

Lizardy-Hajbi, Kristina. *Unraveling Religious Leadership: Power, Authority, and Decoloniality*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2024. 237 pages.

Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi, in her excellent book *Unraveling Religious Leadership*, likens dominant approaches to religious leadership to a garment sewn together by the durable threads of colonialism, which are themselves woven with the fibers of European modernity and capitalism. Lizardy-Hajbi's analysis deftly pulls on five interwoven threads of "modernity/capitalism": individualism, roles, power, expertise, and change. Having loosened these threads, she begins to reweave each, readying the garment of religious leadership for repair.

Decolonial analysis critically interrogates the "corporatized, capitalistic, hegemonized, and supremacist" legacies of modernity/colonialism that shape Eurocentric leadership theories generally and religious leadership models in particular. In the colonial imagination, the leader is "a singular (white, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied male) figurehead" (26) who aims to consolidate and expand power, eschewing cooperative and collaborative modalities of power. Underneath the colonial leader is an "imperial self," self-sufficient, atomized, and unchanging, whose "authenticity" derives from "a self-driven adherence to one's own strict moral codes or agendas regardless of whether they align with their organization's codes or agendas" (61). Lizardy-Hajbi reweaves the threads of the self in leadership theory as relationships that rely on and honor "the unique intersecting identities, positionalities, knowledges, and gifts of all" (68).

Modernity/colonialism privileges leaders who are singular, charismatic, and heroic. In Christian traditions, these same impulses drive traditional theological reflection on the roles of pastor, prophet, priest, and king. Lizardy-Hajbi's reweaving situates leadership in "ecologies of roles" in which persons co-create and inhabit multiple modalities of "being with" in participatory, collaborative events aimed at community-building.

Drawing on Foucault's analysis of power, Lizardy-Hajbi argues that a "coloniality of power" privileges supremacies of identity (race, gender, class, etc.), organizational hierarchy, and economic exploitation. Such power configurations, she writes, "occur materially, epistemologically, and ontologically (as well as psychologically, spiritually, and so on) in all spaces and interstices of lived experience" (114) and emerge in discussions of management (vs. leadership) and servant leadership. Religious leaders should consider two approaches to disrupting modern/colonial configurations of power: revealing and reweaving. Revealing is a "collective, collaborative, [and] interconnected praxis" that discloses patterns of power-over (125). Reweaving reconfigures power-over into shared and collaborative forms of power.

Lizardy-Hajbi argues that discourses of professional expertise often serve as "gatekeeping measures" that privilege "eurowestern/eurochristian" ontologies (ways of

being) and epistemologies (ways of knowing). Expertise stabilizes Euro western forms of professions. In a colonial frame, Lizardy-Hajbi writes, expertise creates a “habitus of certainty:” there is only one “right way” to do things, and the right way reinforces colonial assumptions about what organizations are, how they work, who gets to be a leader, how leaders function in organizations, and what organizations and their leaders should aspire to. The model of the “learned clergy,” she argues, is one expression of a modernist/colonial habitus of certainty: “[*Learned*] in the present-day modern/colonial matrix is almost exclusively equated with intellectual knowledge and reason, the central criteria constituting one’s expertise—through a *habitus* of certainty—as a religious leader” (150).

A decolonial approach to expertise emphasizes the dynamic nature of knowledge, “the pluriversal, dynamic, intersubjective, and hybrid ways and means that people and communities cultivate, shape, and share knowledge over time and space that subvert and negate modernity/colonialism” (154). This approach fosters a “*habitus* of curiosity” that “invites difference, even chaos, into the established order” (157).

The final chapter explores change in a decolonial frame. Dominant approaches to leadership through change imagine a “continual, linear progression that can be manipulated toward desired ends with the right actions by a singular enactor or group of enactors” (164). Lizardy-Hajbi examines Heifetz’s adaptive leadership model and John P. Kotter’s eight-stage process for leading change as examples of this. These and other models operate from a “‘change or die’ urgency.” Organizations must be “saved at all costs,” a view that reinscribes capitalist/colonialist impulses towards “more people/customers and more money/profits” (168), on the assumption that workers are dispensable and the natural ecology will support perpetual exploitation and degradation towards these ends. In the “capitalcene,” organizations need to be good and getting better (bigger, wealthier, more powerful) all the time. Lizardy-Hajbi invites religious leaders to “reorient” attention “to Spirit’s movements rather than a *telos* of more people.” “What if,” she asks, “those gathered in the here and now *are* the people being invited to embody love and presence?” (174)

Lizardy-Hajbi’s scholarship in *Unraveling Religious Leadership* is a vital, salutary, and challenging contribution to a field that has rarely pulled on the threads of modernist/colonial disciplines of power and authority in the fabric of leadership studies. The book’s interdisciplinary frame is exceptionally well researched and cogently and clearly developed. As I read, I found myself imagining a seminary course in religious leadership oriented around the book’s six foci, where each movement of the course would explore traditional leadership frameworks and invite *Unraveling* to offer critical and constructive responses.

In dominant leadership theory, leadership is often defined with reference to the exercise of influence for the achievement of ends. That is, leadership is typically understood as an instrumental mode of human relationship. Indeed, a case could be

made that dominant leadership theory has irredeemably coopted the concept of leadership in instrumental terms. As religious leadership is often non-instrumental (especially in its pastoral care and community-building modalities), I've often wondered whether practical theologians should stop talking about religious leadership altogether. Of course, religious leaders *do* position faith communities and other organizations to achieve ends – but instrumentality, one could argue, is incidental, not fundamental to religious leadership. While not absent in the book, I would have liked Lizardy-Hajbi to have developed a decolonial response to the instrumentality of leadership more directly.

Lizardy-Hajbi's book focuses on unraveling more than reweaving, which is a perfectly legitimate scope for this project. In each chapter, she offers examples of what reweaving in relationship to her six foci might look like. I struggled at times to imagine reweaving in concrete terms and wondered whether detailed case studies might have operationalized the reweaving sections better. Perhaps there aren't many useful case studies in this regard and our task as theological educators is to help emerging religious leaders imagine as yet unrealized decolonial reweavings in the life and work of ministry. Lizardy-Hajbi's book is an excellent guide in this work.

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