# Chapter 10
# Organization: A Decolonial Interpretation

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**Abstract** Decolonizing management and organization studies scholarship still operates from within modern Western capitalist frame of what an organization means. As such meanings of organizational power relations, functional efficiencies and co-ordination are fully assigned to, and contained within logics of capital and eurocentric frame of organization. Decolonial discourses eschew these logics of capitalist organization through contraposing communitarian organizing with modern Western capitalist organization. This impedes the possibility of decolonizing organization through plural understandings of cognate ideas such as organizational power relations, functionalist co-ordination. This chapter through an analysis of a strategic planning workshop for NGOs (non government organization) and a communitarian NGO suggests another meaning for organization as community enmeshment. In community enmeshment, organization and individual are relationally co-constituted, individual and organization are not ontologically prior and distinct from each other. In this conceptualization, organization is not only communitarian, but also leads to other meanings for cognate ideas, in that its function not only preserves human dignity and freedom but simultaneously enables autonomy, agency and survival from uncertainties and shocks.

**Keywords** Decolonising organization · Community enmeshment · Organization ontology · Individual-organization relationship · Communitarian organization

## 10.1 Introduction

Management and organization studies (MOS) continues to remain a predominantly eurocentric pursuit (Prasad 2015; ul-Haq and Westwood 2012; Ibarra-Colado 2006; Dussel and Ibarra-Colado 2006; Jammulamadaka et al. 2021). Whereas decolonising feminisms scholars such as Maria Lugones, Catherine Walsh have appropriated and

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decolonised universal white feminism to provide decolonial feminisms (Lugones 2010, 2016) and androgynes (Walsh 2016); in universal, eurocentric MOS, it remains unclear what decolonial organization means, despite calls to decolonise MOS (Jammulamadaka et al. 2021; Jammulamadaka 2016a; Jammulamadaka and Sharma 2019; Faria et al. 2010; Jack 2016; Westwood et al. 2014; Ul-Haq and Westwood 2012; Ruggunan 2016; Ibarra-Colado 2006). This chapter explores the question of decolonising organization and proposes "community enmeshment" as a form of decolonial organization. The proposed from is distinct from a eurocentric conceptualisation of organization as a bureaucratic (and postbureaucratic) entity that informs and constitutes MOS.

The rest of the chapter is structured as follows. First section provides a brief review of decolonising in MOS, second section looks at organization in Western coloniality/modernity and how it might differ for other ontologies. The third and fourth sections present the methodology and brief descriptions of the exemplars in the study respectively. The fifth section presents the analysis which is followed by a discussion of the findings. The chapter ends with a conclusion.

## 10.2   Decolonising in MOS

Western organization and MOS have been products and modalities of western coloniality/modernity (Ibarra-Colado 2006; Dussel and Ibarra-Colado 2006). Western organization as a raced, gendered bureaucracy depersonalising human interaction and enabling large scale control at a distance came to its fullest potential in the colonial context (Goody 1986; Frenkel and Shenhav 2006). This raises the question of the extent to which one can decolonise MOS without interrogating and decolonising the underlying concept of organization. The question arises because literature frequently invokes the term decolonising organization without clarifying what the term might mean, as if referring to an extant consensus about its meaning(s). But decolonising has been invoked in uneven and diverse ways in MOS literature (see Jammulamadaka et al. 2021 for an overview). This interpretative diversity can be welcomed as illustrative of a pluriversal world where many worlds could possibly co-exist (Dussel 2012; Maldonado-Torres 2008) or even as emblematic of MOS' paradigmatic heterogeneity (van Maanen 1995). Therefore, drawing attention to the ambiguity around the term decolonising organization, is not about stepping onto the slippery and risky path of *defining* decolonising for ontological economy, producing crude reductionist universalism (Wimsatt 2006) or preventing pursuit of pluriversalism. Instead, I am motivated by a conceptual problematic implicit in the appropriations and invocations of decolonising that inadvertently reinforce coloniality.

Could examining indigenous communities and adopting particular methodological and ego-logical reflexivities in data collection, as is common practice in decolonial and indigenous MOS (Love 2019) and studies which invoke methodological precepts and cautions (Love 2018, 2019; Girei 2017; Manning 2018), without engaging with what the term organization might mean in a decolonial sense, be

sufficient for decolonising? What about unpacking and developing other meanings of organisation? The questions are pressing because, unlike decolonial feminisms, there is no corresponding, conceptualisation of decolonising organization that provides a locus of enunciation (Mignolo 2000) and articulation for the colonized, even after Ibarra-Colado (2006) provocatively calls for it. Ibarra-Colado (2006, p. 474) has strongly argued that "'organization' [concept] has not been useful to explain other non-modern social experiences …, [it is] unable to acknowledge … the way the existence of human communities are organized" in the non-west. A locus of enunciation as Mignolo explains is the place from which one speaks. It is the civilizational sense, the culture's common sense which informs the thinking and speaking of the colonized.

Inspite of assertions by decolonial scholars about decolonial praxis (Mignolo and Walsh 2018) of indigenous who organize in ways that "….do not follow the logic of capital" (Lugones 2010:754), there is limited investigation of what such an organizing form might be or what its functionalist meanings might be. Notwithstanding the importance of methodological, ego-logical reflexivity in decolonising MOS, such an approach is limited in that it does not address the needs of scholars who are writing and/or engaging in decolonial praxis. It does not provide us the vocabulary needed to recognise and represent other ways of organising rooted in other ontologies. Literature pointing to indigenous philosophies/knowledges in MOS (Eg. New Zealand's Maori (Love 2019; Panoho and Stablein 2012; Mika and O'Sullivan 2014) South African *Ubantu* (Seremani and Clegg 2016; Fink et al. 2005; Jackson 2013) or South Asia's *karma* (Shenoy-Packer and Buzzanell 2013)) often tends to overlay these philosophies onto extant eurocentric meaning of organization; or position the philosophies in opposition to eurocentric logic of capital reinforcing a reductionist binarism, while avoiding an engagement with ideas of other organization. Consequently in MOS, the idea of organization and its cognates such as organizational power relations, function and co-ordination are treated in a universal sense from within the meaning given to them by modern western capitalism (Kallinikos 2003). This singular modern western sense of the organization ensures that the essential distinction between an "organization of indigenous and/or inhabited by indigenous" and "indigenous (social) organization", disappears; silencing other possible meanings of organization.

This conceptual problematic is significant because western anxieties about native third world organizing (Nuijten and Anders 2007; Nuijten 2012), permeate into and have been instrumental in organizing organizations in colonised societies. Consequently, decolonial scholarship and praxis ends up confirming and reinstating the binary of western efficient organization versus inefficient native disorganization (Jammulamadaka 2016b; Nuijten 2012). When colonised others begin to organize themselves praxistically (Mignolo and Walsh 2018) according to their worldviews and sensibilities, they are expected to align with and be absorbed into modern western bureaucratic organization, (even in its alternate sense) for operational, legal and institutional reasons ignoring local worldviews, or risk being treated as illegal, capricious, inefficient, imperfect failures which are unable to scale up or sustain, thereby reinforcing coloniality (Nuijten 2012; Jammulamadaka 2016a, b). Lacking

a locus of enunciation (Mignolo 2000) to express and voice different logics of orga-
nizing, and reduced to a position of reactive defensiveness, scholarship ascertains
native organizing logics with and from an implicitly hegemonic perspective of MOS.
To paraphrase Escobar (1995, p. 168), studies of decolonising organisation, hint at
cultures from which organization springs, but the conception of organization itself is
understood in relation to the cultures of the West. As such, scholars reject capitalist
organizing practices and counterpose native organizing logics of community-based,
communitarian indigenous organizations as alternatives to dehumanizing, extractive,
western capitalist managerial mode of organizing; culture and community against
economy and politics. For example, Lugones (2010, p. 754, emphasis added) says,
"… met by different concrete people whose bodies, selves in relations [of Latin Amer-
ican women]….do not follow the logic of capital. ….. *They include affirmation of
life over profit, communalism over individualism*". In this discursive oppositionality,
narratives of organizational power relations, functionalism and co-ordination acquire
a universal meaning and currency in form and content as western, imperial, colonial
(and neo-colonial) practices (Cooke 2004; Dar and Cooke 2008; Dussel and Ibarra-
Colado 2006; Dussel and Ibarra-colado 2006; Parker et al. 2014a, b). Communal
and communitarian forms that focus on the life and living, defined in contrast to
this rejected Western universal, get emptied of functional meanings of coordination,
(Nuijten 2012; Panoho and Stablein 2012; Ranta 2016; Tedmanson 2012; Walsh
2010). Inadvertently the discursive move reinforces a singular universal eurocentric
meaning of organization, and tends to exoticise and utopianise communitarian form.

Devoid of an understanding of organizational power relations or, function, the
inter-level interactions and mechanisms of complex systems (Wimsatt 2006) where
world-views, ways of living, and ideas of individual and organization all interact in
complex functional-structural ways to produce immediate local organization with
positive and negative effects, all get black boxed into a quasi-mythic community
that anyhow produces positive outcomes. This happens despite one intuitively and
philosophically sensing that "all organizing is political" (Parker et al. 2014a, b); that,
meanings of power and function are inextricably related to ontology of organization
and therefore likely to be different for different worldviews. Conceptually, a decolo-
nial perspective would insist that there are diverse logics of power relations and
structure-process function stemming from diverse worldviews, some of which may
also encompass solidarities and communities in them. Decolonising MOS therefore
needs to recognize and recover diverse meanings of power relations and structure-
process function rather than just eschewing them because, such rejection would
otherwise imply implicitly accepting a single universal meaning, an acceptance that
is inconsistent with the ethico-political premise of decolonizing and striving for
pluriversal worlds. The next section examines the idea of organization in modern
western capitalism and its logics of power and structure-process functionality.

## 10.3   Organization in Western Coloniality/Modernity and Other Worlds

### 10.3.1   Organization in Western Coloniality/Modernity

Availability of organizations "reflects societal conditions at a particular historical conjuncture" (Aldrich 1999, p. 75). The idea of organization that pervades various bureaucratic forms in MOS is derived from western modernity's values and worldview, it is founded upon drawing "boundaries of the private and public world, work from leisure, family and community" (Kallinikos 2004, p. 15). "… [S]egmentation of life into separate and relatively independent spheres is an essential requirement for the forms of human involvement upon which the bureaucracy is predicated" (Kallinikos 2004, p. 21, citing Kallinikos 2003; Love 2019). Here individual in his/her wholeness as well as the organization, are both apriori and ontologically distinct. "Organizations need founders. But organizations cannot recruit them, because organizations don't exist until founders *construct* them" (Aldrich 1999, p. 77). In this sense, the organization is available to be founded, and founding is establishment of relations between two ontologically prior entities, individual and organization. Individual is tied to the organization, through "non-inclusive coupling … to the organization, consequent upon the separation of the role from the person…". (Kallinikos 2004, p. 21). Even though an organization is defined as a group of people pursuing a common goal (Weber 1947), conceptually, organization is a collection of roles and tasks, not persons and; formal rule-bound behavior pertains to roles and tasks, not persons. This is the fundamental distinction that Max Weber makes in his analysis of basis of authority and formal rationality in the modern world. In his thesis, all other bases of authority and rationality are features of a pre-modern world. Thus, formal organization is a decontextualized, depersonalized collection of rule, task and role based behaviours and practices directed towards goal pursuit with corresponding notions of efficiency as the best (in terms of costs) means of achieving ends and effective goal pursuit strategies for maximising organizational interests, survival and growth. Anthropologist, Marilyn Strathern explains, the underlying worldview in Euro-American thinking as "…individuality of persons is the first fact…" (Strathern 2005, p. 43), in English or Euro-american thinking. Relations are thought of as something over and above the *individual*. "Euro-americans have no difficulties in thinking either individuality or relationality, but only of *thinking them together*…." (Huen 2009, p. 157).

In this sense non-inclusive role-based coupling is the first feature of modern western organization, from which other features such as rule bound behaviour, standardization, centralization and dispensability/replaceability of individual emerge (Kallinikos 2004). This bureaucratic organization has developed its fullest expression in the management of colonies, slaves and indentured labour. In non-inclusive coupling of individual-organization relation, there is a fundamental and tragic opposition between organization and individual. In spite of being created by individuals, the individual in his/her completeness, (or his/her human baggage) is understood as

detrimental to organizational interest. Hence organization needs to socialize, control and subjugate (by dehumanizing, curtailing autonomy) the individual who enters it.

Debates on alternate organization are also tied to this ontology of modern western organization, in the sense that the organization and the individual are distinct and organization needs to provide space to individual (by limiting control of body and tasks), provide a greater share of value created to the individual (through profit sharing), as in co-operatives. For instance, explaining alternate organization, Parker et al. (2014a, b, p. 32) say "all forms of organization that respect personal autonomy, but within a framework of cooperation, and are attentive to the sorts of futures they will produce" (Also see Parker et al. 2014b). Here the idea of individual autonomy reinforces organization as a role collection, which can, and, needs to have a limited reach into the individual's preserve. Here, only goals and modalities of alternate organization are different, not what it means to be an organization.

### 10.3.2 *What About* Other *Organization?*

Scholars studying non-Western worlds have suggested that native worldviews do not recognise the world in autonomous apriori distinct spheres of economy, society, polity, culture etc., or distinct public and private spheres, or dichotomies of free citizen versus bonded slave, individual versus common property rights like the modern West does (Birla 2009; Escobar 1995; Jammulamadaka and Sharma 2019; Jammulamadaka 2018; Prasad 2015; Simpson 2011; Prakash 2003; Love 2019). In this worldview, what is cultural and communal is also at once political and economic or even strategic (Simpson 2011; Birla 2009; Jammulamadaka 2016b, 2018). "All known organizations of people- civilisations, kingdoms or cultures- create and transfer knowledge and understanding of their own praxis of living" (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, p. 137). They form institutions, discourses and practices of such knowledge and organizing (Jammulamadaka and Sharma 2019; Mignolo and Walsh 2018; Quijano 2000). It therefore follows that different societies will have their own organizing and institutional logics emerging from different kinds of social structures, property rights, duties and work (not just individual property rights), conceptions of individual (not just that of modern free citizens vs bonded slaves), (Jammulamadaka 2016a, 2017; Jammulamadaka and Sharma 2019; Prakash 2003; Khanna 2005; Bandara and Dissanayake in press), with related ideas about organization, its power relations, function and so forth. Betasamosake Simpson (2011, p. viii, emphasis added) in the context of indigenous Canadians has argued that "indigenous peoples have always *organized* our families into societies and nations according to our *culturally inherent politics*."

In the Indian subcontinent, literature suggests that the corporate form as a distinct legal entity in the form of *srenis*, *ganas* etc. has existed since about 800 BC till atleast 1000 AD and thereafter has morphed from its interactions with cultures/practices of others who invaded this land (Khanna 2005; Majumdar 1920; Ghoshal 1930). The control of productive resources in this region has also been governed by complex

notions of jointly held property rights, in contrast to the binary individual versus common property rights seen in Western modernity (Appell 1995; Prakash 2003; Sengupta 1980). A further aspect that has constituted the basis of organization in this region is the practice of caste system and *jatis* (loosely translated as communities). Though Western modernity invokes caste system as an unchanging monolithic absolute hierarchy determined by birth; historians, anthropologists and postcolonial scholars have demonstrated the fluidity of caste relations and hierarchies as also their variations across the length and breadth of the sub-continent (Ganguly 2006; Gupta 2007). Caste and *jatis*, two categories which are not contiguous or coinciding social categories have organized occupational life and practice. The manner of organizing determines not only the technological basis of the productive activity, but the whole of the person, family and attendant division of labour. For instance in a native *jati* of silk weavers, the entire family and its division of labour is organized around keeping the palms of the women of the household soft, since only women with soft hands are able to spin the finest of silk yarns. These women spinners do not partake in any household chores lest their palms become rough. The interactions of the elements of caste, *jati*, jointly held property rights and *sreni* arrangements have produced different kinds of occupational and organizational practices involving the conduct of the whole person contiguous with family, not just a partial role (See Jammulamadaka and Sharma 2019). For instance, words uttered in a *sreni* assembly which could vary from a marriage alliance to a business transaction, had a sense of bindingness to them and were inextricably tied to the person's and family's honour (Khanna 2005). The western distinction between private-personal and public-professional did not exist here and this is one of the most critical ruptures brought on by colonial legal institutional apparatus introduced in the sub-continent (Birla 2009; Roy 2008). Such notions continue to permeate in sub-continental societies despite their transformation and illegalization. Here the individual does not exist outside and prior to the organizing frame. They constitute each other.

Ontologically this implies an other logic of organization, where individual and organization extend into, are transposable and make each other together. Strathern (2005), provides a basis to explain this other worldview as one where, individuals are already relational. In the absence of apriori demarcations of public–private, culture-economy, ontological distinctiveness of individual and organization and individual-organization relation itself are different. The individual in this wholistic worldview is not the embedded (Granovetter 1985) or the partial role limited organizational actor. The embedded actor as Birla (2009) explains, is not a whole, but an already bounded and differentiated economic actor constrained (or facilitated) by culture and sociality. This chapter opens up the black box of communitarian form, "broadening meanings" of organizing and managing (Jack et al. 2011). In line with Nuijten (2012) appeal for focusing on practice in understanding native logics, I propose that native organizing with community as the bedrock is ontologically different from modern western organization. I identify this type as a community enmeshment. Using community enmeshment as the type of organizing, I reinterpret meanings for organizational power relations, functionality and co-ordination making this chapter an

attempt to resist "totalizing tendencies within certain thought categories [such as organization]… to interpret everything in their own image" (Ganguly 2006).

## 10.4   Method and Data

This study adopts a phronetic approach making values, ethicality and power relevant in data collection and analysis (Flyvbjerg 2001, 2004, 2006). Given that decolonizing is an ethico-political pursuit, phronetic approach is suitable (Chakrabarty et al. 2017). Phronetic research examines exemplars of the phenomenon under study using focused "detailed narratives" for analysing the discourse. Such analysis allows us to make explicit and visible what is masked and reveal the underlying belief/idea/value (Broadfoot et al. 2004). Through an abductive analysis of discourse the actions, practices and talk that comprise discourse, "are examined for the way they contribute to ongoing (and sometimes rather precarious) organization and constitution of social reality" (Mumby and Clair 1997, p. 181).

The study's data comes from two exemplars chosen on theoretical grounds to reveal native thinking about, perspectives and practices of native[1] organizational founders on various issues of concern to them in organization. The first exemplar is a reflexive account of providing strategic planning training to grassroot NGOs in India. The second exemplar is of an Indian grassroot NGO identified here as WISCOM (pseudonym). Such mixing of methods and data sources has been undertaken as it allows surfacing of deeper insights (Prasad 2013; Srinivas 2012). The data for exemplar 1 comes from an experiential reflexive account, data for exemplar 2 is from multiple sources: observation notes, interviews, archival and organizational documents. Such use of multiple sources of data in generating the narrative for critical discourse analysis is an accepted convention (Vaara and Tienari 2008; Hardy et al. 2000; Prichard et al. 2004). There are many methods of analyzing discourse, here, narratives were examined for what was being said, (and done), by whom and how it was being said (done) with a reflexive awareness of the conditions and oneself, for reading implicit and explicit articulations of organization and interpreting its function. This was achieved by first identifying the articulation and then comparing it to conventional articulations of a bureaucratic organization elaborated above.

### 10.4.1   Data Collection

Data on first exemplar is derived from a first-person narrative of a strategic planning workshop held in May 1998 by a prominent national level agency for 12 grassroots NGOs pursuing microfinance in India. This workshop was special for me, being my

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[1] The word native here is used to refer to what in India is commonly identified as *desi*, crudely translated as country as in countryside and not nation.

first job a week after completing MBA. I had retained personal notes as well as vivid recollections of assisting participating NGOs one-on-one, and used these to write a reflexive narrative in 2010. I am interpreting this account after so many years because it has taken me this long to make sense of the ontological basis and contradictions of the experience and unlearning the view of eurocentric organization acquired through MBA. Data for the second exemplar was collected in 2018. Interviews (total 18 h) and focus group discussions (2 with staff) were carried out with the current head of WISCOM (the founder's son) current board members, founder who ran WISCOM for almost three decades, staff and communities with whom the organization was working. In addition, participant observation was carried out in 6 organizational meetings. Annual reports and other organizational documents (souvenirs, memoirs of the founder, doctoral dissertations on the organization) were examined. Data were in a mix of vernacular and English.

## 10.5    Brief Descriptions of the Exemplars

### 10.5.1    Exemplar 1: Training NGOs in Strategic Planning

#### 10.5.1.1    Workshop Background

The strategic planning workshop was funded by an international donor. Of the 12 NGOs, some operated in multiple domains such as health, education, women's empowerment, environment, along with microfinance, others solely in microfinance. Some had been operational for over two decades, others 4–5 years. Workshop's goal was to make participating NGOs develop specific strategic plans according to donor provided template that included vision and mission statements, program strategy, SMART objectives and a 3-year scaling up plan for achieving operational and financial sustainability. As trainers, we were conscious that this required program details and financials, therefore founder CEOs were asked to bring along their finance manager/accountant. At the end of the exercise, we did have 12 strategic business plans and some of them did make attempts at implementing them.

#### 10.5.1.2    During the Workshop

Participants arrived in two member founder-assistant teams. During lengthy one-on-one discussions with these teams, I realised that, several NGOs did not have finance managers or accountants. Only one NGO team had a chartered accountant, a couple of NGOs had graduates in commerce. Of the others, one was a literature graduate, another a graduate in economics, a few others were having science backgrounds or other bachelors degrees. 2–3 NGOs had experience with well-developed managerial control systems and independently developed their plans. Most of the remaining

founder CEOs and their second line manager/assistant who accompanied them, were generalists who had learnt on the job. They were adept in working with communities and understanding community needs. Their staff too were generalists learning on the job and lacked specific managerial, financial or data management skills. They belonged to communities and areas the NGO worked in and were members of shared networks (such as kin ship and village). Many NGOs had not brought with them the kind of details that were necessary for calculating projections. It appeared that they did not have the information and control systems necessary for capturing these details. Nevertheless, I could see that they had intimate, detailed knowledge of specific people, communities or villages in the manner of a thick description (Geertz 1973). Several of these NGOs were small, working in less than 50 villages, had smaller staff size (less than 25), NGO founders and staff had spent years with communities and had internalized the concerns, issues and details of funds they had been granted. They were trying to recollect and derive, aggregate (nonhumanised) programmatic information during the workshop by interpreting and processing their immersive and intimate knowledge in response to my facilitative questions.

Early on during the workshop, when I raised the issue of deceit and mis-management owing to lack of systems, my managers who were spear-heading the workshop assured me that all of them were known for their integrity and their credentials had been ascertained through due diligence and prior field visits. Some organizations and leaders had won national level recognitions and awards. They accomplished transparency and accountability through ongoing community dialogues and reputational processes. From, these assurances, it appeared that informal processes were dominant in coordinating information and workflows rather than control systems monitoring efficiency.

### 10.5.1.3 Reflections

As a training assistant, I had noticed that for a few of the NGOs, the entire process came very easily. In fact, an NGO which was replicating Grameen Bank model and had a chartered accountant, had come prepared with a strategic plan. But for many other leaders/managers, the logic of the projections seemed alien, somehow they could not relate to it. Several of them repeatedly expressed hesitation and discomfort through objections such as 'how can I force our community to form a group and take loans?', 'What if they don't need the loan?' 'How can I make these estimates unilaterally (not discussing with our community) assuming that I will form so many groups and lend so much money?', 'The lending amounts are decided by our group, community, how can I estimate the amount I will lend or I will need now?' 'I do not know how much funding I will get, how can I make plans for expanding groups without knowing about funds?' 'What if I do not get funds, what happens to these promises (plans) I make to the communities?' Our discussions often continued into the wee hours of the morning, outside official program schedule, yet the doubts and objections remained.

The discomfort they felt was not limited to financial projections, it extended to vision and mission statements and SWOT analysis. They struggled with the notion of *organizational* vision. What made sense to them was community vision. They could instinctively relate to it. But the idea of organizational vision and mission did not resonate with them. It was extremely difficult for them to distinguish the organization as a separate entity from the community. In a similar manner, they were at ease understanding the threats and strengths facing the community. The experience with one CEO, a retired economics professor, working for a Gandhian organization is illustrative. It had been close to 3.30 am in the night and the idea of organizational vision as distinct from vision for the community was still not making sense to him after several hours of discussion. In the end, this gentleman, said, "… but I guess this is difficult for me to accept…based on what I am saying, you develop something..[some vision statement] you have worked hard enough.."

As the 5 day workshop was drawing to its end, the sense some of these NGOs developed with regards to the planning process was one of 'a format that needed to be filled and provided to the donor i.e., us'. These were people, who had struggled against very hostile opposition (I could infer this through the incidents and instances they were sharing). Their knowledge of the communities they were working with was deep, their commitment firm. It seemed to define them and make them as persons. Despite this, (or probably because of this) they could not relate to their NGO as an organization, its organizational interest, priorities or the strategic planning process. It appeared as if for them, the planning process in pursuit of organizational interest, implied some sort of violation of a deep community commitment. They felt a marked unease in committing something on paper as an organizational interest and plan, so much so that some of them asked me to develop the estimates on their behalf and provide them as the workshop output (their subsequent funding from my organization was dependent upon these plans).

## 10.5.2 WISCOM

### 10.5.2.1 *Setting up of WISCOM*: (Pseudonym)

Subhash (pseudonym) went back to his native village as a young man in late 1960s and strived to work for the development of rural areas surrounding his native village with a single-minded focus. These villages were in abject poverty, ravaged by floods and cyclones with people unable to afford proper food. He was driven by a passion to rediscover what he called the wisdom of India which had survived in the villages despite the colonial encounter. He thought of himself as a volunteer, as another member of the village, who was integrating into the village and serving it. He had worked for more than 5 years, during which period he had first tried by setting up a proprietorship salt company with himself as the Director, and then a co-operative with villagers as members. Neither of these had contributed to well-being of the villagers as he had desired. As such he disbanded/disengaged from those initiatives

and had become disenchanted about the value of formal organization. Meanwhile, his continual striving had attracted attention of international donors, who persuaded and insisted that he set up a registered NGO so that they could fund his work.

### 10.5.2.2    Organisation, Function and Process at WISCOM

Finally, WISCOM was registered (setup) in 1976 as a charitable trust with a governing body composed of villagers and urban intelligentsia. During the three decades he led WISCOM, Subhash actively rejected all organization structure and management systems, whether for coordinating, planning, monitoring, reporting systems or performance management. Instead, he held on to his faith in wisdom of village communities in India and insistence on living by such wisdom. His mode of working involved continuous discussions and meetings with villagers—early in the morning, during the day, late into the night etc. to understand issues at hand, causes as well as possibilities. WISCOM had come up with several innovative, transformative practices of rural development in fields of primary and nonformal education, women's empowerment, wasteland development among other things. For instance, the innovations they made in learning material and pedagogy got incorporated into the National Literacy Mission's work in India. Even during the transition period that involved his phased exit from the organization, he actively intervened against his successor's (the first successor was not the son) efforts to introduce managerial systems such as reporting structures, organizational hierarchy, performance management, vision and mission statements that were aimed at institutionalising processes at WISCOM.

The one mechanism that Subhash had followed diligently was having a weekly meeting which was held on the day of the weekly market, when most people visited that area for the market. In that meeting, they shared information about tasks and problems, discussed issues and arrived at agreements over the course of the action. Subhash was so against developing and/or strengthening WISCOM as an organization, that when some donors wanted to give him a grant of over USD one million in the 1980s, he politely refused saying it would distract them from the community. He had even proposed winding up WISCOM at one point in time, because several people in the community had by then become able community organizers/animators and Subhash believed WISCOM was not needed. Despite this, they had managed a budget of a few hundred thousand USD per annum as early as 1990s, when staff salaries were in the range of USD 10–15 per month. When donors approached him with ideas about new projects or operating in new areas, he politely refused, because they were not the needs of the villagers with whom he was working. Sometimes, when some of his staff were interested, he encouraged them and supported them through mentoring to pursue development work on their own outside WISCOM. He was very proud of the fact that WISCOM had contributed to the development of several well-rounded voluntary workers for rural development. WISCOM was one of the organizations who had come up with the idea of self-help savings and credit on its own, way back in the 1970s. As current CEO of WISCOM explained, "It gives you freedom to do some of things that lot of people don't like to do. 90% of the programs,

projects that WISCOM does, people [donors] don't even understand, what we are talking about…." He continues, explaining what his father, the founder did "a great part of innovation at WISCOM is because he did not have money. Because of money crunch we were forced to look at innovations….he [father] had a pathological dislike for money."

### 10.5.2.3   Staff and Structure at WISCOM

The single-minded focus on village communities ran very deep and was evident in the way Subhash and staff spoke about communities and WISCOM. It was always *our* villages, WISCOM villages. Similarly for the villagers it was *our* WISCOM, *our* Subhash. During my interviews when I asked them to describe the organization and its vision, they described village communities. WISCOM did not appear as a separate entity revealing deep-seated integration.

As an old employee recollected,

> We never had working hours or holidays. We worked for as long as we could. If we wanted to go back to families/native place, we told Subhash and left for a few days. We did not have any such ideas like Sunday is a holiday or leave. If we were required at 6 am in the field, we were there, or even if it was night 11.00 or 12.00 pm we were there. For women's meetings in the village, they would come in the night after 8 pm, after finishing all their chores and our meetings would run till 11.00 pm. There were many villages we could only walk to, even cycling was not possible there.
>
> we were not told how to do or what to do. It was just that we had to go to the villages and talk to the community and work with the community. It was not as if we were working for salaries. Once Subhash had called all of us for a meeting and said that he did not have money to pay salaries, that he had tried all avenues but there was no money. He was quite sad and had told us that we were free to leave if we so desired, or, we could continue to work with him. All of us had told him that there was no question of leaving. We had not worked that hard to walk away from the villages, their hopes and expectations we helped instill. We said that we would not ask him for money or for salary, we were not doing this for the money, that he should feel free to pay us when he got money. After a few months, one of Subhash's funding proposals was approved, he then paid the staff. That was how we were.
>
> Once, there was a surprise inspection by an international donor agency. They were pleasantly surprised to see people at work on a Sunday and went back without meeting Subhash and gave us a grant afterwards.

### 10.5.2.4   Community Integration and Vested Interests

Towards late 1990s, the value of land (over 50 acres) WISCOM had leased from government for wasteland development had appreciated. There were some politically motivated attacks in popular newspapers accusing and alleging WISCOM of illegal and unsanctioned activities and misappropriation of funds. It was anticipated that WISCOM's land lease would be cancelled. Subhash refused to actively defend organizational interests, maintaining that community would address the attacks if they found WISCOM valuable, that there was nothing to defend. If community wanted

WISCOM to stop, he would be more than happy to comply. At the insistence of well-wishers Subhash had issued a proforma denial statement. The community however was displeased about the accusations against Subhash. They protested through rallies with hundreds participating, and approached government to act against the newspapers. They asserted that they knew WISCOM better than anyone and formal reports were not necessary to attest to the work.

During the transition period of Subhash's exit WISCOM went through major upheavals attempting introduction of formal organizational processes. During this period, funding for WISCOM declined dramatically. Despite this, the organization had been able to sustain its work for 15 years. As the current CEO of WISCOM explained, "And if you look at why, one of the major reasons why we have been able to survive [the last] 7–8 years without any external funding programs, is because we had safe zone of people."

## 10.6   Analysis

It can be seen from the exemplars, NGOs participating in the workshop and WISCOM, are formally registered organizations. As such they are modern bureaucratic organizations with their own physical offices, resources, funding, staff etc. It is possible to read this as evidence of the universality of modern western bureaucratic organization and its underlying ontology. Similarly, the questions, concerns and comments of NGO founders in the strategic planning workshop as well as WISCOM, can be interpreted as indicative of organizational commitment to the community reinforcing western ontologic basis of organization as being ontologically prior, privileged, agential and deliberately choosing to serve the community. However, in order to account for the other's wholistic ontological basis of organisation, I begin reading the exemplar narratives from the discussions around vision statements in the workshop and WISCOM's origin story and I explain this below.

### 10.6.1   *Absent Boundaries*

The doubts and objections raised by NGO founders in articulating vision and mission during the workshop reflected desires and dreams for/of the community/villages. These were not articulated as an organizational interest to serve the community, as in Moore (2000) sense of managing for value. Further, community is not connoting the same meaning that is conveyed when a modern bureaucratic organization says it seeks to serve customers. The sense conveyed by 'to serve customers' implicitly involves the idea of organizational interest and how serving customers is good for generating value and profit for the organization. Community visions in my exemplars, are not seen as a *means* to organizational wellbeing and perpetuity, instead they have a sense of being an *end* in themselves, as a vision coming from a moral imperative of

thinking of and from the community (and not the organization) being the right thing to do. This sense is particularly clear from the questions about organizational goals posed by participants. The disinterest with organizational vision and reluctance to shift away from a community vision is particularly evident in the founders asking me to make something up in the workshop. It is also evident in the way, staff and Subhash at WISCOM describe visions for/of the villagers when questioned about vision for WISCOM. Here the organization and community are not being perceived as distinct from each other. Community interest is organizational interest. This sense of oneness seems to have made it difficult for the NGOs to formulate strategic plans at the workshop.

The origin story of WISCOM too diverges from ontological priority and distinctiveness of the organization from the individual. It shows that organizational interest was by far the most unimportant reason for setting up WISCOM, instead it indicates the pressure (he registered only after much persuasion and finally insistence from donors) and overwhelming influence of modern[2] legal and institutional frameworks in India which mandate formal registration for receiving funding. Subhash had been working with the community for years before starting WISCOM, he had in fact lost faith in formal organization by the time he registered WISCOM. *Being with*, *in* and working with community was prior to and privileged over the organization in the case of Subhash. Even after registering WISCOM, he did not pursue grants systematically for organizational growth. On multiple occasions, he resisted and rejected grants, directed the funding towards others including staff (whom he had encouraged to start off on their own) indicating that he was not acting out of a conventional (universal) sense of organizational interest which seeks to reduce and avoid competition. His rejection of a large grant for organizational corpus fund, is also contrary to a conventional view of strengthening the organization by developing a strong capital base. These reveal his reluctance and resistance to a conventional view of organizational interest. Instead, he chose to place himself *with* and *in* the community and draw upon the community's sense of sustenance. Origin stories for the other NGOs are not available in my data and may or may not be similar to WISCOM. However, what is common to NGOs participating in the workshop and WISCOM is the absence of the organization and organizational interest as separate from the community it is serving. The reality of the organization, as evident in their practices, which refrained from using formal management systems, processes and structures and their invocation of villages, community, groups at every mention of what are generally organizational goals and strategies suggests that the boundary between the organization and the community is indistinct here. Organization here is not a distinctly bounded bureaucratic entity with a collection of duly specified roles which individuals inhabit as is expected in a formal modern organization. The organization itself is amorphous.

It is necessary to note here that the previous section discussed the absence of individual-organisation ontological distinctiveness in other worldview, and the analysis here points to absence of community-organisation distinctiveness as evidence

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[2] The specific laws are British era laws, Society's Act of 1860 and Trust Act of 1925.

of other worldview. This approximation is within the purview of the individual-organisation sense because the individual is existing, and operating as one internal to the community and not as someone who is outside of and external to the community.

### 10.6.2  Absent Roles

It can be seen that role capabilities were not carved out. The kind of staff in the NGOs from both exemplars indicate this. Prima facie this could be read as a case of informal organization or even a simple organization in Mintzberg's (1993) sense within conventional understandings of informality and organization. However, closely examining the amorphousness suggests that what we see in the exemplars is not a case of informal organization inside the formal organization, where, both formal and informal organization exist simultaneously. It is also not a case of only an informal organization, since in that situation too, the boundary of the organization would be decipherable in the form of group boundaries (Hernes and Paulson 2003). Instead from the narratives it appears that in this amorphousness, the boundary of the organization itself is indistinct and the community and organization both make each other and move in and out of each other. The instance of the employees continuing to work irrespective of salary, control or supervision systems at WISCOM illustrate this relationality. They appear to be working in the course of living as whole persons- their private and publicness together, in their cultural-socio-economic-political-religious fullness *in* and *with* the community, not as an organizational role inhabited by partial individuals. The timing of the weekly meeting routine at WISCOM to coincide with the weekly market is indicative of enmeshing of work and organization into daily existence, rather than establishing the organization as superior to and above daily life. Here the individual is not detrimental to the organization, the organization in its community enmeshment appears as an expression of the community. When I visited villages, I noticed that the way villagers talked about WISCOM and Subhash was as if they were speaking about family members and friends. Subhash had not been visiting the villages due to his old age and failing health. The women inquired about him and had decided to visit him. The entire dynamic was one of visiting families and relations, not one of an NGO interacting with a beneficiary or client receiving services. It is also evident in the comment by Subhash's son about surviving in the absence of funding because of a "safe zone of people".

## 10.7  Discussion

The kind of organization taking shape in the two exemplars is not the non-inclusive role-based incorporation of the partial individual into modern western bureaucratic organization (Kallinikos 2003). The individual and organization are fully being incorporated into each other in relational terms as organizational and community members.

The growing and becoming of the individuals, organization and community has occurred along the course of working and living. I refer to this kind of ontological relationality and organization as community enmeshment.

### 10.7.1   Another Organization: Organization as Community Enmeshment

Ontologically, with organisation as community enmeshment, the distinctions between what is private and public in the staff- organization sense or what is organizational and non-organizational vis-a-vis community are not evident. Here the organization exists, but instead of having separate interests, boundaries, goals, processes and systems it permeates and is itself permeated and made by the community where it exists. From the data, it is evident that the communitarian organizing practices are centered on the community, recognise and vest agency in the community making organizational authority, longevity, resources indistinct from the community. Community enmeshment is evident in the kinds of interpersonal, moral, cultural and political interactions and feelings of care, affection, trust, respect, dignity and participation invested by founders, staff and communities. Subhash's moral authority and relationship with community merges with WISCOM and vice-versa. These are not merely transactional, or reciprocal exchanges of certain economic benefits, instead these are interactions and conversations which have taken place as part of ongoing social life inside and outside the meetings where village life and living and organizational life are indistinguishable from each other, with shared interests and concerns about families and community well-being (as also animosities). It is in this sense that celebration of festivals, worship, income generation activity, education, folk lore, ecological restoration, combating social evils, all merge seamlessly into each other in WISCOM's working.

Strathern (2005) distinguishes a relational worldview from Euro-American one, in that here relations are not thought of as something over and above the individual, instead there is prior relational co-constitution of individual and community. Thinking together of the individual and organization, is one where they are already relational and co-constituting each other. Within Western sense of organization, full inclusion, is understood as a totalitarian kind of organization with absolute control of human behaviour and the human is fully the organizational man (Kallinikos 2004; Clegg et al. 2015). In contrast to this totalitarian organization the formal bureaucratic organizations with its partial inclusion appears as a better alternative. The exemplars of this study differ from both bureaucratic (or postbureaucratic) and totalitarian organisation. Here staff, organization and communities become more able in their relational making of each other, in their enmeshing, their co-constitution. In the next section I discuss the functional meanings of identifying organization as community enmeshment.

### 10.7.2  *An* Other *Meaning of Function*

In eurocentric MOS, organization as community enmeshment, is often perceived as messy, disorganized, pre-modern, archaic, ineffective, unprofessional, inefficient, imperfect etc. When decolonial discourse on communitarian form eschews function, it inadvertently strengthens the view that an other organization is indeed inefficient or imperfect with the attendant suggestion that such inefficiency and imperfection should be celebrated not, denounced. This reasoning whether in eurocentric or decolonial MOS, operates from within a framework of culture and economy as distinct, where culture is held as superior to economic rationality. It perpetuates the idea of what Birla (2009: p. 10) calls "a rational economic actor garbed in ethnic wardrobe", where culture and community is seen as a restraint or an enabler on economy.

Reading from an other, non-Western worldview, where cultural, communitarian practice is not subordinated, or even held superior to rational economic calculation, but where culture also, at once becomes the social, political and economic, one is able to interpret community enmeshment as "textures of meanings" of practices in ongoing life (Birla 2009). This other perspective permits us to read functional meanings of organization as community enmeshment. Such a reading does not reinstate economistic managerialist argument, but shows alternate function where communitarian culture also implies economic and strategic action (Birla 2009).

It is important to note here that at WISCOM culture building is not being pursued to reduce administrative costs of control as is understood in management literature. Instead, reduction of administrative costs is an unintended side-effect of enmeshment. Neither Subhash nor the present CEO justified their community enmeshment in terms of organizational interest and the financial benefits such as cost savings provided to the organization. Even when asked to think this way, they resisted this. This is understood as an end it itself, a way of being and living, not a means of cost reduction for organization. It had been presented as a moral, cultural, political and ethical imperative. Organization as community enmeshment does not operate like economic or financial resources such as capital and labour which can be quantified and incorporated into cost–benefit analysis, strategic plans and financial projections. Being interwoven and enmeshed into the communities, leads to sharing into community abilities, politics, strengths, prejudices and anxieties. It is simultaneously imbued with social, cultural, moral and political value. The primary modes of WISCOM's interventions in communities were meeting and dialogue and this required common human abilities—conversation, talking and listening. Functionally, these cultures of caring, respect and belongingness, simultaneously transpose into and become economic mechanisms of voluntary support of locally based workers and communities having a stake in their own well-being and development, and volunteers who perform without supervision. Work as an economic activity simultaneously transposes into a mechanism of affection and caring towards others and reclaiming self-respect and spiritual pursuit for the self. Talking to and engaging each other,

working and being together becomes both inter-personal and a political act of resistance. This dynamic has made WISCOM a recipient of care and also target of local political conflicts and contestations. This structure displaces organizational power relations of a employer-employee hierarchy, placing them within the community and subjecting it to the numerous dominance/subordination, interdependence political relations of power/anti-power (Pettit 1996; Jammulamadaka 2016a) within the village community. This structuring fulfilled another function by voiding the need for setting up expensive and separate systems of accountability to distant centers of power such as donors. Accountability happened as a matter of course. This wholistic sense of work, explains why staff, did not leave WISCOM even when Subhash could not pay them.

Community enmeshment is also functional in that by erasing the distinctions between organisation and community and culture and economy, it enables solidarity, commitment, and accountability, as also reduces dependence on external funding and increases autonomy. WISCOM being enmeshed into the social, cultural, political, economic, religious life of the community enabled it to discover and experiment with several initiatives jointly that could be worked upon at their level irrespective of the availability of external funding. Without dependence on external sources of funding, these initiatives were part of community's ways of life, local opportunities and resources, and addressed their needs. Such initiatives set up a positive spiral of promoting goal attainment and strengthening community. WISCOM's local successes and community strength in turn attracted distant donor funding which WISCOM was able to accept on its own terms, rather than having to accept donor priorities. They were also able to refuse donor projects that did not find resonance with community's sense of its needs. These initiatives manifested in programs such as wasteland development, women's self- help groups in late 1970s and early 1980s before these had become donor priorities. Community enmeshment contributed to WISCOM's and community's autonomy through reduced resource dependence for them and restored agency and power with the community towards goal identification, selection and effective goal attainment. WISCOM did not have to prepare a separate sustainability plan. It just existed with and in the community. This has occurred in an era where NGOs had become primarily donor dependent (Jammulamadaka 2012; Koch 2009). WISCOM as community enmeshment, also allowed Subhash to actively contemplate winding up WISCOM, actively support staff to start out on their own, because all these benefitted the community. Deregistering WISCOM does not automatically mean the death of WISCOM, it still exists in and through the community. That such ongoing everyday cultural, social, political practice is also an effective organizational practice, is evident in the manner in which local communities mobilised to protect and defend WISCOM against allegations and political attacks from vested interests and outsiders. To this extent, organization as community enmeshment is also highly functional.

The experience of WISCOM suggests that being a communitarian organization need not necessarily mean being opposed to serving certain functions. Instead, this is evidence of an other kind of functionality that springs from and is realised in the wholeness of social world, and therefore its transposability and fungibility across

social-political-economic-spiritual life, redefining resources and capabilities in the form of community centricity and relationality. Organization as community enmeshment is functional and strategic because of its ability to sustain autonomy, life in the face of uncertainty and shocks, self-reliance for the organization-communities, and reducing its resource-dependence. It is organisation, function and strategy *as sustaining one's freedom to exist*, not a strategy in the language of capital and markets. Here the organization exists as a part of the community, not apart from the community.

## 10.8  Conclusion

Just as universal western feminism erases the colonized woman (Lugones 2010), western bureaucratic organization erases this other native "social organization", (Lugones' term 2010). It is the hegemony of eurocentric MOS that these native ways of organization and its cognates have been silenced and particular meanings from Western modernity have been universalized. Decolonial scholars have contraposed communitarian organizing to the logic of capital and seemingly embraced the assigned "inefficiency". To this extent, decolonising organization discourse forfeits the opportunity to evolve plural meanings of ideas such as organization and its cognate functionalisms. This study argues that in summarily associating ideas like organizations, functionality, strategy, efficiency, coordination and leadership with Western management knowledge and rejecting them, native organizing is not only denying an important part of its self but also contributing to a misrecognition and pruning of indigenous wholistic worldviews. It is therefore important to decolonize various management concepts such as organization, to facilitate an appreciation for plural meanings of managerial concepts by changing and redefining meanings. This study, by examining two exemplars, one of a strategic planning workshop and the other of a communitarian NGO, suggests that a modern western bureaucratic, capitalistic, economistic, logic of accumulation and growth based organization need not be the only way of understanding organization and its cognates. Instead, coming from wholistic *other* worldviews, organization can also be understood as a community enmeshment of whole persons. Such community enmeshment, inspite of appearing disorganized in the modern western managerial sense of the word is also highly *other* functional. The argument being made here is not what Mosse (1999: pp. 325–326) calls "the economistic notion of social relations as 'capital' which can be carefully tapped, invested or transferred to meet development ends", the way peer pressure is used as collateral in microcredit lending.

Instead, it is to show that community enmeshment is not just an ethical and a political stance against capitalist modes of organizing. It is at once an economic, functional and strategic stance, where functionality manifests, in all its political-social–historical-economic sense. Such politically and ideologically charged organizing, also happens to be simultaneously efficient, effective for preserving autonomy

and recovering agency. The chapter thus suggests a decolonial meaning for organization and provides a basis for engaging with logics of function and strategy from a decolonial perspective as those which preserve dignity and autonomy.

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