

Title

Beyond authenticity: Exploring the empty image of leadership through the metaphor of water in Daoist philosophy

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Abstract (630 words)

The obsession with authenticity in academic and popular discourses around leadership has hindered critical thinking regarding alternative images of leadership, necessitating a reevaluation of leadership from post-colonial, non-western perspectives. In line with extant literature of critical leadership studies (CLS) (Alvesson and Einola, 2019; Ford and Harding, 2011; Nyberg and Sveningsson, 2014) concerning authentic leadership theory (ALT), this conceptual paper draws on Daoist philosophy to examine and question the fixation on authenticity in contemporary leadership thinking by exploring the critical potential of an ancient Chinese text, *Daodejing* (or *Laozi*). Given the radical changes and bewildering complexities faced by global leaders (Uhl-Bien, 2021a, 2021b), ALT, which combines a heroic and moral self-identity (authenticity) with a sacred realm severed from ordinary followers and organizations (leadership), appears inadequate in addressing these contemporary challenges.

Exploring the use of leadership images from the *Daodejing*, this article builds on established approaches in leadership studies of metaphors (Alvesson and Spicer, 2011) and images (Spoelstra, 2013, 2018), aiming at a Daoist rethinking of contemporary leadership phenomena that have already been discussed. In contrast to ALT, the Daoist image of leadership, exemplified by the metaphor of water, is marked by the *Leitmotif* of emptiness. This emptiness comprises two further philosophical dimensions: (1) moral emptiness and (2) productive emptiness. This is evident in water's efficacy to exist *below* and flow *between* various mundane elements and values, embracing their course of transformation and adjusting to the unfamiliar. As such, the Daoist leadership ethics associated with the empty image of water goes beyond the morally positive qualities of sincerity, transparency, self-

awareness that underpin the model of the authentic self. Instead, a Daoist leader constantly deals with a paradox that involves the negative receptivity and the critical affirmation of the changes and complexities faced by leaders and followers in contemporary organizations.

With the empty image of water in *Daodejing*, this paper aligns with a Daoist philosophy of ‘paradox politics’ (Moeller, 2006), which is further reflected in the dual relationships of leadership-followership and leadership-organization. In Daoism, the traditional antagonism between leadership and organization is transformed, with leaders embodying the role of an ‘underman’ (in contrast to Nietzschean ‘overman’) who supports and serves the organization rather than acting as a heroic figure seeking to redeem it. Furthermore, Daoist leader-follower dynamics prioritize interpersonal and interspecies attunement and learning over the portrayal of leadership as the sole possessor of wisdom responsible for guiding and transforming the followers. Instead of idealizing an authentic leadership image rooted in the paradigm of the charismatic leader (Spoelstra, 2018), this paper employs the critical image of Daoist leadership to subvert the faith in authenticity and proposes an alternative belief rooted in an embodied feminine figure, who exists *below* and *between* the mundane world, relinquishing control over followers and organizations rather than lifting them *up* to a higher sphere. Therefore, a Daoist leader eschews authenticity through an ongoing struggle with the common pitfalls of ALT, especially considering its tendencies towards excessive moralization and self-exclusion.

Overall, this paper aims to contextualize the Daoist figure of leadership in today’s leadership discourse and juxtapose it with the ALT. In so doing, the aim is to highlight the negative-receptive yet critical-affirmative dimensions of the empty image of water, which fosters the heterogeneity and contingency of organizational mundanities, thereby struggling to avoid the imposition of rigid moral authority by leaders (Johnsen, 2018; Śliwa et al., 2013). Additionally, the paper echoes the idea of continuously surpassing the anthropocentric limits of leadership, thus enhancing a leader’s affective capacity in anticipation of the future unknown that extends beyond the human (Raffnsøe and Staunæs, 2014; Staunæs and Raffnsøe, 2019). Hence, this article conceives Daoist philosophy as an avenue for reconsidering the relevance of ALT and addressing critical issues in contemporary leadership studies, situating Daoism beyond the traditional East-West dichotomy when thinking about leadership.

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Postcolonial Theory in Leadership Studies: Applying Ethical Hybridity to the University Classroom

“From where do we look upon the world and from where do we understand what we see?”
(Kamna Patel, 2020)

Power, domination and oppression have been largely unexamined among scholars who develop theories of ethical leadership (Lui, 2020). After all, most leadership research has been developed in the United States and Western Europe, where scholars can easily overlook ‘colonial’ privilege in cross-cultural settings. Leadership ethics starts with the premise that leadership is a subset of ethics rather than the other way around, and thus conceptualizes leadership as a complex relational process (Ciulla, 2014). Because leadership theory has overemphasized the leader and has reinforced the romance of leadership (Collinson, Jones & Grint, 2018), it has overlooked broader systemic factors, such as power and agentic inequalities (e.g. Tourish, 2019), including the post-colonial context. In this presentation, our purpose is to apply postcolonial theory, in particular Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridity, to leadership ethics in the familiar context of the university classroom, which is historically conducive to colonial binaries.

Postcolonial theory holds much promise for understanding leadership not just in terms of dominance but mutual influence. Edward Said’s (1978) controversial work, *Orientalism*, argued that Western European colonial discourse exoticised, essentialised, and totalised colonised cultures in contrast to a modern, rational, and civilised Western ‘Self’ in a process known as ‘othering’. This binary critique became a fundamental component of postcolonial studies. Building on Said’s thesis, Homi Bhabha (1994), a British-Indian critical theorist, sought to present a less binary, more nuanced relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, in a phenomenon he called Hybridity, or the Third Space.

Bhabha (1994) defined hybridity as “a willingness to descend into that alien territory...based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity.”(56). Hybridity presents a grey area between the two groups; not only in the influence of colonizer to colonized, but vice versa; a “transcultural form within the contact zone” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2007). Bhabha shifted the emphasis away from colonial power showing that within the contact zone, both parties are impacted by a hybrid relationality consciously and unconsciously. Brown (2018) suggested that hybridity means “taking seriously deeply held collective values, forms of knowledge and ways of life, in their dynamism, struggles and continuities, as part of a living political context.”(26). The ethical challenge within hybridity has been to understand its colonial history as a tool of racist domination (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2007) feared to dilute racial and cultural ‘purity’ (Mizutani, 2009), and find a third space that recognizes power dynamics and positionalities (e.g. gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, nationality, region, culture, access to opportunity etc.).

To provide some practical ideas to ethical hybridity, we build on previous work applying hybridity to pedagogies in cross-cultural classrooms (e.g. Williams, 2003), and leadership pedagogies such as the Case-in-Point Teaching which involve reflecting on the dynamics of the classroom as a leadership context (e.g. Parks, 2005). University professors can model good leadership, but also operate in institutions that may reinforce the same

“transformational” leader-centric missions that can normalize domination and oppression. Ethically, discourse in the classroom should avoid what philosopher Mary Midley (1981) called “moral isolationism”, the tendency to refrain from judging the ethics of another culture—positive or negative, which tends to ban moral reasoning altogether.

We conclude that hybridization is the discipline of metaphorically ‘stepping out of ones Self’ and into the Other to help foster stronger inter-relational understanding. In education this process is largely unconscious; it cannot be forced. It can be guided, however, with a relational framework of ‘conscious hybrid steps’. These include: 1) Acknowledging your power within your institutional and cultural context; 2) Knowing your positionalities; 3) Recognising your biases and fallacies; 4) Limiting in-class hierarchies; 5) Creating a ‘safe space’ for thoughtful interaction; 6) Finding commonalities between yourself and your students; 7) Critically examining the class content (e.g. readings, case studies); 8) Fostering criticism and task conflict.

Ethical hybridity is about nurturing an adaptive process that encourages mutual influence in a multi-dimensional learning environment. Reflected in constructionist relational models of leadership (Ospina & Foldy, 2010) and ethical reciprocity, it requires self-awareness in the teacher and in turn promotes self-awareness in the students. Hybridity is a phenomenon ever-present in human relations. It evolves over time, is perpetual, and with greater awareness of it, provides a powerful tool for leaders to develop stronger, healthier and more fruitful relationships.

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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL IMPACT OF THE MATANZA
OF 1932 ON THE NAHUAT-PIPIL PEOPLE OF EL SALVADOR AND THEIR COLLECTIVE EFFORT TO PRESERVE
THEIR CULTURE THROUGH THEIR EMERGING ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP.

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Abstract

My proposed paper is based on current, ongoing research of the socio-economic and political impact that the Nahuat-Pipil people's ethnocide that occurred in 1932 in El Salvador. This ethnocide is known as the "La Matanza," saw the killing of over 30,000 Nahuat Pipil indigenous people, mostly men. After the killing, the government went on to ban any vestige of indigenous culture, the remaining Nahuat-Pipil began to hide all outward signs of their cultural identity. UNESCO has raised the alarm that the language of the Nahuat Pipil is in a critical state, approximately less than 300 speakers of the language live in isolation in specific geographic areas. One of these geographic areas is Santo Domingo de Guzman where the efforts for the preservation of their culture is being led by a collective and organized entrepreneurship effort of interacting, intergenerational dynamics between artisan women, men and the elder council. This emergent leadership effort can produce the outcomes necessary to develop and sustain the community while preserving their culture, reconceiving and reigniting their leadership by 1. Interconnecting with the crucial stakeholders such as the government and their resources. 2. Creating a model for self-authored economic development that is sustainable and respectful of their culture and 3. Creating a global "window" based on relational influence. The artisans of the community in Santo Domingo de Guzmán are the only viable option for mitigating the socio-economic and cultural impacts of the Matanza of 1932 of the survivors of the Nahuat Pipil communities and specifically, its correlation with the threat of the disappearance of their original language and overall culture. The research for the paper is based on an intersectional approach of an exploratory ethnological case study anchored on a conceptual framework of social justice, Indigenous method and theory (IMT), critical indigenous theory, phenomenology and the 4Rs (respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that undergirds the paper includes cultural genocide, ethnocide, relational research accountability, transformative enquiry, indigenous mobilization, indigenous rights, colonialism, ethnohistory, sociolinguistics, language revitalization, social justice and international visibility. My conceptual framework seeks to: 1. To bridge the debate on the frame of analysis between the concepts of ethnocide and cultural genocide by highlighting the sequential of systemic ethnic cleansing. 2. To design model to discover the systemic correlation between ethnocide and cultural genocide. 3. To create a critical framework to describe and assess the indigenous cultural degeneration of the Nahuat Pipil as a result of past and ongoing government policies. 4. To highlight the crucial role of cultural revitalization as intervention. 5. To utilize narrative inquiry for unique perspectives and deeper understanding of the artisans of the community for the creation of an economic development model that is self-led and sustainable.

Figure 1.

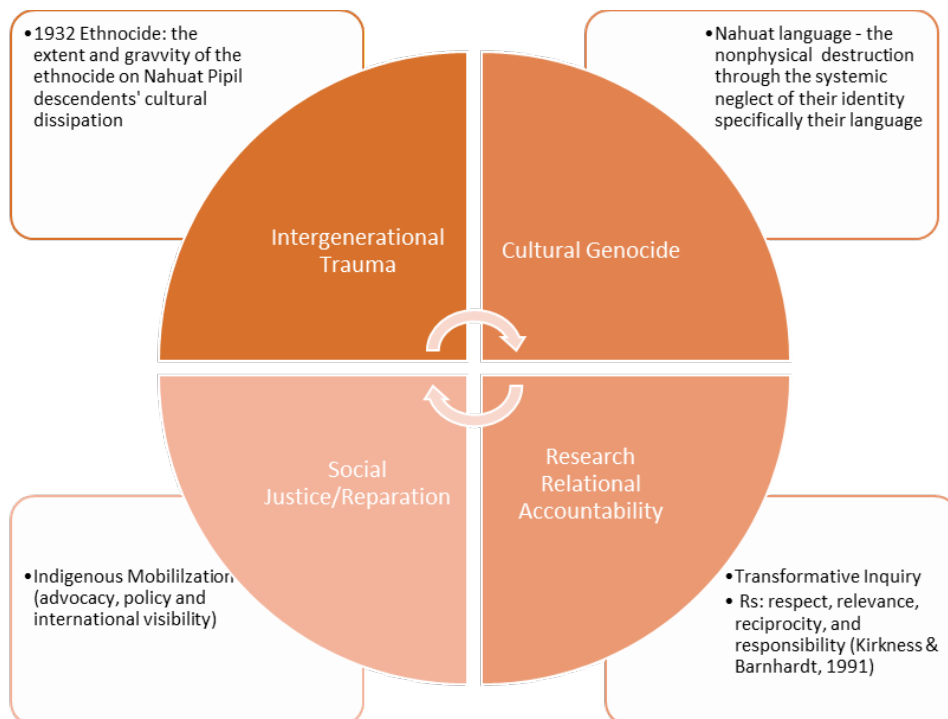
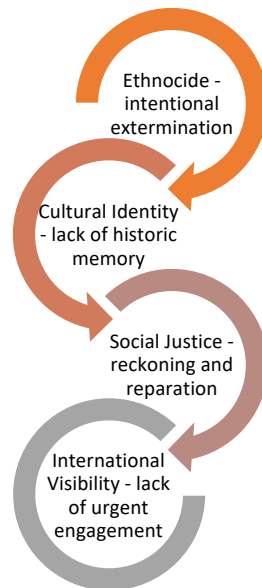


Figure 2.



Philosophical Model

The philosophical model for my research is centered on the acknowledgment of the Matanza of 1932 as the systemic colonizing oppressive instrument that is designed to sequentially complete the annihilation of an ethnic minority group. Cultural genocide through the exclusion, socio-economic oppression and the cultural dissipation specifically the disappearance of the Nahuat language, is the continuous colonizing state building strategy to exterminate the Nahuat Pipil people. My ethnological approach is anchored in my sense of social justice and respect for diversity, autonomy, freedom, cultural identity and historic memory. I believe in reckoning with the injustice committed against the Nahuat Pipil people. The use of research relational accountability safeguards the authenticity and validity of the story of the Nahuat Pipil people. The objective is to model the respect and responsibility we, collectively as a nation (globally) owe to the Nahuat Pipil people. This moral commitment is part of my code of values and principles. My perspective on colonialism, systemic cultural genocide and the pervasive conformation of an exclusive society through the facilitation of a criminal Salvadoran state, frames the purpose for this research. I am also aware of an existent level of bias because of my own experience with

salvadoran cultural dissonance. My personal transnational leadership journey also influences my desire to facilitate the platform for self-advocacy, mobilization and reparation for social justice through the exposure of the Nahuat-Pipil people's collective leadership model to preserve their cultural identity.