Halfway up the stairs

A glimpse of the creative, liminal space, and the liminal leaders who function there

*with particular reference to Christian mission*

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DECLARATION

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Michael Philip Greed
ABSTRACT

Halfway up the stairs: a glimpse of the creative, liminal space and the liminal leaders who function there, with particular reference to Christian mission

Michael Philip Greed, August 2017

Miriam Adeney (2011, p.7) states that the leaders we need today are liminal, polycentric and hyphenated. This research investigates why such leaders are effective.

We draw on three broad disciplines: the liminality of Bhabha, Gilroy and other postcolonial writers, the missiology of Newbigin, Walls and other theologians, and leadership theory as found in Complex Responsive Processes, Systems Intelligence and Ladkin’s (2010) ‘leadership moment’.

These insights are examined through semi-formal interviews with 12 missional leaders who have a liminal (trans-national, cross-cultural, multilingual) identity, where we discover key strengths derived from that liminal identity, including an appreciation of the value of differences and a focus on the person.

We affirm Adeney’s three key terms in the light of insights from postcolonialism, missiology, leadership studies, the 12 interviewees and reflections on my own experience. We see that what the world needs today is leaders who exhibit these characteristics. They are polycentric, that is, truly global, recognising the importance of localisation. They are hyphenated, interconnecting diversity, their very identity making them a bridge. They are liminal, thriving in the in-between space.

Two practical applications given are the need for partnerships, and communities of leaders. At all levels – individuals, organisations and nations – the way forward is found in coming together. The liminal space, characterised by commingling and creativity, is where this happens.
PREFACE

This research brings together three strands that have seldom been considered together: the disciplines of leadership studies and missiology, and the theme of liminality. In the course of my research I have come across just two publications that explicitly and helpfully cover all three: Adeney in her 2011 article, *Colorful Initiatives: North American Diaspora in Mission*, and Roxburgh in his 1997 booklet, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership and Liminality*.

While I acknowledge a range of leadership theories, those that I engage with most fully are the socially constructed approaches of Complex Response Theory (CRP) as presented by Stacey, Caudwell and others, System Intelligence as presented by Hämäläinen, Saarinen and others, and the ‘Leadership Moment’ of Ladkin.

My primary point of departure in my understanding of liminality is the writings of Bhabha, Gilroy, Phillips and other postcolonial writers, and the way in which they use the term to describe the ‘in-between’ state of having an identity derived from two or more places.

Missiologists who approach their discipline with a liminal mindset (whether or not they use that term) include Newbigin, Walls, Roxburgh, Adeney and Rynkiewich. Also worthy of mention is Brunstad who, although not identifying as a missiologist, writes as a Christian on liminality and leadership, drawing on biblical resources and imagery.

Having drafted a research proposal based on the liminal, leadership and missiological literature, I put it to the test by interviewing 12 mission leaders who met my criteria for having a liminal identity: leaders either directly engaged in mission leadership themselves, or involved in mission governance. Through an examination of liminality and leadership as found in the literature, the interviews and my own reflection, I consider the distinctive strengths and advantages liminal leaders and liminal organisations possess. Further, I suggest that the world today is in crucial need of liminal leadership.

I am grateful to Simon Caudwell, Lynn Caudwell and Rob Hay for introducing me to an alternative view of leadership through the writings of Ralph Stacey, Donna Ladkin and others, to Andy Kingston-Smith for introducing me to the writings of Homi Bhabha and other postcolonial writers, and to Hugh Kemp who helped me delve deeper into missiology. Without the convergence of these three areas of research this topic would never have surfaced. My thanks also go to my wife, Teija, and to Michael Weekes who reviewed my manuscript and gave invaluable feedback on it.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Monocultural Christians from cocooned enclaves do not have the experience to lead. The natural bridge-builders should be liminal, hyphenated, polycentric, multilingual Christians. (Miriam Adeney, 2001, p.7)

Manuel Castells (2000a) writes of a ‘network society’ where everything is interconnected. Central to his argument is the concept of network, which he describes as ‘a set of interconnected nodes’ (p.501). A node can be almost anything, what is in focus is their interconnectedness. Miriam Adeney (2011, p.7) takes Castells’ statement of the need for ‘cultural, political and physical bridges’ (Castells, 2000a, p.459) and suggests what kind of people would make the best bridges: liminal, polycentric, hyphenated, multilingual Christians. She backs up this assertion by providing case studies of diaspora communities in the United States who fit this description.

The word liminal first appeared in anthropological writings, in the context of rites of passage, as described by Van Gennep (1909) and Turner (1969), where the liminal zone was a period of uncertainty and transition between childhood and adulthood.

More recently postcolonial writers found the concept of liminality to be a useful one when looking for ways of describing the state of ‘in-betweenness’. The individual or community in this position does not fit in: they are neither here nor there, they are not of the place where they reside, and neither are they of the place they came from. For postcolonial writers liminality is not simply a transitional period between point A and point B, but it becomes part of one’s identity. More than that, it becomes a defining characteristic of one’s identity. For example, Rushdie (1992, p.15) writes, ‘Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times that we fall between two stools.’ His identity is not so much derived from the cultures where he has resided but from the fact that he has lived amongst people of two or more different cultures.

A stairwell is a place of transition, a place one passes through to get from point A to point B, but it is also a place where one can linger and stay. It is therefore a useful metaphor for the liminal space, inhabited by an increasing number of people in the global village of today.
Adeney’s other terms for the best bridge-builders in Castells’ network society are ‘polycentric’, ‘hyphenated’, ‘multilingual’ and ‘Christian’. We will give a brief introduction to each of these terms.

‘Polycentric’ contrasts with monocentric. A monocentric person has deep roots in one place. That place, that culture with its values and taboos, defines the monocentric person. The polycentric person, on the other hand, is not so much ‘rooted’ as ‘routed’ (Gilroy, 1993, p.190); that is, their identity is forged not by the place where they have put down roots, but by their life’s journey, the routes – normally geographical routes – they have taken. The initial route may have just been from point A to point B, but having arrived at point B one finds that it is just a stepping stone on a longer journey. The fact that one is ‘routed’ rather than ‘rooted’ has become a defining part of one’s identity.

The routes through the liminal stairwell space can be seen as hyphens connecting the ‘centres’ or ‘nodes’ (to use Castells’ term). The hyphens also connect one with other routed, liminal people. Interconnectedness is thus a key attribute, interconnectedness with those who are different, but who on a deeper level are similar to oneself because they too are liminal and routed.

As for multilingualism, ‘it powers a multicultural conversation and engagement’ (Greg, G.71). While multilingualism is not a prerequisite for claiming a liminal identity, it is a great help.

Adeney’s final term is ‘Christian’. Jesus identifies himself as ‘the way’ (John 14.6) or a bridge between the human and the divine, himself being fully God and fully human. In him, barriers are broken down, and those who are different come together. This is illustrated in the earliest pages of church history where Jews and Gentiles met, mixed and merged in Christ.

Adeney equates leadership with bridge-building, and suggests that it is liminal, polycentric, hyphenated, multilingual Christians who have the necessary experience and expertise, and who are the natural bridge-building leaders.

Northouse (2004, p.3) defines leadership as ‘a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.’ I would add to that definition Ladkin’s focus on context: the ‘leadership moment’ is the confluence of leader, follower, context and purpose (2010, p.28). This suggests that leaders ‘have a season’ (Edward, E.13): those who lead in a specific place and time are not necessarily those who would lead in another place and time. The context where leadership happens, Adeney asserts, is the liminal space, and leaders need to be able to build bridges through that liminal space.

The present research tests Adeney’s claim that it is those with a liminal, hyphenated, polycentric, multilingual Christian identity who are the most effective leaders. We do not presume to say that one needs all five of these characteristics in order to lead effectively, but we do suggest that all five features

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1 Greg is one of those whom I interviewed in the course of this research.
2 Edward is another of those whom I interviewed.
are an asset to effective leadership. Further, we will examine the question of what distinctive strengths individuals, communities and organisations with such an identity possess.

Since I interviewed only leaders whom I considered liminal, this research is not the place for a comparative study between the strengths and weaknesses of liminal and non-liminal leaders. Rather, I am examining the strengths and effectiveness of leadership that is operated from a liminal space. A further restriction to the present research is that the focus is on missional leadership. Those whom I interviewed were Christian missional leaders whose identity I considered liminal. A contrastive study or one with a wider range of interviewees is beyond the scope of this research.
CHAPTER 2

Literature review

Halfway down the stairs is a stair where I sit.
There isn’t any other stair quite like it.
I’m not at the bottom; I’m not at the top;
So this is the stair where I always stop.

Halfway up the stairs isn’t up, and isn’t down.
It isn’t in the nursery, it isn’t in the town.
And all sorts of funny thoughts run round my head:
‘It isn’t really anywhere! It’s somewhere else instead!’ (Milne, 1924)

A. A. Milne (1924) has provided the title for the present work. Halfway up (or down) the stairs is a creative, liminal space. As such it provides a powerful metaphor for the liminal, in-between space in other walks of life. Halfway up his stairs all sorts of funny thoughts run around Christopher Robin’s head and he wonders where he really is.

About 70 years later Renée Green was in her own stairwell. In ‘Sites of Genealogy’ (1991) Green, an artist, does not simply display her art: she uses the building itself as a metaphor, architecture as a reference, ‘using the attic, the boiler room, and the stairwell to make associations between certain binary divisions such as higher and lower and heaven and hell. The stairwell became a liminal space, a pathway between the upper and lower areas.’ (quoted in Bhabha, 1994, p.5)

2.1 Postcolonial literature

In his seminal work, ‘The Location of Culture’ (1994) the postcolonial thinker and writer Homi Bhabha takes Green’s image of the stairwell and uses it in his discussion of postcolonial identity. Her exhibition, he writes (1994, p.5) ‘displays and displaces the binary logic through which identities of difference are often constructed – Black/White, Self/Other’.
Bhabha (1994, p.2) writes of ‘the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion’. This is a moment of ‘restless movement’ (p.2) for which the stairwell is an apposite metaphor. Bhabha writes of ‘the hither and thither of the stairwell [which] prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities’ (p.5). The stairwell is a place of ‘cultural hybridity’ (p.5), a place where binary opposites commingle and rub shoulders with one another, and where, as a result, new identities are formed. This movement away from ‘singularities of “class” or “gender”’ (p.2) subverts traditionally-conceived binary opposites like native/foreigner, master/slave and aristocracy/working class. Such binary opposites do not have a place in the liminal stairwell, where commingling and hybridity are the order of the day.

There are many postcolonial writers in addition to Bhabha who address the issue of liminal identities. We will note just a handful of key authors here: Said, Spivak, Rushdie, Gilroy and Phillips.

Edward Said and Chakravorty Spivak prepared the ground for Bhabha. In ‘Orientalism’ (1978) Said critiques the West’s view of the ‘Orient’ which came out of a colonialism typified by binary opposites: the West was active, the East passive; the West was the ruler, the East the ruled over; the West was superior, the East inferior. Said argues against this bipolarisation, advocating understanding and respect. Spivak picks up some of these themes in ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1988). The ‘subaltern’ is the one who is outside of and therefore marginalised by the prevalent power structures. The subaltern, Spivak argues, is represented through conversations which white men have with one another. Because of this the answer she gives to the question posed in the title of her article is, ‘No, the subaltern cannot speak.’

Most well known for his novels, ‘Midnight’s Children’ (1981) and ‘The Satanic Verses’ (1988), Salman Rushdie’s collection of essays and reviews, ‘Imaginary Homelands’ (1992) is in part his own commentary upon himself. In the essay after which the book is named, Rushdie looks back over the manner in which he wrote ‘Midnight’s Children’. Using the imagery of a broken mirror which gives ‘shards of memory’ (1992, p.12) of his childhood in India, Rushdie goes on to suggest that the broken glass is in fact ‘a useful tool with which to work in the present’ (p.12). Like a broken mirror, the identity of migrants such as himself ‘is at once plural and partial’ (p.15): maybe a bridge, maybe lost in the liminal space.

Paul Gilroy continues the process of subverting binary opposites. A central theme in ‘The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness’ (1993) is the notion of roots and routes, already noted on page 10. ‘Roots’ suggest binary opposites: African, European and American, for example, while ‘routes’ suggest journeying: encounter and interaction with a diverse range of outlooks. Gilroy moves our attention away from clearly defined centres to the space between them, a space where they mix and mingle and where something new is formed.

The final postcolonial author to whom we turn is Caryl Phillips, most famous for his prize-winning diasporic novels, ‘Crossing the River’ (1993) and ‘A Distant Shore’ (2003). In his collection of essays,
'A New World Order' (2001) Phillips, reflecting on his liminal identity, writes (loc.145), ‘These days we are all unmoored. Our identities are fluid. Belonging is a contested state.’ He reflects on the fact that ‘the Africa of his ancestry, the Caribbean of his birth, the Britain of his upbringing, and the United States, where he now resides’ – they are ‘one harmonious entity’ (loc.148). This is the ‘new world order’ of the title, a liminal space where a number of disparate factors commingle. Of each location Phillips writes, ‘I feel at home here but I don’t belong. I am of, and not of, this place.’ (loc.77) Phillips has made his home in the stairwell and he quite likes it there.

2.2 Christian literature

In 1997 Alan Roxburgh published ‘The Missionary Congregation, Leadership and Liminality’. He bases his argumentation on Turner’s anthropological studies of liminality, which in turn are derived from van Gennep. Turner (1969, p.95) describes ‘the attributes of ... liminal personae (“threshold people”)’ as ‘ambiguous’ and ‘neither here nor there’. Roxburgh asserts, ‘These [Van Gennep’s and Turner’s] accounts of liminality offer a way of understanding the church’s current experience of marginalization ... and changed social location.’ (pp.23-24) Just as Turner finds the concept of liminality useful for understanding his contemporary generation of ‘hippies’ and ‘teeny-boppers’ (1969, p.112), nearly 30 years later Roxburgh uses it as a model for the church to engage with contemporary society. Roxburgh (1997) argues that the missionary congregation, that is, one that seeks a ‘missionary encounter’ with the culture in which it is situated (p.1), is liminal in two ways: firstly it has been marginalized and pushed to the edges of society, and secondly the church itself is without a dominant centre.

Lesslie Newbigin served as a missionary in India for nearly 40 years before returning home to his native UK. The UK, he discovered, was a post-enlightenment ‘pluralist society’ (1989, title). Newbigin found an urgent need for the gospel to engage with contemporary western culture and challenge many of its key presumptions. His two key books are ‘Foolishness to the Greeks’ (1986) and ‘The Gospel in a Pluralist Society’ (1989).

Writing at about the same time as Newbigin, Andrew Walls (1996, pp.3-15) enunciates the Pilgrim Principle, the essence of which is that God transforms people and cultures, and the Indigenizing Principle, which states that for the Christian faith to take root and thrive in any culture it needs to adopt local indigenous forms. Africa needs an African theology, and John Mbiti (1990) and others are providing this. Walls argues that ‘Christianity lives by crossing the boundaries of language and culture’ (1996, p.5) and thereby making itself at home in different cultures. To use the language of Gilroy (1993), it is a ‘routed’ faith. Ray Anderson (2007) endeavours to apply these principles to post-modern western society.

Miriam Adeney (2011, p.7), as noted in chapter 1, understands cultural diversity and recognises the need for bridges. She observes that the church spans all sectors of society, but goes on to decry

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3 The first chapter of Walls (1996), The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture, where he presents the Pilgrim Principle and Indigenizing Principle, was first published as a separate article in 1982.
‘monocultural Christians from cocooned enclaves’ as not having the experience to lead. Equating leadership with bridge-building she advocates for ‘liminal, hyphenated, polycentric, multilingual Christians’ as the most effective leaders.

Michael Rynkiewich (2013, p.113) references Adeney’s statement above in his discussion on the place of western missionaries in the contemporary, liminal world. ‘Stop, look, listen,’ are his first words of advice to the western missionary; avoid the temptation of categorising and taking control ‘by naming, numbering, and training’. Rynkiewich’s background is in anthropology and missiology, from which perspective he examines the ‘hybridity’ and ‘fusion’ that mark contemporary culture where ‘people mix and mingle’ and ‘language has become languages’ (2011, loc.276, italics original).

2.3 Leadership literature

Peter Northouse (2004) enunciates some dozen or so leadership approaches and theories. Some are based on leadership traits (that one is born with), others on leadership skills (that one can learn). Some appear to view the leader in isolation; others focus on the relationship between leader and follower. Later editions of the book add ‘culture and leadership’ (2006), ‘authentic leadership’ (2009) and ‘servant leadership’ (2012), showing the progression of leadership theory down the years.

Drawing on the works of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Donna Ladkin ‘rethink[s] leadership’ (2010, title), focussing on the relationship between leader and followers, for a particular purpose, in a particular context, as noted above on page 11. She writes of an ‘energetic field’ (2012, p.4) where leaders and followers interact and ‘co-construct’ (2010, p.64) one another: this is the liminal space where leadership happens.

Two further contemporary schools of thought deserve mention in this ‘leadership’ section of the literature review: Complex Responsive Processes (CRP), articulated primarily by Ralph Stacey, and Systems Intelligence.

We have already noted the importance of the liminal space where leader and followers interact. CRP takes this one step further and highlights human interaction at the ‘micro’ level. CRP subverts traditional organisational change theory: when an organisation experiences change, CRP argues, it is not because a leader has successfully led his organisation through eight (or nine) steps (Kotter, 1996) but it is the result of grass-roots interaction and relationships. This interaction creates ‘shared meanings’ (Caudwell, 2014, p.33) as more and more people feel the pulse and catch the vision: relationship has greater weight than any one individual, and through the hyphenated network of relationships at the ‘micro’ level, change is experienced at the broader ‘macro’ level.

Stacey (cited in Luoma, Hämäläinen and Saarinen, 2011, p.5) posits CRP against systems thinking because he sees a system as something separate from the people who form it (2007, p.21). Hämäläinen, Jones and Saarinen (2014, p.22) challenge this position: ‘Even if a system appears to have a life of its own, it actually responds to the actions of its members just as they adapt their
behaviour to the system.’ This is Systems Intelligence (SI), defined by Saarinen and Hämäläinen as, ‘intelligent behaviour in the context of complex systems involving interaction and feedback’ (2004, p.1). Using our natural, inbuilt SI ‘we perceive ourselves as part of a whole, noticing the influence of the whole upon us as well as our influence upon the whole’ (Hämäläinen, Jones and Saarinen, 2014, p.15). It is the idea of interaction and feedback, influencing and being influenced that is particularly noteworthy here, as we co-construct our route together through the liminal space.

A final author who discusses leadership through a liminal grid and whose thoughts influence this present work is Paul Otto Brunstad (2016). Brunstad locates the leader not in the centre of his or her organisation but in the liminal zone between its inside and outside.

2.4 The Bible

Liminality in the Bible is focussed in the person of Jesus. Jesus bridges the liminal space between heaven and earth, and he brings together those who would otherwise be segregated.

The first stairway in the Bible is in Jacob’s dream in Genesis 28 where he sees ‘a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God ... ascending and descending on it' (v.12). This dream could be a metaphor for the whole biblical witness which is to do with the mixing and mingling in the liminal space between heaven (where God lives) and earth (where humankind lives), and between the present age and the age to come. Jesus appropriates this image to describe himself when he states, ‘Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.’ (John 1.51). Fully God and fully human, Jesus fills this liminal space. In his person he is ‘the gate’ (John 10.7, 9) in and out of it, and ‘the way’ (John 14.6) through it.

Putting under the spotlight Jesus’ role in bringing together that which would otherwise be apart, St Paul describes Jesus as the one in whom all things come together (Eph. 1.10) and in whom all people are reconciled (Col. 1.20).

This liminality in the person of Jesus is developed in the life of his followers. In the book of Acts Jews and Gentiles and a bewildering array of cultures and identities meet, mix and mingle in Christ. Paul encapsulates this principle in Galatians 3 when he states, ‘There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’ (v.28) Christians already inhabit an ‘in-between space’ where binary opposites do not matter, and follow the one in whom all things, different though they are, come together. Logically, therefore, theology and missiology should be in the vanguard of liminal studies.

2.5 Summary

In summary then, in our route through the literature we have met Christopher Robin and Renée Green in the stairwell. Bhabha and other postcolonial authors, writing of the liminal, hybrid, postcolonial identity, explore the creative liminal space where disparate factors mix and commingle.
We visited Roxburgh and his missionary congregation and Newbigin and Walls who show that Christianity is a ‘routed’ faith as it makes itself at home in different cultures. Adeney and Rynkiewich explore the hybridity and fusion of contemporary culture and the role of liminal Christians as leaders and bridge-builders. We touched on leadership theory, and saw how Complex Responsive Processes looks at leadership from the perspective of shared meanings while Systems Intelligence helps us understand the liminal mix of influencing and being influenced. We noted too that Brunstad places the leader on the liminal edge of an organisation. Finally, Jesus is most at home in the liminal border space and he expects to find his followers there.
CHAPTER 3

Liminal space, liminal identity and effective leadership

Boundaries become the place of meeting and exchange. (Wheatley, 2005, p.48)

In this chapter we will bring together some key themes from the literature on liminal space and identity, and investigate how they fuse around the question of the increased effectiveness of leaders and organisations that have a liminal identity. We will then look further at the nature of leadership.

3.1 Liminality

The word liminal comes from the Latin limen, meaning 'threshold' or 'doorway' (Kidd, 1957). It is a transitional space between one area and another. It is a border zone, adjunct to two or more disparate entities while not being part of any of them. We have seen how it is used in anthropology (the transitional stage between childhood and adulthood), postcolonial studies (the area between the old homeland and the new homeland), in leadership studies (the area between the leader and the followers or between the inside and outside of an organisation), and in Christian theology (Jesus bridges the divine and the human, while in Christ there are no binary distinctions). However, as we have seen from the Latin, the origins of the word are in architecture: the boundary within a building that leads from one part to another. As such the concept of ‘stairwell’ is particularly useful. The idea of ‘threshold’, for example a gate or a doorway, picks up the notions of ‘on the edge’ and ‘transition’, but it fails to describe an inhabitable place. In contrast, a stairwell, while connecting the attic (or nursery) with the boiler room (or town), is also an in-between space in its own right.

We will examine this liminal stairwell more closely with the lenses of Castells’ ‘network society’, Appadurai’s ‘ethnoscape’ and Rynkiewich’s ‘globalizing dynamic’.

The liminal space is Castells' new, interdependent world (2000b, p.367), brought about by globalisation, which in turn is defined by Steger as, ‘the expansion and intensification of social relations across world-space and world-time’ (2008, p.246). The old certainties which we had with ‘upstairs’ and ‘downstairs’ are gone in the liminality of ‘networking and flexibility, which blur the boundaries of membership and involvement’ (Castells, 2004, p.69). Castells’ ‘network society’ (2000a,
title) is a liminal one. Some fight this globalised network society, others embrace it. Those who fight it look back with nostalgia to the days when they felt the world was a simpler place where they had control over their own destiny. Standard rules do not apply in the network society of the liminal space, so a backlash against it is not surprising. It is a restless, unsettled and unsettling space where new connections are made.

Another way of viewing this liminal space is as an ‘ethnoscape’. The term ethnoscape was coined by Arjun Appadurai, who describes it as ‘the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live’ (1996, p.33). An ethnoscape is fluid and unsettled, routed not rooted, with migration and the movement of peoples at its heart. Appadurai cites immigrants, refugees, exiles and guest-workers as examples of those who populate the ethnoscape. Rynkiewich (2011, p.9) describes those in the ethnoscape as ‘rooted in several different places on the globe’. With the caveat that I would prefer the term ‘routed’ for such people, Rynkiewich continues: ‘...with ties of kinship and friendship linked through unprecedented new lines of communication and transportation’. An ethnography assumes that a people are fairly static, and geographically, socially, culturally and linguistically definable. An ethnoscape has a ‘slippery, nonlocalized quality’ while being ‘profoundly interactive’ (Appadurai, 1996, p.48).

In introducing his ‘globalizing dynamic’ Rynkiewich (2011, p.vi) writes of a

postcolonial, urbanizing and globalizing dynamic that casts a critical gaze on all the old understandings, deconstructs and discards them, and then moves on toward a different social order based on multiple identities, ... multilingualism, ... the rise of networks and the demise of groups.

This ‘globalizing dynamic’ resides in the in-between-ness of the liminal stairwell, not in any of the old social orders. Networks are the norm, typified by cross-cultural and trans-national identity, and multilingualism. The globalising dynamic is not limited to people. Rynkiewich notes that goods and ideas also circulate in the global liminal space and ‘no longer is there an illusion that the creator or purveyor of an idea, philosophy, or theology is able to retain control over how that idea is interpreted and used once it escapes its owner’ (2011, p.9).

The liminal stairwell is a place of networks, partnerships and relationships: it is a medley, a mosaic. Contrary to the picture of Christopher Robin sitting alone halfway up his stairs, the liminal stairwell is not an isolated place. It is alive with movement, a medley of interconnecting global citizens, like the fusion of African drums and Celtic pipes in the music of Baka Beyond, like my white African friend who married a black Englishman. The liminal space can be an airport, a railway carriage or an international conference. For many of the postcolonial writers it was a slave ship or a community of workers in a foreign land. I have found the liminal space in the multicultural milieu of Sparkbrook, Birmingham and at the International Pentecostal Church in Lahti, Finland.
This liminal dynamic may lead to chaos and misunderstanding. If I lived in the same place my whole life, like a well-rooted oak, I would be intimately familiar with the subconscious rules governing that society. But if I have moved or been moved from place to place, commingling with others who are ‘routed’, the connections between behaviour and meaning that were taken for granted in the rooted community are no longer valid. I and my fellow-migrants may give quite different meanings or interpretations to the same activities. This may result in initial confusion: for example what may be normal friendship to one may be over-familiar pushiness to another. But as we mix something new is born, something routed and multi-hued. Whether this is a good or bad thing may be open for debate, but the fact is that it is part of contemporary life.

We have referred to a liminal space and the people who inhabit it. Kureishi (1990, loc.2244) writes, ‘The immigrant is the Everyman of the twentieth century.’ This is even more so in the twenty-first century than the twentieth. Johnstone (2011, p.4) confidently states, ‘The scale of movement of people from one continent to another is unprecedented in history, and will be a major preoccupation for governments for much of the 21st Century.’ There is a convergence in the stairwell, a gathering together, not of people who are all the same as one another, for many different staircases converge in the stairwell and the identity of a liminal person is drawn from many different contexts. What these migrants, guest workers, global travellers and cross-cultural marriage partners have in common is the fact that they do not fit tidily into a predetermined box. The essence of who they are is complex and multifaceted.

3.2 Effective leadership

3.2.1 From the centre to the edge

In the past the leader was generally perceived as being located at the centre of his organisation. His job was to ‘influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal’ (Northouse, 2004, p.3). The best leaders were ‘transformational’ who ‘create and articulate a clear vision for an organization, who empower followers to achieve at higher standards, who act in ways that make others want to trust them, and who give meaning to organizational life’ (p.198). If the leader wanted to bring about change in his organisation he would ‘thaw’ it, change things around, following six, eight or ten carefully laid out steps, and then ‘refreeze’ it (Lewin, 1947; Kotter, 1996).

When leadership theory recognised the importance of ‘followers’ the organisational model became a pyramid with the leader at the top and the masses at the bottom. Once the notion of ‘servant leadership’ was recognised the model became an inverted pyramid with the masses at the top and the leader at the bottom.

Roxburgh (1997) rejects both upright and inverted pyramids. Recognising the importance of team leadership, equality and relatedness he flips the pyramid onto its side and creates a wedge (figure 1, p.20). Within this framework he positions the church leaders, the pastors, at the ‘directional point’

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4 The use of the male pronoun is intentional.
(1997, p.64) of the wedge. The church, says Roxburgh, is in a liminal space: it has been pushed to the edges of society and is itself without a dominant centre. In response to this Roxburgh redefines the pastors’ role as poet, who reflects on church and community, as prophet, who ‘address[es] the Word of God directly into the specific, concrete historical experience of the people of God’ (1997, p.60), and as apostle, who gives leadership in navigating the unknown liminal terrain. Roxburgh’s church has a liminal leadership team which is on the edge, outward looking while still caring for the flock.

### 3.2.2 Leadership as influencing

In the course of interviewing 12 mission leaders, one interviewee observed that some people use the term leader or leadership when they mean administrator or manager (Karl, K.180). Karl himself viewed leadership as being ‘about relations and direction, based on a certain vision, based on where you think a group of people or a certain project or process should move to’ (K.178).

I concur with Karl. Leadership is not about holding a position but, following Systems Intelligence thinking, it is about influencing, which itself cannot be separated from its converse, being influenced. Unless one is open to being influenced one becomes obdurate and dictatorial. Granted, when one is in a position called Executive Director or Team Leader one has authority from holding that position and so one is well placed to exercise leadership. But possessing a title or a position does not automatically bestow leadership upon the owner.

Ladkin (2010) writes of the ‘leadership moment’ where leader, follower, context and purpose converge. One of her starting points is the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) who introduces the themes of ‘reversibility’ and ‘flesh’. I perceive and I am perceived. When I touch I am also touched (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.143). This is reversibility. Merleau-Ponty’s name for that in-between space where I perceive and am perceived is ‘flesh’. Ladkin compares this ‘flesh’ to ‘an “energetic field” that is both constituted by, and exists between relating entities’ (2012, p.4).

Ladkin then takes Merleau-Ponty’s ideas and applies them to the relationship between leaders and followers. The ‘energetic field’ of ‘flesh’ between them, where each perceives and is perceived, is the leadership moment, the liminal space where leadership happens, where leaders and followers interact and ‘co-construct’ (Ladkin, 2010, p.64) one another as they experience themselves being perceived by the other and ‘move together towards purposeful action’ (Ladkin, 2012, p.6).
The leader-follower relationship is also in focus in the ‘Complex Responsive Processes’ (CRP) school of thought, which defines leadership in terms of collaborative processes. Stacey notes that humans are ‘fundamentally and inescapably interdependent’ (2011, p.292) and that ‘individual selves are formed by social interaction’ (p.293). Summarising Stacey, Caudwell states (2014, p.34), ‘In Stacey’s CRP account, the coherent patterns of relating, and indeed the organizational strategies, which then emerge are much more to do with the evolving interplay of intentions than those of any one individual.’

The very nature of this evolving interplay of intentions makes it more fitting for a liminal, polycentric environment where people, ideas and worldviews are mixing, intermingling and giving birth to new forms, than for an established monocentric environment. Having propounded the CRP principles of self-organisation and having encouraged leaders to get used to being comfortably out of control, Tim Harle (2011, p.14) looks at the significance of boundaries. He quotes Margaret Wheatley (2005, p.48):

The very idea of boundaries changes profoundly. Rather than being a self-protective wall, boundaries become the place of meeting and exchange. We usually think of these edges as the means to define separateness... But in living systems, boundaries are something quite different. They are the place where new relationships take form, an important place of exchange and growth as an individual chooses to respond to another.

The boundary is the liminal space where opposites come together and commingle and form something new. Harle then crucially suggests, ‘Leadership happens in a liminal space, the creative borderland between the comfortable old and the unknown new.’ (2011, p.24) Between the stability of the inner life of the organisation and the unstable, chaotic environment on the outside, Brunstad (2016, p.13) would add. Harle quotes Roxburgh to support his statement: because old rules no longer apply in the liminal space, it is full of undefined potential. ‘The only meaningful way forward lies in understanding and embracing our liminal existence. We must live with its confusion and humiliation, as a hopeful people ready to discover the new things the Spirit will birth.’ (Roxburgh, 1997, p.47; quoted in Harle, 2011, p.24)

We suggest, then, with Roxburgh and Wheatley, that effective leadership takes the form of a team, and that it is located not at the centre but on the boundary of an organisation, the place of meeting and exchange. Following Ladkin, we place effective leadership at the intersection of leader, followers, purpose and context, and in line with CRP and Systems Intelligence we see it expressed in interaction and influencing.

After examining the field research in chapters 4 and 5 we will take a closer look in chapter 6 at the liminal world in which the leader operates. Then in chapter 7 we will bring the threads of effective leadership, the liminal context and the data from the interviewees together as we consider the importance of polycentrism, hyphenation and liminality in today’s world.
One further question remains before we turn to the interviewees. The 12 leaders whom I interviewed all ticked the boxes for having a liminal identity. Therefore it is useful to ask whether the correlation between a liminal identity and collaborative leadership processes which we have suggested was borne out in the interviews. In my purposive sampling I selected individuals who held positional leadership. Their positions ranged from Communications and Media Team Leader to International General Director. Thus I approached the interviews not knowing whether those I interviewed used their liminal identity to lead by collaboration and the creation of shared meanings or whether their style was more managerial and controlling.

No interviewees were asked directly about their leadership style, but hints were evident to illustrate it. Daisy and Luke both talked about collaborative leadership. Edward and Daisy spoke of using their leadership position to help others flourish. Other interviewees spoke of coming alongside those they led, seeking to understand them, showing appreciation for them as they were. Data is far from conclusive, since this was not the thrust of the research, but it would suggest a correlation between liminal identity and combined or shared leadership.

The only potential counter-example comes from Edward. As we have already noted (p.9), he spoke of leaders having a season, and the need for them to be authentic to that season (E.13-14). He described one of his strengths as being an agent of change and that his season was to bring about change in the organisation which he led, concluding, ‘I’d be terrible to go into an organisation where it’s all stable and everything is well because I might be more of a disrupter!’ (E.33) One would imagine that those who liked the organisation the way it was might have felt his leadership was a disruption. In the liminal space change is brought about collaboratively, as ‘the liminal group’ (Roxburgh, 1997, p.32) explores the way forward together. However, I did not ask Edward about the manner in which he brought about change: that would be a topic for another research project.
CHAPTER 4

Introducing the field research

For the young people who will read your dissertation, I would say, ‘Stop clicking and start listening.’ I would encourage them to go sit with people. (Greg, G.207-208, 216)

In order to test Adeney’s assertion (2011, p.7) about natural bridge-builders being liminal, hyphenated, polycentric, multilingual Christians, and the hypothesis that effective leadership takes place in the liminal space, I conducted interviews with 12 mission leaders or leaders involved in mission governance, whom I considered liminal. In order to find ‘information rich’ interviewees I followed the principles of ‘purposeful sampling’ (Patton, cited in Creswell, 2013, p.350) where the researcher ‘pick[s] cases that meet some prespecified criterion’. My criteria were twofold: firstly that my interviewees are exercising leadership in a missional context or are involved in the governance of a mission organization, and secondly that they have cross-cultural experience, a trans-national identity and are at least bilingual. My rationale was that leaders who met these criteria would fit my concept of a liminal leader.

Ten of the interviews took place in the context of a conference I and the interviewees were attending in May 2016, while two were conducted by Skype. Each interviewee gave written or recorded permission to be interviewed for the purposes of my research, and for the interview to be recorded.

I, the interviewer, said as little as possible. I did not hold a conversation with the interviewees. Rather, stating that the purpose of the questions was to start them talking on issues relevant to my research, I simply gave them space to talk. The questions, which can be found in the Appendix, probe how cross-cultural experience, trans-national identity and multilingualism influence the way the interviewee functions as a mission leader.

Three of the interviewees were women and nine were men. Four were European nationals, five Asian or Oceanic and three citizens of the United States. Three of the Europeans live or lived in Africa. The fourth makes frequent trips into Russia. Two of the Asians live in their country of birth, two live in

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5 For definition of these terms, see appendix.
other parts of Asia and one lives in the UK. Of the three US citizens one was formerly Indian, another formerly South American, and the third used to live in Asia but now lives in Europe.

The primary mission involvement of three interviewees (Greg, Henry and James) is mission governance: that is, they are on the board of a major mission agency. The primary role of two interviewees (Francis and Karl) is consultancy. The others are mission leaders, either nationally (Barry, Caroline), regionally (Angela, Isaiah, Luke) or globally (Daisy, Edward). Some of the latter are also involved in mission governance.

I gave each interviewee a pseudonym, following the successive letters of the alphabet. Thus the first to be interviewed was Angela and the final interviewee was Luke.

The interviews, which were between 18 and 82 minutes in length, were all transcribed. Interviewees’ statements are referenced by their pseudonym’s initial followed by the sentence number in the transcription.
CHAPTER 5

Summary and analysis of interview results

[A liminal identity] opens your mind... You’re less tied to very narrow – maybe cultural – forms or cultural mental models. It’s huge how it affects your thinking, how you view others. (Henry, H.69-70)

In this chapter I will summarise the ‘huge’ impact articulated by Henry in the quotation above.

In chapter 3, summarised in the quote from Kureishi and the prediction from Johnstone on page 19, we saw how the volume of people on the move – whether by choice or compulsion – is massively increasing, and that therefore the number of people with a liminal identity is similarly huge. These multicultural liminal crowds need multicultural liminal leadership. The second part of chapter 3 examined the nature of this leadership, and we noted that effective leadership is team leadership, it is on the boundary of an organisation, and it is to do with human interaction.

Three primary themes emerge from the interviews. Firstly, A liminal identity is an asset in leadership. Secondly, Differences are something positive, which leads to the third theme, The focus is on the person. I do not attempt to squeeze these themes into a mould predetermined by the research, but rather I let them speak for themselves. In chapter 7 I will bring the research, interview data and my own reflection together around the words polycentric, hyphenated and liminal.

There are three further interview themes which have close verbal proximity with Adeney’s statement: Building bridges, The benefits of being multilingual and The role of faith. It comes as no surprise that these three emerged as significant themes, for the concepts of bridge-building and multilingual ability were explicit in the interview questions, while all the interviewees, being mission leaders, were people to whom their Christian faith was central. However, we will still venture some remarks upon them.

5.1 A liminal identity is an asset in leadership

Greg (G.40-48) uses a useful metaphor: glasses or spectacles, worn to help one see clearly. He explains that if he had just one set of experiences, one pair of glasses, everything would seem clear. This would be the mono-cultural or monocentric leader. However, reality is not mono-cultural. Greg states that
reality as seen through a single pair of glasses is actually completely distorted, because what is seen is not reality. One is simply looking through one’s lens at the portion of reality that one can see, and it is that that seems very clear, because one is blind to everything else. What we need, Greg continues, are ‘multi-hued’ glasses. Then, ‘when I look at a person and come to a situation, I’m able to then take on the right colouration to understand that person first and the context first, before I can actually talk about anything else to them’ (G.46). Greg moves on from his glasses metaphor; he finds it inadequate: ‘You’re not simply putting on ... a lens. You are actually in your mind becoming that person.’ (G.47-48) This ability to recognise and adjust to different realities is a strength and asset of the liminal leader.

As Edward (E36-46) reviewed his liminal identity he spoke of his inheritance and what he has become: born and brought up in Asia, doing his tertiary education in Europe, he was informed and moulded by ‘a trans-national education’ (E.42) which enables him to draw on the best of both eastern and western leadership expertise. He sees this liminal position as a ‘privileged’ one from which he is able ‘to use [his] East to help the West and use the western skills to help the East’ (E.44).

While Edward coined the phrase, ‘trans-educational’ Karl (K.15-46) spoke of ‘trans-traditional’ (K.15). In his work he has interacted with people from a variety of church traditions. Each background, each tradition, he says, has an equal place around the work table. It is working in this context that has forged his ‘trans-traditional identity’. ‘I wouldn’t say that my faith has become less Protestant over the years but something has been added to it.’ (K.37) He appreciates this development because it has given him a broader point of view.

In a similar way Daisy was conscious of the liminal space broadening her perspective. ‘I appreciate that there is more than one way to do things. So I don’t assume that my way is the right way.’ (D.31-32) She found that accepting the fact that in cross-cultural contexts people go at different paces and one cannot keep to one’s own fixed plan – that this increased her patience, made her more relational and helped her become ‘more laid back and willing to accept things aren’t perfect but will still work’ (D74-76).

Henry (H.10-16) embraced the word, ‘transnational’, since he was raised in a family that was an ethnic minority in his home country, and then emigrated to the US. This identity, he says, helps him question presuppositions and makes him sensitive to ethnocentricity. Summarising, he states, ‘Almost every aspect of my leadership is affected by my transnational identity.’ (H.15-16)

Francis (F.34-43) sees himself as a world citizen, always adjusting to his host culture, whatever it is. His birth culture ‘happens to be one of the fastest cultures in the world, one that believes in efficiency and frankness and directness’. Yet he works with teams in Africa, Asia and the Middle East where ‘process’ and ‘personal honour’ are more important than ‘product’. And so, understanding effective leadership as not simply achieving goals but giving focus to the means by which the ends are reached, and recognising that a less perfect product achieved with the full commitment of all participants is
more valuable that a so-called perfect product, he consciously slows down, and deliberately shows honour and respect in the manner appropriate to the culture of those with whom he works.

Luke’s approach (L46-49) to his national identity is similar to that of Francis. He and his colleagues set aside their national identity and embrace commonality. A key factor in this attitude is a recognition that their citizenship is in heaven: it frees them up to not focus on national pride or identity. Luke states (L.112) that as a leader, ‘it’s my job to cross those boundaries’. This takes him into the liminal space where he faces ‘that internal struggle’ to overcome cultural bias and ‘accept [that] a different worldview is valid’ (L.115-119).

James’ liminality enables him to model the way forward. His conviction is that he should not take sides in the tribal divisions in his country where there is a ‘real battle between allegiance of the tribal interest and the national interest’ (J.49). He finds that staying within the Christian community enables him to model the kind of leadership he believes in. He states that having a liminal identity in a leadership role enables him to ‘be able to relate and work with people from different ethnic groups and cultures and backgrounds’ (J.63).

Some interviewees found their liminal identity helped them as leaders to ‘just being able to be comfortable where you’re at’ (Angela, A.44). Having spent significant parts of her life in East Africa and the UK, Angela is at home in both Europe and Africa – and nowhere. ‘The flip side of that is just that you’re always feeling like: “Where is my home? Where am I actually from?”’ (A.50, 52)

Isaiah (I.31-35) speaks of visiting a great many countries, each with its own language and culture. Subconsciously he slips into the appropriate mindset for each context: ‘I'm dealing with several languages and that means several cultures, it's all integrated within me.’ (I.31) He feels at home in each: ‘[For example] when I come to meet a Turkish person I communicate in Turkish and then I think of Turkish culture.’ (I.32) Summing himself up, Isaiah states: ‘People may look at me as a Korean but actually I'm several people.’ (I.35) Inhabiting the liminal stairwell, Isaiah adapts to each context and feels at home there. Isaiah’s multilingualism helps, and we will look at that in section 5.5.

To summarise, the liminal space gives Greg multi-hued spectacles, Edward the best of East and West, Karl a trans-traditional faith identity, Daisy a broadened perspective, Henry a transnational questioning and sensitivity, Francis an acute cultural sensitivity, Luke a sense of commonality rather than a national identity, James an allegiance to something broader than his particular group, Angela a sense of being at home in diverse contexts, and Isaiah a sense of inner integration enabling him to subconsciously adapt to any external environment.

5.2 Differences are something positive

The liminal stairwell is not a melting pot where the different parties lose their distinctive characteristics; or, as Angela puts it, ‘We’re not trying to get into some big mush of “we’re all like
this”. (A.80) Angela speaks of not abandoning our ‘distinctive identities’ (A.80), Greg of not losing our ‘personal identity’ (G.110), Karl of not leaving his ‘faith identity’ behind (K.17).

Rather, differences are viewed as something positive.

We understand differences: Isaiah speaks of an experience in his youth in a multi-cultural team when he came to see that people are different: ‘individually different, backgrounds are different.’ (I.18)

We add appreciation to our understanding. ‘They are different, and in the same way I am different. So that leaves room for understanding and appreciating each other [and] the diversity [each] brings.’ (James, J.67-68)

We ‘respect’ differences: ‘It’s more an attitude ... respecting the different traditions that people come from.’ (Karl, K.60)

We are ‘sharpened’ by our differences (Caroline, C.39). Caroline explains: ‘The exposure to different cultures helps you to accommodate other opinions that are different from yours.’ (C.38) Others are simply different, not wrong, and so she ‘embraces’ the difference (C.52).

We ‘celebrate’ our differences (Angela, A.81). Angela elaborates: ‘Shared understanding in spite of the differences, or because of the differences, is a very core importance to me.’ (A.78) Therefore she celebrates cultural diversity (A.82).

We can find our differences ‘enriching’ (Karl, K.39). Karl comments how his faith has been enriched by the insights of other church traditions.

Luke speaks of him and his colleagues ‘affirming’ and ‘rejoicing in our differences’ (L.92). Our differences ‘deepen our relationships,’ he continues, ‘which then builds further trust, so that other leaders can relate better’ (L.96).

We ‘accept very different worldviews or ways of looking at things as equally valid’ (Luke, L.17). This is much more than just accepting that different behaviours are valid. It means being ‘able to talk to someone who believes very differently about the world and about the way that reality is constructed and still accept them’ (L.18-19).

Thus interviewees between them understand, appreciate, respect, are sharpened by, celebrate, are enriched by, affirm, rejoice in and accept the validity of one another’s differences.

Differences are not something abstract: what this means in practice is relating to people who are different from oneself. Take Henry for instance, who speaks of his ability to relate to fellow-leaders with a variety of backgrounds: ‘The fact that I have lived in two separate worlds – being in Latin America and being in the US – it allows me to have less prejudice, less stereotypes, less barriers, than if I was just from Latin America or just from the US.’ (H.42)
5.3 The focus is on the person

This appreciation of people who are different leads naturally to a focus on the person, on relationships. All interviewees felt that their cross-cultural experience, transnational identity and multilingual ability (to use the words in the interview questions) enabled them to more effectively focus on people: through showing respect; through cross-cultural wisdom and understanding; through understanding the problems faced by those not communicating in their mother tongue; through recognising their own cultural bias and limitations; through listening and learning from the other, and through an emphasis on our common humanity. We will illustrate these six points.

5.3.1 Respect

When Luke (L.129) listed what he would expect of both himself and the other person in a cross-cultural relationship, the first thing on the list was ‘a sense of mutual respect’. Similarly Greg (G.190) rejoiced when a point of cross-cultural ‘mutual respect’ was reached with his colleagues, and Edward (E.71) spoke of the ‘mutuality of respect’ between cross-cultural leader and follower. Daisy articulated her respect for others by giving them the space to be different (D.35), the space to be heard (D.46) and the space to hold their own position (D.91), while Karl spoke of the importance of a respectful attitude towards those with different traditions (K.60).

5.3.2 Cross-cultural wisdom and understanding

Angela used the word ‘understand’ and its derivatives 38 times. ‘For me understanding is very important. Understand and be understood.’ (A.15, 27) James (J.5) spoke of his ability to ‘embrace and understand others and not to be quick in judging them’. Luke (L.147-158) explained how his familiarity with a particular culture enabled him to see that the real meaning of someone’s action was not the same as the surface meaning.

Francis (F.70-92), demonstrating flexibility in leadership, explained how he relates differently to people from different cultures. When he is communicating with someone from a culture that prefers oral communication he selects his form of communication accordingly: ‘I'll Skype them rather than writing an email.’ (F.70-71) He also engages in long greetings, asks after the other person’s family. ‘I might share pictures of my family and tell them about personal things about my family – because non-western cultures may not divide between the professional sphere and the private sphere in quite the same way.’ (F.78). As a British man Francis takes special care when relating with an African or Asian woman, ‘very conscious of her dignity as the wife of another man’ (F.89).

Caroline (C.1) states that the fact that she herself has been exposed to several different cultures enables her to understand where people are coming from when they speak in certain ways, for the way they speak is based on the way they think. Edward (E.59-60) gets close to our statement from Adeney when he says, ‘In the mission field a leader without cross-cultural experience, who doesn’t understand transnational, is disadvantaged in significant ways, because we have intercultural competencies which are so different.’ Luke and Francis describe some of the challenges of operating in multiple cultural
contexts. Francis is European, and one of his examples (F.161) is the value of having ‘a lot of African peer friends with the same education’ as his own to help him never forget the collegial equality of Africans and Europeans.

Interviewees spoke of their openness to accepting the wisdom of others coming from different contexts. Caroline (C.2): ‘I am more accommodating to diverse ideas and ways of doing things – although sometimes I feel like: “Oops, I don’t quite agree with that.”’ Daisy (D.37) does not simply assume that because something has always been done a certain way, that is the right way to do it. Greg (G.34) appreciates the accumulated knowledge of conversations: ‘with nationalities and people – both like me and unlike me – around the world’. Barry (B.27-36) explains how he learnt to share his feelings through marrying someone from a quite different culture.

5.3.3 Taking speakers of other languages into account

English is not Barry’s native language, yet he uses it in his daily work. He describes how he and his colleagues understand English, but when they write it they formulate their message according to their own cultural and linguistic patterns. This creates a ‘language barrier,’ for when a native speaker of English reads what they have written, it may mean something different to what was intended. (B.92) Barry illustrates this with the story of an expatriate who ‘really hurt’ (B.96) his (Barry’s) colleague by something he wrote. Reflecting on this, Barry shared (B.105-110):

> The way we say things is different - because we think in our culture the [same] way [as] we speak in our language. So when we say [something], it comes out in a way that our culture would address things. So when my brother – my colleague – was writing, he said it, and there’s nothing wrong with it for me – as a [native of my country] who read it. But [when] the expat read it – it was different... That caused a problem.

Barry, due to his greater familiarity with the hazards of liminality, was able to help his colleague and the expatriate through this crisis.

Daisy and Luke had colleagues like Barry in mind when they spoke of those in English-speaking meetings for whom English was not their mother tongue:

Daisy (D.43-47) spoke of the need to respect such people and the problems they might be having when they are struggling to communicate something. ‘It might be that they just can’t find the words, or even if they can find the words, it’s going to be harder for them to speak.’ So Daisy intentionally gives them opportunity to speak: ‘They might be quiet just because they can’t think of the thing in the language – not because they have nothing to say.’

Luke (L55, 64-66) referred to a conference he had just hosted, in English, which included many for whom English was a second or third language. Feedback received after the conference showed that those for whom English was not mother-tongue were not sufficiently taken into account. He reflects:
‘Even though we recognised that our colleagues by and large have excellent English skills, for deeper level heart discussions it would benefit them to be able to speak their mother tongue.’

Francis and Karl, fully at home in the liminal space, speak of how they adjust their communication style depending on who they are conversing with:

Francis (F.46-51) explains that with his Nigerian students he puts on a bit of a Nigerian accent and sentence structure, with his wife, who is not a native speaker of English, he consciously avoids words she doesn’t know, while with Asians and Africans he speaks more slowly and carefully. ’In an international meeting,’ he continues, ‘you’ll hear me speaking a very different kind of English than my normal British English. If I go out for a beer with you, [we] will speak very fluently and freely, using British idioms. When I’m being recorded of course I’m being a bit more conscious and aware of what I’m saying.’

Carefully constructing his thought, Karl (K.82) observes, ‘Over the years the way I put something forward and particularly where you put which arguments and where or when you put in the main point you want to make, there I think I’ve subconsciously been influenced by how people from other cultures do that and have done that towards me.’ The difference between Karl and Francis is that Karl seems to be speaking about a subconscious, Francis a conscious process.

I am mindful in conducting this research that some interviewees for whom English is not a first language are at a disadvantage. They did not speak at such great length or with such readiness as some mother-tongue speakers. Like Daisy in the quotation above (D.43-47) I endeavoured to give them as much space and time as they needed, and now as I analyse the interviews I consciously study their thoughts more closely, aware that they might not have been able to express themselves as precisely as they might have wanted.

5.3.4 Awareness of one’s limitations and bias

As an ex-pat Brit, Angela is aware of the bias and exclusivity of British humour. She realises that what is humorous to the British may not be humorous to other nationalities. Therefore she adjusts her communication ‘in order for it to be meaningful to them’. (A.93-95) She tells of a non-British friend who shared a difficult situation with her: her own ‘desire as a Brit was to bring humour in and minimise [the problem]’ (A.116). But then she realised (A.118): ‘in doing that I was actually undermining the importance of the issue that [my friend] was bringing to me.’ Aware of cultural bias and blindspots she was able to be of genuine help to her friend.

The liminal space has helped Daisy see that ‘there are different ways of thinking, different ways of doing’ (D.55). This helps her realise that ‘my way is not necessarily the right way or the best way’ (D.54): that is, diversity enables her to see her own limitations and become polycentric, or in her own words, ‘and stop being so egocentric, I guess!’ (D.55)
5.3.5 Listening and learning

Greg observes: ‘That ability to engage with people and to ... acknowledge and listen to them are the most valued things – traits – that a cross-cultural experience teaches.’ (G.29) He tells the story of when he was forced to remain silent, to only listen, and how that brought profound understanding (G.124-193). Introducing this story he gives four words of wisdom: ‘Listen (period). Think (period). Understand (period). Speak (period). So the “speak” is the last; it’s not the first. I have to listen; I have to think hard about what I am hearing and seek to understand it - and then form my opinions and speak.’ (G.119-121)

Daisy speaks of an ‘appreciation for listening and evaluating ... rather than assuming I’ve got the right plan’ (D.102). Luke tells of a time when, if he had been a typical American he would have fired a colleague from a different cultural background. But instead he listened, light dawned and he exclaimed, ‘Aha! That’s what’s happening here that we haven’t been able to figure out!’ (L.29-30) Liminality leads to listening which leads to understanding.

In discussing his trans-traditional identity Karl speaks of the enrichment that follows from allowing other Christian faith traditions to influence him. ‘You’re much more aware on a very regular basis that you can enrich your approach to the Bible and to faith and to church and to God by insights from these other, sometimes Orthodox, traditions.’ (K.38)

5.3.6 Common humanity

In the liminal stairwell our common humanity is more important to us than our differences. This theme is central to Isaiah’s discourse: ‘We are human beings ... created in God’s image’ (I.47-49) – whether we are Christians or Muslims, English, Korean or anything else. Isaiah gives the example of a trip to India where he related as an equal with a poor village girl, and then also as an equal with government ministers. ‘We are the same, equals.’ (I.65)

Daisy (D.85) appeals to our common humanity when describing how rank and hierarchy are not important to her. Francis picks this idea up when he describes his leadership style: ‘[I lead] in a very integrative way which sees my nationality and my language as an accident of birth and truly sees my African and Asian colleagues as that: colleagues.’ (F.65)

5.4 Building bridges

We have demonstrated and illustrated the three major themes that emerged from the 12 interviews: A liminal identity is an asset in leadership, Differences are something positive and The focus is on the person. We now turn to the three further themes: Building bridges, The benefits of being multilingual and The role of faith.

Firstly we will look at bridge-building.
All interviewees related one or more anecdotes of when they were a bridge-builder, or when they themselves, because of their liminal identity, were a bridge. We give a selection here.

Angela (A.125-131) and Barry (B.7-23) spoke of conflict resolution as a bridge. Angela illustrated with an anecdote of how she was able to help a Brit and an American make sense of each other, and of how she was a bridge between church partners and language project workers. Barry illustrated with the story of a conflict between church leaders and the village leader. He felt he lacked wisdom for the situation but then he ‘shared from God’s word, and that really helped appease the situation’ (B.22).

Caroline (C.73-91), married to a local man, found herself a bridge between the local ladies and expatriate ladies. ‘Coming from the western culture, understanding the western culture and understanding the [local] culture, I can help both parties,’ she summarised (C.73).

Edward (E.103-110) related how two partner organisations were producing ‘one particular product’. A bridge was needed to bring to two together, and so ‘a third component, a joint venture’ was set up, and the two partners each selected who would represent them in this joint venture.

Francis (F.118-136) related how his wife was a bridge between black and white people in a Nigerian classroom. Because she (a white, European woman) ‘ate the same food’ as her black fellow-students, she ‘contributed a whole lot more to the classroom communication by what she was, than by what she’d ever said’. In another example (F.137-140) he related how his action of sleeping in the same hut as a local black man was a bridge between cultures. In both of these instances Francis and his wife did not set out consciously to be a bridge. They were simply ‘being together with people in healthy, natural ways’ (F.142): their lifestyle was the bridge.

Henry described his role as ‘a catalyst for partnership. So at the core it was about trying to build bridges.’ (H.56-57) This involved trying to keep partners in the partnership and cooperating with one another. His ‘multicultural, transnational experience’ enabled him to build bridges to people more used to working in their own corporate culture (H.63).

James (J.34-40) spoke of building bridges between different generations, both ‘those before me’ and ‘those coming after me’, and of the struggle between local and national interests described in section 5.1 (J.49). He also described his situation as one who has travelled overseas, received a good education and – unlike most with an overseas education – has now returned to his home area and is ‘sharing the sufferings and the struggle’ (J.52-58). This makes him a natural bridge between different sectors of society.

Karl (K.112-152) gave two examples of how he was able to be a bridge between different members of a working team who did not respect or trust one another. It was because of Karl's in-between status, not part of either group, that he was able to fulfil this role.

Luke told the story (L.148-158) of how a local partner, because of the constraints of their culture and worldview, had to state that they were breaking off all relations with Luke’s organisation. Luke alone,
because of his liminal insider understanding, knew the difference between politics and friendship in that context and was able to explain that to his colleagues. When the storm had passed the friendship between the two organisations became clear and visible again.

A number of common strands are evident in these testimonies of bridge-building.

First of all it is obvious that many of the fissures that needed bridging were between Christian organisations, either between two partner organisations, between the local and international parts of the same organisation, between different denominations or between a church and a project team. A surface analysis might suggest that Christians are particularly prone to disagreements. However, this does not stand up to scrutiny. Apart from the fact that the interviewees were all themselves Christians, and were speaking from their own experience, it indicates that Christians have such a desire to work together that they are willing to confront the barriers which impede cooperation, and bridge the fissures that separate the one from the other. Karl hints at this when he observes, ‘At some point the leaders themselves recognised that their situation had to be rectified.’ (K.161)

Secondly, in each instance the bridge or bridge-builder is either someone who in a way represents both parties (for example, they do not live in their passport country) or they have influence that comes from the position they hold and they exert that influence with wisdom seasoned with liminal understanding.

The third strand is something that Francis makes explicit when he states that his lifestyle is a bridge (F.142). This is not intentional bridge-building. One’s liminal identity means one is a bridge: between different national cultures, between East and West or North and South, between different church traditions.

Finally, there is also a place for intentional bridge-building, which may take the form of conflict resolution. Where conflict resolution is needed the natural mediators and go-betweens are liminal because they understand more than one position.

5.5 The benefits of being multilingual

All interviewees were asked how their multilingualism influenced the way they function as a mission leader. Some commented on the sensitivity they felt for those who were not using their language of preference (see section 5.3.3). Others, some in addition to the aforementioned sensitivities, commented on the benefits of having access to more than one language.

Language facilitates relationships. This, the primary benefit of multilingualism, was articulated by several interviewees. ‘It’s a relationship builder,’ said Angela (A.61). ‘It’s a very natural connector to relationship,’ said James (J.14). Language enables you to ‘build stronger empathy,’ said Edward (E.63).

Language and culture are inseparable and so multilingualism enables one to build relationships across cultures. ‘Language and culture go together,’ stated Isaiah (I.25, I.31): ‘I’m dealing with several
languages and that means several cultures.’ Greg spoke of a multilingual capability powering a multicultural conversation and engagement (G.71), while Edward stated, ‘The language you speak immerses you in the culture, and therefore [because] of having to speak another language [you are] more sensitive to another culture.’ (E.61)

The multicultural conversation empowered by the multilingual capability is particularly enriching since each culture sees the world differently – see Greg’s multi-hued spectacles in section 5.1. Daisy (D.62) states that each new language gives you ‘a different way of thinking, a different way of expressing – it affects all you do in your relationships with others,’ while Karl (K.49) observes, ‘Being multi-lingual ... has helped me to appreciate more that in different languages things are formulated and structured in different ways.’ Caroline (C.69) extends this to body language, commenting on the bridge that is created ‘if you are familiar with the body language of a different culture’.

5.6 Christian faith and liminal identity

Since all 12 interviewees were Christians actively involved in Christian mission, it comes as no surprise that most of them mentioned their faith. We noted in section 2.4 that Jesus bridges the liminal space between heaven and earth, and that he brings together those who are separated. No interviewee touched these points directly, but Caroline (C.115-127), emphasising the multicultural nature of the Christian community, Luke (L.49), arguing that Christians, with their citizenship in heaven, are naturally liminal, Isaiah (I.64-65), emphasising our equality as humans because we are all created in God’s image, and Greg describing ‘people who know Jesus Christ’ as ‘foreigners in this land – we’re all resident aliens’ (G.22-25), provide a keen application of them.

Other aspects of the life of faith which were brought to bear on the conversation include listening to God and the importance of our relationship with him (Barry, B.18, Edward, E.7). Karl (K.31-46) appreciates the fact that there are different, equally valid ways of expressing faith. Daisy (D.38) found that her faith enabled her to step out of her comfort zone and take risks, while James stated that his faith helped him interact with others more easily, and integrate his faith and work with different cultures’ (J.7).

Caroline’s emphasis (C.115-127) on the multicultural nature of the Christian community is an important one. Without this multicultural community we would find it more difficult to absorb new ideas because we would be set in our ways. However, being part of the multicultural body of Christ we are exposed to people, opinions and ideas that are different. Since the body of Christ is a community of love, listening to one another, respecting the cross-cultural insights of our brothers and sisters, and knowing that God’s word is the firm foundation, we allow ourselves to be influenced by one another. A major strength of the body of Christ, then, is its multicultural nature. The corollary of this is that mono-cultural churches are impoverished.
5.7 Summary

Our research question relates to the ways in which leadership is most effective when exercised by those with a liminal identity, and we have noted particular strengths spoken of by different interviewees.

The liminal leader or community, while being comfortable where they are at (Angela), appreciates, adopts and integrates into their own identity the best of East and West (Edward), different expressions of the Christian faith (Karl), and traits of different nations (Henry). They have a broadened perspective and as a result are more flexible (Daisy). They recognise the vital importance of understanding a person and their context before one can engage meaningfully with them (Greg). While not taking sides (James) they know that there is more than one way of seeing a situation (Barry), they realise how crucial it is to cross cultural boundaries and to understand other worldviews on their own terms (Francis and Luke). Given their liminal experience they will subconsciously adjust to a new cultural environment (Isaiah). A liminal Christian community has particular strength (Caroline).

Interviewees did not use the words ‘polycentric’ and ‘hyphenated’, but the concepts are embedded in the ideas they expressed. The interconnected diversity of hyphenation and the localisation of polycentricity are evident in the acknowledgement of our equality as fellow-humans and the fact that recognition of our differences leads, not to fear or exoticisation, but to respect and relationships. In the liminal space interviewees focus on crossing boundaries by listening to and learning from those who are different from themselves. Because of their liminal in-between identity they themselves are bridges, the more so as they become increasingly aware of the hue of their own glasses (Greg, G.40-48) and their own limitations, thereby replacing monocentric knowledge with polycentric understanding.

Before we continue our evaluation of these strengths we will pause to look at the context in which these leaders are operating.
CHAPTER 6

A liminal world

No man is an island entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. (Donne, 1624)

6.1 Nationalism in a liminal age

Bhabha, Gilroy and other postcolonial writers take issue with the ‘centrisms’ of their day. Gilroy, for example, states his intended purpose as to ‘undermine the purified appeal of either Africanism or the Eurocentrism it struggles to answer’ (p.190). Centrisms – labelled by Adeney as, ‘monocultural enclaves’ – are alive and well today as evidenced by the revival of exclusive nationalism in a number of countries, the building of walls, literal and metaphorical, and an elusive search for national purity. These walls were echoed by Francis (F.235-238), as he lamented the fact that some Europeans and Americans in Africa did not connect with the local culture and context, instead they built walls around themselves.

Said’s complaint (1978) was that the West looked on the East patronizingly and imperialistically. It was seen as strange and exotic, enticing and fearful. Spivak (1988) picks up the theme: white men speaking to other white men about the marginalised subaltern denies that subaltern a voice of her own. The East is exotic, passive and silenced, while the West, educated and active, speaks out. Susan Carland (2017) writes similarly about Muslim women today: for as long as it is male Muslim scholars and non-Muslim western feminists who write about Muslim women, Muslim women are denied a voice of their own. This example demonstrates that the state of affairs Said and Spivak were describing is not confined to our history books. Today, as much as in the colonial and immediate postcolonial period, we so often find the ‘other’ exotic and fall into Said’s Orientalism mindset, or threatening and something to be feared.

In my paper, The Battle of the Gods (Greed, 2015), I considered the global forces of market globalism, spheres of influence, jihadism and the mission of God. When examining spheres of influence I noted the existence of national popularism in a number of countries, but I failed to predict the rise of nationalism we are experiencing now in 2017. I saw market globalism defeating both spheres of
influence and jihadism. The lines of battle that are now being set are between market globalism and nationalism. Even jihadism is marginalised by the rise of nationalism – except that jihadism is not dissimilar to nationalism: both are based on the exclusion of those who are different. Fear is on the increase and trust on the decrease; bridges are demolished while walls are constructed.

The world is more interconnected than it has ever been. More people are ‘routed’ than there have ever been, some out of choice, others out of desperation or the search for a better life, yet others against their will. I chose to move from my passport country to Russia and from there to Finland. Some who have migrated from the Middle East to Europe did so because they knew their life was at risk. Others migrated because their home and livelihood had been destroyed. Some were seeking a better job or increased freedom. Others, the victims of people-traffickers, have been moved against their will and against their own interests.

Where is the liminal mission leader on this battlefield between the gods, a battle which drives many to extremism and exclusivism and in which millions get caught in the crossfire? As a builder of bridges and demolisher of walls, the liminal mission leader is part of globalisation – but not market globalism. The mission of God is that the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea: that people would know him (Hab. 2.14; John 17.3). The Church of God can ally itself to neither market globalism nor nationalism. Ours is a third way, articulated by the ancient prophet as, ‘to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God’ (Micah 6.8).

Before we look at the question of the strengths of the liminal leader posed at the end of section 5.7 we will briefly look at fractal theory, since this will help us understand the relationship between individual, community and organisation.

6.2 An application of fractal theory

![Figure 2: A liminal, polycentric, hyphenated model.](image)
Figure 2 on page 38 depicts a liminal, polycentric, hyphenated model. The coloured shapes represent the many centres, that is, the polycentric characteristic of the model. The lines represent the interconnectedness of these centres, that is, its hyphenated nature. The space around the shapes and lines is the liminal space.

Following fractal theory, which states that similar patterns recur at progressively smaller scales (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014), figure 2 can be applied at many different levels: globally, nationally, organisationally, at the team level, and individually.

On one level figure 2 represents the world. Each coloured shape is a nation, an organisation, a ‘node’ (Castells, 2000a, p.501). In these days of globalisation no nation is an island (metaphorically), no organisation exists in isolation. That does not stop some from trying, though, using the politics of control, building walls of fear and exclusion.

Figure 2 also represents the Church. The Church is a global body, with ‘nodes’ or ‘centres’ (local churches and fellowships of quite different ‘shapes’ and ‘colours’) across the globe. The most effective leaders – for example the 12 whom I interviewed – are those who are not rooted in one node but routed between and amongst the nodes. Sadly, some parts of the Church cut themselves off or endeavour to cut others off.

Figure 2 is also a global polycentric organisation which has centres – for example, regional offices – in many different national and cultural environments. Each centre is a different shape and colour, for the strength of a polycentric organisation is its ability to be different in each context, to customise itself for each environment.

In addition, figure 2 is a person, a person comfortable in the liminal space between the nodes, a person whose identity is forged by two or more locations, cultures or languages. The postcolonial writers whom we referenced earlier and the mission leaders whom I interviewed are such liminal people. It is the liminal, polycentric, hyphenated person who is most at home in a liminal, polycentric, hyphenated organisation, Church and world.

A non-liminal, monocentric framework would also follow a fractal model. One only need picture a world where the slogan of each country is to make itself great. In it are corporations and businesses whose goal is to grab the best deals, make the highest profit, and scour the world for cheap resources and lucrative markets. One can imagine individuals there in love with themselves, hogging the limelight, consumed by ruthless ambition, advancing themselves at any cost. The result of such a mindset, be it at a national, organisational or personal level would be exclusion (I am the centre of my own world), disconnection (breaking ties with those who are not in my group) and an increasingly inward outlook (fear of the liminal because it is different).

We will examine the identity and role of the liminal mission organisation and leader under the headings polycentric, hyphenated and liminal.
CHAPTER 7

Polycentric, hyphenated, liminal leadership

It is my desire
Break down the walls to connect, inspire (Perry and Marley, 2017)

At the end of chapter 5 we saw how the interviewees’ insights and identity can be articulated in terms of polycentricity, hyphenation and liminality. We will use that framework now as we focus on these three concepts. However, here at the outset of the analysis we will briefly mention Adeney’s other two key descriptors of the leaders the world needs, that is, multilingual and Christian. Multilingualism enables the conversations that assist and give rise to relationships. Additionally it enables one to see the world through different linguistic and cultural eyes. As such it is an integral part of polycentricity, hyphenation and liminality.

We have already seen in section 2.4 that Jesus is a bridge between heaven and earth and that he brings all things and all people together. In section 5.6 we saw Caroline’s emphasis on the multi-cultural nature of the Christian community, and how that multi-cultural identity is a key strength. The Christian community is ‘rooted’ in Christ (Col. 2.7) and ‘rooted’ in love (Eph. 3.17). Though we may also be ‘routed’ (to use Gilroy’s word) our rootedness in Christ and in love gives us stability and purpose in the ambiguity of a routed existence. Caroline (2015) expresses it succinctly: ‘My roots got routed and have taken root in heaven.’ We will draw on Christian theology and missiology throughout this chapter.

Let us turn now, then, to polycentricity, that is, localisation.

7.1 Polycentric: localised

An international organisation ‘may conduct activities in other countries [but] it retains a major focus in its home country’ (Koenig, 2011). Its motivation for spreading out into other parts of the world may be to exploit them, for example as some ‘multinational corporations’ do (see Greed, 2015). Or its motivation may be to serve them, like those aid organisations which are rooted in a particular country while seeking to serve other parts of the world.
A contrasting model is the global organisation, described by Koenig (2011) as ‘boundary-less’. She states that a global organisation ‘takes a more holistic, interdependent, and interconnected approach’. It does not identify with any one country but receives equal input from many ‘centres’ across the globe. An example of a global organisation is the Wycliffe Global Alliance (see Greed, 2014b). A global organisation is polycentric: ‘programs, chapters, or field offices operate simultaneously in several countries and regions around the world and are governed by a multinational board’ (Koenig, 2011).

A monocentric organisation is the same across the globe. Examples would be the US franchises McDonald’s and Starbucks. Enter a branch of Starbucks in the US, Finland, Vietnam or anywhere else and you will be served the same choice of food and drink in the same manner. A polycentric organisation, on the other hand, seeks to be localised, to contextualise itself to each location. An organisation that is seeking to become polycentric is SIL International, whose Executive Director writes, "We need to modify our structures and practices to enable non-western brothers and sisters to “be SIL” in the way that best suits their context and their desires... so that SIL becomes fully “at home” in every culture and context.’ (Kenmogne, 2017)

A polycentric organisation – or one that is striving to become polycentric – needs polycentric leaders. Ideally, following the fractal model, they would be at all levels. For the organisation to be truly polycentric these leaders, like the 12 interviewees, need to bridge locations, cultures, ethnicities, genders and generations. The goal here is not to achieve political correctness, as a monocentric organisation might, simply wishing to demonstrate a certain point. But a liminal, polycentric organisation recognises that without this kind of diversity some voices will not be heard and that some will remain ‘more equal than others’ (Orwell, 1945), which will be to the impoverishment of all.

7.1.1 Polycentric theology

Nash Williams, a character in Phillips’ novel ‘Crossing the River’ (1993) was born in West Africa, sold as a slave and bought by an American Christian landowner, Edward Williams, who brought him up as a good Christian. As a ‘converted Christian, with a sound moral base’ (loc.121) Nash Williams was sent by the American Colonization Society to Liberia, part of the endeavour to bring the faith to Africa. Much of this section of the novel is in the form of correspondence between Nash Williams in Africa and Edward Williams in America. Reading between the lines the reader realises that something is increasingly amiss with Nash Williams’ faith, until in his final letter he writes that he has essentially become a ‘heathen’ African (loc.845). He has ‘cast off the garb of ignorance’ (loc.854) of his life in America and embraced his essential African-ness. He states that the school is no more, since it was America, and that missionary work is futile. ‘The American God,’ he states, could never take root in Africa, ‘leaving the sensible man with the conclusive evidence that he must reap what grows naturally’ (loc.859) – reaping both the crops that the land produces and the worldview that is inherent to that part of Africa.
Theology, Walls tells us (2002, p.11), ‘is occasional and local in character’ (emphasis original). The faith that had taken root in America could not be uprooted and transplanted to Africa. African Christian faith and African theology need to be based on ‘what grows naturally’ (Phillips, 1993, loc.859) in Africa. Yahweh is not a local deity; he is Lord of the whole earth, but the way in which we relate to him is localised in character and is culturally contingent. That is, the way in which the peoples of the earth relate to God and worship him is polycentric. When ‘the Christian God’ is equated with ‘the American God’ (or the Russian God, the French God or any ‘God’ of any other locality or ethnic group) the faith will never take root in a new location. A major issue for the Tatar people, with whom I worked for many years, is a perception that the God of the Church is Russian, and that in order to follow him they would need to become Russian. The very idea of a ‘Christian’ God can also be a stumbling block, since Christian culture can be seen as western, maybe American, maybe right-wing. There is no universal way to worship Yahweh except ‘in spirit and in truth’ (John 4.24). Since theology is based on what grows locally in any given environment, it – and worship – will look quite different from place to place.

Walls (1996, pp.3-5) elaborates on this by giving examples of the Church in different eras and locations: Jewish believers in first century Palestine, Greek believers at the Council of Nicaea, Irish monks, Victorian Christians in London and Nigerian Christians dancing through Lagos in the 1980s. They are so different that the casual observer may struggle to find any points of contact. However there is continuity ‘about the final significance of Jesus, the Scriptures, of bread and wine, of water’ (p.7). The present day observer might visit a West Asian city and find a grand building labelled ‘Church’ with clergy, liturgy, history and vestments, and then stumble upon a group of people who on the exterior look rather like Muslims but for whom Jesus, the Scriptures, bread, wine and water are central. We see here that the faith has made itself at home in two very different cultural settings right in the same city.

Ray Anderson (2007, pp.115-135) demonstrates how this localisation of theology and resultant polycentrism is happening in contemporary western culture. He looks at the interaction between the written Word of God (the Scriptures) and the contemporary, Spirit-inspired work of God. If the work of God does not seem to align with the Word of God we need to look afresh at the Word of God: perhaps – as the Council of Jerusalem discovered in Acts 15 with regard to the ministry to the Gentiles – another interpretation of the Word of God is possible, one that aligns with the contemporary work of God.

Following this trail laid out by Walls and Anderson we see how theology and missiology, occasional and local in character, are themselves polycentric and liminal. This means that the resultant Church therefore has to be polycentric in nature. Since theology itself is liminal, global systematic theology is an illusion. Theology is formed as the faith takes root in different environments and as contextual theologies grow up: liberation theology, African theology, western theology, feminist theology, water buffalo theology, to name but a few. Theologies are formed in the stairwell where the Word of God
and the work of God commingle with the indigenizing and pilgrim principles (see p.13) in diverse occasional and local settings.

The Church, then, and any polycentric Christian organisation, will have a polycentric theology, as different theologies spring up in the different localities where it becomes ‘at home’. If local theologies are not springing up, that is a likely sign that the faith is not yet at home there. This demands patience and forbearance on all sides since a theology arising in the Kashmir Mountains may offend western sensibilities, and vice versa, because of the culturally-bound way in which each articulate their faith. But unless we are able to embrace both, together with a theology bursting forth from black Africa, and another from the Chinese house church movement, we have not become truly polycentric.

7.1.2 Polycentric leadership

We saw in section 3.1 how the identity of a liminal person is drawn from a variety of different contexts. We saw in the interviewees how such people therefore have a greater appreciation of the distinctives of different cultures or worldviews, and a greater openness towards the fusion of them. A polycentric leader is such a person, recognising the validity of different ‘centres’, that is, worldviews, and able to adapt her or himself to relate to each on its own terms. Luke (L.12-19) emphasised his intentionality in the area of cross-cultural communication. It is more than just understanding that people are different and tolerating those differences: ‘The true challenge is to actually accept very different worldviews or ways of looking at things as equally valid.’ As we noted in section 5.2, this is something deeper than simply accepting the validity of different behaviours. It is recognising that different people see the world and the construction of reality in quite different ways – and still accepting them.

Another interviewee who captured the essence of polycentric leadership was Greg. We have already noted his multi-hued spectacles which enable him to align his vision with the context in which he is operating (G.40-48; section 5.1). Later in the interview he returned to a related theme where he encapsulated the strength of a polycentric leader. Greg shared an insight he got late in life, that ‘people who are transcultural [lead] not only person to person: they are actually leading context to context’ (G.96). That is, they first ‘relate to people’, then ‘understand the context’ and only then ‘apply the principles’ (G.99). The principles of leadership are the same, but they are applied differently, depending on the context, which the leader understands by first relating to the people. Greg maintains (G.108-109) that it is ‘people who are cross-culturally adept [who] are better able to read the contexts, because they have seen context in different places. So they can lead more effectively in a context to context leadership role, but still … not lose their personal identity.’ The polycentric leader can adapt to different ‘centres’ or contexts and relate effectively in each without changing the essence of who they are.
7.2 Hyphenated: interconnected

In writing, the main purpose of hyphens is to glue words together. ‘They notify the reader that two or more elements in a sentence are linked.’ (Straus, 2016) When my friend Nina Tetri married Greg Mustonen her name became Nina Tetri-Mustonen, the hyphen indicating the conjoining of two equal parts. Adeney’s own (implied) hyphens indicate two strands of someone’s identity. The greater part of her article consists of three case studies: Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans and Japanese Americans. These people have a double identity. They are not simply Chinese (or Filipino or Japanese) and they are not simply American. They are more complicated, and even without the grammatical hyphen, theirs is a hyphenated identity.

While the notion of polycentricity concentrates on the disparate points or ‘centres’, that of hyphenation focuses on the connections between those points. The phrase ‘interconnected diversity’ is a helpful one. We saw in section 7.1 that the centres that are being connected can be quite dissimilar. Strength comes from the interconnection of diversity: of people, cultures and traditions that are different from one another. I found it remarkable how many of the interviewees talked about the differences between team members, and these differences were a point of strength and celebration.

Take James for example. He recognises that people are different and that in their eyes he is different from them (J.67). ‘I can’t expect them to think and behave the way I would like them to.’ (J.66) But this is not a problem to him. Rather, it provides the space for understanding and appreciating others, and the opportunity to enjoy the resultant diversity (J.68). Another example is Luke. He compares his own missional context where ‘we actually enjoy hearing the strange and wonderful intricacies of one another’s cultures: it’s something that fascinates us’ (L.95) with the business world where ‘training in multiculturalism just tries to dampen everyone’s identity’ (L.93). Our appreciation of different cultures, he says, deepens our relationships and enhances trust (L.96). Our hyphens are a source of strength. In section 7.1 we noted the difference between an international organisation and a global organisation. The same distinction is evident in Luke’s remarks here where the international organisation with one centre reaching out into different parts of the world dampens individual or local identity, while the polycentric global organisation celebrates individual and local identity, enjoying hyphenation, interconnection and intermingling.

Having looked at some of the benefits of interconnected diversity, we now turn to a specific and timely application of it: reconciliation. We will approach the issue of reconciliation via the stairway of hyphenated theology and church life.

7.2.1 Hyphenated theology and church life

Hyphenation – interconnected diversity – is rooted deep in the Scriptures. We referred to the first chapter of St Paul’s letter to the Ephesians in section 2.4. The whole letter illustrates interconnected diversity well. In chapter 1 Paul outlines God’s overarching plan for the universe: ‘To bring unity to all
things in heaven and on earth under Christ.’ (v.10) In chapter 2 he addresses international relations, where God’s plan again is unity: ‘[Christ] is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.’ (v.14) In chapter 3 he states that it is God’s intent to make his wisdom known to the heavenly authorities ‘through the church’ (v.10), and he then spends the rest of the letter addressing the life of the church, where his plea is for unity. He begins the second half of the letter: ‘Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace,’ (Eph. 4.3) and then continues by enunciating what that means in practice.

Interconnection, St Paul maintains, brings unity at all levels: cosmic, international and church. This is fully in line with fractal theory outlined in section 6.2. Unity is not to be confused with uniformity which would be more akin to Angela’s ‘big mush’ (A.80) where we lose our individuality. Unity strengthens the connections, the hyphens, and celebrates the differences, bringing peace, harmony and working-togetherness. Let’s look now at the unity of interconnected diversity in church life.

Two authors who examine this kind of interconnectedness in church life are Leslie Newbigin and Phyllis Tickle. We will turn first to Newbigin.

As mentioned in section 2.2 Newbigin’s concern is that the gospel engage with and challenge contemporary western culture. He examines the ‘freedom’ of capitalism and the ‘equality’ of socialism and finds that they both fall short of being ‘the Christian view of God’s purposes for the human family’. Rather: ‘From its first page to its last, the Bible is informed by a vision of human nature [in which] what is fundamental is relatedness.’ (1986, p.118) He elaborates (p.122) by explaining how ‘human beings find fulfillment not in the attempt to develop themselves, not in the effort to better their own condition, not in the untrammelled exercise of unlimited covetousness, but in the experience of mutual relatedness and responsibility in serving a shared goal’.

Relatedness, then, is pivotal. According to Newbigin and his understanding of the Bible, a focus on relatedness is what the world needs. Relatedness should be one of the strengths of the church, as seen in our exegesis of St Paul earlier in this section. In the responses of our interviewees we saw a strong focus on the person (section 5.3), and the fundamental significance of interpersonal connections – that is, hyphenation – in the liminal space. Relatedness is comparatively easy between those who share a common cultural milieu. It is more of a challenge across the liminal space with those who are different.

In response to his insights Newbigin argues for a ‘genuinely ecumenical movement’ (1986, p.145) evidenced by ‘local ecumenical projects’ where churches and Christians recognise their essential unity and come together ‘to create a more coherent and credible Christian witness’ (p.145). Newbigin was writing in the 1980s, and the word ‘ecumenical’ is not so fashionable nowadays. However, the meaning behind the word, which we could perhaps summarise as the coming together of those who are different, is as contemporary as ever. Let us now turn to Tickle: where Newbigin has ecumenical projects she has a ‘gathering centre’.
In *The Great Emergence* (2008) Tickle examines the postmodern western church scene. While there were once four fairly distinct types of churches, she argues, Liturgicals, Social Justice Christians, Conservatives and Renewalists, nowadays there is a ‘great emergence’ as people move from all four types of church towards the ‘gathering centre’. The gathering centre, which Tickle equates with the emergent church, is a place of convergence and renewal where denominational differences no longer matter and there are no rules as to how you worship. All communities in the gathering centre, continues Tickle, ‘share one shining characteristic: they are incarnational’ (p.135), incarnational in a ‘post-almost everything’ (p.136) western society.

Circling around Tickle’s gathering centre are those who are drawn towards it but who still hold onto some aspects of their traditions. She gives them liminal-sounding names: ‘re-traditioning’, ‘progressive’ and ‘hyphenated’ (pp.139-142), for such churches and Christians occupy the liminal space between the gathering centre and traditional expressions of Christianity.

I would place myself in the liminal space where traditional and emergent expressions of Christian faith mix and mingle. My hyphenated spiritual journey has taken me from English Baptist to Welsh Chapel to Anglican to Russian Orthodox to Rock Concert Charismatic to Finnish Lutheran to contemplative spirituality, and more besides. Like Karl (K.15-46) with his trans-traditional identity, each hyphen, each way of doing church, enriches me. Likewise, the faith-based organisation with which I work is non-denominational: rubbing shoulders with those whose churchmanship and theology are different from mine is an enhancement to us all. My only regret is that the diversity is not even more varied.

For Tickle unity takes place where denominational distinctives fade; what matters is that the church is incarnational. The form that incarnational living will take will vary from context to context. Like Newbigin, Tickle would like to see the church gathering together if it is to be effective in the world. In section 7.1.1 we noted with approval the existence of a range of theologies, recognising that theology is occasional and local in character. At this juncture we note a vast range of Christian denominations and fellowships, and we do so with a level of censure for we see those who are similar worshipping together, maybe oblivious to the existence of fellow-members of Christ’s Church who are different, maybe deliberately avoiding or excluding them because of that very difference. Brierley (2017, pp.28-35) writes of a ‘great divide’ between black and white churches in the UK. Caroline (C115-127, section 5.6 above) rejoices in the strength that being multicultural gives to the body of Christ. This is the liminal, hyphenated model we wish to promote here, one where those who are different come together, while recognising and appreciating those differences. What brings unity to such a church is their contextualised incarnational living.

Having examined hyphenated theology and church life we now turn to the specific application of reconciliation.
7.2.2 Reconciliation

In section 2.4 we referenced Colossians 1.20 where St Paul states that God’s master-plan is to reconcile all things to himself through Christ, and in section 7.2.1 we saw that one feature of this is our reconciliation to one another. Paul, like Jesus (John 13.34-35), puts greater emphasis on the unity of love than (for example) on doctrinal purity. Those best positioned to engage in the work of mediation and reconciliation are the hyphenated people for whom being connected is of more value than being correct.

One of the seven global currents of twenty-first century mission listed by Fritz Kling (2010) is ‘mediation’. He recognises that in the past he has ‘often placed more value on being correct and accurate than on being connected and accepting of people’ (loc.2672). Now, without condoning positions with which he cannot agree, he understands the importance of interconnectivity if any kind of reconciliation is to be achieved. Interconnectivity, as Angela observed, does not mean that we all become ‘some big mush’ (A.80) but we retain our own distinctives. At the same time, I do experience change as I rub shoulders with those who are different from me. We saw Karl, for example, whose faith has not become ‘less Protestant’ (K.37) through interacting with Christians from a wide range of church backgrounds, but whose faith has been expanded and ‘enriched’ (K.38) through that process. Referring to figure 2 (p.38) again, a result of interconnectivity may be that the coloured shapes themselves begin to crumble at the edges, as boundaries become meeting places, edges become the places where liminal relationships are formed, and the concepts of ‘in’ and ‘out’ blur.

A hyphenated person is well-equipped to bring about reconciliation. When Barry told of a conflict between a local man and an expatriate mission worker, it was he, Barry, a local man with good international experience, who was able to help the two parties find reconciliation (B.92-112). Similarly, Caroline, an expatriate woman married to a local man, understood both parties when an expatriate woman and a local woman had a profound cultural misunderstanding, and so she was able to help them resolve the situation (C.74-91).

I see it as no coincidence that one of the liminal leaders whom I interviewed, James, is himself a professional mediator.

7.3 Liminal: crossing boundaries

The liminal space is where boundaries meet, converge and maybe crumble. With Wheatley (2005, p.48) we affirm that boundaries switch from being places that divide and define separateness to places of meeting and exchange. We add to this: boundaries become places where those who are different and who otherwise would have no opportunity to mix and commingle – where such people meet and interact. The migrant brings together in their person the old home country and the new home country, and so they naturally inhabit the liminal space.
This liminal borderland has a fuzzy edge. There is a space where you are in but not in. Two practical examples of this were provided by Copley and Pearson. Jesus preached to crowds in the open air, ‘thus allowing people to hang round at the edges, listening and weighing up his message’ (Copley, 2015). Pearson’s (2015) church has coffee tables at the back, a liminal space where the homeless prefer to sit during the service, rather than in the normal seating area with the other worshippers.

As we turn to look at liminal leadership, we take note again of Merleau-Ponty, Ladkin and their concept of ‘flesh’ (see section 3.2.2). This ‘flesh’ is the liminal space between leaders and followers. Systems Intelligence teaches us that we are part of a whole, influencing and being influenced. Complex Responsive Processes teaches us that it is relationships that lead to shared meaning, resulting in change. In the flesh of the liminal space, in the complex system in which we share influence and meaning we will touch and be touched by those who are quite different, and the energy of the ‘energetic field’ will be multiplied.

### 7.3.1 Liminal leadership

We saw in section 3.2.1 how Roxburgh redefines the role of pastor as poet, prophet and apostle, and positions the pastor as part of a leadership team. This liminal leadership team is listening to voices from the edge (1997, p.57) for ‘boundaries have become the place of meeting and exchange’ (Wheatley, 2005, p.48). Therefore leaders are to be found on the circumference, not at the centre. Another writer to locate the leader on the periphery is Rohr (2011) who, like Roxburgh, depicts the leader as a prophet. The prophetic leader on the edge, writes Rohr, is both ‘the faithful insider and the critical outsider’. This makes him or her ‘the ultimate threat, the ultimate reformer and the ultimate invitation’.

A third writer to locating leadership on the liminal boundary is Brunstad (2016). His liminal borderland space is situated between the inside and the outside of the organization. The liminal leader, explains Brunstad, looks both ways at once: into the organisation where things are orderly and outside of the organisation where things are chaotic. He proceeds to articulate two distinctive strengths possessed by liminal leaders by virtue of the fact that they are located on the border: firstly they are able to understand and interpret the times, and secondly they are well positioned to seize the moment or opportunity.

Two distinctive strengths of liminal leadership that I would add to Brunstad’s are, firstly, leadership as a liminal community, and secondly, partnership. Firstly we will consider leadership as a liminal community and we will begin with the nature of God.

The nature of God is relationship. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three in one. In his book on the trinitarian nature of God, Rohr (2016, loc.423) sums up the defining characteristic of God with the words, ‘In the beginning was the Relationship.’ Therefore when God creates humankind ‘in our own image’ (Gen. 1.26) he makes us relationship too. This is expressed perfectly in the line from Mbiti (1990, p.141), ‘I am because we are and, since we are, therefore I am.’ This is true of us because
it is true of God. However, although Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equal they are not identical. God is the Creator of heaven and earth. God is the man from Nazareth. God is the wind that blows wherever she wishes (Genesis 1.1, Matthew 2.23, John 3.8). Yet the divine nature is one. We have already seen (section 2.4) how Jesus’ identity is liminal. Such are the differences between, and the oneness of, the three members of the Godhead that they can readily be described as a liminal community.

It is this divine liminal leadership community that is to be the model for us, a community working together in love. This approach is supported by Roxburgh (1997) and his team leadership, and (to name but three interviewees) Edward (E.78), whose six-person leadership team spans six nationalities, Daisy (D.87), with her expectation of being a team together with her colleagues rather than holding a position in a hierarchy, and Francis (F.32-43), with his involvement in cross-cultural teams: ‘The teams I work with involve Arabs, people from Southeast Asia [and] Africans.’ (F.36)

By virtue of inhabiting the liminal space, a leadership team constitutes the coming together of individuals from a wide range of backgrounds. Mary Ho (2016), who describes herself as mirroring the globalisation of missions, suggests that the mission workforce needed today is ‘a mosaic of global leaders, with diverse – even clashing – backgrounds, skills, and experience’. The key competencies she identifies for global leaders are to ‘connect, create and contribute value across boundaries’ (italics original). This can best come about through leadership teams who themselves cross boundaries. Such a team welcomes differences, are sharpened by one another, experience the importance of respect and honour, and learn cultural sensitivity on the job.

Let us now consider liminal leadership and partnership. Community-leadership is not to be limited to the leadership of a single organisation. Leaders on the liminal edge are perfectly positioned for effective partnership with other organisations. The liminal leader is not simply looking out for the welfare of those in his or her organisation but is looking out for the welfare of the whole ethnoscape, to use Appadurai’s word which we presented in section 3.1. In so doing they are seeking to work in partnership with any whose vision, context or purpose overlaps with their own. Their horizon is not the boundary of their organisation: their horizon is the liminal space.

This brings to mind partnership meetings in which I have participated, six or seven organisations represented, two or three representatives from each organisation, embracing six or seven different nationalities, where we discussed the ethnoscape in which we worked. Each organisation had its distinctives, yet there was significant overlap, and we sought to work together in partnership, as a loving community. Henry’s experience was similar (H.55-64, see section 5.4): he explains how his role as the leader of an association of agencies was basically being a catalyst for partnership, a bridge-builder. He gave the example of an organisation that wanted to leave the association and the efforts he went to ‘to bring together members from the different agencies to work on a cooperative project’ (H.61).

* The Hebrew ruach and the Greek pneuma are both feminine.
No one individual can control what goes on in the liminal space. Partnerships and communities of leaders have significant influence, but even for them the complexities of the liminal environment may prove too much. We hold our plans lightly. When something new emerges and blossoms in the liminal space, as it frequently will, it may or may not come from direct human intervention. But it will be the result of interaction between diverse human agents and it will spring from the influence of many.
CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

As a leader it’s my job to cross those boundaries. (Luke, L.112)

Cultural and linguistic diversity have always been part of humankind, but in the past the interaction between different cultures has been limited. Now, with globalisation, monocultural enclaves have been shattered and the liminal space revels in the resultant intermingling and creativity. After commenting on his desire to undermine the purified appeal of centrisms, Gilroy (p.190) goes on to write that his concern is ‘with the flows, exchanges, and in-between elements that call the very desire to be centred into question’. With this statement Gilroy could be describing any one of the 12 interviewees, whose identity and experience foster polycentrism, who affirm and celebrate differences, and who see interconnected diversity as a strength.

However, there is a backlash. An ‘us and them’ mentality is still dangerously widespread, as leaders play to people’s fears and bolster their monocentric enclaves. This year (2017) a new US president has taken office. He appealed, or so it seems, to ethnocentric Americans who failed to look across the border beyond their own back yard. His is an antagonistic leadership style that does not appear to take the liminal realities of the contemporary world into account. As a result the world is now suffering the impact of a powerful binary leader in a liminal age. At the same time the UK has signalled its intent to leave the European Union, opting for monocentrism over polycentrism, disentangling itself from nearly 50 years of interconnectivity with its European neighbours. Other countries too have significant numbers promoting a retreat from the liminal space into the perceived security of myopic monocentrism.

The twelve liminal leaders whom I interviewed demonstrated the effectiveness of leading not from a binary ‘us and them’ position, but from the liminal ethnoscape where cultures, ideas, languages, worldviews, nationalities and individualities mix and mingle, engendering new forms and identities. These new forms will include new ways of thinking, new philosophies and new contexts where theologies will emerge. In this milieu the focus of the liminal leader is on building bridges, not walls, and on understanding and respecting others, be they people, cultures or situations, not self-
promotion or self-aggrandizement. They see difference and diversity as something enriching, something to be celebrated, something that will make us stronger.

We affirm the need for bridge-building leadership, and with Adeney assert that the natural bridge-builders are ‘liminal, hyphenated, polycentric, multilingual Christians’. Liminal, for they inhabit the in-between space between nations, cultures and worldviews. Hyphenated, for in them contrasting opposites and diverse approaches come together. Polycentric, for they are not rooted in one place but routed through the ethnoscapes of the liminal space, understanding people, cultures and situations without regard to where their centre lies.

Liminal leaders are bridges and they build bridges. We began with the image of a stairwell, itself a bridge between upper and lower areas. There are many routes into this stairwell. It is a complex space, and that complexity is the reason for its creativity. I am writing these final lines at the Maailma Kylässä – Global Village – Festival in Helsinki. The music included M.A.K.U Soundsystem, an immigrant band from New York, and Calle Real, a Swedish band playing timba music from Cuba. The festival itself is a celebration of ‘different cultures and surprises from all over the world’ (Maailma Kylässä, 2017), a celebration of liminality and the creativity that comes to birth in the liminal space.

Those who are liminal show a vigorous understanding of the world and its complex dynamics. They appreciate and affirm differences. They have a healthy understanding and appreciation of people, especially those who are different. They bring together disparate communities in peace and reconciliation. Let them be our leaders!
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Appendix: interview questions

The following 7 questions were asked of each of the 12 interviewees.

1. What do you see as your strengths as a mission leader?
2. How does your cross-cultural experience and trans-national identity influence the way you function as a mission leader?
3. How does the fact that you are multilingual influence the way you function as a mission leader?
4. How do any of these factors (cross-cultural, trans-national, multilingual) influence the way you relate to those you lead?
5. How do any of these factors influence the way you relate to your co-leaders?
6. How do any of these factors affect the way in which you allow yourself to be influenced by others?
7. Can you give any examples from your own experience of when you played a bridge-building role as a leader?

I defined ‘cross-cultural’ as having lived in or regularly visited two or more cultural contexts for significant periods with a good level of immersion, ‘transnational’ as having lived in or regularly visited two or more countries for significant periods, or having significant roots in a country other than where one resides, and ‘multilingual’ as being able to understand and be understood freely in two languages.