BEYOND SOCIALIZATION AND ATTRITION:
Border Pedagogy in Biblical Studies

By Roberto Mata

Abstract

This paper uses border pedagogy to address two fundamental questions raised in Democratizing Biblical Studies: what is the impact of traditional educational models on racial and ethnic minority students (REM)? And, what alternative pedagogies can enable REM and others to enter, remain and transform biblical studies into a democratic space of equals? This paper holds that “banking models” of education promote forms academic socialization which may turn REM into the hegemonic ideal of the biblical scholar, while potentially leading those who resist into academic attrition. Furthermore, it proposes a border pedagogy that can enable REM to transcend the threats of socialization and attrition. By undertaking a social, cultural, and political border-crossing journey that entails critical awakening, journeying, crossing, negotiating, and transforming, border-crossers will be able to map, cross, and reconfigure biblical studies into the radical and democratic rhetorical space of equals envisioned by Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza and her fellow border-crossers.
Introduction

In the last decade, the number of racial and ethnic minority students entering or crossing into the field of biblical and theological studies has increased significantly. According to the Association for Theological Schools in the U.S. and Canada, the total number of REM enrolled for the academic year 2008-2009 surpassed 50%. In comparison to the academic year 2002-2003, where only 30% of REM accounted for student enrollment, this represents a sharp increase. This growth in student diversity is due in part to major demographic shifts in the U.S. and to recruitment efforts on the part of graduate schools across the nation. To ensure that REM not only gain access but also complete their degrees, graduate institutions must also address the pedagogical needs of REM.

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2 In terms of individual ethnic groups, the ATS’ Fact book 2002-2003 divided it as follows: White 69.1%, Black 11.6%, Asian 7.1%, Hispanic 3.5%, Native American 0.4%. Although in the academic year 2008-2009 white students remain the largest group, collectively REM have now slightly surpassed that numbers; see the ATS’ “Fact book 2002-2003,” http://www.ats.edu/Resources/Publications/Documents/FactBook/2002-03.pdf (accessed December 10, 2008).

3 In the case of Hispanics, the U.S. Census Bureau reports that this population surpasses 45 million, 15.1 percent of the total 301.1 million, and remains the fastest growing ethnic group in the nation; see The U.S. Census Bureau, “The U.S Hispanic Population,” http://www.census.gov/PressRelease/www/releases/archives/population/011910.html (accessed on November 8, 2008).

4 Harvard Divinity School, for instance, has made significant progress in this regard; the school’s efforts in recent years have included aggressive recruitment of REM through their Diversity and Explorations program, hiring REM faculty, as well the aligning with specific programs, such as the Hispanic Summer Program, among others, to support REM students. In addition, there is also a positive change in the perception among REM students, particularly Hispanics, regarding recruitment efforts at their respective institutions, for just five years ago, Hispanic students held that their schools were not actively recruiting REM; see Edwin I. Hernandez and Kenneth Davies, Reconstructing the Sacred Tower: Challenge and Promise of Latino/a Theological Education (Scranton: The University of Scranton Press, 2003), 47.

5 Frances E. Contreras and Patricia Gándara, “Navegando el Camino/Navigating the Roadway: The Latina/o PhD Pipeline: A case of Historical & Contemporary
Yet, as Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza notes, the type of knowledge taught and the type of pedagogy used to communicate it has in fact not changed over the same period.\(^6\) This raises two critical questions: first, what are the traditional educational models in biblical studies and how do they impact the performance and success of REM?\(^7\) And second, what alternative pedagogical models and practices can enable REM to not only enter the field but also to transform it into a radical and democratic space of equals?\(^8\) In this paper I suggest that “banking models” of education enable and sustain forms of academic socialization which can lead REM to embrace hegemonic notions of the idealized biblical scholar, while potentially leading those who resist it into academic attrition. In order to address this quandary, I assert that border pedagogy enables REM to transcend the borders of socialization and attrition, as well as the pedagogies that sustain them, as they become border-crossers; that is, as they undertake a border-crossing journey that entails the following components: critical awakening, journeying, crossing, negotiating, and transforming.

**Structure**

The first part of the paper addresses questions of social location, pedagogical models, and the implications of hegemonic forms of socialization, as well as the potential threat of attrition for REM. After a brief discussion of current educational models in biblical studies, the paper maps the borders that Eurocentric forms of academic socialization

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\(^8\) Ibid, 127-128.
represent for REM. In the second part, the discussion turns to alternative pedagogical models, particularly those of Fernando Segovia and Tina Pippin. Subsequently, this paper delineates the theoretical foundations of border pedagogy as framed in the works of Paulo Freire, Henry A. Giroux, bell hooks, and Elisabeth Ellsworth. Finally, it suggests ways in which border pedagogy may help reconstitute biblical studies into a radically democratic rhetorical space of equals. By undertaking a border-crossing journey—which entails a critical awakening, journeying, crossing, negotiating, and transforming—REM learn to map borders of oppression, to commit to liberating action and to work with others. In addition, they reclaim their right to name the world, negotiate their survival in the field, and activate peripheral forms of knowing.

Social Location

According to Gloria Anzaldúa, a “border is a diving line, a narrow strip along a steep edge.” As such, a border is set up to establish the “us vs. them” and to demarcate “safe and unsafe” spaces. As a male, mestizo, Mexican immigrant, and Pentecostal student at a prestigious university and biblical studies program, I am part of REM who have recently disavowed the social, political, and cultural borders that demarcated the safe and unsafe spaces of the field. As a mestizo, a person of European and Native American descent, I

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9 As a result of such socialization, as I will argue throughout the paper, REM students are unable to bridge the spaces and negotiate forms of knowing in the academy and in their respective cultural and religious communities. Unable to reconcile the series of contradictions between their complex religious and academic commitments, they may eventually have to decide whether to uncritically embrace the idealized notion of the biblical scholar or resist it and attempt to transform it.


11 As a Pentecostal Christian, I also move in the margins of main-stream denominations. The Spirit moves wherever it wants, including in the borderlands, and imbues my community with hope to think, dream, and speak for itself.
am a member of Jose Vasconcelos’ “raza cosmica” (cosmic race),¹² Gloria Anzaldua’s “atravesados,”¹³ and John C. Calhoun’s “half-breed” Mexicans.¹⁴ As a Pentecostal Mexican immigrant, at stake is the theological and educational growth of my community.¹⁵ Currently, most of the theological resources in our congregations are translated from English and are often irrelevant to our context.¹⁶

The Hispanic Pentecostal church needs its scholars to write and speak in a language it can understand.¹⁷ Despite the demographic growth of Hispanics in the U.S. and the slight increase of their numbers in graduate programs, the number of those who complete graduate degrees is in check.¹⁸ The picture looks gloomier when considering that a decade ago, only 63 out of a 100 Hispanic students who entered kindergarten earned a high school diploma.¹⁹ Of these, only 32 completed a year of college and only 11 completed their undergraduate degrees.²⁰ Considering what is at stake, the community cannot afford to lose its prospective scholars to socialization or attrition. Hence, I hope this work serves as a

¹³ For Gloria Anzaldua, the atravesados are “the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, and the half-dead, in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the normal;” see Borderlands/La Frontera: La New Mestiza (San Francisco: Spinters/Aunt Lute, 1987), 4.
¹⁵ In this context, the dangers of socialization and attrition are clearer. On the one hand, socialization can cause our scholars to embrace Eurocentric visions of the field and ignore the needs of the church and community. On the other hand, attrition can prevent them from completing their respective graduate programs. Overall, this represents a major problem for REM across disciplines.
¹⁷ The community cannot spare the few scholars who enter biblical studies. Therefore, it is imperative that, along with other border-crossers, we find ways to ensure that the field changes its educational practices and becomes a safe space we can inhabit.
²⁰ Ibid, 6.
as a compass that REM can use to avoid the perils of the borders of biblical studies.  

**Traditional Pedagogies in Biblical Studies**

The biblical studies classroom has been traditionally influenced by the “banking model of education.” Such model sees learning as the acquisition, retention, and repetition of facts. In addition, it creates what Paulo Freire referred to as the “teacher teacher-student contradiction,” which presupposes that teachers know everything while students know nothing. In this manner, the banking model enforces a hierarchy where students, as empty receptacles, are below the teacher—who is perceived as the source and regulator of knowledge. Apart from the banking model, Schüssler-Fiorenza also discusses two other models; namely, the “master-disciple” and “consumer” models of education. In her view, the “master-disciple” is a top-down model which encourages students to adopt the perspectives or interpretive frameworks of the teacher. As such, it still maintains the hierarchical teacher-student contradiction discussed by Freire.

Moreover, Schüssler-Fiorenza describes the “consumer” model as having two interrelated approaches; namely, a “smorgasbord” and a “therapeutic” approach. While in the former students select what they think is useful and teachers act as experts and sales persons, in the latter, students select courses or workshops in terms of whether or not these

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21 I write this paper for those REM who are considering entering the field or are engaged in the struggle to remain in it. Most importantly, I write in memory of those REM who have silently departed from graduate programs in biblical studies, hoping my work echoes in an even stronger way their concerns regarding the hegemonic socialization practices of the field.


23 Ibid, 71-86.

24 Ibid, 91.


26 Ibid, 133.
make them “feel good,” or whether it satisfies their needs. Despite their variations, these educational models reinforce hegemonic educational practices and Eurocentric forms of socialization.

Socialization

Socialization itself refers to “the process, through which students gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized knowledge and skills.” The logic arising from this definition and traditional understandings in general is that socialization is not only positive but also necessary in order to enable students to effectively transition from their role as doctoral students to their professional role as scholars. Yet, the field of biblical studies has traditionally promoted a scientific-positivist and value-free ethos, which devalues student voices. In this manner, REM are pressured to set aside their questions and to ascribe to a Eurocentric understanding of what a “true biblical scholar” should be. This socialization is also promoted in four areas: classroom, department, interactions with faculty and students, and professional guilds such as the Society for Biblical Literature. In general, banking pedagogies, hegemonic paradigms, as well as teachers and peers reinforce hegemonic forms of socialization.

27 Ibid, 133.
28 Because Tina Pippin’s reflections are founded on critical pedagogy, whose strengths and limitations she has acknowledged, I do not include her work among the educational models described above.
31 To the extent that uncritical students adhere to the “portrait of the true scholar,” they receive affirmation and acceptance in their departments, classroom, and formal interactions with faculty and students. This affirmation may in turn increase their chances of successfully navigating through the program, for studies have shown that expressed faculty interest on students’ ideas and research topics made students feel valued.
For a time I doubted REM could be socialized to the extent of denying their own voice and uncritically embracing the portrait of the idealized Eurocentric scholar. Yet, these days it is common to find such views even among other REM. On one particular occasion, a Hispanic female colleague hesitated to accept an invitation to attend a lecture titled “Postcolonialism and The New Testament.” In a rather exasperated tone she said: “I am not sure; I get uncomfortable with political issues. I think we should just study the New Testament for its own sake and put our bias aside.” In another occasion, during a conversation over the recent influx of Hispanics and REM to biblical studies, a male Hispanic student in the masters program ranted that Hispanics needed to stop “making a fuzz” about our “so-called marginalization” and “exclusion” in the academy, for our rise in numbers showed that institutional racism was a lie. “It is clear,” he said, “that only the most qualify get in, regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation.” This example is but one end of the spectrum. Considering the pervasiveness of the Eurocentric ethos of the field, resisting such socialization may lead REM to be isolated in their classrooms, the guilds, and in their formal and informal interactions with peers and faculty.

**Attrition**

Isolation has been identified as one of the main factors in academic attrition.\(^{32}\) Attrition refers to the process and dynamics that lead students to drop out of their doctoral program before completing their degrees. This includes the students who do not finish their dissertations known as “ABD’s.”\(^{33}\) The process of attrition begins with confusion about program requirements, lack of communication, and miscommunication with faculty and

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peers. Eventually, these factors turn into frustration, lack of integration, and ultimately isolation, which has been identified as the main cause of attrition amongst doctoral students. Other factors that can lead REM to isolation and subsequent attrition are racial, class, and gender discrimination, which has a strong impact on satisfaction level and commitment to degree completion. To these, one may add the overwhelming display of “white privilege” in biblical studies classrooms.

REM often find that most of the faculty are white and that the curriculum often reflects the dominant group’s cultural, social, and political view. Furthermore, as bell hooks point out, in these academic settings white people often “act as though our presence is less a function of our skills, aptitude, genius, and more the outcome of philanthropic charity. Thinking this way, they see our presence as functioning primarily as a testament to their largesse; it tells the world they are not racist.” But perhaps more latent is the tendency of white students to speak for REM and other marginalized groups. While some want to help REM, they are reluctant to consider how their privilege contributes to the latter’s silencing and isolation. Unfortunately, student attrition reinforces prejudices against REM in certain elite intuitions; namely, that REM leave programs because they are lazy, unqualified, and lack academic ability or genuine interest in the field. Although recent studies have provided insights for academic institutions along the lines of recruitment and retention, REM

34 Ibid, 2.
35 Lovitts, Leaving the Ivory Tower, 177.
37 Joseph Brandt defines it as “a right, advantage, or immunity granted to or enjoyed by white persons beyond the common advantage of all others; an exemption in many particular cases from certain burdens and liabilities;” see Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America (Fortress Press, 2007), 96.
38 bell hooks, Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope (New York: Continuum, 2003), 33.
are still left to their own devices when dealing with the issues of socialization and attrition.  

When attrition materializes, it reverberates among all REM across departments, making the borders of biblical studies all the more tangible. About a year ago, a REM student was having difficulty with some of the academic requirements, which are considered as an essential part of a “true” scholar’s training. Reluctant to conform and frustrated by the pressure he perceived in interactions with others in the department, he was gradually isolated and became increasingly frustrated with the program. One afternoon, near the end of the spring semester and his second year, he approached my desk and said, “I just came to say goodbye; I cannot work with this academic system so I am leaving the program. I will stay in touch.” We shook hands for one last time and then he vanished through the library stacks, never to return. Unable to cope with the socialization practices of the institution, he succumbed to academic attrition.

As a first year Hispanic doctoral student, my friend’s departure not only made real the threat of attrition, but it also left an open question; namely, who will be next? In conversations and interactions with REM—be they Hispanic, African-American, African, or Asian—the concern often comes up: What if I cannot cope with program requirements? Hence, while REM write papers, engage in conversations, and attend classes, the fear of attrition looms in the background like Damocles’ sword. Therefore, it is important that academic institutions not only recruit REM more aggressively, but that they also change their institutional practices and pedagogies. Otherwise, such pedagogical practices and their consequences, as attrition shows, can become “quality control” systems that purge out those who “don’t make the cut.” In addition, REM must develop pedagogical alternatives

40 Hernandez and Davis, Reconstructing the Sacred Tower, 93.
42 For more on the subject see Lovitt’s, Leaving The Ivory Tower, 92.
that enable them to transcend socialization and attrition and contribute to the
democratization of biblical studies.

**Alternative Educational Models**

Apart from the pedagogical proposal delineated by Schüssler-Fiorenza in
Democratizing Biblical Studies, Fernando Segovia and Tina Pippin have also presented
constructive alternatives. In his work, Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the
Margins, Segovia presents a twofold pedagogical proposal. First, Segovia’s proposal takes
diversity to heart; “diversity in texts, diversity in readings, and diversity in readers.”
Second, it views the reality of empire, or imperialism and colonialism, as an omnipresent,
inescapable, and overwhelming reality in the world…” In this manner, Segovia attempts to
incorporate diversity as well as the reality of the imperial/colonial dimension into the
discipline at “the level of texts, readings of texts, and readers of texts.”

Although Pippin does not necessarily elaborate a pedagogical proposal, she
demonstrates how critical pedagogy can be applied in the context of the religious studies
classroom. In this project, she envisions two liberatory spheres: “the classroom as an
open, democratic space and the connection of participants in a wymyn and religious studies
courses with cultural worker’s in the community.” In several ways, this paper is indebted to
the work of these fellow border-crossers. Like Pippin, I do not entirely elaborate a proposal
here, but rather seek to elucidate the ways in which border pedagogy can address two

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43 Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Democratizing Biblical Studies*, 16.
44 Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, 92.
46 Ibid, 93.
48 Ibid, 182.
specific and concrete issues facing REM in biblical studies; namely, socialization and attrition.

Border Pedagogy

Due to the challenges that hegemonic paradigms and their “banking pedagogies” pose, REM must “creatively invent ways to cross borders.” To this end, this paper proposes a form of border pedagogy as a creative venue to map, decenter, and transform the borders of biblical studies in the interest of REM. In terms of its theoretical foundations, border pedagogy is rooted in critical pedagogy, for it links the practice of education to a radical struggle for a more democratic society and sees the notion of difference as part of this transformative struggle. Furthermore, it rests on Freire’s understanding of dialogue as “the encounter between people, mediated by the world, in order to name the world.” From this follows that no one can name the world for others. Drawing on postmodern discourse, border pedagogy also seeks to find ways in “which those master narratives based on white, patriarchal, and class-specific version of world can be challenged critically and effectively transformed.” Building on Gloria Anzaldúa’s imagery and understanding of borders, Henry A. Giroux expands the category of border to signal “a recognition of those epistemological, political, cultural, and social margins that structure the language of history,

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49 bell hooks, Teaching To Transgress, 184.
51 Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 88.
52 Ibid, 88.
54 The use of border and borderlands as categories is not merely incidental but invokes powerful imageries of struggle, social and geographical dislocation, hope, and transformation that are so much a part of the Latino/a experience and that of other REM.
power, and difference. In general, border pedagogy understands education as a process of liberation or as a form of border-crossing.

From these foundations, border pedagogy can be understood as entailing the following six components: First, it points to forms of transgressing those borders which have been created under social, political, and economic oppression. Second, it calls for the creation of pedagogical conditions and practices that would enable students to become border-crossers in order to understand otherness in its own terms. Third, border pedagogy seeks to create a classroom of borderlands in which diversity in students, epistemologies, and meanings can flourish; a classroom practice in which difference is celebrated even as it is interrogated and refashioned. Fourth, border pedagogy exposes “the socially and historically constructed strengths and limitations” of the borders we inherit and within which we operate in order to reconfigure them in the interest of the oppressed. Fifth, border pedagogy insists that no one can name the world for others and dispenses of the teacher-student contradiction that predominates in banking models of education. As Freire points out, “education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.” Finally, border pedagogy also incorporates into the curriculum epistemologies forged in the peripheries of dominant culture so that educational practices and student experiences “need no longer be mapped or referenced solely on the basis of the dominant models of Western culture.”

Building on the theoretical and practical work of Gloria Anzaldua, Henry Giroux,

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55 Giroux, Border Crossings, 20.
57 Ibid, 21.
60 Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 72.
61 Giroux, Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope, 147.
Paulo Freire, bell hooks, among others, this paper suggests that border pedagogy enables REM to map, de-center, and transform hegemonic pedagogies which sustain socialization and attrition in biblical studies. Specifically, border pedagogy requires that both faculty and students learn to undertake a social, cultural, and political border-crossing journey that entails the following stages: critical awakening, journeying, crossing, negotiating, and transforming. In this manner, REM and others become border-crossers who seek the transformation and democratization of biblical studies.

**Critical Awakening**

In contrast to the banking pedagogies of biblical studies, which are conducive to both socialization and attrition, border pedagogy demands that *mojados* (wetbacks) or border-crossers engage in a process of critical awakening before undertaking the border crossing journey.\(^{62}\) Such critical awakening is in fact a process of conscientization through which border-crossers learn to map the social, cultural and political borders of their oppression and dehumanization.\(^{63}\) Without this critical awakening, REM are unable to become border-crossers or *mojados*.\(^{64}\) Hence, border pedagogy encourages REM to first map the Eurocentric character of the borders that undergird socialization and attrition in biblical studies. How does this work? As REM enter the field, they soon realize that neither the content nor framework of study speaks to their experiences. Such uneasiness or experience

\(^{62}\) Mojado is a pejorative term for those who cross the U.S. border illegally, and is often part of the repertoire of those who employ interpellative speech against migrant communities in the U.S. borderlands.

\(^{63}\) Freire uses the term as the learning to read social, political, and economic and contradictions and to take action against them; see *Pedagogy of The Oppressed*, 36.

\(^{64}\) As point of departure, this paper situates its basis framework under the umbrella of the Fourth Emancipatory paradigm in biblical studies. As delineated by Schüssler-Fiorenza, the Fourth emancipatory paradigm acknowledges its own social locatedness, influences and interests; thereby, it challenges the Eurocentric, positivist and value-free neutrality spouse by hegemonic paradigms and their pedagogies in biblical studies; see *Rhetoric and Ethic*, 42.
of not belonging, of being alien and unwelcomed triggers what Gloria Anzaldúa refers to as *la facultad*—that is, “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface.” This “irrational” and acute sensing leads us to further interrogate why it seems as if we’re always catching up, as if we were not a part of the decision making process in the shaping the field and the knowledge it produces.

In addition, critical awakening bids us to map how hegemonic paradigms and pedagogies create and reinforce two portraits in biblical studies; namely, the portrait of the “true scholar” and the portrait of the “wretched scholar.” Mapping the portrait of the “true scholar” and its oppressive underpinnings entails tracing the colonial heritage of the scientific-positivist ethos of the field, as well as the socialization practices that enforce it. Akin to this reality, Fernando Segovia suggests a thorough analysis of the link between biblical interpretation and Western hegemony and colonialism, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth century’s, when, as he points out, “both the formation of the discipline and the process of expansionism found themselves at their respective peaks.” In critical awakening REM map the portrait of the objective, neutral, and value-free scholar which is validated over against non Eurocentric understandings of the field. Simultaneously, the Eurocentric portrait of the “true scholar” creates what Albert Memmi refers to as a “portrait

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65 Anzaldúa adds that La Facultad is also “an instant “sensing,” a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is behind which feelings readily hide;” see Borderlands, 38.

66 Furthermore, through critical awakening we see that the same institutional structures that granted us acceptance can turn into some sort of quality control systems which reaffirm those who accept socialization while purging those who resist via attrition.


68 Segovia, Decolonizing Biblical Studies, 176.
of wretchedness,"\textsuperscript{69} which demonizes the colonized as ignorant, lazy, racially inferior, primitive and irrational.\textsuperscript{70} Subsequently, it is used to justify the socio-economic, political and psychological exploitation of the colonized.\textsuperscript{71}

Furthermore, through critical awakening border pedagogy calls our attention to the ways in which Eurocentric paradigms and pedagogies perpetuate power and privilege. Just as the portrait of the “true scholar” is reinforced by socialization, the portrait of the “wretched scholar” is then reinforced by attrition. In other words, dominant and privileged groups in universities and seminaries across the nation invoke attrition to argue that REM dropped out graduate programs because they were not qualified in the first place. This reinforces the stereotypes of REM as lazy, incompetent, and academically challenged students. Consequently, it will be argued that the problem is not with the program, the institution or the field for that matter, but with the student.\textsuperscript{72} Finally, critical awakening calls our attention to the ways in which traditional curriculum design, instructional practice, and forms of academic assessment sustain white privilege in the biblical studies classroom. Specifically, it pays attention to the ways in which dominant groups deploy notions of difference so that it functions to establish, reproduce, and legitimize their privilege over other groups.\textsuperscript{73} Once these borders or limit-situations are delineated, border-crossers must engage in a journey to transform them.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{69} Albert Memmi, \textit{The Colonizer and The Colonized} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 82.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid, 82.
\textsuperscript{71} Similarly, in biblical studies, this portrait of wretchedness depicts non-compliant REM, those who question socialization, as lazy, incompetent, problematic, and irrational, or as not doing “real and serious” scholarship.
\textsuperscript{72} Lovitts and Nelson, “Hidden Crisis in Graduate Education,” 78.
\textsuperscript{74} Freire, \textit{Pedagogy of the Oppressed}, 72.
Journeying

In journeying, border pedagogy demands that teachers and students commit to a course of liberating action, work with each other, and interrogate their own motivations for journeying. While it is now common place to argue that knowledge and power are related, border pedagogy shifts “the emphasis of the knowledge/power relationship away from the limited emphasis on the mapping of domination to the politically strategic issue of engaging the ways in which knowledge can be remapped…”75 Such remapping entails the very transformation of these borders. However, before this takes place, one must first map them, and then commit to liberating action by journeying with others. Freire makes this explicit noting that: “When a word is deprived of its dimension of action…It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transformation, and there is no transformation without action.”76 In other words it is not enough for prospective border-crossers to simply denounce the dangers posed by socialization and attrition; we must also address the problem. In addition, it has now become trendy to do lots of this denouncing and even claim to “speak for the oppressed.”77 In journeying, borders-crossers always work and speak “with” but never “for” others.

Committing to liberating action in a concrete sense entails learning to work with others. The border-crossing journey of REM in biblical studies is filled with perils, fears, insecurities, threats and uncertainties. Thus, it is never undertaken alone, one travels with prospective border-crossers or mojados from diverse ethnic, economic and socio-political

75 Giroux, Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope, 147.
76 Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 85.
backgrounds. However diverse the group may be, we must learn to speak in ways that transcend our differences. During my graduate studies I have traveled and continue to travel along with Asian, African-American, African, White, and Hispanic students. At various intervals of the journey, we have comforted, encouraged, and given advice to each other, thereby developing a sense of community. Often Asian and Hispanic students in the masters program approach me to ask about the doctoral program. Although they could easily inquire about it at the admissions office, they are looking for a different type of knowledge. They want to know which faculty will support a research project from what Chela Sandoval refers to as an “oppositional consciousness” perspective. Furthermore, they want to know whether faculty are fellow border-crossers or simply la migra (the border patrol or gate keepers) in disguise.

Because in journeying, prospective border-crossers must learn to work with one another, they must also interrogate their own motivations for doing so. As Elizabeth Ellsworth warns, uncritical pedagogues may in fact be “implicated in the very structures they are trying to change.” Thus, border-crossers must embrace a dialogical perspective and dispense of any arrogance, paternalism, and white privilege, for as Freire asks:

How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I dialogue if I regard myself as a case apart from others—mere “its” in whom I cannot recognize other “I”s? How can I dialogue if I consider myself a member of the in-group of ‘pure men,’ the owners of truth and knowledge, for whom all non-members are ‘these people,’ or the great unwashed’?

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79 They want to identify individuals that can orient them without enforcing the silencing that comes with socialization.
80 Ellsworth, “Why doesn’t this feel empowering?”
81 Freire, *Pedagogy of The Oppressed*, 90.
Because dialogue is rooted in humility, it cannot be an act of arrogance.\textsuperscript{82} In journeying we must view and treat other border-crossers as equals. In addition, our actions must contribute towards building a relationship of mutual trust. As Freire points out, “trust is contingent on the evidence which one party provides the others of his true, concrete intentions; it cannot exist if that party’s words do not coincide with their actions. To say one thing and do another—to take one’s own word lightly—cannot inspire trust.”\textsuperscript{83} Learning to work with others in our journeying, therefore, not only requires building trust among the oppressed, but also faith in our fellow travelers and humankind as a whole. The dialogical border-crosser must have faith in others’ “power to make and to remake, to create and to re-create the world, faith in their vocation to be more fully human (which is not the privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all).”\textsuperscript{84} Only after border-crossers—students and educators alike—have interrogated their own motivations for journeying, they will be able to cross the borders of biblical studies.

**Crossing**

REM become border-crossers or *mojados* (wetbacks) as they disavow the student-teacher contradiction, activate peripheral epistemologies, and reclaim their right to speak and name the world with others. In this crossing, REM and others transgress hegemonic borders of meaning, maps of knowledge, social relations and values. Thus, they destabilize, interrupt, and disable the continuum of domination created by Eurocentric paradigms and reinforced by banking pedagogies.\textsuperscript{85} Because the teacher-student contradiction is at the core of banking models of education, it is also pivotal that REM disavow its hierarchies and

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\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, 85. \\
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, 90. \\
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid, 90. \\
\textsuperscript{85} Giroux, *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope*, 147.
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search for constructive alternatives. According to Freire, the teacher-student contradiction sets teachers as fact sources and students as empty receptacles to be filled. Yet, critics have often wondered how teachers are to orient students to become autonomous border-crossers who speak for themselves without directing or deploying some sort of authority. In the dialogical nature of border pedagogy “the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist.” Instead, they both emerge as border-crossers who name the world together. Thus, border pedagogy prevents teachers from constructing for themselves privileged positions as both the sources and regulators of what can and should be known. Because no one can name the world for others, crossing enables mojados to reclaim their right to name the world and to speak for themselves.

Crossing thus becomes an act of disobedience and non-compliance to Eurocentric paradigms and pedagogies of biblical studies. As such it will seem threatening to la migra (border patrol). But this is to be expected since, as bell hooks points out, “...the liberatory voice will necessarily confront, disturb, demand that listeners even alter ways of hearing and being.” For a long time, perhaps too long, it has been REM and Anzaldúa’s atravesados of the borderlands of biblical studies who have had to adjust and alter not only their ways of learning and speaking, but also of being. As previously noted, Eurocentric pedagogies have defined and objectified REM through portraits of wretchedness. We

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87 Ellsworth, “Why doesn’t this feel empowering?” 100.
89 Ellsworth, “Why doesn’t this feel empowering?” 115.
90 Those who not only enforce the Eurocentric paradigms and banking pedagogies, but who also see the shaping of biblical studies as their exclusive right.
93 When I speak of the REM’s voice and experience, I am aware that these cannot be constructed in essentialist terms, and that is precisely my point. Eurocentric portraits of
come to biblical studies with a desire to contribute to the field but soon find our opinions devalued and cast aside. Such experience of disillusionment is best captured by Frantz Fanon as he writes about his experience in Western civilization: “I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.”

Thus, even the most idealist of REM will at some point of another face the fact that our questions and concerns have been ignored by what William Myers terms, “the subtle politics of omission” through which Eurocentric approaches “lock the history of interpretation in the past and evade contemporary issues such as racism and intercultural dialogue.”

Thus, border pedagogy takes seriously student voice and the struggle for self-reconfiguration. With Jean-Pierre Ruiz it refuses to brand student voice as naïve and irrelevant, “for such dismissals replicate the destructive patterns of academic elitism and classism that support the status quo.” However, with Elizabeth Ellsworth it understands that, if not interrogated, the struggle for student voice can become part of what she deems a repressive myth, in which teachers fail to see how they are implicated in the educational systems they are trying to change and voice and experience are casted in essentialist terms. After critically interrogating student voice, however, one must still allow student’s wretchedness have framed and casted the “voice” and “experience” of the REM in such a way that they are unable to name the world for themselves. Such portraits of wretchedness must be eradicated not so much for REM to find their authentic voice and experiences, since a lot of what we know has been shaped by the West, but so that they can have the freedom to construct it in liberatory terms.

98 Ellsworth, “Why doesn’t this feel empowering?” 100.
experiences and knowledge to inform the curriculum and daily class discussions, for as Giroux reminds us, this is what gives meaning to students’ lives and what they use to critique hegemonic culture.  

**Negotiating**

After crossing, border pedagogy requires that *mojados* learn to negotiate their survival in the borderlands to which they have arrived. In this negotiating, one must learn how to sing song of the L*’*rd while in a foreign land, so to speak. Therefore, in order negotiate our permanence and survival in the field we must also move about the power center with a *mica chueca*, which should also enable us to work with the established norms, paradigms, and pedagogies even as we work to reconfigure them borders in the interest of REM.

Due to the dialogical nature of border pedagogy and departing from any trash and burn approach, it is necessary that border-crossers become adept with the various validated

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100 In this negotiating, one must learn how to sing song of the L*’*rd while in a foreign land, so to speak.
103 A *mica chueca* (literary a twisted green card) is really a fake green card which illegal immigrants purchase in order to be able to work and thus survive in the U.S. borderlands.
paradigms and methodologies of scholarship in biblical studies. They must also move with ease between the established paradigms of biblical studies and deal with a diversity of texts, readers, and readings, as Fernando Segovia proposes.\textsuperscript{104} Although aware of the socialization these represent, border-crossers must also become versed with the European languages of research, such as French and German, in order to keep up with the expectations of the field and develop competency.\textsuperscript{105} Without this negotiating, our next generations of scholars, as Jean-Pierre Ruiz warns, could be easily dismissed as poorly trained.\textsuperscript{106}

Thus, it is important that border-crossers establish bridges as they move between center and periphery, between academy and society, between biblical studies in the academy and biblical studies at their respective congregations. This should enable certain REM to avoid becoming "schizophrenic," in a figurative sense, when Eurocentric paradigms prevent them from bringing "their own faith-based questions, religious experiences, and fundamental convictions and therefore do not have the possibility to work through them critically in dialogue with hegemonic discourses in the field."\textsuperscript{107} Hence, through the deployment of their various border-crossing skills—which include their bilingual and bicultural skills and the use of the mica chueca—border-crossers will become the type of biblical scholar which Schüessler-Fiorenza has described as a public "transformative, connected, and integrated intellectual who is able to communicate with a variegated public with the goal of personal, social, and religious transformation for justice and well-being."\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{104} Segovia, \textit{Decolonizing Biblical Studies}, 92.
\textsuperscript{105} Indeed, a border crosser becomes multilingual and is also able to understand the significance behind certain types of silence.
\textsuperscript{106} Ruiz, "Tell the Next Generation," 664.
\textsuperscript{107} Schüessler-Fiorenza, "Rethinking" 67
\textsuperscript{108} Schüessler-Fiorenza, \textit{Rhetoric and Ethic}, 42.
Transforming

The objective of the border-crossing journey is to transform the borders that demarcate, legitimate, and enable hegemonic pedagogies. In order to accomplish this, however, border-crossers must decenter hegemonic epistemologies and activate peripheral ways of knowing. But, as Trinh Minh-ha asks, “What kind of educational project could redefine “knowing” so that it no longer describes the activities of those in power who started to speak, to speak alone, and for everyone else, on behalf of everyone else?”\textsuperscript{109} Border pedagogy offers a potential solution to this quandary as it encourages borders-crossers to draw upon what they know about the world, both collectively and individually, to challenge the Eurocentric ethos of biblical studies.\textsuperscript{110} Certainly, this redefining of “knowing” cannot be casted in essentialist terms, for Western epistemologies have long dominated the educational scene. Consequently, it would be difficult to ascertain what our “authentic” and “true” ways of knowing are.\textsuperscript{111} However, one must also recognize that the marginalized have throughout history developed alternative ways of knowing, continually adapting and recreating them in the interest of the oppressed.\textsuperscript{112} In dialogue with established epistemologies, this knowledge from the margins can enable border-crossers to redefine and reconfigure the field without having to construct it rigorously along Eurocentric points of reference.\textsuperscript{113}

Through this knowledge, border-crossers who struggle to understand themselves along the social, political, and cultural borders established by the elite can now open up spaces for multiple realities, histories, and ways of imagining and recreating the world. As

\textsuperscript{110} Giroux, Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope, 147.
\textsuperscript{111} Similarly, it is also difficult to assume that what border-crossers know about the world has not been framed or influenced by the West in way or another.
\textsuperscript{112} Particularly in colonial settings and relations of domination.
\textsuperscript{113} Giroux, Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope, 147.
Freire reminds us, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry through which human beings purge the World, with the World, and with each other.” In naming the world, in this recreating and re-inventing, border-crossers transform it. Most importantly, it is through this naming, according to Freire, that border-crossers also find significance as human beings. Because in the borderlands, these alternative and multiple ways of knowing are constantly shifting, they are not only contradictory at times, but, as Elisabeth Ellsworth points out, partial and irreducible as well. Therefore, it is in these restless forms of knowing that the border-crosser learns to think and speak as an “I” among other “I”s, constantly undertaking the border-crossing journey to enact the democratization of biblical studies.

**Conclusion**

In the past decade, the number of REM in biblical and theological studies has increased significantly. Yet, several REM students soon discover that their questions and concerns are neither validated nor addressed under the hegemonic educational models of biblical studies. Thus, the objective of this paper was twofold; first, I identified the hegemonic educational models as well as their consequences for REM. After a brief discussion of such models, I suggested that, on the one hand, these serve to enforce a Eurocentric form of academic socialization that leads students to negate their own voices and concerns. On the other hand, such socialization may also lead REM to isolation and

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114 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 75.
115 Ibid, 88.
116 Ellsworth, “Why doesn’t this feel empowering?”
117 Due to socialization and the overall influences of the Eurocentric master narrative, one’s own voice may at first sound foreign and we may even doubt ourselves. Through time and through the continuous critical awakening, journeying, crossing, negotiating and transforming, we will learn to trust our voice as subjects and agents in the building of a more radically democratic field of biblical studies.
ultimately academic attrition. Moreover, I suggested that socialization creates a discursive portrait of the idealized Eurocentric scholar as objective and value-free. Conversely, attrition creates a portrait of the wretched scholar, who is deemed lazy or unscholarly. While socialization serves to reinforce the Eurocentric ethos of the field, attrition serves to prove that REM are “unqualified” and “incompetent.” Hence, it is often invoked to justify REM’s departure from elite graduate programs.

Second, I suggested that border pedagogy may enable REM to transcend the borders of socialization and attrition. In my view, border pedagogy contributes to this project by mapping, decentering, and reconfiguring the social, cultural and political borders of biblical studies in the interest of REM. As I framed it, border pedagogy encourages both students and faculty to engage in a border-crossing journey which entails the following elements: critical awakening, journeying, crossing, negotiating and transforming. In order to ensure that REM remain and succeed in biblical studies, border pedagogy advocates for the transformation of the field into that radical and democratic space of equals which Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza and other border-crossers have long envisioned.