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## Introduction Undoing Boundaries

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### Introduction

The water sold itself  
and from the desert's  
distilleries  
I've seen  
the last drops  
terminate  
and the poor world, the people  
walking with their thirst  
staggering in the sand.  
I saw the light  
at night  
rationed,  
the great light in the house  
of the rich.  
All is dawn in the  
new hanging gardens,  
all is dark  
in the terrible  
shadow of the valley.

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The day is coming  
when we will liberate  
the light and the water,

earth and men,  
and all will be  
for all, as you are.  
For this, for now,  
be careful!

(From 'Ode to the Air' by Pablo Neruda)

In the last twenty five years of neoliberal governance, India has witnessed a dramatic shift to privatisation and corporatisation. The new regime of governance has allowed accumulation of wealth for a few with an accompanying rise in inequity at an unprecedented scale. In this neoliberal era, discourse of management is exalted and allows a significant symbolic capital to accrue to managers. Such a discourse fosters conditions for managementality, or the mentalities and rationalities of management, to determine subject positions that are economically and culturally privileged. While most people struggle for their survival, neoliberalism creates the condition for a small elite to become entrepreneurial, prudential and active to exploit the opportunities offered by corporatisation in a socially uneven India. As Neruda perceptively observed, the corporate-state nexus commodifies and sells everything to the highest bidder leaving the majority of the Indian population in a state of abject poverty. In such times of abundance for a few and deprivation for the vast majority, the question of alternative organisations becomes particularly relevant in India.

Our ideas of alternative organisations in this book are inspired by critical traditions in social and management theory to imagine a different world in which there are emphases on human emancipation, equity and justice. We believe academic writings create counter-discourses that may lead to conditions of what Neruda describes, 'The day is coming when we will liberate'. Such conditions often hinge on the creation and dissemination of alternative imaginations that are repressed by dominant management discourses under neoliberalism. As Bourdieu (1998, 9) incisively observed:

now that the great utopias of the nineteenth century have revealed all their perversion, it is urgent to create the conditions of a collective effort to reconstruct a universe of realist ideals, capable of mobilizing people's will without mystifying their consciousness.

Therefore, we see a need to attend to organisational situations and settings that are silenced by mainstream managerial discourses. We believe a search for

alternatives has to begin by casting in high-relief, silent spaces that lie within and yet outside the capitalist imagination of the world around us.



We take into account the two social vectors of space and time in our engagement with alternatives. We believe that much of our imagination of organisations is still colonised by dominant Western capitalist discourses of progress and modernity. In this book, we would like to attend to alternative realities of organising that are rooted in India. Hence, we are interested in alternative representations of organisational realities that broaden our understanding of management. In doing so, we are interested in recontextualising theories of organisation and management in non-Western institutional contexts. Moreover, discussions of organisations in India are primarily located in capitalist time and are often limited to different corporate forms. As Gupta (1998, 9) puts it, these discussions of organisations are ‘fundamentally shaped by colonial modernities’, in which ideas and ideals of Western capitalism dominate.

We interrogate management theory in a ‘Third World’ context to develop alternative perspectives in not only the spatio-cultural sense of a different geography or culture but also to emphasise a different institutional imperative that casts in high relief non-corporate settings in which vast subaltern groups participate. These settings can be outside capitalist time and follow from Chakrabarty’s (2000) call to distinguish between two types of historic timelines: History 1 and History 2 that have arisen with the spread of capitalism and the emergence of the modern world. History 1 ‘is a past posited by capital as part of its precondition’ (63); and History 2 that does not belong to the ‘life process of capital, which may not be subsumed in the narrative of its progress, yet live in intimate and plural relationships with it, and which allow us to make room for human diversity and the politics of belonging’ (66–67). It becomes necessary to understand alternative organisational forms that exist at the margins of the life process of capital. Therefore, we are interested in alternative organisations as organisational forms whose core logics, values, principles and outcomes diverge from dominant businesses (see Parker *et al.*, 2014). These are organisations that present alternative imaginations to contemporary dominant organisational forms, in particular, the corporation. In doing so, we need to draw upon Chatterjee’s (1983) call to attend to how different institutional configurations get combined in the so-called backward country to produce unique possibilities of furthering alternative management theories.

We are conscious of the fact that imagining alternatives to the current trajectory of management theories under neoliberalism is not an easy task. In his essay on ‘The Spectre of Ideology’, Slavoj Zizek notes ‘it seems easier to imagine the end of the world than a far more modest change in the mode of production, as if liberal capitalism is the “real” that will somehow survive even under conditions of a global ecological catastrophe’ (2012, 1). Elsewhere, in the midst of the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ protests, Zizek (2014) quintessentially shared the following joke to convey his point:

In an old joke from the defunct German Democratic Republic, a German worker gets a job in Siberia; aware of how all mail will be read by friends, he tells his friends. ‘Let’s establish a code: if a letter you will get from me is written in ordinary blue ink, it is true; if it is written in red ink, it is false’. After a month, his friends get a first letter, written in blue ink: ‘Everything is wonderful here: stores are full, food is abundant, apartments are large and properly heated, movie theaters show films from the West, there are many beautiful girls ready for an affair – the only thing unavailable is red ink’. And is this not the situation till now? We have all the freedoms one wants - the only thing missing is the red ink. We ‘feel free’ because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom.

Paraphrasing Zizek, all the terms we use today are false terms, mystifying our perception of the situation, instead of allowing us to think it. Our task then in this book is to provide the red ink.

Such a task of finding alternatives is difficult in times of ‘erasure of political reflexivity...and a normalization of conservative neoliberalism’ (Eckhardt and Bradshaw, 2014, 181). We are living in times when enlightenment has become a new source of darkness. Emancipation and freedom have become harbingers of new forms of enslavement as Horkheimer and Adorno (1976) have brilliantly exposed in their analysis of a negative dialectical relationship in the culture industry. Alternatives have become particularly difficult to imagine because various possible sources of knowledge and political reflexivity are treacherously redirected towards capitalist domination (Marcuse, 1991). Moreover, as Lash and Lury (2007, 4) delineate, we are living in an era when culture has become ‘thingified’. Lash and Lury (2007, 8) further observe, ‘there is such a thingification of media when, for example, movies become computer games; when brands become brand environments, taking over airport terminal space and restructuring

department stores, road billboards and city centres.' In other words, culture does not exist primarily as a superstructure, but thoroughly infiltrates all parts of economy leaving fewer spaces outside it for resistance. Such a shift helps capitalism hide its real motives and as Baudrillard (1981, 71) insightfully suggested, 'to become an end in itself, every system must dispel the question of its real teleology'. Yet, none of this means that we should or we can give up in our attempts to look for alternatives. Invoking Antonio Gramsci, these are notes of pessimism of the intellect, but optimism of the will.

Giddens' (1990) appeal for utopian realism influences this enquiry into alternatives. Accordingly, utopian realist vision requires a combination of emancipatory and life politics. Emancipatory politics refers to, 'radical engagements concerned with the liberation from inequality or servitude', and life politics implies 'radical engagements which seek to further the possibilities of a fulfilling and satisfying life for all, and in respect of which there are no "others"' (Giddens, 1990, 156). Such an orientation hinges on imagining a post-capitalist order that strives to overcome the ravages of class-based society and exploitation of nature. In doing so, we see a need to closely examine alternatives that exist around us and to understand how they can be harbingers of another world. We particularly see the need to comprehend organisations that offer alternatives to the hegemonic corporate order and attend to social movements that often impel such transformations. As Marx (1843) incisively observed:

We develop new principles for the world out of the world's own principles. We do not say to the world: Cease your struggles, they are foolish; we will give you the true slogan of struggle. We merely show the world what it is really fighting for, and consciousness is something that it *has to* acquire, even if it does not want to.

Moreover, it is imperative that we cast in high-relief alternative arenas of organising that often lapse into the discursive ellipsis of mainstream managerial narratives. These alternative arenas are particularly important because the people exploited or cast aside by the corporate order usually exist in such spaces. We further believe that any idea of alternative is closely related to theoretical understandings that we develop of the world around us.

As an edited volume, this book includes various unheard and emerging accounts of alternative organisational realities. It provides an alternative account of contemporary organisational practices in India, which rejects overdependence on narrowly defined mainstream management theory that draws upon for-profit, large

corporations primarily situated in the West. It contests the stereotyped portrayal of management as a control apparatus that is meant to regulate workers, consumers and other environmental factors for greater profits. The overall approach in this book draws upon multiple strands of critical thought.

In the next sections, we elaborate on some key theoretical considerations. We first engage with why there is a need for alternative theorisation of organisations and what are the limitations of mainstream management theories. We identify an increasing body of work that points to a crisis in management – both in terms of the discontents in its practice as well as in the scientific knowledge of management. Subsequently, we elaborate on critical traditions and symbolic power of Western theories in management. Finally, we discuss our chapters that offer alternatives to mainstream organisational and management thought.

### **Limitations of mainstream management theory**

Management is a pervasive institution with unprecedented legitimacy amongst global elite. On one hand, the recent rise of management is closely tied to what Boltanski and Chiapello (2006) label as the ‘new spirit of capitalism’ that justifies people’s commitment to capitalism in a way that renders it attractive. The new spirit of capitalism is marked by the spread of managerialism from the sphere of work to social and private domains. In these fields, it serves the ideological function of making human actors as managers, workers, consumers and entrepreneurs follow the insatiable logic of capitalism to accumulate more and more. On the other hand, management also serves the function of creating extra-ideological violence against vulnerable stakeholders to improve corporate profitability. Extra-ideological violence manifests in scientific management of workers, manipulation of consumers and exploitation of natural resources.

As is the case with capitalism, the managerial approach, that forms the basis of most existing interpretations of how businesses should operate, has arisen in particular historical, economic, political and cultural circumstances (Alvesson and Willmott, 2003). For example, the origins of managerial thought can be traced to when firms largely operated in national markets in the West. Their strategies, therefore, first and foremost, arise within a national context and then are adapted for deployment in other countries. Some argue that contemporary management discourse rarely questions its foundations that stem from a Western/Anglo-Saxon viewpoint and are flawed when applied to other cultural, economic and institutional contexts (Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991; Jack, Westwood, Srinivas and Sardar, 2011). Such a monoculture of management theory is not only problematic from different cultural and institutional standpoints, but is also limiting from the

perspective of different regimes of justification or worth that prevail within any social order (Boltanski and Thevenot, 2006).

Indeed, over the last few decades, management theory, as an ideological and extra-ideological apparatus that supports capitalism, has come under increasing scrutiny. Despite its legitimacy, several problems associated with capitalism are also attributed to the idea of management. For example, excessive ecological crises and repeated corporate scandals of growing proportions over the last two decades have brought managerial transgressions to sharp relief. Similarly, critics have pointed to the role of corporate managers in exploitation of workers, consumers and disempowered stakeholders (Banerjee, 2008a; Burawoy, 1979; Jhally, 1991). Rather than dismiss these as the anomalous, dark side of corporate capitalism, some scholars point to such breaches as an 'extreme manifestation of neoliberal corporate normality' when you factor in the complicity of auditors, regulators, government bodies and professional associations (Willmott, 2011, 109). That no lessons were learnt and aggressive capitalist forces continue to strengthen unhindered by the financial crisis of 2008, has hardly been cause for pause, correctives, or alternatives in mainstream management discourse. Thus, we contend that contemporary management thought has been narrow in its perspective and does not adequately reflect problems faced by organisations today.

Managerialist ideology has been steadily transforming not just business, but also professional associations, public sector firms, non-governmental organisations, schools, hospitals and universities (for example, Avis, 1996; Doolin, 2002; Noordegraaf and Stewart, 2000; Terry, 1998). Fournier and Grey (2000, 174) contend, this iconic status of management has found legitimacy on 'ontological grounds (managers as the bearers of the real world), epistemological grounds (management as the embodiment of expert knowledge) and moral grounds (managerialisation being equated with greater justice, public accountability, democracy and quality in public services)'. Indeed, where earlier management gained its legitimacy by associating with government and political functions, today the situation is reversed. Government programmes are transformed around managerial parameters of effectiveness (Anthony, 2005). For example, new public management, which has emerged as a dominant approach to public administration, is underpinned by a managerialist ideology, which redefines citizens as customers and fashions a results-oriented, customer-driven, enterprising and market-oriented model of public administration (Terry, 1998).

A deepening of managerialist ideology is closely related to the structural shift

to neoliberalism in the last three decades (Harvey, 2005). As Bourdieu (1998, 95, emphasis in original) insightfully observes:

In the name of the scientific programme of knowledge, converted into a political programme of action, an immense *political operation* is being pursued (denied, because it is apparently purely negative), aimed at creating the conditions for realizing and operating of the ‘theory’; *a programme of methodological destruction of collectives*.

This era is marked by marketisation of various spheres of lives in which market success has become the sole criterion for rewarding achievement (Eckhardt, Dholakia and Varman, 2013; Hartmann and Honneth, 2006). In a scathing criticism of neoliberalism, Conway and Heynen (2006, 17) lament:

the consummate power of market exchange, privatization and capital accumulation as the defining features of human action and activity has been raised to unprecedented levels, so that neoliberalism disciplines, destroys, dehumanizes and destabilizes, while such outcomes are rationalized as social inevitabilities.

Boltanski and Chiapello (2006) point to two types of criticisms against capitalism. They label the first type as social criticism that draws attention to inequities, exploitation and loss of solidarities under capitalism. Boltanski and Chiapello (2006, 38) call the second one as an ‘artistic critique’ that highlights the problems of disenchantment, alienation, commodification and inauthenticity. While Boltanski and Chiapello (2006) have observed that capitalism has benefitted from these criticisms by adapting, neutralising these critiques and creating justifications for its spread, they also point to inherent paradoxes in such pursuits under neoliberalism with exacerbation of the very problems that capitalism tries to neutralise (also see Hartmann and Honneth, 2006).

This unreflexive universality of managerial thought becomes problematic particularly when the broader context of advanced capitalism, within which this approach is entrenched, is brought to question. The triumph of capitalism is underpinned by characteristic private appropriation of means of production and a division between capital and labour, the principle of free markets as a coordinating mechanism and a profit motive (Parker *et al.*, 2014). Capitalism has no doubt flourished with significant material achievements and rapid advancements in technology and scientific knowledge (Hobsbawm, 1975). However, many writings on contemporary capitalism point to the violent nature of extraction



and accumulation that is inherent to it (Harvey, 2003; Roy, 2012; Sassen, 2014; Varman and Al-Amoudi, 2016). Bourdieu (1998, 98) incisively observes that, ‘The ultimate basis of this economic order placed under the banner of individual freedom is indeed the structural violence of unemployment, of insecure employment and the fear provoked by the threat of losing employment’. Banerjee (2008b) borrows from Mbembe (2003) and coins the term necrocapitalism to describe this phase of capitalist accumulation that is based on violence, dispossession and death. Banerjee (2008b, 1544) astutely notes, ‘violence, dispossession and death that result from practices of accumulation occur in spaces that seem to be immune from legal, juridical and political intervention, resulting in a suspension of sovereignty’. In necrocapitalism private acts of corporate violence get combined with state violence to produce what Harvey (2003) calls accumulation by dispossession that is commonly visible in battles for control of natural resources in postcolonial societies (Banerjee, 2011). Some examples of necrocapitalistic practices are violent privatisation of commons, expulsion of indigenous people to grab their shared assets and use of modern slavery for private accumulation. Many of these practices across the world, especially in the Global South are justified in the name of progress that has become a key nodal point in discourse of development (Escobar, 1995; Rahnema, 1997).

The ‘drama of progress’ associated with the gains of capitalism comes with several costs across the Global North–South divide (Hobsbawm, 1975, 4). For instance, Goh, Pfeffer and Zenios (2015), in examining workplace stressors such as long working hours, job insecurity, work-family conflict, job demands and low social support at work, point to how more than 120,000 deaths per year and approximately 5–8 per cent of annual healthcare costs in the US may be attributable to how US firms manage their workforce. This study’s conservative estimate of workplace-mortality is comparable with fourth and fifth largest causes of mortality in the US – cerebrovascular disease and accidents, respectively – and exceeds deaths caused by Alzheimer’s, diabetes, or influenza. Pfeffer (2016) laments that responses to the study’s findings have centred around the economic costs of such dysfunctional workplaces rather than the human aspects.

Further, the focus on achieving efficiency to further the profit motive has impelled rising negative externalities – or the hidden costs borne neither by producer or consumer, but passed on to a third party (Parker *et al.*, 2014). For example, Bavington (2011), in his book titled *Managed Annihilation* exposes advanced capitalism’s managerialist impulse that underpinned the extreme exploitation of cod fisheries eventually resulting in a catastrophic collapse in

northern codfish stocks and the criminalisation of fishing in the Newfoundland region, Canada. Bavington challenges the use of management practices as a solution to global fisheries crises, given how these practices have not only resulted in irreparable drops in codfish numbers, but also create further social and ecological problems that are further solved by new management techniques. Rather than arriving at radical alternatives, politicians, academic researchers and bureaucrats are complicit in reconstructing cod as an element to be managed in a complex system and in transforming traditional fishermen for whom fishing is a way of life into professional fish harvesters.

Klein (2008) in her incisive analysis of capitalism argues that neoliberal states make use of disasters to implement far-reaching structural changes that rob people of their resources and incomes. Accordingly, such measures are often introduced at times of disasters when people are particularly vulnerable and have a limited ability to resist. Some of these shocks and disasters are deliberately introduced to create conditions for pro-business interventions. Klein (2008) insightfully gives the example of the coup in Chile led by Augusto Pinochet that helped Milton Friedman and other Chicago School economists to pry open the Chilean economy under the banner of market reforms for exploitation by businesses. Her analysis not only helps us see newer trajectories of exploitation within capitalism but also understand the complicity of academics and their theories in such pursuits.

Closer home, even as India is one of the fastest-growing economies poised to shed its colonial past and transition into a 'superpower', predatory growth threatens its ecological sustainability. A dramatic increase in demand for minerals has resulted in thousands of hectares of barren and unproductive land, poisoning of rivers and streams, generation of billions of tonnes of waste that is inadequately disposed and the unapologetic diversion of ecologically sensitive biodiverse regions for mining. Compounding these ecological crises is the disruption of local communities which besides being directly dependent on natural resources are also victims to waterlogging, pollution and displacement. The very deprivations that were to be alleviated by such forms of development have in fact been aggravated under neoliberalism (Shrivastava and Kothari, 2012).

Deem and Brehony (2005) label management theories associated with neoliberalism as new managerialism and suggest that it should be understood as an ideological configuration that helps strengthen the position of upper classes in a society. Accordingly, new configurations of privatisation are glossed as public-private partnerships and there is emphasis on importing ideas from the private world business into the world of public services. In the new logic of managerialism,