Levinasian Ethics and the Representation of the Other in International and Cross-Cultural Management

Track 6: Ethics and Organizational Processes/Practices

Submitted as regular full paper.

Suggested Running Title: Ethics of the Other.
Levinasian Ethics and the Representation of the Other in International and Cross-Cultural Management

I look at you across the breakfast table, across the detritus of broken eggshells, a scattering of breadcrumbs and empty coffee cups. I look at your face. A face I have looked at for all of the thirty years we have been together. But then that face is not the same one of five, ten, fifteen, twenty years ago. What is behind that face? Do I know? Have I ever known? I ask myself, ‘Are we a couple?’ Yes/No. Are we a two or a one – a copula? Are we coupled? Are we (as my dictionary suggests) ‘A pair of forces of equal magnitude acting in parallel but opposite directions, capable of causing rotation but not translation.’ It mostly seems not. You are not me, I am not you, you are Other; I am Other. Have those years of face-to-face narrowed the gap, closed the distance. Or are we still separated by an absolute difference. Is this distance across the breakfast table an abyss, the one plotted out by Pirandello, a chasm charted by Beckett? But I care for you. I even say ‘I love you’. Because...? Because you define me, I define myself in you. My care for you is also a care of self. Do you care for me? Why?

I look across your desk, across its fastidious neatness of compulsively composed piles of files and papers. I look at your face. It is the face of a stranger. It is the face of a middle-aged Chinese business man – or at least these are the words I conjure up most inadequately to describe your face. I cannot prevent the word ‘inscrutable’ from entering my mind. Why? I don’t know you. You are Other. I am projecting things onto your face from my reservoir of thoughts, ideas and images that some might call ‘knowledge’. Included are elements from the repertoire that some label ‘Theory’. But these are jumbled with other elements differently labeled and unlabelable. I am asking you questions in a style that some might call ‘interview’ and I write down what you say. You tell me things that appear to be about how you do business.

I look across my desk at my computer screen. On it is displayed a transcript of the interview I had with the ‘Chinese business man’. His face is no longer there – not even in my memory. I just have ‘his’ words. What do they mean? I look at the words on the screen. My reservoir of thoughts, ideas and ‘theories’ direct my attention to certain words and certain phrases. I extract these. Later I will order them in a particular manner. Then I will write a text of my own because I am supposed to account for this ‘Chinese business man’. I will presume to represent him and his words in my text. What can I say about him? What do I know about him and his world – this stranger? Are we connected? Yes/No. I am uneasy and uncertain. How wide and how deep is the abyss that separates me from this Other?

It’s the first day of a new term. I fumble into the classroom, my arms loaded with papers, handouts, notes and a list of names of students. I stare out into a sea of faces, all looking at me. I smile, look down and start organizing my papers. Just another MBA class. Just another semester. These are not white faces like mine. The students come from Thailand.
China, India, Burma, Tibet. They come, I imagine, to get a ‘western’ education – an education that I feel that I am somehow expected to represent. But who are these people? My own culture is in my skin, in my breath, in my blood. I can visit other countries, talk to people, read books, but looking at these faces should I try to teach management as it has been canonized in the vanilla MBA? This is what they have been told to expect by the glossy magazines that the University sends out. Should I talk about critique or ethics? Should I practice critical management education? Both seem to just reinforce my self. Whether it originates with Kant or Foucault, with Taylor or Mayo, my knowledge is a knowledge from the west. As I stare at these faces this knowledge seeps out of me into a meaningless puddle on the floor. I fire up the PowerPoint.

I go in search of knowledge, of authority. I go in search of textual reassurance to relieve my anxiety. How do people, labeled ‘international management scholars’, account for these Others they have subjected to their inquiry, to their knowledge and to their gaze? How do they make their representations? I go to the sacred texts as if never having forgotten a desire for a religion of the book. In Management and the Industrial World I locate the following passage in a discussion of management and industrialization in Israel:

The Arab and Sephardic elements are technically and culturally less well advanced, in fact some authorities feel that the European and Asiatic groups are centuries apart culturally... For the analysis in this essay, this implies that the two former groups, with some few exceptions, constitute the unskilled and semiskilled labor force and currently, from a standpoint of potential management base, are of less significance.3

I find this unsettling. The chapter only mentions Arabic people on this one occasion, and Palestinians are not mentioned at all. In talking about Egypt, they say that indigenous management is ‘primitive’ with enterprises managed by a “strong willed individual or family clique” where “one finds a personal rather than a functional type of organisation a complete absence of rational management procedures, and a dearth of competent professional and supervisory personnel.” They continue, asserting that Egypt’s greatest current asset are those people who have graduated or received training or experience overseas – since this makes them “sophisticated” Elsewhere, there is reference to British ‘aristocratic values’, German ‘authoritarianism’, the ‘unquestioning loyalty’ of the Japanese subordinate, the ‘patrimonial’ Indian businessman (also intimated as being ‘thrusting and unscrupulous’)5. I could go on.

This is not an obscure book – it is a foundational text for international and cross cultural management studies (ICMS). Harbison and Myers were there (along with Clark Kerr and others) at the start when ICMS emerged as an academic discourse, primarily in the United States just after WWII. As US international trade burgeoned, there was a perceived need to confront Soviet global incursions through the bulwark of US international investment and business practice. As US trade transactions grew, there was also the need to have representations of other cultures’ business and management practices so that the world could be managed. This was a knowledge that embraced the injunctions of normal science, realist ontology, neo-positivist epistemology and the methodological colours of structural functionalism as exemplified by Parsons in sociology and Radcliffe-Brown in anthropology.

What I also found in this early discourse of ICMS is a particular universalistic motif that deploys the rhetoric of modernization, development and industrialization that tied US
business interests to those projects and to US foreign policy ambitions. This comes replete with the belief that to modernize and develop, other countries need to go through a process that mapped the industrialization process the West had already successfully negotiated. It used a language that represented the Other in relation to the pre-modern, undeveloped and underdeveloped world and the need for the West to intervene to bring development and modernity to it. It is a continuation of an exploitative imperial project in that it involves a colonization of indigenous people through a ‘truth’ that sustains the colonizing culture - the culture that sustains both my life and my anxieties.

Like a bastard social Darwinism ICMS demanded nothing less that progress - a progress built behind a veneer of positivistic theories and methods deployed to scrutinize and represent the management and organization practices of the non-West. It was an appropriation strategy that constructed representations of the Other refracted through a Western theoretic-ideological lens and devoid of any input from the Other and their own understandings interests and knowledge systems. With the rise to dominance of contingency theory in organisation studies with their ‘culture-free’ hypothesis (arguing that organizational contingencies determine structural form regardless of cultural context) weaponry kept being added to the armoury.

Fearing that I was being misled by these dusty and sacred texts from the dawn of the discipline, I went in search of something more contemporary. After all, most of this was written in the 1950s and, still enamoured (often unknowingly) by a culture erected on a concept of temporal progress, I hoped for more. I looked into Redding’s *The Spirit of Chinese Capitalism* and found an intriguing account of contemporary business and management among the overseas Chinese based upon a carefully constructed edifice of Confucian heritage. Not only are a divergent and dispersed set of people collected up and homogenized, but their contemporaneity is denied by anchoring all they do to the glories of China’s past. The essentialisms flow like the Yellow River after a monsoon: “compliance and conservatism are widespread characteristics to a degree where they might be taken as central parts of the ideal-type Chinese personality”; Chinese workers are notable for their “trainability”. They have traditions of diligence and disciplined education, and also a high level of manual dexterity; “‘see the world’ differently to others”; “cause for the Chinese is a matter of ‘connectedness’, of understanding the mutual, reciprocal interplays between a large array of forces”, and so on.

Despite my concerns, I know too that Redding’s is a sympathetic attempt to portray another culture’s business systems emically. But still, the core theme of the book is that the contemporary East only being sensible either with reference to the legacies of a faded civilization, or by reference to the modernity and progression of the West. This is a text written by a Westermer for a Western audience yet one that presumes to have gazed upon, apprehended and then accurately represented the Other. But I don’t want to single out Redding – such practices were apparent in almost every ICMS text that I looked at. The one that really grabbed me, even astonished me, was *Comparative Management: A Transcultural Odyssey*. Replete with its Homeric eponym, the book divides the world’s cultures into four ‘paradigm views of the world’ and makes a central contrast between Western ‘atomism’ and Eastern ‘holism’. This is oddly linked to theories of the dual hemisphericity of the brain: “These two orientations [atomism and holism] have been attributed to the relative dominance of the two brain hemispheres, the analysing reductive left brain, which seems to dominate the
Western world and the synthesising, visio-spatial right brain which seems to dominate in the East. My hopes of progress began to wane.

If I did come to a point of knowing something, it was that ICMS, like all research practices, is involved in the problematics and politics of representation. But there seemed a particular acuity to such problematics and politics in ICMS given its express encounter with difference and the presence of extant differential power structures and relationships that inevitably frames any research. ICMS offered itself to me as a practice of appropriation and representation where Western scholars (my own image keeps creeping back despite my protestations) subject other countries’/cultures’ management and organisational practices to the machinery of northern science so they can construct representations that can stand as ‘knowledge’ enabling them to better engage with, manage and control them. In the same movement, the West’s management systems and managers are conjured up and valorized, as if by magic, in relation to the represented others. This is a white man’s knowledge spoken with authority and universalism. It requires no conspiracy theory to see that this authority is a handmaiden to Western dominance in international business.

It should be clear by now that the answers and solutions I was looking for were not to be found in ICMS. Even worse, ICMS just made my problems worse. What I did find, though, was that my problems resonated with the philosophical investigations of postcolonial theory. I turned to them for guidance. To start with I considered the detailed examination of the representation of the colonial Other by the West in Said’s discussion of Orientalism. For Said:

[O]rientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident.’ Thus a very large mass of writers, among who are poet, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, mind, destiny, and so on. . . . the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient.  

Said suggests that Orientalism constructs an Other in relation to the primacy of a western Self. It appropriates and represents the oriental Other through a complex and networked set of practices that are less about a real attempt to see, understand and explain that Other and more about providing a representation meaningful to the West. Through Orientalism the Other is understood first and foremost in the language of the Same (i.e. the occident), it is an assimilation the Other to the Self. Said meticulously unravels the multitude of representations and representational practices and reveals their interdependence with the institutions and practices of colonialism. This was a ‘knowledge’ of the orient that came to be regarded as “fundamentally stable”. But the oriental never spoke for him or herself.

Comparing what I read in ICMS to Said, I provisionally concluded that Orientalism and northern science were twins enabling and legitimating discourses that continue to serve the neo-colonial project of which ICMS is a component. These representations aren’t accurate or real, maybe they were never intended or required to be; like Said says, Orientalism is “entirely
distinct and unattached to the east as understood within and by the east. No genuine desire to know the Other can be found. I wasn’t the first to realise these connections either - they have recently been documented in certain corners of organization and management theory. In management, just like Orientalism, the Other’s subjectivity is constructed by a Western discourse that claims to speak authoritatively and definitively about it. It is a practice of (mis)representation that seeks to make the Other knowable and hence manageable. Along the way, the Other is silenced through not being asked to self-represent. Silenced through being homogenised. Silenced through having their own knowledge systems derided, obliterated, ignored or marginalised. Silenced through the West's control and policing of the discourse and the machineries of knowledge production and dissemination.

Said was pessimistic. He thought Westerners were ontologically incapable of a 'true' or even sympathetic representation of the Other. This made me shudder.

So what is my relationship to my Chinese businessman and how can I relate to his Otherness? How do I deal with a multi-cultural classroom when my knowledge and culture are rooted in the West? What might my (subject) position be? Who is my Western Self that is in relation to this oriental Other? What are my responsibilities? Should I presume to speak about/of/for this Other, or remain silent? If I speak, by what right do I do so? My questions are all still unanswered as I only reinforce the belief that all our confrontations with difference are fraught with danger.

ICMS, like colonial discourse, seems to want to construct a monolithic Other, one in some state of lack so that Western management and business has a reason and a capacity to penetrate. Like colonialist and Orientalist practices it assimilates the Other to the Same by appropriating strategies that construct the Other as a knowable and known alterity. This is a projection entirely in terms of the West’s own knowledge systems and self identity - a projection that in fact reflects a deficit, and uncertainty, within self. My pinning of you in a stereotype, like a moth pinned in categorical displays at the Natural History Museum, is my attempt to settle myself, to bring me ease, to order my world.

While Said focuses almost entirely on the discourse(s) of the colonizer, reading Bhabha took me in a different direction. What he wants to see is the complex and negotiated interplay between the colonized and the colonizer. He does not accept that colonial discourse is monolithic or that the colonized is a mere captive of that discourse. This comes across as more respectful - I like it. The West, he argues, has an ever-present ambivalence towards the oriental Other, an ambivalence informed in part by its own psychic uncertainties and ambiguities. So, the Orient is, for example, at once both completely knowable through the 'scientific' gaze of the colonizer (like Said says), but at the same time it is an object of desire, and a danger and threat that is mysterious and unknowable. The relationship is essentially unstable, mobile and conflictual, it is structured “by forms of multiple and contradictory belief” The Other cannot be apprehended as having a set of fixed, pre-given characteristics that inscribe a definite cultural identity. Nor can the colonizer be seen as coming to the Other with a fixed and homogenous set of ideas and categories with which to affix to the Other in a monological imposition.

What Bhabba says is that cultural identities are negotiated, cultural differences and their representations are 'performed' in a liminal space, a space of hybridity since neither Self nor
Other sustains an independent and untrammeled identity at the interface. Bhabha sees the homogenisation and monolithic tendencies of colonial and orientalist discourse as akin to fetishism – an attempt to construct a fixed, arrested and stable imaginary Other to satisfy the desires of Self. It is a fetishism constituted by the oscillation, the ‘play’ between the desire for the affirmation of the Same or sameness and the anxiety associated with difference and a sense of lack in self in the face of that difference, that Otherness. However, the repetitions and difference of the discourse mean that meanings slip and disperse and the would-be monolithic discourse loses coherence, splits and fractures to reveal the uncertainties, ambiguities and fetishes of the colonizer. Colonial discourse is always “less than one and double”25. The discourse is unstable because of the ‘translation’ as the West’s ideas and theories get ensnared in the dynamics of interface, of the space between Self and Other and become hybridized.

For Bhabha even if the Other is seduced into a self-identification with the identity offered by the colonizer this mimicry turns back to the colonizer as a deformation, as a challenge to the coherence and fixity the colonizer aspires to. The mimics not-quite-sameness destabilises the regime of the stereotype and the coherence of the identity of the Self seeking definition in a fixed and knowable Other. Braithwaite had noted a similar ambivalence in his notion of ‘creolisation’, wherein forces of both imitation and assimilation occupy the same space as subversive and resistant forces of indiginisation.26

So, in terms of my own problems as a Western ICMS researcher and teacher, this tells me that I can’t assume that there is a stable identity in the Other that I should find, know and then write. It also tells me that my own identity is at stake. The Other that I confront – whether in research, in the classroom or socially – is already soaked in the (neo)colonial experience, in the serried representations proffered by the (my) West, and in his/her reactions and hybridizations of those strategies. More complexly, any sense of the Other available to me can only emerge in the performance of the interaction, in the interstices of a cultural encounter, the constitution of which cannot be determined a priori.

I can’t see any way back from these recognitions to the old assurances of universalisations or even limpid humanistic pluralisations. But then I might suggest that I am a hybrid too, a mongrel diasporized ‘Englishman’. a constructed identity at the interstices of all manner of historical and cultural confluences and confusions. Is not the ethos of the United States based upon hybridity and does not the field of ICMS actual celebrate hybridity as a feature of globalization – as a force for the dissolution of those tricky cross-cultural differences in international business encounters? The construction of the mimic man was, after all, a colonial device of control. If we are all hybrids, all mongrels, where is the cultural difference that differentiates and where is the divide that we have to negotiate – except simply the chasm between two subject positions?

If I am moved to reject any essentialist view of identity and reject the epistemic violence by which colonial and Orientalist discourse has constructed universalist categories, stereotypes and codings of the Other, am I left with the pursuit of complete heterogeneity and in a sense with complete particularism? Can I, then, only speak about this particular Chinese businessman, perhaps needing to drop the category ‘Chinese’ (and perhaps ‘business’ – for assuredly that is not all he is; and perhaps ‘man’ because he is not defined entirely by gender!). Language is getting in my way, but it’s all I have.
I read some of Spivak's texts and found her using the term of the *toute autre* to ward off assimilation strategies and to sustain heterogeneity. The Other remains unassailably distanced, an absolute alterity that cannot be subsumed or assimilated by sameness: the abyss remains. This is akin to Bhabha’s sometime references to the notions of the completely Other, the ‘untranslatable’ element of identity, and to the incommensurability of cultural differences. The idea of the absolute Other serves to resist assimilation, resist naming the Other in the codes and categories of the West or assimilating to the sameness of Self. No more the Other in the image of a ventriloquist’s dummy. Spivak at times seems to advise that the absolute Other, the subaltern, be considered as an ‘inaccessible blankness’ that reveals the limits of the West’s knowledge and representational systems. However, invoking Derrida, Spivak gestures towards an alternative: “Derrida does not invoke ‘letting the other(s) speak for himself’ but rather invokes an ‘appeal’ to or ‘call’ to the ‘quite-other’ (*toute autre* as opposed to a self-consolidating other), of ‘rendering delirious that interior voice that is the voice of the other in us’.”

But, where does all that leave me? What can I say about any Other I encounter – am I silenced, choking on the inadequacy of my own language, unable to represent at all? Clearly, and pragmatically I am not. The Other will be spoken, whether that results in appropriation, misrepresentation or other violations – I’m doing it now; I can’t not not do it. Even equipped with the most radical reflexivity the Other still gets textually rendered – as does the self. But still, I ask, can I make a representation of the Other responsibly, given that if I speak I cannot evade or step outside the subject-position that is spoken through me – a particular historical, cultural, ideological location. I cannot step outside the interestedness of my need to so represent, I cannot assume an innocence.

In the ‘Politics of Translation’, Spivak seems to acknowledge my concerns with the *toute autre* and says that “it is not possible for us as ethical agents to imagine otherness or alterity maximally. We have to turn the Other into something like the self in order to be ethical.”

This invokes two threads of ideas, the first resonates with Derrida’s notion of the inner voice of the Other in us, and the second with Spivak’s notion of strategic essentialism. Derrida suggests the Self-in-the-Other and echoes Bhabha’s insistence (via Lacan) that a sense of self, of identity constitution, is dependent on the Other. In *Remembering Fanon*, Bhabha says that “to exist is to be called into being in relation to an Otherness,” reintroducing the idea of the Other (and the Self) as a relational construct. The Self only exists and is only meaningful in relation to some Other and the notion of a totally independent Self is as untenable as an absolute Other.

The notion of complete heterogeneity that Spivak at times seems to promote is acknowledged to be an idealisation that is in practice negotiable and thus the construction of collective identities, of strategic essentialism, is a necessity on the way to full decolonisation. She permits this as long as we remain conscious of its expedient status, and do not allow it to slip into an essentialism that we take as a real representation. Thus I may make collective representations of the Other as long as the status as a pragmatic fiction is clear and as long as it contributes to a liberatory and not a repressive practice and outcome.

I seem to be arriving at a clearing. I find that I am not condemned to silence with respect to the Other, nor entirely to a scary solipsism. I can speak, but I need to do so brutally aware of my own commitments, motives and subject positions, brutally aware of my responsibilities, and brutally aware of the brutality of language.
I am left still groping toward that ethic and feel that Spivak and Bhabha have not provided either a resolution or a way to go on. Given the intellectual connections and lineage between Spivak and Bhabha, via Derrida, is back towards Emmanuel Levinas, it is hoped that some more inspiration might be found there. Upon reading Levinas I was quite enamoured when I found that he not only dealt specifically with an ethics of the Self-Other relationship, but he also directly addressed this in terms of work.

There is an abyss between labour, which results in works having a meaning for other men, and which others can acquire – already merchandise reflected in money – and language, in which I attend my manifestation, irreplaceable and vigilant. But this abyss gapes open because of the en-ergy of the vigilant presence which does not *quit* the expression. It is not to expression what the will is to its work; the will withdraws from its work, delivering it over to its fate, and is found to have “willed” a lot of things” it had not willed. For the absurdity of these works is not due to a defect in the thought that formed them; it is due to the anonymity into which this thought immediately falls, to the unrecognition of the worker that results from this essential anonymity [...] In political life, taken unrebu ked, humanity is understood from its works – a humanity of interchangeable men, of reciprocal relation. The substitution of men for one another, the primal disrespect, makes possible exploitation itself.31

This humanity of interchangeable men speaks so directly to my experience with ICMS – in fact we could even say that ICMS makes this interchangeability even more exacerbated than it might otherwise be. Whether it be in relation to work or culture, the worker is already positioned both as “merchandise reflected in money” as well as having his or her particularity rendered into anonymity. Spivak’s *toute autre* is still nowhere to be found – only a gesture towards a *toute même*. As Levinas argues there is a gaping abyss between work, as production for the consumption of others, and the expression of an irreplaceable self. Indeed, for Levinas work is a matter of “actions, gestures, manners, objects utilized and fabricated,” work is a relationship of exteriority in the sense that workers are always interchangeable so as to render them subjects of the “anonymous field of economic life” which “reduces to the same what at first presented itself as other”. Work is a betrayal of the self – a masking and dissimulation of the self.34 It involves a “primal disrespect” that enables exploitation.

At this point, my problems still seem to be getting worse. Is there no hope for a solution to the ethical problems of representing the Other in organization studies or in ICMS? Levinas does, however, provide a proviso for this state of affairs; a proviso that might help me out. In the citation included above, Levinas is specific in claiming that the political renders people anonymous only if it goes unrebu ked. It is within this fissure in the politics of work where such a rebuke, such a critique, is rendered possible. But what I’m starting to realise is the real problem lies in the way that my problem is articulated as being one of a search for knowledge. Levinas’ attestation to a rebuke is not based on the desire for knowledge of an object (e.g. the objectified worker) but a form of knowing that is “able to put itself in question”. My starting
question needs to be questioned, not answered. Answering would mean “elaborating a psychology” which involves “the determination of the other by the same”. Questioning would mean “the act of unsettling its own condition”. This is an attestation to the Other that “eludes thematization” while being shameful of “the consciousness of [its] own injustice” in refuting the identity of the Other by representing it.

For Levinas, ethics requires the Other to be considered as being radically different from the same – it needs to account for the absolute particularity, strangeness and *unknowability* of the Other. As Levinas describes it, this is an Other that is irreducible to the I, irreducible to me – the Other that is radically separated from oneself and one’s knowledge rather than being a subject of it. Levinas makes the very telling point that if comprehension, intelligence and knowledge are a “way of approaching the known being such that its alterity with regard to the knowing being vanishes”. I take this to mean that a recognition of the Other places it outside such knowledge systems and into the realm of ethics. So, must I address the Other from a point that might be located outside of knowledge itself?

I started with a problem of how to know the Other without falling into the Orientalist trap of appropriating that Other. Now my problem seems less to be about the specific knowledge of ICMS, but more about knowledge itself, about the presumption of the knowability of the Other and the presumption of a righteousness of the quest for such a knowledge. What Levinas adds to this is that rather than being premised on a pre-occupation with knowledge, subjectivity *starts* with ethics in the sense that it is only when the self is brought into proximity with the Other that it emerges as a self. The self becomes a ‘hostage’ of the Other not a knower of it— the very Other in relation to which the self exists. It is this relationality that suggests that a self is always one from which a response to the Other is demanded and to which the self is responsible. This is not a relationship whereby the Other is subsumed into or known by the self, but rather one of ‘infinite responsibility’ to the Other — an Other who can never be fully known in the intensity of its own particularity and to whom one is responsible without the expectation of reciprocity. As Davis puts it when commenting on Levinas, “the Other lies absolutely beyond my comprehension and should be preserved in all its irreducible strangeness”. This resonates again with Spivak’s *toute autre*.

But dealing with the *toute autre* is not about knowing nothing, but about being prepared to rebuke knowledge of the Other in the name of ethics. This ethics is not something that can be applied to solve my ethical crisis of representation. More radically, the relationship between self and Other *is* ethics and that this is a relationship of exteriority – it entails being open to “the existence of the separated being”. The point here is that for me to recognize my responsibility to the Other means me not regarding that Other as merely another version of my self or my knowledge – the relationship between the Other is not totalizable, but remains endlessly open. Responsibility, or ethics, is not something that is achieved by a particular way of dealing with others but is rather a condition of the self that can never be achieved. The anxiety that provoked my question must remain unresolved if this ethics is to remain alive – it is my desire for a sleep of the just that keeps me tossing and turning at night. If I thought I had solved my initial problems of wanting to know the Other, then those problems would have been multiplied. My question does not provoke a knowledge based solution, it provokes affect and sensibility: “Knowledge would be the suppression of the other by the grasp, or by the hold, or by the vision that grasps before the grasp”.

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Okay, so for Levinas’ ethics is based on the radical exteriority, yet particularity, of the Other and further that the ethical particularity of the Other can only be damaged by knowledge and categorization. “When the Other dissolves into the Many, the first thing to dissolve is the Face”41, says Zygmunt Bauman, another of Levinas’ readers. The desire for such dissolution appears as an attempt to secure power through an agnosticism towards ethics and a seduction by knowledge. With knowledge, the Other becomes a stranger and the strangeness of the oriental Other is one where people are seen as not having personal identities but rather as being assigned to particular classes and categories that in no way originate from them. We do not know them, but rather know of them in our own terms – they are types, not persons as such. They have no faces. As many a culture shocked tourist has said – “they all look the same”.

Following Bauman’s reading of Levinas, it is apparent that ethics is not about righteously declaring oneself or others as being righteous, nor is it about sanctimoniously damning others as being immoral. Instead, ethics is an ongoing process of ‘becoming-ethical’ that can never be completed. Ethics appears now like a form of anxiety involving an ongoing questioning and interrogation of one’s conduct, a questioning in part that I am trying to do here. To claim to be ‘ethical’ renders ethics as the subject of knowledge – it would mean putting a stop to the deliberations that are the stuff of ethics. In Bauman’s terms the ‘moral impulse’ can never be satisfied. Knowledge might offer me a promise of freedom from moral anxiety when in fact it is that very anxiety that is the substance of my morality. It is here that the “moral self is always haunted by the suspicion that it is not moral enough”42. What this suggests is not that ICMS is a necessarily morally void discourse, but rather that it needs to open itself up to the anxiety of which Bauman speaks. This is an anxiety that emanates from an always incomplete ethics where “the responsibility to respond to the other is an infinite responsibility, one that increases the more it is fulfilled”43. Spivak’s toute autre remains an idealization that provokes the anxiety required for ethics.

Naiveté is always inviting – an invitation to take up easy positions that assuage guilt and uncertainty, positions that remove anxiety. I am not immune. I am a doer of knowledge. I do represent the Other both as a professional researcher and as an every day user of language. These representations are knowledge, the very knowledge that tries to cast ethical unknowability of the Other asunder. So given the antipathy of knowledge and ethics, yet the impossibility of not doing knowledge, the new question that starts to bug me is ‘how might ICMS take responsibility for its representations of the other?’ Let’s not be glib - this ‘taking responsibility’ is no simple matter yet one that we face everyday as we choose how we represent other people by writing and talking. In Derrida’s terms this puts the ‘representor’ squarely in a position of undecidability. Derrida describes this undecidability as follows:

The undecidable is not merely the oscillation or the tension between two decisions; it is the experience of that which, though heterogeneous, foreign to the order of the calculable and the rule, is still obliged – it is obligation that we must speak – to give itself up to the impossible decision, while taking account of law and rules. A decision that didn’t go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision; it would only be the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process. ... the ordeal of the undecidability that I just said must be gone through by any decision worthy of the name is never past or passed, it is not a surmounted or sublated
(aufgehoben) moment in decision. The undecidable remains caught, lodged, at least as a ghost – but an essential ghost – in every decision, in every event of decision. Its ghostliness deconstructs from within any assurance of presence, any certitude or any supposed criteriology that would assure us of the justice of a decision, in truth of the very event of a decision.\textsuperscript{44}

The ethical issue for ICMS that I take this to imply is one of taking up responsibility for the representation of those that have hitherto been subsumed as oriental others and accepting that such representations be regarded as a matter of decision rather than of neutral, objective or mimetic representation. Such a point is clearly relevant to any practice of representing the Other, but it is particularly salient to ICMS on account of the colonial legacy of exploitation on which so much of its representational practices depend. In a sense this calls for a post-colonial ICMS that takes its colonial legacy as being central both to the problem of representation and to the decisions that might be made in the present when choosing to (or choosing not to) study people from other cultures and in making particular representations of them. Such decisions, as Derrida points out, are always particular, always requiring some ordeal of undecidability: “[e]ach case is other, each decision is different and requires an absolutely unique interpretation, which no existing, coded rule can or ought to guarantee absolutely\textsuperscript{45}”. In a Levinasian sense “not knowing how to respond in the face of the call from the Other […] involves undecidability, a clear and certain recognition that one is drawn in [at least] two irreducible directions but still must decide in order to act\textsuperscript{46}”. Moreover, as Derrida proposes, deciding in the face of the undecidable is a form of madness, rather than one of knowledge or rationality. It is an immersion in this madness that might bend towards the impossible demands of an ethics of the toute autre.

From Levinas to Derrida, a new ethics of ICMS seems imaginable (but not easy). This imaginability emerges when the representation of the Other in ICMS is regarded as a site of undecidability, even though the reality of ICMS has been born from a desire to remove the undecidability of the Other by rendering it knowable in an absolute and universalistic fashion. The radicalness of this aporia weighs heavy, especially given that “management thought has returned again and again to the suggestion that there might be a solid ground … that would remove uncertainty”; and further that “the disappearance or management of political and ethical quandaries in the face of some great calculating machine would indicate not ethics but rather then end of ethics\textsuperscript{47}”. The problem then is that the desire for certainty in knowing the Other (as many) has been at the very centre of ICMS – this is a project whose intention was to render the cultural Other knowable such that s/he can be managed. An ethicalization of ICMS would entail, at very least, abandoning this quest as being both futile and wrong – saying no to an end of ethics.

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My questions have all been quite practical. They have all been about how to go on with research and writing in relation to the ethical problematics of representing the Other in ICMS. Personally this is a political as well as an ethical problem. In discussing Levinas’ ethics in relation to the multitude of Other people, Hansel has noted the political imperative that “[the] institution … can in turn pervert itself, forgetting its justification and oppressing human beings in an impersonal totality. We must remain vigilant to prevent human rights – or, more precisely, the rights of the other man [sic] in his uniqueness – from being flouted by the abstraction of the system\textsuperscript{48}. If we regard ICMS as having been a handmaiden to the modern institution of the western corporation, then the political implications of Hansel’s comments to
ICMS are both palpable and significant. In one sense this is relevant to all confrontations of and representations of the Other in organisations as such. However it is the colonial and Orientalist legacy of ICMS that makes it particularly salient to, and exaggerated in, that discourse. At very least, this involves Levinas’ awareness that ‘we’ or ‘them’ can never be the plural of ‘I’ or ‘you’.

Diprose has made the provocation that “[d]ecolonization, the opening of modes of living beyond the imperialism sustained by the truth of colonization, rests on the ability of the colonizers to respond to [the] contestation of their ‘truth’ generously, in Levinas’ sense. This is a generosity born of an affective corporeal response to alterity that generates rather than closes off cultural difference”. To try and get at such an affectivity, I turned to Levinas distinction between the said and the saying in Otherwise than Being. If I’ve come to a provisional conclusion from all these deliberations, it is about how the knowledge of the said might be replaced by the affect of the saying as a means of cultivating a necessary undecidability for an ethical ICMS.

For Levinas, the said is that which is signified – it is the ontological function of language that seeks to represent and objectify. The said is that which would:

idealize the identity of entities … [it] … would constitute that identity, and recuperate the irreversible, coagulate the flow of time into a ‘something’, thematize, ascribe a meaning. It would take up a position with regard to this “something”, fixed in a present, re-present it to itself, and thus extract it from the labile character of time.

In these terms, ICMS, in its representation of the Oriental Other, is a particular and extreme instance of the objectification that is enabled by the said – one that fails to acknowledge its limits or the potency of that failure. Saying, on the other hand, is that “which signifies prior to essence, prior to identification”. The saying precedes the said, such that the said can never be reduced to saying. Levinas’ comments point to the very limits of language as a means of signifying the ethical relation with the Other. It is in the saying that language is not reduced to an objective knowledge but involves that activity of knowing the Other. Saying is not “the communication of a said, which would immediately cover over and extinguish or absorb the said, but saying holding open its openness, without excuses, evasions or alibis, delivering itself without saying anything said”. The saying is the ethics of language that constitutes the condition of the possibility of the said, yet an exclusive focus on the said overlooks the “essential exposure to the Other”; the quandary that results is that “Saying is never fully present in the Said, yet the Said also constitutes the only access we have to it; it leaves a trace on the Said but is never revealed in it”.

Levinas’ distinction between the saying and the said does not ‘solve’ any (of my) epistemological problems – more importantly it suggests a reconsideration of those problems – a reconsideration that I have been trying to work through here. The saying points me towards an ethics that requires a certain humility in relation to the knowledge structures that I might be seduced by – structures that are inevitably in the realm of the said.

ICMS, has been a project aimed at knowing the cultural Other such that s/he can be managed. It is also a project that has failed to be open to the otherness of the Other – instead always having sought to render it in relation to the same or the self. As a form of knowledge it fails
to take responsibility for the undecidabilities (and un-knowabilities) of its own epistemic practice. I hope that attesting to focus on the saying is not merely a point of academic intrigue, but rather a call that the knowledge systems used to categorise others as workers in general, and as foreign others in particular, is one that at best privileges knowledge over ethics and at worst destroys ethics with knowledge.

I choose not to end with a solution, but with a requirement for a management practice and a management theory that has an openness that might take it beyond its sad colonial legacy – one that can still go on without claiming to have said it all, one that might place ethics ahead of knowledge.

Notes

2 Ibid p. 188
3 Ibid p. 158.
10 Dispersed in the Diaspora around Southeast Asia, but glossed into an homogenous whole in Redding’s text.
11 Redding, The Spirit of Chinese Capitalism, p. 52
12 Ibid p. 222.
13 Ibid, p. 72.
14 Ibid, p. 76.
17 The Western domination of the field is indisputable, resting historically, institutionally and politically with the USA in particular.
19 Ibid, p. 5
20 Ibid, p. 32.
21 Ibid, p. vii
24 Ibid, p. 75
27 Bhabha, Locations of Culture, p. 74.
32 Ibid, p. 175.
33 Ibid, p. 176.
34 Ibid, p. 176.
36 Ibid, p. 86.
39 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 302.
40 Ibid.
42 Ibid, p. 80.
47 Ibid., pp. 238-239.


49 Diprose, Corporeal Generosity, p. 146


51 Ibid., p. 46.

52 Ibid., p. 6.

53 Ibid, p. 143.

54 Davis, Levinas, pp. 75 & 76.