The Cross-Cultural Training Industry: Well-Intentioned Service Provider or Technology of Anglo-American Neo-Imperialism?

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Abstract

The construction of the world as an increasingly global marketplace has provoked an array of responses from both academic circles and organisational practitioners. In this paper we focus our attention on one of these responses, namely on what we have labelled the 'cross-cultural training industry'. The cross-cultural training industry is significant because it consists of a highly influential network of corporations, private consultancies, government organisations, authors, business schools and academic publications which, when taken together, exercise considerable power in making suggestions on how to do business with 'others', who are deemed to be different from oneself. Drawing on the work of Edward Said (1978), this paper seeks to explore the extent to which this cross-cultural training industry might be regarded as a contemporary technology of Anglo-American domination and neo-imperialism. In addressing this polemic, we present a discussion of the use of videos for cross-cultural training and identify the following practices as central to the way in which knowledge of the Other is therein constructed: the conflation of nation-states and culture; the silencing of the voice of the Other and the use of essentialist categories for marking cultural differences. We contend that these practices are fundamentally imperialist in nature and that as such, what might be at stake in the cross-cultural training industry is not a faithful portrayal of the Other, but a form of systematic discipline by which cross-cultural trainers are able to produce the Other culturally, politically, scientistically, ideologically, and above all in their own image.

Introduction

'Globalisation' has become a central theme in academic and popular business discourse over the past decade. Signified by terms such as the 'global economy' (Hirst and Thompson, 1994), the 'global marketplace' (Paliwoda, 1993), or the 'global village' (McCracken, 1988), the world, and its people, are presented in increasingly interconnected ways as a perceived consequence of developments in communications' technology, capital mobility and migration. The psychic proximity arising from the social, technological, economic, and political interdependence of globalisation poses a serious challenge to the meaning of 'place' and to the meaning of 'culture'. Places are not, as Massey (1995) sharply reminds us, simply linked together: they are linked together in unequal ways and the social relations that bind them together are relations of power. Although the form that this power takes places varies from country to country, 'we can imagine a centre of power at the world headquarters, from which radiates control of a variety of sorts to the different branch-plants, marketing offices, development laboratories and so forth. There may be continental, regional and national 'headquarters' too which function as relay-stations for the overall decisions of head office but which also have power to take certain kinds of decisions for themselves' (Massey, 1995: 69-70). However, the unequal geography of power is not only embodied in such obvious things as multinational corporations. The unequal interdependence between places is much easier to see when, for instance, you that the decision to close down a factory in your area has taken place in New York, Tokyo or London. Or, if you hear bits of news about the exploitation of 'cheap labour' in cities and villages in India and Africa, from the media.

In the midst of this global connectedness, places and cultures are constantly restructuring, and the notion of any internally generated 'uniqueness of place' is hard to sustain, despite the new
claims of exclusive sovereignty being made in Central Asia, the Baltic, and in what used to be Yugoslavia, where new nationalisms are arising alongside claims to a particular space. It is particularly difficult for some people to find even a place of their own, as painfully portrayed in the anonymous poem called ‘home’ quoted by Ugresic (1996) about the loss of personal and social identity experienced by young, ex-Yugoslavian refugees:

Where do you come from?
From Yugoslavia
Is there any such country?
No, but that’s still where I come from.

If the common notion of place, especially on a small-scale, is often bound up in a fantasy of settledness, coherence and continuity, then any current talk of displacement (Bammer, 1994), either through migration or the colonising imposition of a foreign culture, depends likewise on the fantasy of prior cultures as being embedded in place. The simple relation between local place and local culture cannot, as Massey and Jess (1995) argues, be so readily assumed. However, if we turn to influential management texts (for example, Hofstede, 1980; Laurent, 1983; Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1993; Tayeb, 1996) and look at how they view ‘culture’, we would be left with the impression that it is fixed and unchanging. This monolithic and static view of culture is constantly been consumed by firms and their managers who are warned that if they do not understand the rigid cultural distinctions between nations or racial/ethnic groups, or mishandle them, business objectives will be jeopardised.

Organisations have responded to this advice by investing heavily in knowledge and skills’ searches that would render their employees culturally competent and linguistically proficient. This investment has taken many forms: consultancy audits, reports and individual and group training courses; language training and the ‘learn French in three weeks’ industry; sensitivity seminars, cross-cultural training manuals and videos; increased secondments overseas (now widely used in merchant banking and financial services as a training mechanism) and the appointment of internal HR specialists to deal with the human resource challenges of globalisation (in British Telecom for example). In addition to this corporate investment, academics in a variety of management disciplines have devised prescriptive theories and models for effective cross-cultural interaction. This academic interest has emerged through various forms of literature including research into the selection and training of managers for overseas assignments (see, for example, Tung 1981, Smith 1992), intercultural communication training (Landis and Brislin, 1983, Black et al., 1991) and the notion of the effective ‘global manager’ (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989), *inter alia*. The practitioner concerns of doing business in globalised constructions of a world market place has given rise to what we label the *cross-cultural training industry*. We view this industry as significant because it contains a network of corporations, private consultancies, government organisations, authors, business schools and academic publications which, when taken together, exercise considerable power in making suggestions on how to do business with ‘others’, who are often deemed to be ‘different’ from oneself.

This paper concerns itself with some of the paradoxes and tensions which are to be found at the heart of this *cross-cultural training industry*. In articulating these concerns, we focus our thesis on the question of whether such an industry or, more appropriately, such a network of political interests could ever claim to be anything other than a technology of domination and neo-imperialism. Drawing on the work of Edward Said (1978), and the principally
Foucauldian (Foucault, 1977) insights which he brings to bear on such processes of ‘Othering’, we explore the extent to which this industry can be regarded as a valuable tool for enhancing managerial performance in intercultural contexts and the point at which it might be alternatively interpreted as a technology of Anglo-American neo-imperialism. We ask questions such as: in whose interests is this industry functioning? In terms of cultural difference, what is the Other purported to be different from? Has ‘different from’ been subsumed into just different? Does the industry present its conceptualisations of difference as natural, obvious and preordained, or is it in any way reflexive about its role in representing the culturally Other? In short, is the cross-cultural training industry a well-meaning and honest provider of an increasingly important organisational service, or is it just another form of Anglo-American imperialism masquerading as a socially and economically justifiable corporate provision in a globalised economy?

The Institutionalisation of a Cross-Cultural Training Industry

As a discipline, management and organisation studies has maintained a curiously paradoxical relationship to the cultural exigencies of international management. Early\(^1\) international management research was primarily concerned with the question of why firms internationalise and sought recourse to international trade and economic theory for explanation. This initial focus on international economics was, as Redding (1994) notes, highly significant: it not only sidelined pertinent anthropological and sociological perspectives, but, more worryingly, it also framed subsequent research into international management within the narrative confines of structural functionalist epistemology and attendant positivist methodologies. Initial comparative management studies, contained notably in the research of the Aston School for example, provide the most significant evidence of the influence of ‘normal’ scientific practice (Kuhn, 1962) on organisation theory (Marsden and Townley, 1996, Donaldson, 1996). Culture and society had little explanatory and even less of an interpretative role to play in this early stage of international management research.

As the internationalisation of (principally US) corporations accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s\(^2\), however, an increasing emphasis was placed on the challenges impelled by the practice rather than the logic of international business. Fuelled by increasing competition from other ‘developed countries’, who had begun for the first time seriously to compete with the US, these challenges induced a practitioner and academic interest in the question of how corporations might best manage the contingent issues of internationalisation (Usunier, 1998), such as organisational design, international finance, marketing and HRM. Towards the end of the 1970s such ‘how’ questions provided sustenance for strong arguments being mooted against the a-societal and a-cultural notions of organisation propagated by the Aston School (Mueller, 1994). The subsequent debates about the culture-free or culture-bounded nature of organisation (as an entity) provided sufficient intellectual space for the factoring of cultural and societal phenomena into academic and practitioner agendas. Despite these developments within comparative management studies in the 1970s and the emergence of cross-cultural management during the 1980s (Tayeb, 1996), the issue of cultural difference has remained an underdeveloped area of international management research both in terms of its conceptual advancement, its levels of publication and its position as a subject for reflection and critique (Adler, 1983; Boyacigiller and Adler 1991; Redding, 1994; Lorbiecki, 1997; Usunier, 1998;)

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\(^1\) By early we refer to the international management research of the 1960s. Wright and Ricks (1994) explain that research into international business was very much in its infancy during this period.

\(^2\) In consonance with the USA’s emergence as a global economic power.
Jack, 1999). Given the increasing number of statements and proclamations contained within the more contemporary discourse of globalisation about the importance of understanding the cultural exigencies of international management, it might be suggested that the discipline of international management is consequently in the process of institutionalising an understanding of cultural identity and difference which lacks conceptual maturity and critical currency.

Despite the underrepresentation of identity and difference in the agenda of mainstream international management theorisation, the emergence of the discourse of globalisation within management and organization studies more generally, has revived interest in the particularities of culture and business interaction. As part of this more recent global discourse, Tung (1995) noted two particular areas of study – cross-national and intra-national management - in which cultural differences have come to play a central role. She articulates the difference between these two strands of management in the following way:

*Managing cross-national diversity refers to managing the interface between peoples of two countries, such as that between expatriates and host-country nationals. Managing intranational diversity, on the other hand refers to coping with the realities of an increasingly diverse, both ethnic- and gender-wise, workforce in a given country* (Tung, 1995, p. 482)

What Tung refers to as ‘intranational’ management is more commonly referred to in the US and the UK as ‘managing diversity’ which has as Litvin (1997) observed, been quickly accepted as ‘an important and powerful tool to harness the energies of all organizational members for service in the global battle for organizational success’, (Litvin, 1997: 189) In chronological terms, the debates surrounding diversity management discourses emerged during the late 1980s and early 1990s and as such represent the most contemporary instantiation of organisational concern with difference, albeit of a wider remit than just culture. Interest in the management of diverse workforces was sparked, initially in the US (Cox, 1994), by the publication of the Hudson Institution’s influential report, *Workplace 2000* (Johnston and Packard, 1987) which informed North Americans that by the year 2000 the majority of their workers would be African-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, women and other ‘minority groups’ (Beasley, 1996). Since then, interest in diversity management has spread to other countries and evidence suggests that it will be a powerful influence in organisations in Canada (e.g. Taylor, 1995; Lynn, 1996) and in the UK (e.g. Littlefield, 1995; Iles, 1995; Watson, 1997; Lorbiecki and Jack, 1999). Prasad and Mills (1997) believe that the entrance of diversity into mainstream managerial ideology, and its subsequent emergence as the popular solution on how to recruit and retain employees within multicultural societies, has been the result of a number of persuasive arguments which present diversity and difference as a legitimate area of management involvement and control (Lorbiecki, 1998). In a previous paper (Lorbiecki and Jack, 1999) we suggested that the management of diversity has been most frequently legitimated through its presentation as a business case: the moral imperative of respect and tolerance at work has been given commercial respectability through its connection with improved business performance and a better bottom-line. Moreover we suggested that it had accrued further legitimation since it taps into the underlying fear that traditional monocultural organisations are no longer effective in meeting the demands of a global marketplace. As Dodds (1995) remarked, diversity management not only represents a means of coping with potential organisational ineffectiveness in the light of increasing global competition, but also provides a releasing mechanism for desperately needed talents suppressed by monocultural organisations which labelled and stereotyped on the basis of
gender and race. Within this discourse, difference is represented as a potential strategic tool for the successful control and manipulation of intra-national corporate diversity.

However, it is not just an interest in the internal management of organisations which has focused attention on difference between people as a potential source of corporate ineffectiveness. The increasing number of joint ventures, strategic alliances, mergers and acquisitions, as well as other types of strategic development aimed at positioning organisations to serve increasingly international markets, has pointed to problems of difference at the corporate interface itself. This further instantiation of a contemporary global consciousness is, however, more restricted in its focus as it highlights differences pertaining to national culture, rather than on wider markers of identity such as those tackled in the diversity management initiatives highlighted above. Tung (1995) refers to this area of difference as one of cross-national diversity ‘such as that between expatriates and host-country nationals’ (p. 482). Examples of the numerous foci of study incorporated within this area include the transportability of management practices between nations, notably those of Japanese corporations (Tayeb, 1996), the cultural problems of international joint ventures (Swierczek and Hirsch, 1994) and foreign parent-local subsidiary relationships (Tayeb, 1994). At the heart of these bodies of literature lies an explicit concern with the effect of cultural differences on managerial values and practices. A typical example of a cross-national, or cross-cultural, study of management is Smith and Berg’s (1997) investigation of the problems encountered within the context of cross-cultural groups from corporations based in different countries. They found that differences in language, culture and background manifested themselves as conflicts or opposing beliefs about the definition of constructive group members, group leaders and group dynamics. ‘The challenge for multinationals’, according to Smith and Berg (1997, p. 14) ‘is to transform these apparently contradictory beliefs and practices by searching for a framework that connects them’. The need for frameworks or guidelines for managing cultural differences has become central to the area of cross-cultural management as it attempts to respond to the demands of globalisation in the form of increased international and intercultural management interaction. Difference is therefore a matter which concerns external corporate dynamics as well as internal corporate identities.

This concern with cultural difference or diversity as an internal or external weakness of the company has led to a huge corporate investment in the search for the knowledge and skills which might allow organisations to manage this potential liability. As Tung (1995) points out, the increasingly international and intercultural nature of management has led to the perception that:

‘There is an urgent need for [ ] managers to develop a new repertoire of skills and abilities to manage and/or work with people whose cultures and value systems can be significantly different from those at home’ (Tung, 1995: 485)

Organisations have responded to this advice by engaging in knowledge and skills’ searches that will render their employees culturally competent and linguistically proficient. This investment has taken many forms as indicated in our introduction. Further evidence of this corporate concern with managing identity and difference can be found right on our own university doorsteps with the proliferation of combined or joint degrees in business with a foreign language. UK Universities have joined the odyssey of ‘internationalisation’ (Raimond and Halliburton, 1995) by specifically targeting under-graduate and postgraduate markets overseas, and the value of the contribution of Higher Education to UK export earnings is
estimated at around £1,800 million (DfEE, 1998): 34% of full-time postgraduate students are from overseas (CVCP, 1998). The desirability of overseas recruitment is not, however, expressed in purely economic terms, for according to the CVCP (1998), ‘international students enrich the cultural and intellectual environment of a university...and foster understanding between different cultures’. MBAs form a large part of this postgraduate market and according to Quacquarelli (1998) overseas participants can be as high as 90% in some leading UK Business Schools. UK universities are now competing with one another to recruit and produce the ‘best’ global graduates by arguing that they will provide them with the most advanced knowledge and skills on how to work with people of different cultures and languages. In addition to this corporate investment and university posturing, academics in a variety of management disciplines have devised prescriptive theories and models and proffered cultural frameworks for effective cross-cultural interaction. This academic interest has emerged through various forms of literature including research into the selection and training of managers for overseas assignments (see, for example, Tung 1981, Smith, 1992), intercultural communication training (Landis and Brislin, 1983, Black et. al., 1991) and by promoting the notion of the effective global manager (Bhartlett and Ghoshal, 1992), inter alia.

What is emerging then from this particular problematic of globalisation is an increasingly institutionalised organisational and corporate response to the cultural exigencies of international and intercultural management. This institutional response, which we refer to as the cross-cultural training industry, is underpinned by a common belief in the need and possibility of harnessing and managing the impact of cultural differences on the practice of international management. Managing cultural difference is now ‘big business’ and combined together, this powerful network of business schools, authors, consultants and corporations has propagated a practitioner-led agenda on difference with the promise of enhancing individual managerial and collective corporate performance at an international level. However, if we ask certain apparently naive questions about some of the themes which lie at the centre of this cross-cultural training industry, we might begin a process of critical scrutiny which, as we argued earlier, has been notably missing from investigations of international management. For example, what is the Other (that is the ‘foreign’ manager, consumer, employee etc.) purported to be different from? In order to address this polemic and to begin the process of critical scrutiny, we turn to the ideas of Edward Said (1978) as a way of framing theoretically our arguments.

**The Idea of Orientalism**

The publication of Edward Said’s book *Orientalism* in 1978 was a landmark not only in the author’s discipline of literary criticism, but also in many of its intellectual neighbours such as cultural studies, sociology and social theory, politics and international relations, and European, Oriental and African Studies. The success of Said’s work lay, as Gandhi (1998) explains, in his systematic and complex unravelling of the way in which principally Western European scholars (writers, poets, linguists, philologists, historians inter alia) constructed knowledge of the ‘Orient’ (everything that was not Europe) in their work. In particular, Said explored the sets of representations (categories, classifications, images) utilised by these scholars in producing their accounts of the Oriental Other. In doing so, he placed a central emphasis on the notion of the Orient as a cultural production rather than a mere reflection of an existing reality since, for him and many subsequent scholars of his work:
As much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West (Said p. 5)

Orientalism was thus a Western set of epistemological practices and cultural constructions which served to create its object of study rather than a set of descriptive practices for articulating the contours of an a priori reality called the Orient. Of central importance to these epistemological practices is Said’s argument that they form part of an exercise of power by which an active Western subject, in this case the European scholar, knows and masters a passive Eastern subject, the particularities of the Orient. As Easthope and McGowan (1998) suggest, Said’s Orientalism in effect documents the ways in which the former governs and dominates the latter and exposes the relations of power inherent in such systems of representation which, to a large extent, protest their innocence under the guise of scholarship.

Underpinning this notion of Orientalism as a cultural construction produced within a specific set of power relations is Michel Foucault’s concept of discourse as a system of regulation (to be found for example in Discipline and Punish, 1977). Conceptualised as a type of Foucauldian discourse, Orientalism thus becomes a way of structuring, regulating and locating the Orient through the production of a series of minutely detailed knowledges of it. Or, as Said puts it:

(...) a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient (p. 3)

As Easthope and McGowan (1998, p.243) point out, ‘what occurs in the process of the production of these knowledges is the whole fictioning of a culture or cultural meanings which is regulated in such minute ways that it comes eventually to be regarded as natural’. It is this emphasis on the way in which the cultural production of knowledge of the Other becomes naturalised that is so vital to an understanding of Orientalism. For, as a consequence of its ‘naturalisation’, the ideological activities and political interests which serve to produce these knowledges become masked and banished to the discursive margins, with the effect that what is paradoxically foregrounded (the non-western Other) is a form of truth perceptibly ‘free’ of any sort of ideological domination or political distortion. However, as Said goes on to explain, the ‘naturalisation’ of the knowledge of the Other is neither neutral nor value-free, as epitomised by the classic hierarchical power/knowledge relations contained in First/Third World or ‘developed/developing’ discursive divides which render knowledge(s) produced by the (Western) First World purportedly superior to that produced by the Rest of the World. And it is this asymmetrical knowledge/power relationship that produces what Said calls the ‘dreadful secondariness’ of some people and their cultures. A point echoed in Calas’s (1992) study of international management theory and practice in which she found that Western writings that used a modernist perspective of how ‘other people in the world are “different”’ (Calas, 1992:205) employed a mode of rhetorical argumentation of Time, Race and Voice which resulted in the premise that only ‘developed’ people can produce useful knowledge. ‘Underdeveloped’ people are, therefore, rendered inferior and incapable not only of producing valid knowledge, but more significantly incapable of representing or speaking for themselves. This colonising practice is not, however, an exclusive feature of contemporary sociality.

The above premise of ‘natural’ superiority and inferiority was reflected in anthropological and social discourses of the 1900s when the term ‘culture’ was closely associated with socially
elite concepts such as refinement of the mind, or tastes and manners based on a superior education and upbringing. As Heller (1985) points out, this definition of culture was also identified with the intellectual side of civilisation, and its German spelling *kultur* was used extensively in Europe before the Second World War to support arguments on the social and racial superiority of some groups over others. The sort of rhetoric contained within this hierarchical ordering of power, knowledge and position in the world is not, however, just a product of the past: its legacy spills over into the present. Today’s discursive evaluation of the global economy is, as Priyadharshini (1999) observes, replete with metaphors of tigers, dragons and elephants in ways obviously reminiscent of the literature and images from the days of the Raj. Yet the implications of the Orientalisation of the Orient extend also to the West. If we can say that the Orient exists largely as a fiction then it is possible to assert that it is a fiction necessary to the construction of an opposing fiction – that of the West. For Said, therefore, the meaning of both the Orient and the West is not inherent in either but is rather constructed in a dialectical relationship of difference between the two. Deeply felt and experienced as natural it is none the less an existence which is, to a very large and political extent, a fictional account of culture.

Although Said unsettles these ‘foundational stories’ of Otherness, his work should not be taken as a celebration of the fractiousness and fragmentation to be found in certain versions of postmodernism. Said’s exposure of both Western and Eastern ‘cultures’ as grand works of fiction should not be confused with postmodernism’s preoccupation with deconstruction, the end of history and ‘grand narratives’. Although Said and postmodernists are both equally interested in discourses and narration, Said is critical of ‘cults like post-modernism, discourse analysis, New Historicism, deconstructionism, neo-pragmatism’ since they afford their adherents ‘an astonishing sense of weightlessness with regard to the gravity of history’ (Said, 1993, pp.366-7). For as Pearson et al (1997) take pains to point out, Said, in his unfolding narrative of Orientalism, demonstratively makes known his solidarity with populations despised and rejected by the West’s dominating social order, with his self-located intellectual representations deliberately tied to ‘the poor, the disadvantaged, the voiceless, the unrepresented, the powerless’ (Said, 1994:84). As Radhakrishnan (1994) acutely chides us, postmodernism is itself yet another Western ideology, embedded in Eurocentricism i.e. ‘Eurocentricism masquerading as authentic universalism’ (Radhakrishnan, 1994: 309). Postmodernism’s total rejection of universalism, in favour of a rigorous and uncompromising relativism, presents, therefore, a further, though nihilist, grand narrative, in which postmodernism can have nothing to say about other cultures. The logic of postmodernism’s de-differentiation has, however, been severely questioned within the West by feminists who have sought to postmodernise their feminism without, at the same time, conceding to postmodernism’s master claims concerning knowledge and theory. Feminists, such as Donna Haraway (1985), Nancy Fraser (1989) and Linda Nicholson (1990), have pressured postmodernism to acknowledge its shortcomings, blind spots and internal contradictions, by warning us that the social significance of postmodernism is not to be taken for granted.

Postmodern feminists sees the postmodern ‘condition’ as a problem, and ask why it is that an increase in epistemological complexity results in the lessening of knowledge, especially of the Other? Or, why is knowledge and practice, or knowledge and ‘worldliness’ posited in terms of mutual incommensurability? What helps them out of this aporia is, as Radhakrishnan (1994) explains, not just another ‘pure’ epistemological nuance, but rather a very real historical challenge: the challenge from women of colour in the ‘first world’ as well as from ‘third world’ men and women, but with the possibility of meaningful coalitions or cross-cultural
projects between them, despite their fundamental differences of race, class, sexuality and nationality. Postmodern feminism sees, therefore, the minimalisation of the grand-narratives into the récit of postmodernism as an epistemological move that launders the guilt of Eurocentricism. Modernity was, after all, achieved as an effect of colonialism with the unequal effect on the coloniser and the colonised. Much of the capital needed for industrialisation came from the colonies (one of the most obvious examples being cotton from India for the mills in Lancashire), and it was the production of surplus value from the colonies that paved the way for the universal sovereignty of modernity. And of course, in the process, other knowledges were wasted. If the dominance of modernity was the result of both the creation and the maintenance of the developed-underdeveloped divide, how can postmodernism, with its power of high theory, find itself absolved of its modernist past?

Said’s rejection of postmodernism’s rigorous and uncompromising relativism, and his commendation of ‘universalism’ needs to be placed in context if it is to be understood, accurately. His notion of universalism is based on the establishment of ‘a single standard’ for ‘freedom and justice’, far removed from ‘the ideas of a universal norm of international behaviour [which] meant in effect the right of the European power and European representations of other people to hold sway’ (Said, 1994: 68-69). His concept of universalism includes the hitherto, wasted knowledges of the Other or ‘outsider’, but not this is not without its own problematics as Spivak (1993) makes clear in her forward to her book entitled, ‘Outside in the Teaching Machine’:

‘In the last five years, we have seen an explosion of marginality studies in college and university teaching in the United States. In one way or another, all the pieces included in this book are part of that struggle (...) Five of the pieces were presented and published in a British context, one is on Canadian subject matter, but my own position as a U.S. academic seems clear to them. Such a caution emerges out of my conviction that, as the margin or “outside” enters an institution or teaching machine, what kind of teaching machine it enters will determine its contours.’ (Spivak, 1993, p.ix)

Later, in her book Spivak describes the thoughts that were going on in her head as she prepared to deliver a paper, which was later included as one of the chapters in the aforementioned book, at a conference on Cultural Value at Birkbeck College, the University of London on 16 July 1988. In her musings she felt obliged to think not only about her own cultural identity, but from what space she was speaking, and what space the representational member of the audience might place her. What did the audience expect to hear from her today, here? In order to bypass comparison with essential characteristics of race and gender (whose definitions would in a British context, ‘label’ her an Asian woman), she chose a name that ‘would not keep her in (the representation of) a margin so thick with context. With all the perils attendant upon a declared choice she ‘chose’ the institutional appellation ‘teacher’. (Spivak, 1993, pp.55-56). Her choice of appellation is significant as it gave her the power to communicate on a more equal footing with the speakers, audiences, writers, readers of that particular ‘kind of teaching machine’: a British university. She is a university teacher. In making this stance, she was able to forefront her cultural identity as a ‘radical academic’, interested in social change.

Spivak’s reflective deliberations on the presentation of herself to members of the British academy raise a number of substantive issues relevant to ‘teachers’ inside various teaching machines. ‘Teachers’ are influential figures: they have the power to determine what counts as
knowledge, which knowledges are disseminated for subsequent consumption, and by what methods. Within the cross-cultural training industry, which can also be likened to a teaching machine, the use of videos is a favoured method of transmitting ideas on ‘other cultures’. Recently, for example, we received unsolicited emails from ‘global training products’ offering a range of videos on: negotiating with the Chinese; international leadership; global team building; cross-cultural understanding, and intercultural communications. Just like the ‘learn French in three weeks industry’, these emails promised us the possibility of being able not only to appreciate and understand cultural differences, but also to be able to manage them effectively in our everyday dealings. However, as we hope to demonstrate in the next section, cross-cultural training videos are not stand-alone pieces of impartial knowledge: they are ‘thick with context’ and contain powerful portrayals and messages of the cultural other, absorbed and filtered through other bodies of knowledge. They are broadcast in many different contexts, watched by future and practising managers, as preparation for an overseas assignment or international/cross-cultural roles, as well as by students within formal international education. And within the academy they have more recently become the subject of academic debate (see for example, Ellison, 1997; Lonergan and Ladau-Harjulin 1997; Jack, 1998). Given their centrality then to the ‘teaching machines’ of the cross-cultural training industry, videos would seem to represent a pertinent and useful set of materials for the present purposes of exploring the latent neo-imperialism of cross-cultural training. It is important to note here however that we do not regard the use of cross-cultural training videos as problematic per se. They can, if used judiciously, act as a very fruitful vehicle for the exploration of cultural identity and the social and political process which this involves. But as Spivak reminds us, the social and political usefulness of videos as training materials very much depends on the kind of teaching machine they enter. Rather than enlighten, educate, critique and in spite of the teacher’s good intentions, as we sadly acknowledge from our personal experience of using them, this teaching machine can serve to reinforce myths, stereotypes and racial discrimination.

Illustrating Imperialist Mediation: The Case of Video Materials
In this section we comment upon three videos used as part of different cross-cultural training courses. In examining these videos what we are attempting to do is to outline the nature and contours of the teaching machines within which they are being used in order to address the polemic set at the beginning of this paper. In order to do this we take an interest in the practices and sets of representations utilised as part of this video training. In particular we address the question of how portrayals of the Other are made to seem stable, natural and obvious rather than culturally constructed, politically positioned and ideologically mediated. The first video with which we are concerned is called ‘Making the Difference: Living and Working Abroad’ and is produced by TV Choice Productions in association with the Centre for International Briefing which is based at Farnham Castle in the UK. The Centre itself is highly prestigious, and specialises in running two/three week preparation courses for managers who are about to embark on overseas assignments. The video lasts about 25 minutes and is accompanied by a teaching manual which includes: advice on how to use the action pack; a two page introduction on cultural difference; a synopsis of the key points explored within the video (results, relationships, time, body language, problems for women and ‘yes means no’); a copy of the script; background information containing views of the interviewees who have worked abroad; a series of questions to ask students once they have watched the video, discussion topics and role play exercises. The video commences with a scene at an airport and starts with the following commentary using a female voice-over:
‘The modern world is becoming smaller and smaller. Thanks to modern communications and transport, countries are closer than ever before. It’s tempting to think that people are getting closer, too but are they? In fact, there are many differences. Some large, some small (...) Each culture has its own beliefs and ways of doing things - not better, not worse - just different. (Pans to children drawing at a table). When you go abroad - to live and to work - you take your luggage with you. (Children’s drawing of luggage). But there’s something else that you’re taking, that you may not realise - your “cultural baggage”: attitudes taken for granted, preconceived ideas about how the world works. You’ll have to change and adapt to survive. (Children’s drawing of airliner and parachute in trouble). If you don’t understand this simple fact, if you go out unprepared, you’re heading for trouble.’

The screen is interrupted by the caption, MAKING THE DIFFERENCE, the commentary then continues with:

‘When you’re new to a culture it is easy to make mistakes. They may be small, a wrong word or gesture, but in business they can lose deals, they can break careers.’ (Making the Difference script, undated, p.14)

The video then moves to Chas, a trainer in a multi-national company who went to work in Brunei, who talks about the ‘never forgiven’ mistakes made by his predecessor. That interview is followed by five others, interspersed with commentary on key points and shots of various locations and settings. Anne, who worked as teacher in Colombia, advises the viewer ‘not to get too depressed’ over their different time keeping. Claire is used to illustrate very subtle differences in body language, as she found out when she went to live in Greece (raising an eyebrow to signify ‘no’). Catherine ‘discovers the cost’ of Sri-Lanka’s ‘politeness culture’: they are ‘very polite people and they don’t like to say “no”’ (they kept saying “yes” when she asked “is the shopping centre in this direction”, and she got lost). Colin, warns us not to think of the Germans as similar to ‘us’, just because of the single European market - “that’s one of the biggest mistakes that people can make”. The video then moves to two women’s experiences of working in the Middle East: Maureen is cautious and says:

‘So many times you’ve gone and had that innocent cup of coffee, and the next thing you find yourself fighting off very unwanted advances, and the guy does not understand why you’re fighting him off. You’ve made eye contact with him, you’ve smiled at him, you’ve sat in a public place with him. All of these things suggest that you are behaving in a way that the women he knows would not behave and therefore you’re not to be respected. A lot of women hate this when they are travelling, they absolutely hate to come to terms with this. They hate to confront it and they hate to admit it, but unless you do you are really placing yourself in danger often.’ (Making the Difference script, undated, p.21)

Suzy, however, counterbalances the above view by describing her very different experiences of being in the Middle East where women ‘are treated with such respect’ and she ‘was treated like a queen’. Just before the video ends, a commentator suggests:

“So the ideal is to be comfortable with difference, to tolerate ambiguity, to put up with what someone called the continual state of beleaguered self-esteem’. (Making the Difference script, undated, p.23)
The extracts from the script of *Making the Difference* outlined above, together with its ironic title, serve as an illustrative example of a manufactured cultural fiction of the Other, similar to Western fictions of the Orient. Several practices and sets of representations might be identified which illustrate this. First, the video buys into and replicates popular discourses on globalisation and culture, representing the former as a phenomenon which is all pervasive and a ‘matter for all’, rather than an idea constructed and emanating from the economic powers of the ‘developed’ world. Evidence for this Westernised construction and thus ‘ownership’ of globalisation lies in the way in which its implications and exigencies are couched in the discourse of capitalism. Not dealing with the cultural challenges of globalisation will ‘lose deals’, cause ‘trouble’, ‘break careers’. In other words it poses as a threat to the maintenance and perpetuation of the rationality of Western capitalism. Second the video holds the power to shape viewers’ concepts of others’ social and cultural identities. It does this in the first instance by conflating nation states with national and unitary cultures e.g. ‘Sri Lanka’s politeness culture’, ‘the Germans’, ‘Colombian’ time-keeping, thus rendering invisible the multifaceted nature and numerous cultural differences which might be found within each of these societies. It might be suggested that this is a technique of control, a practice of drawing tight boundaries around and subsequently homogenising a set of culturally diverse people such that they might be ‘known’. Culture thus becomes a container with a socially factitious nature. Third the images of the children are important since they suggest that the process of ‘learning’ or at least ‘acquiring’ culture is one which is on the one hand deterministic - the children are portrayed as innocent and passive learners of an already established body of knowledge with no agency for mediating these materials. And politically and historically ‘neutral’ - the innocence of the children renders innocent the knowledge of the cultural Other, that is to say knowledge from which has been masked stories of colonisation, historical repression and violence. Indeed the adage in the video that each culture has ways of doing things - ‘not better, not worse, just different’ - would seem to provide almost a justification for ignoring the historical and political legacies of cultural colonisation. Fourth, and most importantly, the Other has no voice in these videos; they are not permitted to speak for or represent themselves. The silencing, death and preservation of the Other’s cultural structures into ‘glass jars’ and its subsequent epistemological ‘post-mortem’ by Western eyes is reminiscent of Marsden and Townley’s (1996) account of ‘scientification’.

The previous point would seem to indicate that the processes involved in using the video, and their ironic attempts to bring the material of the cultural Other to ‘life’, are just as problematic as the content of videos. These processes constitute acts of mediation on the part of the cross-cultural trainer, as we attempt to explain in our analysis of Ellison’s (1997) paper on the use of cross-cultural training videos. In that paper, Ellison, a consultant with the Centre for International Briefings, concentrates on the video, *The Cultural Gap*, and uses it to illustrate how he uses videos in his job (or more importantly how he thinks they ought to be used). At the beginning of his paper, he states that that using a video in a presentation:

‘(...) provides a degree of compromise. It allows the introduction of thoughts and ideas from another culture whilst retaining control over content and quality, within the parameters of the video, over time’. Although this video [The Cultural Gap] is intended for the shipping industry (it is targeted at ships’ crews and has a distinct maritime flavour), it provides general lessons to be learnt, and it ‘does not take long for the “real” audience to start relating to the “virtual” audience. It is neither too academic nor too boring’ (Ellison, 1997, pp.106-107).
The context for the video is important here. At the start of the cultural briefing sessions offered by the consultancy, the participants are introduced to the concept of culture and asked to reflect upon their own culture with specific recourse, following a brief outline of their work, to the studies of Hall, Trompenaars and Hofstede. Having had this introductory session, the video is then shown. In terms of content, Ellison points out that the video covers the topics of introductions, culture filters, culture management skills and understanding cultural values. Using a basic sender-message-receiver model for interpersonal communication (a model, we might add, which is not without its problems), Ellison uses the notion of culture filters (which equates to a type of ‘noise’ in the terminology of the S-M-R model) as a concept which (p.108):

(...) explains how people communicate and how what they say and what they understand will be affected by their cultural background and cultural understanding of the situation. Some people may use these filters without knowing it.

These ‘culture filters’ are something that must be managed such that communicative messages might be encoded in a culturally sensitive way in order to ensure that the meaning of the message might be subsequently decoded and understood correctly. These two culture management skills read (p.109):

1. check, check, and check again that you interpret correctly the message sent to you by someone in another culture
2. make sure in your own communication to make use of your culture filters so that you really say what you mean.

The final part of the video deals with ‘understanding cultural values’. The participants are presented with a list of ‘values’ such as generosity, honesty, reliability, respect, openness and fairness. They are asked to discuss the relative importance of these values and to consider which of the values mean most to them. Differences in response are highlighted during discussion and act as the basis for an analysis of cultural differences.

Although Ellison is conscious of allowing the Other to speak in his training sessions, what he ultimately does is to force participants to box themselves, their identities and therefore also others and others’ identities in the boxes which comprise the training models he follows (e.g. S-M-R communicative models). In a similar way to the video discussed in the previous section, culture, cultural values and cultural identity are taught to be things that people possess, rather like a television or a microwave oven, or baggage in Making the Difference. They are taught to be external to the individual; it is taught that they determine and influence the way in which people communicate and understand each other. Culture has acquired boundaries and homogenising values. It has become ‘useful’ by taking residence in the discursive schemata of managerialism. The Other has once again been silenced; it has been frozen into discrete and essentialist categories of difference and processed mechanically through a series of different training models. This is the effect of Ellison’s teaching machine. It is his active mediation which has provided the technocratic contours of this particular form of training material.

Coming to the close of this discussion on the nature and use of video materials we now turn to Lonergan and Ladau-Harjulin (1997). In their paper, they explore the problems of cross-cultural awareness among ‘Finnish and British business people’ and present ways in which
‘representatives from different cultural backgrounds’ (p.135) may establish lasting business relationships across cultural thresholds. In the first section of their paper entitled ‘Finno-British’ culture, the authors set out the impetus for their reflections:

‘The Finnish and British cultures are both part of the Western-European cultural heritage and are thus relatively closely related, yet as Stewart and Bennett (1991) note: The core difficulty in intercultural interaction is a failure to recognise relevant cultural differences’ (p.135)

Yet again the starting point for regulating the Other is to position it within the confines of national borders which will, according to this narrative practice, assure that all within it can be known through a single and unitary set of knowledge. Considering that the United Kingdom is a multicultural society comprising as it does numerous ethnic groups, four identifiable countries of its own, and an increasing exile and refugee population, surely linking ‘British society’ with a corresponding ‘British culture’ is particularly myopic. In utilising ‘extracts’ from videos, Lonergan and Ladau-Harjulin point out (p.137) that:

‘The approach taken constantly compares and contrasts the students’ culture with the target culture: more specifically, it compares the culture of Finnish businessmen from the Helsinki area with the culture of English businessmen from the London area, at the level of middle management and above’

Two points of critique might suggest themselves upon reading this quotation. First the importance accorded to the ‘constant’ comparing of one culture to another implies a kind of ‘cultural journey’ at the end of which can be found the authentic foundational elements which comprise the cultural identity of the Other. This is a quintessentially ‘Modernist’ journey (myth? illusion?), a search for better foundations for understanding those whom we do not ‘know’. Second the artificial binary constructed by these authors masks the possibility of exploring the multi-discursive nature of identity, that is its capacity to be constructed at the intersection of a number of different discourses. Are Lonergan and Ladau-Harjulin’s students being asked to ignore the possibility that their discussions about Finnish and British cultures might need to take into account the institutional context of the video? Or what about the fact that the people in the video live in the cities of Helsinki or London? Or the fact that they occupy fairly high level management positions? In other words there may be important intersections of discourse at play here which may help students understand the nature of difference in a different manner, discourses about managerial and technical expertise, geographical location, professional milieu, gender. What if the ‘businessmen’ were women? To what extent would gender discourse alter a discussion about cultural difference? What if the ‘English’ businessmen were Scottish? Or of bi-cultural parentage? The quotation would seem to offer the possibility of discussing multiple frames of discourse: instead the national cultural signifier is privileged and this opportunity is lost. How blinding such transparency can become! On a final note, perhaps the clearest indication of the authors’ use of functionalist conceptions of culture comes from their citation of Goodenough (p.138) who defined culture as:

‘Whatever it is one has to know or to believe (in order) to operate in a manner acceptable to the member of a society’
Being cross-cultural aware is thereby reduced to a discrete domain of knowledge which should allow students to operate like a native. The use of the video, then, is presumably intended to provide at least some of that knowledge.

**Repercussions of Using Cross-Cultural Training Videos**

The objective of the previous section was to illustrate some of the practices and sets of representations implicated in the use of videos as a cross-cultural training method. Importantly we attempted to explore critically not only the materials contained in the videos themselves, but also the narratives of the trainers who use them. The fundamental practice which was common to all three instances of ‘Othering’ was the conflation of nation states and cultures, or as Massey and Jess (1995) phrase it, the simple relation of a local place with a local culture. This is a technique of control, a tool for the fixing and subsequent homogenisation of otherwise socially and culturally diverse members of societies. Once the Other has been pinned down in this way, it then becomes a discrete space whose finer contours can consequently be more easily known. A further practice common to the videos examined was that of silencing the cultural Other such that it cannot represent itself. This is a central tool of imperialism, noted by both Said (1978) and Calas (1992), which presupposes and further perpetuates the myth that only ‘developed’ people are capable of producing knowledge and delivering it within the context of cross-cultural training. Related to this practice is the use of essentialist (Bauman, 1993) categories of difference for producing this ‘superior’ knowledge of the Other. The possibility that our identities are multiplicitous and that our experiences as humans are to a large extent conditioned by the multiplicity of gender, class, race, ethnicity etc. is discounted wholesale.

We contend that these are all imperialisit practices which provide the social space for the presentation of detailed, perceptibly a-political knowledges of the Other. It is through these practices that the Other is regulated, restructured and ultimately subjugated and as such they represent an exercise of power and domination. In writing our paper, we too are mindful of our cultural identities in what after all is a critique of ‘the cross-cultural training industry’, and how we might deliver it to a conference on Critical Management Studies in Britain. Like Spivak, we too are ‘teachers’ inside a teaching machine and our main concern is with the knowledge that we and others are purporting to construct, not only here, in presenting this paper, but later when it is, hopefully, published for wider consumption. Being a ‘teacher’ is, however, only one of our multiplicitous identities, but its usage here enables us, albeit temporarily, to escape the ‘unbearable whiteness of being a pale, stale, male’ (Jacques, 1997) or the concomitant disablement of ‘speaking as female and white’ (Calvert and Ramsey, 1996). For as Trinh T. Minha- ha (1989) writes, ‘Being merely a “writer” without doubt ensures one a status of far greater weight than being “a woman of colour” who writes.’ (Trinh T. Mindha-ha, 1989:6). What we are concerned with is what Gee et al (1996) call the ‘new work order’ and how human lives, human identities and human possibilities are shaped and circumscribed not only through our new ‘globalised’ times, but also in our teaching.

As with Orientalism, what may be at stake in the future projection of cross-cultural capability as a discipline is not a neutral, faithful and hopeful portrayal of the dialogue between the Self and the Other, but a form of systematic discipline by which our discipline is able to manage and even produce the Other culturally, politically, scientistically, ideologically, but above all in our own discursive image. Unless we become reflexive about the theoretical discourses which we bring to bear on the central constructs of our intellectual agenda, then cross-cultural capability will, like Orientalism, become just another instance of a disciplinary power.
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