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'Arrive Bearing Gifts …': Postcolonial Insights for Development Management

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Organizations working in the development sector play an important role in contemporary processes of globalization. The term *globalization* has many interpretations, but it tends to refer to a certain set of observed societal changes. These include the disrupting of national boundaries, and the expansion of channels of communication between First and Third World nations (Castells, 2001). Development organizations are seen to be at the forefront of these interactions between the First and the Third Worlds, at this point in our history (Ebrahim, 2003; Prasad, 2003).

This chapter reports on a nine-month participant observation study within one such donor-funded NonGovernment Organization (NGO). Based in a medium-sized town in the United Kingdom, EWH designs and builds information technology (IT) products[1] aimed at reducing poverty in lesser-developed countries. For the purpose of this study, this organization is conceptualized as a system of competing discourses. Insights from postcolonial theory and criticism, or postcolonialism for short, and critical management studies are used to provide an analysis of the organizational discourses in operation (Knights and Morgan, 1991, Knights and Willmott, 1999, Prasad, 2003). Each discourse is analysed in terms of its constituent tropes, which are at once contradictory, silent and supportive. By attempting to highlight the taken-for-granted discursive assumptions in operation within the organization, the study makes three key observations. First, the study demonstrates the survival of colonial ways of knowing in a contemporary organization. Second, the importance of recognizing both ambivalent and contradictory discourses, along with 'non-discursive practices', is illustrated. Third, the chapter argues that, despite the contested nature of dominant ways of knowing, the embedded Western-centric epistemologies within this organization appear to remain dominant over time. The chapter

concludes by outlining the implications of these findings for the study of development management in an increasingly uncertain, global context.

Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism takes as central the idea that colonial adventures by Western nations, along with resistance to these adventures by colonized peoples, have played a significant role in shaping the ways in which we know the world today. Postcolonialism thus highlights these ways of knowing, arguing that the implications of the colonial encounter are experienced not only in contemporary geopolitical boundaries, but also in the economic, social, cultural and even linguistic norms in operation.

These ways of knowing, rooted as they are in a colonial past, have been critiqued as 'power/knowledge relations' by Foucauldian scholars (Foucault, 1976; Escobar, 1995). This body of research has pointed to the 'truth effects' of such discourses, noting that they are observable in their operation in contemporary society. To give an example relevant to this study, authors have noted that the dominance of particular epistemo-logical frameworks in Western organizations is such that staff members implicitly assume that by using a particular methodological framework for empirical data collection, people in non-Western contexts may be studied, analysed and ultimately *known* (Kwek, 2003). Moreover, such hegemonic epistemologies have been criticized for their own blindness to the very assumptions that underlie them, an effect that in turn contributes to the silent power held in contemporary society by such epistemic frameworks (Escobar, 1995; Mir et al., 1999; Prasad, 2003).

A key critique of this politics of representation is given by Said (1978) in his discussion of the discursive operation he calls '*Orientalism*'. Wide-spread in today's Western society, Orientalism operates by creating a series of constructions of the East that act to reinforce the West's hegemony over it. For example, Said notes that the East, or the Other, came to be constructed in terms of a series of stereotypes such as *cruel*, *sensual*, *illogical*, *cunning* and *childish*. Western societies then began to discursively constitute themselves in polar opposition to these stereo-types, implicitly constructing a series of binomial opposites, for example: centre/periphery, developed/underdeveloped, scientific/superstitious and so forth. These opposites were clearly hierarchical, with the West invariably linked to the superior pole and the non-West relegated to the inferior. This construction of the East served as a focal point for the West

gradually to constitute its own self-image as a superior civilization (Kwek, 2003). Once a link between inferiority and the non-West had been discursively constructed, colonialism became acceptable as a 'project designed to civilize, improve and *help* those peoples who were "lagging behind" in the March of History and Civilization' (Prasad, 2003: 12). Given these observations about the hegemony of the colonial discourse, a number of scholars have queried the implications of this for organizations. Mir et al. (1999) for example, discuss whether non-Western organizations might ever be able to construct their own voices, outside of a Western epistemological framework. Even if this were to occur, the authors ask, would Western organizations be able to hear such voices, given the hegemony of colonial ways of knowing?

However, recent scholars in this area have observed that such hegemony cannot be thought of as final and complete; even the most hegemonic discourses are inescapably unstable. Postcolonial authors have critiqued Said's work from this perspective. Most notably, Homi Bhabha has problematized the idea of the colonial discourse as something that is monolithic and homogenous in its discursive fixing of notions of the East (Bhabha, 1994). Instead, he deems Orientalism to be characterized by ambivalence, uncertainty and contradiction (Bhabha, 1994; Prasad, 2003). To illustrate this, he shows how this ambivalence is particularly evident in the ways colonial discourse recognizes and frequently high-lights *difference*, for example in race, culture and history, and yet at the same time, it assumes that the Other may be *fully accessed* and *understood* (Escobar, 1995). The paradox is, according to Bhabha, that on the one hand the discourse of Orientalism conceptualises the Other as being radically different and thus occupying a conceptual space fully *outside* the West (hence 'unknowable'), while on the other hand colonial discourse regards the non-West colonized peoples as being fully knowable with the help of Western categories and epistemologies, such as those frequently used by, for example, aid and development agencies (Kwek, 2003; Prasad, 2003). Because of this inescapable permeability of the discourse of Orientalism, it must be conceived of as being always open to subversion. Authors such as Bhabha have argued that this instability preserves a space for anticolonialist struggle (Prasad, 2003).

In summary, the postcolonial approach to the study of organizations implies three concerns for this study. The first idea involves the way in which postcolonialism isolates taken-for-granted ways of knowing in order to critique and examine their effects. The second concern involves

Said's notion of Orientalism, a means by which the non-Western Other is discursively constructed. The third idea draws on Bhabha's notion of the ambivalence and complexity inherent in these western constructions of the Other.

Organizational Discourse Theory

The conceptualization of discourse used in this study is closest to Foucault's notion of 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (1972: 49). Foucault conceives of power as a series of networks, in which individuals more or less collaborate. He describes these networks as 'power/knowledge relations' because they tend to propagate a view of the world (a knowledge) that becomes, over time, so taken for granted as to be almost invisible (Foucault 1976; 1990).[2] By investigating how these discourses came about in the first place, he problematizes their taken-for-grantedness in contemporary life. He argues that discourses are sustained by their re-enactment in everyday life at the 'restricted level where they are inscribed (the local cynicism of power)' (1990: 94–5). This conception has been used by many management studies scholars in the study of discourse and power (Grey, 1994; Knights and Morgan, 1991; Knights and Willmott, 1999; Walsham 1993; Watson, 1994).

However, the concept of discourse traditionally evoked by organization theorists, which foregrounds that which is written and spoken, is extended (Brannen, 2004, Boje; *et al.* 2004; Hardy, *et al.* 2005). In this study, I saw a focus on practice as equally important for its usefulness in understanding how discourses are established, resisted, reproduced or subsumed over time in given settings (Watson, 1994). Related to this, an important aspect of the analysis of data in this chapter is an emphasis on the 'non-discursive', *silent* aspects of organizational life (Foucault, 1990). While these are similarly downplayed by management studies authors, the importance of the silent aspects of life and of emergent practices in organizational contexts, is certainly implied in the focus on practice espoused here. The value of practice, I would argue, lies partly in its highlighting of instances in which what happens in the workplace directly contradicts what is spoken about or written.

Studying EWH

EWH is a small, non-profit NGO based in a medium-sized town in the

UK. The organization consists of approximately fifteen members, mostly from either development or IT backgrounds. Half of the staff members receive salaries, with the other half volunteering their time. June 2004, the month I joined the team, was a time of great excitement for EWH: the organization had just received a large amount of money from a major UK donor, in order to carry out a pilot study. EWH had recently developed an idea for an IT product that would assist with communication problems in developing countries and had now been granted the funding to develop and test it. Spirits were high, and the team was actively recruiting volunteers. Over the nine-month period of observation, I was based in the office from nine to five, for three days a week. I attended meetings with the donor who was funding the project and with collaborating organizations in the public and private sectors. I accompanied the team on a six-week trip to an African country in order to test the new IT product. Social activities formed an important part of what it was to work at EWH. The team often went to the pub in the evenings and always ate together at lunchtime, during which hour everyone would gather in the kitchen to chat. As detailed above, the theoretical angle adopted for this study conceptualizes discourse as a phenomenon that is enacted in practice, talk, documentation and silence, and it was for this reason that I spent nine months hanging out with the organization. I wanted to observe as much as possible: the jokes, the random emails that are sent around, the upsets over lunch. It was the smaller aspects of EWH life that would be difficult to access from interview transcripts or document analysis alone.

At the outset of the study, I had no perceived intention to draw upon postcolonialism. As the research progressed and I attempted to make sense of the hundreds of emails, intranet pages, notes from daily diary entries, photographs, documents and transcripts of interviews with colleagues that I had collected, it was difficult to know where to begin. I was aware, however, that there was something that puzzled me about the way that EWH members, including myself, spoke about the people in developing countries we were trying to help. I had a vague concern about the lack of coherence of this discourse. From this observation, I examined the data for all references to people constituted by EWH staff as those we were helping, using the metaphor of the 'Other' (Said, 1978). In particular, two aspects of the ways of speaking and acting regarding the 'Other' appeared important: 'Saving the Other' and 'Knowing the Other'. These observations will be unpacked below and the following points highlighted:

- Although initially, the survival of colonial ways of knowing appeared evident in the dominance of the idea that the Other can be both 'saved' and 'known' by EWH members as they developed their IT tools, upon closer inspection it became clear that these views of the 'Other' were marked with contradiction and ambiguity.
- Moreover, these ambiguous ways of speaking and contradictory ways of acting appeared to obscure distinctive and important silences surrounding the discursive construction of the Other at EWH.

Despite these challenges, ambiguities and silences however, the assumption that the Other can be both 'saved' and 'known' by EWH members remained central to the organization: to its ways of speaking about the 'Other', and to the practice and outcomes of its work. These points are illustrated next, using extracts from the data collected for this study.

Colonial Ways of Knowing

First, it appeared at meetings, in documents and in interviews that the idea that the Other can be helped and saved by EWH was taken by all as a given. The Other was discursively constituted as being implicitly inferior and thus in need of help from EWH: 'I would not be putting my time into projects if I didn't see the benefits. Once the South gets itself sorted economically, we can stop running round after them helping the.' (John, interview, April 2005). Getting 'sorted economically' implicitly means adopting the specific form of capitalism that has come to dominate flows of finance in Western nations, at this particular historical juncture. The assumption is thus that this specificity of political economy is necessarily better than any system 'the South' might operate:

> Now I kind of have it as a fundamental, deeply held belief, the way people believe in God, because I have been blessed with a wonderful education, very very safe … (I have) everything in life and never wanted for anything …. and there are millions and millions of people starving all over the world and … its just fundamentally unfair. So to use all my education and try to help people in the world … (emphasis in original interview). (Sally, interview, July 2004)

The assumption is thus that it is a moral imperative to attempt to help the Other, from the privileged position of a Western education. The idea of being able to help the Other, in helping 'it' to catch up with Western

ways of living, was further evident when discussing the upcoming visit to an, as yet unknown, African country. As we discussed the development of a methodology for carrying out the planned assessment, John outlined the importance of gifts:

> See how you can be useful to them, this is a trade, yeah? I have an old apple mac laptop, take that through and give it to them, its crap, its 27 hertz … give it to them and they will use it … these sorts of things … 'Arrive bearing gifts …' (John, internal meeting about assessment methodologies, June 2004)

With the belief that the Other requires the help of EWH, the next discursive manoeuvre involved constructing the organization itself to be in a position to provide this help. This view is implied in the excerpts above and was widely shared within the organization. The assumption of being able to help was evident in the mission statement prepared by EWH:

> Mission Statement: To research, develop and deploy Engineering tools that assist humanitarian development and relief work, reducing poverty and suffering. EWH's aim is to create products that, as much as is possible, are accessible to the poorest communities. (Document, EWH Mission Statement, taken from proposal sent to UKD, EWH's main donor, in April 2004)

In summary, it was thus implied that the Other could be helped and therefore saved by the work of EWH.

A second idea that appeared to be widely held was that despite the many differences between EWH and those we were trying to help, it was fully possible for EWH to come to know and understand the Other. This would be achieved through the project methodology, which was loosely based on the popular PRA (participatory rural appraisal) approach and had been used by team members on previous development projects (Edwards and Gosling 2003). During the preparatory meetings for the field trip to Kenya, my colleagues and I appeared, from the data gathered, to collude in the notion that through the careful use of the correct methodology, in particular its emphasis on 'cultural sensitivity', the Other would be rendered knowable. At the outset, this view was promoted mostly by John, head of the Humanitarian Department at EWH. However, as others began to work on the development of the assessment methodology, we drew on literature, research and feedback from others in the development sector, all of which promoted this view

to a greater or lesser degree. In legitimating this approach, John drew on his previous developmental experience:

> Before I go to the field, I need to know what's on their minds. Before I go to India, if they call Superman, you know, 'Shaftiman', well then, I can drop that into the training programme: 'You don't have to be like Shaftiman' and get a laugh out of them, you know… culture is important. (John, internal meeting about assessment methodologies, June 2004)

Moves like 'hiring a driver' and spending long periods of time 'in the field' were seen as providing the key to unlocking the differences and really knowing the Other:

> Hire a driver for the first week. He will be your fixer, your translator, he will be the most important person in the evaluation; for filling in the gaps, helping with the context. We need to make sure that the problem isn't 'oh, it's Ramadan at the moment' or 'the truck has broken down three miles out the road'. (John, internal meeting about assessment methodologies, October 2004)

Again, although the above excerpts draw on John's contribution to these meetings, this view of being able to know the other featured in the methodology that the rest of the team produced. This document was presented to new staff members, volunteers and partner organizations in addition to being taken on fieldwork, and as such, this way of knowing the world was reproduced in the working practices of EWH.

Another important aspect of the methodology employed by EWH, along with the above sensitivity to culture, involved categorization and quantification of the Other. This was achieved through the use of questionnaires, field notes and comparison across countries and regions in order to develop a profile of the given country in terms of prescribed categories.

> Once we decide what we are trying to measure, what you do is set up a phrase … (for example:) 'Our (software) enables access to information, to reduce poverty', and then we have to nail each part of that sentence; 'What is access? What is poverty?' We come up with a couple of indicators and bang, bang, bang. (John, internal meeting about assessment methodologies, October 2004)

A focus on measurement is key, where measurement refers to the ability to categorize and count all aspects of the context being studied.

> It's all about linkages and triangulations (between countries). We want to

look here (Ghana), 'does that correlate to there (Solomon Islands)? Oh yes it does!' Just three indicators, three simple indicators with one question for each … We can check those boxes then, you in the Solomon Islands, Emily in Ghana … we can really nail those. (John, internal meeting about assessment methodologies, September 2004)

Thus, in carrying out a set of assessments according to this methodology, EWH's humanitarian team would develop a series of 'user group profiles' for potential beneficiaries of the software. These profiles would be developed using specific categories, such as age, income and access to computer technologies. In sum, careful adherence to assessment methodologies would make the world of the EWH software user easier to access and to know.

Colonial Assumptions in Saving and Knowing the Other

When speaking about the people that we were trying to help, the language used and resulting conceptualization of the Other implied distinctly Western-centric epistemological frameworks (Mir et al., 1999; Prasad and Prasad, 2003). Whether it was constructing the Other as inferior ('Once the South gets itself sorted economically… we can stop running round after them helping them …') *or* hammering the Other into categories for quantification and generalization ('… just three simple indicators'), these forms of representation had attendant power effects. Constructing the Other as inferior (as needing help) went hand in hand with the attendant conceptualization of EWH as being superior (in a position to give that help). Said (1978) argues that constructing these kinds of binomial oppositions reflects the ways in which Western discursive practices can often tend to construct a form of Western identification against the idiom of an inferior, helpless Other. Similarly, projects that focus on the categorization and quantification of the Other for data collection purposes are seen by some authors as performing an ontological function:in distinguishing the Other, such categorization and quantification essentializes it, and renders it usable for whatever purposes the researcher wishes to put such 'knowledge' to (Kwek, 2003). As Kwek observes, these ways of representing the Other are violent and potentially destructive as they inescapably forward a particular way of knowing the Other and the world, which involves separating out 'experts' (often the aid sector workers) from 'non-experts' (the intended beneficiaries) and 'knowers' from 'non-knowers', ignoring the fact that

these non-knowers are frequently experienced experts in the very local practices that are being studied (Kwek, 2003).

Ambivalence and Contradiction

It would be simplistic to say, however, that I and my colleagues at EWH all subscribed all the time to a discourse that conceptualized the Other in terms of needing to be saved and being fully knowable, although manifestations of this way of viewing the world were clearly in evidence. The following section explores the alternative discourses that did emerge, in particular those that constituted the Other as being outside the scope of EWH's power to save or know. Cynicism about whether development could actually achieve the goals it set out to meet was common across the organization:

> I mean, development generally comes from within … if you look at South Korea, if you look at China or India or all those kinds of places, they have developed themselves, no one else has done it for them. (A friend) was saying there is anecdotal evidence that Africa might have developed further if it wasn't for development workers. (Sally, interview, July 2004)

Over the course of the nine-month project, two influences appeared particularly significant in generating scepticism among team members about their ability to save the Other. The first one was the 'group reading scheme' that was implemented. The team began to read critical papers which problematized aspects of development and aid. Members of EWH discussed these papers at weekly sessions, which often generated debate about the nature of their work.

> I'm not sure … When I started here first, I thought that development was the way forward. But now, I mean it's so context specific. (Sally, conversation, September 2004)

The second influence that appeared to generate sceptical talk was the six-week visit to the country in Africa. During this time, EWH members visited a number of IT-for-development projects, which although well known in the international development community did not actually appear to them to be helping the intended beneficiaries very much. During this period, and upon returning to the UK, EWH's location in the development sector and its related ability to 'help' or 'save' the Other were frequently contested in conversation.

> It just feels a bit wrong to try and get donor funds to fund our team in the UK to build (I.T. products) for these guys. (Is it a) bad use of funds? (Roger, Conversation, November 2004)

Just as the idea that EWH could save the Other was continually challenged, the organization's ability to know the Other was likewise debated and contested over the nine month project. Key to this was the conceptualisation of the Other as fundamentally quite different in terms of culture, race and language, an idea that appeared to be taken for granted by most members of the organization. The idea that these differences would be difficult to overcome when the team went to carry out the testing of the IT product in the context of the African country was shared by most.

> If you want any decision to be made in Africa, first off they will say yes to you and it's not going to work, they need to say yes to you about five times and the decision needs to be made once a month…' (John, meeting, June 2004)

The differences were generally conceptualized as being inexplicable, irritating and opaque.

> Be very careful with the whole sexism thing, don't go into rooms alone with a guy, you will compromise them … all these things are manipulated, its rather like Eastenders on acid. Everyone is looking for a scandal, everyone is looking for revenge and they will use your lack of familiarity with their social construct … you gotta try and be as neutral as possible … you have got to be very sensitive to their cultural signals. (John, meeting, June 2004)

The Other was very much conceptualized as being outside the cultural space of the UK context in which EWH operated, a notion that stands in direct contradiction to the view of development methodologies as rendering the Other 'knowable'.

In short, despite initial assumptions about the hegemonic nature of the Western-centric ways of knowing in operation within this organization, closer examination revealed much deeper levels of complexity and contradiction within these discourses. While this notion that discourses are subject to continuing contradiction and change is widely accepted in social theory, in management studies the nuances of how this occurs in practice are frequently glossed over. In postcolonialism however, this very aspect of discourse is given centre stage by authors such as Bhabha (1994), who emphasize the changes and contradictions observable within

the colonial discourse. In developing an approach to the study of develop-
ment organizations, one contribution of the present study is to add to the
work of Bhabha and others by highlighting the significance of discursive
silences in the workplace. The importance of this aspect of organizational
life emerged in the nine months of participant observation with EWH.

Silent Discourses

This chapter has so far focused on illustrating two dominant discourses,
and ways in which they were resisted and challenged within the daily
operations of EWH. However, there were things that happened in
practice during my time with EWH that were rarely discursively
articulated, but that represented very important aspects of the work of
the organization. Going by the definition of discourse as a whole set of
power/knowledge relations, which are written, spoken, communicated
and embedded in social practices, I refer to these other 'things' as
discourses, albeit silent ones. Foucault locates silence, 'the things one
declines to say', as less the absolute limit of discourse 'than an element
that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to
them within overall strategies' (1990: 27). In order to write about these
other aspects of life that remained silent but that were observable in
practice, it is necessary for me, as author, to inscribe them with my
interpretation of their role in this social setting, a methodological
manoeuvre that has attendant power effects. The potential problems with
this are discussed later on. First, two such silent discourses are outlined.

   The first one concerns the notion that EWH can save the Other, a
discourse that was shown above to have been challenged by the view that
perhaps the Other was neither in need of being saved by EWH, nor *could*
be saved by EWH. What was not articulated discursively, though, was
the fact that the Other was saving EWH on a daily basis. First, without
the presence of a needy Other, the funding that paid the salaries of EWH
staff would never have been obtained from donors. Second, having
chosen careers in the field of development, both EWH staff and EWH
volunteers implicitly depended for their livelihoods on this ongoing
conceptualization of a needy Other that can and needs to be saved. It
must be noted that this discourse was never fully 'silent'. These issues
were sometimes, although rarely, the subject of jokes and asides from
members of the organization. However, from my experience of this
organization they were never the subject of formal debate or of any

significant engagement in conversation. It must be concluded that the hegemonic nature of the 'We *can* save the Other' was so very strong that even questioning *that* discourse through an articulation of 'Perhaps we *cannot* save the Other' proved unsuccessful. The deafening silence surrounding the notion of the 'the Other *saves us'* is thus perhaps unsurprising.

The second silent discourse surrounded the fact that despite the shared acknowledgement of perceived problems with ICT for development and its attendant methodologies, funding structures and vested interests, the position of EWH within this sector and its processes was never seriously debated. In fact, conversations that addressed ways of overcoming the issues found within this sector tended to conclude with an agreement to apply 'more development': for example, spending more time 'in the field', attracting funding from a wider sphere of Western donors and so forth. The strong underlying notion that 'development is flawed' remained largely silent, though emerging in jokes and throwaway comments throughout the period of observation and during interviews with participants.

Reasons for these two deafening silences can only be guessed at, though it could be suggested that to articulate either one and seriously engage with alternative courses of action could only lead to a questioning of the existence of EWH, of the usefulness of development as an industry and of the very self-identities of EWH staff members, self-identities implicitly bound up with these phenomena (Knights and Willmott, 1999). It is interesting that both of the silent discourses observed concerned the fact that despite numerous articulated challenges, EWH as an organization carried on. Reasons for the organization's persistence, and the silences that accompanied it, are explored next.

Saving and Knowing the Other: Persistent Discourses

Despite the challenges to the dominant discursive ways of viewing the Other, outlined above, activity around recruiting new programmers and developing existing and new IT products increased during the remainder of my time with EWH. In short, observing the workplace practices at EWH implies that by the end of the project, EWH generally continued to conceptualize the Other in terms of needing salvation, and their organization in terms of being able save them.

Despite the agreement that certain problems were present within the

development apparatus, EWH members appeared convinced that they were in a position to transcend these issues. Potential ways of achieving this included a change in approach. For example, it was suggested that EWH, in addition to developing IT solutions, might investigate the provision of IT training for the Other:

> It worries me slightly about our approach, bringing solutions that have already been developed in the West, over here … I mean perhaps what we might be better off doing is training African programmers to do it themselves … but then its like (an acquaintance) said, 'What makes you think the programmers here are worse than your ones; perhaps they're better?'… (Thinks for a bit) … I suppose maybe what we are doing is developing a global solution to a global problem. (Roger, conversation, November 2004)

It was clear that even with these doubts, the conviction that the Other can be saved by EWH was so deeply embedded that it was able to resist the challenges that it had faced. In fact, the most significant outcome of the visit to the country in Africa, besides the testing of the original IT product, was the development of a plan to design a new, improved IT product to help poor people. To fund this new idea, applications for donor funding continued, and continued espousing the inferior other in need of help, with EWH styled as saviour.

Similarly, regarding the assumption that EWH was in a position to know the Other fully, despite the alternative points of view that were expressed, the overall problem was framed as being fundamentally solvable by a more sophisticated methodology. Problems could be overcome by using more participatory elements, by talking to people more, by immersing oneself in the field for longer periods of time and so forth. The possibility for EWH to know the Other for the purposes of this project remained implicit. 'The only way to understand a farmer's needs is to talk to a farmer … what I mean is it's not staying (in this town) and thinking we have got the solution' (Roger, meeting, November 2004).

In short, despite the acknowledged differences between EWH and the Other, the accepted participatory approaches to development projects, which involved talking to local people as well as quantifying and comparing across cultures, were seen as providing the means to access fully, know and understand the people in developing countries that the organization espoused to help. The initial assumptions around 'saving' and 'knowing' the Other remained dominant in conversation, in documentation and moreover in practice.

To explore how certain discourses survive and dominate over time in this manner, it is useful to draw on Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) study of hegemony in discursive activity. The authors note that in social spaces that are subject to frequent changes and uncertainty, dominant ideologies and imaginaries tend to be drawn upon in the construction of a stable discursive realm (Appadurai, 1996; Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). The space occupied by small, relatively young NGOs operating between the First and Third Worlds forms such a shifting, uncertain context. For example, in the case examined here, EWH's work involved significant engagement with a highly unfamiliar context, the country in Africa. Previous experience was limited to visits to different African and other developing nations as part of past development projects. Moreover, 'permanently changing conditions' is a phrase that could be used to describe the contemporary development sector, as the current shift towards more managerial practices and the continuously changing priorities of donor interests contribute to uncertainty and change (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 138). In short, it is perhaps unsurprising that developmental ways of knowing were drawn upon and persisted in the work practices of EWH staff , despite the debate and cynicism that these generated.

The above observations have implications for those interested in the dominance of Western-centred ways of knowing within the sphere of development management. In particular, it is interesting that while resistance to dominant discourses is often highlighted by critical studies of both development and organization, such resistance appeared in this case to have little practical impact on the reproduction of such ways of knowing within EWH. Perhaps Foucault (1976) provides an answer. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, he notes how contesting discourses can in fact act to reinforce the dominant discourse by giving the impression that it has been laid open to challenge, and has survived. In a later work he asks, 'did the critical discourse that addresses itself to (in this case) repression come to act as a roadblock to a power mechanism that had operated un-challenged up to that point, or is it not in fact part of the same historical network as the thing it denounces?' (Foucault, 1990: 10). In Foucault's view, hegemonic ways of knowing such as the Western-centric episte-mologies highlighted for discussion above are, in fact, reinforced by the presence of resistance and cynicism. In summary, the above observations imply that these epistemologies might be more difficult to resist and subvert than authors such as Bhabha suggest.

My role in the process

Of course, my role as a participant observer in this study was by no means neutral. More overt aspects of this influence were evident in my choice of literature when, after three months with EWH, I was asked to provide 'social studies of development' papers for the team to read. I had begun to wonder silently whether the methodology, which derived directly from the team's previous experience on aid and development projects, was problematic in its boxing of the 'beneficiaries' into categories predefined by development theorists. I therefore provided a number of critical papers that called into question some of the basic assumptions of development as a discipline. These papers were read by team members and presented at lunchtimes. They sparked some debate, as outlined previously.

The second occasion where my influence was particularly clear to my mind involved a meeting with EWH's main donor, UKD. At this meeting, I was introduced as a PhD student-slash-EWH member. I recall wanting to appear competent to the donor for the sake of my colleagues at EWH. My diary notes are as follows:

> We plan for the meeting ahead … I am asked to organise my response to any potential questions on the (methodology), so I make some quick notes in my diary. I see now, re-reading, that I had included the words 'participatory approaches' and 'livelihoods' in the hope of glancing at them and possibly throwing them into the conversation. (Fieldnotes, UKD Meeting, September 2004)

In short I had begun to use and reinforce the language of development, despite having personal reservations about it. As Escobar notes in his analysis of development as a discourse, 'to speak is to do something – something other than to express what one thinks; … to add a statement to a pre-existing series of statements is to perform a complicated and costly gesture' (Escobar, 1995: 217).

Finally, the critique of accepted ways of knowing the world must be turned inward on my own approach to this study, which is merely a representation of my data, which are in turn a representation of my interpretations of EWH life (Geertz, 1973). My views are necessarily Western-centric and my own ways of speaking of the Other are no more nor less representationalist and power-laden than those of my colleagues at EWH. Furthermore, I acknowledge the inescapable 'hidden agenda' behind my efforts to construct forms of knowledge in the pursuit of my own academic status (Knights, 1996).

Conclusion

I have empirically demonstrated that in the case studied, the discursive constitution of the Other at EWH as markedly characterized by ambivalence, contradiction and silence, rather than by articulated one-dimensionality. However despite these challenges, dominant discursive formations that reinforce colonial ways of knowing appear to remain hegemonic.

A potential limitation of the present study lies in its specificity. For example, the nine-month time frame used could be critiqued as being inadequate for observing longer-term changes in the hegemonic discourses discussed here. Similarly, the youth of the organization studied, and its location in a specific cultural context of the UK, at the particular time at which the study was conducted, must be considered. Given all these, however, I would argue that the observations presented here remain relevant for the study of development management for the following reasons. First, it is interesting to observe that all members of this organization shared a similar background with thousands of NGO workers worldwide: educated at Western universities and with a number of years' experience at large international development institutions (Gopal et al., 1999). In addition, the development sector context, described above as shifting and uncertain, is shared by many NGOs of varying sizes, all over the world (Giddens, 1991; Prasad and Prasad, 2003). Thus, this chapter makes the following important contributions to the study of development management and organizations, more widely.

The first contribution is to help overcome a recognized gap in the field of organization studies. Although, in the last few decades, organizational research has drawn upon a number of different scholarly traditions such as feminism, postmodernism and so forth, surprisingly even *critical* organization scholarship has mostly ignored the insights offered by postcolonialism (Prasad, 2003). The few exceptions to this omission tend to focus on macro-level critiques of theory and policy (Avgerou, 2003; Cooke, 2003; Gopal, 1999; Mir et al., 2003; Prasad and Prasad, 2003). There is thus an urgent need for further work that uses ideas from postcolonialism in the study of micro-processes of power within contemporary organizations. Providing one such study is the first contribution of this chapter.

The second contribution is a theoretical one, albeit supported by empirical illustrations. This chapter contributes to the ongoing debate

regarding the use of discourse as a lens for studying organizations. Organizational theorists who use the concept of discourse have tended to focus exclusively on that which can be easily accessed empirically; the spoken and the written (Brannen, 2004; Boje *et al.*, 2004; Hardy *et al.* 2005). This chapter argues that equal attention must also be given to that which is not spoken and not written, the 'non-discursive practices' that make up part of organizational life (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 107). This chapter provides an empirical illustration of the importance of giving non-discursive practices equal weight in organizational research.

Finally, the postcolonial lens applied to the study of this development organization usefully critiques the increasingly dominant view that NGOs must be welcomed as an apolitical organizational form, which promises to bypass the problems inherent to both private-sector and government-assisted aid. From the discussion of the present case, this chapter suggests that NGOs may, through the colonial ways of knowing that persist in social, cultural and even linguistic practices, be contributing to the reinforcement of Western-centred epistemologies, and the resulting confinement of the non-West into categories of the West's own making. Moreover, as was noted here, the operation of these ways of knowing is such that their very enactment ensures that organization members remain blind to their inherent assumptions, and so such discursive reproduction remains invisible and beyond critique. Studies such as this, however, can render taken-for-granted discourses open to examination.

NOTES

1. In the interest of confidentiality, the location and field sites named here are fictitious.
2. 'Discourse' is used in place of the more cumbersome 'power/knowledge relations'.