

***International and Cross-Cultural Management Studies: A Postcolonial Reading* by Jack, Gavin and Robert Westwood**

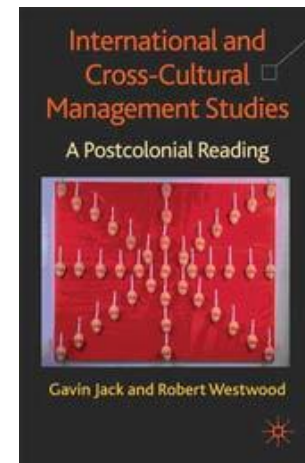
Palgrave Macmillan, February 2010

ISBN: 978-1-4039-4617-1, ISBN10: 1-4039-4617-5, 288 pages

Reviewed by Dr. George Simons at www.diversophy.com

Jack and Westwood have accomplished a tour-de-force review of management research and literature, the development of its intercultural perspectives and, in particular, their prevailing parochialisms. One is tempted to say, "It's about ethnocentrism," but the word is neither broad enough nor detailed enough to encompass the entire political, managerial and academic culture that has grown up around cross-cultural management theory and practice. Given the centuries long dominance of Western and more recently US American thinking and practice in management, this postcolonial scholarship is now focused on finding the authentic voice of the Other and giving it the floor to speak.

If solutions best emerge from good descriptions of the problem, Jack and Westwood have done well from both a historical and theoretical perspective, highlighting not only the elements of the current "orthodoxy," too largely driven by research methodology and too little from deep analysis of culture and the needs of diverse peoples. In simple terms, the footprint of colonialism is no longer found primarily in settlement or military occupation, but in the paradigms of Western thinking that are by and large dichotomous (the West vs. the Rest) and unilaterally imposed on how management should conduct business wherever. It is the intent of postcolonial studies, and of the authors of this book, not simply to examine these elements, but to interrupt their flow and to re-contextualize and politicize them in a way that empowers us to enable alternative ways of thinking and acting in a fresh ethical framework.



This is a major concern for not just management theorists and practitioners, but for interculturalists as well, since we share Eurocentric thinking and methodologies in our work and frequently, with little or no awareness of them, serve the status quo in academic, socio-political and commercial contexts. As Westerners, we are in every respect the heirs of these cultural frameworks and unconsciously if not consciously rely on them and universalize them. Ours is the dominant story into which other's narratives are fitted. So tight is this frame that is extremely difficult for managerial and cultural studies from other orientations to find recognition and publication. Legitimization is institutionalized and we own it. Most of the world does not participate in the shaping of research, but is expected to be its consumers.

We count what we want and need and what we term "development," is not what others might experience from these priorities. Shaping our own cultures of economy, production industrialization, we shape those of others as well. Institutions of religion, family and social structure, if not directly attacked in the colonial globalizing process, suffer an ongoing erosion of difference that is neglected or denied or deemed irrelevant to the transnational project.

This book is written in such a way as to be primarily targeted to academic research and teaching programs. Jack and Westwood examine the literature and textbooks of the field, author by author and often book by book in historically sequential clusters to identify persistent assumptions about cross-cultural managerial science, methodology, pedagogy, and illustrate how they are disseminated. The origins of methodology, they point out, can often be related to the need for dominance, both racial and political in the past, and may remain shaped by contexts of slavery and resource exploitation even in the present.

What does this analysis tell us as interculturalists? Put in stark terms, *essentialism* has dominated our field of research and our approach to other cultures as we collect and classify and publicize differences and categories of values and behaviors according to our need to know, thus locking ourselves into our representations of the others as well as our own abstract models. Our stereotypes, no matter how sophisticated are such not because of their content, but because they function to fit our needs, whatever our intentions in pronouncing them. In managerial studies these have formed what the authors call a “canon” of representational studies.

Understanding deep values as living organisms is critical to connecting with our own and others’ cultures as well as seeing the effects and dynamics of hybridization. Cultures do not stand still. They adopt and adapt as well as resist and reject, but in any case they do not remain untouched. A chapter on “Engagement, Hybridization and Resistance” surveys these dynamics and their treatment in management studies but also takes critical looks at the culture of the discipline itself by those who do not or choose not to operate from its center.

Who will slay the monster? The final act in this drama, PCT (postcolonial theory) must inevitably strut the boards and attempt not just to reframe but to reconfigure the field. To do so, the authors suggest a number of both theoretical and methodological recommendations. On the theory side, the operative word is “contextualization.” We search for a fresh and valid understanding while doing our best to disengage ourselves from our position of unconscious privilege. This requires new questions and lines of inquiry, realizing our own subjectivity, and embracing the Other’s subjectivity in history and story, often dealing with a hybridized postcolonial otherness in native cultures and informants,

When it comes to methodology, collaboration in both research and its modes of presentation are needed. We look to encourage autoethnography, a search for stories and pictures coherent to those inside of a culture as well as to those outside it. We learn from global ethnography which sees the connections of indigenous worlds. We support indigenous research methods that may break with but also communicate with and affect the dominant methodologies.

This will not happen without at the same time developing an “Alternative Institutional Frame.” This is the topic of the penultimate chapter. It concerns the housing of theory, methodology, learning institutions, the publishing of books, textbooks and journals, and how university resources are managed and distributed. Unfortunately the authors do not present much in the way of alternative voices and stories despite their strong plea for the presence of these in the discussion.

The book itself is itself a cause for reflection on the intercultural resources we apply and reading it causes us to contextualize what we have accumulated in our learning and reading, itself an important step in the right direction. Acronym management is a challenge to perusing today’s professional books, including this one, and, while the authors fail to analyze the degree to which the currency of acronyms participates in representational essentialism, they do mercifully provide the reader with a two page listing of them at the outset of the book.

In short, a challenging read that treats its material with insight and respect while begging for growth and change in the field of cross-cultural management studies.