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Raza Mir

William Patterson University

Ali Mir

William Patterson University

Nidhi Srinivas

New School University

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MANAGERIAL KNOWLEDGE AS PROPERTY: THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

[RAZA MIR](#)

[ALI MIR](#)

William Paterson University

[NIDHI SRINIVAS](#)

New School University

In this paper, we analyze the manner in which universities have been deployed as institutions to privatize knowledge. We use the example of the establishment of management institutes in India in the 1960s by US institutions such as the Ford Foundation. The import of management education into India served to delegitimize local managerial practices, and to produce a workforce capable of serving the interests of multinational corporations rather than addressing local priorities. We conclude through this example that management pedagogy has constantly been deployed to render certain forms of public knowledge appropriable by private institutions such as corporations. We end by suggesting that management pedagogy should act to restore a new concept of knowledge, where it is presented not merely as a resource, but as a public consciousness..

Thirty five years ago, when Amar Bose started Bose Corporation with technology he developed at (MIT), MIT let him have the rights to his patent for nothing...his foundation has since donated \$6m to MIT.

But times have changed. MIT does not just want generous alumni...if it has had a hand in their commercial success, it wants a slice of their companies.

Wall Street Journal, July 20, 1999.

The above story in the Wall Street Journal details a particularly bitter legal battle between the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and one of its alumni. The earlier relationship between MIT and corporate America seems to have been reciprocal, with the university demanding nothing from corporate America, but receiving their grateful largesse anyway. However, this reciprocity has since been replaced by the transactional relationship. In other words, the give and take between the university and its alumni is being moved from the realm of 'trust' to the realm of 'contract', marked by institutional monitoring systems and punitive liability clauses. The university is now demanding huge royalties on products that their alumni developed while they were students at the university. The story is emblematic of some of the pressures exerted on and by universities in the new millennium. The benevolent MIT of yore allowed its students access to their inventions, and scarcely bothered about the income they generated from them. In return, they could count on some rewards through donations by grateful alumni, but the bulk of its revenues were still derived from the generous patronage of the state.

But the MIT of today seems different. Government funding of its programs has tapered off, but its corporate revenues have begun to take up some of the slack. Its Technology Licensing Office generates almost \$20m a year, and the university now owns stock in several startup companies begun by its students. MIT is one of the top 50 contractors used by the Pentagon, in a list that includes large corporations like General Electric and Lockheed. Indeed, the university has begun to look more and more like a conglomerate corporation.

If this story has a familiar ring to it, perhaps it is because it parallels similar developments across the world on the macroeconomic front. Regimes of neo-liberalism continue to displace centrally planned economies all over the world and social welfare spending by governments has been a major casualty of this process (Nissen, 2002; Kurien, 1994). Votaries of this process persist in the hope that private interests will ultimately come to the rescue of the shrinking social safety net. However, private investment in traditionally welfare-oriented activities has had a less-than-impressive record (the privatization of US healthcare being a dubiously spectacular case in point, see Sloane, 2003, for an analysis). At the same time, theories of neo-liberalism and supply-side economics continue to become hegemonic. Perhaps taking advantage of this theoretical mandate, private corporations have become more and more dominant in the recent past. The top 300 corporations now account for over 25% of the world's productive assets (Cooke, 2003; Barnett & Cavanagh, 1994).

How does one theorize these formulations in the institutional and national regimes in the recent past? What do they have to teach us about the new atmosphere in managerial education? Our contention in this paper is that there is a continuity in which interested economic parties (corporations and governments of developed countries) have deployed universities to further the economic status quo. The example of the transfer of management education from the west to the third world serves as a useful marker to observe the manner in which these imbalances are reproduced. In this paper, we address these issues through a historical analysis of the emergence of business schools in India. Our analysis clearly identifies the international role of American universities and quasi-academic institutions, and indirectly of US policy, in transferring knowledge into the third world. Such disclosures of the tainted interests within the universities should come as no major surprise. In other words, while there is indeed cause for alarm that the aims of current universities are being subverted through corporate regimes, this is not a new concern, indeed, it harks back to a much earlier era. In the case of India, the successful implantation of a certain regime of management education has not only created a conduit for the conquest of the industrial space in India by western multinational corporations, it has also subverted the initial development goals set by the Indian nation state and generating a highly stratified professional class.

In the second part of this paper, we build on the historical insights of the first part to theorize the newer pressures on universities today. Despite the fact that universities, and especially business schools, have always been used in the service of specific power agendas, there is indeed greater cause for concern this time round. In the new climate of neo-liberalism and privatization across the world, there is now an increased and perhaps more ruthless pressure to turn academic institutions into foot soldiers of global corporations. We close with an agenda for people who are already in academia, and who work with critical theories. While the university may be a site

where hegemony is waged, it can also be turned into a site for the emergence of counter-hegemonic discourses. To that end, the task of developing alternative and critical theories to explain historical phenomena is an important ethical and representational task. Such theorizing has the potential to offer theoretical support to those activists who oppose the existing power structure. Critical theorizing thus has the potential to reclaim some of the liberatory potential that we have always associated with the university.

Universities and Knowledge Transfer: The Case of Indian Management Institutes

The following historical account shows how management education from a very early period in its history, emphasized detachment from the university. Our argument is that such transfer needed insulation from the bureaucratic forces of the university, to ensure management education retained its independent character. But the independence came at a cost, notably the subversion of its original aims. The original aims of the institution had always been associated with a specific task of nation-building, anchored by the discourse of 'self sufficiency' (Hill et al, 1973). However, the emergent result of professionalized management education has been one where a local elite enforces an global and extractive agenda on the public, supported by an elaborate theoretical discourse that casts all resistance to it as illogical and incoherent (Mir, 2001).

About four decades old, the management discipline in India today boasts five major journals, considerable industry support, and very high student enrollment. It is not an exaggeration to say the MBA degree is the most popular post-graduate degree in India today (Deb & Palety, 2003). This brief note highlights the manner in which management education was institutionalized in India.

The rationale of development

In the late 1950s, bureaucrats and academics in New Delhi were trying to set up a management school. The two decades after India's independence could be characterized as a time of modernization, of large-scale investment by the state in science, technology and education (Khilnani, 1999). India was in the midst of its second five-year plan and needed trained personnel to guide the industrialized growth transforming its economy. Yet where were these people to come from? Historically, a few professionals who were employees of managing agencies had controlled Indian businesses. Management was a rare skill, acquired through great experience, and a little education, usually British. Many professional managers were British, typically on a short-term renewable contract. Their key task was to create systems that could then be taken up by less skilled Indian personnel (Ray, 1992).

After the independence of India from British rule in 1947, with the rapid growth of industrial investment, and the promise of improved transport, power, and communication infrastructure, there was a spurt of growth of large-scale enterprises. In this situation, the economists who were drafting India's second five year plan were worried about the scarcity of skilled labor for the expanding enterprises. The need of the hour became not just industrial investment but also investment in technical knowledge (Roland, 1988; Sinha & Kao, 1988). Learning how to

construct and maintain large-scale dams and irrigation projects had its natural counterpart in the knowledge needed to run them. The question posed was how technical knowledge could be acquired.

Management education was seen by these planners as a set of techniques, an applied science like engineering, where the basic principles would remain the same irrespective of contexts (tendon, 1984). And the source of all this knowledge, of these techniques and basic principles, was undeniably, unremarkably the West. It was a time when the superiority of Western knowledge, for certain spheres, was accepted. What was needed was a means of sharing Western knowledge on the subject, through the latest pedagogical techniques. These institutes were to fulfil a disseminatory role (Srinivas, 1994). Marsden (1994) suggests that the Indian nation-builders, in their search for qualified managers were vastly concerned about the large exodus of British experts after independence. Evidently, the need had to be filled from local labor pools, which involved substantial training programs. This, according to him, paved the way for a quick and often unexamined decision to partner with a variety of western institutions to import their techniques lock stock and barrel into India. As he put it, “products of these various institutions replicated views of management promoted in the United States, where management was seen as being based on a general set of principles and analytical techniques which could be applied to organizational problems in a universalistic way. The local context and culture were deemed to be unimportant.” (Marsden, 1994: 45)

Enter the Ford Foundation

In March 1955, Douglas Ensminger of the Ford Foundation contacted representatives of the Government of India and the Government of the United States, to discuss assistance for management development. At that time, the Indian Government had shown an interest in applied training, of the sort offered in engineering schools. Management training was becoming seen as a type of education essential for the sound functioning of organizations. Good management, like good engineering was meant to generate economic development and increase productive efficiency. In this formulation, what was noted was the discipline’s contribution to efficiency, specifically to methods of coordinating and supervising production. But this emphasis on efficiency also led some planners to believe managerial training to be well handled within the existing framework of engineering education, through a nominal treatment of work-related issues (Hill, Haynes & Baumgartel, 1973). In other words, it was argued that since India already had an existing network of engineering schools, it would be easier if some aspects of working life could be taught in these schools. Such pedagogical tinkering would perhaps obviate the need for investment in an entirely different discipline (Kumar, 1982).

However, in his letters to the Indian government, Douglas Ensminger asserted that management required separate attention, beyond the education offered in an engineering school. Management could not be seen only as the execution of production related tasks; rather, it involved overall skills in marketing, financing, and general management functions within companies. Therefore, a separate school was required (Ensminger, 1972). The Indian government's Planning Commission eventually accepted these recommendations, also because of similar logic being put forward by the Robbins Report a study commissioned by the Ford Foundation. From this point

onward this report became the blueprint for management education (Tandon, 1984). It asserted that the new management institutes should be autonomous of the existing Indian university system, and modeled on US business schools. The report also anticipated that such an institute would serve as a model for subsequent Indian management schools.

A committee was formed by the Government of India, which presented a plan with the aid of the Ford Foundation about the way in which Western management experts would be transported to India to help set up the management schools. The plan was accepted and in 1959 and 1960 two management schools, named the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) started functioning in India, at Calcutta and at Ahmedabad. The planners decreed that the IIMs would be kept independent of state universities. As autonomous institutes, they would have greater freedom in deciding their curriculum as well as in administration matters such as salary and tenure. Also, the institutes would follow the pedagogy in use in Western schools, notably the case study and class discussion approach. These were considered useful for better understanding of the managerial issues in organizations. Finally, it was decided the graduate program would be two years in length and residential; so, hostels were constructed so that students could attend the programs from all over India (Hill, Haynes & Baumgartel, 1973; Tandon, 1980).

Innovative pedagogy

Under the technical assistance provided by the Ford Foundation, faculty from the Harvard Business School and MIT visited India to establish the curriculum. Working with Indian management faculty, they transferred and innovated teaching, hiring and tenure methods that sought to inculcate professionalism in students. The methods were subsequently adopted by other schools offering postgraduate programs, and became the "IIM model". The model had four key features: a competitive exam used to select candidates, use of case methods, high use of foreign course material, and a residential program. Interestingly, the competitive exam and residential program were already features of the existing professional training for India's civil servants.

The IIMs used an entrance exam, the Common Admission Test (CAT), for selecting candidates to the post graduate program. CAT emphasized numerical, (English) language, and logical skills. Such an exam implied that entry to the program was merit-based, open to everyone with the apt skills. The test was supplemented with an interview and group discussion process, to identify applicants with communication and interpersonal skills. The CAT emphasized the importance of both merit and neutrality as important aspects of IIM education, and was an affirmation of its professional image, raising favorable comparisons to the well-known and reputed Civil Service exams.

New teaching methods were introduced. Tandon (1980) recalled that at Ahmedabad the new pedagogy was substantially different, involving choices by students as to which courses they could take, the use of case study approaches, and a participative learning environment. Students were not used to such innovations. This led to an initial phase of confusion, low morale, and resentment of students at these impositions. American faculty had to constantly explain and refine these teaching methods, justify their importance, train the trainers in their use. Class participation was an unusual requirement to make of these students. They were used to education

systems where class interaction was usually in the form of questions directed to the teacher. Participation required debating issues, arguing, frequently taking sides. The experience could be aggressive and disquieting, disturbing the placid exchanges of previous educational settings.

There was a high foreign content to the program. The IIMs were institutions of applied learning, expected to teach concepts directly applicable in work settings. However concepts were mostly based on American experience: textbooks, readings, examples, authors were all foreign. The sharply foreign flavor of such teaching added an element of confusion to the program, emphasizing its close roots with the West while also raising the common question of its relevance, in students and trainers alike.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the program was its residential nature. The IIMs operated as a “total” institution. They were enclosed campuses where a variety of facilities were available for students, including food, health, sports and recreation. There was really no need for them to leave the institute until graduation. In fact, they hardly found the time to do so. Gates kept away the outside world, allowing students to concentrate on the novel courses, teaching and evaluation methods. As Goffman (1961) has shown, such enclosed institutes encourage high internalization of educational norms, while reducing information about the outside world. In Goffman’s presentation, the total institution is predicated upon the breakdown of all barriers between spheres of life, characterized by a cultural separation between the “home world” and the “institutional world”. The new IIM students lived in a milieu which was deliberately isolated from India, and the total institution eventually rendered them by degrees fit to accept the western paradigm as distilled wisdom.

Unlearning Indian knowledge

Why acquire management knowledge? What was it to be used for? India lacked the history of enormous growth in large-scale enterprise that presaged the birth of American management schools. But the explanation that spread was that these schools would help India develop through the import of knowledge and techniques. The management schools were not really sites for enabling economic growth. But not just economic development but social development as well. The important strategic imperative was not only acquiring Western knowledge, but also unlearning Indian knowledge. This statement may sound like hyperbole, but it must be recalled that the attitude of these elite groups is no different from the entire discourse of development. For instance, it recalls the spirit of the discourse of development, embodied for example in this communiqué from the United Nations Department of Economic Affairs in 1951:

There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of caste, creed and race have to burst; and large numbers of persons who cannot keep up with progress will have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated.

(Quoted in Escobar, 1994:3)

The ethnocentricity of this view apart, it points toward the way in which the exercise of structural reform, be it economic or educational, sought to create a certain kind of citizen. Thompson (1966) chronicles the manner in which the working class was constructed in Britain; similar processes were being enacted on a global scale, where the colonial workforce was being produced, theorized as a particular cultural artifact and subjected to material and organizational practices based on these myths (Said, 1978).

Western managerial knowledge in managing large-scale enterprises demanded abandoning the restraints seen in adherence to traditions, to religious values, and to cultural beliefs. These cultural factors were represented as constraints that hampered the smooth transfer of new knowledge that would forge a new India (as in Kapp, 1963 and Prasad & Negandhi, 1968). Thus, managing a factory involved finding ways of overcoming the inevitable systems of patronage that developed on caste, kin, and religious lines. It demanded overcoming these 'traditional' restraints with a new force, that of impartiality, of merit-- in fact, of professionalism. And what existed in organizations before, was dubbed traditional, "unprofessional". The need of the hour it was said was giving India professional management, ridding it of the unprofessional practices preventing its development (Tandon, 1984).

The project of importing management education into the new country was thus seen as part of the larger task of reshaping India itself. The issue was not simply creating an institution of higher learning but rather a conduit to disseminate what was seen as superior knowledge to the populace. The evaluation of this knowledge, or its suitability to Indian conditions was seen as irrelevant to the scope of the project. Particularly in the case of the IIMs, the defined strategy was one of training, rather than any analytical pedagogy, as device to ensure that that suitably educated skilled administrative labor was made available. The pedagogical task did not involve any commitment to research, except in passing.

Initial success

Initially, the competition for admission to these schools was limited. However, as Indian industry grew, so did the demand for skilled professionals in marketing, production, finance, and human resources. Business schools became a natural source for satiating such demand. By the late 1970s there was a rapid growth in management schools, modeled on the initial IIMs. And still the demand grew, as independent institutions offered MBAs on the "IIM" model. Today some say that the prestige and privilege that go with acquiring an MBA degree is unprecedented, and the creation of a new professional class (Rajagopalan, 1992; Srinivasan, 1989).

Over the past several years, the value of an MBA from these institutions has gained great currency in India, to the extent that an admission into the IIMs automatically guarantees entry into the highest echelons of Indian society. Needless to say, 80% of all graduates from IIM accept jobs with multinational corporations, and follow a job trajectory that is designed to propel them into the upper echelons of management (Deb and Palety, 2003). The social capital of these institutes translates into a huge network, which looks after the graduates and alumni of these institutions by private job offers and intra-corporate relationships (For instance, consider the website <http://www.iitiim.com>, which offers entry only to graduates of such institutions, and

contains within it a variety of job postings, templates of business plans, and private advice on entrepreneurship). Organized social events are conducted for this purpose in India and the US, and provide ways for these groups to maintain their position of primacy in the Indian corporate landscape. Many of these graduates are active in lobbying the Indian government to eliminate tariffs on goods imported by subsidiaries of multinational corporations, reduce corporate taxes, and relax environmental standards for foreign investors.

Knowledge transfer and development

The Government of India initially supported management education in the belief that it would be directly applicable to issues of development, and increase the bank of professional skills required for economic development. However the progress three decades later, in these two goals, has been largely limited. By the 1970s the content of Indian management education was already under severe criticism. Mendoza (1977) and Moris (1977) urged modification of management knowledge to the local work values of Asia and Africa respectively. To them certainly the disseminatory approach was inappropriate. Some (like Kumar, 1982) criticized management schools for their inability to generate better growth, for being part of a larger monopolistic corporate system. Lackluster economic growth, high deficits, led to severe policy changes, by the late 1980s. High protectionism had reduced competitiveness and economic growth (Bardhan, 1984).

Today, as the Indian government gradually privatizes its possessions, its funding for the IIMs has been sharply cut (Business World, 1991). Forced to find their own resources, these institutes have naturally turned to corporate funding, and increased intake of MBAs. These avenues continue to privatize these institutions, further subverting their emancipatory possibilities. While the Indian schools have made great advances in increasing the country's bank of professional skills, these aims have been achieved through a highly stratified educational process. The IIMs have become the conduit to large corporations and MNCs within India, while lesser schools are avenues to lesser corporations. This stratified system belies any belief in a bank of local managerial skills. Rather, the initiatives of the 1960s, have today enabled a knowledge-based class system.

Resisting Theories, Theorizing Resistance

The above example of the transfer of pedagogical knowledge into India in the 1960s and 1970s provides us with a rare glimpse into the institutional forces that shaped the management education infrastructure. In many ways the US government and the Ford Foundation arrogated to themselves the task of making the Indian system 'better', even at the cost of undermining the existing structure. The process of undermining the Indian system of education went hand in hand with the creation of a class of Indian managers who would follow the global system in letter and spirit. Again, this recalls the practices of colonial administration. Like the Ford Foundation researchers, the colonial administrators based their ability to effect institutional transformations on the emergence of a new citizen, one who was 'local' by birth but 'global' by affiliation ('global' being synonymous with the goals of the metropolis). As an example, consider the following statement by Lord Thomas Macaulay, the Legal Member of the Council

of Indian Education in 1785. Justifying the need to westernize Indian education, Macaulay stressed,

“We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class, we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of population.”

(Macaulay, 1785, 1972: 249)

Macaulay’s statements did not represent an isolated individual utterance; his words along with the actions of his adherents decisively tilted the future of education policy in British India to a colonialist mode, whereby the learning of Sanskrit and Arabic and indigenous sciences was banned. For Macaulay had compared investment in indigenous knowledge systems to “wasting public money; for printing books that are of less value than the paper on which they are printed while it was blank; for giving artificial encouragement to absurd history, absurd metaphysics, absurd theology; for raising up a breed of scholars who find their scholarship an encumbrance and a blemish” (Macaulay, 1972: 250). Likewise, one of the preconditions for the installation of the western systems into India was the unlearning of various Indian systems of education, deemed worthless by the institutional authorities. This is not to say that such unlearning was not resisted (see Mir, 2001, for empirical analysis). But these resistive acts often take on highly indirect means, and are rarely theorized in the mainstream. In the absence of any real power in the relationship, the responses of powerless subjects take subtler forms, a more passive dimension (Scott, 1985).

The new discipline

Management education is now globally privatized. The distinctive feature of the knowledge it embodies when compared to other disciplines, is its private character. By this we mean that from an early stage, management academics were eager to control the discipline’s outputs, so that they would meet capitalist aims. In this sense, an MBA differs from other masters' degrees in its content and pedagogy, just as business schools themselves differ from departments in the humanities and social sciences. With its very specific emphasis on a certain instrumental pedagogy, an MBA is very different from other graduate degrees in the social sciences, de-emphasizing the elements of inquiry in the service of the practical. While privatization has always been distinctive about the discipline of business education, there is a growing managerial focus on the university itself, using the tools of privatization on the home front, so to speak. Universities now ally with corporations in India, and even tailor their syllabi to address corporate issues. Companies like Microsoft offer substantial equipment to Indian universities, which in turn revamp their syllabi in computer science programs to reflect Microsoft’s software focus. Likewise, business schools in India struggle to offer courses in business process outsourcing and ecommerce to satisfy a need communicated to them by global corporations, usually through

consultants like McKinsey Corporation. Universities are slowly being co-opted into corporate agendas.

In raising these issues, our concern is not to decry such trends alone, but study them within the historical context of such educational institutions. How does management education as a distinct institutional form, constitute knowledge?

Agendas for universities in future

As universities today don managerialist garb, and spout professional discourse, they appear more and more like corporations. More importantly, there are several ways in which academic theories are being generated to justify this university-industry interface, in ways that simply gloss over the potentially negative aspect of this association, especially in its current formulation (Coupe, 2003; Watling, Prince & Beaver 2003).

In our opinion, the form of concerted theorizing that goes on in management, and its connection to corporate interests, is a fundamentally dangerous phenomenon. Apart from ignoring (and indeed, eliding) the obvious questions about identity (whose knowledge, whose property), and subjectivity (how do organizations create cooperating subjects), these theories ultimately serve the interests of those who seek to appropriate all forms of socially produced knowledge, and declare it “organizational knowledge”. In a society where organizations are regarded as entities, this privatized knowledge is transformed into “property”, with deeds of ownership, the right to punitive action against traditional users, and the right over future product developments.

And what if there is no such anti-mainstream theorizing in universities? In the absence of principled academic struggle within universities, we soon find that privatized knowledge redefines the managerial subject making her/him more amenable to a form of constrained agency, where s(he) deploys techniques to fulfill orders filtered from above. In management theory, we see a complete shift in the conceptualization of knowledge from consciousness to resource.

Knowledge is not disembodied; it is not context-free. And universities provide us the best example of that ground reality. We believe that it is absolutely essential to identify and locate a space for those who wish to reclaim the university as a site of liberatory pedagogy and practice. Alternative and critical theorists who work within the space of the university thus have their task cut out for themselves. For example, critical management theorists must reconceptualize and restate the default assumptions in their field, and must bring attention to the inherently power-laden and coercive character of the current wave of organizational knowledge-appropriation across the world. By outlining the fundamentally violent character of knowledge appropriation, they can offer important theoretical backing to those localized groups of citizens across the world who are banding together to fight the violent ingress of multinational corporations into their lives.

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Raza Mir is Associate Professor of Management at William Paterson University, New Jersey, USA. He published articles in several journals including *Strategic Management Journal*, *Organizational Research Methods* and *Journal of Business Communication*, and is on the Editorial Board of *Group and Organization Management* and *Critical Perspectives on International Business*. He is interested in studying the transfer of expertise across national boundaries through multinational corporations, especially their institutional, discursive and coercive elements. Email: mirr@wpunj.edu

Ali Mir is Associate Professor of Management at William Paterson University, New Jersey, USA. His research focuses on the transformation of work in late capitalism. He is currently working on the new forms of international division of labor in information technology industries. His research has appeared in such journals as *Cultural Dynamics*, *Information Systems Management*, and *Management Learning*. He has written and consulted for the World Wide Web project of Encyclopedia Britannica. Email: mira@wpunj.edu

Nidhi Srinivas is Assistant Professor of Nonprofit Management at the Milano Graduate School of Management and Urban Policy, New School University. His research interests include strategic management and governance of third-sector organizations, the intersection between management and science fiction, discourses of citizenship and clientele in third-sector organizations, knowledge transfers of management theory and pedagogy and mobilizing commitment to organization strategies. Email: srinivan@newschool.edu