

# **On liminality**

## **Conceptualizing 'in between-ness'**

Master Thesis of Human Geography

Supervisor: Dr. H. van Houtum

Co-reviewer: Dr. O. Kramsch

Jasper Balduk

Nijmegen, June 2008

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## Summary

In recent years, the concept of liminality could regularly be found in geographical literature. This concept was introduced in 1909 by the ethnologist Arnold van Gennep in his *Les rites de passage*, where it referred to a state of 'in between-ness' during such rites. More precisely, it denoted a category in between 'normal' social categories, which brought about connotations of sacredness, empowerment and comradeship, but also of death and darkness. Obviously because of the imaginative power of this, the concept was introduced in other disciplines, one of which was human geography. However, as a result, and even more as a result of the concept surviving the paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism – a shift that implicated that categories lost their meaning and should be approached more critically – the original meaning of the concept has come to shift and weave.

In the first part of this thesis, I have therefore tried to answer the question, if it is still clear what liminality refers to and what it has come to mean in a society that is sometimes viewed as more fragmented. From a content analysis of contemporary geographical literature, in which the concept is applied to situations in contemporary society, I have concluded that liminality actually has little to do nowadays with the things it originally intended to describe – especially in the context of ritual. Because of that, I have argued to abandon the concept as it was intended and as it has become to be used. However, from a reconceptualization of its Roman roots, we may emphasize its political connotation to matters of power and identity, which makes the concept still suitable for theorizing contemporary society.

From a perspective on the European Union as an empire, I have tried in the second part of this thesis to exemplify how in particular the concept's relation to *Limes* (the northern frontier of the Roman Empire) can give us insights to the current state of affairs in regard of a political reality at the EU's extreme ends – the Outermost Regions and the Overseas Countries and Territories. In this part, in other words, I have hypothesized how the position of the Overseas Countries and Territories and the Outermost Regions of the European Union can be regarded as liminality and can be explained by referring to their political-geographical significance as the *Limes* of the European Union as empire.

## Introduction

This thesis will be about the concept of liminality, which is related to the English word 'limit'. Some authors have traced this concept to the Latin word *limen* (e.g. Shields, 1991:84; Turner, 1967:94). Others have traced it to *limes* (e.g. Cowart, 2006:211; Froman & Foster Jr., 2002:3; Voase, 2002:8); finally, some have traced it to both (e.g. Moran, 2000:5). Both of the words probably have the same root (*limus*), according to the Oxford Latin dictionary, and their meanings are quite overlapping, *limen* referring to 'threshold', literally and figuratively in the sense of limit, and *limes* in particular to 'boundary', 'frontier', and 'limit' (Glare, 1982:1031). The concept was introduced in 1909 by the ethnologist Arnold van Gennep in his *Les rites de passage*, but Van Gennep did not make clear from which Latin word he derived it. In his theory, liminality refers to a state of 'in between-ness' during rites of passage. Such rites are accompanied by a territorial passage, such as crossing a threshold (Van Gennep, 1960:192). What complicates finding 'the' proper root of liminality, however, is that this threshold *stands for* neutral territory, such as a frontier (*ibid.*:19) – or *limes* in Latin. As the liminal threshold bears all of the characteristics of the neutral zone, the frontier and the boundary, in this thesis I will emphasize the relation between liminality and *limes*, the importance of which will become clear henceforth.

From the above, the reader may already derive that the concept is somewhat abstract. Consequently, there are slightly different interpretations of its meaning. Also, it is applied to various situations. Moreover, this abstract concept, of which the Latin roots may point to divergent nuances, has not only a whole history in regard of Roman times, but it has also survived the paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism, as it was introduced in 1909 and is still being applied. Above all, however, we may recognize by now that the concept could have been susceptible to fashion during the last decade. Just as in any other facet of human life, also in the social sciences there can be found tendencies in concepts and terms that are popular to work with. Although the concept of liminality was introduced as early as in 1909, it took a long time before it received any attention outside ethnology and anthropology. It was not before 1960 that the English translation of *Les rites de passage* was published; since then, and especially when Victor Turner (1967) elaborated on Van Gennep's insights, the concept became widely known. In human geography, the concept gained importance after Rob Shields introduced his ideas in *Places on the margin* (1991). According to him, such places, where social orders get blurred, are the best locations to discover how cultures present themselves and to deconstruct their self-definition in terms of modernity: universalizing and

homogeneous. Since then, and in particular in the late 1990s, the concept was quite upcoming in this discipline. Peaking in the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, though, it is perhaps even by now already sinking into forgetfulness – that is, in regard of geography. Taken together, this gives us an interesting context to see what we should make of the concept of liminality, to see where it has brought us and what it has given us.

As said, liminality refers to a state of in between-ness during rites of passage. Without running ahead on things too much, such rites are ceremonial acts of a special kind that accompany a person going from one social grouping to another, connected to different phases in life (Van Gennep, 1960:1-3). The character of such an important, ritual transition comprises a phase in which people are in between social groupings, thus “betwixt and between’ all the recognized fixed points in space-time of structural classification” (Turner, 1967:97). In other words, liminality is intended to describe a state of being ‘beyond usual categories’ and, as such, forms a category itself, ‘in between categories’. What follows is that the concept is fundamentally rooted in the philosophies of modernity, which claim that the world is perfectly knowable and which are directed at discovering universal truths and meaning (Kitchin & Tate, 2000:16). Modernity brings along the search for evidence, fact and truth, and therefore the rationalization of society (Peet, 1998:194). This implies that the world can be categorized – hence, that the course of time and of life can be divided into meaningful stages or phases. Postmodernists, on the contrary, reject the idea of absolute truth and argue that there is no truth outside interpretation (Kitchin & Tate, 2000:16). According to Peet (1998:195), in postmodern philosophy, “modern reason is reinterpreted critically as a mode of social control which acts openly through disciplinary institutions, in more disguised forms through rational socialization and, most subtly, through rational self-discipline.” Hence, postmodern thinking is concerned with developing an attitude towards knowledge, methods and law-like truths (Kitchin & Tate, 2000:16). Liminality, in this sense, should be regarded as a political tool, an arbitrary method to categorize people; the meaning of which, in fact, exists only by the grace of the collectivity that has accepted the categories *before* and *after* the liminal stage.

Theoretically, thus, the concept of liminality has received a different, more critical meaning with the shift to postmodernism. However, this has not been the most important development. As postmodernists argue that truth is a matter of interpretation, ‘categories’ can be recognized in the eye of the beholder (that is, of the researcher). I intend to show that, as a result, researchers have added more and more ‘liminal stages’ to the average person’s course of life. In a sense, postmodernists may even argue that the whole of social life is a continuous

liminal process. Along with the fact that several authors argue that life has become more and more complex and fragmentized (Castells, 2000:3; see also Walther & Stauber, 2002), with overlapping phases, daily routines, roles, etcetera, it becomes obvious that the concept's interpretation may have broken somewhat adrift. It can be disputable if a situation that is labeled 'liminal' shows indeed characteristics of 'original' liminality, for example in regard of the ritual context of the concept.

With this thesis, I therefore wish to contribute to current research debates by firstly asking the question:

***To what situations is the concept of liminality applied?***

Is it still clear what we are talking about when speaking of 'liminality'? Is the concept all or not used unequivocally? Can there be found a more or less stable characterization of situations that are labeled 'liminal', or does every 'liminal' situation need to be conceptualized in its own terms? When it has become clear that certain concepts are suitable to a given situation, a better understanding of the character of that situation can be created within the scientific community. But if the concept is to be redefined over and again, before it is even clear what the situation in question is like, it may be best to completely abandon the concept. So, if the second option can be applied to the current situation, the question can be asked if liminality is still a useful or reliable concept to describe this variety of situations, or if more 'neutral' or common concepts such as 'a phase of in between-ness', 'a period of transition', 'a twilight zone', 'ambivalence', etcetera, would be less confusing. In short, with the first part of this thesis I want to add an interpretational or communicational perspective to current debates concerning liminality. Thus, in this first section, that is centered around questions such as mentioned above, the focus is explicitly on liminality as a ritual phase of in between-ness. I will compare the original understanding of liminality to the ways it is used in studies of contemporary society. In doing so, a content analysis will lead me to the conclusion that the concept of liminality as a 'state of being during a transition' has no more value for today's society, at least not when looking through the lens of postmodernism and in the concept's original context.

To dismiss the concept completely, however, would be premature. What I would rather suggest is to shift the concept's main point of attention from a 'personal experience' of a state of in between-ness that is related to the course of life, to a more geographical-political focus on such a state of being, for two reasons. First, an analysis of instances in which the

concept is used shows that such a shift (or at least such an 'expansion' of the instances in which the concept is applied) has already taken place. So, there are situations in which the relative position of Turkey vis-à-vis Greece has been called 'liminal' in the light of the European Union (Rumelili, 2003). Second, such a geographical-political shift can be given a specific direction by making explicit the link between liminality and *limes*; whereas the concept's relation with rites of crossing a threshold may have been diluted, a re-emphasis of its relation with in particular *limes* instead of *limen* may give a new lease of life to the concept of liminality. I especially want to direct the reader's attention here to **the Limes** – the name the Romans gave to the northern border of their Empire. According to Paul Erdkamp (2000), among others, the *Limes* was rather a border zone and a frontier, *in between* the 'civilized' and 'barbarian' world, far more than a strict boundary. Although the relation between liminality and a frontier may be clear, the relation between the concept and an explicitly *imperial* frontier is thus far untouched and unexplored. I will try and show in the second part of this thesis that it is in particular the relationship between liminality and *Limes*, that can clarify several characteristics of our contemporary society, rather than the relationship between liminality and cultural practices at the level of the hunter-gatherer societies that were once analyzed from a modernist perspective. To be exact, I intend to show how the relationship between liminality and *Limes* can clarify certain aspects of the European Union as empire.

Thus, in the second section I abandon the traditional, anthropological interpretation of liminality in favor of a new, more politically geographical understanding of the concept. As a contribution to current research debates concerning the concept of liminality, as well as to (scientific and societal) debates concerning the nature of the European Union and the way the Union 'works' in regard of zones of differentiation, in the second section of this thesis I put forward the proposition that several colonial heritages of various member states of the European Union should be seen as the *Limes* of the EU. Hence, I will follow, among others, Zielonka's perspective on the EU as a neo-medieval empire (2006). The political reality of the EU's *Limes* – of the colonial heritages in the form of Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) and Outermost Regions (ORs), respectively – is in my opinion to be viewed as 'liminality'. Thus, the hypothesis in that part is:

***The position of the Overseas Countries and Territories and the Outermost Regions of the European Union can be regarded as liminality and can be explained by referring to their political-geographical significance as the Limes of the European Union as empire.***

Which contemporary superpowers or important political players (i.e. the United States, the European Union, Japan, China) can indeed be regarded as 'empires' is open to debate, but it is not hard to find authors who claim that the European Union at least shows several features of empires. This is however not the only reason why I focus on the EU. In contemporary research, there has been a lot of attention to the EU's border problems. Much of this border research is about the hard and strict border policies of for example Ceuta and Melilla, whereas I want to show that the EU can also be related to a 'soft border problematic' in the form of a frontier and a zone of differentiation. Also, despite the amount of recent articles on the EU's border policy, the OCTs and ORs have thus far not received much attention. Yet, in particular in respect of EU policy regarding former colonies of several of its member states, several peculiarities can be found. My primary goal in the second part of this thesis is therefore to develop a better understanding of the Union's policies in regard of those areas, those former colonies, that are still politically connected to some of its member states.

This part, in other words, should be seen as an argumentation to a more geopolitical understanding of zones of in between-ness on the basis of a certain understanding of the nature of the European Union and of the way it functions: liminality is the concept by which the situation at the 'external-internal' borders of the EU can be described, being 'partly EU'.

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## ***Part I***

# **Liminality in human geography**

***Towards a new reading of the concept of liminality***

## 1. Introduction

In 1909 Arnold van Gennep's *Les rites de passage* was published. According to Kimball, who wrote the introduction of the 1960 English version of this important ethnographical work, it had failed to reach the other social sciences; something which could be set straight, so he hoped, by the English translation (Kimball, 1960:v). Whether it was from that translation or from Victor Turner's elaboration on Van Gennep's theories, from the end of the 1960s onward, the rites of passage received quite more attention.

Especially Van Gennep's concept of liminality, elaborated on in Turner's *The forest of symbols* (1967) and particularly in *The ritual process* (1969), appeared to be relevant to scholars from various disciplines. The concept is derived from the Latin words *limen* ('threshold') and *limes* ('boundary', 'frontier') and it originally meant to describe the quality of the actual transition of rites of passage. Rites of passage are, in short, ceremonial acts of a special kind that accompany a person going from one social grouping to another, connected to different phases in life (Van Gennep, 1960:1-3). So, there are ceremonies of birth, puberty, marriage, and so on. Part of such rites is a territorial passage, such as crossing a threshold (Van Gennep, 1960:192) – or *limen* in Latin. Yet, this threshold *stands for* neutral territory, such as a frontier (*ibid.*:19) – or the Roman *limes*.

The character of such an important, ritual transition comprises a phase in which people are in between social groupings, thus “‘betwixt and between’ all the recognized fixed points in space-time of structural classification” (Turner, 1967:97). It is this ‘in between-ness’ which is called ‘liminality’. According to Turner (1969:95), “attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* (‘threshold people’) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space.” In this manner, people become outsiders, in a strange way kept at a distance – sometimes literally (Turner, 1967:98) – from ‘the’ social reality.

In the original, ethnographical meaning of the concept, liminality thus refers to someone going through a transition, being neither this nor that, and at the same time both (Turner, 1967:99). It is important to note that according to Van Gennep, “the passage from one social position to another is identified with a *territorial passage*, such as the entrance into a village or a house, the movement from one room to another, or the crossing of streets and squares” (Van Gennep, 1960:192). Also, liminality is often likened to death, darkness, invisibility and lowliness on the one hand, but, as if people “are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to

enable them to cope with their new station in life”, also to sacredness and comradeship – to ‘*communitas*’ – on the other hand (Turner, 1969:95-96). Therefore, it is often associated with ‘spiritual’ or ‘mystical’ elements in experiences accompanying such moments of in between-ness.

From the above, it should not be too surprising that this concept and its attributive, ‘liminal’, triggering the imagination, have appeared regularly since their introduction in English scholarly literature, and not only in the field of ethnography. Little, Jordens, Paul, Montgomery and Philipson (1998), for example, found the concept very applicable regarding the experiences of those who suffer chronic illness and cancer. In short, patients have described their situation as liminal: they found themselves first in a state of alienation of ‘normal’, ‘healthy’ people and identification with ‘patients’; this was followed by a period of inability to communicate their experiences with their social familiars; and finally, it led to a growing awareness of limits, empowerment and available time. In another anthropological context, the concept has been used to describe a period of uncertainty: women being screened for cervical cancer may find themselves in a situation in which test results *may* be indicative for cancer. This in between-ness, that is felt until it is definitely known whether or not the person suffers from the disease, has also been described as liminality (Forss, Tishelman, Widmark & Sachs, 2004). However, in this example, positive connotations of liminality such as experiences of empowerment did not come to the fore. Also, all or not with additions such as ‘sub’ or ‘supra’, the concept has been used in the field of psychology (e.g. Dixon, 1971) and from thereon also in communication and marketing studies (e.g. Haberstroh, 1994; Key, 1973), where it has been used in relation to the responses to stimuli on a subconscious level (so-called subliminal perception).

Obviously, and partly because of its connection to territorial passages, the concept has also found its way into geography and geography-related studies (e.g. Adelson, 1994; King-Irani, 2006; Navaro-Yashin, 2003; Rumelili, 2003; Shields, 1990, 1991; Teather, 1999). However, just as in the above-mentioned study concerning cervical cancer (Forss et al., 2004), here too, in most of these instances liminality has been connected to negative experiences instead of positive emotions of empowerment and comradeship. Moreover, as I will show, the concept generally seems to refer less and less to rites of passage, undergone by persons in a crucial phase of their lives.

Perhaps this weaving of the concept’s meaning is not so strange in the light of the paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism. After all, in 1909, during the high days of the belief in a knowable and makeable world, Van Gennep developed the concept to

categorize people who fell in between categories. With the shift to postmodernism, however, truth, hence meaningful categories, have become the products of interpretation (Kitchin & Tate, 2000:16). Even more, they have become to be seen as modes of social control (Peet, 1998:195). Therefore, not only has liminality as a category 'in between categories' received a different, more critical meaning with the shift to postmodernism; also, as 'categories' are a matter of interpretation, more and more stages in a person's life have been called 'liminal'. As a matter of speaking, postmodernists may argue that social life is a continuous liminal process. Next to this, several authors have argued that life has become more and more complex and fragmented (Castells, 2000:3; see also Walther & Stauber, 2002), with overlapping phases, daily routines and roles – or categories; together, this makes it hard to determine where or when a social role, phase or other 'category' really is “'betwixt and between' all the recognized fixed points in space-time of structural classification” (Turner, 1967:97) and what this in between-ness consists of.

For example, Ken Jowitt, in an essay about the (ideological) boundaries within the EU and in regard of trans-Atlantic relations, drops the word 'out of the blue' in stating that the “current categorical division of labor between America, acting like the Norman aristocracy, and the EU, being little more than its Brussels bureaucracy, will guarantee a *liminal status* [emphasis added] for Eastern Europe; Russia's effective exclusion from Europe; a lower threshold for the emergence of anti-Western movements of rage within Europe; and an increasingly condescending America irritated by and dismissive of an increasingly spiteful, self-absorbed, and timid Western Europe” (Jowitt, 2003:124). What does this 'liminal status' mean? If liminality has got something to do with in between-ness, then between *what* is Eastern Europe? What ambiguity are we talking about? What passage is involved here?

We may, in other words, ask ourselves if it is still clear what we are talking about when speaking of liminality. If the concept's denotation is unambiguous, the various situations to which it is applied are instantly recognizable. But if it is not clear what liminality means in relation to a given situation, as in the example above, the concept's usefulness is questionable. Also, we may wonder if the concept contributes anything to a comparison of different situations in which the concept is nevertheless used, despite various circumstances; in other words: is its interpretation reliable? Perhaps in such a situation more 'neutral' or common concepts such as 'a period of transition' or 'ambivalence' would be less confusing. Without saying that the original context of liminality is the one and only 'proper' context in which the concept makes any sense, I believe it is worthwhile to ask the question whether

liminality is still communicable if its meaning can refer to various and shifting phenomena. Therefore, I wish to contribute to current research debates by asking the question:

*To what situations is the concept of liminality applied?*

With this question I want to contribute to current debates concerning liminality from a communicational perspective. By means of a content analysis I will compare the original understanding of liminality to the ways it is used in studies of contemporary society to see whether it is possible to clarify what the precise kinds of in between-ness are to which the concept may refer, and what conditions are required in such cases. I will do so because, despite the confusion caused by the variance of instances in which the concept has been used so far, I believe that the concept may still be applicable to typical kinds of in between-ness that require specific conditions.

In other words: I believe the concept to be useful still, however, I also believe that, in order to use it according to standards of validity and reliability, we need a framework or a frame of reference that may serve to decide whether or not the concept of liminality can add to the understanding of a given situation. The point of departure will be to what extent we should or should not abandon the traditional, ethnographical interpretation of the concept, and replace it by insights derived from studies that focus primarily on contemporary society, such as sociology and geography. Hence, I will commence with the original context of the concept and the attached ethnological notions, which will be related to contemporary society. Subsequently, several contemporary examples in which the concept plays a significant role will be discussed to see how original contexts may have changed and have been adjusted. Finally, I will make a first step to a new reading of liminality in which insights, derived from this discussion, are synthesized.

## **2. Liminality – original context**

### **2.1. Liminality and rites of passage**

As mentioned, liminality refers to a peculiar state of 'being and yet not being', so to speak, during rites of passage. These rites actually consist of three stages: first, a preliminal phase, during which rites of separation are carried out; second, a liminal phase, during which transition rites are performed; and finally a postliminal phase, concerned with ceremonies of incorporation into the 'new' world (Van Gennep, 1960:20-21). Liminality, it follows, concerns the second stage, which may be called 'interstructural' (Turner, 1967:93): "liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner, 1969:95). Liminality, being in between 'separation' and 'incorporation', then, is above all related to exclusion, or at least to seclusion (e.g. Turner, 1967:7). Liminal subjects often face taboos (*ibid.*:13) and they may have to be hidden because they are polluting from the principle 'that which is unclear is unclean' (*ibid.*:97-98).

What can be derived from this, is that liminality is the result of an *action*; it is intentional, perhaps even strategic. It divides and binds together people into social groupings or categories and, with that, it binds together communities and societies. Liminality as a part in a process of categorization, however, makes it also normative. The question, then, is whose norms are involved. Who made the categories, and who is to decide to which a certain person would belong? And here, liminality reveals something strange: ritual – of which liminality is a part – is a mechanism that converts the obligatory into the desirable (Turner, 1967:30). The step of liminality, guiding a subject moving from one social category to another, is forced upon the subject; being liminal is *not* a choice. Every member of the community must undergo the rites of passage. Yet, as these steps in life are associated with social values, norms and standards and since they are accompanied by music, singing, dancing and so forth, these steps are made worth celebrating. They receive their meaning and their 'natural' character from the social, communal interpretation. In other words: liminality is comparable with Foucault's idea of 'governmentality' (Foucault, 1991). It is a complex form of power, self-inflicted and reassured by means of internalization; hence, liminality is a discursive practice. It is the result of power/knowledge relations, rooted in history and produced and reproduced by social practices (e.g. Foucault, 1974). Liminal persons are thus the objects of (generally approved) internalized (political) power relations.

During the phase of liminality is a person *transforms*; he or she *becomes*, or *grows* in a sense. Liminal people are becoming better; they achieve a new 'essence' or 'nature'. The practice of liminality implies that such a passage is irreversible; one cannot become a boy anymore after having become a man. It also implies that the state of liminality is supposed to end. Importantly, this means furthermore that liminality is something which is *experienced* by subjects that undergo these rites, *and* that it is related to characteristics *ascribed* to them.

As noted, the before-mentioned unclearness and uncleanness lead to the seclusion and/or exclusion of liminal persons. However, this is not necessarily connoted to negative emotions as exclusion commonly is in modern society, since – as said – liminality is both positive and negative. It is likened to death, darkness, invisibility and lowliness, but also to sacredness and comradeship (Turner, 1969:95-96). Liminality is related to the sacred as opposed to the ordinary, the secular and profane. It is related to growth and rebirth (Turner, 1967:99). Also, "the liminal group is a community or comity of comrades and not a structure of hierarchically arrayed positions. [...] People can 'be themselves', it is frequently said, when they are not acting institutionalized roles. Roles, too, carry responsibilities and in the liminal situation the main burden of responsibility is borne [by others]" (Turner, 1967:100-101). How the whole of comradeship and sacredness works, may be well-described by Yi-Fu Tuan (1986). Liminality is related to the dualism 'familiarity – strangeness'. Pilgrimages, for example, can be conceived of as some sort of self-chosen liminality: as journeys into strange territory, travels "for a 'center out there,' a sacred center and a strange place at which pilgrims, all strangers to each other, nevertheless feel a common bond: they have moved from a local community to something larger and freer – to 'communitas'" (*ibid.*: 12). In this interpretation, liminal persons are strangers; and strangers offer not only excitement, but also intimacy, for when lacking "a familiar script, people are encouraged to speak as unique selves, or not at all" (*ibid.*: 13; cf. Van Gennep, 1960:184-185).

The relation between liminality, notions of space, strangeness and the divine is further elaborated on by Shields (1992): strangers represent something beyond our imagination. In common sense, truth is equal to what is present – 'presence' meaning both 'being here' as well as 'being visible' (compare 'I see!' and 'I understand!'). Absence, however, is never purely 'not being'; rather, it is the impression of a presence that has gone, thus bearing traces of signs. Strangers, now, represent absence, *yet* they are visible and *present*. Therefore, they put into question the sanctity of presence, hence, of *truth*. In other words: strangeness has the capability of exposing us to laws beyond our comprehension, to 'divinity' or the sublime (cf. Kearney, 2003).

I have mentioned above that liminality is identified with a territorial passage (Van Gennep, 1960:192), meaning that space plays a role in the transitional process. As can be derived from what is said thus far, however, liminality is not only related to *passing by* certain spatial elements. For example, when secluded, liminal persons are appointed a particular space. Also, certain spaces provide the setting for liminality more than other spaces do. In this sense, places themselves can become associated with liminality. In other words, the threshold can be replaced by a liminal *space* (Turner, 1986:43). In this context, we may speak of *sites* of passage (e.g. Matthews, 2003) or liminal *zones* (e.g. Urry, 2003).

As a provisional conclusion, we can thus derive from the original, modernistic context of the concept that liminality is related to matters of seclusion or even exclusion and that it is the result of discursive practices that are concerned with (political) power relations. Furthermore, it is an *irreversible* and *temporal* state of being; rites of passage are linear<sup>1</sup>. Also, it refers to experiences as well as attributes. It is connected to enhanced powers, to a sense of purity and divinity; finally, it is a state of being that is strongly spatially bound. Even more, liminality can be a characteristic of space itself. Of course, this is one of the reasons why the concept has found its way into geography; however, the question whether we can indeed still speak of liminality *at all* in regard of our contemporary societies and in the light of the commonly accepted, postmodernist claim that social categories are arbitrary – be it in an ethnographical or geographical context – will be put forward in the next section.

## **2.2. A valid question: “do we have rites of passage and/or liminality?”**

Van Gennep was interested in how people moved from one social grouping to another. As an ethnologist, he was particularly interested in less advanced cultures, in which the groupings are more separated, accentuated and autonomous in relation to one another than in our culture. Hence, he also based his conception of the rites accompanying these movements, the rites of passage, on his knowledge of “semi-civilized peoples”. It is for these reasons that he observed that such passing from one ‘world’ to another needed an intermediate stage – the stage of liminality. And since “in the least advanced cultures the holy enters nearly every phase of a man’s life”, it is also for this reason that he observed that such a passage “from group to group takes on that special quality”, that is, the quality of acts “whose major aspects fall within the sacred sphere” (Van Gennep, 1960:1-2).

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Grimes recognizes that this is indeed Turner’s conception of ritual. He himself, however, appears to contend that it is also possible to view ritual as something circular and/or static (Grimes, 1990:174-190).

Implicitly, Van Gennep stated that the more advanced a society is, the fewer the holy enters phases of a person's life. Our contemporary societies, especially in West-Europe, are characterized even more by this process of secularization (Bruce, 2002; Luckmann 1967; Martin, 1978, 2005). More in general, for example according to Campbell and Moyers (1990), we seem to live nowadays in a world without ritual – which is the whole of the scholarly idea of rites, ritualizing and ritualizations (I will return to this threefold distinction by Grimes (1990:9-10) later). And without ritual, rites of passage, and the social categories concerned, it may be questionable whether we can speak of liminality in regard of our culture.

Indeed, although Victor Turner stated that rites of passage also concern “entry into a new achieved status, whether this be a political office or membership of an exclusive club or secret society” (1967:95), he later mentioned that “with the increasing specialization of society and culture, with progressive complexity in the social division of labor, what was in tribal society principally a set of transitional qualities “betwixt and between” defined states of culture and society, *has become itself an institutionalized state*” [emphasis added] (Turner, 1969:107). Even more, in *From ritual to theatre* (1982), he distinguished “ergic-ludic ritual liminality” predominating in tribal and early agrarian societies from “anergic-ludic *liminoid* [emphasis added] genres of action and literature” that flourish in industrialized ones (Turner, 1982:52-53), partly as a consequence of the complexity of modern society:

In the so-called ‘high culture’ of complex societies, liminoid is not only removed from a *rite de passage* context, it is also ‘individualized.’ The solitary artist *creates* the liminoid phenomena, the collectivity *experiences* collective liminal symbols. This does not mean that the maker of liminoid symbols, ideas, images, etc., does so *ex nihilo*; it only means that he is privileged to make free with his social heritage in a way impossible to members of cultures in which the liminal is to a large extent the sacrosanct.

Turner, 1982:52

Thus, according to the above, individually created liminoid phenomena tend to be experienced as liminal symbols. In other words: liminality as an experience seems to exist still. But can we indeed say so if clearly not all of the other, above-mentioned characteristics of liminality are concerned, such as seclusion, discursive practices related to (political) power relations, irreversibility, temporality and linearity, enhancement of powers, a sense of purity and divinity, and its spatially bound character? For example, can we relate the playful or

'ludic' character of liminoid genres to the elements, connected to liminality, of social control and political power relations? How can we, in our *secular* societies, relate the collective experience of liminoid phenomena to liminality if the liminal is to a large extent the sacrosanct? How should we relate an *artistically* created liminoid phenomenon, and the way it *might* be experienced *individually*, to the strategy that liminality stands for – that is, a collectively followed strategy of forced seclusion? In this sense, I believe it is even questionable whether liminoid phenomena can be experienced as liminal symbols indeed: although liminoid phenomena seem to appeal to *an understanding of* the sacrosanct and of liminality, they do not combine this with a rite of passage-context, nor do they show other characteristics of liminality – characteristics that are, in my opinion, conditions to experience liminoid phenomena as liminal symbols. In our society we may have no liminality anymore *at all*, not even in regard of the experience of liminoid phenomena; instead, we might have to call *all* such phenomena *and* the way these are experienced 'liminoid'.

Although Turner seems to have tried to adjust the theories concerning rites of passage and liminality to our contemporary society, the concept of liminality (instead of a 'liminoid state') is still being used. For example, Elizabeth Teather, although acknowledging that "there may be a latent need for certain *rites* (ceremonies) of passage to be reintroduced" (1999:21) has brought together several articles in which the concept plays a vital role. Even more, despite her acknowledgement, she contends that we can still speak of rite of passage-contexts. Elaborating on the relation between space and place and, for example the way these are interwoven with certain activities (e.g. Castells, 2000), with identity (e.g. Harvey, 1989), with bodies (e.g. Foucault, 1977) and agency (e.g. Giddens, 1984), she states that in contemporary consumerist societies, individuals may choose to mark their passage by their consumption patterns (1999:14). In this, she follows Schouten, who, basing himself on Turner (but not on Turner's acknowledgement that in our societies, the liminoid is removed from a *rite de passage* context!), states that "in the modern, secular world [...] people often experience an isolated type of liminality (liminoid states) for which there exist few supportive rites of passage or kindred groups. [...] In such circumstances, people may create personal rites of passage, shaping new identities with such symbols and activities as are made available by our consumer culture" (Schouten, 1991:421). In other words: according to Teather, a rite of passage-context goes together well with individualization. Space is but one of 'such symbols and activities made available by our consumer culture' that are used in the creation of new rites of passage, as can be derived from Teather when she mentions that space, being everything but neutral, is vitally linked to stages of becoming (1999:3). As a result, she

expands Van Gennep's territorial passages within the theory of rites of passage, to include various types of the space/place dialectics (*ibid.*:22), as well as individual choices.

The question, then, remains: do we, in our societies, still have rites of passage indeed and, if so, is the idea of a 'liminal state' (as opposed to something liminoid) still a meaningful concept to be used in human geography?

### **2.3. Rites of passage: yes; liminality: unclear**

Some authors believe that there is no true ritual anymore in our societies (e.g. Campbell and Moyers, 1990). In regard of this, especially a supposed lack of rites of passage has been linked to social issues such as the increase in substance abuse and violent behavior among adolescents, according to Gavazzi, Alford and McKenry (1996:167). More in general, Blumenkrantz (1992:40) states: "Rituals of initiation or rites of passage, once a central cultural experience in families and communities, have been forgotten. Today's teenagers, lacking meaningful attachments, are finding ritual introductions to adulthood that are in conflict with society." A counterweight against these "negative rites of passage" can be found in newly invented 'rites'. In this regard, Blumenkrantz speaks of an intervention model, the Rite of Passage Experience (*ibid.*), instead of actual rites of passage (see also Grimes, 1990:Ch. 5). His model offers a deliberately invented 'structure' into adulthood which is accompanied by ceremonial acts and is supported by school, communities, and families (Blumenkrantz, 1992:90). So how should we see such an 'experience'? What is its relation with actual rites of passage? How is it related to ritual at all, if we would indeed have no more ritual in our culture? And if it is related to ritual, are such rites characterized by a state of liminality?

It is hard to find consensus about ritual – the whole of rites, ritualizing and ritualizations. According to Ronald Grimes, one of today's most important scholars in ritual, it can be mere repetition and it can be circumspection and allusion. You can act the way you acted before, because before, it 'worked' too (e.g. fixing the toilet), or your aim is to make an appeal to something beyond the empirical (Grimes, 2000:12). It is especially the second interpretation that should be related to the subject of this thesis; yet also this application of 'ritual' is encompassing much.

In this regard, I will try to give an indication of how I use 'ritual' by beginning to list "the qualities that appear frequently in the family of activities we label 'ritual'" (Grimes,

1990:13). It must be said, however, that this list (figure I-1) may encompass controversies, exceptions and the like; it is neither descriptive, nor definitive.

<p><b>Qualities of ritual</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Performed, embodied, enacted, gestural (not merely thought or said)</li><li>• Formalized, elevated, stylized, differentiated (not ordinary, unadorned, or undifferentiated)</li><li>• Repetitive, redundant, rhythmic (not singular or once-for-all)</li><li>• Collective, institutionalized, consensual (not personal or private)</li><li>• Patterned, invariant, standardized, stereotyped, ordered, rehearsed (not improvised, idiosyncratic, or spontaneous)</li><li>• Traditional, archaic, primordial (not invented or recent)</li><li>• Valued highly or ultimately, deeply felt, sentiment-laden, meaningful (not trivial or shallow)</li><li>• Condensed, multi-layered (not obvious; requiring interpretation)</li><li>• Symbolic, referential (not merely technological or primarily means-end oriented)</li><li>• Perfected, idealized, pure, ideal (not conflictual or subject to criticism and failure)</li><li>• Dramatic, ludic [i.e. playlike] (not primarily discursive or explanatory; not without special framing or boundaries)</li><li>• Paradigmatic (not ineffectual in modeling either other rites or non-ritualized action)</li><li>• Mystical, transcendent, religious, cosmic (not secular or merely empirical)</li><li>• Adaptive, functional (not obsessional, neurotic, dysfunctional)</li><li>• Conscious, deliberate (not unconscious or preconscious)</li></ul>
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Figure I-1: *Qualities of ritual* (Grimes, 1990:14)

It is in the context of figure I-1 that rites of passage originally took place; indeed, *originally*. Although one of the qualities of ritual is that it is supposed to be traditional and archaic, Grimes also acknowledges that – in particular when talking about rites – rites can indeed be constructed: “Whatever the reason, the past two decades have witnessed a resurgence of interest in the construction of rites of passage. The aim of inventing or constructing rites is bold, some might say arrogant. But without constant reinvention, we court disorientation. Without rites that engage our imaginations, communities, and bodies, we lose touch with the rhythms of the human life course” (Grimes, 2000:3). More precisely, in regard of the invention or construction of rites, he distinguish rites from ritualizing and from ritualizations:

Usually, rites can be named: Bar Mitzvah (the rite of becoming a man in Judaism), Baptism (the rite of becoming a Christian in some denominations). [...] The term 'rite' as used here refers to a set of actions, widely recognized by members of a culture. Rites are differentiated (compartmentalized, segregated) from ordinary behavior. Typically, they are classified as 'other' than ordinary experience and assigned a place discrete from such activities. A rite is often part of some larger whole, a ritual system or ritual tradition that includes other rites as well. [...] Ritualizing is the act of cultivating or inventing rites. Ritualizing is not often socially supported. Rather, it happens on the margins, on the thresholds; therefore, it is alternately stigmatized and eulogized. [...] 'Ritualization', then, refers to activity that is not culturally framed as ritual but which someone, often an observer, interprets as if it were potentially ritual. One might think of it as infra-, quasi-, or pre-ritualistic. [...] Whereas the notion of ritualization invokes metaphor – one 'sees' such and such an activity 'as' ritual – rites of various types are 'there'. A cultural consensus recognizes them. Ritualization includes processes that fall below the threshold of social recognition as rites.

Grimes, 1990: 9-10

In this sense, we should rather speak of Blumenkrantz' model as 'ritualizing' a passage or as a 'ritualization' of a passage. However, this distinction is merely theoretical, since, in effect, Grimes takes up quite a pragmatic view on ritual and rites of passage: "Rites are not givens; they are hand-me-downs, quilts we continue to patch. Whether we call this activity ritual creativity, ritual invention, ritualizing, ritual making, or ritual revision does not matter as much as recognizing that rites change, that they are also flowing processes, not just rigid structures or momentary events" (Grimes, 2000:12).

Invented rites can thus still be taken as ritual. But an important condition is nevertheless that rites still have to be related to giving meaning to life:

Today ritual helps integrate and attune life on an increasingly globalized planet. There is a growing suspicion that the so-called Western way of life has reached a precipice. In a few hundred short years it has done untold damage to the planet and to indigenous peoples. [...] 'Their' ritual practices [of the indigenous peoples, JB] may, in the long run, be more practical than 'our' practicality. [...] If we do not birth and die ritually, we will do so technologically, inscribing technocratic values in our very bones. Technology without ritual (or worse, technology *as* ritual) easily degenerates into

knowledge without respect. And knowledge without respect is a formula for planetary annihilation. It matters greatly not only *that* we birth and die but *how* we birth and die.

Grimes, 2000:13

In this sense, all or not invented, rites may still encompass a state of liminality as they are related to the 'course of life'. However – and I think this is crucial – today's rites, in our pluralistic society, can be enacted *without* community (Grimes, 2000:124). In this, Grimes seems to abandon Turner's idea of 'communitas'. Also, the 'liminoid' quality of today's invented rites (thus indicating the optional character) makes that today's ritual tends to last shorter and it blurs ritual enactment with theatrical performance, as well as (scholarly) detachment with (participatory) engagement (Grimes, 1990:132-143). It may very well be for this reason that Grimes does not use the concept of liminality in reference to today's ritualizations.

In answer to the questions central in this paragraph, I think we can state that contemporary rites of passage should be taken seriously – that is, as ritual in the description given in figure I-1. Today's rites are neither less serious nor more 'ludic' than traditional rites, and they are at least as important as they are in traditional societies. However, as these rites are often individually developed, *and* because we live in a pluralistic society, which is commonly viewed as more and more fragmented (Castells, 2000:3), the 'structural categories' that were neatly distinguished by such rites in the conceptualization of Van Gennep have disappeared, from a postmodern perspective.

People nowadays are regarded as being engaged in continuously shifting structures: one can lose his job at the same time one is getting married, and one can decide to break with a certain religious community and yet every Wednesday night be engaged in the opening rituals of the local karate club (see also Walther & Stauber, 2002), although such ritual should perhaps not be seen as ritual how it is used in the context of this paper. So, although the original context of liminality – rites of passage – can still be found, liminality as a phase of in between-ness is hard to demarcate, practically: can anyone be liminal in reference to one passage, and fall within the network of classifications in regard of other passages at the same time? Also, from a postmodern perspective, many of such classifications are voluntary and individually invented; transforming from one category to another is therefore largely voluntary, too, and so are the ritualizations accompanying such transformations. These voluntary affairs are in flat contradiction with discursive practices concerned with (political) power relations, originally connoted to liminality as a stage within rites of passage. Also,

when rites of passage are enacted individually, liminality might still refer to experiences, but it can hardly refer to characteristics *attributed* to a person: who would indeed see that another individual is going through a passage? Although ritual may be attached to notions of 'the course of life' (which might point to divinity and sacredness), I highly doubt whether liminality as a stage during ritual can be related nowadays to experiences of enhanced powers. Furthermore, during ritualizations that are, as said, often voluntary, I find it hard to believe that there would be any space where people who are undergoing rites are being secluded out of impurity. For instance, the naturalization of immigrants is sometimes regarded as a rite of passage (e.g. Boelhower, 1997). In the Netherlands, among other countries, immigrants are sometimes being kept aside until their naturalization. For one thing, I would consider the process of naturalization not a matter of ritual, since it is, in my opinion, too much a technocratic and bureaucratic matter for that. Being given a social security number is hardly a matter of transformation, I would argue. Furthermore, however, if seclusion is part of this process, this does not happen out of impurity of the immigrant, but from practical reasons to do a background check.

Also theoretically, liminality as a period of in between-ness is hard to demarcate: in the context of temporality and spatiality, for example, a serious question would be where and when liminality begins. Does liminality include *both* separation and incorporation (strictly speaking the pre- and postliminal phase, respectively) or indeed just the phase *in between*? In practice, someone undergoing rites of separation may already be considered 'not fully integrated in this world anymore', for instance. And does the space of exclusion encompass the space of inclusion, comparable to a civilized village surrounded by wilderness, or is it the other way round, and are there spaces of exclusion within the civilized world? This taken together, it is highly doubtful whether we can indeed refer to something like a state of liminality.

Yet despite the difficulties with the concept, liminality is regularly used in scholarly literature. But especially in regard of Western society, its application has more and more been removed from an ethnographical or anthropological context, to a more 'general' social sciences-context. In the following, I will work to an analysis of several examples of studies in which the concept is used.

### **3. 'Liminality' in studies of contemporary society**

#### **3.1. 'Cultural geography'**

To emphasize the broad range of subjects in which the concept is used, let me begin by taking several examples together under the header of 'cultural geography'. I am aware of the fact that this 'field' of study has much overlap with sociology, management, etcetera – it is for a reason that the following articles have been published in magazines such as the *Journal of Aging Studies*, *Human Relations*, and *Organization Studies*. Yet, I am taking them together under 'cultural geography' because the following examples are clearly centered around spatial elements (e.g. 'tourist destinations', 'the hotel', 'the street', 'the work place') and the role these play in the matters of the respective studies.

Before, I have mentioned that liminality could also refer to *sites* of passage (Matthews, 2003) and liminal *zones* (Urry, 2003). John Urry states that various parallels have been drawn between pilgrimages and tourism. Referring to Turner and his ideas about pilgrimages and *communitas*, he says: "The tourist moves from a familiar place to a far place and then returns to the familiar place. At the far place there is the worshipping at sacred shrines and the tourist is supposedly uplifted through intensive social bonding in which everyday obligations are suspended or inverted. In the liminal zone there is a license for permissive or playful behavior. And then there is return with enhanced social status" (Urry, 2003:12). In this, he also draws a parallel with Shields, but in my opinion, he leaves aside Shields' implicit notion that liminality is more or less something of the past instead of of today (I will return to this later). Also, I doubt whether the average tourist seriously sees a relation between sacredness and ritual and 'simply being on vacation'. Are these really live-changing experiences? When acknowledging that some authors maintain that notions of liminality have to be given a more specific content, Urry (2003:13) leaves the door open for me to mention here an article by Pritchard and Morgan (2006), who give the combination of liminality and tourism the specific content of the hotel.

According to them, within the sexualized marketing of tourism, tourists may "subvert social norms, challenge convention and seek adventures in liminal travel spaces such as hotels and airports. [...] The sense of flux and mobility of human traffic in these anonymous yet public spaces of marginality and transition, create conditions of freedom and opportunity for those open to such adventures" (Pritchard & Morgan, 2006:762). Although they acknowledge that the notion of liminality in cultural geography and tourism studies has become a little problematic and slippery since it has been used in a whole variety of social and cultural

contexts, *and* although they recognize Shields' argument, that liminality in most instances should no longer be related to Western consumerist patterns, since today most Western consumers no longer need liminal environments for reckless enjoyment (I will return to Shields' conception of liminality later), they contend that hotels remain at the heart of liminal discourses (*ibid.*:764). In short, hotels "all share the same cultural construction in the social imagination as places of desire and opportunity. As we enter their lobbies we enter a 'displaced' space, which is a place of rest and sanctuary yet which is not home; a place of anonymity and ambiguity, yet one where we are constantly under scrutiny and observation. To enter a hotel is to cross an imagined threshold into a liminal place which is strange, yet familiar, which offers freedom for some, but constraint, risk and unease for others" (*ibid.*:769-770). Hotels, they argue, offer spaces outside the norms of the prevailing (enforced) social spatialization; yet, Pritchard and Morgan seem to forget that next to the prevailing social spatialization, also *liminality* is originally an enforced spatialization. Obviously, in hotels normal rules and conventions can be suspended and personal identities can be reshaped; but only temporarily. Also, can we connect these places to ritual and rites of passage?

In my opinion, Matthews (2003) succeeds better in making plausible his interpretation of liminality, when stating that the street (as a metaphor for all outdoor places within the public sphere) is a liminal space, in that it is infused with cultural identity, especially in the passage of youngsters from childhood to adulthood. It is about power and identity indeed: "Usually used in relation to race and ethnicity and the contradictions that emerge with the colonization of one people by another, the phase and state of liminality that young people acquire when on the street, associated with the conjunction between a status that they are attempting to shed (childhood) and an emergent public identity (adulthood), can be likened to the process and condition of hybridization. When hanging around on the street, young people are symbolic of the oppressed hybrid, a group in-between," (Matthews, 2003:103), neither adult, nor child. Although Matthews intends to show how the street is not a zone deliberately occupied by youngsters as a means of provocation, there are echoes of Blumenkrantz' notions of the (possibility of) negative rites of passage as mentioned before.

On the other end of the scale of age, assisted living facilities for elders have also been called liminal spaces, as moving to such a facility may cause a crisis of identity that manifests itself as feeling betwixt and between locations and roles. According to Helen Black (2006:67-68), long-term care can be both a place and time of positive transformation and a place and time of anxiety and suffering. On the one hand, staff members encourage elders to do as much as they can for themselves, and they encourage elder autonomy, empowerment and

individualism. On the other hand, most elders see assisted living facilities not as home, but as impermanent residences. This results in anxiety about the future. As most of the elders living in such facilities seem to still believe that they can go home at some point in the future, but very few really do, the assisted living facilities are connected to experiences of death and dying, but also to improvement and the possibility that the next and final stop will be a nursing home. In other words: the changes in environment, finances and health, and diminishing contact with the outside world can cause confusion about the meaning of life. Here, aspects of rites of passage can be recognized, alongside notions of empowerment and spaces of seclusion; yet, this seclusion has got nothing to do with impurity. Liminality it is not really recognizable here (nor in Matthews, mentioned above) as an *enforced* strategy, a result of power relations.

Also on the work floor, liminal spaces have been identified. Management consulting, for example, can be seen as a liminal period since usual practice and order are suspended and replaced by new rites and rituals, according to Czarniawska and Mazza (2003). Consulting is a “condition rather than a role or a relationship” (*ibid.*:269). As liminal spaces are “being created when the switch is to take place”, this means in this case: “the organization veils itself, and then shows its new face already in place. Although all the participants are aware of what has happened in the meantime, it is almost a matter of delicacy not to discuss it in detail. This aggravates the feeling of liminality for the consultants, who are allowed to reflect on their condition only in anonymous interviews, if at all” (*ibid.*:284). In regard of trust and distrust, and familiarity with the company and its habits, consultants may find themselves in between clients, employees, and the external world. Yet, at the same time, the consultants are the ones conducting the rites of passage (*ibid.*:285). Czarniawska and Mazza easily adapt the terminology of liminality to the organization: “In the liminal space, the (usually distinct) borders between the sacred and the profane are blurred. In organizational vocabulary, one could say that the borders between theory and practice are opened” (*ibid.*:284). In doing so, they also contend that organizations show ritual to some extent. They state that the kind of ritual and rites they are talking about show parallels to ritual in everyday life (*ibid.*:285) – as Van Gennep has mentioned – and they do so because they reject Turner’s preference to use liminoid phenomena instead of liminality in modern societies. One of their reasons is that anthropology and the rest of the social sciences seem to “have agreed that there is no ‘great divide’ between so-called premodern and modern societies” (*ibid.*:271). I tend to disagree with this. In the first place, I do not see so much agreement within the social sciences that there would be indeed no huge difference between premodern and modern societies. The

before-mentioned developments of secularization, for one thing, is a difference that should be kept in mind here, especially when talking about how much the sacred enters ordinary life. Second, I don't recognize anything of ritual as defined by ritual scholars such as Grimes in ritual of business organizations. Yes, consultancy will bring transition, and yes, it will bring the need to re-negotiate and re-identify social norms; but I would not connect these to rites of passage and liminality, as many of the qualities given in figure I-1 cannot be related to such changes.

According to Christina Garsten (1999), too, liminality can be found on the work floor, although she seems to be more lenient in acknowledging that her application of the concept is rather unorthodox and should be seen as metaphorical (Garsten, 1999:603). She locates liminality in temporary workers as they share some of the interstructural and ambiguous characteristics of liminality, being drawn into extended circles of loyalty yet lacking the structural bond created by a regular employment agreement. These workers can be seen as going through a passage to either a regular working contract or an increased sense of marginality in relation to the labor market (*ibid.*). They are on the one hand 'just temporarily' stationed, referring to not needing to know all the ins and outs, but on the other hand they enjoy the freedom of not having to work overtime or getting engaged in typical workplace conflicts. It allows one freedom to choose when and where to work (*ibid.*:606). She makes it acceptable that temporal workers indeed "embody social changes under way and challenge existing categories in the realms of work, employment, and organization. The liminal position of temporary employees may be seen as a seedbed of cultural and social creativity, a position in which new models, symbols and institutions arise" (*ibid.*:615); there may even arise some sort of *communitas* among the temporal workers. However, she does not refer to ritual; at best, the 'making sense of the world'-element is that flexibilization in the workplace should be connected to fragmentation as a global process.

As I myself have worked as a temporal employee in an organization that, at the time, also had a (temporal) consultant for a manager, I can draw from my own experience that, if liminality as a concept is indeed applicable to the work floor, it should rather be seen as a metaphor for fragmentation. I cannot agree that the department where I worked was to be seen as a liminal space, neither do I think that the manager, nor the regular staff, were invited to develop new rituals to make sense of my presence, their situation, let alone of their lives. Also, I cannot say that the 'state' I was in was *enforced* upon me.

From all these examples, it is clear that the concept is difficult to use in relation to modern society. Perhaps this also is the case in regard of traditional societies, as modernist

ideas of clear-cut categories seem to be somewhat outdated. However, it is clear that many of the concept's characteristics do not come to the fore in the above-mentioned, contemporary situations. For example, the liminal condition is, as said, something that is not only experienced by, but also ascribed to people. It is questionable if such is the case in these examples – if one stays in a hotel, I doubt whether the average reaction will be: “ah, so you're one of the threshold people!” I think it is not even too ridiculous to say that we should be cautious not to mention every situation 'liminal' or 'liminoid' in one way or another. But what is clear indeed, is that such situations that have some sort of liminal element in them are strongly spatially bound. None of the examples mentioned in this chapter thus far, come from literally geographical magazines or books. Elaborating on the spatial element of liminality in an 'acknowledged' geographical context, we will almost automatically arrive at the before-mentioned Rob Shields.

### **3.2. Liminality in geography**

Maybe Shields' application of the concept of liminality is known best in geographical circles. In *Places on the margin* (1991) and in the preceding article *The system of pleasure* (1990), he uses the concept to clarify how zones may provide “the setting for a life-changing transition” (1990:48), or taken somewhat more broadly, how places may provide the setting for moments of in between-ness and loss of social bearings. So, where the Brighton seashore was first a liminal zone because sea bathing was considered very beneficial – pseudo-religious, perhaps – at the end of the eighteenth century, it later provided the setting where the industrial workforce could spend a “liminal time-out” – because holidays were a new phenomenon, let alone when classes mixed freely in such a gay carnival (Shields, 1990).

Indeed, he describes places with reference to a state betwixt and between existing orders; in the beginning this was perhaps even mixed with sacredness. But closer scrutiny shows that he also recognizes that the necessary element of ritual seems to get more and more lost in the character of such places. In the Niagara Falls, for example, we can find a combination of experiences (Shields, 1991: Ch.3) First, there are experiences we could take under the header of pilgrimage destinations with metaphysical aspects of experience; second, there are rite of passage-like honeymoons; third, along with the rising of popular tourism, the Falls became an expression of excessive and useless power. Gradually, the Falls lose their mystic appearance in favor of a pragmatic 'use', namely, as a cheap power source for industry. Tourist attractions surrounding the Niagara Falls are slowly beginning to replace the

attractive power of the Falls themselves, until finally, the Falls function merely as a background against which sexuality and commerce are being presented. Hence, in regard of the 'pre-industrial' view of the Niagara Falls, Shields states: "The various aspects of the Falls' liminality, which had formed the foundation of its status as a pilgrimage destination, were gradually broken apart into a liminoid, but not fully liminal, experience" (Shields, 1991:125). Yet even more, today, as a marginalized place of mass tourism, the Falls offer an interesting perspective on how we centralize our 'bodies', being "engaged in a struggle to have *individual selves* by situating [ourselves] in both regular and ironic relationships with spectacles of society and of nature, documenting for [ourselves] a biography which reflexively establishes a coherent relationship between [ourselves] and the world, and which elaborates on the position of individuals within a spatialisation of [our] social and geographical world" (*ibid.*:157).

In the end, Shields appears to use particularly the concept of *marginality* rather than liminality, to show how "that which has been denied in the construction of a Western cultural identity" is actually a "central theme in Western culture and thought" (Shields, 1991:276). Liminality, as he indeed tends to attach the concept to a rite of passage-context, seems to indicate especially how we *believe* places *used* to play a role; that is, it comprises a "landscape of affects" (Shields, 1990:39) in the collective 'cultural memory' in regard of phases that have been important in our individual lives as well as in the broader framework of a spatialization of cultural sites. Although such places may still be attractive as a background against which we can conduct our own ritualizations, today, they seem to do so more because of our imagination rather than because we would still connect them to empowerment or sacredness, seclusion, impurity, and the like.

Shields obviously tries to stay close to the original interpretation of the concept: liminality is a state that people used to undergo in some instances (but, as it seems, not anymore); and with it, it denotes the spaces where they underwent this state, or at least the spaces we *believe* they experienced liminality. What is clear, is that Shields is eventually a little reluctant to apply the concept in reference to experiences in contemporary culture, in today's world.

Less reluctant than Shields are the geographers Madge and O'Connor (2005), who try to combine all characteristics of liminality; they focus on a state of in between-ness that is combined with an important passage in life. However, although they contend otherwise, the 'rite-context' does not play a significant role in their study, in my opinion. What they do emphasize, is the relation 'place – individual passage'. Their study is still quite

anthropologically inspired; but at the same time, a notable aspect is that the role of cyberspace is examined. In their article, they focus on the role of the internet site Babyworld in the identity construction of future mothers. Participants in the virtual reality of the site 'try out' different versions of motherhood in a 'liminal space' created by negotiating creatively with online/onsite boundaries.

In presenting cyberspace as liminal, they (partly) follow Shields, who, talking about ritual and (multi-)media, states: "Retrospectively, it is clear that there has been a history and succession of 'virtual worlds' which anticipate the information and communication technologies to make present what is both absent and imaginary. [...] Virtual space is not only betwixt and between geographical places in a non-place space of telemediated data networks, but participants take on 'usernames' or identities, and many surreptitiously engage in activities they might not otherwise consider" (Shields, 2003:11-13). Madge and O'Connor are aware of Turner's preference to use 'liminoid' in relation to modern society. Also, they have taken notion of Shields' argument that, actually, "the virtual became a liminoid space; not one directed at rites of passage, but rather at experimentation" (Shields, 2003:14). Yet, they use the term liminal rather than liminoid, for one thing because they believe it is arguable that in some sense the future mothers were going through a rite of passage in the use of Babyworld website. As stated, in my opinion, the rite-context in the sense of *ritual* (figure I-1) is hard to find in their study. And it is questionable whether we can call something 'liminal' if no ritual is involved.

They do make it plausible that the cyberspace of Babyworld offers a possibility for *communitas*: for "equality of relations, comradeship that transcends age, rank, kinship etc. and displays an intense community spirit" (Madge & O'Connor, 2005:93). Also, they show that it is indeed a time-space where people can develop or experiment with their new identities. Yet, it is a self-chosen space; it is not a space of seclusion or of impurity. No matters of discursive power play a role here.

Perhaps as a consequence of the difficulty to combine the concept of liminality with the individual rites of passage in our pluralistic societies, it may be necessary to focus on only a few of the characteristics of liminality. In most studies in which the concept is used, just as in the examples mentioned in the paragraph before, this is the case. As stated, Madge and O'Connor seem to abandon the context of ritual; instead, they emphasize the liminoid character of a place (in cyberspace) by directly linking it to experiences of individuals going through a passage. They play with the concept's meaning: although drawing on Shields, they also choose to apply his insights in a way fit to their own research, that is, by stating that

cyberspace is indeed 'liminal' instead of liminoid in this situation, although there is practically no ritual in their study.

From the above-mentioned examples we may argue that it is necessary to see what characteristics should *at least* be identifiable when we talk about liminality. Is it commonplace to abandon the context of ritual? Is it commonplace to emphasize the cultural narratives concerning a place rather than these places' roles within power-related structures? Is the formation of some sort of *communitas* enough to call something liminal? Are there authors who may call a given place 'liminal' without considering the identity of the people who use that particular place? Can there be liminality without a passage? As we shall see, the answers to such questions will differ, depending on the respective author's perspective.

In other examples of liminality that I have found but left aside thus far, the concept is politically connoted. I mean by that, that although the application of the concept may be derived from an analysis of individual experiences, it is applied to the situation of (1) a socio-cultural *group* that (2) is somehow involved in a (political) struggle for recognition. It also often refers to a rather static situation, or at least more static than a passage-related concept would have us believe. Therefore, I will first elaborate on theoretical insights into liminality as a category of political identities. Obviously, to speak of liminality as some sort of category already indicates the more static nature of this interpretation of the concept.

### **3.3. Liminality as a political identity**

When talking about *political* liminality, the first thing coming to mind would probably be the way in which the world today is organized in political-territorial units: in states (Storey, 2001:1). There is a close connection between states and nations, in that nations generally strive to have a state of their own (Storey, 2001:51). Nations, then, are now usually seen as "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1991): groups of people that believe they share a common history, connected to a historic territory, communicated through a shared (public) culture of mass media. It is within this order of states and nations that Anne Norton (1988) situates political liminality. She distinguishes three types: territorial, intellectual and structural liminality. In all three of them, she takes the nation as the unit against which liminality is positioned.

However, especially in regard of territorial liminality, which she positions literally "on the border" (Norton, 1988:57), I want to emphasize here that it would be perhaps more proper to position liminality also against the unit of the *state*, since nations do not necessarily have to

have a territory (thus borders) of their own; states do. I am aware that this may be a merely theoretical distinction: within state boundaries that encompass no clear nation, it will be harder to find a 'deviant' identity which can be labeled 'liminal' – the interpretation of liminality in this context will follow. Yet on the other hand, since the state apparatus may use nationalism as a vehicle in *creating* a sense of togetherness (Storey, 2001:72-73), territorial liminality should not be restricted to state borders. So, it seems that territorial liminality can be related to practices of the nation as well as of the state. Obviously, also intellectual and structural liminality depend partly on the organization of the state apparatus (again, the explanation of these kinds of liminality will follow); I believe that in these types of liminality, ideas of the 'imagined community' play a role just as much as do legal (thus state-related) decisions.

In politics, so-called 'liminars' are between allegiances. According to Norton (1988:53), the recognition of the liminal "marks the conscious differentiation of self and other, of the body politic from other bodies politic. The differentiation of subject and object, self and other, requires both an object of likeness and an object of difference. Liminars provide an object that is like, though demonstrably other than, the subject. They thus provide an object with which the subject can identify even as it differentiates itself." I tend to say that liminality as a political identity would thus be an intermediate stage before the Other as identified in practices of orientalism (Said, 1979); liminars resemble the Self too much to be exotic, but on the other hand they are too strange to feel perfectly comfortable with them. The consequence is that liminars are approached with paranoia (Norton, 1988:54-55).

Territorially liminars live literally on the border, "betwixt and between adjacent nations. They are most often physically removed from the capital and the centers of political and economic power, thus possessing the relative poverty and impotence characteristic of liminars. They are regarded, and regard themselves, as unconventional and egalitarian, as wanderers removed from obligations to kinsmen and neighbors" (Norton, 1988:56). This 'impotence' should be regarded relatively: it is rather contemptuous of authority, thus *outlaw*-like, than 'weak'. They make laws of their own, yet within the nation (or rather, state). This kind of liminality fits the adventurer, the outlaw, the frontiersman. But since borders of the state may move, the identity of these frontiersmen may change too: "Once all Americans were frontiersmen, credited with the ambiguous attributes of that state. [...] As the nation expanded, liminars were assimilated, displaced from their liminal status by the inhabitants of newly acquired territories. The frontiersmen changed with the frontiers" (Norton, 1988:63).

Liminality in borderlands that are hardly reachable tends to stand for roughness yet familiarity with civilization, for strength but subordination, for poverty and freedom, and the like.

Next to territorial liminality, Norton distinguishes intellectual liminality. Liminals of this sort reject the doctrines that the nation or state presents as 'truth' (*ibid.*: 69). Typically, they are (positioned as) madmen and traitors. Madmen, living a truth of their own, have to be kept away from society, as Foucault (2001) has shown. The objective of the asylum was not so much to cure madmen in isolation; rather, it had to be so organized that "evil could vegetate there without ever spreading; [that] unreason would be entirely contained and offered as a spectacle, without threatening the spectators" (Foucault, 2001:196). In effect, the asylum had to be a reminder for those who might doubt whether a universal morality 'worked' and it had to be an instrument to make a social shift if necessary (*ibid.*:246). This echoes the idea of liminality as a strategy of secluding the impure. Next to madmen, there are traitors who "employ their involvement in the order they have abandoned on behalf of another in which they are ideologically comprehended" (Norton, 1988:71). Finally, there is the group of bohemians: "This quietist species of liminality is the peculiar province of the intelligentsia, artists, and literati [...]. The use of this name in France, England, and the United States affirms the liminality of this group, substituting a metaphoric natal-national estrangement for an intellectual one. Such groups commonly affect flamboyant and idiosyncratic dress and manners to differentiate themselves from the surrounding society. They frequently espouse radical political opinions but rarely involve themselves in political action" (*ibid.*), unlike the 'real' traitors; in any way, it is clear how the idea of paranoia is closely related in this situation to their rejection of the order prescribed by society.

The third group exists of structurally liminals: the poor, peasants, the (industrial) workforce, but also women and ethnic minorities. As the political significance of liminality "lies in [the] capacity to transform weakness into strength" (Norton, 1988:76), the reader may imagine how these groups, "deprived of the exercise of power by reason of their distance from the center, make of their distance and their consequent exclusion from those institutional structures a claim to authority and a source of power" (*ibid.*). It are the poor, the peasants and the industrial workers that stood and stand symbol for revolutionary movements in Marxist discourse. Women, as a structurally liminal group, have a more ambivalent position: "They are at once at the center and on the periphery, containing and contained within the structures of the state. They are at once the agents and the objects of structure – as mothers instructing children in social forms, and as a group commonly subject to exceptionally stringent behavioral constraints" (*ibid.*:80). Ethnic minorities, finally, are "made ambiguous by their

cultural variance from the dominant group, their race, or the nationality of their ancestors” (*ibid.*).

Returning to the elements of liminality identified in the beginning of this thesis, we can say that in the political context, liminality is centrally related to power structures and exclusion rather than seclusion. Clearly, the element of ritual and the passage-context do not play a role anymore in this interpretation. But what *is* important is that liminars experience exclusion as well as that they are identifiable by others as ‘being liminal’. Ideally, it may also still refer to enhanced powers. Finally, the spatially-bound characteristic seems to be quite important still, and not only for territorial liminality, since the reference-group of the liminars is the nation or the state. This means that locations of centralized power and certain places of the public sphere are inherently harder to reach for liminars than for others. Now it’s time to see how these theoretical forms of political liminality can be identified in more politically oriented geographical literature.

### **3.4. Case studies of political liminality**

In the examples that will follow, the concept is clearly removed from a ritual context and even from passages. As stated, in these instances the concept is more politically connoted than in the examples before. To begin with, let me take here an article that might be seen as somewhat in-between cultural and political geography.

Leslie Adelson (1994) explores the production of culture, but focuses on the role of immigrants. Her article was written at a time of highly emotional debates in Germany over who should have the right to German citizenship and when right-wing extremist bombings directed at Turks were prominent in the news. Not surprisingly, Adelson looked at the role of Turks in German discourses of otherness. According to her, “Turks in Germany bear the force of academic, administrative, legal, and sometimes violent exclusion while they are at the same time appropriated for a kind of conflated, imaginary otherness” (Adelson, 1994:305-306). I will not further discuss here her analysis of Turkish and German identity, which she derives from Turkish-German literature, among other things, but it is worthwhile to mention that the otherness or cultural difference is positioned as representing the process of cultural interpretation which is formed in the confusion of living in the disjunctive, liminal space that Turks (often still seen as *Gastarbeiter* or ‘guestworkers’) occupy; marginal positions do not so much reinforce supposedly a fixed identity of a self, but they rather reveal the ambivalence of identity. In line with Norton, in regard of Turks in Germany, Adelson calls this Turkish-

German liminality (Adelson, 1994:307). She emphasizes further how this ambivalence goes back to ideas of the two countries compared to one another: “There is a ‘Turkish’ component to hybrid constructs of German national identity today that is not oppositional but performative. By the same token the Turkish nation [...] would be unthinkable without a performative orientation toward Europe. [...] The Economist [...] characterizes Turkey as more like Europe than not” (Adelson, 1994:309).

The structural liminality above is related to the imagination of a country (Turkey) as a whole; this can also be found in Rumelili’s analysis of the perpetuation of the difficult relations between Turkey and Greece (2003). She starts with the question how it is possible that feelings of mistrust and threat perception between the rivals have persisted in institutional contexts such as NATO, since these normally would have led to shared norms. First, she rejects the thesis that NATO membership would have “provided Turkey and Greece with a security blanket against the Soviet bloc and thereby gave them the incentives to ride free on the effort of their more powerful allies and shift the focus of their foreign policy from the Soviet threat to their more parochial conflicts”, because this assumption takes their enemy roles as fixed (Rumelili, 2003:214-215). Instead, she takes on a constructivist approach that a collective identity among states by means of community-building may have the unwanted result of promoting an understanding of ‘outside states’ as different. This, she argues, is most visible with states that resemble each other in many ways; “states situated in liminal (partly self/partly other) positions with respect to the community” (*ibid.*:216). As she convincingly demonstrates, this is what happened in the relationship between the two countries in the years of 1995-1999, during which Turkey actively sought candidateship in the European Union and the relations between Turkey and the EU intensified because of the Customs Union Agreement. According to Rumelili, through institutions such as NATO and the Council of Europe, Turkey is considered as a part of Europe; situated mostly in Asia and having a predominantly Muslim population, Turkey is on the other hand considered a threat to European identity based on geography and Judeo-Christian culture. And partly European “and partly not, and insisted on being recognized as European while violating its standards, Turkey has thus been perceived as threatening alternative notions of European identity” (*ibid.*:222). That Turkey, threatening as its liminal identity is to Europe, finds resistance especially in Greece is because Greece, as a member state of the EU, is situated on the periphery of the Union economically, politically and geographically and has therefore never enjoyed a secure European identity (*ibid.*:223). We may argue that this example shows a combination of territorial and structural liminality.

Such (structural) liminality is in more instances related to the location of a given area. Russell Leigh Sharman (2001), for example, elaborates on insights into post-colonial Latin America that suggest a regionalization of race that reflects a stereotyped image of black backwardness and, related, informal economic activity (Sharman, 2001:47). Especially in Costa Rica as opposed to other Latin American countries, the nationalist discourse is one that has been constructed as a 'white myth of racial purity' against an over-all Latin-American context of mixed ancestry. Afro-Costa Ricans are thus caught in the excluded middle of this dichotomy (*ibid.*). The coastal province of Limón, now, has a predominantly Afro-Latin American population. This province is connected to the highlands (where the capital is located and where we should situate 'mainstream society') through only a single highway. At the highlands-end of the highway, the racial qualifier in the nationalist self-image "forces Afro-Costa Ricans into a perpetual process of social initiation where blacks and blackness take on the symbolic trappings of danger and pollution. At the black point of origin, Limón, the categories are reversed, such that white migrants to Limón are placed in a similar position of liminality with all the trappings of danger and pollution, but without the racial qualifier that precludes total social incorporation" (*ibid.*). According to Sharman, the Limonenses must create a sense of place "out of their 'polluted' patch of space" (*ibid.*:60) in the national landscape. In the process by which they do so, blackness stands for *communitas*.

Where we can view liminality in the example above as an empowering state of being, this element is not present in Navaro-Yashin's analysis of Northern Cyprus (2003), where people also have to find ways to create a sense of place within a 'non-place'. Northern Cyprus, as a self-declared 'state' but not recognized thusly by any state other than Turkey, has liminal qualities: it is and yet is not. This goes for its inhabitants, too (Navaro-Yashin, 2003:113-114). They may, for instance, remark of their situation that "life is dead here" (*ibid.*:111). Being completely dependent on Turkey, economically as well as politically, inhabitants referring to their 'state' sometimes say Turkey, sometimes the Turkish Republic of North-Cyprus, and sometimes the Republic of Cyprus. They live under a regime with authoritarian characteristics; people who criticize Turkey's military presence are double marginalized (*ibid.*:113). The liminal state follows one's whereabouts through the symbolic effect of not-existing and actual practice: they carry passports that can bring them to nowhere but Turkey. According to Navaro-Yashin, the political on Northern Cyprus "never shows itself in the holistic form in which it is often depicted in political anthropologies. It rather appears, often in phantasmatic form, between absence and presence (in this case of 'state'), or in the recurring imaginaries and fantasies of 'statehood'. Here, the meaning of existence,

betwixt and between life and death (a subversion of the opposition), must be sensed to be grasped [...] There is, once again, no space here (in war or under ceasefire) where death is not tangled with 'the political'. The life cycle does not turn. Neither is it linear. Life is kept on hold." (*ibid.*:121). But it must be said, though, that such isolated areas have been of all times and of all places; think of tribes in rainforests and the like. The fact that the phenomenon on Northern Cyprus catches the eye is because it is located in the midst of the globalizing world. For that matter, it only accentuates the process of transnationalization "that is transforming many parts of the world into such 'no man's lands' (*ibid.*:120)."

Comparable to Turkish-Cypriots, Palestinians are also 'nowhere' in the framework of international law. According to Laurie King-Irani (2006:942), as stateless persons, "they occupy a liminal and interstitial space in the international legal and political order, an order that (contemporary discourses of cosmopolitanism, globalization and emergent transnational organizations aside) remains founded upon and grounded in the interests of sovereign nation-states rather than in the claims of sub- or transnational actors, whether individuals or groups." Even more, she draws a parallel with the war on terror, since this war on an abstraction knows no boundaries or frontiers, thus does not admit distinctions between 'foreign' and 'domestic' jurisdictions: "people of diverse nationalities and social classes are discovering what it means to lose rights previously guaranteed by law. Being a citizen in possession of a valid passport no longer ensures protection against the surreal world of the Patriot Act, extraordinary renditions, torture, 'targeted killings', and a UN-approved military occupation in Iraq" (King-Irani, 2006:925). This post-9/11 world order is nothing new to Palestinians, as UN-established institutions have to deal with the Palestinians' needs and demands through channels outside the jurisdiction of the UN's human rights regime – a consequence of their liminal political and legal zone, being second class citizens in Israel or refugees in surrounding Arab countries.

As may be clear, the concept of liminality has thus been applied to a whole range of subjects. It has become hard to decide whether a given situation should be called 'liminal' indeed; Rob Shields' eventual application of 'marginal' suggests that the meaning of liminality actually encompasses too much, or characteristics other than to which his attention is primarily drawn. In the next section, I will formulate my conclusions to the question, whether or not the concept of liminality can add to the understanding of a given situation.

## **4. Betwixt and between meanings: the liminality of *liminality***

### **4.1. Cultural-geographical and political-geographical liminality**

I opened this part of this thesis by saying that the concept of liminality, originally an ethnological concept, has appeared to be relevant to scholars of a whole range of disciplines. Yet, as it has been used to describe many different situations from many fields of expertise, there have been observable shifts in its interpretation. Hence, I have put forward my doubts about the usefulness of the concept. Also, we may wonder if the concept contributes anything to a comparison of different situations in which the concept is nevertheless used, despite various circumstances; in other words: is its interpretation reliable? To learn more about this, I have asked the following question:

*To what situations is the concept of liminality applied?*

However, especially in relation to contemporary, modern society, it can be regarded questionable whether the concept should be used at all, since, according to several authors, we might not have ritual or rites of passage anymore; and it is actually the quality of such a context which the concept was intended to describe in the first place. This was already recognized by Turner, who proposed to use the term 'liminoid' to describe the characteristics of events that show similarity with liminal events, but that are more voluntary in nature. Therefore, I have first directed my attention to contemporary ritual: does ritual nowadays still contain rites of passage?

According to ritual expert Ronald Grimes, it does indeed, but today's rites have been individualized. They are rather ritualizations than true rites – between which the distinction has been made clear before. As a consequence, the obscurity concerning the concept of liminality has still not been removed, because in the true sense of the word, liminality refers to a state of being that is not only experienced during rites of passage, but it is also connected to characteristics ascribed to people. And in the case of individual rites (which are therefore unrecognizable for others), this is but one element of liminality that does not seem fit for contemporary circumstances. The obligatory connotation of the state of liminality is another characteristic that raises doubts to the question, whether or not the concept is still useful. But since the main condition of the state of liminality – undergoing rites or ritualizations of passage – is still present in contemporary society, *and* because it cannot be denied that the concept is simply applied in scholarly literature on a regular base, I have found it worthwhile

to see under what circumstances the concept is used, then. To what kind of characteristics does it refer?

In short, a content analysis shows that the many different applications of the concept are far from unequivocal. They have in common that they all point to something 'in between' and that this 'in-between-ness' is in one way or another related to something spatial – whether it refers to a particular context, such as 'the hotel', or to an imaginary otherness that brings distance (thus the unknown and the frightening) nearby. But there, the commonalities stop. That is, I believe my examples of 'liminality' (the way the respective authors believe it is rightfully applied) can be divided into two categories: cultural-geographical and political-geographical studies. I take the example of Madge and O'Connor under this first header; Shields, on the other hand, does not use liminality at all in regard of contemporary society, in my opinion: as he recognizes that his applications of liminality actually describe things that happened in the past (things that broke apart into 'liminoid' experiences), he characterizes the places connected to these events in the present rather with 'marginality'.

#### **4.2. Cultural-geographical liminality**

The examples of cultural-geographical liminality are characterized by their temporariness and their voluntariness. Tourists *choose* a destination and a hotel for their vacation; youngsters choose whether or not to use the street for the making of their identity. The same goes for elders choosing whether or not to stay in an assisted living facility (although this example may be open to discussion, as well as the next), for employees choosing whether or not to stick with their jobs in times when there is an interim consultant changing the course of business, and for interim consultants and temporary employees choosing whether or not to take one assignment instead of another, as well as for mothers in the making choosing whether or not to go online to try out different roles. As may be clear, all of these examples – partly because of their voluntariness – are also temporary situations. People do not go on vacation forever, people are not forever teenagers, businesses do not go through reorganizations constantly, and once you are a mother, you are not anymore a mother-in-the-making. Although these situations may be regarded as passages, they are not necessarily related to rites and ritual as defined in figure I-1; furthermore, also other characteristics of liminality are not necessarily present.

In regard of the two above-mentioned features, it can be concluded that the voluntariness of this sort of 'liminality' is clearly contradicting its original context, whereas

liminality has indeed originally been connected to a state of being that, in principle, should not last. But the irreversibility of liminality is not necessarily present in these examples. In this cultural-geographical kind of liminality, there does not have to be a 'passage in life', nor does such a passage, if there is one, have to be accompanied with rites or ritualizations. In fact, the absence of ritual as defined by the qualities mentioned before seems, at least in these examples, more common than an appeal to the meaning of life indeed. In most of these instances, the 'liminars' need not be recognizable by others as going through a state of liminality (an exception may be the mother in the making), although they are of course recognizable as such, the moment they are in the particular 'liminal space'. This means that their liminality does not encompass characteristics ascribed to them by other, non-liminal people. Even the sort of comradeship of *communitas* may be questionable in these examples: of course, kids on the street form such a group, and perhaps so do temporary employees working on one and the same work place. But hotel guests? Should I feel a common bond with every tourist I meet when I am on vacation? In some instances, liminality may encompass the enhancement of powers, but this is not always the case. Most importantly in regard of the divide made here, between cultural-geographical and political-geographical applications of liminality, is that there are no political or power-related consequences of this state of being in the examples of the first category. Obviously, this is related to the voluntariness of this kind of liminality, which is, as said, in contradiction to the original meaning.

#### **4.3. Political-geographical liminality**

Contrary to the cultural-geographical applications of the concept, the political-geographical instances of liminality are characterized by their involuntariness and the more or less permanent nature of the in between-ness – or at least its undetermined duration. Turks in Germany most likely do not want to be excluded, but it remains a question for how long they will be; and Turkey as partly European, partly other, wants to be an EU-member but is regarded not satisfying 'European'. The country is still willingly excluded from the European Union, and it is undetermined if and when it will be fully accepted as a European nation. Afro-Costa Ricans are excluded from the Costa Rican national self-image, just like Turkish *Gastarbeiter* are in Germany; and just like them, it is unsure whether Afro-Costa Ricans will ever be part of this image. Turkish-Cypriots are not by choice excluded from international politics, although it can of course be argued that they themselves have declared their own

state; but as this was decades ago and as the citizens have to live under an authoritarian regime, according to Navaro-Yashin, their present situation can hardly be called voluntary. Although recently, the relations between Southern and Northern Cyprus have become a little closer, it is far from clear if and when the island will be united again. Finally, the example of the Palestinians shows the same image of (a) people in exile, against their will excluded from the international order of states, and God (or Allah or Jahveh) knows for how long.

The examples show either structural or territorial political liminality, but often a combination of both: while the Turks in Germany are indeed, as a minority, structurally liminal, this is related to the imagination of Turkey as partly European, partly not. And while Afro-Costa Ricans are, as a black minority, also structurally liminal, this is related to them inhabiting a province that, because of its relatively isolated location, has easily been excluded from the national self-image. In relation to the original context of the concept, the obligatory or binding character of liminality is obviously most important. But it is hard to speak of passages in regard of these examples, since liminality here stands for undetermined duration. But it is clear that, *if* the state of liminality ends, it will be followed by recognition and enhanced political power. For another thing, political liminality is not irreversible. Theoretically, political liminars can switch back and forth between politically powerlessness and powerfulness. Also, there is no ritual, let alone a rites of passage-context, at stake here. None of the situations described are related to practices that are intended to create a better understanding of, or relation with, life. Political liminality refers to experiences of exclusion, but it *may* refer to characteristics ascribed to people. The Costa Rican example is perhaps clearest in showing both: Afro-Costa Ricans experience exclusion, but their blackness also represents something frightening and economical backwardness. On the other hand, Turkish-Cypriots are not recognizable as 'non-existent'. Political liminars may form a sort of *communitas*. Again, in the Costa Rican example there is a clear reference to this sort of comradeship under the denominator of blackness. And it would not be too strange if Turks in Germany experience a same sort of common bond. However, I believe it would be doubtful whether Turks in regard of their country and its difficult relationship with the EU feel the same companionship. The same goes for the enhancement of powers: liminality may, as in the Costa Rican example, create a sense of empowerment, but just as often, it is related to a *weak* position.

#### **4.4. The liminality of *liminality*: towards a new reading of the concept of liminality**

Whether or not we still know ritual and rites of passage in our society, it is clear that the concept of liminality as used in the examples discussed here often does not refer to any such context, although a few authors do proclaim so. Liminality, the way we may run across the concept in literature, is in most instances not related to a state of seclusion during acts that are intended to accompany the rhythm of life. In fact, the concept seems to be pointing to lots of things and situations 'in between' – but it may be worth questioning whether all the applications of liminality are so well-chosen. In this light, it is telling that Rob Shields refers to 'marginality' rather than to 'liminality'.

The division I have made here, between cultural-geographical and political-geographical liminality, is to be seen as an attempt to create order in the many uses of the concept. As said, especially in the cultural-geographical examples, the concept apparently may refer to virtually every facet of our lives, as life has become more and more fragmented, and there are many situations to be found that carry some element of in between-ness. In regard of such situations, it appears that we do not have to emphasize all characteristics of the concept and yet call the situation 'liminal'. The only thing we really need to do is pay attention to the spatiality of the context, but every other characteristic (though not all of them at once, of course) seems to be redundant in one instant or another. Apart from the ritual connotation, we can abandon its connection to the individual going through a passage; we may discard the fact that liminality should not only denote experiences, but also characteristics ascribed to people. Or we may leave aside the notion of liminality as an enforced state of being, or the empowering character.

Especially in reference of a view on holidays, hotels and businesses during management consulting as liminal spaces, we must be aware not to lose touch with what the concept originally described: should we conceive of internships as liminal periods, during which people – in a way like temporary employees – are part of a company, but not entirely? Should we regard a tailback of cars during daily rush-hour as liminal, because we are in between working time and the home situation; in our own cars, our domains, but in the public sphere; during which social orders seem to get blurred, since the complete board of directors can be stuck in traffic next to the cafeteria lady? And what about spending a sunny Sunday afternoon in the park? Are we more 'ourselves' in such areas of 'cultivated nature'? Why is it that in such instances everybody seems to be happier and more patient with one another? Does the park make its visitors form one big *communitas*? Or how about the regular Friday-after-work-drink, during which the boss suddenly has a first name and is able to laugh, too?

There are too many of such examples, I believe, during which we choose to behave in a way different than normally; during which social orders receive a different meaning. It is possible to see one's manager during a night out, in a situation where we seem to accept bodily contact in a way we normally never would, simply because it is too crowded on the dance floor. In this regard, it may be regretful that the distinction liminal/liminoid has not received the attention it should have received, although this would have eventually led to an overwhelming number of 'liminoid' situations, about which there is to say hardly anything meaningful, to my idea, since the 'threshold' has lost its value as a denominator of 'the big next step'.

In that sense, the political-geographical applications of liminality form a more coherent group, with a more coherent reading of the concept. Still, it has little to do with the original context of liminality, but at least it is clear that, in this interpretation, it can be only applied to a struggle for recognition within power structures, related to a group of people rather than individuals. It is about political inequality. Liminality, in these examples, is thus about politics. In regard of Norton (1988), the examples of political liminality are mainly territorial and structural; intellectual liminality is not really an important theme. Hence, in this category there are at least two 'stable' characteristics of the concept: its spatiality and its connection to power. What I therefore wish to suggest, is that the concept of liminality is perhaps most useful in political contexts, whether bio-politics, international relations, or interregional imaginations of otherness, since the concept is used more unequivocally in regard of political geography than in relation to cultural geography.

As is clear from all the examples discussed in this section, it is virtually impossible to keep in mind *all* characteristics of liminality in situations of in between-ness. Our societies have simply grown too complex – or at least, with the shift to postmodernism we have discovered that social life is too complex – to easily recognize 'true' liminal phenomena. However, if we are a bit more cautious in deciding whether or not to use the concept (instead of 'marginality' for example), and if our choice is to depend on lessons we may derive from authors who have used the concept before us, we may choose to limit the concept's application to political-geographical situations.

If we do so – and I suggest we do, to avoid further confusion about the concept – we implicitly renounce the original, ethnological context of liminality. We are not talking anymore about individuals preparing for the 'next big step' in life. In regard of the Latin roots of liminality, we are not talking anymore about individuals crossing a threshold, a *limen*. Instead, in particular in regard of the obligatory character, the politically subordinate position and the undetermined duration of political liminality, we are talking about geographically

demonstrable zones in which the relative position of a specific group of people is lower than that of another group or outside that zone. We are talking about a zone that is not equally permeable in both directions. We are talking about a border with discriminating qualities, which is more difficult to cross than a threshold, yet one that calls into existence two 'sorts' of reality. We are, in fact, talking about a frontier: a *limes*. To elaborate hereupon, and to give a more directive interpretation of liminality in which explicitly this *political-geographical* context is emphasized, I want to suggest here that we should use liminality best as a derivation of *Limes* (with a capital 'L').

The *Limes* was the name of the northern border of the Roman Empire. But according to, among others, Paul Erdkamp (2000), the *Limes* was in particular a border zone and a frontier, *in between* the 'civilized' and 'barbarian' world. Thus, by means of the concept of liminality as a derivation of *Limes*, we may express the political intensions behind and consequences of an zone of in between-ness. Furthermore, as the *Limes* is a particular *imperial* border zone, typical elements of liminality, such as for example the above-mentioned discriminating qualities, are similar to characteristics typical to empires. Also, imperial frontiers are particularly not equally permeable in both directions, just as liminal zones. Therefore, I suggest to apply the concept of liminality to specifically *imperial* zones of in between-ness.

To conclude with, in other words, I want to propose here to abandon the concept of liminality for the larger part as it has been used thus far. The variety of subjects to which it has been related has made its meaning thusly diverse, that the concept can only be used after the situation in question is perfectly described in its own terms. Because of that, the concept does not contribute to a comparison of situations. However, from in particular a political-geographical perspective, we can find more coherence in the various applications of the concept of liminality, although in this group the concept may still refer to a whole lot of situations, from the position of guest workers to the position of North-Cyprus. Therefore, I suggest to use the concept only in situations of political-geographical importance which have imperial features.

In the second part of this thesis, I will elaborate on this by highlighting several areas that are related to the European Union. According to various authors, the Union should be seen as an empire (e.g. Zielonka, 2006). In this regard, the areas that will have my attention can be seen as the EU's *Limes*. This has got as a consequence for these areas, that their political reality can be characterized as liminality – as a particular form of in between-ness, present at imperial frontiers.

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## ***Part II***

### **The *Limes* of the European empire**

***Liminality at the 'external internal' borders of the European Union***

## 1. Introduction

In political geography, in recent years much attention has been paid to “Fortress Europe” (e.g. Alscher, 2005; Geddes, 2000; Goldschmidt, 2006; Van Houtum & Pijpers, 2007), by which is meant the stringent anti-immigration policy and the strict border regime of the EU. Such research focuses on a typical, hard border that has foremost the purpose to ‘keep people out’. Exemplary are the fences separating Ceuta and Melilla from Morocco, or the Mediterranean in which numerous lives have ended in an attempt to reach the promised land.

Another focus in political-geographical research has been the nature of the European Union. In these debates, in which the Union is sometimes seen as a neo-medieval empire (e.g. Böröcz & Kovács, 2001; Zielonka, 2006), the central theme is that the EU is foremost characterized by (1) a complexity of (2) *relational* distances between the member states. Here, the emphasis lies on the *lack* of boundaries, or at least on the difficulty to specify ‘the’ borders of the EU because of overlapping loyalties. Looking at the Union from different perspectives, such as territory, citizenship or customs, to name a few, we can see that it is a logical choice that the Union uses a concentric model, with Brussels as the administrative center and with different border lines which sometimes overlap and sometimes cross one another. For example, EU law is applied variously to different territories in regard of the Schengen agreement, which guarantees free movement of people and is aimed at removing “internal frontiers” and strengthening controls at the EU’s “external borders”. This agreement, however, only includes the territories of 13 member states, but not the UK, Ireland or the 12 countries which have joined since 2004 (Europa, 2007a). As a result, so-called “strengthened controls at the EU’s *external borders*” may include internal borders, for example those between the United Kingdom and France. Also, not all EU member states are in the European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU); some do not use the euro because they do not want to, others because they are not yet allowed to since their national economies do not yet meet the standards set out by the European Central Bank (Europa, 2007b, 2007c).

However, both of these debates may have distracted scholarly attention from another type of *external* ‘internal’ border which also characterizes the European Union. This kind of border can be conceived of as ‘in between’ the two main themes described above, since it is indeed some sort of external border, but one that is located within the European Union. It can be understood as a result of relational distances between and within the member states. This type of border, located ‘within the external borders’, is ‘soft’; it are not so much the fences between Morocco on the one hand and Ceuta and Melilla on the other hand that play a key

role. Far more than that, this type of border is characterized by the area of Ceuta, respectively Melilla *itself*, as it is 'Spain', although not many will quickly recognize it thusly because it is located on another continent. It is some sort of border *area*. And there are actually a whole lot better examples of this, such as the Netherlands Antilles, a group of islands in the Caribbean. This former colony of the Netherlands (an EU member state) is still 'Dutch', but instead of being part of the Netherlands, it is part of the *kingdom* of the Netherlands, of which 'the Netherlands' are also a part. Yet, as the islands are Dutch, they are 'associated' with the EU, but they are not considered EU territory. Areas such as these are the focus of this second part of this thesis.

The border I emphasize in this section, or rather border *zone* as I intend to show, exists of the Outermost Regions (ORs) and Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) of the European Union (figure II-1). As these areas are 'partly' EU (and within this group, there are some areas that are even 'more partly' EU than other territories), many of them seem to be somewhat neglected, in terms of development as well as in literature concerning the EU's border dilemmas. Although there is a whole debate about Europe's internal and external border problem, the OCTs and ORs of EU member states have thus far received hardly any attention.

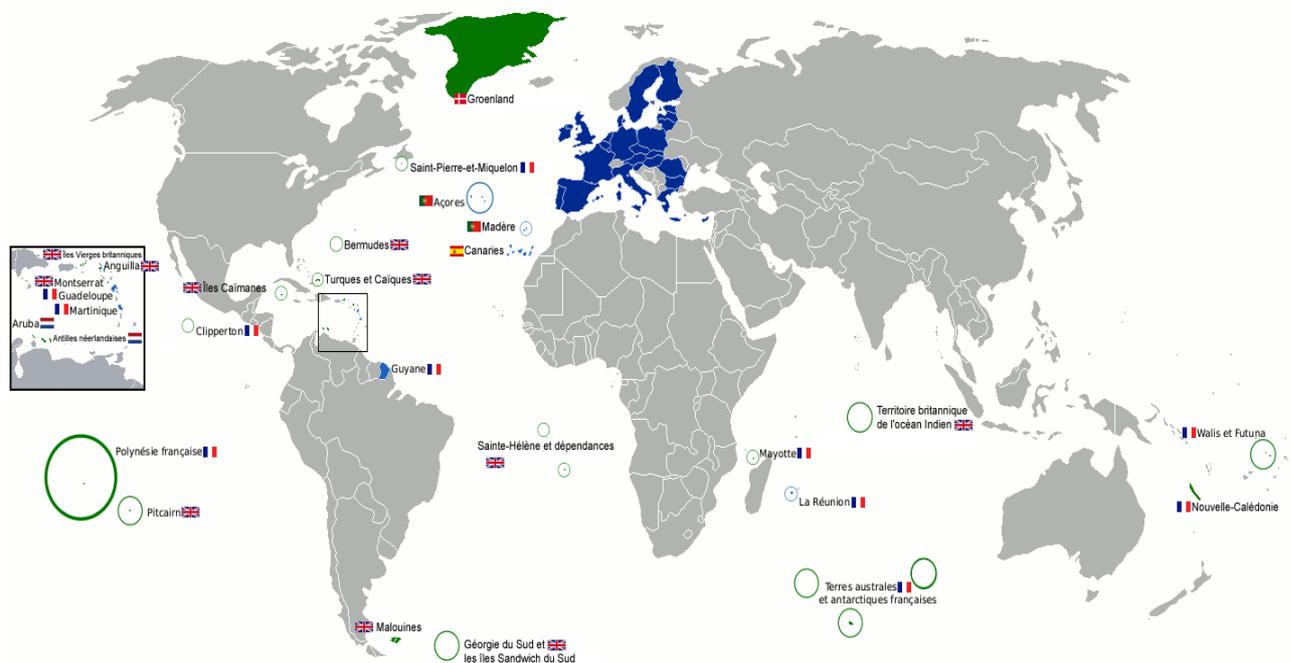


Figure II-1: the Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories of the European Union (Wikipedia, 2007). This figure is meant to provide only an idea of the spread of EU-territory and territories associated with the EU. For as far as identifiable: the EU member states are depicted in dark blue, the Outermost Regions in light blue, and the Overseas Countries and Territories are in green.

They are often seen as a remnant of a colonial, imperial past of individual West-European countries. Rather than a remnant, however, I believe that the current situation is kept alive, perhaps encouraged, foremost by EU policy. Moreover, in regard of the debates concerning the question whether or not the European Union is to be seen as an empire, I think these areas add an extra dimension to a conceptualization of the Union as a contemporary empire. In other words: the ORs and OCTs can still be regarded as imperial 'Outer Provinces'. Thus, instead of analyzing this soft border zone as a residue of individual former colonial powers, I try in this part of this thesis to give an impulse to a more coherent approach of EU policy in relation to ORs and OCTs as former colonies.

In the preceding section, I have argued that we should limit ourselves to political-geographical situations when referring to the concept of liminality. Furthermore, I have suggested that in doing so, we should use the concept as a derivation of *Limes*, which was the name of the northern border, or rather border zone, of the Roman Empire. I suggested to do so because situations that have been labeled 'liminal' in political geography show characteristics that are comparable to empires and imperial frontiers. In addition, the rather weaving meaning of the concept of liminality is given more anchorage if we make explicit the relation between liminality and *Limes* – that is, if we use the concept of liminality only in regard of political-geographical research that is concerned with empires and imperial features.

I will argue that a coherent approach of the OCTs and ORs, now, should begin with an elaboration on Zielonka (2006), among others, who claims that the European Union is to be regarded as an empire. From thereon, we can identify the OCTs and ORs as the European Union's *Limes* – some sort of border zone in between the 'civilized' and the 'barbarian' world. This, I suggest, gives us better leads to make sense of the many exemptions and exceptions in EU legislation in regard of these areas. Thus, departing from a conception of the nature of the European Union as empire, I intend to explain how the mechanism works that creates diffuse civil rights and duties, and sometimes even second-class citizens, at the EU's *Limes*. The political reality of this diffuseness and sometimes subordination within this zone should be seen as liminality, as this concept – as a derivation of *Limes* – can explicitly be related to the way the EU as empire 'works'. Hence, the central proposition of this part of this thesis is:

***The position of the Overseas Countries and Territories and the Outermost Regions of the European Union can be regarded as liminality and can be explained by referring to their political-geographical significance as the Limes of the European Union as empire.***

In the following, I will underpin this proposition by starting to explain how the European Union can be seen as an empire. Subsequently, I will highlight the consequences this has got for the EU's borders, in particular for those areas I refer to as the EU's *Limes*. Finally, I will synthesize these insights with an example of this situation of liminality within the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, two 'Dutch' Overseas Countries.

## **2. The European empire**

I will argue that the OCTs and ORs (which are former colonies) are still in a subordinate position vis-à-vis 'their' mother countries, being EU member states. They should be regarded as zones of liminality that are the result of the nature of the EU. In doing so, I also argue that this liminality is conceptualized best as a derivation of *Limes*. Thus, I draw a parallel between these areas and the border zone (the *Limes*) of the Roman Empire; therefore, I also state that the EU is to be conceived of as an empire, with which I will continue.

### **2.1. Empires: a framework**

In conceiving the European Union as an empire, I have to emphasize that I focus on a 'framework' that may help us understand how the EU 'works'. It is important to do so to avoid confusion, since there are various debates under the header of 'imperial rule'. For example, it is not my objective to offer a definition of empires here, nor to compare the EU with the United States. However, because I, in my understanding of the EU as empire, will build on insights derived from all of these debates, I will give a rough sketch here of different approaches of empires.

Although it is impossible to make a hard distinction between different approaches of imperial rule, it is fair to say that one recurrent focus is how to define empires in a more strict way (sometimes set off against 'hegemony'; see Agnew, 2003). Obviously, in this sort of research it are rather defined characteristics of empires that are emphasized, such as their 'course of life'. Also, these studies often focus quite straightforwardly on the USA (e.g. Ferguson, 2004; Maier, 2006; Noreña, 2007; Todd, 2003). For that matter, most authors state that America has never been a 'true' empire – it rather forms (or formed, according to some voices) a hegemony with imperial qualities.

In relation to this, some of the authors mentioned above tend to broaden their 'definition' of empires to adjust it to contemporary politics, especially the foreign politics of the United States. Münkler (2007), for example, is not so reluctant to call the United States the new empire; although his characteristics of empires are largely the same as those of Maier (2006), he emphasizes more the intentionality behind economic globalization, combined with the ideology of liberal democracy being *imposed* upon countries, as the main characteristics of contemporary imperial rule. In this, he follows a bit Ignatieff's concept of *empire lite* (Ignatieff, 2003a, 2003b): "America's empire is not like empires of times past [...] The 21<sup>st</sup> century imperium is a new invention in the annals of political science, an *empire lite*

(emphasis added), a global hegemony whose grace notes are free markets, human rights and democracy, enforced by the most awesome military power the world has ever known. [...] It is an empire without consciousness of itself as such, constantly shocked that its good intentions arouse resentment abroad” (Ignatieff, 2003b:1).

This situation of a lack of self-consciousness and resentment abroad is related to the fact that empires engage in an ambiguous form of sovereignty, a point also made by Hardt and Negri (2006:29); however, their approach of Empire (with a capital ‘E’) is a useful tool to conceptualize contemporary world politics in terms of an imperial *order* as a result of discursive practices in the political and economical global arena. As such, Empire stands for a complex reality that has indeed started off as an (American) response to proletarian internationalism (2000:51), however, the United States only occupy a privileged position in this hegemony rather than being ‘the’ imperial power behind contemporary politics (*ibid.*:xiv). Thus, the concept of Empire stands for a new, *global* form of sovereignty – perhaps one might say an economic hegemony<sup>2</sup>, one that is beyond state-level, *decentered* and *deterritorializing*, managing hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies and plural exchanges (*ibid.*:xii). Many of the Imperial characteristics that Hardt and Negri summarize (2000:xiv-xv), are an enlargement of ‘classical’ characteristics that are often highlighted in the first approach of empires mentioned above. For example, all empires tend to present their rule as the logical outcome of history, and therefore “as a regime with no temporal boundaries and in this sense outside of history or at the end of history” (Hardt & Negri, 2000:xv). Also, it goes for every empire (in its narrow definition) that its concept is always dedicated to peace, although its practice is one of violence, or at least of conquest and enlargement of the sphere of influence.

In short, although Hardt and Negri’s Empire stands for a *global* form of sovereignty, it is rooted in Western ‘Enlightened’ thought, presenting itself and its values such as market capitalism, modernity and democracy as the ultimate characteristics of civilization – a civilization that is, however, reserved for the happy few. Thus, if there had to be ‘an’ imperialist power behind contemporary politics, this would be ‘the West’. This is the point of departure in *Empire in denial* (2006), in which David Chandler shows how Western states effectively maintain hegemony by denying other states’ sovereignty, yet by denying their own

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<sup>2</sup> In this sense, Hardt and Negri’s use of the concept of Empire can be regarded as the leftist version of Castells’ “network society” (2000), being first and foremost a theoretical approach to understand new forms of sovereignty or hegemony.

responsibility at the same time. So, by deploying language usage such as 'rogue' or 'collapsed' states or by publishing a list of most corrupted countries, the West justifies intervening in the name of 'capacity building'; however, by primarily focusing on bureaucratic mechanisms and ignoring social and political divisions, the result is in fact the creation of phantom states that depend on permanent international (i.e. Western) supervision.

If we take these characteristics of empires and the mechanisms behind their acting, there are certainly parallels with the EU. To draw these somewhat more clearly, I will continue with summarizing the most important features of empires and compare these to EU policy. I must, however, say in advance that I will sometimes take together characteristics that others see as separate features. For example, Maier (2006) sees the 'mission' of bringing peace and prosperity that empires tend to have as a justification for their rule as a separate feature from the tendency to depict others as 'barbarians'. In my opinion, the more because empires tend to expand, these characteristics are indissolubly interconnected since there is no need to bring prosperity if another civilization is further advanced than your own.

## **2.2. The EU as empire**

As may be clear, empires use pacification and peace as a justification for imperial rule. Such a mission often receives some sort of sacred status, for it is commonly not presented as 'just' peace, but as a *perpetual* one. In this respect, the much by American Neo-Conservatives used term '*Pax Americana*' (see for example Kagan, Schmitt & Donnelly, 2000) should not be too surprising. Next to peace, empires also claim to bring prosperity; in one word, they bring civilization. Put differently: empires tend to present themselves as benevolent, which may naturally be a matter of dispute between the imperial force and others<sup>3</sup>, not in the least the, by the empire thusly depicted, 'barbarians'. That this policy of 'benevolence' is precisely the foreign policy of the European Union becomes especially clear in the 'mission' that the EU has formulated for itself. In the brochure *The EU in the world: the foreign policy of the European Union*, tellingly with a photograph of a white hand shaking a black hand on the cover, the European Commission (2007a:3) states: "Faced with today's complex and fragile

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<sup>3</sup> For an interesting perspective on the view, held by many Europeans, that America would engage in 'aggressive' pacification politics, see Kagan, 2002. In this article, Kagan states that Europe (i.e. the EU) undeservedly gives itself credit for the realization of a Kantian 'perpetual peace', because it has in fact willingly and intentionally handed over the region's *military* security to the Americans after World War II. Thus, the Americans *have been appointed* the status of 'the world's policeman'.

world order, the EU is increasingly involved in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and anti-terrorism activities. It supports reconstruction efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Union has taken the lead in dealing with the problem of global warming and the emission of greenhouse gases". A little further, under the header of *Soft power*, thus demonstrating that the EU is not too modest to acknowledge that it indeed wants to influence other countries' policies, it is stated:

Having brought stability and prosperity to its own citizens today, the EU seeks to work with others in an interdependent world to spread the advantages of open markets, economic growth and a political system based on social responsibility and democracy. The EU does not try to impose its system on others, but is not shy about its values. Any democratic European country can apply to become a member of the EU. [...] As such, it serves as a model for cooperation and integration between countries in other regions. The EU acts out of enlightened selfinterest just as much as global solidarity. On an increasingly interconnected planet, supporting economic development and political stability in the wider world is an investment in one's future. By helping others, the EU helps to make life safer within its *frontiers* for its own citizens (emphasis added). And as a multipolar world is becoming a reality, EU member states need to speak as one if they wish their voice to be heard.

European Commission, 2007a:4

Another, highly important feature of empires is a typical (imperial) kind of borders: *frontiers*, also mentioned in the quotation above. This type of borders, of which the importance in a scholarly sense was probably first recognized by Lord Curzon of Kedleston (1907), was originally identified with large wastelands and other 'natural' boundaries – deserts, mountains, seas and rivers – conceived of as no man's land, of which the inhabitants (if there lived any) were depicted as barbarians who could impossibly 'own' the land. Frontiers are thus not merely 'lines', but rather *zones*. The northern frontier of the Roman Empire for that matter, the *Limes* (including Hadrian's Wall), has often been wrongly depicted as a 'hard' boundary; it was just as much rather a zone than a thin line. Not by coincidence did the Romans think of their empire as an "*imperium sine fine*": that which was beyond Roman civilization ("*Barbaricum*") was perhaps not of any interest in regard of 'colonization', but still the Romans laid claim on authority way beyond the imperial 'borders' (Erdkamp, 2000). Another peculiarity of frontiers is given in the fact that that, which happens

at the frontier, clarifies the meaning of the center: frontiers “are critical to the credibility of the regime” (Maier, 2006:78). Thus, the frontier is often more a zone of communication than a line of separation (*ibid.*:82). Frontiers therefore “involve gradations of power and influence”, meaning that “there is almost always a scale of integration descending from the center to the periphery, which usually corresponds to decreasing rights and an increasingly limited capacity to determine the politics of the center” (Münkler, 2007:5). Such imperial boundaries are also not equally permeable in both directions. Entering an imperial space is often more restricted than leaving it (*ibid.*). A last important characteristic of frontiers is that they tend to move away from the center if not confronted by another power, as empires tend to expand in securing their authority. The before mentioned characteristics come together in such a way that empires coerce their neighbors (who are almost never equal to the respective empire (Münkler, 2007:5)) into adopting patterns in their own image. The EU, for that matter, has managed to create some sort of frontier (in the sense of *zone*) around its territory. This frontier exists in part of candidates for membership, working towards meeting the standards set out by ‘Brussels’. In other words: the Union’s territory is thus far still expanding (European Commission, 2003a:21) as there are still potential future members. Even more, partly this frontier exists of “neighbors as a ring of friends” who are *offered* “increasingly close ties with the EU in return for progress towards respect for democratic values and the implementation of political, economic and institutional reforms” (*ibid.*). The coercive intentions of this policy and the conditionality of this ‘friendship’ or ‘neighborship’ are apparent.

Another feature of empires is the fragmented and overlapping loyalties among the *different peoples* over which authority is exerted (Maier, 2006:138). The problem, then, lies herein that empires integrate and differentiate at the same time. Their message (‘everyone deserves peace and prosperity’) is one of equality and homogenization while their practice is based on a center-periphery-based order. As Hardt and Negri put it: “Imperial sovereignty is not organized around one central conflict, but rather through a flexible network of microconflicts; Empire does not create division but rather recognizes existing or potential differences, celebrates them and manages them within a general economy of command” (2000:201). Not surprisingly, in *Europe as Empire*, Jan Zielonka argues that the European Union should be conceived of as some sort of neo-medieval empire, for its “overlapping authorities, divided sovereignty, diversified institutional arrangements, and multiple identities” as well as its “soft border zones that undergo regular adjustments” and “export of laws and modes of governance” (2006:15). Therefore, he proposes a reconceptualization of

the balance between 'Brussels' and other levels of authority. For one thing, the Union should adopt a more flexible and looser way of governing; for another thing, its democratic legitimacy should be reconceptualized as parliamentary representation will not work in a neo-medieval system.

As stated, there is hardly any agreement about whether there are contemporary empires, and if so, whether the EU or even the USA should be really considered thusly. However, from the above it can be derived that the term can serve as a useful framework to conceptualize how the Union 'works'. It may serve to understand how we should see its mission to bring peace, civilization and prosperity; why there are so many overlapping loyalties within its borders and why it tends to grow. Especially, however, it enables us to understand why it 'dictates' how others at (and beyond) her borders should behave. This situation of a subordinate position from the imperial border – the frontier – in regard of the center, now, needs further explanation in light of this thesis. In the following, I will elaborate on the situation *at* the prototype of imperial frontiers, the Roman *Limes*, to relate this to the concept of liminality as I see it applied best.

### 3. Frontiers: *Limes* and liminality

#### 3.1. The Roman *Limes*

According to Paul Erdkamp (2000), among others, the Roman Empire did not have a strict border, as the *Limes* had long been depicted. In fact, it did not have 'a' border at all; there were no boundary stones marking the end of the Empire and road maps did not distinguish 'Roman' from 'foreign' territories. The Romans thought of their Empire as one without an end: an *imperium sine fine*. Yet, Roman expansion did not encompass the whole world; it simply stopped where it stopped, as long as there were sufficient means of production to feed the soldiers posted in the respective areas, or rivers that could supply them. Thus, the *Limes* was by no means a hard, cultural boundary line; it was a zone that was often in the middle of another people's territory, for example. The artificial barriers within such a zone were not of any value in regard of defense, nor did rivers actually keep the Romans from moving further into unknown territory. The *Limes* was more of symbolic and administrative nature; it was not the result of a 'grand strategy' in a military sense. This also means that the Romans laid claim on authority way beyond the imperial 'borders'. Whether it was a liegeman-king ruling the respective territory or a Roman governor was not of interest, as long as the Empire kept functioning. Therefore, 'active' civilization politics were of no importance. Although Roman influence – militarily, but foremost socially and economically – was felt way beyond the 'border', border-crossing contacts hardly advantaged people who did not belong to the upper classes. In other words: for as far as Roman culture was adopted at the frontier, it were the upper classes that did so. Moreover, they did so not from political purposes, but from personal interests.

In the imperial age, most Roman emperors neither were preoccupied with conquest, nor with defense. Instead, most of them were pretty satisfied with maintaining the status quo. As a result, the *Limes* did not have so much of a defensive or offensive function. Instead, it developed as a diffuse zone between the Roman Empire and *Barbaricum* – the 'uncivilized', savage and unknown territories beyond Roman civilization. And as such a zone, its functioning as a division was far from delineated: did barbarian peoples live on Roman territory or were there Romans living in *Barbaricum*? It was the prototype of a frontier, in which many of the before-mentioned characteristics are distinguishable, being a zone of communication, of intercultural contact on the one hand and of relatively isolated 'civilizations' on the other. It clarified the meaning of the center in the sense that Roman emperors did not hesitate to violently restore order at the *Limes* and beyond, which accounted

for increasing popularity at home and fear and obedience at the frontier. Yet, at the same time the people at the *Limes* were hardly capable of determining Rome's priorities. The situation on the frontier, in these border areas, may be described with the concept of liminality.

### **3.2. Liminality: ethnology and contemporary society**

In the first part of this thesis, I have extensively elaborated on the ethnological concept of liminality. As a matter of completeness, however, I will shortly reintroduce the concept here. Originally, liminality referred to the quality of the actual transition of rites of passage. These comprise rites of separation, transition and incorporation (Van Gennep, 1960:20-21), meaning that the person undergoing the transition is first excluded from his social grouping – commonly in a truly territorial manner (*ibid.*:192) – only to be incorporated again into the next social grouping (and their territory) after successfully having 'transformed'. During this phase of transformation, in between the preliminal phase and postliminal phase, respectively, a person is liminal. The character of a liminal phase is what Turner calls 'interstructural' (1967:93). "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner, 1969:95). Not only are they 'neither here nor there', they themselves are also 'neither this nor that', and at the same time both (Turner, 1967:98-99). Thus, originally liminality – related to the Latin words *limen* in the meaning of 'threshold' and *limes* in the sense of 'boundary' and 'frontier' – refers to an anthropological notion of both empowerment and lowliness, to a state of 'in between-ness' that is related to sacredness, which is appointed to people by others in the course of ritual, socialization and identity building.

However, obviously because of the imaginative power of the possibility that something or someone can be placed in between regular structural classifications, the concept has since its introduction been used in a whole variety of interpretations, ranging from the role of cyberspace for future mothers trying out 'mother roles' (Madge and O'Connor, 2005), to the status of Northern Cyprus in international relations (Navaro-Yashin, 2003). But as a consequence, the concept's usefulness has become somewhat questionable as it does not contribute anything to a comparison of different situations that are nevertheless labeled 'liminal'. Next to this, liminality as a 'category in between categories' has become problematic in a society that, from a postmodern perspective, is commonly viewed as fragmented; therefore, categories are arbitrary and above all constantly shifting anyway.

In the first part of this thesis, I have compared the original understanding of liminality to the ways it is used in studies of contemporary society. This has revealed that a division can be made between cultural-geographical and political-geographical forms of liminality. Especially in regard of the first category, the arguments above fit the case: liminality seems to be applicable to a whole lot of situations that do not have so much in common with one another. Furthermore, all of the discussed examples show that several essential characteristics of liminality have been abandoned, such as its ritual connotation in many instances. Therefore the concept of liminality as a 'state of being during a transition' has no more value for today's society, at least not when looking through the lens of postmodernism and in the concept's original context. In the second type of liminality, the concept's original context of ritual and the like is perhaps even less important; however, it shows opportunities to start from finding another interpretation.

In a political-geographical context, liminality is applied to struggles for recognition within power structures (e.g. Adelson, 1994; Rumelili, 2003; Sharman, 2001), related to a group of people rather than individuals. It is about political inequality and encompasses a whole discourse of 'inside' and 'outside', depictions of barbarianism and otherness concerned with a certain spatiality. Liminality, in these instances, points to a territorial and structural in between-ness (cf. Norton, 1988): geographically demonstrable zones in which the relative position of a specific group of people is lower than that of another group or outside that zone. This position is of an undetermined duration. Such zones are not equally permeable in both directions and call into existence two 'sorts' of reality; hence, they show a great similarity to an imperial frontier – or *limes*. And as I have just explained, **the** *Limes* was the prototype of a frontier, a zone in between the 'civilized' and 'barbarian' world.

### **3.3. Liminality as an imperial border regime**

To overcome most of the problems of the constantly shifting interpretation of the concept of liminality, I want to start from the political-geographical interpretation of liminality as it has been used thus far, that is, as a discourse of a political 'inside' and 'outside', where the duration of this division is undetermined. This interpretation of liminality, with its explicitly political connotation, is less ambiguous than the cultural-geographical examples in which the concept has been used. Yet, also in regard of the political-geographical application of liminality, we may run the risk of creating a situation where every political 'in between-ness' can be called liminality – comparable to the cultural-geographical instances of the concept.

For example, in Flanders, the economically most important state within the Belgian federation, there has been a *cordon sanitaire* to isolate one Flemish political party. All the other parties agreed not to involve The Vlaams Blok (Flemish bloc, which changed its name later into Vlaams Belang – Flemish interest) in any administrative or political agreement because of its extreme right-wing position (Bax, 2006). In several cities, the situation could thus exist that the biggest party, elected democratically, had no voice whatsoever. I think that this situation can indeed be described by a sort of in between-ness, perhaps even by a form of political liminality that Norton (1988:69-74) calls 'intellectual liminality': the Vlaams Blok rejected several democratic principles, and thereby the doctrine of the state. As a result, they were excluded from political power. In my opinion, however, it does not add anything to our knowledge to call all sorts of political in between-ness 'liminality'. So, next to the political-geographical interpretation of liminality as a discourse of a political 'inside' and 'outside', I suggest to start with emphasizing the relation between the concept of liminality and the Latin root of *Limes* in the sense of 'imperial frontier', thus not in the sense of just 'any' boundary. It is from this derivation that the concept serves surprisingly well the purposes of exposing how empires, by means of frontiers, create a geographically localizable, political reality of structural in between-ness.

In other words, I argue to abandon the concept of liminality for the larger part as it has been used thus far. In making obvious its relation with *Limes*, we can provide the concept with a less ambiguous interpretation: one that is strictly concerned with a geopolitical context – in a way this has already been practiced. Still, this new meaning leaves intact the relation between the concept and its Roman roots; yet the attention is shifted towards a more geographically localizable form of in between-ness. Furthermore, it emphasizes that this in between-ness is the result of a political intension and that it is related to power – just as the concept originally was.

Liminality in this sense gives us a more discursive reading of imperial frontiers as the result of political considerations, of the way frontiers are viewed by imperial centers, and of the way political reality is felt in these areas. Summarizing, with the concept of liminality, we can describe a geopolitical reality at imperial frontiers, which has the following features:

1. This reality encompasses a center-periphery approach in politics, which makes the border zone automatically inferior and subordinate to the center, in a way that these border zones are *in between* Self and Other: too strange to be full-fledged Self, but too familiar to sever the ties.

2. This is symbolically and/or administratively, thus structurally laid down in treaties, customs unions, matters of citizenship, and the like.
3. This discourse is perhaps not so much the result of a *conscious* strategy (as the *Limes* neither was), but nevertheless follows a certain world view that reinforces itself.
4. This view entails the idea that civilization is a progressive process, but also the idea that the center is always one step ahead.
5. Finally, the concept of liminality forces us to keep in mind that this world view explicitly encompasses zones of exclusion (or semi-inclusion), because they are related to matters of identity (that is, the twilight zone between civilization and barbarianism, center versus periphery versus the outside world), power and politics, and the like.

Now that I have explained how the European Union works as an empire and how a given political reality of in between-ness at imperial borders can be qualified as 'liminality' as a derivation of *Limes* in the meaning of an imperial border zone, let us take a closer look at the actual state of affairs in the Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories.

#### **4. The *Limes* of the European Union**

The Overseas Countries and Territories and the Outermost Regions of the European Union are former colonies, as said. This probably makes several things instantly come to the reader's mind, such as their (subordinate) role in the histories of their respective mother countries and probably their distance from the European continent. They form the extreme ends of EU territory, or at least they are the most distant territories 'associated' with the European Union (see figure II-1). These matters have not only effected their relationship with their mother countries, for instance in regard of complexity and peculiar power balances (on which I will elaborate further on with an example), but as a result also the European Union does not show much coherence in its relationships with the various territories. In fact, I have stated that the ORs and OCTs can still be regarded as imperial 'Outer Provinces'. Therefore, in this part of this thesis I wanted to give an impulse to a more coherent approach of EU policy in relation to ORs and OCTs as former colonies by adducing arguments in support of the following proposition:

*The position of the Overseas Countries and Territories and the Outermost Regions of the European Union can be regarded as liminality and can be explained by referring to their political-geographical significance as the Limes of the European Union as empire.*

As I have made clear before how the European Union can be conceived of as an empire, in the following, I will clarify how the OCTs and ORs can be regarded as the EU's *Limes* or frontier, and how the actual state of affairs in these areas can be viewed as liminality.

To be complete, the ORs are the Azores and Madeira (Portugal), the Canaries (Spain), and the four French overseas departments of French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Réunion (Europa, 2007d). They are considered EU territory, in contrast to the OCTs, which are merely 'associated' with the EU because of their 'special bonds' with four member states. These four member states are the United Kingdom, having a special relationship with Anguilla, the Cayman Islands, the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, Montserrat, Pitcairn, Saint Helena and dependencies, British Antarctic Territories, British Indian Ocean Territories, Turks and Caicos Islands, and the British Virgin Islands; France with Mayotte, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, St. Pierre and Miquelon, the Southern and Antarctic Territories, and Wallis and Futuna; the Netherlands with Aruba and

the Netherlands Antilles (existing of the islands of Curaçao, Bonaire, St. Maarten, St. Eustatius, and Saba); and finally Denmark with Greenland (Brigandi, 1998).

#### **4.1. Absence of coherence**

The ORs, being EU territory, are thus more integrated in the EU than the OCTs. However, the ORs do have a special status within EU policy: they “are distinguished by their low population density and considerable distance from mainland Europe” (Europa, 2007d). Moreover, they “may benefit from specific measures on the basis of Article 299” of the European Community Treaty, which considers their “considerable structural backwardness. The Declaration provides for the possibility of adopting specific measures to assist them as long as there is an objective need to promote their economic and social development. In addition, Article 299 of the Treaty authorises the Council to adopt specific measures laying down conditions for applying the Treaty and common policies to the outermost regions” (*ibid.*). Looking at figure II-2, we may raise questions about the validity of especially the argument of ‘considerable structural backwardness’ to distinguish Outermost Regions from EU mainland. The ORs, depicted on the right side of the map of the EU, show a GDP per head that is closer to the average GDP per head of the EU as a whole than the Baltic states, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. In fact, it is quite comparable with the GDP per head of the Czech Republic, Greece, and large parts of Portugal, Spain and Italy.

Even more, why would there be a distinction between the relation that ORs have with their mother countries on the one hand, and the relation that OCTs have with their mother countries on the other? The characteristics to distinguish ORs from mainland Europe (low population density, considerable distance from mainland Europe and considerable structural backwardness) hold just as true for many OCTs. Regarding distance, for example, the four French ORs lie in the Caribbean just as much as the Netherlands Antilles, which are OCTs.

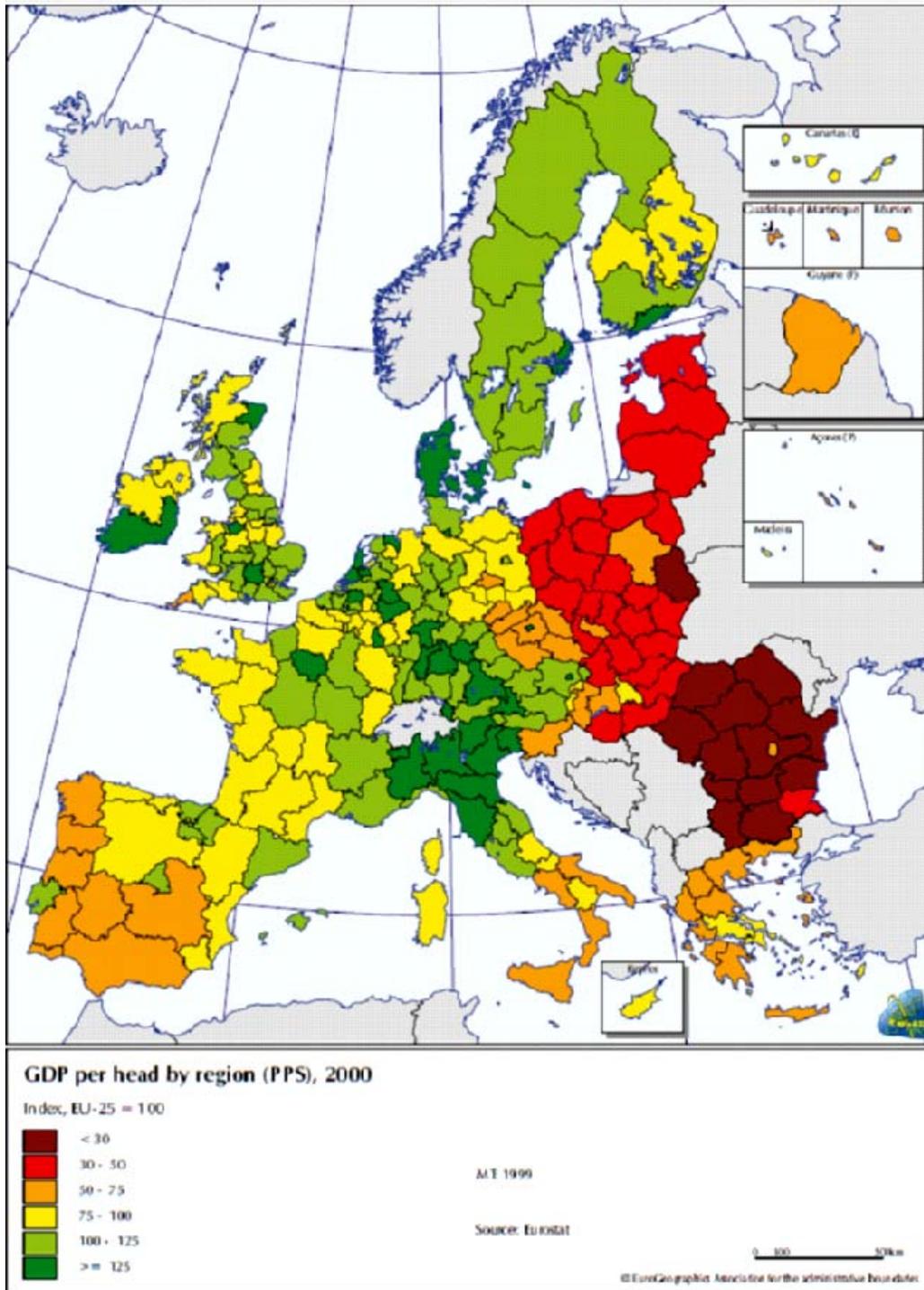


Figure II-2: GDP per head by region (European Commission, 2003b:13). This figure is based on the average GDP per head of all of the 25 member states of the EU by January 2003. The areas in dark red show regions where the GDP per head is less than 30 percent of the GDP per head of the EU as a whole; the regions where the GDP per head is over 125% of the GDP per head of the EU as a whole are depicted in dark green.

Even within the group of Outermost Regions (as isolated from the OCTs), there are differences. For example, the Schengen agreement is applied variously among them. The Schengen area includes Portugal, Spain and France; however, although it does include the Azores and Madeira (Portugal) and the Canaries (Spain), it does not include the four French Outermost Regions mentioned before (Europa, 2007a).

Muller (1999, 2001) has shown that differences between the ORs and OCTs, as well as the in-between differences among these groups, are mainly the result of divergent ideas concerning the usefulness of the various colonies of the European colonial powers in the build-up to 'Europe' as an organized bloc, and of their various ideals of citizenship. Most of these differences are, in other words, born out of arbitrariness and economic use for the individual member states; there is hardly any logic from the whole of the EU behind them. However, these differences do have consequences for the inhabitants of the OCTs as well as for the various member states of the EU in regard of each other.

For example, when in 1995 France tested nuclear weapons in French Polynesia, there was in the first instant confusion about whether the country was allowed to do so, for one thing because EURATOM (the treaty concerning the common development of *civil nuclear energy*) could be extended to military tests. More importantly, however, it was not entirely clear whether the respective treaties, prescribing that permission needed to be asked from 'Brussels', also concerned the French OCT as this was not EU territory. However, Euro-MPs did indeed interfere in the matter since it was not sure whether Pitcairn, a British OCT, would also be affected by the tests; yet no one took actually the effort to measure whether or not there were dangerous levels of radiation (Muller, 2001:445-446).

Another example is that the inhabitants of the Dutch OCTs did not have the right to vote in European elections; however, in 2007 the Dutch Council of Ministers, being corrected by the European Court, decided that they actually should have this right indeed (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2007a). For particular reasons however, there are still differences among the OCTs, as inhabitants of France's OCTs also have the right to vote in European elections, but inhabitants of British OCTs do not (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2006a).

The ORs receive EU funding from the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the European Investment Bank; also, there are specific funds set up for each group (Muller, 2001:443). Furthermore, since the OCTs are associated with the EU through one of the member states, they too receive funding from the European Development Fund (European Commission, 2007b:64-70). This taken with the above, however, it does

recall what is said before about empires presenting themselves as benevolent, yet in the meantime showing a “scale of integration descending from the center to the periphery, which usually corresponds to decreasing rights and an increasingly limited capacity to determine the politics of the center” (Münkler, 2007:5).

Hansen (2002:485) wonders why “colonialism [is not] approached as a shared (Western) European experience which in many ways transgresses the particular national outlooks”, since “there is a considerable scholarship which examines the impact of the colonial world order on historical as well as current notions of Europe and European identity” (*ibid.*). In particular in regard of these last matters – notions of Europe and European identity – it is striking that there is hardly such a thing as a shared approach of the colonial heritage of the individual member states from the perspective of the Union. The absence of these areas in these matters adds a final dimension to the conception of the OCTs and ORs as the European *Limes*, which will be explained in the following.

#### **4.2. The role of identity**

According to Böröcz and Kovács (2001) and Kuus (2004), the eastern enlargement of the EU revealed that the Union was more than a mere administrative body. True, one of the reasons why there was quite a severe discussion about the newcomers joining the EU was that there were some ‘objective’ characteristics of backwardness that needed to be overcome, in some way comparable to the ones mentioned in relation to the OCTs and ORs. But identity also appeared to play a role. Before the enlargement, the ‘European-ness’ of the European Union was hardly ever questioned; for one thing, perhaps, because all of its member states were on the European continent. However, discussions concerning the enlargement also appeared to be connected to some vague idea of a superior West-Europe versus an inferior East. These revealed, in other words, that West-European countries claimed to be true ‘European’ at the expense of East-Europe. This is not too strange in the light of the history of the EU itself, which predecessor was a direct consequence of the Second World War and which was shaped under the circumstances of the Iron Curtain and Communism (Hansen, 2002), but in the light of ‘the whole of the continent of Europe’, it is.

Although since the enlargement the West-European countries of the EU seem to have lost their hegemonic position in deciding what is ‘European’ in favor of several East-European countries, simply – though perhaps overstated – because of the fact that they could not ignore the geographical position of the newcomers, we have to keep in mind that

'European-ness' in relation to the EU has been a West-European matter from the start, if only because the standards for entry have been set after the example of the economic and cultural situations of West-European countries. A conclusion soon to be drawn, then, is that one of the things these West-European countries shared was their colonial past, as is also clear from Muller (2001). Yet, as stated, there is hardly a shared EU approach of the former colonies of the member states. In other words: first, 'Brussels' seems to leave the before-mentioned division of West- versus East-European countries intact where it comes to a colonial versus a non-colonial past. Second, and most important in regard of this thesis, this means that these former colonial powers are privileged in regard of their 'non-European' territories when it comes to deciding whether or not these should be regarded EU. In Hansen's words (2002:490): "The Treaty of Rome's specification [was] that only European states can acquire membership of the EU. But if this is so, one could ask, what are we to make of those member states that divide their location between continents; that is, those member states that are both European and African, both European and South American, and so on?"

Related to the fact that EU member states have the monopoly in determining who qualifies as their nationals (Rostek & Davies, 2006), this has huge consequences, for the member states function as gatekeepers to decide who will be granted the status of EU citizen. Although an overarching EU citizenship has created a need to harmonize national legislations, most of the member states strongly oppose delegation of powers in this domain to the EU, as nationality policy is associated with state sovereignty. The development of citizenship at the EU level thus interferes with traditional understandings of this notion. Since national citizenship is often considered equivalent to national identity, adopting European citizenship may produce an inner identity conflict which can only be overcome if the concept of citizenship will no longer be associated mainly with national identity. According to Rostek and Davies, there are indications that such is precisely the case: people seem to no longer experience an obligation to combine these two levels of identities, one corresponding to the nation-state and another to the European Union. However, this does not mean that such an obligation would also have been disappeared in the eyes of others. In other words: it does leave room for huge relational distances under the umbrella of EU citizenship, even *within one and the same member state*. Even more in regard of former colonies, this means that there is a situation in which someone's EU citizenship may be contested (in the sense that others see it as some sort of semi-citizenship) since it does not fall in line with national citizenship, or to put it more precisely: with (a conception of a) national identity, let alone European identity.

Obviously, the five features of liminality that I have distinguished in the previous chapter are all present at the European frontier or *Limes* – the whole of the EU's OCTs and ORs. First, differences in European citizenship and voting rights, as well as the fact that they are all in the end governed from the European mainland, indicate their inferior and subordinate position in regard of the center; I have also shown how this is interwoven with matters of 'European' identity, thus of Self and Other. Second, their position is apparently laid down administratively – in treaties, customs unions, matters of citizenship, and so forth. These treaties all point to a given reality of these areas being 'in between' Europe and '*Barbaricum*'. Third, as EU member states have the monopoly in determining who qualifies as their nationals, their policies of citizenship in regard of 'their' OCTs and ORs is a matter of reinforcement of a certain world view – of an idea of a European identity. Fourth, from their position of "considerable structural backwardness" (Europa, 2007d) and therefore the role of institutions such as the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the European Investment Bank, we can indeed derive the idea that civilization is conceived of as a progressive process, and that the center is 'further down the road of civilization'. Finally, and summarizing, the OCTs and ORs indeed show that the EU views the world explicitly in zones of exclusion or semi-inclusion.

In conclusion, as they do form part of member states' territories, one may ask the question whether the OCTs are truly 'outside' the external borders of the EU. I argue that they had better be regarded as a frontier, of which the political reality can be viewed in terms of liminality; as zones of in between-ness. One may also ask why there is a distinction between the ORs and the OCTs in the first place. I believe that the diversity in legislations regarding the EU's Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories resembles in a way the delegation of powers in the age of the Roman Empire: it is not the interest of 'Brussels' how liegemen, kings, governors – or member states – maintain order at the imperial border, as long as the empire keeps functioning. Indicative for this is that there are possibilities to avoid ratification of *all* member states of the Union (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2006b:25) when it comes to a possible future change in the status of the former colonies of the Netherlands from OCTs to ORs (thus becoming 'more European'), although such a change will link these areas directly to EU policy.

## 5. An example

As said, I would give an example of the complexity of the relation between OCTs and their mother countries and how this is intertwined with the relation with 'Brussels'; in the following, also the before-mentioned issues of peculiar conditions concerning citizenship and matters of identity will come to the fore.

Since the Charter of 1954 (with several adjustments) the Kingdom of the Netherlands exists of three formally autonomous countries, that are supposed to be equal to one another: the Netherlands, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba<sup>4</sup> (Overheid.nl, 2006<sup>5</sup>; see also Kraan, 2004; Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2007b; Oostindie & Klinkers, 2001). Although the three countries of the Kingdom are all autonomous and supposedly equal to one another, "the greatest emphasis in internal Kingdom relations lies with the Netherlands, both in fact and in law" (Kraan, 2004:594). All of the citizens under the Dutch Crown have the Dutch nationality, but the asymmetrical power balance between the three countries has got huge consequences for inhabitants of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, especially in regard of the European Union. For example, the Netherlands form an integral part of EU territory; the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, being OCTs, do not. Yet, although they are autonomous countries according to the Charter of 1954, they are considered 'Dutch' OCTs in European nomenclature (Brigandi, 1998). Furthermore, all Dutch nationals enjoy EU citizenship, but EU decisions 'in principle' do not cover the Dutch OCTs (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2006a). Therefore, inhabitants of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba did not have the right to vote in European elections until 2007, as mentioned (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2006a, 2007a).

Interestingly, the Netherlands Antilles have chosen to cease to exist as an autonomous country and as a whole, yet to stay within the Kingdom of the Netherlands: the islands of Curaçao and St. Maarten will become autonomous countries within the Kingdom, just as Aruba is now. Bonaire, Saba and St. Eustatius will be special municipalities of the Netherlands (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2006c, 2007c). However, the

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<sup>4</sup> In fact Aruba was until 1 January 1986 part of the Netherlands Antilles, however, the basis of the form of government of the Kingdom as a whole is the Charter of 1954.

<sup>5</sup> The Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands is downloadable from the website <http://www.overheid.nl>, which is the central access point to all information about government organizations of the Netherlands. After having typed in 'Statuut' in the search engine, the reader is directed to the external link <http://www.antillenhuis.nl/web/images/Publicaties/Statuut.pdf> which opens the document as it has appeared in the Official Gazette (*Staatsblad*) of the Netherlands.

Netherlands believe that there are yet too many problems that have to be overcome before Curaçao will be autonomous. The date, set 15 December 2008, will probably not be made because of 'problems' concerning the Public Prosecutor, the organization of the police, public finances, and so forth (Sitalsing, 2007). But there is more than meets the eye in regard of the Netherlands hesitating to grant the island an autonomous status within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The 'problems' concerning the Public Prosecutor, the organization of the police, public finances, etcetera, are precisely those matters that are often referred to as conflicting with 'good governance' about which David Chandler (2006) speaks in *Empire in denial* and which offer the justification for ongoing intervention from the side of the 'better organized', perhaps even 'more civilized' Netherlands as an EU member state located on the mainland. Notions of civilization versus barbarianism such as these are also apparent in a Dutch MP's pronouncement, that the Netherlands Antilles would be a "corrupt robbers' den". Even more, in 2006 the Dutch Minister of Immigration Policy and Integration (!) suggested in a draft bill to send criminal Antilleans (who have the Dutch nationality) back overseas and there have been suggestions to place the Netherlands Antilles under legal restraint with the United Nations (Mentens, 2008).

Whenever the autonomous status will be achieved, the OCT-status of the Dutch former colonies will then change into an OR-status (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2006c). As mentioned, this change means that they will become EU territory. In other words, the Netherlands Antilles have chosen to be further incorporated in the European Union. Whereas they welcome a 'more EU-status', the picture of French-Polynesia looks quite different; France has a comparable situation concerning the balance of power between 'Paris' and its overseas territories, but developments in French-Polynesia go in the completely opposite direction of the developments on the Antilles. Until recently, the inhabitants of French OCTs were the only OCT-inhabitants to vote for European elections; and so were the Polynesians, being inhabitants of this French OCT. However, the Polynesians wanted to be French without being 'European'. They therefore opposed European political rights and wanted to end political ties with the EU, a wish fueled by the search for a European identity by mainland Europe, which resulted overseas in fear of an erosion of their culture and political autonomy (Muller, 1999:44).

## 6. Conclusion and discussion

In this theoretical approach, I have tried to show how the somewhat shady relationship between the EU, its member states and their 'associated' areas of the Overseas Countries and Territories as well as the Outermost Regions can be understood in terms other than mere geographical, economical or administrative. I have tried to explain how the underlying logic of the way in which empires function can be used as a starting point to see how these regions, located at the imperial border, are in some sort of a political in between-ness, perhaps even 'vacuum', in which notions of exclusion/inclusion, barbarianism and good governance may be exposed, since they are neither actually 'within' the EU, nor really 'outside' the Union. These areas *themselves* are the border, I argue, as imperial frontiers are soft and in flux (Zielonka, 2006:1).

This situation, that I call liminality – as a derivation of *Limes*, the northern border zone of the Roman Empire – is in a way comparable to the situation at the *Limes* as it was in the high days of the Roman Empire: just like it was not the interest of Rome how liegemen, kings or governors maintained order at the imperial border, as long as the empire kept functioning, it is neither the interest of 'Brussels' how the member states shape their relations with the OCTs, and to a lesser extent, the ORs. Hence, the subordinate status of the ex-colonies of West-Europe is not so much as a remnant of colonial histories, but rather a situation that can be maintained because of the complexity of the Union in terms of a neo-medieval empire.

As a result, these territories are susceptible for questionable situations concerning citizenship, intervention regarding concerns of local authorities, and the like. And, since the struggle for the credibility of the imperial regime is constantly felt at imperial frontiers, these areas are also susceptible for depictions of barbarianism because it is at the frontier that 'civilization' clashes with 'backwardness'. To its extremity, this leads to first- and second-class citizens, both within the various member states as well as in the European Union as a whole. Obviously, this may complicate political relations, as in the case of the Netherlands Antilles mentioned above.

Of course, as the EU and its member states are democratic, they have to pay attention to the desires of their populations in other parts of the world. The main point here, however, is that within the framework of the EU, with its delegation of powers and the ideological message of bringing prosperity from the center to the periphery, *and* within the peculiar histories of the former colonies, such thing is hampered. It seems to take some time before a shout from the *Limes* reaches 'Brussels'. The member states appear to have in the end the

power to decide what happens at the EU's *Limes*, although the EU is in fact the overarching political body. This leaves space (literally) to distinguish between fully fledged EU-citizens and 'associated' EU-citizens who enjoy a huge variance in European rights, depending on the individual member state's agreements with the central power of Brussels.

The question, then, is how we should overcome this liminal position of the inhabitants of the EU's OCTs. The first step to take would be to clear out any distinction between the ORs and OCTs. But can and should 'Brussels' demand equal rights and duties for all people that are in one way or another associated with its member states? On the one hand, such would be precisely according its message of equality and democracy. On the other hand, it would violate its own democratic model in which cooperation of the member states relies on voluntarism and, to a large extent, autonomy for all member states; and the complex relationships that these maintain with their former colonies lie precisely within the member states' authority, thus beyond that of the Union. Although it seems fair to have eyes for geographical, cultural and economical distances, exemptions are in some instances hard to explain as they get easily entangled in underlying 'ideological' interpretations – as if the inhabitants of the periphery 'have not arrived yet' at the point where they will become fully-fledged EU citizens. Perhaps in terms of economic assistance, such is defensible, but this goes often accompanied by a sort of cultural 'parenting' in terms of developing 'proper' institutions for fighting corruption and for bookkeeping. Furthermore, if this assistance is not accompanied by equal rights such as voting rights, it will not exceed the level of developmental aid. But also bringing prosperity has an ideological connotation, for why would economic growth be necessary? However, this message is far from likely ever going to be abandoned, even if it would not be emphasized, since the EU is also for the 'normal' member states (located on the continent) foremost a vehicle for economic growth.

The solution obviously would be for the European Union to abandon any of its ideological connotations, and just to see itself as an administrative body that facilitates cooperation; but since any human contact is shaped by notions of 'I', 'we' and 'them', there will always be people that fall in between the most striking groups of the 'civilized we' and the 'most barbarian them'.

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