افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

**AA-AA**

چو کشور نباشـد تن من مبـــــاد       بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مـــباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم       از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com                                          afgazad@gmail.com

| European Languages | زبانهای اروپائی |

by THOMAS KLIKAUER – NADINE CAMPBELL
17.09.2020

# The Anti-Racist Feminist and the Corporate CEO



In 2016, the former corporate leader and TV show host Donald Trump became US president. In the night that his victory was announced, previous Ku Klux Klan (KKK) leader <u>David Duke</u> described the event as *one of the most exciting nights of my life*. A year

later, the FBI revealed that hate crimes increased for a second consecutive year, with attacks targeting Muslim and Jewish people as well as the LGBTQ community.

Corporate leaders and right-wing leaders are legitimized through German sociologist Max Weber's *l'idée fixe* of the so-called charismatic leader. The grant certifier of the Kaiser's Wilhelminian Empire, Max Weber, not only legitimized corporate leaders but also domination. Soon, Weber's charismatic leaders mutate into Managerialism's favorite hobby-horse, the transformational leader, even though Weber also thought there are visionary, authentic, spiritual, and wise leaders.

Over the last four decades, business schools and an ever compliant business press have done everything in their ideological and broadcasting powers to cement the *l'idée fixe* that business organizations need leaders, corporate apparatchiks, and of course, the heroic CEO. Since leadership does not come naturally, it had to be socially constructed. In the case of corporate leaders, the ideology of leadership is largely managerially constructed in business schools. Despite rafts of business professorships, management leadership journals, leadership conferences, MBA degrees, thousands of articles in the business press, and in semi-scholarly outlets like the Harvard Business Review, the fact remains that there is no core universal truth of leadership to be discovered.

Still, the ideology of corporate leaders remains a very good business even when it mostly sells *taken for granted ideas* – often presented as leadership theories. In the real world of corporate leaders, they are more often than not defined through two key elements. Firstly, almost universally, they are men, and secondly, corporate leaders tend to be white. Rarely is this made part of the business school curriculum apart from an elective run as a Friday night class. This is done so that business schools can claim, "oh, we cover this". Almost all business school professors just don't write on white supremacy because writing about supremacy is painful, and might even point the finger at themselves. Business school professors are – more often than not – white, middle-aged men, more or less mirroring the world of management.

Ever since management writer Henri Fayol's rather militaristic "chain-of-command", Frederick Taylor's authoritarian management ideas, and Alfred Chandler's "field units", the idea that militaristic leaders mirror corporate leaders have taken hold and has been re-told ever since in management, business school, and its ideological pamphlets called academic journals. In standard business school writing, is not at all surprising to find highly ideological passages like these,

The English would undoubtedly have lost the battle of Agincourt if they had underestimated the importance of the leadership factor. Any astute observer of organizations will notice that CEOs have a considerable impact on their companies.

This is the love-song of a white man for the militaristic, corporate, and above all-male, leader. This is designed to legitimize the white supremacy and masculinity of corporate CEOs of which, in 2018, just 27 of the Fortune 500 were women (barely 5.4%), and just three were black men (0.6%) – not women. From Bezos to Musk to Zuckerberg to Gates, and on it goes, corporate power means the power of the white man. To legitimize their domination, business school professor and the corporate business press sells the need for corporate leaders as common sense, as normal, and even as natural. Ex-CEO Donald Trump just represents a slightly more extreme version of macho-management.

Like Donald Trump, Bezos, Musk, Zuckerberg, Gates, Branson & Co have all but transmuted into celebrity CEOs reinforcing the domination assuring ideology of patriarchy, white supremacy, and imperialism – now sold as globalization. To legitimize this even further, token-females like Sheryl Sandberg have been wheeled out, occasionally that is. It is conservative feminism recast in terms of Hayek's neoliberalism. This is individual advancement – not social progress. Almost self-evidently, the false promises of feminine corporate leadership had to remain unfulfilled.

In the conflict of feminism against Marx and the ever-alluring question: will women feminize and thereby humanize the workplace or will the power of capitalism, companies, and corporations force women to become just like male CEOs, Marx won hands down. In other words, female CEOs operate like just men taking on the ruthless traits of the corporation and corporate capitalism. Just as Maggie Thatcher caused the death of men in an isolated, if not desolated, place called the Falklands Island to get re-elected. It worked – they died, and she got re-elected.

Like business schools, corporations like to present themselves as an inclusive place with lovely pictures on their websites showing a diversity of people and, of course, plenty of smiling women. Often, it is not much more than visual branding. In reality, it deliberately over-represents the diversity found in corporate management and the average business school. Still, the image of a colorful happy face aids the false picture of inclusion and even progressiveness. More often than not, corporate apparatchiks interpret diversity through the logic of capital, focusing on how companies and corporations can use people of color to further their corporate agenda.

The very same corporate agenda is secured when the media reports of – yet another – business scandal. In cementing the "bad apply" ideology, these reports tend to focus on an individual CEO while never questioning the system of corporate apparatchiks, CEOs, and corporate capitalism. Instead, a glorification of heroic leadership takes place. During corporate scandals, the media sacrifice one in order to save the many. Beyond that, scandals are used to show that the system is working and business ethics – a contradiction in terms – is here to do two things: it identifies the bad apples, and it assures the continuation of the "nothing wrong with the system" ideology. This is the *raison d'être* of business ethics as much as of corporate social responsibility.

Undeterred from business scandals, leadership fantasies continue to be perpetrated by corporations, the media, and business schools. Everyone is it, and everyone is a winner. Corporations and good corporate leadership are shown to be needed and good. Business schools run business ethics classes to show that corporations are good. They receive full-fee paying MBA students and employ business professors. The business press receives advertising from corporations and even from business schools that often function look-a-likes of corporations. Finally, business school professors and deans can fly business class and meet important clients in the business lounge and for business lunches. It is an ingenious set up that severs all those who are part of it – not the precariat and not the women toiling away in outsourced sweatshops in Bangladesh. Meanwhile, business schools sell all this as ethical leadership or even more fashionable: as ethical stewardship.

The key to all this is that the faith is in the heroic leader. Of course, this also includes *The White Man's Burden,* as presented by Rudyard Kipling, author of the Jungle Book. This is the image of the white savior bringing civilization to non-whites. Much of this reaches deep into popular culture with Harrison Ford (the white leader) freeing enslaved and non-white children in Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom.

Bill Gates and Warren Buffett carry the same ideology forward. Two old white men are saving non-white African children from the misery the white man has brought to Africa with highlights like the slave trade, also known as the Triangle of Death. Like Harrison Ford, corporate leaders like Gates and Buffett, as well as Donald Trump, are well aware of the power of impression management. This is not really all that new. Historically, Robber Barons, like John D. Rockefeller, turned to philanthropy to save their reputation – it worked rather well. The Rockefeller Foundation is well known – Rockefeller's Ludlow Massacre is mostly forgotten. Propaganda works. In the world of corporate propaganda –

now called public relations, the <u>center for sustainable leadership</u> is by no means the height of all this.

<u>Corporate PR</u> ideologically underpins the masculine ideal of corporate leadership, cementing a Euro-American dominated culture designed to present domination not only as eternal but also as inherently good. One of the most common ideologies found in business schools, for example, is the *l'idée fixe* that the world had <u>always had leaders</u>. In her insightful book, <u>Redeeming Leadership</u>, Helena Liu, for example, argues that,

the typical business school degree reinforces imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist and patriarchal ideologies equipping graduates with the hegemonic values they then identify and reproduce in their everyday lives at work and beyond.

The quote shows how <u>Managerialism</u> works. Trained in business schools, corporate apparatchiks and managerial leaders run corporations with the dehumanizing gaze of a dominator. Their entire system enforces the hierarchical "<u>Class Ceiling</u>" legitimized through the worker-leader ideal. It conjures up fantasies of a society in which everyone can rise to the top – just look at Zuckerberg – and the *fata morgana* of a fair workplace based on meritocracy where ability prevails and where the old boys club no longer runs the show.

In reality, these workplaces are still run by corporate apparatchiks glorifying the ideal of the business conquest in which the male CEO is in control of "his" business organization. On the other side of the coin are those structurally disadvantaged and defined as non-dominant groups, the subordinates, underlings, or simply a human resource – a resource just like cattle, an apparatus, or implement. When non-white underlings highlight white power in management and the self-assign privileges of the corporate apparatchiks, they will be accused of "play the race card".

What works in management works in management studies just as well where so-called "leadership studies" have mutated into a preferred playground for white, middle-aged business school professors. Being part of the boys club and being friends with the gatekeepers of academic journals – known as editors – they, again, get preferential treatment in so-called '<u>prestigious journals</u>'.

These journals tell anyone to think outside the box but exist inside a tidily controlled box. In many cases, these are nothing but the outlets of the ever same. They publish the same meaningless trivialities in various versions over ten years. This is called "having an established track record". It adds very little to scientific advancement, which is no longer the point anyway. The point is individual advancement – the next job or the next

promotion. Candidates for university promotion often face managerialist committees staffed all those who have never had an original thought in their entire academic existence. Failing scholarly and worse, failing intellectually, they become corporate apparatchiks hooked on Impact Fetishism (output rather than sense) like being addicted to crack cocaine.

Here, another white, middle-aged gatekeeper assesses a candidate's academic work. It is, most likely, a person put into place because of admin credentials. The appointment to a selection committee comes via other corporate apparatchiks – this time, they are university apparatchiks. In business schools, both are highly similar. The dress code, the managerialist language, the superior behavior, etc. mirror those found in the average business class lounge and almost any corporate office. These are the engineers of structural violence. They smile in your face and tell you how much they support empowerment.

"Despite the celebratory and celebrated language around female empowerment, emerging ideals of female leadership bear a similar imperialist heritage to masculine leadership models", writes Helena Liu. The irony is that much of this is often implicit or structural violence. It has become naturalized. In business schools, it is assumed to be natural. The same goes for management in universities.

Leadership, structural violence, and domination are normalized and unquestioned just as the denial of the fact that managerial leadership not only means followers, subordinates, and underlings, but it also means the exclusion of democracy. Still, every manager of corporate affairs and even those inside universities and business schools will tell you that we live in a democracy. This marks yet another Spectacular Achievement of Propaganda.

Set against that are four options for resistance against the structural violence that governs university and corporate leadership. It all starts with decolonizing one's mind or what might also be called "*A Short Course in Intellectual Self-Defense – Find your inner Chomsky*". Secondly, find non-abusive and non-violent ways of relating to other people while trying to escape the pathological nightmare of Managerialism that governs our workplaces. Thirdly, re-imaging social meaning beyond the myths of leadership; and fourthly, read Helena Liu's exquisite book "Redeeming Leadership" published by Bristol University Press.

**CounterPunch 16.09.2020**