LIDERAZGO MESTIZO/MESTIZO LEADERSHIP: RELATIONAL CROSS-CULTURAL LEADERSHIP FOR THE BORDERLANDS

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Abstract

The growing pluralism of our neighborhoods requires leadership that cultivates shared life together amid contexts of profound and enduring difference. Presented here is the first article of two that promotes a relational social constructionist account of cross-cultural leadership. It draws on a narrative inquiry among twelve Latinx pastors serving in multicultural congregations in Southern California. This article proposes a relational (re-)conception of culture in light of Gloria Anzaldúa's theories of mestizaje and the borderlands and then advances a praxiological and missiological framing of relational leadership, or liderazgo mestizo, which describes four interconnected categories of leadership practice. The second article, to be published in the following issue, will examine ways that liderazgo mestizo reflects and re-accents Relational Social Constructionist Leadership theory.

Introduction

When I first set out to research Latinx pastors for my doctoral dissertation project, I hypothesized that Latinx pastors by virtue of their Latinx culture would exhibit particular aptitudes for leadership within culturally diverse communities. I was looking for evidence that culture shapes capacities and that capacities shape leadership. My project at that point was informed by a postcolonial agenda that sought to promote marginalized Latinx voices as leaders with important lessons to teach the dominant culture. However, as I

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reflected on the narratives of the Latinx pastors that I interviewed in light of constructionist articulations of hybridization—in particular, those of Mikhail Bakhtin and Gloria Anzaldúa—it became clear that my hypothesis was overlooking many interesting things that God's Spirit was doing in these diverse communities. There was of course evidence in the pastors' narratives that culture shapes leadership. But my hypothesized progression was equally true in reverse order: leaders shape culture. Often in our enthusiasm to measure how cultural factors influence leadership behaviors and the effectiveness of leadership practices, researchers like Geert Hofstede and I have spared little attention for how the dynamics of leadership shape cultures—the very cultures that supposedly shape leadership. The foundational assumption behind these cross-cultural leadership studies is that a person's national context imprints a value-based and cognitively constraining culture ("software") in one's mind that manifests itself in organizations through distinctive behavioral patterns. Such approaches to cross-cultural leadership not only tend to obscure the agency of organizational members, as the focus is almost entirely on the activities and qualities of a few exceptional individuals ("leaders"), they also obscure the agency of the leaders themselves, as their own behavior is (allegedly) determined by cultural constraints (narratives) over which they have no say or control.

What is the relationship between leadership and culture? How does culture influence leadership? How does leadership influence culture? Among cross-cultural leadership scholars, our emphasis has, to an overwhelming extent, been on the question of how culture influences leadership, and this has reflected and reinforced two major reductionisms—one related to agency and the other to diversity—at the heart of modern western leadership studies. However, Bakhtin (1895–1975), whose theories have been at the center of critical discussions of cultural hybridity in western postcolonial discourse since the early 1980s, highlights the intimate link between agency and diversity. He suggests that all knowledge and meaning is a product of dialogue; that our worlds are constructed by language; and that agency is the capacity to coauthor new meanings and the power to "re-accent" the words

(language) we use. In short, we are never simply bound to the ways in which words have been used before us, for it is in the midst of each particular conversation between speakers and listeners that meaning emerges. Even though meanings are situated (i.e., shaped by contextual realities)—and therefore resist being re-accented—and even though authorities may seek to control meanings ("monologue"), there are always "loopholes" in our dialogical interactions for "creative understandings." This space for creative understandings emerges from the fact that every word draws on a host of prior dialogues, stories, and experiences and thus has a plurality of possible meanings ("polyphony"). Diversity (polyphony) and agency (the capacity to generate meaning together) go hand in hand. Without agency, there is no diversity. Without diversity, there is no agency.

Yet in a growing number of our neighborhoods touched by globalization, at their best, cross-cultural leadership models serve as a kind of "sophisticated stereotyping"[1] that might just as easily limit our imaginations with regard to the agency of neighbors and the polyphony of their cultural narratives. Most cross-cultural leadership theories—regardless of whether they are mainstream or postcolonial or decolonial—have tended toward what Professor Willie James Jennings calls a "deeply distorted relational imagination." These models of leadership distort identity and hinder efforts to cultivate belonging, because they have been formed within an imagination shaped by methods of domination that perceive *others* not as creative relational agents but as objects to be manipulated for our own ends and outcomes. As students and practitioners of cross-cultural leadership, we need relational accounts of both culture and leadership to disrupt homogenizing conceptions of culture and hegemonic approaches to leadership. As a Latinx practitioner and scholar myself, and drawing on field research among Latinx pastors, in what follows I offer one such relational account of culture and leadership.

[1] J. S. Osland, A. Bird, J. Delano, and M. Jacob, "Beyond Sophisticated Stereotyping: Cultural Sensemaking in Context," *Academy of Management Executive* 14 no. 1 (2000): 65–79.

Mestizaje and the Borderlands

Latinx scholars debate the precise shape of and approach to Latinx identity. Yet most agree that our (so-called) assimilation to the United States involves a hybridization of cultural narratives rather than the erasure of one and wholesale adoption of another. Gloria Anzaldúa—a Chicana, queer, feminist, and postcolonial activist—describes her experiences of hybridization in terms of *mestizaje*. Anzaldúa was raised in the border country of south Texas, and she draws on her borderland experiences to paint vivid pictures of what it means to be a *mestiza*, a person "alienated from her mother culture, 'alien' in the dominant culture, the woman of color caught between *los intersticios*, the spaces between different worlds she inhabits." Anzaldúa called these spaces between worlds *borderlands* and people who experience them *borderlanders*.

By marrying a constructionist theory of knowledge (*la conciencia de la mestiza*) to a decolonizing agenda, Anzaldúa mapped a pathway for moving beyond reified, essentializing, exclusion-oriented, victim-oriented, and boundary-marking configurations of cultural identity. La conciencia de la mestiza entails, among other things, an imagination and an intellectual posture characterized by a tolerance for ambiguity and contradiction, by a spirit of hospitality that includes rather than excludes difference, and by a resistance to attempts by those in power to control knowledge or define reality. Even thirty years later, Anzaldúa's frameworks continue to impact Latinx discourse, because her lasting contribution lies not so much in her answers to the questions of who Latinx peoples are or what Latinx culture is, as in the way she helps us deconstruct the epistemic assumptions behind these questions that have so often obsessed western cultural theorists. Anzaldúa highlighted the importance of narrative in identity formation—the stories we tell (and embody) continuously (re)shape our sense of self and community and our ways of relating in the world.

An analysis of the Latinx pastors' narratives in light of Anzaldúa's constructionist theories of identity suggests that experiences of mestizaje and the borderlands entail (at least) three interrelated psychosocial dynamics that I term—coalescence, collision, and displacement. These interconnected experiences operate

simultaneously and on a continuum, with each Latinx person and Latinx community identifying with each of these three experiences to differing degrees (see fig. 1).

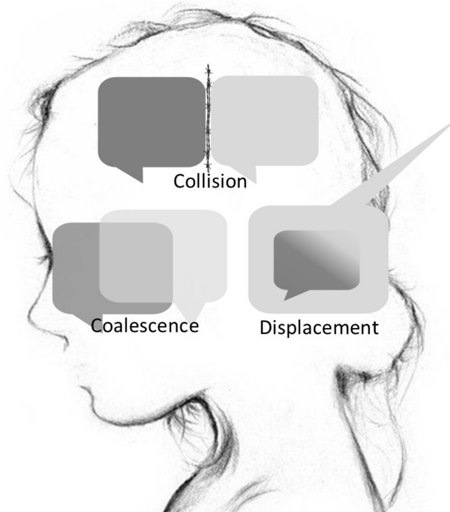

Figure 1. Mestizaje and Dynamics of the Borderlands

- *Coalescence* refers to the experience of a continual fusion of identities—the creation of new and distinct narratives through the blending and integration of multiple cultural narratives (see fig. 2). Anzaldúa analogizes the dynamic of coalescence within a person or community to the weaving of a unique tapestry that incorporates materials from the multiple worlds one inhabits.

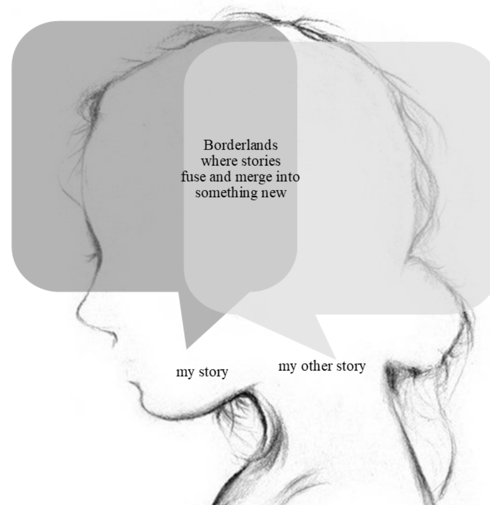

Figure 2. Coalescence and Creation of New Narratives

• *Collision* refers to the experience of living with the myths and worldviews of two or more cultures informing one's imagination (see fig. 3). Anzaldúa analogizes the dynamic of collision to a Mexican-American border running right through her heart and imagination. The experience of collision, she explains, feels like the ongoing conflict of bordering nations within one's psyche or social system—"within us and within *la cultura chicana*, commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture."[2]

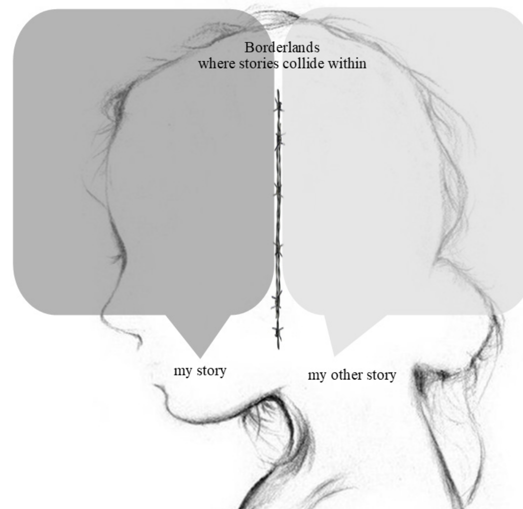

Figure 3. Collision and Borders Within

• *Displacement* refers to an experience of otherness and alterity—of never being fully at home nor fully accepted in one's place—where one's narrative is continuously resisting and (at the same time) incorporating narratives of the broader context (see fig. 4). Anzaldúa

[2] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/la frontera,* 100, 195. Foundational to Bakhtin's hybridity theory is the dialectical assertion that hybridity involves not only the "*mixing* of two socio-linguistic consciousnesses" but also the simultaneous "*collision* between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms." Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 360.

> illustrates displacement using the indigenous Náhuatl concept of *nepantla*—a perpetual state of transition, "the liminal space between" that "uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another, when changing from one class, race, or sexual position to another, when traveling from the present identity into a new identity."[3]

Figure 4. Displacement and *Nepantla*

My qualitative narrative study suggests that at least some—and likely a growing number—of our neighbors' cultural identities are complex, multivalent, and fluid. Many Latinx peoples experience within themselves and their communities the dynamic tension of multiple cultural narratives. These narratives continuously collide and coalesce into new shapes, even as they resist and change amid encounters with the narratives of their neighbors. By holding in tension the dialectics of collision, coalescence, and displacement, this framing of mestizaje offers a complex vision of unity in which difference persists even as change continues through relational interactions with others. In creating visions of life together in contexts of pluralism, leadership would do well to expect and embrace dynamics of coalescence, collision, and displacement.

[3] Anzaldúa and Keating, *This Bridge We Call Home,* 180.

Webs of *Testimonios*: Reimagining Culture for the Borderlands

A coalescence-collision-displacement framing of mestizaje points to the need for accounts of culture that create conceptual space for situatedness, flux, polyphony, and agency as integral dimensions of cultural identity. In other words, cultural identities in the borderlands are at once:

- *Situated.* The shapes of our cultural narratives are inseparable from dynamic constellations of relationships, places, and activities. All of our embodied experiences are inexorably tied to social, political, and historical situations.
- *Shifting.* Our experience of places is continuously shifting due to migrations and relocations. We might move to another neighborhood, or others might move into our neighborhood. Either way, our cultural narratives are only provisionally stable, as they remain linked to shifting contexts.
- *Plural.* Communities and individuals experiencing mestizaje describe navigating multiple (often incommensurate) cultural narratives, indicating that our cultural narratives are not monolithic.
- *Chosen.* Our contexts and relationships shape us, but they do not determine us. Experiences of mestizaje can, to a certain extent, be chosen and embraced or muted and suppressed. For instance, participants sometimes experienced displacement, coalescence, and collision due to factors beyond their control (e.g., the participant's parents move to a new country), but at other times participants experienced displacement, coalescence, and collision due to their own choices (e.g., participants chose to fellowship with a church of an unfamiliar culture).

In light of these experiences of mestizaje, one prototype for conceptualizing culture can be found in the corporate practice of

testimonios in Latino churches. Culture in this view is understood as webs of testimonios continuously (re)constructed through relational interactions. A *testimonio* is a novella-length, first-person narration of significant life experiences in which the narrative voice is that of a witness who recounts events with the aim of inspiring social transformations. Testimonios have a metonymic function by which one's story is representational of others who have lived through similar situations. At the same time, testimonios are inherently polyphonous in that they always leave space for the stories of others, so although testimonios involve truthfulness and veracity, they are never simply "the truth."[4]

The multi-voiced practice of testimonio in Latino congregations illustrates a complex and dynamic unity that embraces difference. In urban centers of North America, the composition of local congregations is continuously shifting due to immigration patterns tied to globalization. Newly arrived neighbors bring distinct, often competing, stories by which they make sense of the world. As they share their testimonios, these newcomers introduce new words and distinct meanings for familiar words, meanings that reflect the diverse ways they construe the world. Pastora Nadia's church in Long Beach prioritizes testimonios in corporate worship settings, in small-group settings, in one-on-one conversations, and even in leadership meetings. She describes it this way:

> When we get to sit at a table together I want you to bring your history [testimonio] with you, because it's going to make me better, and it's going to grow me as well as a leader. Right? So, when we sit at staff meeting, I love to hear the heart of people who have a different understanding of systems and growth and church that have been influenced by their upbringing. It's been influenced by their education. It's been influenced by the relationships that they're in; that I'm not a part of, right? So, we bring it all to the table and it makes the kingdom stronger.

[4] John Beverley, "The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio," *Modern Fiction Studies* 35, no. 1 (1989): 173, 178.

The aggregate testimonios of a congregation reflect a kind of cacophony of imaginative structures and conceptual schemes. As congregants interact and share life together, their testimonios evolve and are mutually enriched. The very words (language) of their testimonios are continuously re-accented with a wide range of cognitive, aesthetic, and affective meanings. Testimonios coalesce, and yet they each retain their own integrity and their own particular narrative voice. Through dialogue and reflection, a faith community reaches agreement (which stimulates mission and action to transform the world); and yet all agreements remain provisional, for wherever they experience agreement (coalescence), they also find contestation (collision). In shared praxis, difference persists.

Testimonios are an ongoing practice, and so the meaning-making never ends. In the same way, cultures are not closed or fixed systems. Cultures remain in permanent flux. Like webs of testimonios on which a congregation draws for meaning in the midst of living discourse—webs of meaning that shape the congregation's praxis—culture is situated and embodied, plural and permeable. Finally, this conception of culture is inherently relational, for testimonios are always a relational practice, a shared practice. Webs of testimonios can only be authored together.

Borderlander Spirit: A Pneumatology of Culture for the Borderlands

For Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, testimonios are "a meaning-making ritual" that awakens people to the work of God in *lo cotidiano* (ordinary, everyday experiences), and it is the Holy Spirit who propels and guides this work of conscientization and meaning creation.[5] Pastora Julieta, who today leads a multicultural Nazarene congregation in Pasadena, California, was born in Guatemala. She was a young child when her parents moved to the United States

[5] Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, "Testimonios: Relato, Agencia, y La Mujer Latina" in *Vivir y servir en el exilio: Lecturas teológicas de la experiencia latina en los Estados Unidos*, eds. Jorge E. Maldonado and Juan F. Martínez (Buenos Aires: Kairós, 2008), 125–28, 144.

to work as missionaries among the growing Spanish-speaking immigrant communities in Southern California. Julieta likens ministry to the cacophony of salsa music and the improvisation of salsa dancing:

> I'm reading you. I'm reading the room, and I'm responding to what feels appropriate. And I recognize the uniqueness of this connection right now that will never be the same, and yet this is deeply tethered to a larger story…the movement of the Spirit… I can step into it and forego my own insecurities.

In the messiness and disorientations of the borderlands, Julieta remains aware of God's Spirit:

> [T]his thoughtful, generous, expansive Spirit was there…just holding what in the world is happening [sic]. So, I understand the Holy Spirit to be ever-present in those times where I have thought: there's no way God is in this. There's no way this is God. And then there was [sic] glimpses of the Wild Child that would spark up and would kind of like [she makes a grasping and pulling gesture toward herself] bringing me back…in those border spaces, where it's like, "Let's just eat together. Can we sit here? Um, can we sit here and enjoy what's happening?"[6]

In a missiological reimagining of the borderlands, the Spirit is the *coyote*, the Borderlander Spirit, always out ahead of us, crossing borders, disrupting the barriers that divide us, creating spaces for dialogue, inviting us into relationship with others, and cultivating

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[6] Conde-Frazier et al., describe dancing with the Holy Spirit, the *wild child of the Trinity*, who is "anywhere and everywhere moving, calling forth, and stirring things up…She is untamable, full of possibilities and creative potential…She is the miracle of the mélange that terribly confound[s] some but keep[s] others praising God who never ceases to surprise and amaze us." Loida Martell-Otero, Zaida Maldonado Perez, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 14.

shared life together amid enduring difference. The Borderlander Spirit models for us a different way of engaging difference. Instead of dominating or managing the narratives of others—whether through homogenizing methods that stifle the polyphony of our neighbors' contesting stories or through hegemonic methods that stifle the creative agency of our neighbors' storytelling—the Borderlander Spirit leans into the messiness of real relationships, (re)accenting our stories through dialogue.

Liderazgo Mestizo: *Relational Leadership Practices for the Borderlands*

Constructionist articulations of relational leadership begin at the very point at which dominant cross-cultural leadership research (e.g., Hofstede and GLOBE) stumbles, that is, with the assertion that we exist in a mutual relationship with others and our surroundings and that we both shape, and are shaped by, our social experience in everyday interactions and conversations.[7] Others do not determine our actions, nor do we determine their actions. Organizational members and neighbors are not objects to be managed but irreducibly complex, creative, relational agents. Relational Social Constructionist Leadership (RSCL) theory, the focus of the second article of this series, takes as its point of departure the constructionist assertion that everything we say and do manifests our relational existence—all reason, emotion, compulsion, memory, and experience are "performances within relationship."[8] This metatheoretical starting point compels

[7] Key works in this conversation include: Mary Uhl-Bien and Sonia Ospina, *Advancing Relational Leadership Research: A Dialogue among Perspectives,* Leadership Horizons (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Pub, 2012); Mary Uhl-Bien, "Relational Leadership Theory: Exploring the Social Processes of Leadership and Organizing," *The Leadership Quarterly* 17 (2006): 654–676; Mary Uhl-Bien, John Maslyn, and Sonia Ospina, "The Nature of Relational Leadership: A Multitheoretical Lens on Leadership Relationships and Processes," in *The Nature of Leadership*, eds. D. Day and J. Antonakis, 289–330 (London: Sage, 2012); and Dian Marie Hosking, "Moving Relationality: Meditations on a Relational Approach to Leadership" in *Sage Handbook of Leadership*, eds. Alan Bryman, David Collinson, Keith Grint, Brad Jackson, and Mary Uhl-Bien, 455–467 (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011).

[8] Gergen, *An Invitation to Social Construction*, 397.

RSCL scholars to "examine leadership as a more dynamic and socially-constructed system of interdependent relations in which shared leadership and organizational change can occur."[9] Within this leadership theory, relationships are not treated as things to be manipulated/managed but as the raw material within which leadership emerges.[10] My mestizo−re-accenting of social constructionist approaches to relational leadership begins with the premise that real embodied relationships with others are wonderfully and irreducibly messy experiences and that anytime we engage in dialogical (meaning-making) relationship, we step into borderlands.

In RSCL theory, meaning-making processes are embodied in distinct and discernible practices.[11] Thus, *liderazgo mestizo* (LM), is built on the assumption that leadership is embedded in everyday relationally-responsive dialogical practices. LM outlines four interrelated categories of practice—bridge-building practices, storytelling practices, advocative practices, and catalytic practices. Each sphere of practice is overlapping and interconnected and should be understood as building on and informing each other rather than as clearly demarcated categories. Each category of practice also draws our attention to important dimensions of life together—namely, relationships, discourse, power, and change. Reflecting the relational-orientation at the heart of this framework, storytelling practices, advocative practices, and catalytic practices

[9] Ospina and Uhl-Bien, *Advancing Relational Leadership Research,* 260.
[10] Uhl-Bien, Maslyn, and Ospina, "The Nature of Relational Leadership," 289–330.
[11] Interest in practices "of leadership in the plural" continues to grow in conjunction with interest in discursive and relational leadership theories. Cf. Uhl-Bien, "Relational Leadership Theory"; Jean-Louis Denis, Ann Langley, and Viviane Sergi, "Leadership in the Plural," *Academy of Management Annals* 6(1) (2012): 211–283. ean-Louis Denis, Ann Langley, and Viviane Sergi, "Leadership in the Plural," Academy of Management Annals 6, no. 1 (2012): 211–283. Jean-Louis Denis, Ann Langley, and Linda Rouleau, "The Practice of Leadership in the Messy World of Organizations," Leadership 6, no. 1 (2010): 67–88.

are best understood as subcategories of bridge-building practices, which focus on relationships (see fig. 5).

Figure 5: Liderazgo Mestizo: Four Overlapping Spheres

In articulating these four categories, I remain indebted to two important leadership frameworks: Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal's four-frame model, and Mark Branson's leadership triad. In *Reframing Organizations,* Bolman and Deal advocate for leaders to view their organization from multiple perspectives ("reframing") to better understand what is going on and thus to develop more effective strategies for organizational change.[12] Within their leadership framework, the four-frame model serves as a managerial diagnostic tool. Though our starting points reflect very different philosophical orientations, the four-frame model provided a helpful typology for sorting categories of practices in my thematic analysis of the pastors' narratives.

Branson's leadership triad emerged from his reflection on his ministry experiences at an urban congregation in Oakland,

[12] Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (Newark, NJ: John Wiley, 2017).

California.[13] The leadership triad describes three spheres of activity to which leaders must attend when fostering a culture of and spaces for action-reflection in a church: (1) *interpretive leadership* is about understanding and shaping meanings in text and context in order to raise awareness of God's missional initiatives; (2) *relational leadership* attends to all of the human dynamics among a church's participants and with the world around them; and (3) *implemental leadership* is about reforming and initiating activities and structures that are consistent with the interpretive and relational work. LM, as we shall see, clearly echoes these spheres of activity, though I have included a fourth category of practice drawing on Bolman and Deal's "jungle frame." This fourth frame focuses on dynamics of power.[14]

The more significant debt, however, lies at the theoretical level, for LM builds on a number of missiological assertions that are foundational to the leadership triad:

(1) God is the initiator, always present and active in the local;

(2) disciples in community (churches) are invited to discern and participate in God's missional initiatives;

(3) discernment is about praxis, dialogical cycles of action and reflection;

(4) neighbors are creative agents whose voices are instrumental in the ongoing work of discerning God's initiatives; and

(5) intercultural realities shape our praxis.

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[13] The leadership triad was first outlined in 2002 for the World Council of Church's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. Recent iterations include: Mark Lau Branson, "Forming Church, Forming Mission," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 365 (2003) and Mark Lau Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church" in *Missional Churches in Context*, ed. Craig Van Gelder, 94–126 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).

[14] The term *advocating* is drawn from Bolman and Deal's description of the "advocate" in their political frame. Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations, 355.*

With regard to leadership, then, missional leadership in multicultural contexts "is about shaping an environment in which the people of God participate in the action-reflection cycle as they gain new capacities to discern what God is doing among and around them."[15] Leadership is about promoting ways of doing life together that grow attentiveness to God's initiatives. Branson and Martínez contend that "the complexities of the issues we face are such that the most important thing a leader can learn in response to our changing world is discernment linked with multiple practices."[16] These assertions shaped the hermeneutical question at the heart of my narrative inquiry and analysis: What leadership practices help cultivate communities characterized by a growing capacity for missional discernment amid enduring levels of diversity?

The pastors shared many practices that do not appear in the LM framework, because I focused on leadership practices that I interpreted as having potential for shaping learning environments that grow people's capacity to discern and participate in the Spirit's missional initiatives. As a practice-oriented framework, LM should not be understood as a leadership strategy nor as a list of transcendent/universalizable competencies. Both of these readings misconstrue LM because: (1) a strategy reading transplants these practices to a different context and thus separates them from the embedded relational realities in which they emerged; and (2) in a transcendent list of leadership competencies reading, LM would reinforce individualistic visions of leadership that constructionist frameworks explicitly attempt to deconstruct. In each category below, I begin by sharing stories and practices from the narrative data, which I then re-accent in light of the missiological and relational frames outlined above.

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[15] Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martínez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011) 57.
[16] Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership*, 233.

Bridge-Building Leadership Practices

Pastora Adriana of Iglesia Puente de Gracia (Bridge of Grace Church) understands leadership in terms of "bridging gaps" and "barriers" among cultures, language groups, generations, socioeconomic classes, and even theological traditions. For Adriana, bridging is about understanding the cultures from which she came and yet being sufficiently assimilated in her current cultural context/neighborhood that she can "live in both worlds." She outlines the relationship between her identity and her vocation by saying, "I am able to befriend and I have friends in both. I live in both lands." When asked about practices, Adriana describes how she intentionally sought out friendship with Father Charles Juarez, a Catholic priest, though *catolicos* and *evangelicos* have historically avoided each other. Pastora Adriana and Father Charles share pulpits regularly, organize joint prayer services, and partner together to bless their neighbors. Their practices of friendship are bridging their congregations. Pastora Adriana admits that learning bridge-building is not comfortable or easy, but adds that bridge-building is a skill she now teaches others. She explains, "I think that one of the things that I'm able to do is to take a [culturally unassimilated] person and walk them in a journey to be a [bicultural] person." She mentors potential leaders and explains to them, "you don't have to stay here. You've been here [in the United States], you know the language, you're bilingual. Let's help you be a bridge-builder instead of staying comfortable where you are."

Pastor José grew up in a bilingual home, but he does not speak Spanish. José intentionally looks for opportunities to practice his broken Spanish during their weekly church leadership meetings. Spanish-speakers, usually first- and second-generation immigrants, laugh and tease him for his broken Spanish, but he does it anyway. He explains, "The fact that I'm risking ridicule to go up there and work my way through Spanish—butcher[ing] the language sometimes —they love it. Because our Spanish-speakers know what it's like to learn English and also risk ridicule." José steps out of his comfort zone and his insulated role as senior pastor, not only because it creates space for more marginal voices, but also because laughter and a shared experience of vulnerability draw his diverse

leadership team together.

Pastor Mateo's mentoring relationships have been a particularly life-giving aspect of his ministry. Mateo describes his relationship with Rafa and Michael—the former, a player on the neighborhood soccer team that he coached, and the latter, a member of his church youth group. Mentoring is about developing a "friendship of trust and honesty," explains Pastor Mateo, and friendship is about helping people recognize and embrace their creative agency. For him, agency involves "breaking through the predetermined categories and narratives of what does it mean to be Latino and Latina [*sic*]." Friendship is about helping each other learn to tell our own story, to reimagine new ways of doing things, and to develop a voice that's unique and does not have to mimic the voices of those in power.

Bridge-building leadership practices are practices with potential for fostering learning environments that promote friendships that disrupt cultural, linguistic, doctrinal, and socioeconomic divides, relational spaces where God's people can grow in their capacity to discern the ways in which the Spirit is working to bridge people within and beyond the church. Bridge-building practices enhance the church's awareness of the agency of neighbors and cultural others.

Bridge-building practices facilitate discernment of questions such as these: Where is the Spirit drawing our attention to the relational gaps in our community and neighborhood? Where is the Spirit inviting us to join in fostering friendships that build bridges in the borderlands? In what ways is God inviting us to risk discomfort to befriend our neighbors? Bridge-building leadership practices are not complicated. They take no expertise, no special training, and no heroic powers. Friendships that open our imagination to the creative and embodied agency of God and neighbor often start by sharing meals in people's homes and creating time and space to laugh together.

Storytelling Leadership Practices

Pastora Nadia grew up in the city of South Gate, California, where her friends and neighbors and church were all "heavily

Mexican." Today, however, Nadia serves in Long Beach, California, where she is pastoring people who have stories that are very different from her own. She recounts the day, early in her pastorate, when she received a phone call from a non-Latina neighbor, a victim of intimate partner violence. Nadia recalls sifting through her own cultural prejudices and feelings of profound discomfort in order to respond with compassion rather than repulsion to this woman who had had children by multiple men and had just been brutally beaten by her latest boyfriend. "I know pain," explains Nadia, "but I know brown pain, right? I know Latino pain." Here was a battered woman who did not fit into her Latina ideals of *familia* in any way. Still, she listened to the woman's story, held her close, wept with her, fed her children, bought her groceries, and even picked up her prescriptions.

People often pull away from relationships with those whose stories are significantly different than their own. "Culturally speaking, sometimes it's easier for us to stick to what is safe and normal, to what we've known…[B]ut the gospel never calls us to be safe and comfortable," Nadia reflects. In her experience, compassion and friendship and mission begin by listening to people's stories. Today, in her ministry, she is intentional about creating spaces for cross-generational and cross-cultural storytelling, often in the context of shared meals. "When we get to sit at a table together, I want you to bring your history with you, because it's gonna make me better, and it's going to grow me as well as a leader," she explains. Nadia acknowledges that it takes practice to share stories in ways that reflect the complex and messy realities of life, in ways that are honest about our ongoing processes of discipleship. People tend to sanitize their *testimonios*, but she explains that good story-sharing makes room for process and grace.

Pastora Isabel from Nicaragua has eighteen years of experience working with multiethnic churches. "We can think idealistically that we're just gonna flatten all the differences, but that's not the reality. And so there has to be an anchoring truth like a familia without negating these differences. We can't negate them, we can't flatten them. They're very important." Pastora Isabel knows the temptation to foster unity by forcing agreement and by crushing

difference—unity through uniformity, she calls it. “If there’s conflict, we deal with that as familia. If there’s tension, we should deal with [it] as familia. Familia doesn’t leave each other.” When I ask her how we can be familia amid our profound differences, Pastora Isabel replies succinctly and without hesitation (like she has shared these ideas many times) that churches must promote: (1) a culture where disciples set aside their privilege—privilege often couched in stories that defend the values and biases of one’s own ethnic/cultural/political group; (2) the practice of naming and repenting of our cultural prejudices and stereotypes, for “no one comes to the table…with a clean slate”; (3) a culture in which people share and receive stories, especially stories about hurts and wounds—“I may not agree with how we got to this, but if it’s hurting you, can you help me understand?”; (4) the value of ongoing learning in the community, which above all entails the practice of asking questions—questions like, “Can you help me understand your story? Because it is unlike my story.” And questions like: “Help me understand your pain, because it’s different than my pain—I have some pain too, but it’s different, so I need you to help me understand.”

Though practices within this sphere at times involve relating personal and communal anecdotes, storytelling here works synecdochically by encompassing any practice that cultivates learning environments where God’s people grow in critical awareness of their own situatedness, in receptivity and appreciation of new or incompatible cultural narratives, and in awareness of the Spirit’s initiatives in the midst of their discourse. Storytelling leadership practices sensitize God’s people to the Spirit’s initiatives in the midst of our relational dialogue. Storytelling leadership practices facilitate discernment of questions like: Who are those cultural-others in our church and neighborhood that the Spirit is calling us to engage in dialogical relationship? How is the Spirit inviting our community to grow in our capacity to listen and welcome the (often competing) stories of others? Storytelling leadership practices are not complicated. They take no expertise, no special training, and no heroic powers. Growing in awareness of the Spirit’s presence and work in *lo cotidiano* can be as simple

as making time for storytelling with congregants and neighbors, reflecting on Scripture in ways that explicitly draw attention to our situatedness, and creating spaces for discernment and dialogue with cultural-others.

Advocative Leadership Practices

It was the first of many such calls Pastora Isabel received. This one was from a young mother in the neighborhood who was seeking help. "My husband is an alcoholic, and he hurts me. He beats me…I know that at the community service center nearby, they give, uh, birth control shots. And I think that I want to do that, because I can't keep having children," she explained urgently. Isabel recounts that they made a plan. They waited for the husband to leave for work one morning, and then Isabel picked her up and they drove together to the community center. They were home before the husband returned, and he never found out. Isabel recalls how the young mother beamed, "I have agency over my body, and I want to start studying again." Like many immigrant mothers in the community, this young mother had never finished elementary school. "There was a lot of dysfunction in those communities," laments Isabel. Amid the dispossession and oppression, she sought "to minister to women who were lonely, sad, needed…genuine friendship, but also needed to connect their lives to and their children's lives to things that could allow their lives to flourish." She explains that her motives were simple: "I just wanted them to see Jesus alive through me, and that Jesus loved them, and that they had agency over their lives." Her leadership practices created spaces where these young women could deepen their awareness of their personal agency in a context of abusive patriarchy.

Pastor Mateo associates the abusive patriarchal leadership in some Latino churches with a colonial wound and a history marred by *caudillismo*, a term in Latin America associated with leaders of quasi military authoritarian regimes, and thus having to do with

abuses of power, authoritarianism, and disempowered followers.[17] Mateo's pastoral team is multicultural and gender inclusive. He explains: "Even though I lead, I'm very conscious of my power, especially because of what I do with the colonial wound and all this kind of stuff [*sic*]. I'm aware of my male normativity in a Latino context." Mateo is not only aware of the power dynamics, he often draws others' attention to the ways he personally benefits from patterns of hierarchical patriarchy. The question he constantly asks himself is: "How do I disperse [my power] in healthy ways?" Caudillismo ignores and silences and manipulates dissenting voices, but Pastor Mateo regularly facilitates conversations that create space for a diversity of perspectives.

Advocative leadership practices sensitize the church to the Spirit's initiatives amid the complex power dynamics in diverse communities. Advocative leadership practices foster learning environments where God's people can grow in their capacity to identify and resist behaviors that repress agency and stifle competing narratives. Advocative leadership practices increase responsiveness to the Spirit's work to re-accent dehumanizing stories and language so that our narratives resist patterns of dominance. These practices take no expertise, no special training, and no heroic powers. These are not reserved just for the few exceptional individuals in positions of authority. Communities committed to advocative leadership practices may be found befriending vulnerable peoples in the neighborhood, creating safe spaces for marginal voices to share their stories, facilitating the participation of less-dominant voices in organizational discernment processes, and examining (and exposing) the ways in which their narratives may lend to hegemony and homogeneity. These practices open spaces for people to notice and join the Spirit's liberating initiatives amid their relationships.

[17] See chapter five of Oscar García-Johnson, *Spirit Outside the Gate: Decolonial Pneumatologies of the South,* Missiological Engagements (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019).

Catalytic Leadership Practices

Pastor Juan reflects that during his twenty years of ministry, he has never stopped learning. He describes his church as a place to experiment: "San Vicente Church became like our sanctuary, our lab, you know, like, 'Come, let's try what works here. What can work here?'" For Juan, the concept of the church as a laboratory means that there's room for mistakes: "I have made errors. I'm sure I've made errors, but I've tried to learn from them." A coffee shop, yoga classes, after-school tutoring programs, sports camps—the church continues to experiment with ways to engage and befriend their neighbors. Sometimes experiments take root, Juan explains, and sometimes they don't. Either way, the church learns from each experiment. When shared life together is imagined as a laboratory, disciples are invited to live in a continual learning mode.

Pastora Isabel explains that the church's neighborhood was changing quickly with the influx of thousands of working-class immigrants from Latin America. New experiments like a summer camp for children left at home by working parents and suffering from food insecurity were ideas that emerged from friendships and dialogue with these new neighbors. The congregation experimented with tutoring programs, medical services, women's Bible study, women's support groups, and English classes. When it comes to discerning the Spirit's work, Isabel explains, "you don't know what the Spirit is going to do unless you're paying attention." For her, paying attention involves taking long, slow walks in her neighborhood and making time to listen to her neighbors' stories. With a smile, she recalls God's life-giving initiatives in this broken, hurting neighborhood: "[Y]ou could see the physical transformation of the trailer park—the joy in their lives physically, but also emotionally…That's what the flourishing life of the Spirit should look like when Jesus steps in and does transformation."

The missiological assumption behind all catalytic leadership practices is that the Spirit is moving and catalyzing transformation in our context, which means that local churches live in the dynamic tension between the questions: Where is the Spirit of God working in this particular context, and how is the Spirit inviting us to participate in this work? Churches discern these questions through

dialogical processes that involve, among other things, iterative cycles of critical reflection on experiments. Catalytic leadership practices create learning environments where God's people grow in attentiveness and responsiveness to the Spirit's initiatives in the midst of the community's experimentation. Such practices enhance a church's capacity for missional improvisation.[18] These practices raise awareness of ways the Borderlander Spirit is calling the church to include the voices and stories of neighbors and less dominant voices in their praxis and experimentation. These practices take no expertise, no special skills, and no exceptional personality traits. They may simply involve responding to failed experiments as opportunities for learning or creating space to reflect on ways in which experiments promote (or fail to promote) the agency of God and neighbors.

Conclusion

Rather than being about exceptional individuals who catalyze or motivate action in others,[19] *liderazgo mestizo* is about relational practices—practices for anyone in the community—that shape ways of life together that celebrate difference and are responsive to the relational initiatives of the Borderlander Spirit. Monological conceptions of culture and leadership—that obscure agency and crush difference into sameness—cultivate unrelational habits of mind that lead us to engage (cultural-)others, be they neighbors or organizational members, as objects to measure, manage, and master. The borderlands, however, continuously thwart our efforts to control the stories. They invite us to lean into the messiness and wonder of everyday embodied friendships with neighbors. They

[18] Kathleen Eisenhardt and Benham Tabrizi, "Accelerating Adaptive Processes: Product Innovation in the Global Computer Industry," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1995): 84–110.Also, Mark Lau Branson and Alan J Roxburgh, *Leadership, God's Agency, and Disruptions: Confronting Modernity's Wager* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021) 128–31.
[19] Cf. Tacy Byham and Richard S. Wellins, *Your First Leadership Job: How Catalyst Leaders Bring Out the Best in Others* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2015).

remind us that our webs of testimonios do not threaten visions of life together but instead enrich our relational imaginations and thus promote ways of life together that pay attention to God's initiatives.

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