Leadership and Culture

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Introduction

Interest in the relationship between leadership and culture first garnered attention during the 'cultural turn' in management and organization studies in the 1980s (Peters & Waterman, 1982; Smircich and Morgan, 1982; Morgan, 1986) and has grown considerably in subsequent decades. We now stand at a point where there is a substantive body of literature on how leadership manifests itself within organizational cultures as well as across diverse national cultural contexts. In this chapter, we begin by introducing the reader to literature on leadership from various extant perspectives paying particular critical attention to social psychological and psychological approaches that currently dominate the field of leadership studies. We then proceed to explore new thought and emerging directions for culturally alert and sensitive research into relationships between culture and leadership. In so doing, we make no apology for privileging interpretative and critical approaches to the study of leadership and culture – particularly those drawn from disciplines of anthropology and postcolonial studies – as we contend that these offer means of addressing the most pressing issues faced in this area. We draw selectively on our own scholarship and empirical research to propose and illustrate possibilities for fresh research agendas. What follows is an outline of the chapter.

The first part of this chapter provides an overview of extant literature on leadership and culture. including main perspectives that foundationally established the field and various critiques which have overtime shaped the debate. In this, we engage with the sensemaking that has informed current understanding in this area. Early preoccupations with leadership and culture gave rise to what we now know as the field of cross-cultural leadership, which from the 1980s began to emerge as one worthy of research endeavour. From Hofstede (1980; 2001) whose

work, though heavily criticised, provided an early template for observing cultural dimensions in organisations and, arguably, a basis for subsequent investigations into the relationship between culture and leadership (Smith et al. 1996; Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1997; Schwartz, 1999; House et al., 1999, 2004) until now, the field of cross-cultural leadership has evolved as a legitimate domain of inquiry in its own right. In this early period of development, there were also explorations of the arguably instrumental relationship between *organizational culture* and leadership (Case, 2008).

The attempt to understand leadership from a cultural standpoint has not been without its critics as many scholars have argued that research on cross-cultural leadership – dominated largely by social psychology - remains mainly predicated on dimensionalization of culture which presents a narrow view of the phenomena and occasions loss of the bigger picture (Tayeb, 2001; Dansereau and Yamarino, 2006; Dickson et al., 2006; Jepson, 2009). Others note heterogeneity and complexity of societal culture (Nkomo, 2011; Iwowo, 2012; 2015), its fluidness and instability (Bhabha, 1994) and importance of power, positionality and cultural symbolism (Ailon, 2008; Eyong, 2017); all of which call for a more holistic and interpretively sensitive appreciation of the leadership-culture nexus.

The second part of the chapter considers contemporary strands of research into culture that are informing the field of leadership studies, including those serving to break convention with established thinking. We hope this sense-breaking might help identify, articulate and establish new directions for the debate. For instance, we foreground growing interest in anthropologically informed research into *leadership practices* that try to escape some of the heretofore ethnocentric, corporatist and instrumental proclivities of leadership studies (Jones, 2005, 2006; Warner & Grint, 2006; Guthey & Jackson, 2011; Case & Sliwa, 2020). Such research calls for paying close and culturally sensitive attention to leadership practices in non-Anglophone contexts (Jepson, 2009, 2010; Schedlitzki et al., 2017; Case et al., 2017). We also pay attention to postcolonial critiques of leadership studies which offer a more fundamental challenge to the status quo.); a challenge that, we contend, is now overdue in light of the dominance that Western corporatist views of leadership have long enjoyed. Drawing on the work of pioneering scholars such as Achebe (1958), Fanon (1963), Said (1978), Spivak (1988) and Bhabha (1994) who have supplied the language with which to problematise mainstream knowledge frameworks originating from the Global North, we offer some alternative heterodox research agendas.

Towards Cultural Understanding of Leadership – *What we know*

It is widely acknowledged that cultural forces play a significant role in shaping leadership perception, understanding and practice (Smircich and Morgan, 1982; Lord and Maher, 1991; Meindl, 1995; Northhouse, 2004; House, 2004; Hunt and Yan, 2005; Gill, 2006). As Smircich and Morgan (1982) argued in their seminal paper, leadership in organizations is intimately related to processes of *meaning management* – that is, the ways those in positions of authority (typically managers) seek explicitly or implicitly to shape perceptions of colleagues and subordinates. More recently, Schnackenberg et al. (2019) have provided a comprehensive review of symbolic management research, revealing how this area of interest has developed in the years following the formers' ground-breaking work (see also chapter 30 of this volume on the role of symbolism with respect to leadership in a post-truth world). Viewed from this perspective, leadership entails a process by which others *perceive* someone to be a leader; the logical corollary being that such perceptions will vary widely across cultures (Lord and Maher, 1991). The leadership relationship, moreover, exposes values and beliefs of both leaders and followers (Northouse, 2004). Against the backdrop of different cultures, 'leadership means different things to different people' (Gill, 2006; p.7) and should therefore be studied in the context of how it is perceived by those involved in leading and following because, amongst other things, it is culturally contingent (House, 2004). In this view, leadership is enacted within social space and its *meaning* constructed based on individual accounts of experience occurring in social reality; one that is itself steeped in cultural norms, values and practices. Given the all-important role that cultural forces play in shaping understanding and practice of leadership, the need for leadership to be understood in terms of cultural composition and complexity across

culturally bounded spheres of meaning, as well as how the latter informs practice, is what gave rise to cross-cultural leadership research.

Mainstream cross-cultural studies of leadership

In 1980, Hofstede published *Culture's Consequences*, a treatise on manifestations of national culture in IBM across 53 countries which went on to become a foundational text in the study of national culture in organisations. He examined the impact of cultural differences on management practice and identified four components of culture; *Power distance* – degree of inequality among a country's people deemed acceptable within that culture; *Individualism/Collectivism*; value placed on individual versus group relations/orientation*; Masculinity/Femininity* – how a society views goals and achievement and *Uncertainty Avoidance* – a people's risk appetite and approach to uncertainty. He subsequently expanded this to include a fifth dimension – *Confucian dynamism* or *Long-term Orientation* (1991); a concept of time-orientation derived from Confucius' ideas. Hofstede argued that the degree to which these components are present within any national culture would influence management/leadership practices within those societies.

The GLOBE study of Culture and Leadership (House et al., 2005) was another influential text that shaped contemporary thinking on cross-cultural leadership. In this, the authors argued that leader-effectiveness within a given society was inextricably tied to its cultural perceptions of leadership and embedded within its values/belief systems, with such perceptions and status/influence of leaders, varying across cultures. Leadership was studied across 62 countries and, building on the Hofstedian analysis, 5 additional cultural dimensions were developed. These included: *Assertiveness* – the degree to which individuals are decisive and willing to be

confrontational/aggressive in their relationships with others; *Gender-Egalitarianism* – the extent to which a collective minimizes gender inequality; *Future Orientation* – how individuals engage in future-oriented behaviours; *Humane Orientation* – the degree of collective altruism and *Performance Orientation* – how a collective rewards members for performance (House et al., 2005). Furthermore, the work of Smith et al. (1996), Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1997) and Schwartz (1999) each offer perspectives that have helped shape the discourse. Other studies include Gerstner and Day (1994), Kanungo and Mendonca, (1996), Offerman and Hellman (1997), Jung and Avolio (1999), Mellahi (2000), Martin et al. (2009) and Resick et al. (2011) to mention a few.

As much as they helped further understanding of leadership across cultures, these studies have not been without their drawbacks. Chief of these was the tendency to make sweeping categorisations and unduly homogenise culture across diverse geographical spaces and human subjectivities. This led to unwarranted and implicitly ethnocentric generalizations whereby the cultural identity of one country/group of countries is taken to be representative of a much wider whole. For instance, a major critique of Hofstede's work lay in its tendency to portray Africa and later, Sub-Saharan Africa as culturally homogeneous, even while arguing for the uniqueness and particularism of national cultures. There was equally an inability of this study to distinguish between whether West Africa was a region or just a country (see Nkomo, 2008). Sub-Saharan Africa was grouped into West, East and South, and listed alongside countries such as USA, Germany and Netherlands. In contrast to the standard country listing, Africa was broadly studied on a continental, rather than on a country level. This connotes a sweeping generalisation and culturally homogenises an entire sub-region. For example, it presents certain findings as being from 'West Africa', implying that such findings are representative of all countries in that sub-region and Culture (and subsequently, management practice) in

Francophone Senegal is rendered as being same as in Anglophone Ghana. As with Hofstede, though to a lesser degree, the GLOBE study advanced an inaccurate portrayal of Africa, presenting culture as homogenous in its sweeping classification of the Continent. For instance, findings from five different African countries – Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe – are presented as representative of the entire Sub-Saharan Africa region. From this, it would seem that leadership in Africa is uniformly characterised by high uncertainty avoidance, high power distance, and high collectivism, which, despite the existence of shared cultural symbolism across many parts of African society, is certainly *not invariably the case*. A further criticism lay in the contention that dimensionalization of national culture was fundamentally reductionist. Proponents of this view contended that such categorisation tended to narrow the purview of phenomena under study and, more often than not, occasioned a loss of the bigger picture (Tayeb, 2001); a situation that undermines the complexity of the leadership-culture nexus and is ultimately detrimental to a more nuanced appreciation of contextual practices.

Organizational culture and leadership

In addition to interest in cross-cultural leadership phenomena, there were also explorations of the rather instrumental relationship between *organizational culture* and leadership (Case, 2008). According to Peters and Waterman (1982), for instance, successful companies possessed 'strong cultures' in which employees were committed to a clear set of values that united and motivated them. 'Good managers,' they claimed, 'make meanings for people, as well as money' (1982: 29). In their winning formula, it was the leader's duty and prerogative to persuade employees to sign up to corporate values and thereby exact a commitment to work that transcended the mere compliance that could be secured through paid employment. In other words, by contracting normatively with their organization (Etzioni, 1961), employees would

always be willing to go the extra mile for that employer. Similarly, Deal and Kennedy argued that companies with so-called strong cultures 'can gain as much as one or two hours productive work per employee per day' (1982: 15). They asserted that leaders not only had the right but the obligation to change organizational culture through manipulation of symbols, stories, myths, rituals and ceremonies in order to secure greater productivity from the workforce.

The 'cultural excellence' movement enjoyed popularity at the time and can lay claim to having significantly influenced corporate leadership and change methodologies. Indeed, it spawned an entire consultancy industry in its own right. Nonetheless, it certainly was not without its detractors. Critics at the time included, *inter alia*, Kunda (1992), Parker (2000), Willmott (1993) and Wilson (1992). These authors mounted critiques on a variety of grounds, including: *conceptual inadequacy*; *questionable ethics*; and *lack of practical feasibility* to control cultural change implementation. Indeed, Willmott (1993) coined the disparaging term 'corporate culturism' to apprehend the way in which managerial consumers of cultural excellence were being ideologically duped into accepting views and pursuing practices that were inherently deceptive, misleading and ethically compromised.

Emerging Thought and New Directions - *Where we go*

Leadership in 'our' image and likeness? African philosophy and knowledge politics
While sustained progress appears to have been made towards greater understanding of leadership phenomena, much of the discourse remains dominated by Western-centric perspectives, to the exclusion of the diverse range of alternatives hailing from the Global South. Many scholars contend that despite the existence of other views as to the nature of these variegated social phenomena, the former have been systemically privileged as mainstream, with the rest othered in wider contemporary debate (Obiakor, 2004; Mbigi, 2005; Nkomo,

2008; Iwowo, 2015). This knowledge positioning is seen as not only intellectually ethnocentric but as a fallout of Western knowledge hegemony and systemically pervasive, having positioned itself on the back of colonial power and authority in the wake of Empire (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988; Bhabha; 1994).

A few critical perspectives speak to this issue of knowledge politics, most prominent of which lies within the field of Postcolonial Critique (PCT). As a body of knowledge, it challenges established ways of knowing and contends for the deconstruction of dominant hegemonic ways of understanding the world. It is defined broadly as the critique of social, economic and political conditions, as well as of ways of thinking and representing Empire that persist long after its dismantling (Brett, 2007). Its proponents argue that the world has long been viewed through the narrow ethnocentric lens of the colonizer to the detriment and exclusion of the equally significant worldviews of the colonized; with systemic production and representation of Western knowledge not only legitimising its privileged positioning as mainstream, but creating an uneven dichotomy in which other knowledge forms were cast in the periphery. Knowledge has thus been and, to a large extent is still, produced and controlled by the West, with its real power lying not in the political, economic or technological, but in its assumed authority to define, represent and theorize Other's subjectivities (McEwan, 2001). This privilegizing tendency (Dutton et al., 1998) not only sponsors the universalizing assumptions of Western knowledge, but also its authority to legitimise them. In challenging this, postcolonialism cites the insufficiency of Western epistemological frameworks in grappling with the totality and complexity of the rest of the world; calling for recognition and respectful acknowledgement of knowledge pluralism. Mainstream knowledge is thus considered an off-shoot of historical European expansionism and challenged on the basis that it unduly universalizes a narrow ethnocentric worldview.

Leadership theory through postcolonial lens

This argument has significant implications for what we say leadership *is* (its ontological status) and for how we say it *should* be practiced (the normative ethics associated with leadership). In other words, if leadership means different things to different people, then it follows that it will inevitably be a contested concept (Grint, 2005) which will resist facile 'mainstream' appropriation/representation (see also chapter 46 of this volume). If we say that Western knowledge frameworks are epistemologically unaligned with non-Western subjectivities, for example, what then does this mean for our understanding and practice of a putatively 'mainstream' representation of leadership, which is itself arguably informed by partial and culturally attenuated conceptual frameworks?

It has been argued that mainstream leadership discourse is indeed part and parcel of an enduring Western knowledge hegemony (Adizes, 2007; Banerjee, 2004; Banerjee and Linstead, 2004; Prasad, 1997; chapter 37 of this volume). For instance, the paradigm of 'transformational leadership' has remained one of the most widely adopted approaches in management learning, despite its many detractors (Blunt and Jones, 1997). It is further argued that mainstream leadership theory is culturally dissonant and often philosophically inconsistent with the socio-cultural fabric of many African societies. Because of this, it is grossly ineffective for addressing the unique sociocultural and socioeconomic problems of African national contexts (Eyong, 2017; Mbigi, 2005; Nkomo, 2008; Obiakor, 2004); a reality that is all too infrequently taken into account with respect to leadership education (Iwowo, 2015). If this is the case, why then does Western leadership theory continue to dominate contemporary discourse? Why is it continually positioned as mainstream and to what end?

One might imagine that it is because alternative perspectives, such as, indigenous accounts of leadership, either do not exist or, if and where they do, have been deemed inferior and occluded by powerful hegemonic forces. PCT contends the latter is the case and we believe it is important to keep this in mind when appraising mainstream leadership and, not least, *cross-cultural* leadership. Within the critical gaze on leadership and culture, the role of knowledge politics in shaping the field has given further rise to discourses of resistance. The critique of Western knowledge hegemony with respect to the above remains a subject of growing interest, gaining prominence in the debate. Such prominence ensures that we maintain a critical gaze and thus sustain the interest generated thus far. We believe the voices that speak to this are on the rise and will continue to be for the foreseeable future.

Anthropological Perspectives on Leadership and Culture

We have thus far implicitly assumed the meaning of two key terms – *leadership* and *culture* – that are exploring in cross-cultural context in this chapter. It is now time to pay closer attention to these concepts in ways that are alert to the postcolonial critique that we are trying to advance. This is not the place to engage in a detailed definitional debate with respect to either concept and, indeed, others have already undertaken this daunting task and provided comprehensive reviews (see, e.g., Bryman 2013; Burns JM, 1978; Burns JS, 1996; Goldstein, 1957; Grint, 2005; Heifetz, 1994; Katan 2018). Nonetheless, as they lie at the core of the various academic positions we are exploring and arguments we wish to advance, it is helpful to outline some of our thoughts on these notions.

The discipline of anthropology (in all its forms) takes the exploration and understanding of human culture as its main purpose and *raison d'être*. So, it is appropriate that we look for definitional insight and inspiration from this field of study. When turning our gaze toward

leadership practices, we would argue strongly that these are best understood in *cultural terms*. In other words, we need to approach leadership phenomena reflexively from a theoretical position culturally nuanced in terms of the dimensions and sensitivities (Brown, 2004). This means viewing leadership through a hybrid lens that permits and accommodates interaction of the social, psychological and physical. Certain recent theoretical innovations in the discipline of leadership studies, in particular, the Leadership-As-Practice (L-A-P) movement, are well-suited to facilitating socio-material explorations of leadership phenomena (Crevani and Endrissat, 2016; Raelin, 2016; Raelin et al., 2018; Sergi, 2016, chapters 2, 21 and 45 this volume). Indeed, this theoretical perspective on leadership practices can be employed usefully to examine leadership phenomena *empirically* in postcolonial cultural contexts and we shall shortly outline some studies that illustrate its fecundity in this regard. Before doing so, however, it may be helpful to consider a little more what anthropology has to say about leadership.

From inception as an academic discipline, anthropology has been interested in highlighting and accounting for leadership phenomena in human communities (e.g., Mumford, 1909). Early ethnographic work, for example, focussed on chieftain - or what Mead (1935) referred to as 'Big Men' - patterns of authority in small-scale traditional societies. In this regard, the writings of Margaret Mead on Papua New Guinea, Raymond Firth with respect to Melanesia, Marshal Sahlins on Polynesia and the Amazonian research reported by Claude Lévi-Strauss come immediately to mind as seminal accounts of the dynamics of leadership, authority, social organization and culture (Mead, 1935; Firth, 1949; Sahlins, 1958, 1963; Lévi-Strauss, 1949). Whilst these accounts of relationship between leadership and culture privilege the *social*, developments of evolutionary anthropology have sought to place greater emphasis on the physiological, genetic, sexual and neurological dimensions of leader-follower relations and

influence. This diverse field of study finds parallels between authority patterns in the behaviour of other mammals, such as, dominance hierarchies in social carnivores (wolves, lions, wild dogs, etc.) and primates (chimpanzees, gibbons, bonobos, etc.) and contemporary human social organization. It also explores evolutionary links to hominin and archaic *homo sapiens* communities (Garfield et al., 2019; Graeber and Wengrow, 2021).

In light of our concern that leadership studies in cross-cultural context should be alert and sensitized to postcolonial critique, it is important that we acknowledge the way in which the discipline and sub-disciplines of anthropology have been strongly implicated historically in colonial ambitions and exploits (Banerjee and Linstead, 2004). For example, Brelsford (1944) set out to 'advise' British colonial district officers in Zambia on authority relations amongst the Bemba, to better predict and manage these peoples. On a related theme, Mamdani (2012) points out how the anthropological notion of 'tribe' was used instrumentally by colonial states to impose certain forms of group identity on individual subjects. Organizing populations in terms of putative tribal affiliation helped subjugate and render them more malleable to colonial regulation and government. There are many such examples in the anthropological record that make clear the 'facilitative' role this discipline often played in terms of supporting and strengthening colonial administration. In short, anthropology has a chequered history and has bestowed a legacy of academic guilt (Rosaldo, 1989) that contemporary scholars working in the field have had to contend with. Anthropologists writing and researching in a postcolonial context have taken this to heart and made a concerted effort, reflexively, to redress the problem both in terms of retrospective evaluation of past practices and methodological prescriptions intended to avoid future research relations with 'subjects' that could be damaging or exploitative (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Marcus and Fischer, 1986; Rosaldo, 1989; Sedgwick, 2007, 2017).

We hope to have made clear that, as a discipline, anthropology has taken - and continues to take - an active and explicit interest in leadership phenomena. However, one might reasonably ask what, precisely, is the *subject of study*? What do anthropologists, or anyone else for that matter, mean by leadership? This question brings us roundly back to the problematic and seemingly elusive matter of how to define or otherwise circumscribe leadership phenomena.

Perhaps the first and most obvious thing to point out is that *leadership* is an abstract noun found within the English language. It is *one* word in a *one* particular language. As Jepson (2009) and Case et al. (2011) have pointed out, it is rare to find a nounal term for *leadership* in languages other than English. It would seem that the historical 'slippage' of the verb *lead* to the role *leader* and abstract noun *leadership* is something peculiar to the English language (Case et al. 2011).

From the anthropological record, it might reasonably be concluded that there is a set of phenomena manifesting universally – or, perhaps to be more precise, near universally (Brown, 2004) – that can be connoted by terms that signify ways in which individuals exercise agency in mobilizing socio-material resources within a given time-specific setting that, in turn, motivate others to be moved, or permit themselves to be persuaded to pursue a particular end or set of ends. An innovation that the English language – a language that has become so globally ubiquitous in large measure as a result of Empire - alighted upon was to generate a single abstract noun to represent these patterns of conduct in human communities and organizations. It is critically important to recognize, however, that this is a relatively unusual linguistic invention and that different constellations of terms relating to leadership phenomena are found in non-Anglophone settings. Moreover, the fact that there is a word in English that serves as both metonym and synecdoche for leadership phenomena in no way

'solves the problem of representation', as it were. Difference, variation, ambiguity and mutual misapprehension seem to abound. Indeed, at the limit, it has been claimed that the English word *leadership* is little more than an empty signifier that is open to multiple uses and interpretations (Spoelstra, 2013).

So, if simple definition and agreement about what *leadership* connotes remains elusive, what might researchers interested in such phenomena usefully explore? This is a question that, on the one hand, we would want to leave open because nobody can be sure what future creativity and innovation might be possible; yet, on the other, we would like to suggest some lines of enquiry that could be fruitful to other researchers. For example, we have found significant inspiration in Keith Grint's treatment of *leadership* as an 'essentially contested concept' (Grint, 2005 *pace* Gallie 1955/56). In other words, rather than *expect* to be able precisely and incontestably to *define* leadership, for all practical purposes it makes sense to view leaders and leadership as socio-material assemblages – a notion that Grint draws from actor network theory (Latour, 1996, 2005) - that lack intrinsic *essence* and can be recovered in scientific, professional or lay terms in multiple ways.

Rather than define terms in abstract, we might instead map the empirical terrain by finding out what concepts are invoked and what socio-material conduct takes place in the name of leadership and related terminologies *in any given culture and language*. Based on his own enquiries in this regard, Grint suggests that the empirical field can be organized by answering a series of questions relating to the 'who', 'what', 'where', 'how' and 'why' of the phenomenon. Elements of the resulting nomenclature correspond respectively to leadership as Person (who), Result (what), Position (where), Process (how) and Purpose (why). In other words, in historical and contemporary studies of leadership a certain structural *grammar*

seems to inform scientific, professional and lay accounts (Case, 2011). These, in turn, reflect particular explanatory dispositions, preferences and assumptions. For instance, according to some person-centric narratives, *who* leaders are makes them leaders, in others it is *what* leaders achieve, *where* they are located, or *how* they get things done that qualifies them as leaders. Forms of explanation can be located within this conceptual alembic; some focussing exclusively on one dimension and others proposing an admixture of the who, what, where, how and why motives.

We would like cautiously to suggest that this heuristic approach to exploring patterns of explanation and understanding in relation to leadership provides a nuanced and sensitive way of investigating the relationship between leadership and culture that is linguistically mobile.

In this subsection we have thus far attempted to offer insight into how anthropological and linguistic sensitivity, informed by postcolonial critique, offers an emerging way forward for research into the relationship between leadership and culture. We now move to demonstrating how these ideas and the research platform we argue for may be applied empirically. To this end we draw on the authors' studies of leadership practices in two postcolonial contexts: (a) Official Development Assistance interventions in Lao People's Democratic Republic (a former French colony); and (b) the Nollywood film industry in Nigeria (a former British colony).

Studying Leadership from Indigenous Perspectives: Two Illustrations

The Language and Practice of Leadership in Laos

To illustrate some arguments and proposals we have made thus far, we draw attention to some anthropological-linguistic research into leadership one of the authors undertook in the

postcolonial context of Lao People's Democratic Republic between 2011-2016. Laos did not exist as a nation state until it was colonized by the French and its borders formally demarcated in a treaty of 1893. The country formed part of what became known as French Indochina alongside other colonial acquisitions of Vietnam and Cambodia. Aside from a slight interregnum during World War II when the Japanese conquered and occupied Laos, the French remained colonial masters until the victory in 1975 of the communist Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) at the end of what, in local parlance, was termed 'the American war'. The LPRP created a single party socialist state informed by a broadly Marxist-Leninist ideology that remains in power to this day. It was in this setting, whilst working on a series of rural development Official Development Assistance (ODA) projects, that Case et al. (2017) undertook an ethnographic study of leadership practices in formal meetings (typically attended by state civil servants, agricultural professionals and members of farming communities). They also report on some of the challenges faced politically by smallholder farmers working in the field (both literally and metaphorically) in trying to represent or describe *their understanding* of leadership, given that there is no translational equivalent for this abstract noun in the Lao language. What Case et al. (2017) concluded from their empirical investigations is that leadership in Laos is highly person-centric and intimately related to personal position or placement within situated social and political hierarchies. In other words, leadership practices closely and predominantly coalesce around what Grint (2005) proposed as the *who* and *where* of leadership. Of course, other leadership-related motives – the whats, whys and hows - were present in the narratives they recorded but these were significantly less prominent.

Case et al. (2017) also point to the way that leadership and authority relations need to be understood as the outcome of complex historical and socio-material conditions. Many leadership-related patterns of conduct, such as systems of patronage and the terminology used

to designate leaders, have been inherited by the LPRP from the pre-colonial period; a time when the region now occupied by Laos, northern Thailand, southern Myanmar and southern China was characterized by rule of *mandala* states (Evans, 2002). Kinship relations found in villages to this day, but dating back millennia, as well as systems of property rights, patronage, inheritance, etc., also feed into the contemporary leadership nexus. These ancient patterns of conduct have been overlaid by an admixture of colonial influence stemming from the period of French rule, Communist Party ideology and Russian-influenced politburo political organization and, not least, the language of ODA intervention (much of it 'English') that has come into play since 1986 when the LPRP began a programme of relative liberalization and general 'opening up' to the outside world. These historical and contemporary conditions give rise to a rich palimpsest of leadership-related terms and practices.

The case of Nollywood New Media

A poignant illustration of the all-important role that contextual and socio-cultural spaces play in shaping and impacting our understanding/practice of leadership may also be found in Nigeria's mainstream film industry. We focus here on traditional Nollywood, its earliest sphere characterised by home-video and DVD movies made in the English, and/or Igbo Language (Iwowo 2018; 2020). We draw on the example of how the enactment of indigenous leadership frameworks (in this case, the particular African leadership philosophy of *ubuntu*) in lived experience, are used to defy the hegemonic capitalist structures of Hollywood. This lived enactment of *ubuntu* is presented as a radical alternative to the hegemonic demands of Hollywood capitalism.

The capitalist leadership structures of Hollywood (Gomery 1978, 1996; Ross 2021; Sklar 1975) are supported by its history of the monopolistic 'system'. In contrast, traditional-Nollywood leadership stems from a sustained defiance to the capitalist British (neo)colonial legacy of

paternalism. This defiance subconsciously relied on the cultural values of *collective survival, shared ownership, reciprocal respect* and *humaneness* – these being manifestations of *ubuntu. Ubuntu* is that African leadership philosophy meaning 'personhood' or 'humanity' in the Bantu languages of Southern African regions, and also enunciated in iziXhoxha as '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*'. Tutu (1999: 31) unbundles this as, 'my humanity is inextricably bound up in yours'. Broadly constituting an existential philosophy of most African traditions, which prioritise the indispensability of community, hospitality, care, respect and reciprocity to interpersonal relations (Mangaliso 2001: 24; Nsube 2010: 78). this worldview centralizes collective survival, commonwealth, interconnectedness and dignity, condensed in the proverb: 'I am because, you are'. Common parlance amongst Nigerians also illuminates this philosophy: 'What affects the eyes affects the nose'. At the commencement of traditional Nollywood in 1992, this *ubuntu* character was reinforced by attempts of Nigerian filmmakers to circumvent prohibitive costs of filmmaking. By this negotiation, they trammelled the colonial legacy of dependence hitherto installed by the British to forestall the flourishing of an independent Nigerian film industry.

At the time of Nigeria's independence in 1960, its cinema was confronted by a dearth of professionally skilled filmmakers (Olusola 1965). This resulted from the paternalistic policies of the Colonial Film Unit (CFU), informed by its stereotyping of the colonised as mentally inferior. At its inception in 1939, the CFU instituted a policy of 'specialised techniques' for films made for 'primitive people' (*Colonial Cinema* 1943). These specified that sophisticated scripting, cinematography and editing be 'rigidly eschewed' in films made for the British colonies (Iwowo 2018; 37) and were perpetuated through the CFU 'Africanisation' drive, in which indigenous filmmakers were taught substandard filmmaking. However, the latter were further disadvantaged by lack of opportunities, as the CFU commissioned only British filmmakers for productions involving complex technologies and critical practice. As such, early Nigerian filmmakers were ill-equipped to tell their stories using the international

conventions of cinematic vocabulary (Olusola 1965; Diawara 1992; Obiaya 2011, and Iwowo 2018). Post-independence, Nigerian cinema subsequently sought skilled resources from the UK. This was a deliberate neo-colonial structure of leadership dependency, which crippled the cinema when Nigeria's economy collapsed in the 1980s (Obiaya 2011).

In 1992, Nigerian filmmaking enterprise was reactivated as 'traditional Nollywood', by some young Nigerian theatre and film graduates who, seeking to mediate their unemployment through productions, relied on inherited cinematic naiveté and scant equipment. Unlike their predecessors, however, these filmmakers did not look to the West for technical leadership i.e. postproduction skills, funding, or distribution; but they developed a minimalist budgetary template – combining goodwill and communal approaches to living via *ubuntu*. In demonstrating this, relatives and friends offered their homes as film locations for little or no fee, with costumes often borrowed for free. Producer Bond Emerua recalls that communities sometimes fed cast and crew for free, and sent out town-criers to solicit for extra cast members; with Nigerian retirees often happy to be cast as elders in films (Haynes 2016: 142). Reciprocally, producers were expected to respectfully utilise such goodwill and show gratitude to benefactors in film credits. This worldview equally gained expression in the general non-necessity of written contracts: Collaborators, guided by the *ubuntu* spirit and the belief in the African metaphysical laws that 'you reap what you sow', usually trusted that verbal agreements would be honoured. Consequently, product turnaround was typically swift and Producers satisfied with making slight returns on a film before moving on to next production. With this affordable style, indigenous moviemakers – leading collective action to harness resources – proliferated narratives addressing myriad socio-economic issues in Nigeria, and quickly amassed audiences across Africa, Caribbean and Western diasporic communities. Indeed, traditional Nollywood is the metaphoric child of *ubuntu*,

Thus, the industry's popularity soon displaced what was termed 'African cinema' (Iwowo 2020: 96) - that postcolonial film genre ironically hamstrung by its fidelity to (neo)colonial, production-budget standards. In this contextualisation, *ubuntu* thus challenges the predatory capitalism of colonialism, demonstrating that wealth can be collectively made, and owned if sincerity, respect, and reciprocity are prioritised. In postcolonialism one can read this as dislodging (neo-)colonial leadership.

Thus, we not only see the lived embodiment of non-Western leadership philosophy in a non-Western context but more importantly, how this underscores anticolonial/postcolonial resistance to Western hegemonic thought, i.e., capitalism and knowledge imperialism within this particular context of African filmmaking. We also see how the enactment of indigenous leadership practices unconsciously becomes a site of anti-hegemonic resistance in this context. In addition, the community action of *ubuntu* undermines the colonial idea of the 'great man'/heroic forms of leadership, in the way it harnesses collective energies within this socio-cultural context to achieve objectives. In terms of Grint's (2005) typology, this marks a shift from the colonial emphasis on the Person – the 'who' of leadership – to Process and Purpose, i.e., the 'how' and 'why' of leadership afforded by *ubuntu* philosophy. Furthermore, the harnessing of collective economic resources is resonant of what we might frame in terms of leadership-as-practice (LAP) as socio-material endeavour (Carroll et al., 2008; Raelin, 2016; Raelin et al., 2018), this approach – in its espoused ethics - arguably being consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of *ubuntu*.

Conclusion

In this chapter we began by offering an overview of the field of cross-cultural leadership studies and its emergence as a domain of enquiry in the 1980s to 1990s, paying particular attention to how its study has been shaped over time by the various scholarly perspectives that speak to it.

Moving on to its critique, we noted how the cultural turn in leadership studies was fundamentally reductionist and sweepingly ethnocentric in its dimensionalization, categorisation and simplification of leadership culture. We then sought to present alternatives that challenge accepted wisdom and mainstream hegemonic thought. Our postcolonial critique set the stage for a closer consideration of anthropological perspectives that attend to the contextual relationship between leadership and culture. In so doing, however, we were also at pains to acknowledge the darker role anthropology played in the ethnocentrism and colonial exploitation of Empire. In short, anthropology is burdened by postcolonial guilt and has sought to distance itself from its earlier positions by offering alternative and more reflexive approaches that counteract the dangers of ethnocentrism. Having made a strong case for the inexorable and intimate interrelationship between leadership and culture, we presented two cases that demonstrated how anthropologically and linguistically nuanced interpretative methods can be applied to empirical understandings of leadership phenomena. One example drew on our studies of the language and practices of leadership in Laos; the other, our research into post-colonial and anti-colonial filmmaking in Nigeria. Exemplifying *ubuntu* philosophy, the latter showcased distributed leadership and the egalitarian harnessing of collective action. In both illustrations, we attempted to foreground the importance of approaching leadership phenomena form a socio-material perspective and the potential value of applying Leadership-As-Practice theory in understanding situated leadership processes (see also chapters 2, 21 and 45 of this volume).

These examples sought to exemplify an alternative, heterodox and critical agenda that contrasts with extant mainstream approaches to the study of cross-cultural leadership; approaches which, we argued in our earlier critique, exhibit hegemonic, corporatist and Western-centric dispositions inherited from the days of Empire. Future studies of leadership, we contend

strongly, should eschew extant intellectual chains that bind them to Empire in implicit and explicit ways. Instead, when studying leadership in cultural context, perspectives need to shift radically away from the inherited gaze of the colonizer and toward indigenous sensibilities and understandings. The contemporary interpretative modes of enquiry offered by social and cultural anthropology offer the appropriate methodological equipment, linguistic sophistication and analytical nuance to redress the imbalances in research orientation that we have been at pains to point out. We trust our critical review of the current state of cross-cultural leadership studies combined with thoughts on some possible future directions and programmes of research that might be taken-up within the field provides a stimulus for fresh work on the part of interested readers.

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