general, suffer from a “provincial (i.e. Western) character” and called for an “opening up of the postcolonial imagination” (Dawood and Koshul, 2011). Their answer to their own call is often emic models crafted by emic researchers with emic concepts (e.g. Chinese guanxi and Confucian concepts, mobilized and discussed by ethnic Chinese researchers). If, indeed, research in so-called “developing” / non-Western countries has suffered from “western-centrism” because most prominent scholars were Westerners, could it not suffer already or in the near future from some kind of “non-western” or “eastern centrism”? To say the least, “indigenous” research seems at crossroads and hesitating between two paths, increasingly driven by scholars and practitioners with different backgrounds and divergent interests and objectives. In this respect, considering the theoretical discussion (Huff, 1999) conducted in specific journals is particularly enlightening. For example, Management and Organization Review, the official journal of The International Association for Chinese Management Research (IACMR), has published since its creation in 2004 a number of papers from prominent Western and Eastern scholars (March, 2005; Tsui, 2006; Whetten, 2009; Barney and Zhang, 2009) questioning the evolution of indigenous – Chinese – scholarship. Specifically, Barney and Zhang (2009) distinguished two paths for the evolution of Chinese scholarship – developing a Theory of Chinese management, focusing on
applying and refining theories developed elsewhere in a Chinese context, or developing a Chinese theory of management, focusing on creating explanations for the existence of unique Chinese management phenomena.

Last but not least, Westwood (2006: 103) wonders “What does it mean to be in an encounter with others embedded in the specifics of their own location, a location radically different from that of the interlocutor ?”. We ask in return : What does it mean to be embedded in its own location ? Some authors (Bertrand, 2007; Assayag, 2007; Bayart, 2010; Moore-Gilbert, 1997) denounce the subjectivism and the absence of sociological reflexivity of some PC thinkers. This absence is visible at two levels. First, it some may lack reflexivity regarding their own activist practice and agenda. Many PC scholars make a stand in debates that are not exclusively academic and who have strategies of intervention through activist reviews. This may not be an issue. However what is clearly questionable is the lack of clarity between academic legitimacy and activist polemic. Second, a lack of sociological reflexivity can be observed in what Bertrand (2007) calls “the objectification of the subjectivities”. What is striking is the recurring argument about the identity of the speaker: one should be “a certain type of person” to be able to talk legitimately (see also point# 1.2). In other words, many seem to assume that researchers should share the social, personal and historical backgrounds of the observed population in order to legitimately and scientifically be able to analyze it. Such indications are rare (social origins, present and past socio-professional status, activist activities…) although they may be crucial to sociologically establish the different elements of an intervention in the debate.

1.5. Business, imperialism and globalization
Companies from ‘developing’ / Subaltern countries may take advantage of Subaltern discourse and ethnicity for strategic purposes against non-Subaltern/ Western competitors. At nation-states level, this discourse may be manipulated to defend alternative modes of “development” and capitalism, replacing some form of imperialism (West=>East or North=>South) with another (eg. South=>South).

We previously showed (in point #1) that the homogenization and the essentialization of representation could have political consequences. They can also have business implications. From a corporate and entrepreneurial standpoint, we defend that the notions of culture, cultural differences, domination / colonial relations can be utilized as a strategic resource for the international development of non-western firms against Western business partners / competitors.

The notion and use of “Asian values”, for instance, can help us shed some light on this issue. It is indeed noticeable that “Asian values” are frequently intertwined with Chinese-Confucian ones and that sharing these values has contributed to the influx of capital from overseas Chinese populations (Ampalavanar-Brown, 1998). Conversely, the idea that Chinese culture may enable “Asianism” to become an influential ideology seems to be shared by some of China’s neighbors, expecting China to federate the region and impress the world not only by its economic success but also by spreading its values. Szanton Blanc observes that the discourse not only asserts Chineseness against a Euro-American hegemony, but also projects Chinese characteristics upon Asia as a whole, rendering Chinese into the paradigmatic Asian (Szanton Blanc cited by Dirlik, 1997). Besides, “Asian” or “Chinese” values are likely to serve also the particular interests of a number of (self) designated “Chinese” companies, from the Mainland and overseas communities. We (Goxe, 2012) called such behavior “strategic ethnicity”. These behaviors are “strategic” because they represent deliberate moves either to develop a competitive advantage or to defend it. In the first case, a number of individuals emphasize the cultural gap existing between the Chinese (business) culture and potential customers' (Western entrepreneurs willing to tap into the Chinese market for example) in
order to justify the need for cross-cultural advice and other consulting services. Yao (2002) notes the (over-)reliance on “culture” in the field of business management in general and approaches to Chinese entrepreneurial behavior in particular, with the “eager evocation of concepts like “guanxi” (“relationship”) or “mianzi” (“face”), etc. Researches and managerial literature invariably allude to “Chinese business networks” sustained by “Chinese cultural values and tradition”. The number of researches studying the impact of Chinese values and practices on “Chinese” business performance (in absolute or over Western businesses) is considerable (see Yeung, 2000 for a review). This literature has contributed to erect the image of unique / exotic Chinese enterprises and entrepreneurs impregnated with stereotypical values and practices derived from a cultural heritage (“Asian”, “Chinese”, “Confucian”) which definition remains vague (“a highly generalized and homogenized notion of Chinese culture” (Yao, 2002)). In the second case, stressing on cultural differences, the unique nature of Chineseness and therefore the impossibility for persons of non-Chinese origin to assimilate Chinese practices contributes to repel or postpone the entry of potential competitors. The allusion to a mysterious and inscrutable “Chineseness” also helps some foreign entrepreneurs experiencing difficulties in China justify these problems as the result of exogenous cultural differences rather than internal / personal issues. The same conclusions could be drawn with the Indian case.

This “strategic ethnicity”, which can thus be considered as a “soft power” (Nye, 2004), is also likely to be used on the political level for business purpose. In 2011, Manmohan Singh the Indian Prime Minister declared during his visit in Ethiopia and Tanzania: “The commerce between India and Africa will be of ideas and services, not manufactured goods against raw materials after the fashion of Western exploiters”. This political statement is strategic because it reinforces the idea of shared commonalities among these heterogeneous countries which are linked by a common history and domination of the West. The idea of an alternative model of
doing business is implicit in this discourse, as if exploitation was a western prerogative, a discourse strongly supported by PCS.

PCS and subaltern studies have in common to be intellectual reactions against domination. On the one hand, PCS are a reaction to a massive, collective and historical phenomenon. On the other hand, it is a reaction against an inside and diffused domination, more difficult to eradicate. PCS have investigated three forms of domination: colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism (the first two concepts being a manifestation of the latest). Westwood (2006:104) shows that modern capitalism as well as globalization are forms of imperialism and that “Imperialism is “the radically altered forms of capitalism’s accelerated penetration into the noncapitalist world” (Parry, 1997: 228) creating an unbalanced and asymmetrical new world order under western hegemony”. In these PC debates about globalization and imperialism, the West, where capitalism was invented, is often pointed out as the main source for the problems created by this phenomenon. If struggle against domination is the motto of this research stream, scholars probably successfully denounced the West but they may have failed to denounce and confront other kinds of domination or imperialism originating from the Rest, taking place in the same field and geographical areas (i.e emerging/ developing countries). The case of the relationships between emerging countries in Africa is a good example. Very few scholars have studied South-South imperialism. In their recent book, Southall and Melber (2009) question the competition for natural resources (and more specifically land acquisition) currently happening in Africa among Western powers but also among new players like China, India or Saudi Arabia. This quest results in situation of exploitation and domination similar to what happened during colonization. There is a sort of irony in this situation regarding India for instance. India, still an emerging and poor country and a champion of South-South solidarity, is also participating in the quest for arable land in Africa, a place still stricken by
famines. Besides, MNCs from emerging countries reproduce the exploitative systems denounced in MNCs from more “developed” countries. Companies like Karuturi Global, an Indian rose farming MNC company, or Shiva group, own thousands of acres in various African countries and are regularly pointed out by the NGOs such as Human Rights Watch. Thus, for Westwood, postcolonial theory offers a number of points of analysis and critique of globalization but it seems that this offer, though rich and interesting, is limited because it omits another aspect of this phenomenon: the South-south imperialism.

2. Research implications

We concur that the field of IBMS needs to be reconfigured and that PCS offer a ground of far-reaching interrogations. Three reasons make us think that PCS are heuristically useful in the field. First, PCS question the “localization imperative” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). Knowledge is localized and marked by a class or gender, economically or socially. It should be interpreted according to this status because representations and norms are locally created (and even the notion of universalism, often used as a justification for colonialism and imperialism). Second, PCS systematic will to study the relationship between “knowledge” and “power”, insisting on a historical perspective of domination (a central concept) has been particularly fruitful and probably contributed to let new voices be heard (in response to Spivak’s initial interrogation). Third, PCS have explored the core question of interactions between the home country and the colony (and by extension: nations, empire and globalization). PCS have proven to be powerful tools to question the “textual operations” of the Center (or the “colonial library”, Desai, 2001) and to consider the diversity of answers of the Periphery.
Thus, in this paper we did not question PCS per se, but the some of the uses than can be made with these theories, in and out of the academic field, by scholars, practitioners, nation states, and so forth. Our “provocation” and critique represent a call for deeper (and, perhaps, more neutral) analysis of the ongoing reconfiguration of the economic, business, political and academic fields. The various issues briefly alluded to and discussed in the paper are only some indicative pointers. We hope that the outline of the critique provided above may help foster more reflexivity and neutrality in the analyses offered so far. Finley (2002) shows that reflexivity can be understood in different ways. She identifies five variants of reflexivity, namely: introspection (using personal revelation as a springboard for interpretation); intersubjective reflection (how unconscious processes structure relations been the researcher and participant); mutual collaboration (recognizing research as a co-constituted account, adherents of participative research); social critique (which offers the opportunity to utilize experiential accounts while situating these within a strong theoretical framework about the social construction of power); and discursive deconstruction (attention is paid to the ambiguity of meanings in language used and how this impacts on modes of presentation). Reflexivity differs according to the aim of the study as well as the methodological and theoretical traditions. The first three variants (introspection, intersubjective reflexion and mutual collaboration) aim to take into account or describe the researcher’s personal reaction (conscious or not) and interactions with the researched. In terms of methodological and theoretical tradition, the majority of them they fill into phenomenology or psychology researches. The last two variants (social critique and discursive deconstruction) focus more on “how the research is co-constituted and socially situated, through offering a critique or through deconstructing established meanings” (2002: 224) and are more in use by social constructionist, post-modernist researchers as well as by sociologists. If we put aside the methodological and theoretical traditions, often linked with a specific discipline, PC scholars
in IB and MS can be challenged for their aim or agendas. For Richardson (1994: 523): ‘Self-reflexivity unmasks complex political/ideological agendas hidden in our writing’. But PC researchers seldom question their own political agendas.

“Post-colonial” “refers to changed conditions that have evolved and continue to evolve as the social, cultural, political and economic conditions of the colonial are reconfigured after the varied endings of the colonial moments” say Westwood and Jack (2007: 247). “The expansion and elaboration of the European Union, the development of organizations research in China, combined with that country’s size and economic power and the future decline of the American Empire all presage substantial changes in the context of research that will shape the way the international community of organizations scholars will evolve over the coming decades. [...] Forecasts are foolish, but the future of a scholarly field is connected to its past and to the social context of its development” predicted March (2005: 17). It should be all so clear that, because formerly colonized / non-Western societies and their social, cultural, political and economic conditions are evolving or have evolved already, because their economic, cultural and political power has increased and continues to increase, they exert now considerable influence on other societies, including Western ones. The (no-longer) Subaltern are speaking but are we listening? Have we noticed how much they have changed? Are they listening themselves?

References


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