

A postcolonial *and* anti-colonial reading of 'African' leadership and management in organization studies: Tensions, contradictions and possibilities

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Abstract

This article reports on a postcolonial and anti-colonial reading of representations of 'African' leadership and management in organization studies. The resulting analysis revealed tensions and contradictions between stereotypical colonial images of 'African' leadership and management and proposed counter-images that often reflect the excesses of cultural relativism. Finding alternatives between colonized representations and counter-representations is not an easy project. This article extends existing postcolonial scholarship in organization studies which has relied primarily upon the seminal trinity of Said, Spivak, and Bhabha by incorporating anti-colonial and nationalist thought found primarily in the work of Fanon, Césaire and Senghor.

Keywords

African leadership, African management, anti-colonialism, cultural identity, hybridity, postcolonialism, postcolonialism and organization studies

Western interpreters as well as African analysts have been using categories and conceptual systems which depend on a Western epistemological order. Even in the most explicitly 'Afrocentric' descriptions, models of analysis explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly, refer to the same order. (Y. V. Mudimbe, 1988: x)

This article is the product of a reflective journey instigated by a specific event: my anxiety about whether 20 years of teaching leadership and management in the United States would serve me well in South Africa, my new home. That anxiety dissipated when I arrived only to find there was little

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adjustment required since the texts prescribed for the leadership modules assigned to me were all from the United States and more than familiar. Despite a rather perverse sense of momentary relief, engagement with my students was unsettling. Students were not receptive to hearing how Jack Welch transformed General Electric. The leadership and management prescriptions in the texts were grossly inadequate, embarrassingly so, for the kinds of questions and issues students raised. Lest I sound naïve, it is one thing to theoretically understand the hegemony of Western conceptualizations of leadership and management but encountering it was jolting. So I embarked upon a search for ‘African’¹ leadership and management.

This article offers a postcolonial² and anti-colonial reading of what I found and still am learning, surfacing the tensions, contradictions and possibilities for *re-writing* ‘African’ leadership and management into the field of organization studies. While my search revealed Africa was all but invisible in the mainstream leadership and management literature, I also found a body of literature that has arisen in response to the exclusion and marginalization of Africa in the leadership and management discourse. Yet, these alternative representations often unwittingly preserve, even as they attempt to overcome, the ideological coding of Western (primarily USA) conceptions of leadership and management.

The significance of this article lies beyond this subjective motivation. Its importance is underscored by two interconnected discourses. First, transformative change is a dominant discourse on the African continent today. Leaders in Africa continue to grapple with the persistent challenges associated with unequal development and marginalization. The New Partnership for Africa’s Development initiated by the Organization of African Unity’s successor, the African Union, and the call for an African Renaissance reflect a growing discourse among some African leaders and academics that Africa must solve its own problems and look within for answers (Adibe, 2004; Makgoba, 1999; Venter and Neuland, 2005). Effective leadership and management are often touted as the key to the transformation of the continent (Khoza, 2006; van Rensburg, 2007).

The same conclusion is reached from a different chorus of voices. Much of the development discourse, the various ranking systems for measuring country progress, and Afro-pessimists represent Africa as a failure (Ayittey, 1998; *The Economist*, 2000). African states are described as ‘irremediably corrupt’; ‘hopeless’; ‘criminal’; ‘ungovernable’ or generally in ‘chaos’ (Andreasson, 2005; DeMaria, 2008; Harris et al., 2004; Martin, 2008). The cause of these maladies is often attributed to the inherent inadequacy of leadership and governance (Andreasson, 2005; World Bank, 2000). Ironically, the discourse of renaissance and the discourse of failure share the same episteme. Although coming from very different sources both reduce the causes of Africa’s contemporary problems to a crisis in leadership and management. This dangerous reductionism overlooks the significance of what Mudimbe (1988: 2) refers to as the all-embracing marginality of Africa, produced by the tripartite elements of colonizing structures that dominated physical space, the reformation of natives’ minds, and the integration of local economic histories into the Western perspective. This is not to say Africa’s problems are nonexistent and that leadership and management are irrelevant. But there is a need to recognize that problems of the continent are located firmly in Africa’s colonial past as well as in its postcolonial present (Ahluwalia, 2001). Any effort to proffer a leadership and management solution for the continent must be interrogated within this reality.

The research in this article focused on two questions: (1) How is ‘African’ leadership and management portrayed in organization studies literature? (2) What are the possibilities for *re-writing* ‘African’ leadership and management in organization studies? These questions are ultimately concerned with problems of representation, identity, agency, and resistance—of how difference is represented both in the sense of representation as depiction and representation as speaking for (Gunew, 1998).

To interrogate these questions, I extend existing postcolonial scholarship in organization studies which has primarily relied upon the seminal trinity of Said, Spivak, and Bhabha by incorporating anti-colonial and nationalist thought found in the work of Fanon, Césaire, Senghor as well as what Ahluwalia (2001) refers to as contemporary African inflections on postcolonial theory (Appiah, 1992; Mbembe, 1992, 2001, 2002a, 2002b; Mudimbe, 1988). Appiah, Mbembe and Mudimbe have been referred to as an ‘African’ trinity in postcolonial studies (Werbner, 1996).

Only recently have organizational scholars turned to postcolonialism as a theoretical lens for critically interrogating management and organization studies (Calás and Smircich, 1999; Özkazanç-Pan, 2008; Prasad, 2003; Westwood and Jack, 2007). It has been used to reveal the colonial and neo-colonial assumptions that underline management and international management (e.g. Fougère and Moulettes, 2009; Frenkel and Shenhav, 2006; Jack and Westwood, 2009; Özkazanç-Pan, 2008; Westwood, 2006); cross-cultural and comparative management (e.g. Kwek, 2003; Moulettes, 2007; Westwood, 2001); globalization (Banerjee et al., 2009); workplace diversity (Prasad, 2006); organization control (Mir et al., 2003); workplace resistance (e.g. Ong, 1987; Prasad and Prasad, 2003); silencing of the ‘Other’; (Calás, 1992); and organization culture (Cooke, 2003). A few contributions have focused on Africa. Long and Mills (2008) examine the impact of postcolonial organizational thought on the conception and treatment of the Rwandan people during the 1993–1994 genocide. Nyathi (2009) explored the possibilities of African anti-colonial thought for re-thinking organization theory.

Thus, the contribution of this article is opening up postcolonial discourse in organization studies by bringing anti-colonial thought to understanding the particular ways in which leadership and management in Africa have been represented.

Postcolonial theory and anti-colonial thought

This section attempts to link the concerns and critiques of postcolonial theory and anti-colonial thought. However, at the same time it demonstrates why African anti-colonialism is essential to understanding the particular form of colonialism in Africa and resistance to it. Postcolonial theory is extensive and diverse because it covers a diffuse set of intellectual positions and practices (Ashcroft et al., 2006; Dirlik, 1994; Ghandhi, 1998; Loomba, 2005; Young, 2001). This heterogeneity is partly due to the interdisciplinary nature of postcolonial studies which ranges from literary and cultural studies to economics and political science as well as its diverse theoretical underpinnings (Loomba, 2005). It also draws from a diverse set of theoretical agendas, including post-structuralism/post-modernism, feminism, Marxism, and psychoanalysis (Young, 2001). The heterogeneity of postcolonial studies has given rise to several debates about its relevancy.

One debate has been the relevancy and utility of postcolonial theory to Africa. Some scholars have argued that its post-structural/post-modern orientations and reliance on discursive practices leaves little to assist in addressing material realities in Africa. Williams (1997: 831) contends this is due to the omission of an ‘authentic and well sustained African input’ into postcolonialism. On the other hand, Ahluwalia (2001: 9) while recognizing that Africa has been curiously silent in some postcolonial theory formulations, argues that it is postcolonialism’s challenge to and reconfiguration of dominant narratives which makes it a particularly empowering discourse for those who have been marginalized. He also argues that adopting a postcolonial lens to understand colonialism in Africa does not reject the importance of other theoretical formulations emanating from earlier works on anti-colonialism, *négritude* and nationalism. Instead, Ahluwalia (2001) believes the question of identity prominently raised in these earlier works is indeed the link to postcolonial studies. Young (2001: 68) offers an explicit statement about the significance and relevance of these

works: 'Although postcolonial theorists have typically been select with respect to their interest in third world anti-colonial thinking of the past, they owe everything to these critiques of imperialism and the ideological system that underpinned it'. Young (2001: 253) positions Francophone African socialism as one of the closest immediate precursors of postcolonial theory.

African anti-colonialism in the form of an intellectual, political, philosophical and cultural response to European colonial rule is a complex formulation that spanned geography, time and different ideological positions (Young, 2001). This short review cannot do justice to its density. Négritude, Pan Africanism, African Socialism, and African Humanism represent the most prominent forms of African nationalism. Anti-colonialism was a diasporic undertaking that forged a tri-continental link of struggles of people of African descent across America, the Caribbean and Africa or what Gilroy has labelled the 'Black Atlantic' (Gilroy, 1993).

Colonization in Africa and elsewhere was not just about a scramble for markets, labour and other resources (Ahluwalia, 2001; Olaniyan, 2005). It also meant the newly acquired colonies had to be re-inscribed in European discourse (Ahluwalia, 2001; Said, 1979). Africa could only be incorporated unequally into the orbit of the West (Olaniyan, 2005). Everything 'African' was represented as negative while everything positive was European. Mudimbe (1988) argues the reformation of the natives' minds was designed to socialize Africans to despise their history, culture and themselves—their very blackness. Black people were dehumanized and represented as a race not fit to be members of the civilized world (Césaire, 1972). Anti-colonial activists created new and powerful identities to challenge colonialism not only on a political or intellectual level but also on an emotional plane (Lomba, 2005; Moore-Gilbert et al., 1997). The most prominent among these efforts are found in the work of Léopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon. Although there are differences in their oppositional strategies, all engaged in resistance to colonization or what Said (1993) terms making the *voyage in* mixing with, transforming, and imposing upon the discourse of Europe and the West.

The négritude movement of the 1930s, advocated primarily by Léopold Senghor, owes its name to the Martiniquan poet and activist, Aimé Césaire who declared its very naming an act of defiance (Ahluwalia, 2001; Young, 2001). Although négritude would prove to be a contentious ideology that still fuels heated debates about its essentialism, it is viewed as a significant effort to resist Europe's representations of Africa in a critical fashion (Ahluwalia, 2001; Appiah, 1992; Ashcroft, 1997; Moore-Gilbert et al., 1997). Négritude was at its core about returning to Africans a humanity that had been denied in the colonial process of representing them as the 'Other'. For Senghor, négritude comprised the totality of African cultural values and personality (Senghor, 1994).

In his writings, Senghor articulated not only the uniqueness of African culture but also its value to the world (Young, 2001). Négritude did not contest the colonial idea of 'race' but used it to celebrate blackness and black culture (Appiah, 1992). The negative traits the colonizers had ascribed to Africans—sensuality, rhythm, earthiness, mysticism, communalism—were transformed into positive markers of humanity in Senghor's négritude (Ahluwalia, 2001; Young, 2001). An often cited quote from Senghor illustrates how he conceptualized the central difference between the cultures of Europe and Africa: 'I think, therefore I am, wrote Descartes, "... I feel. I dance the other" the Negro-African would say' (Senghor, quoted in Irele, 1981: 77). Chatterjee (1993: 17) argues 'in order for anti-colonial nationalism to be authentically anti-colonial, it had to liberate itself from post-Enlightenment rationalistic frameworks of thought or the "cunning of reason"'.

Négritude has been heavily criticized as reinforcing instead of negating the idea of race, a fake philosophy based on the idea of an imagined Africa, the worst form of essentialism, contradictory, and a low ebb in dialectical progression (Appiah, 1992; Mbembe, 2002b; Mphahlele, 1974; Parry, 2000; Sartre, 1963). However, négritude was not just about forging a pan-African autonomous

identity, it was also to be in the service of an African socialism rooted in traditional values and cultural practices that would liberate the continent from Western capitalism and materialism (Mbembe, 2002a; Senghor, 1994; Young, 2001). As Loomba (2005) has noted anti-colonial intellectuals like Senghor were not just interested in questioning colonial discourse but also in the possibility of social change. In his later years, Senghor appears to have adopted a hybrid view on African identity arguing that African society was economically and culturally mixed with African and European contributions. He called for '*enracinement et ouverture*', recognizing African socialism had to be rooted in the local context and culture but at the same time open to outside challenges and influences (Senghor, 1964).

While Senghor's nationalism focused on establishing a collective positive cultural identity for Africans, Césaire's contributions were about unpacking European colonialism and debunking all claims and forms of logic the colonizer offered as evidence of the naturalness of the imperialist colonization of Africa (Ahluwalia, 2001: 27). He was less interested in asserting an African identity and even in later years distanced himself from Senghor's conceptualization of *négritude*. For Césaire, *négritude* was expressed as a weapon against the power and racism of European colonialism (Moore-Gilbert et al., 1997). In *Discourse on Colonialism* (1972) he offers a rigorous critique of colonialism unmasking its many contradictions. For example, he argued the pseudo-humanism of the West expressed as bringing civilization to Africa, was nothing more than a means to dehumanize and objectify the 'Other'. His critique demonstrated how colonization works to decivilize the colonizer (Ahluwalia, 2001). Yet, Césaire did not totally reject the idea of humanism but believed a humanism philosophy for the world did not yet exist and had to be articulated (Loomba, 2005).

Frantz Fanon's name is perhaps most associated with theorizing about anti-colonial resistance because of his direct affiliation with the Algerian struggle for liberation (Young, 2001). All of his writings including his well-known books *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Wretched of the Earth* focus on questions of resistance. Trained as a psychiatrist, Fanon detailed the cultural and ideological processes and practices of colonialism that created responses of assimilation and self-alienation in Africans (Moore-Gilbert et al., 1997). The act of surfacing these processes and his linking of mental disorders with imperialist domination was a form of resistance to colonialism as being good for the 'natives' (Moore-Gilbert et al., 1997: 12). Fanon suggested the first level of resistance for subjugated peoples is a subjective understanding of oppression and its effects. This was important because as Hall (1990) points out the dominant regimes of representation had the power to make the colonized view and experience themselves as the 'Other' and to internalize inferiority. Fanon's analysis of the human experience of colonialism was not limited to the subjective realm but was also centred in the exploitative economic motive of colonialism. According to Young (2001: 275) 'the concern in postcolonial writing with individual human experience and cultural identity alongside the more objective field of history is partly the result of the influence of Fanon himself ...'.

Fanon's writings reveal a complex and ambivalent relationship to *négritude*. While he embraced the idea of a positive cultural identity for Africans, Fanon was leery of the idea of an essentialist African identity (Loomba, 2005). Ahluwalia (2001: 26) asserts Spivak's concept of *strategic essentialism* resonates strongly with Fanon's view that essentialist forms of cultural identity may be important to transcending the assimilation effects of colonialism so as to develop a decolonized subjectivity. But Fanon was keenly aware of the complexities of developing a viable non-essentialist nationalism rooted in culture. Scholars argue that through his arguments in *Wretched of the Earth*, largely based on the Algerian colonial and anti-colonial experience, he achieved the dialectic of universal and local to articulate the essence of colonialism and decolonization avoiding the racial emphasis of his contemporaries (Moore-Gilbert et al., 1997; Said, 1993; Young, 2001). Fanon's conception of the interconnectedness of people within global relations is reflected in his assertion:

'The future of every man (sic) today has a relation of close dependency on the rest of the universe. That is why the colonized peoples must redouble their vigilance and their vigor. A new humanism can be achieved only at this price' (Fanon, 1967: 126).

The contributions of Senghor, Césaire and Fanon must be viewed within the different intellectual and political currents in play at the time. Berger (2004: 9) argues that anti-colonial nationalists attempted to mesh highly romanticized interpretations of African pre-colonial traditions and cultures with the utopianism embodied by Marxism and socialism and 'Western' visions of modernization and development more generally. Mbembe (2002a: 256) argues that the colonizers' denial of the humanity of Africans forced African responses into contradictory positions that were, however, often concurrently espoused. One position was particularistic and attempted to establish the uniqueness of African identity predicated on a pre-colonial African culture. There was also the universalistic argument that Africans were human like others. According to Mbembe (2002a), the former became the rationale for arguing the latter.

The discourse of anti-colonial nationalism, then, reveals the complex and slippery slope for those who attempted to forge a means of resisting the hegemonic effects of European colonialism on the subjectivities and representations of colonial African subjects. The research in this article suggests a *déjà vu* experience in respect to contemporary representations of leadership and management in Africa. On the one hand, the dominant portrayal of 'African' leadership and management in the mainstream literature is one of deficiency rooted in essentialist racial and colonial stereotypes of Africa. On the other hand, the counter narratives offered in response to these dominant portrayals often evoke a unique 'African' identity also predicated on essentialism and a recovery of the grandeur of pre-colonial Africa reminiscent of some anti-colonial discourse. Instead of disrupting the dominant discourse, these alternative representations end up reinforcing 'African' otherness, retarding progress towards an emancipatory discourse about leadership and management in Africa.

Methodology

In my search for 'African' leadership and management, I reviewed the organization studies literature. I analysed two types of texts: journal articles and books. Journal articles were identified through computerized library searches of three electronic data bases: Academic Search Elite, ABI/Inform Global, and Emerald. I searched for full-text scholarly articles through 2008 using the terms 'Africa and leadership' and 'Africa and management'. The search was further filtered by only including articles published in management and organization studies journals. Leadership and management textbooks were identified through a search of the library catalogue as well as my subjective knowledge of the market. Edition of the book was used as a proxy for influence and dominance of a book. The management and leadership textbooks analysed were Daft (2008); Griffin (2008); Robbins and De Cenzo (2008); Hellriegel et al., 2008; and Yukl (2006). One of the texts, Griffin (2008), makes reference to the fact that 1.5 million students have used the textbook since 1984.

The library catalogue was also searched for scholarly books on leadership and management in Africa supplemented again by my knowledge of books in the field of management and leadership. Indices of these general texts were searched for reference to leadership and/or management in Africa. It is possible some references to African leadership and management were omitted in my search. However, the use of multiple sources provides some confidence that what was found is representative of the body of knowledge on 'African' leadership and management in organization studies.

All of the texts uncovered were read and a content analysis was employed. This analysis allowed me to sort the texts into four categories based on the core content/themes of the texts (Klenke, 2008). I also made use of the key words of journal articles in the sorting process. Once the texts were sorted, I then performed a critical analysis of the discourse to identify the representations and images of 'African' leadership and management within each category. My critical analysis was guided by three questions: (1) How is leadership and management in Africa being represented? (2) Who is the 'author' of the representation? and (3) What is/are the ideology/ideologies underlying the representation?

'African' leadership and management in organization studies literature

An overall impression is the general scarcity of texts, materials and references to Africa in organization studies—it is largely invisible. This is not at all surprising. Theories of leadership and management have generally omitted the voice of the racial 'Other' whether it is Africans or other non-Western perspectives (Calás, 1992; Jack and Westwood, 2009; Nkomo, 1992; Prasad, 1997, 2006; Westwood, 2006). Western leadership and management discourse has typically set up its authorial subjects as the implicit reference and yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural 'Others' (Said, 1979). Jack and Westwood (2009) have demonstrated the same tendency for inter-national and cross-cultural comparative management studies.

Leadership theory emanates primarily from the United States based on studies of American leaders (House and Aditya, 1997). Yet, leadership theory is largely represented as universal and scholars often do not notice the 'universal' is indeed specific. Minnick (1990) labels this faulty generalization or non-inclusive universalization as a significant error in the production of knowledge. The error occurs when one group is studied but the knowledge generated then represents the whole concept—leadership. The prefix 'American' is suppressed when we speak of leadership theory or management theory in organization studies. In contrast, the 'Other' who speaks or writes about leadership must always attach the prefix 'African' to any discussions of leadership and management.

In terms of reference to specific African leaders, Nelson Mandela is frequently cited as an example of extraordinary transformational leadership or portrayed as the epitome of servant leadership. Former South African President Thabo Mbeki is given as an example of *rigid leadership* in Barbara Kellerman's (2004) book *Bad Leadership*. Shaka Zulu is used by well-known leadership scholar Manfred Kets de Vries (2004) to demonstrate the nature of despotic leadership in his book *Lessons on Leadership by Terror: Finding Shaka Zulu in the Attic*.

In addition to these minor references to African leaders, other representations fell into four broad categories. First, there is a body of literature under the general rubric of what is known as *African management development* (Jackson, 2004). This body of literature focuses on the need for capable leadership and management in Africa and arose contemporaneously with development management studies. The second category is a body of work on national culture that has become quite prominent in recent years. These texts examine 'African' leadership and management in the context of describing Africa's national culture primarily within Geert Hofstede's (1980) seminal typology or GLOBE's more current framework (House et al., 2004). The third category consists of representations of 'African' leadership and management that appear in discussions of *precursors* to management theory in popular management textbooks (e.g. Griffin 2008). Finally, there is a small but growing body of literature on 'African' management philosophy authored primarily by African scholars. The representations found in each of these categories are now analysed more fully.

African management development

In this body of literature, the portrayal of African leadership and management is one of deficiency and incapacity (e.g. Harbison and Myers, 1959; Kiggundu, 1989, 1991; Safavi, 1981; Waiguchu et al., 1999). It is important to understand the origins of this literature. The emergence of attention to 'African' management in the management and organization studies coincides with the rise of development management studies. Cooke (2003) has argued that despite its disciplinary separation, development management has direct connections to management. This connection is concretely demonstrated by the appearance of 'management' texts focusing on management in developing countries. Relevant to the present project are such notable texts as Blunt and Jones' (1992) *Managing Organizations in Africa*; Kiggundu's (1989)³ *Managing Organizations in Developing Countries: An Operational and Strategic Approach*; and Harbison and Myers' (1959) *Management in the Industrial World: An International Analysis* (Jackson, 2004; Jack and Westwood, 2009). In their book, Harbison and Myers (1959: 117) argued for the logic of industrialization and sought to demonstrate the applicability of management to both advanced and industrialized countries. Indeed, the book was part of a larger project, The Inter-University Study of Labor Problems in Economic Development, funded by the Ford Foundation. Jack and Westwood (2009) point out how this project signified the emergence and growth of international and cross-cultural management studies.

The common denominator of both development management studies and management studies in developing countries is a narrative of underdevelopment of Africa (and the Third World) which justified intervention by the West or as Cooke (2004) argues to bring First World management to the pre-modern, deficient Third World. Development studies was a direct product of the decolonization process unfolding in Asia, North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa and approaches to their economic and social development were the means used by the West to ensure enfoldment of these regions within the emergent capitalist order (Jack and Westwood, 2009: 125). Gupta (1998: 45) sums up approaches to development management in underdeveloped countries as 'Orientalism transformed into a science for action'.

One of the earliest published articles on management development was published in the *Academy of Management Review* in 1981. Safavi (1981: 319) argues that 'the inability of African nations to train capable managers for major institutions has been the main inhibitive factor to real economic and social development'. Unequivocal statements like, 'Unfortunately, the African civil service has lost the capacity to manage' appear in the text.

Safavi (1981) admits painting a rather gloomy picture of management development education in Africa and offers a model for improvement. His model underscores the conflict between African socioeconomic status (i.e. culture, limited resources, poverty and under education) and the use of Western knowledge in management development. In a similar fashion, Kiggundu (1991) also points to the lack of high-level managerial skills as one of the main reasons for Africa's underdevelopment and lack of economic, social, and political progress. Ironically, although the authors tend to point to the legacy of colonialism in the underdevelopment of managerial talent and the inappropriate fit between African contexts and Western ideas of management and administration, their prescriptions often call for more Western ideas and approaches to management. For example, Kiggundu (1991) calls for the development of skills in strategic management, negotiation, resource development and utilization, operations management, production and administration, and cross-cultural interactions and communications. The authors rely primarily upon Western benchmarks for their evaluation of and prescriptions for 'African' leadership and management.

We see a parallel line of argument in development management studies. In response to critiques of the ineffectiveness of development projects, the World Bank commissioned a research program examining institutional capacity building in Sub-Saharan Africa. The results of the research were published in a book entitled, *Africa's Management in the 1990s and Beyond: Reconciling Indigenous and Transplanted Institutions* (Dia, 1996). In calling for a better connection between the societal culture of Africa and development management, Dia (1996) built upon Hofstede's research to describe how 'African' culture differed from the West. Dia's call among other factors contributed to the rise of a number of non-governmental local agencies. Instead of representing a decolonizing project, these NGOs primarily funded by official aid agencies and multilateral funding giants like the World Bank, have largely become the new compradors—continuing the work of their precursors (Hearn, 2007). Thus, the so-called 'Africanization' of NGOs in the 1990s can be viewed as an extension of the colonial project.

The representation of 'African' management development ends up perpetuating the binary categories of developed vs. developing and largely reinforces Western management and leadership as *the* solution to complex social, economic and political problems of the continent (Cooke, 2004; Jack and Westwood, 2009). More importantly, the discourse suggests 'African' leadership and management fails because of its inability to incorporate Western management practices into its 'chaotic' state. This keeps the hegemony of Western prescriptions for leadership and management in tact and reinforces the natural weakness and incapacity of Africans to lead or what Said (1979) labels the *reductive repetition motif* in his analysis of the Western representations of Islamic cultures as hopelessly deficient. The reductive repetition found in this representation of 'African' leadership and management reduces management development problems in Africa to a core set of fatal deficiencies whose solutions can only be externally devised (Andreasson, 2005).

Leadership and management literature on national culture

Representations of 'African' leadership and management can also be found in the extensive body of research on national culture in the organization studies literature (e.g. Hofstede, 1993; Zagorsek et al., 2004). The underlying argument of this work is the observation that US theories of leadership and management may not apply outside the borders of the United States because of differences in national culture. One of the most dominant models of this research has been the work of Geert Hofstede. A number of critiques exist of Hofstede's work (e.g. Ailon, 2008; Kwek, 2003). My analysis is specific to his representation of Africa. In a 1993 article, Hofstede (p. 87) makes reference to Africa in a section labelled 'management transfer to poor countries'. Specifically, he writes:

There is a broad regional pecking order with East Asia leading. The little dragons have passed into the camp of the wealthy; then follow Southeast Asia (with its overseas Chinese minorities), Latin America (in spite of the debt crisis), South Asia, and *Africa always trails behind.* (emphasis added)

Again, the representation reinforces the idea of Africa permanently stuck in underdevelopment, unable to join modernity. A table in the text of the article is quite telling. In the table, Hofstede lists the national culture dimensions scores of ten *countries*. 'West Africa' is listed as one of the ten countries (the other countries listed are United States, Germany, Japan, France, Netherlands, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Russia and China). There is *no* footnote indicating 'West Africa' is a region of a continent and not a country, leaving one sceptical of Hofstede's awareness of the error.

This error reflects a general tendency in the literature on national culture as well as in the international and cross-cultural management literature (Jack and Westwood, 2009). While authors argue for particularism and uniqueness of national cultures, very often broad generalizations prevail. The cultural identity of a single country or a few countries is taken to represent the whole. The recent seminal Globe Study of 62 nations conducted by Robert House and a group of international scholars also reflects this tendency, not only in regard to Africa but generally. There is reference to the culture of 'sub-Saharan Africa' (which consists of 53 countries) when only five African countries are included in the study (House et al., 2004). Researchers remain oblivious to the different colonial histories of countries lumped together in a single region, relying instead primarily on geographical contiguity.

'African' leadership and management in management textbooks

The management textbooks reviewed also make reference to management in Africa although not explicitly (e.g. see Griffin, 2008). The representations most often appear in sections discussing management history and its origins. Typically, the reference is to the building of the great pyramids in Egypt as an example of the existence of management in antiquity. George's (1968: 4–5, 8) publication, *The History of Management Thought*, offers a more telling in-depth discussion of ancient Egyptian management:

The building of the pyramids with a technology that would be considered primitive by modern standards, affords us testimony of the managerial and organizational abilities of ancient Egypt ... The managerial planning of where the stones were to be quarried, when, what size, and how they were to be transported required the practice of what today might well be called long-range planning ... They understood and appreciated, for example, managerial authority and responsibility, and they recognized the value of spelling out job descriptions in detail. 'If control via records and paper is the hallmark of an advanced civilization, the Egyptians of the New Empire would have to be considered civilized indeed'.

The text has an undertone of astonishment at the degree to which management existed in Egypt and a begrudging inclusion in advanced civilization. In a chapter on management in Egypt, Harbison and Myers (1959: 158) assert 'there is little managerial experience or tradition in the country' which makes delegating responsibility difficult. Other than the reference to Egypt, 'African' leadership and management is largely invisible in management textbooks. What is also problematic is the notion that management practised in Egypt was 'pre-scientific' (Ezzamel, 2004). Discussions of 'precursors to management theory' in the texts are typically followed by a formal treatment of management theory as represented by classical management theory and scientific management theory (e.g. Griffin, 2008: 32). In these texts, there is no reference to the other great ancient civilizations in Africa (e.g. Timbuktu, Songhai, Empire of Mali, and Mapungubwe). Riad (2005) would suggest this is consistent with the tendency to position ancient Egypt as the only country on the African continent relevant to the recorded history of all knowledge. The uniform manner in which management textbooks distinguish between pre-scientific management and formal management suggests a binary inferior relationship between Western development of management and management and leadership that existed in Africa.

This representation also fails to acknowledge the hybrid nature of the colonial encounter by positioning formal management theory as pure and without antecedents (Bhabha, 1994; Cooke, 2003; Frenkel and Shenhav, 2006). For example, theories of change management, group dynamics, and participatory management have colonial roots in Africa and Asia (Cooke, 1999). A

more contemporary example is Bernie Bass's acknowledgement that his idea for the concept of transformational leadership arose after talking with a group of South African managers when he visited the country in the 1980s (Hooijberg and Choi, 2000).

African management philosophy

In the last few years a body of literature has arisen in response to Africa's relegation to the margins of leadership and management research as well as practice. This body of knowledge has become known as *African management philosophy*. Edoho (2001: 74) defines *African management philosophy* as:

The practical way of thinking about how to effectively run organizations—be they in the public or private sectors—on the basis of *African* (emphasis mine) ideas and in terms of how social and economic life is actually experienced in the region. Such thinking must be necessarily interwoven with the daily existence and experience in Africa and its contextual reality.

Proponents of African management philosophy argue that Africa's effort to engineer authentic development will continue to be unsuccessful until endogenous leadership and management systems are established and institutionalized (Anyansi-Archibong, 2001; Blunt and Jones, 1997; Boon, 1996; Dia, 1996; Edoho, 2001; Mangaliso, 2001; Mbigi, 1997, 2005; Mbigi and Maree, 1995; Ngambi, 2004; van der Coff, 2003). The call for endogenous approaches to management and leadership falls within a broader discourse that seeks to reclaim the aesthetics and identity of Africans (Makgoba, 1999; Mbeki, 1998).

A major question driving the field is: If Africa was better managed in the past, what went wrong and how can it be *reclaimed*? Colonialism is identified as the culprit for the often corrupt and ineffective leadership and management of organizations in many African countries today. The underlying belief is that if indigenous 'African' leadership and management can be *reclaimed* and *reinstitutionalized* in Africa, there would be a positive effect on resolving the significant problems facing the continent. African management philosophy scholars argue that Eurocentric practices are inadequate because leadership and management challenges in Africa are embedded in a very different cultural, political, economic and social context (Blunt and Jones, 1997; Horwitz, 2002; Jackson, 2004). In the development management literature, there was a corollary call for an *indigenization solution* or *cultural turn* to development anchored in local cultures and values of the continent (Dia, 1996).

Beginning with the work of Nzelibe (1986), a number of articles and books have been written arguing for a rejection and/or limitation of Western management thought and practice in Africa and the adoption and incorporation of African philosophy into management (Anyansi-Archibong, 2001; Edoho, 2001; Khoza, 2006; Mbigi, 1997, 2005; Ngambi, 2004). The belief that colonialism brought management to Africa is rejected by these scholars. In fact, these scholars argue the importation of scientific management (Taylorism) and European notions of administration and bureaucracy disrupted and essentially clashed with 'African' management thought and practice. Nzelibe (1986: 9) states:

Development of the principles of management was marred, however, by contact with the Western world, contact marked by decades of economic exploitation, social oppression and the importation of scientific management, all of which have left acute problems for management today.

Kiggundu (1991) suggests that during colonization the various colonial powers first destroyed or denigrated local institutions and management practices, and then replaced them with their own colonial administrative systems out of the belief in Western cultural, biological and technological superiority over Africans. Africans were developed only to the extent of carrying out lower level administrative tasks as civil servants in colonial governments. Higher-level management skills of Africans were not developed because they were not expected to assume managerial and leadership responsibilities. At the independence of many African states, few Africans were trained to assume high-level management positions in modern post-colonial states (Blunt and Jones, 1992; Dia, 1996; Kiggundu, 1991; Rodney, 1974).

Proponents of 'African' management philosophy often look to the history of Africa and the presence of indigenous knowledge systems that resulted in effective management during the pre-colonial era (Edoho, 2001; Kiggundu, 1991; Ngambi, 2004; Nzelibe, 1986). Although descriptions of leadership and management during the pre-colonial period remain problematic because of the scarcity of written documentation of such systems, this has not prevented scholars from offering descriptions of 'African' leadership and management systems. In offering such descriptions, scholars draw heavily from the literature in African studies and writings of African historians (e.g. Davidson, 1991; Diop, 1987; Mazrui, 1986).

How are the basic dimensions of 'African' management and leadership described in these writings? While writers often point to the vast diversity of Africa, the tendency is offering generalized descriptions of 'African' management. Whereas Western management thought is said to advocate Eurocentrism, individualism and modernity, 'African' management thought is said to emphasize traditionalism, communalism, co-operative teamwork, and mythology (Mutabazi, 2002; Nzelibe, 1986). Edoho (2001) also argues that communalistic life is the centrepiece of the 'African' personality and is distinctively 'African'. 'African' management thought is also said to be characterized by a strong belief in the individual's relation to nature and supernatural beings and connections between the individual and ancestors (Mbigi, 1997; 2005; Nzelibe, 1986).

Nzelibe (1986) argues these traditional values, assumptions and principles guide 'African' management thought. He points to the elaborate administrative and managerial procedures dating back to antiquity that enabled many kingdoms in Africa to complete significant large-scale projects. Africa's ancient empires in Ghana, Mali and Songhai, and Oyo are given as historical evidence of the existence of effective management systems and leadership. While power was centralized, the success of a leader (whether head of a family, clan or kingdom) lay in his (sic) capacity to listen well and to put the community's interest first (Mutabazi, 2002; Ngambi, 2004). Writers point to the careful preparation of future 'chiefs'⁴ to be sensitive to social issues (Mutabazi, 2002). Kiggundu (1991) adds that typical administrative systems were relatively small in size, homogenous in terms of membership, used local technology and indigenous knowledge systems, and co-existed in relative harmony with the environment.

One specific feature of African culture that has been connected to leadership and management is the philosophical thought system known as *Ubuntu* (Karsten and Illa, 2005; van den Heuvel, 2008). Its origins remain an enigma but *Ubuntu* was popularized in South Africa with the publication of the book, *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management* (Mbigi and Maree, 1995). *Ubuntu* according to Mbigi (1997: 2) is a literal translation for collective personhood and collective morality. Mangaliso (2001: 24) defined *Ubuntu* as:

humaneness—a pervasive spirit of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness—that individuals and groups display for one another. *Ubuntu* is the foundation for the basic values that manifest themselves in the ways African people think and behave towards each other and everyone else they encounter.

Proponents argue Ubuntu can be parlayed into the practice of leadership and management for competitive advantage not just for Africa but universally (Mbigi, 1997; Mangaliso, 2001). Mangaliso (2001: 32) asserts:

Incorporating *Ubuntu* principles in management hold the promise of superior approaches to managing organizations. Organizations infused with humaneness, a pervasive spirit of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness will enjoy more sustainable competitive advantage.

Tensions, contradictions and possibilities for re-writing

The representations of 'African' leadership and management reveal a number of tensions and contradictions. In the end, this review raises more questions than answers and problematizes the writing of Africa into leadership and management knowledge. It is necessary to raise Spivak's (1988) famous question, 'Can the subaltern speak?'. Postcolonial theory underscores the larger problem that in the context of hegemonic Western leadership and management knowledge production, can Africa be written unproblematically into management and organization studies? In their efforts to cancel the negative images and/or invisibility of Africa, African management proponents often end up repeating the very errors they hope to erase. Nor is there any questioning of the managerialist assumptions embedded in prescriptions like '*Ubuntu* can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage' (Mangaliso, 2001: 32)

Ironically, the representations of 'African' leadership and management' found in Western texts as well as the alternative, *African management philosophy*, show a tendency to essentialize 'African' culture. Whether it is descriptions of Africa's national culture in the management literature or the alternative conceptions of 'African' culture by mostly African scholars, 'African culture' is portrayed as a homogeneous concept. Both offer certain beliefs and values that *all* African people share based on very small observations. In the national culture literature, scholars make sweeping generalizations about Africa's national culture based on a handful of countries. Likewise, it is not uncommon for 'African' management proponents to analyse their own country's culture but then proceed to use it as an exemplar of 'African beliefs and values' (Hallen, 2002). Similar to proponents of national culture theory, African management scholars also suggest every culture must have some sort of philosophy of life or worldview that can be objectively described (Hallen, 2002). Although, *Ubuntu* is peculiar to South Africa, it is prescribed as relevant to the whole of Africa.

A binary opposition is set up between African culture and Western culture. For example, Nnadozie (2001) in offering advice on managing African business culture systematically compares African and American cultural dimensions using Hofstede's theoretical framework. He states, 'Africans have a more relaxed attitude toward time than Americans do. They consider time as flexible not always firm, hence the so-called 'African time' (Nnadozie, 2001: 56). His portrayal of 'African time' is very similar to that offered by Harris, Moran and Moran (2004) in their description of culture in Africa.

Critical scholars of African philosophy contest the portrayal of African culture as fundamentally symbolic and ritualized. Hallen (2002), for instance, argues that these two overworked characterizations convey the impression that Africa's indigenous peoples express beliefs and values through symbols and ritualized behaviour rather than discursive verbal statements, a criticism that was also made of *négritude*. Unfortunately, it is proponents of an alternative nonperjorative portrayal of African culture who often repeat these misconceptions. Should it be taken for granted that all of Africa's cultures share certain core concepts, values and beliefs that have remained pure

and unaffected by colonization? Wright (2002) points out that culture is not an object—it is not purifiable. Thus, it cannot be understood to be pure (Bhabha, 1994) but instead one should recognize the mutual effects of colonizer and colonized (Frenkel and Shenhav, 2006).

There is also a tendency to present African culture as largely inherited from the past, preserved relatively unchanged in the present (Hallen, 2002). This suggests culture is static and unchanging and ignores the influence of context and time. Although, there is also the tendency to re-claim the past as better than the present, creating a past greatness/present backwardness binary that reinforces lingering images of current Africa as the hopeless continent (Fanon, 1968). In a discussion of the difficulty of defining the ‘African’, Wright (2002: 2) argues, ‘Identity (especially group identity) does not have a single point or moment of origin but is always being constructed and identity is not given and fixed but rather is constantly re-produced in and as performance’. The idea of identity as always in motion contradicts some of the discursive practices of African management scholars and the essentialist ways in which ‘African’ is invoked in their writings.

But perhaps the most formidable contradiction is one aptly described by Appiah (1992). He argues that the main problem with *négritude* and African humanism in which *Ubuntu* has its roots is that proponents forget that ‘Africa’ is an invention of Europe. Or as Mbembe (2002a: 257) asks: ‘Is it possible for African societies to recover a sense of themselves in relation to nothing other than themselves?’

What then are the possibilities for re-writing African leadership and management? A quote by Ian Parker (1992: 5) underscores the difficulty and challenge of re-writing ‘African’ leadership and management: ‘Language is so structured to mirror power relations that often we can see no other ways of being, and it structures ideology so that it is difficult to speak both in it and against it’. How then are we to represent and *re-write* ‘African’ leadership and management in organization studies? Ashcroft (2001: 46) argues the phrase: ‘the subaltern cannot speak’ need not imply that the subaltern is silenced and has no voice ... rather it suggests that the voice of the subaltern does not exist in some pure space outside the dominant discourse’. It is important to avoid reconstructing ‘African’ leadership and management as merely another unproblematic field of knowing (Odora-Hoppers, 2002). However, the challenge is a *re-inscription* that operates in the dominant system but refuses to leave it intact (Ashcroft, 2001).

First, in resisting Western domination of leadership and management, scholars must avoid simple binary oppositions. As Fanon (1990: 171) stated, ‘the unconditional affirmation of African culture reinstates the prejudices embodied in the “unconditional affirmation of European culture”’. Juxtaposing African culture and Western culture or the past greatness/present backwardness dichotomy reinforces the very binary which colonial and imperial discourse uses to keep the marginalized in subjection (Ashcroft, 2001; Fanon, 1990).

Second, there is a need to challenge not only stereotypical Western representations of ‘African’ leadership and management but also counter discourses prescribing simple constructions based on the notion of a pure ‘African’ culture. Scholars must abandon essentializing tendencies in favour of multiple formulations. Referring to ‘African’ leadership and management’ as singular conceals considerable variation and complexity (Jackson, 2004; Wright, 2002). The notion of a homogenous ‘African’ leadership or management may be just as dangerous as the idea of a universal theory of leadership or management. Africa is a large continent with vast cultural diversity, which makes it difficult to propose a totalizing conception of leadership and management. The point is perhaps the search should not be for convergence but for capturing the variety and complexity of the leadership and management phenomenon that may exist within the continent (Hoogvelt, 2001; Jackson, 2004).

Third, the issue of globalization re-casts the whole question of finding a pure ‘African’ leadership and management. Hallen (2002: 5) offers the following thought:

If Africa's cultural heritage is to come to terms with the latter-day problems of modern nation-states in a globally international community, then African social, political and economic demands upon and priorities within that community also must have to be enunciated and addressed.

Instead of searching for or imagining 'African' leadership and management it may be worthwhile to engage in more descriptive research that examines how leaders and managers in organizations in Africa are responding to the dual pressures of globalization and local needs. Much of the literature on 'African' management philosophy is prescriptive not descriptive. As noted earlier the literature on *Ubuntu* tends to position it as a transformative management concept that can be the key to competitive advantage for organizations in Africa. Yet, some empirical evidence casts doubts on its actual presence in organizations (Jackson, 2005) and whether it can be claimed as a uniquely 'African' construct. At the same time, we should not assume globalization has a totalizing, top down effect on how African leaders manage and lead their organizations. If we accept Appiah's (1992) observation that there has always been resistance in Africa to fully embracing imperialistic influences, then we should seek to understand to what extent local managers and leaders resist absorption into and mimicry of Western management and leadership practices.

Conclusion

My analysis of the literature revealed tensions and contradictions between stereotypical colonial images of 'African' leadership and management and proposed counter-images that often reflect the excesses of cultural relativism (Hallen, 2002; Wright, 2002). Finding alternatives between deeply, embedded debilitating colonized images of Africa and counter-images is not an easy task (Ashcroft, 1997; Spivak, 1988). As Parry (2000: 715) argues a reverse discourse replicating and therefore installing the binaries devised by the dominant centre to exclude and act against the 'Other' does not automatically liberate the 'Other' from the very colonized conditions it hoped to escape. Yet, the very act of offering alternative representations is a form of resistance. It can be viewed as a first volley towards dismantling Western domination of leadership and management. However, it also suggests more than one narrative is needed to avoid essentializing 'African leadership and management' and creating an emancipatory discourse and practice of leadership and management in Africa.

This article offers a postcolonial *and* anti-colonial reading of 'African' management and leadership in organization studies. While there is much overlap between the two, the significance of such an approach for organization studies can be noted by pointing out where the two converge and diverge (Angod, 2006; Banerjee, 2000; Lattas, 1993; Young, 2001). The question of essentialism is an example of where the postcolonial theory and anti-colonial thought both converge and diverge. While both projects underscore how the colonial project was rooted in difference where non-Western colonized subjects were fixed as less than and inferior, postcolonialism eschews essentialism or any glossing over of difference (Ahluwalia, 2001). It privileges multiplicity and hybridity. Anti-colonial scholars critique this anti-essentialism and argue the wholesale dismissal of essentialism can serve unwittingly to erase the agency and power of the colonized to speak and find viable solutions to their own problems (Dirlik, 1994; Parry, 1994). Banerjee (2000: 10) argues 'unbridled anti-essentialism' can end up disempowering and denying the agency of colonized peoples to resist domination by the West. Because of its emphasis on discourse analysis manifested in the work scholars like Said, Bhabha, and Spivak, other critics accuse current forms of postcolonial theory of taming the political bite of resistance discourse (Howard, 2006: 46; Parry, 1994).

Anti-colonial thought positions itself as an oppositional discourse to the repressive intrusion of colonialism and its on-going effects. Unlike postcolonialism, anti-colonialism places value on collectives who are cognizant of differences but unite around common struggles against social structures of oppression (Young, 2001). It might be described as the epistemology of the colonized, anchored in an indigenous sense of collective and communal colonial consciousness (Dei and Asgharzadeh, 2001; Loomba, 2005). It seeks to resist colonialism, change it and build something new (Fanon, 1990). The challenge for those seeking to re-write 'Africa' into management and organization studies is finding a third space not only in the sense of Bhabha's formulation but building something new that does not end up reiterating the binary oppositions and hierarchies of colonialism. Thus, the difficult question is how then do we perform the gaze without falling into the trap of essentialism?

Stuart Hall's recognition that identity is a matter of becoming as well as being is instructive (Hall, 1994). He argues that scholars do not have to choose between difference and hybridity but instead recognize both are valid (Loomba, 2005). Kortenaar (1995: 41) sums it up well in stating 'authenticity and creolization are best regarded as valuable rhetorical tools that can be made to serve liberation'. Such a view enables postcolonial scholarship within organization studies to open up spaces for interrogating multiple histories of colonialism and postcoloniality and the ways in which subjugated peoples choose to resist the strictures placed upon them through the tropes of colonialism(s). While the anti-colonial project argues the subalterns can and do speak, and have attempted to become agents of their own history, it simultaneously recognizes the limits of class, ethnicity, culture, gender and differences in defining how and why the subaltern speaks (Dei and Asgharzadeh, 2001). The task then, according to Loomba (2005: 153), 'is not simply to pit the themes of migrancy, exile and hybridity against rootedness, nation and authenticity but to locate and evaluate their ideological, political and emotional valances, as well their intersections in the multiple histories of colonialism and postcoloniality'. To fracture the dominant discourse, we must work in a third space if we wish to articulate alternative text(s) that transform not only the present representations of 'African' management and leadership but also the body of knowledge known as leadership and management in organizations (Bhabha, 1994; van den Heuvel, 2008; Nyathi, 2009).

Westwood and Jack (2007) call for epistemic reflexivity and mindfulness in acknowledging one's positionality. I am keenly aware of my own subjective position in this project. My identity as an African-American presents its own set of tensions, ambivalences and contradictions in terms of my voice. Should I speak and can I speak unproblematically about 'African' leadership and management given my identities? These concerns are embedded within the long complicated positive and negative discourse of African-American identifications with Africa. Africa has been for some of us a source of pride, a means of claiming identity and roots (Du Bois, 1965). While for others a place not to be from and a disturbing gratitude to have escaped its fate through slavery (Ayittey, 1998; Richburgh, 1997). I do include myself in the Diaspora, as being among those geographically displaced by colonialism fully cognizant of the privileges arising from having established my academic career in the academy within one of the richest and most powerful nations in the world but at the same time on the periphery because of my race and gender. Yet, I am fully aware the subjective experience of subordinating discourses and practices of Western hegemony are not the same either over time or across the globe. My position is similar and also different to Spivak's (1988) subjective reflection. So, can a privileged 'third world' academic *from* the 'first world' *now* living in the 'third world' speak for people here? Clearly, my diasporic relationship to the continent is not isomorphic to that of those who have always been in Africa and who have a different history and experience of colonialism and postcolonialism.

Notes

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- 1 African is placed in quotes for two reasons. First, it recognizes Mudimbe's analysis that Africa exists as an invention of the West's imagination. Second, to indicate the discomfort with reducing a large, diverse continent to a single label as well as to denaturalize the idea of 'African'
- 2 Drawing on Westwood and Jack (2007: 246–247), the term postcolonial refers to a disparate body of knowledge whose 'post' refers to a particular temporal meaning: a condition after colonialism although there is no one single point where colonialism formally ceased. However, it also refers to the study of the continuing economic, social, political, and cultural effects of colonialism. When I use a hyphenated post, I am denoting a particular historical period (e.g. post-colonial states in Africa).
- 3 This book resulted from a research project on performance management in the private and public sectors of developing countries sponsored by two United States government agencies (NASPAA and USAID). This is further evidence of the link between management and organizations studies and development management.
- 4 These scholars use the term 'chief' without pointing out that even it was an invention of colonialism because only Europeans could have the title King.

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