

JESUS THE BORDERLANDER: HYBRIDITY AS SURVIVAL STRATEGY AND

MODEL FOR POLITICAL CHANGE

A Cultural Representation from the Gospel of John

By

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To Justa and Alvino, my great grandparents, for crossing the  
first borders;

To Jesusita and Benito, my grandparents, whose prayers and  
thirst for knowledge have brought me to this day;

To Imelda and Samuel, my parents, whose mobility has taught  
me to feel at home wherever I go;

To my aunts Martha and Esperanza, my sisters Sandra, Diana  
and Martha, who never stopped asking if I was done;

To Jerusa, my best friend, who never grew tired of  
encouraging me and believing I would finish;

To Professor Segovia, for his endless support and patience;

To my good friends who deciphered and polished my English,  
stimulating my writing with their comments;

To my home church, for their constant prayers;

To Ricky, my four-year-old nephew, whose love and passion for  
Jesus inspired me to finish this dissertation

## INTRODUCTION

If I were to sum up the core of my dissertation in one word I would use *hybridity*. As one of the central concepts of the present project the term hybridity not only enfold and exemplifies the central thesis of this project—that of Jesus as a borderlander, a model for political change and a strategy for survival—it also explains the construct that as a reader and interpreter, I am socially and politically conditioned by my cultural context.

Hybridity, a polyvalent concept, has helped me to read and understand a wide range of events, from the most complex social and cultural phenomenon to the most trivial personal experiences of everyday life. Hybridity, as an identity marker, expresses my biculturalism as well as my racial and ethnic mixtures of multiple heritages. As a hermeneutical lens, it helps me to interpret and engage my cultural context as an intertwined net of power relations, inscribed in the complexity and richness of everyday cultural practices. As a reading strategy it compels me to read and listen to the various voices engaged in conversation, and reminds me of the ever temporal and changing nature of interpretations. As I develop and explain my thesis in the following pages, the meanings of

hybridity will be clarified.

Although Jesus' hybridity has been considered through various scholars' methodologies, the unique perspective I bring forward is my reading from the location of a border-crosser. Reading is always a subjective and cultural act, and my reading of Jesus in *John* is not the exception. However, as I acknowledge the strong influence of my social location in my reading I am still able to read from various perspectives and I do not reject other readings as implausible.

Ultimately, as a woman and a racial/ethnic minority from the Two-Thirds World, my aim in this project is to construct an alternative representation of Jesus as a hybrid being and a borderlander which can operate as a postcolonial strategy of survival and as a model for political change.

In order to distinctively emphasize my interest in the political character of this representation of Jesus which I depict from a Johannine perspective, I must first offer an account of some cultural and personal experiences instrumental to the conception of this project.

Growing up in a Protestant church in Mexico in general, the social and political issues of my context were absent from the agenda of the church. Most of the

Protestant churches in my past stressed the spiritual interpretation of the Bible. The Gospel was read, and in many of them is still read, only as a personal message for spiritual growth, avoiding its social dimension and potential for political change. The common representation of Jesus circulating amongst many of the Protestant people was shaped by what is considered the "spiritual Gospel" par excellence, the *Gospel of John*. As a single gospel, *John* is the most published and distributed gospel in Latin America.

This sole image of the spiritual Jesus permeated most of my childhood. It was in high-school, as I was studying the history of Mexico from a critical point of view, when my perception of Jesus changed dramatically. I learned about the *conquista* and the evangelization of the indigenous people, and how the gospel of submission and tolerance was imposed by the Spaniards as a colonizing tool. By using images of a weak and subservient Jesus the natives were subjugated and pacified with a soporific gospel.

Later in seminary, I learned of some oppressive images of Jesus serving the purpose of colonial interests. Through the writings of liberation theologians I also learned of new alternative images of a liberating Jesus emerging in the midst of the ecclesial base communities, and the

political and cultural effects of such images of Jesus in some Catholic communities of Latin America. Undoubtedly, the images of a helpless and powerless Jesus used to evangelize during the *conquista* have faded but there are still other images that could be used as oppressive tools therefore we need to highlight the liberating alternatives to broaden the spectrum of Jesus images.

Throughout the history of Christianity many social and political changes can be explained as consequences of the impact of diverse representations of Jesus in culture. The history of the Two-Thirds World has particularly witnessed such changes under a Jesus that "was projected and paraded as the totem symbol of the privileged and the powerful."<sup>1</sup> Now, in a postcolonial non-Western Christianity, real flesh-and-blood readers attempt to "unravel the mystery of Jesus" under "new hermeneutical horizons."<sup>2</sup>

As a real reader myself, I also attempt to unravel the mystery of Jesus under my own hermeneutical horizon, that of borders and hybrid identities. As a native from the borderlands—the U.S.-Mexico border—crossing borders has been a vital practice in my life. The ethos of the

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<sup>1</sup> R.S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Asian Faces of Jesus* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), viii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

borderlands has influenced me to see borders and boundaries not as off-limits signs, but as invitations to intersect and create new worlds and possibilities, where mixture itself becomes a new alternative. It is under this hermeneutical horizon that I undertake this present project.

Therefore, I want to believe that, if positive representations of Jesus brought liberating social and political transformation in the past, more positive readings of Jesus can continue to help in the process of liberation and decolonization today. In an imperfect world, one that is still predominantly androcentric and haunted by the ghost of imperialism, it is vital to develop new representations of Jesus that can be used to fracture the patriarchal and colonial discourses still insistently proclaimed as part and parcel of the Good News.

In the following pages I propose an alternative representation of Jesus, as a borderlander and hybrid being who contests his context to offer a new inclusive way of life. This representation seeks to go beyond the exclusively spiritual representations of Jesus by highlighting also the concrete and material aspects of the political act of incarnation. It is also an invitation to pragmatically engage the Johannine Jesus as a model for

political change and social transformation.

In order to reach my goal I have organized this project in four chapters, each aiming to provide a particular argument to support my thesis. In the first chapter, I examine the representation of Jesus in the *Gospel of John*. Using theories of representation as critical lens, I survey the methodological approaches used by Johannine scholarship to interpret and represent Jesus. I then present a sample of representations to show how, different readers, using different approaches, in different cultural backgrounds, render particular representations of Jesus which are inevitably subjective. I conclude with a summary addressing some of the political ramifications of such representations for social transformation.

In chapter 2, I survey cultural studies as the methodological ground for my interpretive model for biblical criticism. I provide a historical background of cultural studies and demarcate some of its foundations. Based on some postulates from cultural studies I define the concept of hybrid identity using my Mexican-American context, and establish my hybridity as a platform to develop both, a hermeneutical lens and a reading strategy for this project.

In chapter 3, I offer my representation of Jesus as a



hybrid being and a borderlander in the *Gospel of John*. I construct this representation by applying the reading strategy developed in chapter 2 to two passages from the Gospel of John. First, I analyze the Prologue to map Jesus' hybrid identity as borderlander and present his border-crossing practice as a strategy for survival and subversion. Second, I present an exegesis of the story of the Woman Accused of adultery, to establish Jesus as a borderlander breaking down the patriarchal discourse and offering an opportunity for social transformation.

Finally, chapter 4 turns by way of conclusion to the political ramifications of Jesus' hybridity as a strategy for survival for minorities groups and as a model for social and political change.

In our postcolonial, hybrid world, where countless political and geographical borderlands are continuously offered by our multicontextual reality, interdependency and integration are not far from our reach if we can realize the potential of liminal zones and third-spaces, if we are open to believe with Gloria Anzaldúa that "the borderlands are the privileged locus of hope for a better world."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Scott Michaelsen and David E. Johnson, eds., *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 3.

## CHAPTER I

### REPRESENTATIONS OF JESUS IN JOHANNINE STUDIES

#### Introduction

Beginning in the late 1970s with the emergence of literary criticism in biblical studies, Johannine scholarship has been undergoing a significant transformation in terms of its theoretical and methodological approaches.<sup>1</sup> The new interpretive paradigms, which have surfaced as counterparts of the traditional historical view, reflect the socio-political and cultural complexities of a postmodern world. These changes have brought to the field not only competing modes of discourse and distinctive reading strategies but also the presence of minority voices. These new readers interpret texts in ways that are rather different from the traditional Western scholarship that dominated the academic world of biblical studies in the past

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<sup>1</sup> For a functional exposition of the changes in critical paradigms within Johannine scholarship see: F.F. Segovia, "The Tradition History of the Fourth Gospel," in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith*, eds. R.A. Culpepper and C.C. Black (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 179-89. For literary readings see M.W.G. Stibbe, comp., *The Gospel of John as Literature: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives* (Leiden, New York, Koln: E.J. Brill, 1993); A.R. Culpepper and F. F. Segovia, eds., *The Fourth Gospel from a Literary Perspective*, *Semeia* 54 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991); F.F. Segovia, ed., "What is John?" *Vol. I: Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996); F.F. Segovia, ed., "What is John?" *Vol. II: Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998). For contextual postcolonial readings see, Musa W. Dube and Jeffery L. Staley, eds., *John and Postcolonialism: Travel, Space and Power, Bible and Postcolonialism*, 7 (London: Continuum, 2002).

century.<sup>2</sup>

Following these dramatic changes in interpretive paradigms, and using theories of representation as critical lenses, my aim in this chapter is to examine select textual images of Jesus produced within Johannine scholarship and unveil the intricacies of their formation. In doing so, I seek to understand the building-blocks of the representation processes that operate behind the Jesus-images; particularly the political and personal strategies involved in such constructions.

This chapter has four major sections and a conclusion. Section one, an exposition of the main theories of representation, serves as the analytical background against which I will appraise the selected textual images of Jesus from the *Gospel of John*. In section two, using the above-explained theories of representation as critical lenses, I examine the methodological approaches that have predominated among Johannine scholars, the scaffolding of their interpretations and representations of Jesus. In this section I also review their critical approaches, paying

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<sup>2</sup> Regarding some of the different ways of reading emerging from minority voices see Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); also, R.S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Voices From The Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, Revised and Expanded Third Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006). For an extended explanation on the shift of critical paradigms, including the appearance of minority voices see, F.F. Segovia, "'And They Began to Speak in Other Tongues': Competing Modes of Discourse in Contemporary Biblical Criticism," in *Reading from This Place. Volume 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, eds., F.F. Segovia and M.A. Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 1-32.

attention to the type of reader involved in the construction process, as well as the underlying concepts of text and location of meaning. In section three, I summarize the historical profiles of Jesus produced by the legendary quest for the historical Jesus research.<sup>3</sup> The summary of the historical profiles that I include in this section serves as background for the Johannine representations of Jesus. In the fourth and last section, using the tools provided by the representation theories, I will evaluate select Johannine representations of Jesus to elucidate the processes by which such images were constructed. Ultimately, the results of such analysis will provide a pattern against which I will contrast and construct my personal representation of Jesus. For the purpose of analytic contrast I have divided this last section into three subsections that highlight the work of three main groups within Johannine scholarship: Western male scholars, Western female scholars, and Hispanic/Latin American scholars. Finally, by way of conclusion, I present a synopsis of the Johannine representations of Jesus, highlighting the elements of the production process surmised from them—as well as their political ramifications.

In the first section, which follows, I provide an overview of the basic principles of the three main theories of representation. These explain the processes by which we

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<sup>3</sup> Although the focus of this chapter is on Johannine representations of Jesus, it is essential to acknowledge those other areas of scholarship such as Synoptic Gospels, Christology and the Quest for the historical Jesus, that have produced important representations of Jesus, particularly the latter.

human beings tend to make sense of and explain the world that surrounds us.

### **Theories of representation**

Representation in concept and practice has had a long and contentious history. Its beginnings date to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, with the early literary theory that emerges from the ideas of Plato and Aristotle, who shared the common position that literature was the representation of life. For Aristotle, representation was an important human activity, and the arts were the main modes of representation.<sup>4</sup> For Plato, representations were "mere substitutes for the things themselves . . . may be false or illusory . . . and they may represent bad persons and actions, encouraging imitation of evil."<sup>5</sup> For this reason, Plato proposes, in his *Republic* or *Ideal State*, that the government should regulate representations.

Plato's concern about the power of representations to promote the imitation of evil has been present in almost every society or generation that has sought to regulate and restrain the production of representations—linguistic or iconic—in the name of religion, moral standards, and social or cultural traditions. Representations can be powerful mechanisms of control; they can influence people and produce

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<sup>4</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, "Representation" in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. F. Lentricchia and T. McLaughlin, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

political change. As W.J.T. Mitchell puts it, "even purely aesthetic representations of fictional persons and events can never be completely divorced from political and ideological questions."<sup>6</sup>

Language is used to represent the world via three main theories or approaches: the reflective, the intentional, and the constructionist. This last approach has two major models: the semiotic, influenced by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure; and the discursive, associated with the philosopher and historian Michel Foucault.<sup>7</sup>

Before describing these three approaches, a working definition of representation is in order. According to Stuart Hall, "representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people."<sup>8</sup> As simple as this definition might seem, the process of producing and exchanging meaning within culture, is a complex one. To understand such process we need to elucidate three fundamental concepts—culture, meaning, and language—and how they contribute to the construction of representations.

Culture, as the site where meaning is produced and exchanged, is defined as a process, a set of practices rather than as a set of things; culture has to do with the

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<sup>6</sup> Mitchell, "Representation," 15.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Asa Berger, *Cultural Criticism. A Primer of Key Concepts* (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1995), 77.

<sup>8</sup> Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1997), 15.

shared values and meanings of a group or a society.<sup>9</sup> Within any particular culture, it is understood that there is always more than one way to interpret or represent reality.<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, what organizes and regulates our social practices and influences the way we behave within culture, are the cultural meanings that we, as participants in that culture, give to our material and abstract worlds. Through these meanings we create our own identity, and we define those meanings according to the ways in which we decide to represent them.<sup>11</sup> From a postmodern point of view, meaning is not something that can be found as an inherent characteristic of the material or abstract world, but rather, it is something that we construct. We produce meaning constantly, in any social interaction in which we take part.

Meaning is not fixed; it is always subject to contestation and negotiation because groups within society establish different meanings that they want to impose on others.<sup>12</sup> Individuals or groups fix meaning, and over time these fixed meanings seem so natural that we tend to see the thing, person, event, or word in question as possessing such

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<sup>9</sup> John Storey, *Cultural Studies and The Study of Popular Culture. Theories and Methods* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Hall, *Representation*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> E. Doyle McCarthy, *Knowledge as Culture. The new sociology of knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Storey, *Cultural Studies*, 4.

meaning in itself.

Meanings, therefore, as products of our subjectivity, are strongly tied to relations of power. They can deeply shape our lives depending on which side of the binaries we are standing, male/female, black/white, gay/straight, and which of those meanings are being socially favored, since they are constantly contested in the process of cultural interaction with one another.<sup>13</sup>

Just as we can only share culture through the meanings we create, we can only share meaning through our common access to language; language constructs meanings because it operates as a representational system that is set up within the limits of culture. Using language, we represent thoughts, ideas and feelings in culture.<sup>14</sup> "Language is the shared cultural 'space' in which the production of meaning through language—that is, representation—takes place. Representation is dialogic, it is interactive, is a double-sided process".<sup>15</sup>

If we integrate the concepts of culture, meaning and language, we can say that representation is a cultural practice that produces the meanings of the relations between the material things in the world and their mental concepts in our minds.<sup>16</sup> Since we express these meanings through the signs of our shared code, language, they have the potential

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<sup>13</sup> Hall, *Representation*, 10.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.



to be meaningful for other people.<sup>17</sup> However, because they are social constructs and not innocent reflections of reality, they are emblematic of the relations of power that move society. As such, representation produces culture.

Representation, as production and exchange of meaning through language involves two processes and two systems. The first process takes place in our mind through our conceptual system. Through this mental process, we organize the world in our own particular ways, to explain reality to ourselves based on personal experiences and on the shared values with our culture.<sup>18</sup> These conceptual maps help us navigate the world that surrounds us. Although this process is particular, because it responds to a personal view of the world, it also shares some similarities with other members of our culture since we exist within the same context.

To exchange meaning, however, we need more than our mental representations. We need to translate those mental representations into common codes, into a common language. Language is the second system of representation involved in constructing meaning. The second process then is to translate our thoughts into words, sounds, and images that are organized into languages to express meanings and communicate our thoughts to other people.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Storey, *Cultural Studies*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Chris Barker, "Representation" in *The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies* (London-Thousand Oaks-New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2004), 177.

<sup>18</sup> Hall, *Representation*, 17-18.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

According to this view, two related systems of representation produce meaning in our culture. The first enables us to construct correspondences between things (people, objects, events, abstract ideas, etc.) and our system of concepts to give meaning to the world that surrounds us. The second depends on constructing correspondences between our conceptual maps and a set of signs, organized into various languages that stand for those concepts.<sup>20</sup>

The process that links the relation between things, concepts and signs is what we call representation. The three theories that explain representation of meaning through language are called reflective, intentional and constructionist (or constructivist) approaches. They respond to the questions: where do meanings come from? and how can we tell the true meaning of a word or image?<sup>21</sup>

### ***Reflective approach***

The reflective view sees meaning as an inherent part of the object, person, idea or event that is located in the real world. Therefore, language is used as an unambiguously descriptive system; it functions merely as a mirror. Thus, language reflects the true meaning of the thing that it describes; it is fixed and exists as such in the world.

This theory, which considers that language works by

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<sup>20</sup> Hall, *Representation*, 17-18.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

reflecting the truth that is already "out-there," fixed in the world, is also called mimetic.<sup>22</sup> The reflective approach has as its philosophical blueprint the platonic Theory of Forms.<sup>23</sup> For Plato, a Form exists for every object or quality in the realm of reality: Forms of dogs, cats, human beings, lakes, love, and honesty. He assumed that the objects were essentially the Forms and that the physical representations were mere shadows mimicking the Forms.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, the world of substance we inhabit is the temporary portrayal of the world of Forms—the realm of the real—which will vary under different circumstances.

Just as for Plato the Forms were the essences of the various objects in the world of matter, for the reflective theory true meaning is inherent to the persons, objects, ideas and events that are represented through the system of language.

### ***Intentional approach***

According to the intentional approach, meaning is thought to be located in the speaker or author. The speaker is the one who constructs a particular meaning of the world through the common system of language, but the words are defined by the author's intention. Although this could be

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<sup>22</sup> Hall, *Representation*, 24.

<sup>23</sup> On the theory of forms see Dave Robinson and Judy Groves, *Introducing Plato* (Victoria, Australia: Totem Books, 2000), 64-75; also Donald D. Palmer, *Structuralism and Poststructuralism for Beginners* (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, Inc., 1997), 15-16.

true at a certain level, since we use language in our unique way to confer a special meaning on things, it is also true that we cannot be the sole source of meaning in language, since we would not be able to express ourselves with a private language that no one else understands. If we want to communicate and share our unique meanings, we have to use the codes and common conventions of language.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Constructionist approach***

Moving away from the pre-established and personal uses of meaning and language, the constructionist approach recognizes the public and social character of language. It acknowledges that neither things in themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language. Rather, meaning is accepted as something society constructs, using representational systems: concepts and signs. The fact that there is a material world where things and people exist does not imply that they carry meaning in themselves. Under this theory, what gives meaning to the material world through the system of language, are the symbolic practices and processes of representation.<sup>26</sup>

Since meanings depend not on the material quality of the signs but on their symbolic function, meanings change historically and are never finally fixed. Meaning,

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<sup>24</sup> Robinson, *Plato*, 64; Palmer, *Structuralism*, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Storey, *Cultural Studies*, 8.

<sup>26</sup> Barker, "Representation," 177.

therefore, must involve an active interpretation process. Meaning has to be constantly read or interpreted because language is inevitably imprecise.<sup>27</sup> The meaning we adopt as readers is rarely, or rather never, the meaning given by the writer; therefore, interpretation is an essential aspect of the process by which we give and take meaning. The reader is as important as the writer in the production of meaning. We should bear in mind, however, that our interpretations will never produce the final moment of absolute truth,<sup>28</sup> nor the meaning expressed by the writer, since language on both ends, production and consumption is always imprecise.

Ultimately, representation is endless interpretation, always in flux due to the imprecise character of language. The phenomenologist philosopher Max Scheler argues that: "one cannot understand a person by its actions, but it is by knowing the person that one can understand its actions."<sup>29</sup> Postmodern theoretical debates on identity, language and representation would oppose Scheler's statement as essentialist and as presupposing the priority of the subject as an explanation for his/her actions. In my view, however, Scheler's statement can help us to appreciate that, one cannot of a certainty understand Jesus by reading the representations of him. Knowing the politics of representation assumed by the authors, can aid one in

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<sup>27</sup> Hall, *Representation*, 28.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>29</sup> Marcos Manuel Suances, *Max Scheler principios de una ética personalista* (Barcelona: Herder, 1976), 35.

understanding the claims of such representations, although not necessarily in understanding Jesus himself.

In the second section, which follows, I explore the methods and approaches that Johannine scholars have used to read the *Gospel of John*. These critical strategies have served as scaffolding for their representations of Jesus. As I point out the theory of representation at work in each of these approaches, I not only highlight the type of reader involved in the construction process but also note the underlying concepts of text and location of meaning that are important in tracking their ideological foundations.

#### **Interpretive discourses at work in Johannine studies**

Four critical paradigms have dominated biblical scholarship in general, and thus Johannine studies in particular, during the past 30 years: historical criticism, literary criticism, social-scientific criticism, and cultural studies.<sup>30</sup> The emergence of these four paradigms can be broadly explained as a direct result of historical and social changes. According to Fernando F. Segovia, the key catalysts in prompting the shift in paradigms have been the roles that culture and experience have played in the

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<sup>30</sup> For a detailed explanation on this particular view of biblical criticism following a model of four umbrella paradigms see F.F. Segovia, "'And They Began to Speak in Other Tongues': Competing Modes of Discourse in Contemporary Biblical Criticism," in *Reading from This Place. Volume 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, eds., F.F. Segovia and M.A. Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 1-32.

reading strategies.<sup>31</sup> As readers have come to acknowledge the inevitable influence of culture and experience in their readings, they have also admitted the non-universal view of their perceptions. The focus of their approaches has evolved and readers have moved from the illusory universal objectivism inherited from the Enlightenment to the chaotic plural subjectivism of the postmodern period, socially conditioned and politically positioned.

This change in focus is evident as a backdrop for the four main critical paradigms, and it can be explained as a three-stage process. Each of the basic elements involved in the reading process—author, text and reader—represents a stage. The author implies the past, complex world behind the text; the text represents the literary, rhetorical and ideological construct; and the reader signifies the complex world of the present that re-enacts the text and its past.

In stage one, influenced by the rational and scientific thinking that emerged from the Enlightenment, Johannine studies focused mainly on the author: the historical context of author and text, the history of traditions in the text. Thus, Edgar Krentz argues that "The Bible was no longer the criterion for the writing of history; rather history had become the criterion for understanding the Bible"<sup>32</sup> This first focus is represented by the historical critical paradigm. Owing to the influence of the scientific

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<sup>31</sup> Segovia, *They Began to Speak*, 1-32.

<sup>32</sup> Edgar Krentz, *The Historical Critical Method* (Philadelphia:

empiricism and its emphasis on semiotics, Johannine studies next moved its focus to the text. The text seen as an artistic work that could be isolated from the context of its production and studied in its parts, could become a literary universe that has a life of its own. With the text as its focus, biblical criticism moved toward the literary critical paradigm. Finally, in a third stage, due to the influence of the postmodern thinking of the last two decades, Johannine studies has been changing its focus toward the reader, the subject who demands to be heard and approaches the text from a personal social location. These readers construct meaning from a particular cultural and political situation as they interact with the text.

The following subsections outline the status of the four main critical paradigms within Johannine scholarship.

### ***Historical criticism***

Influenced by nineteenth century positivism, historical criticism focuses mainly on the historical context of author and text. The reader, labeled as an objective observer, is considered capable of retrieving the text's original meaning in a quasi-scientific way.

Within the historical-critical paradigm, the idea of a Fourth Gospel that can be read, first, as a source for the historical situation of the evangelist and, second, as a source for the events of Jesus' time, led Johannine studies

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Fortress Press, 1975), 30.



mainly in two directions: the study of the traditions and formation of the text and the history of the Johannine community. In the first and more textual emphasis of Johannine studies, the contributions of Rudolf Bultmann<sup>33</sup> and Robert Fortna stand out<sup>34</sup>. Their theories regarding the different stages and sources found in the composition of the text forever changed the concept of a one-stage coherent redaction of the Gospel. In the second and more theological/ideological approach, one which focuses on the study of the Johannine community, three main perspectives can be seen. In the first, and presenting his view from an ecclesiological perspective, Raymond Brown<sup>35</sup> has argued for the theory of accommodation, noting that the situation of conflict present in the Gospel is the product of a mixed community that was trying to integrate a variety of different views. Second, George W. MacRae<sup>36</sup> used the theory of syncretic religious traditions to argue that the author was trying to integrate symbols that were common to different religious traditions as a way to emphasize the universal character of Jesus. A third position advances the

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<sup>33</sup> Rudolf K. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford, England: B. Blackwell, 1971).

<sup>34</sup> Robert T. Fortna, *The Fourth Gospel and its predecessor: from narrative source to present Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

<sup>35</sup> Raymond Edward Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966-70); and R.E. Brown, *The community of the beloved disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

<sup>36</sup> George W. MacRae, *Invitation to John: a commentary on the Gospel of John with complete text from the Jerusalem Bible* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1978).

idea that the conflicts reflected in the Gospel are the product of a crisis between Christians and Jews in the context of the synagogue. In this debate, employing form criticism, Louis Martyn has argued for a more Jewish-Christian context of the Gospel. He sees in the text a two-level drama: first, the story of Jesus, and then the story of the Johannine Community.<sup>37</sup>

Under this historical-critical approach, blazoning the idea that "the text should be interpreted in terms of the context in which it was composed"<sup>38</sup> the roles of culture and experience are relevant only at a textual level. It is the author and text, not the reader that should be fully immersed in the culture of production in order to retrieve the reality mentioned in the text. Therefore, the reader should remain neutral and objective, reading a fully contextualized text while trying to restrain all subjective interaction with the text.

Judging by this concept of an almost-direct co-relation between text and world, the theory of representation that seems to be in use within the historical critical paradigms is the mimetic or reflective theory. As mentioned in the previous section, reflective theory assumes that meaning lies in the real world and that language functions like a mirror reflecting the true meaning as it already exists in the world. In fact, historical criticism has considered the

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<sup>37</sup> J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1979).

text a window to the past—assuming that what we see in it is what existed in the past. This perspective, although interested in the history of the text, seems to ignore, ironically, the historical changes in the ways in which the world has been represented through cultures and languages.

### ***Literary criticism***

Shifting its emphasis from author to text, biblical criticism next moves to literary approaches, and centers its interest on the rhetoric of the written work. The text, as a literary universe, is isolated from the context of its production and is studied as a coherent unity—a meaningful whole that responds to an internal structure. In this paradigm, the reader is still objective; however, under particular lenses, such as feminist readings and reader-response, questions about the social location of the reader begin to emerge and meaning is also placed in the hands of the reader and not only in the text.

With the application of literary criticism, Johannine studies enter what could be considered a second stage. The focus now moves from the author to the text. Under this paradigm, a more textual-formalist approach is applied to the Gospel. For example, Alan Culpepper<sup>39</sup> has studied the Gospel from the point of view of narrative criticism, paying attention to such features as plot, characters, point of

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>39</sup> R. Alan. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: a study in*

view, implied reader and author, and so on. D. Moody Smith<sup>40</sup> has also presented a text-centered perspective through a canonical reading that allows the reader to interpret the *Gospel of John* in the textual context of the New Testament. Robert Smith<sup>41</sup> argues for the opposite side, saying that we should read *John* by itself, independent of a consideration of the other Gospels. This involves a non-canonical approach to studying Jesus, which Smith achieves by centering his understanding of the Gospel and of Jesus on Jesus' first public words in *John*. Robert Kysar<sup>42</sup> also employs a literary approach to the Gospel by following the narrative plot line and using the implied reader and author, taking the text in its present form.

The role of the text within the literary paradigm is central; however, such scholars as Craig Koester<sup>43</sup>, Jeff Staley<sup>44</sup>, and Robert Kysar<sup>45</sup> use a reader-response approach that inclines more towards the reader. Even using approaches such as narrative, rhetorical, reader-response, and deconstructionist criticism, the interaction between text

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*literary design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

<sup>40</sup> D. Moody Smith, *John among the Gospels: the relationship in twentieth-century research* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

<sup>41</sup> Robert H. Smith, "Seeking Jesus in the Gospel of John," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 15, (1988): 48-55.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1976).

<sup>43</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the fourth Gospel: meaning, mystery, community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

<sup>44</sup> Jeffrey Lloyd Staley, *The print's first kiss: a rhetorical investigation of the implied reader in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

<sup>45</sup> Kysar, *Maverick Gospel*.

and reader remains the same as under historical criticism: objective and universal.<sup>46</sup> Under this second paradigm, culture and experience continue to have a secondary role; the text is seen as a self-contained universe, independent of reader, author and socio-historical context.<sup>47</sup>

Although in the literary paradigm the text has preeminence over the author and the historical context of the text, it is still possible to say that a certain degree of reflective theory is in use.<sup>48</sup> The text is treated as a universe that has trapped the meaning of some external reality that can be freed by the reader. By following the structure, plot, characterization, and all other literary features, the reader is able to uncover the meaning already defined in the text as a reflection of a distant world. This uncovered universe can also be seen as the creation of an author who intended to send a specific message using a particular language. The representation of that literary universe lies in the author's use of rhetorical devices and personal agenda. Once more, this is an illusory view of representation, language and meaning, which reminds us of the intentional theory of representation, where the meaning is placed in the author's intention. If it were possible to unlock directly the author's intended meaning simply by following the literary devices used in the text, there would

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<sup>46</sup> Segovia, *They began to Speak*, 18.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>48</sup> Hall, *Representation*, 24.

not be so many interpretations of the same Johannine texts studied through the lens of the literary paradigm.

### ***Social-scientific criticism***

Within social-scientific criticism, with its interest on the cultural behavior of society and the individual, the focus in biblical criticism moves a little further towards the reader. Now the reader is seen as a subject informed of her/his ability to construct meaning(s) from the text. The text, however, is still somehow considered as a window to the past. We could say that it is a two-way mirror because we can see glimpses of the past and also the reflection of the present reader superimposed on the past. The methods employed to read the past come from the sociological and anthropological models of contemporary societies.

Using the tools of the social sciences—such as sociology, anthropology, sectarian studies, and Mediterranean studies—a number of scholars have studied the *Gospel of John* from a cultural-historical view. Textual studies with this focus examine not only the cultural traits of the community, its language, and its relational patterns of behavior, but also other social codes that can be seen in the text when filtered through these methodological lenses. Jerome Neyrey<sup>49</sup> takes a socio-scientific approach using sectarian models to study the development of the Johannine

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<sup>49</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, *An ideology of revolt: John's Christology in social-science perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

community. He says that, at first, the Johannine Community supported a mission to the Samaritans and Gentiles. Later, however, this community became closed and started a revolt against the synagogue and other Christians. Norman Petersen<sup>50</sup> studies the Gospel's use of language—a sociological study pinpointing the different levels of language that *John* uses to identify the various groups in the story. David Rensberger<sup>51</sup> talks about the Johannine community from a sectarian background as well. But he also considers the social and political elements that speak to the oppressed situation that the community was living in. Rensberger tries to build up the elements that can help John's Gospel be seen as a text that speaks to those in situations of oppression and, therefore, as a text that can bring liberation.

Under the social-scientific paradigm, the interaction between the reader and the text reveals a complex dialogue because of the interdisciplinary approaches that are used. We see at work the more emphatic role of culture and experience, and a more contextualized text when it comes to approaches such as sociology of religion, cultural anthropology, and comparative societal studies; however, the reader still does not need to be fully contextualized to interact with the fully contextualized text.

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<sup>50</sup> Norman R. Petersen, *The Gospel of John and the sociology of light: language and characterization in the fourth Gospel* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press, 1993).

<sup>51</sup> David K. Rensberger, *Johannine faith and liberating community*

The representation theories that I see in use here are the reflective and the intentional. The idea that it is possible to go back to the historical setting of the text's composition to interpret the text according to its context is guided by the reflective theory. The meaning is believed to be located somewhere in the past, but, at the same time, the degree of authorial intent at play in the background reminds us of the intentional theory of representation.

### ***Cultural studies: a first glance***

With its focus on the reader, cultural studies has advanced in biblical studies the role of a postmodern self-conscious reader, politically engaged and ideologically positioned. In addition, according to Segovia, cultural studies seeks to integrate within biblical criticism "the historical, formalist, and socio-cultural questions and concerns of the other paradigms on a different key, with the situated and interested reader and interpreter always at its core."<sup>52</sup>

Under the cultural studies paradigm, the reader's interaction with the text becomes a more intimate dialogue than ever before. The use of interdisciplinary approaches and the emphatic role of culture and experience demand both

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(Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988).

<sup>52</sup> F.F. Segovia, "Cultural Studies and Contemporary Biblical Criticism: Ideological Criticism as Mode of Discourse," in *Reading from This Place. Volume 2: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*, eds., F.F. Segovia and M.A. Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 8.



a contextualized text in its setting of production as well as its context of consumption. Also required is a fully contextualized reader who can interact with this fully contextualized text. With a self-conscious reader at work in this paradigm, the representation theory that seems to be implicit is the constructionist approach. Meaning is not assumed to reside in the text or in the historical context of composition; rather, the reader uses the system of language to construct meaning as she interacts with the text.

This paradigm which emerged in the last decade of the twenty-century has not been explored as fully as the previous ones; however, the number of scholars applying the critical approaches encompassed under the umbrella of cultural studies is growing. Using the perspective of postcolonial studies and her social location as an African woman from Botswana, Musa W. Dube rereads the story of the Samaritan woman to expose how "mission texts tend to befriend imperializing ideologies by authorizing the cultural subjugation of foreign lands and people."<sup>53</sup> Another politically situated reader, Zipporah G. Glass, using her experience and heterogeneous identity of a former Afro-deutsch and now African-American woman, approaches the *Gospel of John* with a postcolonial critical view arguing that "the discourse of power in *John* 15:1-8 advances a

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<sup>53</sup> Musa W. Dube, "Reading for Decolonization (*John* 4:1-42)," *Semeia* 74 (1996): 37.

construct of citizenship for establishing positions of inclusion and exclusion."<sup>54</sup> According to Glass' reading, such a construct of citizenship is what helps create the homogenized identity that is needed in the modern act of nation-building. Other recent works that explore issues of travel, space, power and hybridity—from the perspective of postcolonial subjects—in the *Gospel of John* are included in the collection edited by Dube and Staley.<sup>55</sup> As stated before, readers under the umbrella paradigm of cultural studies read as real readers, aware of their subjectivity and their political choices. They bring to the interpretation of the *Gospel of John* their culturally situated experiences.

Before evaluating some of the Johannine representations of Jesus using the tools from the representation theories discussed in section one, and the analysis of critical paradigms from section two, we will add a third lens through which representations of Jesus from Johannine scholarship could be read as part of a broader research of Jesus: the findings of the quest for the historical Jesus.

The following section offers a succinct history of the representations of Jesus that have emerged from the quest for the historical Jesus. This academic endeavor of

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<sup>54</sup> Zipporah G. Glass, "Building toward 'Nation-ness' in the Vine: A Postcolonial Critique of John 15:1-8," in *John and Postcolonialism: Travel, Space and Power*, ed. Musa W. Dube and Jeffery L. Staley (London: Continuum, 2002), 153.

<sup>55</sup> Musa W. Dube and Jeffery L. Staley, editors, *John and Postcolonialism: Travel, Space and Power* (London: Continuum, 2002).

"freeing" Jesus from the constraints of literary constructs seeks to present him as a "real" historical figure.

### **Representations from the quest for the historical Jesus**

The roots of the contemporary quest for the historical Jesus spread in many different directions; its history comes from diverse places. However, given the rationalist spirit behind the quest, I believe its longest roots extend from the Enlightenment. With the emergence of rationalist biblical criticism grounded in Baruch Spinoza's exegetical method, the reading of the Bible and the images of Jesus began to change at the end of the seventeenth century. Through Spinoza's work, which advocated reading the Bible as any other literary work, disconnected from its dogmatic tradition and affirming "the meaning of the Bible must fit the experience of reality, as we know it,"<sup>56</sup> the Bible became the object of historical science. This shift marked the beginning of the historical-critical method, which shocked the Church of the eighteenth century and served as a foundation for Hermann Samuel Reimarus' critical representation of Jesus. Reimarus' work is considered by some scholars to be the beginning of the modern quest for the historical Jesus.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture. Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs* (Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2002), 42.

<sup>57</sup> Barry D. Smith, *History of the Quest for The Historical Jesus*, <http://abu.nb.ca/Courses/NTIntro/LifeJ/HistoryQuest.htm>

The quest for the historical Jesus can be explained, thus far, as a three-phase endeavor: the original quest, the new quest and the third quest. This quest, initiated two centuries ago, has been one field of study that has contributed prolifically to the almost 2000-year-old endeavor of literarily representing Jesus.

### ***First quest***

Running away from the unreal and "inhuman" Christ of faith confectioned by the institutionalized Church of the fourth and fifth centuries, the questers of the historical Jesus decided to strip away the cloths of dogma and faith from Christ, hoping to find the human Jesus they assumed was hidden in the Gospels. It is with such spirit that in the nineteenth century, Reimarus, one of the main figures from the original quest, declares that Jesus "was to be seen in political terms. Jesus had messianic pretensions and saw himself as a future king of this new kingdom."<sup>58</sup> According to this view, Jesus was in ideological and religious alignment with his culture in having the peculiar eschatological worldview that led him to enter Jerusalem and intend to seize the power as a worldly Messiah.<sup>59</sup> Reimarus claims that, since this supposed plan failed, the disciples had to salvage Jesus' original effort by creating the

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<sup>58</sup> James Carleton Paget, "Quests for the historical Jesus," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*, ed., Markus Bockmuehl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 142.

<sup>59</sup> Harrisville, *The Bible in Modern Culture*, 56.

"fantasy of a merely spiritually suffering Savior."<sup>60</sup> This is how Reimarus explains the confusing contradictions that he finds in the Gospels between Jesus' ideas and the disciples'.

After Reimarus, several scholars developed their own versions of Jesus. These "others were less pessimistic and wrote lives of Jesus that were humanistic in flavor . . . and sought to re-create Jesus' mental and social outlook."<sup>61</sup>

Another important figure of the original quest was D.F. Strauss, thanks to whom "the contrast between 'the historical Jesus' and 'the Christ of faith' initially came to prominence"<sup>62</sup> after his critique of F.D.E. Schleiermacher's Jesus. Strauss declared Schleiermacher's Christ "as little a real man as [. . .] the Christ of the church."<sup>63</sup> Schleiermacher had pronounced *John's* portrait of Jesus as the most reliable and authoritative, based on his affirmation that the author of the Gospel was John the son of Zebedee and, therefore, a faithful eyewitness of Jesus' life.<sup>64</sup>

Two more Jesus-images stand out from the first phase of this historical quest: the first is Ernest Renan's Jesus,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>61</sup> Paget, "Quests," 144.

<sup>62</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *A New Perspective on Jesus. What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 17.

<sup>63</sup> D.F. Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History: A Critique of Schleiermacher's "Life of Jesus,"* Lives of Jesus Series (1865; ET: Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 4-5; cited by Dunn, *New Perspective*, 17.

portrayed as supporter of "pure worship, a religion without priests and external observances, resting entirely on the feelings of the heart."<sup>65</sup> The second is Adolf Harnack's Jesus, "whose gospel centered on the fatherhood of God, the infinite value of the human soul, and the importance of love."<sup>66</sup> As these idealistic reconstructions show, the goal of the first questers was to recover the Jesus of history hidden behind the Christ of faith. The main result of this quest was the realization that the Gospels were products of faith, and not chronological or historical accounts. By the end of the nineteenth century, the consensus of the questers is summarized in Strauss' conclusion that "in the Fourth Gospel the Jesus of history had already been lost behind the Christ of faith."<sup>67</sup>

The original quest came to its end when, at the beginning of the twentieth-century, the works of Albert Schweitzer and Martin Kähler challenged the liberal lives of Jesus portrayed by the first questers, showing their biases and subjectivity in creating liberal Jesuses with whom they felt comfortable.<sup>68</sup> According to Schweitzer and Kähler, who studied Jesus in the light of his religious-historical context, Jesus was "an eschatological enthusiast and messianic pretender who died in dramatic fashion on the

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<sup>64</sup> Dunn, *New Perspective*, 17.

<sup>65</sup> Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus* (1863; ET: London: Trubner, 1864), 87-88; cited by Dunn, *New Perspective*, 18.

<sup>66</sup> Dunn, *New Perspective*, 18.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

cross trying to force God to bring in his longed-for kingdom."<sup>69</sup>

### ***Second quest***

Convinced that the Gospels offered no reliable accounts that could be the source for the historical figure of Jesus, the second phase of the quest shifted focus. In the 1950s, in the wake of the Second World War and influenced by the existentialist philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger, two of Bultmann's students—Ernst Käsemann and Günther Bornkamm—began the new quest for Jesus.<sup>70</sup> They believed, just as Bultmann did, that the New Testament writings said very little about Jesus the person and his life, because they were not interested in those details. What mattered to Bultmann was "Christ's teaching that confronts us with the question of how we should interpret our own existence."<sup>71</sup>

With such an existentialist message, Günther Bornkamm established as the task of this new quest "to seek the history *in* the *Kerygma* of the Gospels, and in this history to seek the *Kerygma*."<sup>72</sup> He understood that in the accounts

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<sup>68</sup> Paget, "Quests," 145.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Barry D. Smith, *History of the Quest for The Historical Jesus*, <http://abu.nb.ca/Courses/NTIntro/LifeJ/HistoryQuest.htm>

<sup>71</sup> William J. La Due, *Jesus among the Theologians. Contemporary Interpretations of Christ* (Harrisburg, PS: Trinity Press International, 2001), 59.

<sup>72</sup> Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (1956; ET: London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1960), 14, 21, 23; cited by Dunn, *New Perspective*, 20.

of the Gospels there was no "historical interest apart from faith."<sup>73</sup> The focus then became more the reconstruction of the historical context of production in which the message about Jesus was presented, the *Kerygma*, rather than the reconstruction of the historical Jesus per se. Other scholars participating in this new quest include James Robinson, Joachim Jeremias, a conservative who advocated for the historical-critical method, T. W. Manson and C. H. Dodd.<sup>74</sup>

### ***Third quest***

By the late 1970s, after the decline of existentialism and a period of "no quest," a renaissance in Jesus scholarship started the third quest.<sup>75</sup> Although this third quest has been characterized by its widely contrasting representations of Jesus and lack of a common methodology, Marcus Borg highlights three points of consensus among these questers: the image of Jesus as an eschatological prophet has faded, a new image of Jesus as teacher has emerged, and the social world of Jesus has become central to the quest.<sup>76</sup>

In the words of Robert Funk, founder of the Jesus Seminar and active in the third quest, the goal of the this quest has been to "set Jesus free from the scriptural . . .

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Barry D. Smith, *History of the Quest for The Historical Jesus*, <http://abu.nb.ca/Courses/NTIntro/LifeJ/HistoryQuest.htm>

<sup>75</sup> Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 5.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 7-10.



prisons in which we have incarcerated him."<sup>77</sup> Some of the divergent portraits of Jesus that emerge from this third quest are John Dominic-Crossan's Jewish Cynic Peasant;<sup>78</sup> E.P. Sanders' Restoration Eschatology Prophet;<sup>79</sup> Burton Mack's Hellenistic-type Cynic Sage;<sup>80</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's Egalitarian Wisdom Prophet;<sup>81</sup> Richard Horsley's Social Prophet;<sup>82</sup> and Marcus Borg's Spirit Person.<sup>83</sup>

In the end, it seems that the binary logic that fueled the battle of the Christ of faith vs. the Jesus of history set in motion by the quest for the historical Jesus has killed both figures leaving no winner. The result has been in some cases an "a-historical" Jesus, dispossessed from his Jewishness and the community of faith that constructed him through the Gospels' narratives. In the opposite extreme, in a similar position, the Christ of faith became "unbelievable." Because of his extreme divinization he was

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<sup>77</sup> Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 300; cited by Dunn, *New Perspective*, 21.

<sup>78</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus. The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1992).

<sup>79</sup> Contrary to the consensus mentioned by Borg, about the disappearance of the eschatological prophet for scholars of the third quest, we see that Sanders continues to highlight the eschatological aspect of Jesus' mission. See E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

<sup>80</sup> Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

<sup>81</sup> Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Chritisin Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

<sup>82</sup> Richard Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

<sup>83</sup> Hershel Shanks, ed., *The Search for Jesus. Modern scholarship looks at the Gospels* (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society,

removed from the context of his incarnation. Just as the extremes of too much light or too little light prevent us from seeing clearly, polarizing the identity of Jesus/Christ prevents us from seeing the spectrum of the hybrid identities offered by this tension.

Although I am not pursuing a comparative study between the representations of Jesus presented by the quest for the historical Jesus and those from Johannine scholarship, I will highlight the correlation between them at the end of this chapter.

In the fourth section, which follows, I analyze representations of Jesus that come from the *Gospel of John*. Using the lenses of the previous sections, I explore each reading, characterization or representation of Jesus in search of its rhetorical character, ideological motivation and the historical constraints imposed by the subjectivity of the readers who interpret the text. Although the reader always experiences some absence and distance through representation, due to the breach between the object and its representation, it is equally true that "representation does give us something in return for the tax it demands, the gap it opens. One of the things it gives us is literature."<sup>84</sup> Alternatively, this literature gives us the opportunity to keep filling the gaps in search of new and liberating images of Jesus.

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1994), 89.

<sup>84</sup> Mitchell, "Representation," 21.

### **Representations of Jesus from the *Gospel of John***

There are as many representations of Jesus in Johannine studies as there are readers interpreting the Jesus in the *Gospel of John*. As different as the interpretations may be, it is possible to identify common features that help categorize the representations into paradigmatic models. The first, which I call the theological model, is suggested by the particular titles used by the Fourth Evangelist to refer to Jesus. The second, which I label the literary model, results from the rhetorical devices used by the writer. The dynamic of hide-and-seek can be identified in the course of the story of Jesus found in *John*. A third, or socio-political, model uses characteristic elements of the cultural environment—in which the Gospel is assumed to have been written—to categorize Jesus as a sage or a cynic, a political leader or a revolutionary. The fourth, a reader-oriented model, consists of the interpretations of readers who, aware of their own agendas and the dangers of fixing a particular historical label on Jesus, advocate for a more contextual representation—one that remains coherent with the text as a whole and with the Johannine milieu, but which responds primarily to the socio-cultural perspective of the flesh-and-blood reader in question.

The following paragraphs review representations of Jesus within Johannine Western male scholarship, Western feminist scholarship, and Hispanic/Latin American scholarship. Presented are 10 sketches of Jesus based on

the *Gospel of John*, organized according to the approaches used and explained in terms of reader, text, location of meaning and theory of representation.

### ***Western male scholarship***

Western men have produced the vast majority of Johannine scholarship, and the material can be clearly demarcated according to the critical paradigms they have used. I have divided this section in three parts, each according to the critical paradigm applied.

### ***Historical criticism***

Under this paradigm, the images of Jesus presented by male scholars are read mainly against the historical context of the production of the text and the ideological background of the Old Testament. The focus has been on the Gospel's Christological titles—Son of God, Son of Man, the Son, Christ, Messiah—and Jesus' role as prophet, which, according to John O'Grady, is the best way "to grasp the mature thought of the author(s)."<sup>85</sup> By and large, historic-critical scholars do not explore the socio-political and socio-cultural ramifications of these images. Their studies do not take any specific stance or political-cultural position. Since they consider their views to be objective, most of their images of Jesus are posted in a historical

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<sup>85</sup> John F. O'Grady, *Models of Jesus* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 2.

perspective that belongs to the story of the text, without any correlation to the present. Ignoring that such historical views of the text are constructions.

*Jesus, the Revealer.-*

One of these well-known images of Jesus, which has been criticized as a-historical, is the one presented by Rudolf Bultmann.<sup>86</sup> According to Bultmann, who reads the *Fourth Gospel* through the lens of the Gnostic Redeemer myth, Jesus in *John* speaks mainly as a revealer sent from God. He is not the Rabbi who discusses the Law, nor the prophet who announces the kingdom of God, but he is the Revealer.<sup>87</sup> As Revealer, he is not just any man, but a very concrete human being in history: Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>88</sup> The Revealer is not a teacher: he does not transmit something, but he calls people to himself.<sup>89</sup>

Jesus reveals nothing except the fact that he is the Revealer,<sup>90</sup> and as such, he is the one whom the world awaits and who brings in himself that which the world is longing for: life and truth as the reality by which human beings can exist; light as the whole transparency that illumines our

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<sup>86</sup> D. Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 19, 135.

<sup>87</sup> R. Bultmann, *Teología del Nuevo Testamento* (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1987), 420-487.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 486.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 458.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 484.

existence, making questions and doubts disappear.<sup>91</sup> That is why, for Bultmann, the core of *John's* message is expressed in *John* 1:14, "the Word became flesh" in a concrete human being, and that makes it unnecessary for *John* to explain a virginal birth or a pre-existent origin.

Although the Revealer is said to be a concrete man in history, we cannot respond to the question of why it should be Jesus, without destroying the scandal that the revelation in itself brings. The Jesus who reveals the glory of God is the same Word who became flesh; as such, he is not a model of the historical past but a constant and permanent presence. The historical Jesus, his human history, retains forever the meaning of being the revelation of God's glory.

The philosophical influence of the existentialism that Bultmann received from Martin Heidegger is evident in the Revealer for whom the worth of the individual "is determined by the decision he or she makes in the actual concrete circumstances of life to respond wholeheartedly to the will of God as it is revealed at that moment."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 487. This is Bultmann's existentialist representation of Jesus, the Revealer who guides us to a full knowledge of our present existence.

<sup>92</sup> La Due, *Jesus among the Theologians*, 59.

*Jesus, the Messiah.-*

With only two occurrences in the *Gospel of John* and, for that matter, the only two in the whole of the New Testament, the title of Messiah is little discussed in most Johannine commentaries. John Ashton and John Painter are among the few scholars who have focused their studies on Jesus as Messiah. According to Ashton, the title of Messiah looks back to the past, recalling a glory achieved and the fulfillment of a prophecy. It is a Jewish concept that can only be understood when read against the religious tradition found in the Hebrew Bible. By definition, the Messiah is a man anointed and sent by God at the end of time to help God establish God's kingdom. The Messiah is seen as the ideal successor to King David and, as such, is associated with the restoration of the kingdom of Judah.

Building on the assumption that the Fourth Gospel was written as a missionary tract to draft Jews from the Diaspora to the new faith, Ashton affirms that Jesus is portrayed to the Jews as the promised Messiah, the one who is coming to fulfill all their expectations; he is the prophet Moses foretold, the King of Israel.<sup>93</sup> The miracles of Jesus are signs that point to the fulfillment of prophecy. They are written, as *John 20:31* says, so that we may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

In a similar way, John Painter affirms that Jesus is

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<sup>93</sup> John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 256.

perceived as Messiah because of the signs that he performed. Painter's point of departure for developing this image of Jesus rests on the widespread messianic expectations that were present at the time of Jesus. Painter traces throughout the Gospel what he calls the quest for the Messiah, which is also seen as a quest that follows the different stages that the Johannine community lived in its transition as a group segregated from the synagogue.<sup>94</sup> Messiahship in *John*, according to Painter, is interpreted as the unique divine Sonship of Jesus, who is the emissary from the Father.

According to Ashton, Messiah and Son of God are twin titles not usually distinguished as separate titles: the first "Messiah" points to the Jewish past of the Johannine community, while the latter "Son of God" points to the Christian future. In fact, it assumes in *John* a claim to divinity that was probably the claim that was rejected by the Jewish community as blasphemous.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> J. Painter, *The Quest for the Messiah* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 468.



*Jesus, the prophet like Moses.-*

A third historical representation of Jesus inferred from the *Gospel of John* is that of a prophet similar to Moses. Following his theory of the two-level drama, J. Louis Martyn identifies in *John* a Christological movement that reveals the stages in the growth of the community's faith, a Christian group that is experiencing a rupture from its Jewish context.<sup>96</sup> For Martyn, the Gospel depicts the conversation between the church and the synagogue and how *John* leads the community to a more adequate faith by moving them from the expectations of the Prophet-Messiah like Moses to the presence of the Son of Man.<sup>97</sup>

Arguing for a Samaritan influence on the redaction of John's Gospel, Marie-Emile Boismard also speaks of a Christology in evolution. He presents the movement from Jesus the prophet, like Moses, to Jesus the new Moses. He says that the Gospel, written to convert Samaritans, not only proves that Jesus fulfills their eschatological aspirations, but it actually shows the superiority of Jesus over Moses.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ashton, 240-41.

<sup>96</sup> Martyn, 102.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>98</sup> M.E. Boismard, *Moses or Jesus. An Essay in Johannine Christology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 132-33.

*Jesus, the Sovereign.-*

Conceived under the jurisdiction of the Roman Empire, the Fourth Gospel was intended to encourage those Christians experiencing oppression and persecution at the time.<sup>99</sup> For Richard Cassidy, who poses the thesis of a Gospel consciously written with the imperial political power of Rome as a backdrop, the entire *Gospel of John* is permeated with the sovereignty of Jesus.<sup>100</sup> *John's* high Christology is meant to counteract the claims of sovereignty made by some Roman emperors with the claims of Jesus as sovereign.

Three main acclaim titles are highlighted throughout *John's* Gospel to consistently and thoroughly establish the superiority of Jesus' kingship over the Roman imperial officials who claimed divine powers for themselves. According to Cassidy, the same exact titles were bestowed upon various Roman emperors: Savior of the World, Lord, and Lord and God. The fact that *John's* final version of the Gospel includes those three titles prompts Cassidy to affirm that *John* consciously chose to integrate them into Jesus' identity. Jesus, as the Word of God, comes to the world entrusted with the mission of giving light and life to those who believe in him. As Son, Jesus claims to be sent by the Father to speak with the authority of God. Through the narratives of the signs, Jesus is portrayed as sovereign

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<sup>99</sup> Richard J. Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 88.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

over nature, diseases, and even over death.<sup>101</sup>

With a Jesus represented as a supra-human being, true savior of the world, and the only one who can be called Lord and God, *John* intended to encourage his readers to endure Roman persecution and not to be intimidated by the claims of the Roman emperors who called themselves saviors.<sup>102</sup> Although Jesus' kingship comes as an alternative power that counteracts Roman rule, Cassidy highlights the fact that this alternative is not imposed but chosen by voluntary confession that Jesus is Savior of the world, Lord and God.

#### Literary criticism

In recent literary interpretations of the Gospel, such as the ones done through a reader-response lens, although imply a more real reader who takes a specific stance in terms of religious beliefs or political views, there is still disengagement evident in the images of Jesus. Jesus is depicted as an interesting and psychologically complex character in *John*, but not as a politically realistic figure.

An interesting characteristic of the literary approach to the Gospel is that it frees the characters from their historical constraints. With the possibility of reading the Gospel as a narrative universe in itself, without further historical references to the socio-cultural context of its

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 85.

production, the reader can focus attention on such features as the literary figures of speech, the plot of the story, the patterns in which the characters are depicted, narrative time and other literary devices that help to construct the story as a coherent unity.

*Jesus, the elusive Christ.-*

Mark W.G. Stibbe speaks of Jesus in *John* as the elusive Christ.<sup>103</sup> He points out how, through a dynamic of hide-and-seek, the Fourth Evangelist focuses on the mysterious elusiveness of Jesus. Throughout the story, people seek Jesus, and he keeps withdrawing and hiding from the crowds. He lets them find him only when the time is right.

Jesus also seems to escape all attempts to arrest him, and he is constantly moving from open to secret spaces, reinforcing his elusiveness. Stibbe points out as well the use of geographical uncertainty in *John*, which highlights Jesus' elusive presence. Added to this list of literary motifs is the ambiguous and elusive language employed. Metaphorical language and misunderstandings are common in *John*: Jesus tells Nicodemus that "He must be born again," but that idea can also be understood as being born from above; Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman about giving her living water, which can also be understood as running water.

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<sup>103</sup> M.W.G. Stibbe, "The Elusive Christ: A New Reading of the Fourth Gospel" in *The Gospel of John as Literature. An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, comp., M.W.G. Stibbe (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 231-247.

Jesus speaks in riddles, delivering a cryptic discourse that, in the end, Stibbe interprets as reflections of the mystery of Jesus' nature.

This Jesus is then the God who cannot be physically or intellectually contained. This elusiveness, however, is not an exclusive theme developed by *John*; other sources can be used to trace the history of the topic, such as the elusiveness of Yahweh and Sophia/Wisdom in the Old Testament, or the elusiveness portrayed in Dionysian mythology. What makes more interesting the depiction of Jesus as elusive is not the mere literary portrait that Stibbe draws from the Gospel, but the historical explanation that he finds behind this literary device.

Going back to the theories of J.L. Martyn and R.E. Brown, Stibbe connects the elusiveness of Jesus with the experience of the excommunicated Johannine community.<sup>104</sup> In a way, the elusive Jesus is a mirror of the community, which is living in a hide-and-seek dynamic, striving to survive in a hostile context.

Other scholars who have developed images of Jesus as a story character from a literary perspective are R. Alan Culpepper,<sup>105</sup> Charles H. Talbert,<sup>106</sup> Robert Kysar<sup>107</sup> and

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>105</sup> See R. Alan. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: a study in literary design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

<sup>106</sup> See Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: a literary and theological commentary on the fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

<sup>107</sup> See Robert Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1976).

Jeffrey L. Staley.<sup>108</sup>

*Social-scientific criticism*

Under this paradigm, the images of Jesus show the socio-cultural elements of his context; from this point a more political Jesus can be developed, as has been done by Rensberger. These images, however, remain in the historical background of the Gospel with only a tentative impact on the real reader.

*Jesus, the King.-*

Based on the idea of a Johannine community in crisis, a community that has suffered ostracism not only from the synagogue but also from the public liturgy, festivals and, in sum, from their entire ideological universe, Rensberger defines the Johannine community as an inward group.<sup>109</sup> Using Bryan Wilson's model of sectarianism, Rensberger identifies the Johannine community as an introversionist group that sees the world as irredeemably evil, renouncing it and establishing a separate community. For him, this position is supported by the way salvation is talked about in the text, as available only to those who belong to the group. Although the group became isolated, it also has features of the conversionist and revolutionary groups, because it demands

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<sup>108</sup> Jeffrey Lloyd Staley, *The print's first kiss: a rhetorical investigation of the implied reader in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

<sup>109</sup> David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community*

public expression in testifying to the truth.

Following Thomas Johnson's characteristics of sectarian groups, the Johannine community can be considered a sect because it has at least four of these characteristics: rejection of the world; the claim of a unique or special truth; intimate fellowship; and a dualistic view of reality.

The Johannine community is a sectarian group of Jewish-Christian origin with introversionist features, but still interested in the possibility of mission to the world. Thus, Rensberger argues, "The King of the Jews is he who is not of this world, who creates the community of those who hear his voice and draws their allegiance away from the world, its authorities, and its violence, toward God."<sup>110</sup> Further, *John* presents a Jesus who comes into the world to testify to the truth, "This truth is the reality of God, the reality that God enters the world of God's own making to redeem it."<sup>111</sup> *John's* Christ did not come to judge the world or to change it from within, but to save it and recall it from its self-absorption to a stance as creatures before its Creator.<sup>112</sup>

To confess Jesus as Messiah is to acknowledge that one lives already in the kingdom of God.<sup>113</sup> The Johannine community confronts the world not merely with a doctrine, but with an alternative society, a counterculture in which

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(Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 27.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

the message of Jesus' messiahship has been realized.<sup>114</sup>

Jesus' kingship is for the oppressed community offering hope to the oppressed under the sovereignties of this world by offering them the sovereignty of God.<sup>115</sup> Jesus as character represents the Johannine community and its struggles and social oppression; Jesus is the matrix for the community's life. This double image of Jesus is based on Martyn's theory that the narrative tells both the story of Jesus and that of the Johannine community.<sup>116</sup>

In sum, I would argue that these approaches are not interested in exploring the impact that the image of Jesus has had in our context from a political point of view. Most of the authors read the text as if in a vacuum from their position of privilege under the hegemonic values of this society, still believing that reading is an innocent act. They forget to acknowledge the oppressive effect that the text has had on the rest of the world that is hidden away from the privileged few. They have ignored the political effects of the text, reading it as a disinterested story and not taking into consideration their own social location and its effects. The self-conscious reader of cultural studies, the one who delves into the political and ideological intricacies of the text, has not yet fully developed.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>116</sup> J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1979).



### ***Western feminist scholarship***

In Johannine studies, the still-limited presence of women and their more multidimensional and interdisciplinary ways of approaching the text makes it difficult to establish a clear division between paradigms. However, I can say that, from the point of view of methodology and focus, most of the approaches are in the vein of literary criticism along the lines of Gail R. O'Day,<sup>117</sup> who presents a different way of approaching Jesus' identity by using the "I am" sayings instead of the Christological titles. In so doing, she presents the participation of women in defining Jesus' identity. Jane Kopas,<sup>118</sup> with a similar approach, talks about the redemptive encounters between Jesus and women as paradigmatic of the way in which human beings can respond positively to the message. Adele Reinhartz,<sup>119</sup> Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza,<sup>120</sup> and Pheme Perkins<sup>121</sup> are more history-oriented in their way of laying a foundation to prove their feminist perspectives.

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<sup>117</sup> Gail O'Day, "John 7:53-8:11: a study in misreading," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 111 Winter (1992), 631-640.

<sup>118</sup> Jane Kopas, "Jesus and women: John's Gospel," *Theology Today*, 41 July (1984), 201-205.

<sup>119</sup> Adele Reinhartz, "The Gospel of John," in *Searching the Scriptures. A Feminist commentary*, ed. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 561-600; Reinhartz, *The word in the world: the cosmological tale in the fourth Gospel* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992).

<sup>120</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's child, Sophia's prophet: critical issues in feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994); E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In memory of her: a feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1994).

<sup>121</sup> Pheme Perkins, "Jesus: God's wisdom," *Word & World*, 7 no 3

Although few, the following examples help us see a more creative way of representing the Johannine Jesus by resisting patriarchal forces and imperial relations, helping construct more egalitarian and appealing alternatives of the Incarnate Word.

*Jesus as prophet in the prophetic reign-of-God movement.-*

Building upon Rosemary R. Ruether's vision of Jesus as prophet and the tradition of spirit Christologies as sources, Mary Rose D'Angelo proposes a representation of Jesus as a prophet within a prophetic movement.<sup>122</sup> D'Angelo's focus is not so much upon Jesus as the heroic prophet who brings liberation, but upon the movement of women and men who shared the life of Jesus. Although she sees this community of liberation in which Jesus is remembered as an egalitarian community, D'Angelo is not so much envisioning a "discipleship of equals," like the one Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza proposes, but more of a cooperative, communal effort.<sup>123</sup> This prophetic community, by which Jesus is remembered, is the movement of women and men who were Jesus' companions and participated as prophets. They understood their mission as bringing the reign of God and moving away from the imperial control of Rome through

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Summer (1987), 273-280.

<sup>122</sup> Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Re-membering Jesus: women, prophecy, and resistance in the memory of the early churches," *Horizons* 19 Fall (1992), 199-218.

<sup>123</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory*, 140-154.

spiritual resistance.<sup>124</sup>

Considering that in Judaism prophecy was a role open to women, D'Angelo says that, within the prophetic movement, women and men were equal, both in following and in learning from Jesus, the messenger of Sophia. Together with this community, Jesus hears and speaks to others, sharing the power of the spirit rather than controlling it. The message preached by the community is the "reign of God" as an alternative to the imperial control of Rome. To proclaim "God reigns" in the first century was a challenge to the emperor, which explains why Jesus died as an enemy of the Roman imperial rule.<sup>125</sup>

By being an itinerant community, the reign-of-God movement challenged the patriarchal household. Since women and men were out of the controllable bounds of the family, they challenged not only the paternal authority within every household but, ultimately, the control of the emperor, the father of the country.<sup>126</sup> The itinerancy of the movement also challenged the imperial taxation system, since they renounced possessions and money. All that they had belonged to God; they had nothing from Caesar.<sup>127</sup>

What D'Angelo envisions with this image of Jesus as prophet within a prophetic movement is to move authority from Jesus to the whole community. By seeing Jesus as a

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<sup>124</sup> D'Angelo, 207.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 211.

prophet who shared in the spirit and learned from the women prophets, we are called to acknowledge the prophetic authority of our own experience in the spirit. In the end, D'Angelo wants us "to find the saving incarnation not only in Jesus but also in our own bodies, women's as well as men's."<sup>128</sup>

*Jesus, God's Wisdom.-*

Based on the Jewish traditions that celebrated Wisdom (Sophia) as the eternal presence with God, Pheme Perkins advocates for a representation of Jesus as Wisdom. The Prologue of *John* introduces the eternal presence of Wisdom with God as the Word. These two words were interchangeable: one is a masculine noun (Word) and the other is a feminine noun (Wisdom). Jesus, as the only revelation of God, is the Incarnate Word who gives salvation to those who believe in him. He is the divine Son.<sup>129</sup>

Arguing that the classical Christological affirmations have adopted the Johannine masculine language, Perkins proposes to recover the feminine figure of God's creative Wisdom. She says that early Christianity was not limited to the male-gendered images that described Jesus' activity. Wisdom Christology should challenge us to find other ways of speaking of God in more inclusive ways.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>129</sup> Perkins, 275.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 279.

*Jesus, the cosmic Being.-*

As a Jewish feminist, reading from a reader-response approach, Adele Reinhartz offers a representation of Jesus that pretty much remains in the text. Jesus, a character who has not only a historical and ecclesiological setting but also a cosmological origin, is described in terms of Son of God, Son of Man, the Christ, the Word, the Light, and the Life.<sup>131</sup> He has been sent by the Father to accomplish a mission in the world.

The cosmological tale that has Jesus as the main character is a rhetorical work presented to invite all readers to see themselves as members of Jesus' flock. But, as Reinhartz affirms, for the rhetoric to succeed it is necessary to be a compliant reader. Being a compliant reader means to accept not only the truth claimed by this Gospel, but also the negative representations of the Jews. As a Jewish reader, she resists the text and discounts its claims of authority; however, as a feminist, she appreciates the potential that Jesus, as the non-gendered Word, brings to feminist theology.<sup>132</sup>

Without being essentialist, it seems that, their experience as women in an oppressive patriarchal society has shaped the way most women scholars read. They have the point of view of a more involved reader, perhaps because of the

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<sup>131</sup> Reinhartz, *Cosmological tale*, 27.

<sup>132</sup> Reinhartz, "John," 595.

personal understanding of the Gospel's oppressive effects. The focus on the reader is evident in their interested and positioned readings, and this focus begins to point to the presence of the self-conscious reader of cultural studies. This socio-historical conditioned reader can also be seen at work in the imperialistic view of the Gospel that some, like Mary D'Angelo<sup>133</sup> exposes, and the exclusivist and anti-Semitic view that the Fourth Gospel presents, according to Adele Reinhartz.<sup>134</sup>

By and large, the perspectives that these female scholars use to approach the Gospel help construct more realistic or political images of Jesus—images related to the practical interpretations by women readers and in some way offering more liberating readings in the struggle against patriarchy and imperialism. For Reinhartz, whose position is more radical than the others', there is rejection of the text—and Jesus' image as a liberating possibility for her—because of its anti-Semitic remarks.

These approaches are more thoroughly engaged with the reader's context and cultural and political stances, but they still do not fully relate to the oppressed world, although they fight the forces of patriarchy and imperialism. Since they do not subscribe to the meanings "within" the text nor to the intentionality of the author's message, their representations fall within the optic of a

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<sup>133</sup> D'Angelo, "Re-membling Jesus," 199-218.

<sup>134</sup> Reinhartz, "John," 594-597.

feminist constructionist approach.

***Latina/o and Latin American scholarship***

The representations of Jesus within the Latina/o and Latin American communities are diverse and reveal the complexity of the communities. However, most of the representations at work are derived from a composite view of the four Gospels; there are no specific representations coming from the Fourth Gospel. The two images I present here, retrieved from current readings, follow the line of theological reflections on Jesus in general rather than biblical exegesis from a specific Gospel. Although there is no particular methodological preference in these readings, what is evident in most is the use of praxis of faith and everyday reality as entry points into the text. The authors mix approaches in their readings and it is evident that the context of consumption of the text has priority over the historical context of production.

*Jesus, the Liberator.-*

The main representation of Jesus that emerges from Latin America comes from the perspective of liberation theology.<sup>135</sup> Using an economic and social context as a point of departure, liberation theologians read the image of Jesus

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<sup>135</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator. A Historical-Theological View* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993); Leonardo Boff, *Jesucristo el Liberador. Ensayo de cristología crítica para nuestro tiempo* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1985); Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison, *Jesus in Global Contexts* (Louisville:

with the lens of the class struggle. After acknowledging the socio-economic reality of the reader, the second step for constructing this image of Jesus is the thinking process that emerges from praxis, where praxis means "concrete engagement for the purpose of transformation."<sup>136</sup> Once the social analysis has been done and reflection from praxis has taken place, the next step for Christology in Latin America is to examine the historical Jesus. The idea is not to recover what Jesus did and said, but to understand the relevance of the historical Jesus in the Latin American context. The belief is that their social context gives them an advantage over other social contexts, since the Palestine of the first-century might be closer to the reality of present-time Latin America than to that of modern Europe.

Liberation theologians in Latin America acknowledge three main oppressions: the economic oppression of poverty; the social oppression of dehumanization; and the spiritual oppression of sin. From all these oppressions, Jesus can liberate.<sup>137</sup>

Jesus' miracles in the Gospels are seen not so much as demonstrations of Jesus' divinity, but as actions of liberation that freed the oppressed as a consequence of participating in creating God's kingdom.<sup>138</sup> From this stems the idea that Jesus' followers must do what Jesus did:

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Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

<sup>136</sup> Pope-Levison, 30.

<sup>137</sup> Boff, 80-93; Pope-Levison, 34-35.

<sup>138</sup> Pope-Levison, 36.



generate partial liberations with the idea of anticipating the future liberation that, in God, would be an integral liberation.<sup>139</sup> This image of Jesus as a liberator is linked to Jesus as prophet. As such, Jesus questioned the religious-political authorities and demanded justice, challenging the oppressive systems of his time. The current focus on this image gives hope and liberation to the powerless to demand justice from the elite.<sup>140</sup>

*Jesus, the Galilean-Mestizo.-*

Contending that Galilean identity is the basic starting point for Christian identity, Virgilio Elizondo claims that marginality is at the center of the dynamics of the Gospel.<sup>141</sup> Based on what he calls the *Galilee principle*—described as “what human beings reject, God chooses as his very own,”—he presents Jesus' Galilean identity. This identity, a symbol of marginality, is a mirror where the Mexican-American community, *mestiza* and therefore marginalized like most members of the Latino/a community, can find its clear cultural identity. In the light of this faith, the community finds that its ultimate identity is with God's chosen people.<sup>142</sup>

This Galilean Jesus was a human being with no

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<sup>139</sup> Sobrino, 79-87.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey. The Mexican-American Promise* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 107.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 103.

particular privilege (Phil. 2:6-7); he even assumed the form of a slave, someone who, according to the dominant segment of an oppressive society, is less than human. Jesus, representing a new priesthood, offers no sacrifices and sacrifices no one but himself for the sake of the world. He came into the world of the voiceless, the sick, the hungry, and the oppressed, not to do things for them, but to become one of them.<sup>143</sup>

According to Elizondo, the challenge of this Jesus today is to understand what Galilee was and what is the meaning of being a Galilean, and to seek out those with similar characteristics living in today's world. It is there, in the most unsuspected places, where God continues to work.<sup>144</sup>

The presence of an interested, self-conscious reader in these interpretations seems to provide a glimpse of the cultural studies paradigm, although there is no deliberate and concrete exercise of the approach. In general, however, I see the positions described as more politically committed to their realities and in search of social transformation. The approaches are rather more theological than exegetical, more oriented to the reader than to the text. They are not constructing Jesus exclusively from the text, but from their spiritual and everyday experiences that serve as a

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 107.

comparative key to read the text.

In fact, these political visions from the reading strategies of the Catholic Latina/o and Latin American liberation theologies present a challenge that I have taken in the construction of my own reading strategy. Since in the Latina/o-Protestant tradition we tend to go first to the text and then to our personal realities, not always considering the political reality in a formal way, the reading strategy I present in this project is a reading strategy that seriously contextualizes the reader. This strategy considers the historical contexts of both production and consumption of the text, acknowledging their political agendas.

### **Conclusion**

By and large, almost every historical setting has witnessed a particular Jesus, meaningful and relevant to the social context of production. The Judaism of the first-century called Jesus Rabbi; nascent Christianity, in need of identity in the midst of the Roman Empire called him King of Kings; Jesus, the Son of Man, the Revelation of God, was both the promise of human life and the power of evil in Augustine's anthropology. For the medieval Benedictines, Jesus was the Monk who Rules the World, and in the Renaissance, he was the Universal Man; he was the Mirror of the Eternal for the Reformation era. Jesus was a Teacher of Common Sense during the Enlightenment; and he even became

the Arian Jesus under Hitler's regime.<sup>145</sup> He has also emerged as Liberator and Revolutionary for political and social movements advocating for justice.<sup>146</sup>

Throughout history, these and many other images of Jesus have influenced and shaped the Christian world in particular ways and, as I have shown in the last section, through the lenses of particular theories of representation and critical paradigms, all are ideological and rhetorical constructs, products of their time, used to produce particular responses from the readers.

Under the paradigm of historical criticism, the role of culture and experience has been relevant only at a textual level. It is the text, not the reader, which has been fully immersed in its culture in order to reveal the reality believed to be described by it. This paradigm supposes a reader who should remain neutral and objective, a reader who approaches a fully contextualized text restraining all subjective interaction with it as if his/her culture and experience were removable garments. Under this paradigm, the images of Jesus that the scholars present are mainly theological-historical: they emphasize and explore the meanings of the Christological titles, most of which have

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<sup>145</sup> These are some of the most common historical images and representations of Jesus explored by J.J. Pelikan, *Jesus through the centuries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>146</sup> Exemplary models of this Jesus are presented by Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Times* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978) and Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994).

their background in the Old Testament, and they pay attention only to the historical reality behind the text, not the reality in front of it.

Little can be said regarding the sociopolitical and socio-cultural ramifications of the images derived from the historical-critical approach since most of the representations remain within the limits of the narrative. By and large, most scholars presented here take no specific stance or political/cultural position in their studies because their goal is to be objective and centered in the text, not the reader. They disregard the subjectivity of readers already present within themselves.

Viewed under the paradigm of literary criticism, the text appears to be central, though in its diverse approaches (narrative, reader-response, deconstructionist, and rhetorical criticism) the interaction between the text and the reader remains the same as the reader under historical criticism—i.e., considered objective and universal. In the literary paradigm, culture and experience still have a secondary role; the text is seen as an independent universe with a life of its own and is equally disconnected from the socio-political contexts of production and consumption.

The social-scientific paradigm has the reader engaged with the text in a much more complex dialogue due to the interdisciplinary approaches used. However, even when we see a more emphatic role at work for culture and experience with the contextualization of the text throughout the new

approaches (such as sociology of religion, cultural anthropology, and comparative societal studies), the reader's contextualization is still not seen as important for interaction with a fully contextualized text. In this case, the images of Jesus show the socio-cultural elements of his context; from there one could develop a more political Jesus, as in Rensberger's rendition. However, the image remains in the historical background of the Gospel with only a tentative impact on the real reader through liberation theology with some of the characteristic elements of the community in the *Gospel of John*, but not necessarily in relation to the image of Jesus.

For the most part these approaches are not interested in exploring the impact that the image of Jesus has had in the contemporary world. And by this I do not mean so much the impact from a spiritual perspective, but rather the political and social ramifications of such images, considering that at the core of the Gospel, Jesus seems to be always confronting and mediating social/political incidents. Most of the authors seem to be interested in exploring the text with diligence, meticulously, but their reading exercise appears to be oblivious to their surroundings, as if it were a private text. From the position of privilege that the hegemonic values of the One-Third World society offers, it is not easy to see the oppressive effect that the text has had on the Two-Thirds World. Text-constrained readings that do not fully

acknowledge the context, both of production and consumption, run the risk of ignoring the political effects that the text has had, and thereby risk perpetuating oppressive values that may be implied in the text.

For the most part, as I mentioned in the review of Johannine scholarship, the methodologies that have been used to read the biblical text have obscured the identity of the readers and have produced supposedly objective readings, hiding the readers' personal and political agendas. On the other hand, the images of Jesus that have been presented are more in accordance with the historical and narrative elements of the text, confining the characterization of Jesus to the story. The images of Jesus belong more to the historical conditions of the production of the text than to the historical conditions of its consumption. In that sense, these images resemble the representations from the quest for the historical Jesus; they have tended to move to the extremes, in an either/or logic, advocating mostly for one side of the spectrum, rather than problematizing the binary optic.

From a more appealing position, bring creativity and certain freedom from the historical preconceptions of the text, the representations offered by the western female scholars and the Latino/a and Latin American scholars exhibit traits of a real reader who is trying to make sense of the Johannine texts in ways that challenge the imperial and patriarchal powers under whose influence the Johannine

Jesus was conceived. The more subjective views of Jesus created by these scholars have paved the way for my cultural representation of Jesus, giving me the opportunity to come to the text with a concrete socio-political view and ideological position which will allow for a culturally situated representation of Jesus from my social location.

After this brief survey of Johannine representations of Jesus which helped me explore the critical and ideological processes behind such constructions, and serves as conversational backdrop for my research, I propose first, to approach the text as a self-conscious, real reader from the perspective of the cultural studies paradigm and, second, to read the text from my historical conditions of consumption. As I will explain in chapter 2, for cultural studies the interaction between text and reader is understood as a cultural encounter that brings to the analysis of the text not just the cultural background of the text, but also the reader's cultural background. Therefore, both text and reader are acknowledged as cultural products and the result of their interaction is regarded as a cultural construction.

In a paradigm where the role of culture and experience is highly regarded and attended to, as it is in cultural studies, the role of the reader transcends the universal and objective observer to become a subjective and particular participant.

To establish the foundation of my representation of Jesus from a determined social location, I shall see myself



as a real reader, rooted in a specific culture and experience, which will definitely affect the way in which I approach the text. Cultural studies, therefore, allows me to read as a feminist Mexican-American subject, experiencing the postmodern mobility that is present at the very core of my hybrid identity.

In the end, my intention is to offer an alternative representation of Jesus, contextualized at both ends, but aware of its limits. Ultimately, all textual representations, whether academic or devotional, are strategic constructs; transitory interpretations that are not only influenced by the ideology of the critical paradigms used to produce them, but also tainted by the readers' cultural context and subjective preferences. Given this temporal and subjective character of representations, it follows that no single interpretation can be ascribed to a text as its final or only plausible reading. Therefore, the intention of my representation is to offer an alternative political construct, shaped by my cultural and political views, as a model for political change and social transformation in the ongoing process of decolonization and search for global interdependency.

## CHAPTER II

### CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND HERMENEUTICS: THEORIES AT WORK

#### Introduction

Throughout history, the readership of the Bible has generated an array of hermeneutical approaches.<sup>1</sup> It seems that what motivates the continuous search for the perfect method and the ideal reading strategy is the perpetual challenge and illusory goal of recovering and finally understanding the original meaning of the biblical text. It is as if with each new paradigm, the reader aspires to get closer to the historical moment when the stories first developed or the events originally took place.<sup>2</sup> Some readers look at the biblical text as if it were an historic archive

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<sup>1</sup> In recent years a good number of expository books, explaining the burst of contemporary critical approaches and their principles, have been published; a couple of them I find helpful in exploring the application of some of the main methods are: George Aichele, et al, *The Postmodern Bible / the Bible and Culture Collective* (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 1995); and Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes, ed., *To Each its Own Meaning. An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and their Application* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed description of the hermeneutical basis and goals of the historical-critical method see: Edgar Krentz, *The historical-critical method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); McKenzie, *To Each its Own*, 18-22; W. Randolph Tate, *Interpreting the Bible: A Handbook of Terms and Methods* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 166.

from which all its original meanings could be extracted . . .  
. if only the master key were found.

This last metaphor seems to characterize some of the past historical approaches used to study the New Testament. For the past two centuries, biblical scholarship has generally studied the New Testament for the ideological work that it *reflects*, as a text that archives and mirrors history.<sup>3</sup> However, challenged by postmodern views and the incursion of culturally and ideologically positioned readers, many of them minority and non-western readers, a conscious shift has taken place. This shift is from an objective, fixed text to what I call a subjective, hybrid text whose meaning is not considered predetermined. Rather, it is organically actualized as it comes in contact with real-flesh-and-blood readers. Such a shift has rendered evident the potentiality of the biblical text to go beyond the mere "reflection of history" to the concrete reality of *making* history and *producing* ideologies. These changes have been happening, some more consciously than others, as biblical passages are reenacted through diverse reading-

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<sup>3</sup> For a critic of the objective view of the text, presupposed by the historical method, see: McKenzie, *To Each its Own*, 6-9; Segovia, "And They Began to Speak," 9-14.

processes.<sup>4</sup>

As this chapter unfolds it will expose the historical progression between the two mentioned poles of reading texts: as reflecting or as producing history. This chapter is divided into four main sections. In the first section I map out the chronological development of biblical hermeneutics—from the early Christian Church's pre-critical views to the main contemporary critical paradigms. This section serves as theoretical framework for the remaining three sections. Section two is an exposition on cultural studies, its origins, basic principles and main theoretical concepts. Section three is the development of my own hermeneutical framework, following the principles of cultural studies explained in section two. Finally, section four is the exposition of my reading strategy, derived from the hermeneutical framework presented in section three.

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<sup>4</sup> Cultural texts, including the Bible, seldom offer reading instructions, and when they do, they become part of the text itself, and therefore subject to interpretation. Nothing guarantees readers will read a text as "intended." However, what is still predictable is that, the reenacting of the biblical text using any media will produce ideology. According to church historian Karlfried Froehlich, the biblical text is "a source of human self-interpretation" and through its historical interpretations it has been "participating in the shaping of life", quoted in Mark S. Burrows and Paul Rorem, *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), xi. A similar claim about the potential of the text to make history is made by the Culture Collective, in Aichele, *Postmodern Bible*, 1: "the Bible has exerted more cultural influence on the West than any other single document."

Ultimately, my aim in this chapter is to lay the theoretical foundation for my "hermeneutics from the bridge," my contextual method and its derived reading strategy that I apply in chapter 3 to my reading of two selected passages of John which serve as foundation for my personal representation of Jesus.

In the first section, which follows, I present a general map of the chronological development of biblical hermeneutics.

### **Biblical hermeneutics: a synopsis**

Hermeneutical shifts in biblical studies have been caused mainly by external factors. In one way or another, every methodology bears within itself the marks of the socio-historical contexts that have shaped or produced it. The following overview shows some of the main hermeneutical approaches that have shaped biblical scholarship and how each emphasizes different elements of the interpretive process. Each reflects the ways in which readers have sought to respond to the socio-historical demands of their worlds.

From New Testament times through the present early twenty-first century, biblical interpretation has been both the product and the source of historical change. Just as

philosophical, political, scientific and artistic movements have influenced biblical interpretation, likewise, biblical interpretation has influenced many branches of knowledge. In a way, the history of biblical hermeneutics mirrors humanity's history.

Influenced by the philosophical movements of their time and highlighting the authority of the text, biblical scholars from the first century through the Reformation Era concentrated on reading the Bible mainly between two interpretive methods, the allegorical and the literalist.<sup>5</sup> The allegorical method looked for clues outside the text to uncover its symbolic sense, while the literalist view emphasized the internal elements of the text as the key for interpretation.<sup>6</sup> Before the rediscovery of Aristotle's

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<sup>5</sup> These hermeneutical approaches correspond to the two major schools of biblical interpretation that derived from ancient Jewish hermeneutical traditions and dominated Early Christianity, the Alexandrian and the Antiochene Schools. The first was Platonist and followed the allegorical or typological perspective, with a focus on the text's spiritual sense; the second had a grammatical-historical focus, and it followed a literalist perspective and was Aristotelian. For a detailed explanation of the two schools, see Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), 18-22; also David Jasper, *A short Introduction to Hermeneutics* (Louisville-London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 36-39; and Manfred Oeming, *Contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (England: Ashgate, 2006), 9-27.

<sup>6</sup> For methodological nuances see: Tate, *Interpreting the Bible*, 144-145; Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture. Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs* (Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2002), 10-29; and Richard

philosophy, medieval hermeneutics' focus was on the spiritual sense of the Scriptures, with God and faith at the center, in search of a moral meaning to live by.<sup>7</sup> It was with this reading lens that the worldview of the Medieval Age was constructed: the idea of a "hierarchical order of beings created and governed by God".<sup>8</sup>

However, when in his *Summa Theologica* Thomas Aquinas redefined his reading strategy in light of Aristotelian philosophy, stressing the literalist sense of the Scriptures over against the allegorical, the spiritual sense began to lose value.<sup>9</sup> Later, stirred by the discovery and exploration of the New World, the scientific findings of the Renaissance and the emphasis of the Reformation on individual faith, the image of the "perfect world" that had been kept alive through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries began to crumble, giving birth to a "mechanistic"

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N, Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 64-65.

<sup>7</sup> The fourfold path of medieval hermeneutics is summarized in Nicholas of Lyra's verse, "*Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia* [The letter shows us what God and our fathers did; the allegory shows us where our faith is hid; the moral meaning gives us rules of daily life; the anagogy shows us where we end our strife];" cited by Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew N. Carpenter, "Western Philosophy," *Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia* 2005, <http://ca.encarta.msn.com>

<sup>9</sup> See P. Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 32-36; Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 29-30.

view of the world.<sup>10</sup>

The world had turned into a cosmic machine, composed of parts that moved in perfect harmony according to physical laws, although without a purpose. This new worldview created a major crisis; it defied the beliefs of the Church and demanded an urgent response from biblical scholars. Soon thereafter, with the Enlightenment proclaiming reason as the guide to all knowledge and human endeavors, many biblical hermeneutists accepted the challenge and adopted the rationalist approach to the Bible that would give birth to the historical-critical method.<sup>11</sup> Scholars began to study the Bible using the same conventions of analysis that they applied to other cultural texts of their time in order to render reasonable interpretations.<sup>12</sup>

Two centuries later, just when reason seemed to be guiding the world in the direction of unstoppable progress and biblical hermeneutics toward a logical, clearer view of the Bible, the beginning of the twentieth-century witnessed

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<sup>10</sup> Carpenter, "Western Philosophy," *Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia* 2005, <http://ca.encarta.msn.com>

<sup>11</sup> See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Historical Criticism: Its Role In Biblical Interpretation And Church Life," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 245-9; Harrisville, *Bible in Modern Culture*, 42-45.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.



the downfall of the Enlightenment's reason.<sup>13</sup> The horror of two world wars, the cruelty of the holocaust and the use of science to accomplish massive destruction caused worldwide disappointment; the world's empires began to collapse.

Reason had become irrational, and existentialist philosophers questioned its objectivity, wondering about the personal and subjective motives involved in all human actions. Likewise, biblical hermeneutists began to question the scientific foundations of its historical-critical method. The long reign of the historical approach, which had fostered reading the Bible as if looking at a window to the past, with an objective and universal view, was coming to an end. The "clear window" to the past, which consciously or unconsciously had served as a helpful device to hide personal agendas, was becoming foggy with the observers' breath. Biblical scholars began to wonder about their own motives in the process of interpretation. Rudolf Bultmann,<sup>14</sup> influenced by Heidegger's existentialism, eventually acknowledged his own presuppositions as reader. In fact, these first glimpses of subjectivity planted the

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<sup>13</sup> Jasper, *A short Introduction to Hermeneutics*, 99-111.

<sup>14</sup> William J. La Due, *Jesus among the Theologians. Contemporary Interpretations of Christ* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 57-59.

seeds for some of today's contextual approaches.<sup>15</sup>

By the late 1970s, two new interpretive paradigms had emerged. From its exclusive quasi-scientific interest in historical evidence, biblical hermeneutics moved into two new areas: literary criticism and the social sciences. The literary approach aimed at bringing clarity to the biblical text by studying its narrative, plot and linguistic structure. The social-scientific approach sought to clarify the meaning of the text by studying contemporary sociological and anthropological models of Mediterranean societies which, because of their resemblance to those from New Testament times, could offer help in interpreting some of the social innuendos of the text.<sup>16</sup>

In the meantime, as world empires were disintegrating, the dormant seed of a new interpretive paradigm, cultural studies, was beginning to germinate. The final decolonization of the Indian subcontinent and Africa, which began after World War II, was strengthening the hopes of those searching for liberation and justice. During the

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<sup>15</sup> See Segovia, "They Began to Speak," 28-31. Under the paradigm of cultural studies, all postmodern approaches demand a full disclosure of the reader's agenda and social location, since contextual perspectives assume that there is no meaning without the reader.

<sup>16</sup> For a sample of this perspective see the book written by two of the main proponents of the scientific perspective, Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

1960s and 1970s, the vast majority of colonized countries that were struggling to gain their freedom achieved their independence. At the same time diverse oppressed groups around the world were beginning to fight for their rights and identity. In this environment, Latin American liberation theology emerged as a prophetic voice in the world, and those silenced by oppressive systems began to find their voice. The social movements of the 1960s and 1970s (i.e., the Civil Rights Movement, the Labor Movement, feminist movements, and Gay and Lesbian movements) brought some of the minorities to the national stage in ways that could no longer be ignored. African-Americans, Chicanos/as, women's coalitions, Gays and Lesbians, as well as other minority groups became visible to the world.

By the 1980s, the new interpretive paradigm of cultural studies/ideological criticism emerged in biblical scholarship.<sup>17</sup> A radical shift occurred: readers who were interpreting the Bible from decolonized countries and minority groups moved their focus from the text to the reader of the text. The once "clear window" to the past that the historical-critical approach had offered got fuzzier and hazier as social and cultural changes placed the new faces of "minority readers" in front of the text.

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<sup>17</sup> See Aichele, *Postmodern Bible*, 272-307.

Together with the new readers and new readings, postmodernity brought different approaches that reflected the world's diversity, which, after all, has always been inhabited by many cultures.

With the rupture of the latest empires into decolonized nations, the subtle readings that had dominated the Christian world for centuries were brought into trial. In the last three decades, these readings, once accepted as universal and as objectively "reflecting the history" of the text, were proven to have been socially constructed and forged by the empires as means to dominate and control less powerful nations under imperialist evangelizations.<sup>18</sup>

In the end, Western scholarship has been found guilty of reading the biblical text for the benefit of the empire, "making history" in favor of the nations in power. The biblical text, through the readings and interpretations performed by readers in power (i.e., readers from the empires, or Western readers), has often served imperialistic and patriarchal agendas. Now, the marginalized voices that have contested and confronted the

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<sup>18</sup> For detailed explanations on the emergence of postcolonial criticism in biblical studies see: R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins*, chapters 5 and 6 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000).

presumed objective and universal readings of dominant readers are seeking to "make history" in more inclusive ways using the very same biblical text that once made history largely for the empire.<sup>19</sup>

With ideological criticism shifting the attention of biblical scholars to the complexities of the postmodern world, the inevitable interconnectedness of our readings and our cultures has been made evident. Just as the biblical text is the product of its historical context, so are we, the readers; we read from our social location. This paradigm has, at its core, the presence of a politically engaged and ideologically positioned reader who is aware of her/his subjectivity and reads with a well-identified agenda. The last two decades of the twentieth-century and the beginning of the third millennium have witnessed the emergence of many of these real, flesh-and-blood readers.<sup>20</sup>

These readers are the (self-) constructs from the socio-historical changes that have altered not only the

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<sup>19</sup> The readings of those who historically have been oppressed seek now to liberate all readers, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 5-6.

<sup>20</sup> Some of these readers have been mentioned in chapter one on section four, see Musa W. Dube and Jeffery L. Staley, eds., *John and Postcolonialism: Travel, Space and Power*, vol. 7, *The Bible and Postcolonialism* (London: Continuum, 2002); R.S. Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Bible*, vol. 1, *The Bible and Postcolonialism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

political geography of the planet, but also the ways we map our social, cultural, economic and intellectual identities. Most of these real readers are women and men from groups that the One-Third World considers minorities, Non-Euro-Americans, Non-heterosexuals, Non-Christians. These real readers approach the biblical text from their own social location, with particular agendas, reading for liberation and decolonization. Theirs are political and interested interpretations of the Bible.<sup>21</sup>

Drastic social and political changes all around the globe have shaken the world population and have brought such mixture and diversity to the Western world. In the aftermath of colonialism, postcolonial subjects have not only reclaimed their voices in their homeland, but have also made themselves heard to their former empires. The Two-Thirds World is hybridizing the One-Third World with new reading strategies. The objective and universal Western readings that once were employed to oppress and control those with less power are being counteracted by the questioning and readings of these postcolonial readers.<sup>22</sup>

Although many factors have triggered the shift to this

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<sup>21</sup> See Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis. MS: Chalice Press, 2000), 184-195; Fiorenza, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 165-190.

<sup>22</sup> See Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 15-21

last critical paradigm, I must stress the presence of this self-constructed reader as one of the key factors. The special focus on real readers has permitted the fourth paradigm of cultural studies to emerge within biblical studies. Cultural studies has integrated within biblical criticism "the questions and concerns of the other paradigms on a different key, a hermeneutical key, with the situated and interested reader and interpreter always at its core."<sup>23</sup> Consequently, as a politically engaged and ideologically positioned self-conscious reader myself, my aim and the core task of the present chapter is precisely the development of a liberating reading strategy, socially and historically conditioned which can serve to promote social transformation and political change as we move forward in the ongoing process of decolonization and liberation of the Two-Thirds World until respectful, global interdependency is achieved.<sup>24</sup>

As a way of framing the development of my reading strategy from the borderlands, in the following section I present a more detailed overview of the development of cultural studies.

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<sup>23</sup> Segovia, *Decolonizing*, 41.

<sup>24</sup> As stated by Dube, imperialism is a "continuing reality in global relations", see Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 48.

### **Cultural studies: reading texts politically**

In postmodern times, particularly within the academia—our constructed world of concepts and ideas—we are never satisfied with our current wealth of knowledge. We are always searching for more, expanding, coining new terms in a desperate attempt to acquire new and radiant meanings. We overlook the fact that our extravagant spending of words puts our conceptual economy at risk of bankruptcy. As we struggle to survive and thrive in the academic world, always having to negotiate our identity with numerous dialogues and discourses, bargaining with every word to extract extra meaning, we sometimes devalue language; our currency loses its power of meaning-acquisition. Such seems to be the case of words like culture or ideology; the intellectual market has become so supersaturated with their wide application and frequent use that it is difficult to draw attention to them any longer. Just as in any national economy new currency is issued to prevent it from collapsing, sometimes we need to re-issue key concepts to keep our discourses, our conceptual economy, meaningful.

Lately, in academia, the concept of "cultural studies" has lost as much meaning as has the word "culture." Cultural studies is becoming an automatic



placeholder to cover what seems indefinable. The goal of this section is to specify the worth of the cultural studies currency that I will be using in this project by delimiting the value of some of its key concepts.

In the first part of this section, I present a brief history of cultural studies by introducing some of the seminal ideas on culture; in the second, I offer my understanding of cultural studies by discussing fundamental concepts and presuppositions; and, in the third part of this section, I explain two of the core concepts in cultural studies that are fundamental to the development of my interpretive practice: hegemony and identity.

### ***Cultural studies begins: a short history***

Although hundreds of universities worldwide boast of having dedicated departments and the highest-degree programs of study in cultural studies, the genealogy of this discipline is rather brief and of humble roots. It is interesting to point out, as I was speaking of the economy of language before, that the seed whence cultural studies germinated was precisely a project focused on the re-evaluation of words. At the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, a group of British historians and sociologists of Marxist influence began studying British

culture in each individual lifestyle aspect; part of the project consisted in re-evaluating concepts such as democracy, art, culture and literature. Within this group of scholars were Richard Hoggart, Raymond William, and E.P. Thompson, the founding fathers of cultural studies. Their most important works, *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), *Culture and Society* (1958) and *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), are considered the foundational texts of cultural studies.<sup>25</sup>

A biographical sketch of these pioneers of cultural studies is in order to appreciate the ideological commitment as well as the political goals of this critical endeavor.

Richard Hoggart was born in 1918 into a working-class family in Hunslet in the North of England—the most heavily industrialized district of South Leeds in the 1940s.<sup>26</sup> Although orphaned at an early age, he was able to

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<sup>25</sup> Some of the historical details of cultural studies can be found in, John Hartley, *A Short History of Cultural Studies* (London: SAGE Publications, 2003); Chris Barker, *The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies* (London: SAGE Publications, 2004), xv-xvi; Richard Johnson et al, *The Practice of Cultural Studies* (London: SAGE Publications, 2004), 14-16; John Storey, *Cultural Studies and The Study of Popular Culture: Theories and Methods* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 1-8; Ziauddin Sardar and Borin Van Loon, *Introducing Cultural Studies* (London: Totem Books, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> See, Stuart Sim, ed., *The A-Z Guide to Modern Literary and Cultural Theorist* (London: Prentice Hall, 1995), 206-9; also

study because of a High School scholarship he received. Later, he went to study English at the University of Leeds, obtaining bachelor and master's degrees. When the Second World War began, he was drafted into the army and sent to serve in North Africa and Italy. He was discharged in 1946. After his military experience, he embarked on an academic career. He was Lecturer in the Department of Adult Education at the University of Hull (1946-1959), Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Leicester (1959-1962), and Professor of English at the University of Birmingham (1962-1973), where he founded and became the Director of the famous Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) from 1964 to 1968.<sup>27</sup>

It is said that, after Hoggart's interview with Birmingham, he accepted the appointment under three conditions, one of which was the dream of the CCCS, "'I said I wanted to start my own postgraduate course and I invented it on the spot,' he said 'over tea and biscuits in Surrey. It was to be in contemporary cultural studies.'"<sup>28</sup>

The Center opened in 1964 and Hoggart immediately

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John Simkin, *Richard Hoggart*, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/HIShoggart.htm>

<sup>27</sup> DJ Taylor, *Working-class hero*, *The Guardian*, Saturday February 24 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/feb/24/society>.

<sup>28</sup> David Ward, *Interview with Richard Hoggart*, [http://www.publications.bham.ac.uk/birmingham\\_magazine1996-99](http://www.publications.bham.ac.uk/birmingham_magazine1996-99)

challenged the traditional university English department curriculum by focusing the Center on an interdisciplinary ethos "because of his belief that the teaching of English at that time was too narrowly defined."<sup>29</sup> Cultural studies were "born out of opposition to academicism and the sanctioned objects of an older canon,"<sup>30</sup> states fellow culturalist Fred Inglis. Hoggart, like Raymond Williams, attacked "the elitism of the Eliot/Oxbridge 'school' of culture which sought to sustain distinctions of 'high' and 'low' culture."<sup>31</sup> Hoggart saw the need for a new concept of 'cultural studies,' one that would be more inclusive; that task of re-definition was one of the aims of the Center. Cultural studies, as Inglis explains, "denounce the category of art as an instrument of class assertiveness, refuse the sacred status of art, and treat all symbolic expression as equally worthy of serious interpretation."<sup>32</sup> Williams' book *Culture & Society 1780-1950*, where he contrasts the ideas of 'culture as art' and 'culture as a whole way of life,' served as an inspiration for Hoggart in

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Fred Inglis, *Cultural Studies* (Oxford, UK-Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1993), 16.

<sup>31</sup> The Centre For Contemporary Cultural Studies, [http://www.sociologyonline.co.uk/post\\_essays/PopHall.htm](http://www.sociologyonline.co.uk/post_essays/PopHall.htm)

<sup>32</sup> Inglis, *Cultural Studies*, 18.

creating the CCCS.<sup>33</sup>

Hoggart's acclaimed book, *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), presents a study of the life and culture of the working-class, thoroughly infused by his own upbringing. He pays attention to "such mundane matters as English working-class speech patterns, living-room décor, eating habits . . . critique of popular magazines, songs,"<sup>34</sup> among other topics. Also based on his own educational experience, he analyzes the displacement that students from the working-class experience as the process of pursuing higher education inevitably takes them away from their familiar social and cultural background. He also studies the threat that commercial interests pose to that culture.<sup>35</sup>

Raymond Williams, considered the second founding father of cultural studies, was the most important British cultural historian and theorist after the Second World War.<sup>36</sup> As a literary and social thinker, he was interested in studying literature and similar cultural forms as products of social processes and not just as aesthetic forms. In his 1958 essay entitled "Culture is ordinary," he

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<sup>33</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies: two paradigms," in *What is Cultural Studies? A reader*, ed. John Storey (London: Arnold, 1996), 31.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>36</sup> Sardar, *Introducing Cultural Studies*, 25-29.

defines the concept of culture as

both traditional and creative; that it is both the most ordinary common meanings and the finest individual meanings. We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life—the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning—the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction. The questions I ask about our culture are questions about deep personal meanings. Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind.<sup>37</sup>

Shortly after the war, he founded the journal *Politics and Letters*, in which he voiced the concerns later exposed in his book *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, a critical view of the literary tradition from the Romantics to Orwell with particular focus on key terms such as 'industry,' 'democracy,' 'class,' 'art' and 'culture.'<sup>38</sup>

Like Hoggart, Williams' work has also been influenced by and committed to his class origins; both men shared similar experiences living in a post-war era and working with adult education.<sup>39</sup> Williams exposed his analysis of film and cinema as cultural expressions in his books *Preface to Film*, *Drama in Performance*, and *Modern Tragedy*, and the connection between ideology and culture and the

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<sup>37</sup> Raymond William, "Culture is Ordinary," in *Conviction*, ed. Norman McKenzie (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1958), 75-6.

<sup>38</sup> Phillip Drummond, "William, Raymond: British Media Critic," in *The Museum of Broadcast Communications*, <http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/W/htmlW/williamsray/williamsray.htm>

<sup>39</sup> Sardar, *Introducing Cultural Studies*, 24-9.

development of socialist views in the mass media arts in his work *The Long Revolution*. He published his first and autobiographical novel, *Border Country*, in the 1960s and began to work closely with contemporary mass media, which converted two of his novels into TV plays and gave Williams a weekly column on a BBC television program from 1968 to 1972.<sup>40</sup>

The third and last founding figure of cultural studies is E. P. Thompson. Following in the tradition of Hoggart and Williams, we see him bringing to the field his cultural experiences as a child of humble origins and a post-war young adult with a working-class spirit.<sup>41</sup>

In 1924 Edward Thompson was born in Oxford, into a Methodist missionary family. As a young adult he went to Cambridge to study history, but had to interrupt his studies to serve in Italy as a member of the British army during the Second World War. He worked as a lecturer in history at the University of Leeds, where Hoggart had studied English. He founded the Communist Party Historians group with some friends after the war and, in 1952 the group founded the journal *Past and Present*, dedicated to

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<sup>40</sup> Phillip Drummond, "William, Raymond: British Media Critic," in *The Museum of Broadcast Communications*, <http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/W/htmlW/williamsray/williamsray.htm>

<sup>41</sup> Sardar, 31-3.

study the history of the working-class. In 1956, disappointed with the invasion of Hungary and the events happening in the Soviet Union, Thompson decided to abandon the Communist party and joined the Labor party.<sup>42</sup>

His acclaimed work, *The Making of the English Working Class*, was published in 1963. Shortly thereafter, in 1971, he resigned his teaching position at Warwick University when the school began to favor the programs that met the demands of the industrial world and neglected humanistic programs.<sup>43</sup>

The three founding fathers' extraordinary interest in culture in its wider expression, and their similarities in all having working-class backgrounds, Marxist inclinations, experience in working in adult education and living in the aftermath culture of the Second World War planted the seed of the political dimension in cultural studies. The following are some of the contributions that the life experiences and social vision of this trio of cultural critics ultimately brought to the Center: a new concept of culture; the dismantling of the "high/low" culture binary;

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<sup>42</sup> Scott Hamilton, 'An Appetite for the Archives': New Light on EP Thompson, [http://readingthemaps.blogspot.com/2007\\_03\\_01\\_archive.html](http://readingthemaps.blogspot.com/2007_03_01_archive.html)

<sup>43</sup> John Simkin, "E.P. Thompson," <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/HIStompson.htm>



a new way of studying culture in itself and the analysis of mass media as producer of meaning and culture; the contextual study of "audiences" in particular realities and not as an abstract category; and the establishment of cultural studies as an academic discipline. At times, however, this last achievement seems contradictory to the post-disciplinary character of the field itself.<sup>44</sup>

One final figure completes the list of pioneers of cultural studies and the CCCS: Stuart Hall. A native of Kingston, Jamaica, Hall was born in 1932, the son of an accountant. Awarded a Rhodes scholarship, he moved to England with his mother in 1951 to pursue a bachelor's degree in art at the University of Oxford and, later on, a Master of Arts from Merton College. During the 1950s, together with a group of intellectual socialists—which included E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams—he launched two radical journals: *The New Reasoner* and *The New Left Review*. He worked as a teacher at Brixton and taught media studies at Chelsea College. In 1957, he joined the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.<sup>45</sup>

In 1964, Hall co-authored a book entitled *The Popular*

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., [http://www.sociologyonline.co.uk/post\\_essays/PopHall.htm](http://www.sociologyonline.co.uk/post_essays/PopHall.htm)

<sup>45</sup> John Simkin, "Stuart Hall," <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/HIShallS.htm>.

Arts which won him an invitation from Richard Hoggart to join the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University. Four years later, in 1968, Hall himself became the director of the Center, succeeding Hoggart in the position. Under Hall's leadership, the CCCS became an intellectual force recognized world wide during the 1970 and 1980s.<sup>46</sup>

During the Center's golden period, Hall's Neo-Marxist perspectives used in the analysis and production of culture were what characterized the research interests of cultural studies. John Storey's claim that "all the basic assumptions of cultural studies are Marxist"<sup>47</sup> undoubtedly stems from Hall's known commitment to Marxist analysis. With Hall as the director of the Center, cultural studies became a defined academic discipline. During his directorship, Hall wrote several influential books, among them *Situating Marx: Evaluations and Departures* (1972), *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* (1973), and *Policing the Crisis* (1978).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Simkin,  
<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/HIShallS.htm>

<sup>47</sup> John Storey, "Cultural Studies: An Introduction," in *What is Cultural Studies? A Reader*, ed. John Storey (London: Edward Arnold, 1997), 3.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., Simkin,  
<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/HIShallS.htm>

Cultural studies and the Center continued to have a healthy life beyond these early years. In fact, many are the histories that speak of the dissemination of cultural studies, as well as its practitioners, around the world. Let us focus, however, on the stated aim of this section: to highlight the beginnings, the political roots of cultural studies, its commitment to social change and how it "has sought to develop ways of thinking about culture and power that can be utilized by forms of social agency in the pursuit of change."<sup>49</sup> For Stuart Hall, it is this political engagement of cultural studies that aims to make a difference in the world and what distinguishes cultural studies from other areas of study.<sup>50</sup> As for me, it is its potential for transforming the world that motivates my commitment to apply it as critical lens.

### ***The basics of cultural studies***

In the words of Stuart Hall, one way to define cultural studies is as a discursive formation, "a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about—forms of knowledge and

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<sup>49</sup> Chris Barker, *The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies* (London: SAGE Publications, 2004), xviii.

<sup>50</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler (New York-London: Routledge, 1992), 277-94.

conduct associated with—a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society”<sup>51</sup>. The “ways of talking” about cultural studies are what manifest cultural studies or, as Barker states, “the vocabulary of cultural studies performs cultural studies.”<sup>52</sup>

What better way to explain cultural studies than by performing cultural studies through the exploration of popular concepts from cyber-culture as they are used to describe the meanings of cultural studies? Tracking the words from the Internet blurbs<sup>53</sup> used by some universities to promote their cultural studies departments, I offer here a temporary discourse to explain the basic concepts and presuppositions of cultural studies. Beginning with the advertisement from Claremont University:

The Cultural Studies Department provides **multidisciplinary** graduate training within the humanities, and between the humanities and social sciences. Cultural studies students approach topics from **a variety of perspectives**, studying the theories, canons, and paradigmatic assumptions of several disciplines. —Claremont Graduate University, USA<sup>54</sup>

The key concept that stands out as central for

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<sup>51</sup> Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Culture, Media and Identities Series (London: Sage Publications & Open University, 1997), 6.

<sup>52</sup> Barker, xiv

<sup>53</sup> I have marked in bold the word that I have understood as crucial in each of the descriptions for the purpose of establishing the basics of cultural studies discourse.

<sup>54</sup> Blurb taken from: <http://www.cgu.edu/pages/1091.asp>. Bold words highlighted by me.

Claremont in doing cultural studies is its "multidisciplinary." According to Stuart Hall, cultural studies "has multiple discourses; it has a number of different stories [and] . . . includes many different kinds of work."<sup>55</sup> It is an interdisciplinary field of study that has no explicit subject area, but, departing from the concept of culture as a very inclusive notion, it offers a framework to study and trace an extensive scope of cultural practices within a political context. Barker affirms that Cultural studies "has always been a multi- or post-disciplinary field of inquiry that blurs the boundaries between itself and other 'subjects'."<sup>56</sup> In that sense, cultural studies is not a discipline per se, but more a mode of inquiry that challenges the institutionalized nature of disciplines. It has no particular theories or methods itself, but it appropriates and works with a vast array of approaches that come from different disciplines. It "draws from whatever fields are necessary to produce the knowledge required for a particular project."<sup>57</sup>

The fact that cultural studies has no specific subject area or particular object of study makes it difficult to

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<sup>55</sup> Stuart Hall, *Theoretical Legacies*, 278.

<sup>56</sup> Barker, *Introduction*, SAGE Dictionary, xvii.

<sup>57</sup> Grossberg, et al, *Cultural Studies*, 2.

establish a fixed definition that could encompass a variety of views. However, as the following description from Lingnan University emphasizes, the core concept of culture as the sum total of everyday life processes, at local and global levels, establishes a concrete point of departure or a pivotal concept crucial for doing cultural studies; it offers a common ground within the vastness of this borderless field.

As a new discipline, Cultural Studies includes the analysis of a wide range of works including literature, film, art, popular culture, commodity and media culture, **the social and political "text" of a particular way of life, and intellectual and socio-cultural movements as well as other living forms of social practice.** Informed by critical theories and contextual analyses, Cultural Studies examines the **changing relationship between culture, society, history, politics and technology in the contemporary world.** Cultural Studies allows us to understand the key problems of human creativity, social ideology and cultural consumption in the contexts of **local history and global transformation.** All these forces will be pivotal in the development of our cultural imagination, cultural education and cultural policies in the years ahead.

-Lingnan University, Hong Kong<sup>58</sup>

The concept of culture in cultural studies is defined politically, as in the texts and practices of everyday life, not exclusively aesthetically as in the knowledge of fine arts.<sup>59</sup> Culture is always in tension and contested because, where different meanings can be ascribed to the

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<sup>58</sup> <http://www.ln.edu.hk/cultural/>

<sup>59</sup> John Storey, *Cultural Studies & The Study of Popular Culture. Theories and Methods* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 2.

same texts or practices, the dominant groups tend to impose their meanings and the minority groups defy their impositions. Culture, therefore, is the terrain where meaning is assimilated or resisted; "it is the battlefield where hegemony is established or dissolved."<sup>60</sup> From this angle then, even the aesthetic definitions of culture can be seen as political, as part of the everyday practices that speak of a particular socio-political stance.

Some of the specificities of the everyday life, which culture as a political concept has brought into analysis, are highlighted as the subject matter of the cultural studies department at McMaster University:

Without limiting itself to traditional texts, cultural studies examines the conditions of cultural and social life through an analysis of a **wide range of cultural and social practices**, inquiring into areas such as **gender, sexuality and the body, race and ethnicity, mass culture and visual culture**. Critical theory emphasizes the development of **self-critical, self-reflexive** interpretive strategies. Most importantly, both cultural studies and critical theory challenge accepted theories and critical practices in order to open up **new ways of thinking and being**.

—McMaster University, Canada<sup>61</sup>

Cultural studies was pressed to include categories such as gender, sexuality and the body in its language when in the 1970s, according to Stuart Hall, feminism confronted

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<sup>60</sup> Storey, "Cultural Studies: an introduction," 4-5; Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 1-31.

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~cstudies/>

cultural studies and "as a thief in the night, it broke in; [it] interrupted, made an unseemly noise, seized the time, [and] crapped on the table of cultural studies."<sup>62</sup> This sudden awareness caused a shift that "reorganized the field in quite concrete ways,"<sup>63</sup> forcing the CCCS to rethink its language.

Some of these concrete ways that Hall was referring to are "the question of the personal as political; the radical expansion of the notion of power; [and] the centrality of questions of gender and sexuality to the understanding of power itself."<sup>64</sup> Equally important as the categories of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity are the "self-critical and self-reflexive interpretive strategies" mentioned in McMaster's definition. Cultural studies is always a process *in process* and never a final theoretical solution; as Hall affirms,

cultural studies has drawn the attention to itself, not just because of its sometimes dazzling internal theoretical development, but because it holds theoretical and political questions in an ever irresolvable but permanent tension. It constantly allows the one to irritate, bother, and disturb the other, without insisting on some final theoretical closure.<sup>65</sup>

Side by side with the non-fixed methodology, self-

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<sup>62</sup> Hall, *Theoretical Legacies*, 282.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 284.



reflexivity, interdisciplinary and political characters, are two other key concepts that should be added to this already broad spectrum of cultural studies: identity and hegemony. These concepts are emphasized in the blurb from the University of Melbourne as follows:

Cultural Studies at Melbourne offers students an exciting and productive environment in which to acquire and develop essential skills in cultural analysis and communication. Cultural Studies is an interdisciplinary field concerned with **cultural identities** and media, cultural texts from movies to mardi gras, the workings of cultural power, the consumption of cultural commodities, **the relationships between popular, national, and contemporary global cultures, with the circulation, effects and meanings of culture in everyday life.**

-The University of Melbourne, Australia<sup>66</sup>

The best way to explain the significance of these two concepts within the language of cultural studies is to trace their echo back to the source of their emission. According to Barker, the concepts of "text, ideology and hegemony" emerged from practicing cultural studies in the 1970s under the lens of "neo-Marxism and its engagement with both structuralism and the work of Gramsci."<sup>67</sup> In the 1990s, cultural studies was filtered through the lens of "post-structuralism and especially the work of Foucault," This, in turn, added the concepts of "discourse, subjectivity, representation and identity"<sup>68</sup> to its working

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<sup>66</sup> <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/HB/areas/ACULTUR.html>

<sup>67</sup> Barker, 'Introduction,' *SAGE Dictionary*, xvi.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

vocabulary.

Parallel to the power of performance ascribed to the language that is used to talk about cultural studies is the power of production or that power attributed to cultural studies to generate new language. If invoking cultural studies manifests cultural studies, then the manifestation of cultural studies invokes language. Such has been the case in speaking of cultural studies at different times and with different perspectives. Since identity and hegemony are two of the fundamental concepts used in the construction of my reading strategy, in the following section I will explore their discursive potential for a "critical political intervention."<sup>69</sup>

***Decoding cultural studies: identity and hegemony***

Judging by its political roots and the ideological convictions of its founders, it is clear that cultural studies is not a value-free scholarship. From its inception, it developed as a political endeavor committed to social transformation by exposing and criticizing the relations of power and the ways they influence and shape cultural practices. In fact, this commitment to change and transformation can be inferred from the triple purpose that

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<sup>69</sup> Hall, *Theoretical*, 294.

Chris Barker identifies as central to the discourses and work of cultural studies. Barker states that "most writers in the field would probably agree that the purposes of cultural studies are analytic, pedagogic and political."<sup>70</sup> In its analytic endeavor, cultural studies seeks to expose structures of power and domination to raise the kind of consciousness that can advance social transformation. Its pedagogic purpose is fulfilled "through teaching and writing . . . cultural studies writers offer a variety of storytelling that can act as a symbolic guide or map of meaning and significance in the cosmos"<sup>71</sup> and, politically, "cultural studies has the potential to assist in comprehending and changing the world."<sup>72</sup>

In this process of making the world comprehensible for ourselves and for others so that we can change it, the central task of cultural studies has been to analyze and expose culture, the political terrain where meaning is negotiated. Culture, the site where hegemonic values and representations are produced, resisted and assimilated and where identities are created, assembled and disassembled, is always demanding a political stand. In the stage of

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<sup>70</sup> Barker, 'Introduction,' *SAGE Dictionary*, xviii.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

everyday life, hegemony and identity seem to play key roles; their intricate relationship is what creates history. Through the paradigm shifts life keeps unfolding, and rarely in a peaceful manner. In this battle for meaning, the ultimate challenge to hegemony is a self-defined identity, knowing that such alleged self autonomy exists only within the limits imposed by the contextual constraints of language.

Hegemony was developed as a theoretical principle within "twentieth-century Marxism, by the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), to explain the control of the dominant class in contemporary capitalism."<sup>73</sup> According to Gramsci, the ruling class "exercises social authority and leadership over the subordinate classes through a combination of force and, more importantly, consent."<sup>74</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, when the concept was first added to the vocabulary of cultural studies, it was with the idea in mind that "there is a strand of meanings within any given culture that can be called governing or ascendant."<sup>75</sup> The social forces that set in motion the production, preservation and circulation of the meanings usually

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<sup>73</sup> Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick, ed., *Cultural Theory. The Key Concepts* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), 164.

<sup>74</sup> Barker, 'Hegemony,' *SAGE Dictionary*, 84.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

defined by the *hegemon*, or ruling class, is what we called hegemony. In this sense "Hegemony is what binds society together without the use of force."<sup>76</sup>

Regarding the ruling values and meanings within culture, "hegemony is a temporary settlement and series of alliances between social groups that is won and not given."<sup>77</sup> In theory, this hegemonic discourse is not conceived as a fixed dictum since it represents the temporary meanings established by the agreement of certain social groups at given moments. History, however, has witnessed the ossification of many hegemonic discourses under totalitarian socio-political, economic and religious structures. If hegemonic values are re-negotiated whenever existing discourses are challenged and new alliances are made, extraordinary contestation is needed for the subordinated groups to be able to challenge those in control in a totalitarian society, where hegemonic values are more enforced and more difficult to overcome. For some critics, this neo-Gramscian theory of hegemony is debatable because it presumes a common culture that does not correspond with our postmodern, pluralist world, populated

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<sup>76</sup> Sardar, 49.

<sup>77</sup> Barker, 'Hegemony,' *SAGE Dictionary*, 84.

by a myriad of cultures.<sup>78</sup> Factors such as migrations, cultural and economic globalization, and social tolerance of alternative lifestyles and subcultures have certainly opened up many worlds where there used to be an illusory "one"—the illusion created by what the hegemonic values chose to highlight or to veil. I would argue, however, that hegemonic discourses continue to operate regardless of the plurality of our postmodern society. On the one hand we have radical religious groups and conservative societies that try to keep alive the traditional hegemonic values, on the other hand new hegemonic values have emerged from the imperial economies of the world and are disseminated through popular culture and the values of capitalism.

Identity, what I consider the other side of the political coin that is society, is a concept that became popular in the vocabulary of cultural studies during the decades of the 1990s.<sup>79</sup> Throughout history, identity, or the discourse of the self, has been variously defined. The spectrum of definitions ranges from those that assign autonomy and agency to the self, to those that barely recognize the existence of the individual considering the multiple external forces at play in the process of

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<sup>78</sup> See Barker, 'Hegemony,' *SAGE Dictionary*, 84.

<sup>79</sup> Barker, 'Identity,' *SAGE Dictionary*, 93.

identity-formation.

A brief history of the self takes us back to the seventeenth century, when one of the well known ideas on identity is proclaimed by René Descartes: "*Je pense, donc je suis.*" By affirming "I think, therefore I am" Descartes establishes the autonomy and agency of the self. For a while, the Cartesian assurance that one can doubt anything—except his/her existence—dominated the world of ideas. In the eighteenth century David Hume challenged it by stating that we are nothing else but "a bundle of sense impressions that continually change as the individual has new experiences or recalls old ones."<sup>80</sup> In the nineteenth century, Emile Durkheim, the father of sociology, declares the individual to be the product of society, exposing the strings that make the individual function within culture. In the twentieth century, from a psychoanalytic perspective, Freud links the development of the self (ego) to the experiences of assimilation that happen during childhood as we interact with other persons. The ego then is experienced as the tension between the *id* and the *super-ego*, the *id* representing our basic instincts and the *super-*

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<sup>80</sup> Edgar, *Cultural Theory*, 184.

ego our moral consciousness.<sup>81</sup> Later, Lacan problematizes the formation of the Freudian self with his mirror stage theory.<sup>82</sup> According to Lacan the fragmentation of the self occurs between six and eighteen months of age, when the baby identifies her/his image in the mirror (physically or figuratively) as a unified being, but this visual unity does not correspond to the disarticulation and fragmentation experienced by the baby's uncoordinated body. As the baby begins to speak, his/her identity will continue to be shaped by the social conventions of language, forever defined by others.<sup>83</sup>

Following this postmodern trend on identity-formation, always in process and contextual, Stuart Hall asserts that "cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation . . . identities are names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position

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<sup>81</sup> See Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi, eds., 'Ego, Id, Superego,' *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 93-4; 145; 295-6.

<sup>82</sup> For an excellent overview of Lacan's mirror stage theory visit the webpage of the English department of the University of Hawaii at <http://www.english.hawaii.edu/criticalink/lacan/index.html>

<sup>83</sup> Darian Leader and Judy Groves, *Introducing Lacan* (London: Totem Books, 1998), 42-3, 51, 78-80.



ourselves within, the narratives of the past."<sup>84</sup> In that sense, identity can be explained in terms of both, space, as the "somewhere" and language as the "narratives." Regarding space, Kathleen Kirby affirms that "national origins predetermine ideological formations; individual cultures, set apart by the bounds of continents and countries, rivers and mountains, form their realities in divergent ways. As subjects, we vary widely depending on the actual place we came from and the subsequent places we occupy."<sup>85</sup> From the point of view of language, identity can be explained as discursive-performative because it "enacts or produces that which it names through citation and reiteration of norms or conventions."<sup>86</sup>

One of the ways in which I explain the construction of identity within cultural studies is as history in the making intersected with the moments and experiences of our biographies, all at once taking place within the socio-geographic-political meanings of everyday life. We make sense of culture and its values through ourselves, and as we go through the processes of meaning-making we experience

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<sup>84</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 225.

<sup>85</sup> Kirby, 11.

<sup>86</sup> Barker, 94.

identity-formation. Therefore, "since meaning is never finished or completed, identity represents a 'cut' or a snapshot of unfolding meanings."<sup>87</sup> In that sense, I would say that we do cultural studies side by side with the construction of our identity, or as Fred Inglis states, referring to the way cultural studies operates, "biography is the regular form of our method."<sup>88</sup>

If the critique of culture, therefore, happens in political terms, and we mediate culture through ourselves, it is of utmost importance to acknowledge, as self-conscious readers, our political engagements and ideological positions as we read cultural "texts".<sup>89</sup> Paraphrasing Inglis, one way to engage in the critical analysis of cultural texts is through autobiographical discourses, studying and engaging the practices of everyday life by reading from ourselves. As we read, we openly participate in constructing meaning, because "a text does not carry its own meaning or politics already inside itself. Texts do not define ahead of time how they are to

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Inglis, 235.

<sup>89</sup> The idea of "texts" refers not only to written texts, but to all what surrounds us -objects, subjects, events, ideas, etc.-, whether is tangible or not.

be used,"<sup>90</sup> they are defined according to the social location of the readers.

As I am intentionally preparing the foundations to construct my reading strategy in the following section, using the autobiographical lens, it is important that I establish the parameters I will use in the construction of my identity. From the previous theoretical statements I would like to highlight four ideas that I consider vital in my process of reading and constructing identities: first, power relations are inherently linked to the construction of identities. Identities are created in relation to outsiders, the other (i.e., Western representations of the Non-Western in terms of ethnic identities are seen often as subordinated to the West). Second, I see identities as not unified, but always fragmented, ruptured, discontinued and contradictory; we are split among political allegiances, we have multiple identities that struggle within us. Third, identities are constantly changing; they are not final products but productions in process. As Bill Ashcroft declares, "not only is identity constructed but it is variable and provisional."<sup>91</sup> For many theorists identity cannot be fixed, it is "perpetually in flux, pursuing an

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<sup>90</sup> Storey, 6-7.

<sup>91</sup> Bill Ashcroft, *Post-colonial transformation* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), 175.

illusion of wholeness and selfhood that is ultimately unattainable."<sup>92</sup> Fourth, identities are closely dependent on the space of a nation, influenced not only by the geographical space but by its political ethos. These basic ideas on identity formation, I will use in the following sections where I construct my hermeneutical framework and its reading strategy.

**Hermeneutics from the bridge:  
cultural studies from the borderlands**

As a postmodern reader, socially conditioned and ideologically positioned, I present in this section the basis for what I call my hermeneutics from the bridge. This limited and subjective hermeneutical lens represents a perspective from the US-Mexico borderland that seeks to read for liberation, aiming at social transformation and political change as part of a much larger postcolonial agenda carried by many readers from the Two-Thirds World.

Given the vast array of interpretive paradigms within biblical criticism that serve and represent diverse ideological positions, I have decided to propose my own hermeneutical lens, with its corresponding reading

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<sup>92</sup> Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi, eds., 'Identity,' *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 148.

strategy, as a way to express my own ideological position. This hermeneutics from the bridge is contoured by my social location and reflects my political position within the postcolonial discourses.

Working under the cultural studies paradigm, with my biography as my method, the foundation for my hermeneutics and reading strategy is my personal experience as a real-reader. I therefore begin by demarcating the spatial limits that have shaped my identity. As part of the Latino/a population of the US, the geographical and political history of the relationship between Mexico and the United States has played a key role in the development of my critical perspective, as I proceed to show in the following section.

### ***Land, history and identity***

The face of the world has changed dramatically during the last two centuries. Almost every nation has fought territorial battles to defend and define its boundaries and used its political power to control them. No territory changes hands without it being noticed. The power of a nation to defend and retain its boundaries—and expand them when possible—is what gives pride and dignity to its people as a nation. Every border, frontier, or limit moved,

whether to gain or to lose territory, becomes an indelible scar or a glorious memory in the identity of a nation.

The identity of the Mexican-American community in the United States has been meaningfully shaped by the history of its homeland. In 1848, with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, the life of the inhabitants of the old northern states of Mexico changed drastically. The unjust appropriation of half of the Mexican territory gave birth not only to a new population with an ambiguous identity, but also to a new reality: the unique world of the Northern Mexican borderlands, a place where the lives of many poor Mexicans turn into their loftiest dreams or their worst nightmares.

Since 1848 and Mexico's loss of half of its territory, the feeling of displacement and dispossession has been present to its people. One manifestation of this feeling is the continuous border-crossing by thousands of Mexicans who come to the United States to reclaim a better life as restitution for their seized territory. The influx of the border-crossers never stops; no law or border patrol can repress the dreams and hopes of those who, because of their poverty, have nothing to lose. The stubbornness of wanting to cross the border in spite of the many previous failed attempts has become as much a part of the identity of this

community as is their ambiguous and divided life.

It is always difficult to define the characteristics of the Mexican-American community; there are so many different realities, motives and agendas in each group. Any definition remains fragmentary and in a dynamic progress. The population, although all ethnically rooted in Mexico, has gone through varying and different stages of formation. The result is racially different faces and different political, economic and cultural realities.

Although the history of the Mexican-American/Latino(a) presence in what is now U.S. territory could be traced back to the sixteenth-century, I have started my story at a critical point that defined the geographical identity of both countries and of their people. That first critical stage of the formation of the Mexican-American community was the territorial annexation of 1848 in which Mexico lost half of its territory, and the inhabitants of those lands, to the U.S.<sup>93</sup> The second stage of formation occurred during the recruitment of workers to labor in railroad construction at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>94</sup> The third main stage happened during the Mexican Revolution (1910 to 1917), when thousands came to the U.S. looking for

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<sup>93</sup> Manuel G. González, *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States* (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 2000), 58-81.

<sup>94</sup> González, *Mexicanos* (The Great Migration 1900-1930), 113-138.

a safe place to live. Some sought a new beginning after much loss or a hiding place from the violence of the revolution.<sup>95</sup>

A fourth stage occurred during World War II, when the number of Americans engaged in military service created an overwhelming need for laborers in the homeland; this resulted in the recruitment of a large number of Mexicans to work through the "Bracero Program" (1942-64).<sup>96</sup> However, as abruptly as they were hired, they were discarded when they were no longer needed and deported when they became a burden during times of U.S. economic crisis. At one point, even Mexican-Americans who became legal citizens and had been inhabitants of the land before it was taken, were deported just like the rest, without respect for or recognition of the legal status that had been granted to them.<sup>97</sup>

The relationship of the Mexican-American people with the U.S. during the second part of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century has depended

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> González, *Mexicanos* (The Bracero Program), 170-5.

<sup>97</sup> See Denis Lynn Daly Heyck, *Barrios and Borderlands: Cultures of Latinos and Latinas in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 6; M. Gonzalez, *Mexicanos* (The Second World War and its Aftermath 1940-65), 161-190.



upon the utilitarianism of the U.S.<sup>98</sup> After a long history of labor activism, fighting for their rights at their places of work in mines, meatpacking houses, and food, garment and other industries, Mexican-American workers finally achieved a milestone. In 1965, thanks to the leadership of César Chávez, Dolores Huerta and others, the United Farm Workers Union was created. The Mexican-American/Latino(a) workers began to have a voice and an identity. It was a paradoxical event. The very borderland that was stolen and caused the loss of identity for those who were caught up in it in the nineteenth century was the land that reinstated the identity of the people who, through hard labor on what was previously their own soil, have acquired a new face in the twentieth century.<sup>99</sup> Thanks to those farm workers, the Mexican-American community has been gaining public identity ever since and has been getting stronger through education and political participation.<sup>100</sup>

In regard to the awakening of the community, Gloria Anzaldúa says: "Chicanos did not know we were a people

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<sup>98</sup> Heyck, 5-8.

<sup>99</sup> M. Gonzalez, *Mexicano* (The Chicano Movement), 191-222.

<sup>100</sup> For a brief history of Mexicans in the US see, Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latino in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), "Mexicans: Pioneers of a Different Type," 96-107.

until 1965 when César Chávez and the farm-workers united and *I Am Joaquín* was published and *La Raza Unida* party was formed in Texas."<sup>101</sup> From that moment in history, the Mexican-American population started raising its voice through a variety of organizations that the Chicano movement has birthed. Apart of the workers' movement, the Chicano movement has helped to secure civil rights and respect for Mexican-Americans' identity as a people and a culture.

The Mexican-American population is numerous and diverse, deeply rooted in both countries' ways. For many of those coming from Mexico, the U.S. represents the hope of reclaiming a better life and a sense of getting even for the past loss. Although each person crosses the border for a different reason and with a different agenda, one thing seems to remain the same for all: there is an ambiguity of identity that makes it easy to slip back and forth between both worlds; because of the geographic proximity of the U.S. to Mexico living a part-time lifestyle, half of the year in the U.S. and the other half in Mexico, has become second nature. Those living this life are chameleons in their U.S. surroundings and trick the system with their

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<sup>101</sup> See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987), 63.

double identity. Life in the borderlands is a constant metamorphosis and a game of masks, switching from one identity to another, risking all to regain in other ways what was taken from them. Smuggling has become the ethos of survival, not only in the smuggling of goods but also in the smuggling of lives, of the risk-takers who dangerously cross the border everyday. According to Gloria Anzaldúa, "[in order] to survive the Borderlands you must live *sin fronteras* [without borders] and be a crossroads."<sup>102</sup>

A glimpse of the many faces and agendas of the Mexican-American population in this country can be seen in the following quote from Anzaldúa's self-definition:

We do not identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don't totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness . . . sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. When not copping out, when we know we are more than nothing, we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; mestizo when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly ever own our Black) ancestry; Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the US; Raza when referring to Chicanos; Tejanos when we are Chicanos from Texas.<sup>103</sup>

Here she is just talking about that part of the population that was born in the United States. The complexity of the community increases when we include also those born and raised in Mexico, people who has come to the

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<sup>102</sup> Anzaldúa, 195.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 63.

U.S. to stay permanently or who may be commuting between both worlds, the identity of the community becomes multi-dimensional.<sup>104</sup>

Diverse political, economical, historical and cultural situations have brought us to be part of this ambiguous Mexican-American population. We have suffered discrimination, segregation, and many other problems, like the rest of the Latino/a minorities, but, through the organized movements that fight for civil rights and through the education of our people, the Mexican-American community has been getting stronger. As long as we insist on affirming our identity and our roots, there is hope that the entire Latino/a community can become an agent of historical change.

It is with this idea in mind, in the spirit of the sociological imagination,<sup>105</sup> that I embrace my historical background and intersect it with my biography. I search for ways in which I can use my social location to bring about

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<sup>104</sup> For a complex and detailed categorization of the nine types of Mexican, Mexican-American and Anglo-American borderlanders see Oscar J. Martinez, *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S. - Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1998), 70-1.

<sup>105</sup> A concept coined by sociologist Mills in 1959. It is the ability to intersect our biography with the historical moment in which we are living; to find the connection between our everyday life at the social, personal and historical level. See C. Wright Mills, *The sociological imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).

historical, political change and social transformation through everyday cultural practices, particularly through the interpretation of the cultural text that has shaped the Western world, the Bible.

Having presented the socio-historical dimension of my identity, I present in the following section my biographical intersection.

***The bridge: struggle, rupture and hybridity***

As a Mexican woman, born and bred in the bicultural neo-colonialist context of the Rio Grande Valley borderlands and now living as a resident alien in the US, I am aware of my particular situation and of the fact that I represent just another segment of the present postmodern plurality. I am also aware that both the space I inhabit and my hybrid identity help me to read and interpret reality in a particular way. I celebrate my biculturalism as an advantaged point of view that allows me to evaluate, consider, respect and appreciate the presence of the multiple realities that co-exist in this country.

By acknowledging the complexity of my context and by listening to other Mexican-American voices, I can better understand the perspectives and the sources of my identity and the ways in which I can use them as hermeneutical

lenses.

I grew up in the bicultural context of the borderlands, in a Mexican town called Reynosa which borders Texas. I was well-informed of my Mexican roots and well-acquainted with the history of the United States of America. I recall being aware, even as a child, of the historical struggle hidden (historically and symbolically) behind the International Bridge, located just ten blocks away from my parents' home. In a way, that bridge represented the negative result of the rupture we suffered as a nation at the hands of our imperialist neighbor. Paradoxically, the bridge also represents the physicality of a new connection —a hybrid culture resulting from the encounter of two very different worlds; one struggling for survival under economic oppression, the other thrashing about in the waters of interventionism.

In my childhood, I did not know the complexity involved in a label such as Hispanic or Latina. Back then, the only Latinos/as I knew were Chicanos/as and Puerto Ricans. And although I used to associate the U.S. with good things such as candy, toys, vacations, and having a good time with my family, I had never thought of living in the US: first, because of my awareness of the negative historical background of U.S./Mexican relations; second,

because of my firsthand experience with racism during the years that I lived in the borderlands; and, third, because of my personal knowledge of the oppression and cruelty inflicted upon the grassroots Mexican people when searching for jobs on the U.S. side of the bridge to better their families' quality of life.

These experiences, however, were one-sided and my viewpoint shifted when I moved to the United States in 1988. Only at the north side of the Rio Grande was I able to understand what being a U.S. Hispanic/Latina woman meant. My decision to move to the U.S. was difficult. I temporarily lost the freedom, mobility and agency that I felt I had within the familiar space of my own country. However, I must also say that I have acquired a better perspective and a greater awareness of my mestiza, hybrid identity as a Mexican-American and now as a Latina living in an alien context. While I was living in Mexico, I took such identity for granted.

My condition as an alien in the U.S. has helped me go back in my history and be more aware of the political location in which I stand now with my hybrid identity. The roots of my identity as a Mexican-American/Latina woman, as I see it, have their origins in the imperialistic move by the U.S. to incorporate not only the northern region of the

Mexican land but also the population living there at the time. "In 1848, U.S. imperialism created a group of second-class citizens within the belly of the beast."<sup>106</sup> Somehow, our presence here is a metaphorical way of recovering our lost territory. However, it is also important to acknowledge that our presence in the U.S. is a product of various other motives: some come to acquire education; others to reunite with family; others for political issues; but the vast majority of Mexican immigrants come searching for survival. The impoverishment experienced by the grassroots mass in Latin America, caused by the imposition of neoliberal global capitalism, is probably the main factor that forces our people to cross the border. In a succinct way, Fernando Segovia has defined this segment of the Hispanic-Latino/a population that has immigrated to the U.S. as "the diaspora (which) represents the sum total of all those who presently live, for whatever reason, on a permanent basis in a country other than that of their birth."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> José David Saldívar, "Américo Paredes and Decolonization," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 299.

<sup>107</sup> Fernando F. Segovia, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Diaspora: A Hermeneutics of Otherness and Engagement," in *Reading from this place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, eds. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 60.



The experience of imperialism lived by the Mexican-American population has been complex both historically and religiously. First, Spain came with an evangelization project that demolished the religious systems of our ancestors. The Spaniards ignored and disregarded our native cultural and religious beliefs, resulting in an ontological oppression that threatened our identity.

Then the U.S. came, with its imperialistic enculturation through its Protestant evangelizing projects that were no different from the first evangelization of Mexico conducted by the Roman Catholic Church of Spain. These evangelization projects were undertaken with imperialistic intent and they included a supposedly universal way of reading and interpreting the Bible. Such a "universal way," however, encouraged us to live our Christianity in an Anglo-European style.

In spite of the enculturation brought through the different processes of evangelization, in many ways the Mexican-American community has persistently returned to its own heritage. In some places, where the concentration of Mexican-American population is large enough to have a strong presence, they constantly reinforce their identity by means of special celebrations, by establishing their own stores, restaurants, churches, and museums, and by creating

and participating in coalitions that give voice to the community. All these cultural expressions somehow reenact the life they left back in their native country.

The bridge, as a site of struggle, rupture, and hybridity, represents a reminding scar of the oppression imposed on the Mexican-American population, but also a place of dialogue and construction from where we as Mexican-Americans can reconstruct our identity, denounce oppression and call for liberation. The bridge, a privileged site that allows me to stand at the same time on both sides of the border and in two completely different places, offers a rich hybrid location that can be used as a reading strategy and a model for political change.

Building upon the metaphor of the bridge as a place of rupture, encounter and hybridity, I present my contextual reading strategy.

### **Border criticism: hybridity as reading strategy**

As readers, we make sense of the texts we encounter in ways which seem to fit our needs. Each reader uses the interpretive strategies that can better help her make sense of her world.<sup>108</sup> In my readings of the world and its texts I have discovered that, for the most part, my interpretive

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<sup>108</sup>. Storey, 6-7.

strategies come from my life, particularly from my hybrid experience of growing up in a bi-cultural, bi-lingual, bi-national, bi-ethnic/racial and bi-religious context. From an early age I learned to navigate in dual, ambiguous settings, both at social and familial levels. My hybridity, however, began long before I was born, and it has been an integral part of the Mexican people.

Using the ideological framework of cultural studies as my platform, which openly invites my autobiographical discourse as my method, according to Inglis,<sup>109</sup> I use here my personal experience to develop my reading strategy from the bridge. This helps me make sense of the biblical text in relevant ways, as I intersect my biography with this postmodern, postcolonial, globalized historical moment we live in. As a feminist, hybrid/border woman of Mexican origin, shaped by the bi-cultural socio-political context of the Mexico-U.S. borderland, trained in the academic world of the empire, and now teaching others to subvert the hegemonic interpretations of the biblical text, I have come to realize that the prolonged act of border-crossing has been crucial not just in the formation of my identity but in my perception of the world.

Surrounded by cultural differences, we operate within

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<sup>109</sup> Inglis, 235.

all sorts of borders, literal and figurative.<sup>110</sup> Our identity is shaped not only by the limits of the borders we inhabit but also by the political ramifications of respecting or crossing those borders. In speaking of the functions of a border, Alejandro Morales says,

A border maps limits; it keeps people in and out of an area; it marks the ending of a safe zone and the beginning of an unsafe zone. To confront a border and, more so, to cross a border presumes great risk. In general, people fear and are afraid to cross borders. People will not leave their safe zone, will not venture into what they consider an unsafe zone.<sup>111</sup>

For Gloria Anzaldúa, "the borderlands are the privileged locus of hope for a better world."<sup>112</sup> In a similar way, Russ Castronovo celebrates the potential of the contact zone, but he advises us not to forget "the trappings of power that patrol the boundaries of any area of culture."<sup>113</sup> The borders, as permeable boundaries, prove advantageous not only for borderlanders, but for the hegemonic ideologies

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<sup>110</sup> See R. Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993). 217.

<sup>111</sup> A. Morales, 'Dynamic Identities in Heterotopia', in *Alejandro Morales: Fiction Past, Present, Future Perfect*, ed. J.A. Gurpegui (Tempe: Bilingual Review, 1996), 14-27 (23).

<sup>112</sup> Scott Michaelsen and David E. Johnson, 'Border Secrets: An Introduction,' in *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*, ed. S. Michaelsen and D.E. Johnson (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>113</sup> Russ Castronovo, 'Compromised Narratives along the Border: The Mason-Dixon Line, Resistance, and Hegemony,' in *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*, ed. S. Michaelsen and D.E. Johnson (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 203.

that structure social realities.<sup>114</sup>

Whether we celebrate the subversiveness of borderlanders or lament the repressiveness of border patrols, it is important when reading cultural maps to "pay attention to the borders, for it is in these uncertain regions where the landscape of politics is most susceptible to sudden change and reversal."<sup>115</sup> And to better understand borders, it is vital to pay attention to border identities and the hybrid realities that emerge from the borderlands.

Some of the lessons I have learned from the border, as a borderlanders, have come to serve now as foundation for my strategy of reading and surviving. First, I have learned that reality is never what it seems at the borderlands; we and the others can always hide and disguise our presence and/or actions. The reasons may be diverse: to protect our identity, gain access, avoid interrogation, manipulate situations or stress power-relations. Second, although the image of a border seems to set a limit, there is always the possibility of going beyond the limits. In spite of all the obstacles and laws that those in power try to enforce to limit the agency of the oppressed, the survival instinct always rises, and those who need to cross to preserve their

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<sup>114</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity', *Communication Inquiry* 10 (1986): 5-27 (22).

<sup>115</sup> Castronovo, 217.

life find new routes and ways of crossing. Third, the mixture and hybridity that occurs in the borderlands brings about the reality of a third option, a new possibility, not confusion or diminishing. Fourth, contact zones, although unsafe at times, offer the possibility of change, rupture and renegotiation of a better world, when the interdependence between the two parts is respectfully acknowledged.

With such cross-border lessons I propose a reading strategy from the borderlands using as lens the concept of hybridity. I intend to read and appropriate the texts that surround me as hybrid-texts, understanding hybridity 'as the sign of the ambivalent and shifting forces of colonial power which cannot be registered at a purely mimetic level within colonial discourse but exceed it, resisting containment and closure,'<sup>116</sup> as described by Homi Bhabha.

Two basic assumptions emerge for this proposed reading strategy from the borderlands: first, the recognition of the reader's hybridity as a way of avoiding the illusion of universal and objective readings and as a way of identifying the contesting extremes of her/his different reading axes; second, the acknowledgement of the text as a

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<sup>116</sup>. M. Rossington, "Homi K. Bhabha," in *The A-Z Guide to Modern Literary and Cultural Theorists*, ed. Stuart Sim (London: Prentice Hall, 1995), p. 52.

hybrid product containing different sides and positions within it, inscribed at the moment of its production, as well as a site where multiple meanings converge and are produced in the context where the text is read/consumed.

Besides having my hybridity as a reading strategy and as a strategy for survival, I also see it as a model for political change. Following Bhabha's concept of the hybrid moment, where "the transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are neither the One nor the Other but something else besides, which contests the terms and territories of both,"<sup>117</sup> I will use hybridity as a way of defying the pervasiveness of binary thinking in the biblical text to offer a political reading that opens a third, new, infinite space.

In the end, what seems critical for me when reading the biblical text from the bridge is to open hybrid spaces—different interpretations of the text that dare to cross borders—in order to find a better life for those who are oppressed. This reading strategy strives to bring about liberation by engaging the text as a hybrid text that is always fluid and always changing. In the following chapter I show the application of this reading strategy.

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<sup>117</sup>. H.K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 28.

## CHAPTER III

### JESUS THE BORDERLANDER: A CULTURAL REPRESENTATION OF JESUS FROM THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

#### **Introduction**

The Bible, like other cultural texts, has permeable borders; is not a hermetic self-contained narrative. It is a *hybrid-text* that has been read, translated, represented, interpreted and transmitted in so many ways that it is not uncommon to see it being reenacted in movies or TV programs. We hear its message in songs, admire its characters through sculptures and paintings, and encounter its stories in such a wide variety of media that at times we overlook them. Over the centuries then, the Bible has been undergoing hybridization, a process that is even more active now than when the texts were first written.

The biblical text certainly belongs to the culture that produced it, but now it belongs to us, as it has also belonged to all the cultures before us who have consumed it, re-produced it and re-enacted it. However, to say that the text belongs to the present or that it is *sin fronteras* and hybrid does not mean it is ahistorical. On the contrary, the timeless re-enactment of the text is what makes more evident its historical nature and its role in



making Hi/story. Just as the text's hi/stories have been shaping the ways we read our own her/stories—and make Hi/story in the West—our personal her/stories have also been shaping the ways we read the text's hi/stories. This hybridization of the text, a mutually-transforming process between text and reader (meaning producer), is not only active at the consumption level but also at the production level, where personal hi/stories shape the hi/stories within the text. As I look closely at the *Gospel of John* in this chapter, it is possible to appreciate the strategic value of the hybrid quality of the *Gospel of John*, at both levels.

My aim in this chapter is to analyze the characterization of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. Using my hybrid identity as a hermeneutical lens and reading strategy, I will present what I identify as a hybrid Jesus in *John*: a cultural representation of Jesus as borderlander. His hybridity offers both a strategy for survival and a model for political change.

This chapter is divided into two sections and each section comprises four subsections. Section one looks at Jesus' representation in the Prologue of John. Its first subsection establishes the context of production of the passage; the second surveys some of the main scholarly

interpretations of the characterization of Jesus from the Prologue; the third explores Jesus' hybrid identity through my cultural reading of the Prologue (Jn 1:1-18); and the fourth is a brief conclusion of the section. Section two is my journeying through the story of the Accused Woman (Jn 7:53-8:11). The first subsection establishes the context of production of this passage; the second surveys some of the main scholarly interpretations of the *Pericope Adulterae*; the third tracks Jesus' cross-border activity and identity as a borderlander from my cultural perspective; and the fourth is a brief conclusion of the section. Both cultural interpretations emerge from the application of the reading strategy and hermeneutical lens developed in chapter two. Because each text is a unique terrain which can be roamed in multiple directions, according to the signals we decide to follow, there are no fixed steps in the reading and interpretive processes of each story. Rather each reading shows distinct aspects of my hermeneutics from the bridge outlined in chapter 2.

## **In the beginning: mapping Jesus' hybrid identity in the Prologue of John**

According to Raymond Brown, the *Gospel of John* emerges from and reflects the struggles of a mixed community of Jews, Gentiles and Samaritans who were striving to accommodate to their different theological positions.<sup>1</sup> For Brown, the Johannine community, constructed as a marginal group expelled from the synagogue, was struggling with their "relationship to Judaism, with questions of self-identity, and with Christian life in a situation of minority status and some oppression."<sup>2</sup>

The sociological presuppositions offered by Brown, of a mixed community which produced the *Gospel of John* as an attempt to make sense of its surroundings, serve as framework to my cultural reading of the Prologue of John. Understanding the dynamics of such border society, where multiple realities converge and cross-cultural ties give way to hybrid identities illumine the hybrid nature of the representation of Jesus, the Logos, and explain the cross-

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<sup>1</sup> C.R. Koester, "R.E. Brown and J.L. Martyn: Johannine Studies in Retrospect," *BTB* 21 (1991):53.

<sup>2</sup> R. Kysar, "The Gospel of John," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Volume 3. Editor-in-chief D.N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 918. The three most common causes used to explain the expulsion from the synagogue are: "the introduction of another group of Christians into the community [...], the enforcement of

border interactions of the Johannine Jesus in the story of the Accused Woman. Ultimately, the Johannine narrative can be read as discursive-performative because it "enacts or produces that which it names through citation and reiteration of norms or conventions."<sup>3</sup> Both passages are the reflection of the community's hybridism and hence models produced to solidify such identity.

### ***The Prologue and its context of production***

In the history of Johannine scholarship, the Prologue of the Gospel is one of those passages that has most intrigued readers and inspired the widest variety of interpretations. Every commentary written on *John* refers to the Prologue's uniqueness, its perplexing and puzzling character, and the challenges that it poses to those who try to break its density in search of a compelling interpretation.

In addition to the primary fascination that *John's* Prologue elicits, due to its famous and ever-captivating concept of Logos, the context of its production continues to pique readers' curiosities. In the last century two main hypotheses have circulated within Johannine scholarship as

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a formal benediction against the heretics [...], the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E" (918).

possible means to elucidate the origins of the Prologue and its production context. The first hypothesis, which I call the revisionist approach, assumes that an independent poem is the source for the Johannine Prologue.<sup>4</sup> Following this approach, most scholars have studied the Prologue as a reconstructed piece that the Evangelist redacted based on a pre-existent hymn of uncertain origins. This hypothesis is expressed in three viewpoints that correspond to the three settings usually identified as probable contexts of the "original hymn." The first viewpoint proposes that the "original hymn" emerged from Gnostic circles in the surrounding areas, the second viewpoint adjudicates the "original hymn" to Jewish Wisdom speculation, and the third viewpoint affirms that the hymn came out of the cultic setting of the Johannine community itself.<sup>5</sup>

The second hypothesis, the one that acknowledges the creativity of the Evangelist as author of the Prologue, I call the creationist approach.

In general, scholars who support the revisionist hypothesis that the Prologue was taken out of an existent

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<sup>3</sup> Barker, 94.

<sup>4</sup> Gail O'Day, "The Gospel of John. Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Volume IX (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 517.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 517-520.

hymn point to the "rhythmical sentences, verses, strophes which are distinguished from prose elements or additions, [the] breaks and sudden switches in the movement of thought"<sup>6</sup> as confirming evidence. The absence of the Logos as a Christological title in the rest of the Gospel and the lack of Johannine style in some verses are also arguments used to support this hypothesis.

In regards to the first viewpoint of the revisionist hypothesis, the Gnostic influence in the Prologue, Rudolf Bultmann establishes his presupposition of the presence of a Gnostic source in the formation of the Prologue, elaborating on the idea advanced by Hermann Gunkel "of an early impact of eastern Gnostic speculation upon early Christianity."<sup>7</sup> This presupposition postulates that the Prologue is the Evangelist's revised work of a pre-Christian "Logos hymn."<sup>8</sup> According to Bultmann, the hymn originated in the Gnostic circle of the Mandaeans, a community that considered John the baptizer as one of its

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<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John*, Vol. 1 (London: Burns & Oates; New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 224.

<sup>7</sup> Rudolph Bultmann, "The History of Religions Background of the Prologue to the Gospel of John," in *The Interpretation of John*, ed. John Ashton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 43.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43.

prophets or "priests."<sup>9</sup> He affirms that, with all probability, it was in that community that "it had been said of John the Baptist that, in him, the Word had become flesh."<sup>10</sup> It is clear, affirms Bultmann, that the Baptist sect was robbed of its hero and "what was said of him is now asserted of Jesus and he is made to witness on Jesus' behalf,"<sup>11</sup> which consequently explains the demotion of John the baptizer in the Gospel.<sup>12</sup>

Although Bultmann's work influenced greatly the study of the Prologue, his classic theory has been practically abandoned. One of its predicaments is the anachronism of the material he cites as influential to the Prologue, *the Odes of Solomon*, which postdate the *Gospel of John*.<sup>13</sup> Besides, there is no evidence to prove that Gnosticism existed during the writing process of the *Fourth Gospel* or that John the Baptist had a connection with such a school

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<sup>9</sup> Rudolph Kurt, "Mandaeism," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, volume 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 500.

<sup>10</sup> Bultmann, "History of Religions," 42.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>12</sup> According to the evangelist, John the baptizer is very clear about his lower status when compared with Jesus. Through his testimony in chapter one he several times affirms it: "I am not the Messiah;" "I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals;" and "after me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me," (1:20, 27, and 30 respectively.)

<sup>13</sup> O' Day, "The Gospel of John," 517.

of thought.<sup>14</sup>

The second viewpoint within the revisionist hypothesis emphasizes the literary dependency of the Prologue on Jewish Wisdom Traditions, including the writings of Philo, which, according to C.H. Dodd,<sup>15</sup> exhibit a close link between the concepts of Logos and Sophia.

Similarly, Adela Yarbro Collins affirms that the representation of the Logos in the Prologue stands parallel with the typical representation of Wisdom in the Jewish Wisdom Tradition and these are almost interchangeable characters within the *Wisdom of Solomon* as well as in Philo's writings.<sup>16</sup>

Although the word Sophia is not present as such in the *Gospel of John*, the influence of Jewish Wisdom literature in the Prologue is undeniable. The books of *Proverbs*, *Sirach*, *Wisdom of Solomon*, *Baruch* and *1 Enoch* offer a clear parallelism of Sophia and Logos as we can see in the following table:

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<sup>14</sup> Martin Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus*, JSNTSup 71 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 27.

<sup>15</sup> C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 272-85.

<sup>16</sup> See Adela Yarbro Collins, "New Testament Perspectives: The Gospel of John," *JSOT* 22 (1982), 50.



Logos-John	Wisdom-Torah
<p><sup>1a</sup> In the beginning was the Logos</p>	<p>Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me, and for all the ages I shall not cease to be. <b>Sirach 24:9</b>  I will trace her course from the beginning of creation, and make knowledge of her clear. <b>Wisdom 2:22</b>  The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. <b>Proverbs 8:22-23</b></p>
<p><sup>1b</sup> and the Logos was with God, and God was the Logos.</p>	<p>With you is wisdom, she who knows your works and was present when you made the world; she understands what is pleasing in your sight and what is right according to your commandments. <b>Wisdom 9:9</b></p>
<p><sup>3</sup> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being.</p>	<p>The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens. <b>Proverbs 3:19</b>  I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always. <b>Proverbs 8:30</b>  I learned both what is secret and what is manifest, for wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me. <b>Wisdom 7:21-22</b></p>
<p><sup>4</sup> in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.</p>	<p>For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness. <b>Wisdom 7:26</b>  For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD. <b>Proverbs 8:35</b></p>
<p><sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.</p>	<p>She is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail. <b>Wisdom 7:29-30</b></p>
<p><sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him</p>	<p>She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well. <b>Wisdom 8:1</b>  No one knows the way to her, or is concerned about the path to her. <b>Baruch 3:31</b></p>
<p><sup>11</sup> He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.</p>	<p>Then the Creator of all things gave me a command, and my Creator chose the place for my tent. He said, "Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance." <b>Sirach 24:8</b>  Wisdom found not a place on earth where she could inhabit; her dwelling therefore is in heaven. <b>1 Enoch 42:1</b></p>
<p><sup>12</sup> But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.</p>	<p>Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets. <b>Wisdom 7:27</b>  For wisdom is like her name; she is not readily perceived by many. <b>Sirach 6:22</b></p>
<p><sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth</p>	<p>In the holy tent I ministered before him, and so I was established in Zion. <b>Sirach 24:10</b>  Afterwards she appeared on earth and lived with humankind. <b>Baruch 3:37</b>  She is the book of the commandments of God, the law that endures for ever. All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die. <b>Baruch 4:1</b></p>

According to Rudolf Schnackenburg, "the strong echoes of the O.T. and speculations on Wisdom and the Torah" might have come from Christian converts from Hellenistic Judaism.<sup>17</sup> He advocates for a Christian origin of the hymn, which he qualifies as a "Hellenist" Christian hymn given the inclusion of the Logos. If we read the Prologue in light of some of the hymns that emerged from the early church<sup>18</sup>, affirms Schnackenburg, such as the ones in Philippians 2:6-11 and Colossians 1:15-20, there is no need for a theory of a pre-Christian hymn about the Baptist as proposed by Bultmann, when similar hymns to Christ were circulating in the primitive Church.<sup>19</sup>

Schnackenburg, who states that the core material of the Prologue belonged to a cultic hymn, distinguishes four strophes: the first addresses the identity of the Logos and its role in creation (verses 1-3); the second strophe explains the role of the Logos in the world as its life and light (verses 4-9); the third mourns the rejection of the Logos before its incarnation (verses 10-11); and the fourth strophe is a joyful praise to the incarnation that brings

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<sup>17</sup> Schnackenburg, *St. John*, Vol. 1, 231.

<sup>18</sup> Ephesians 5:19

<sup>19</sup> See Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII)*, Anchor Bible 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 19-20.

salvation to the believers (verses 14-16).<sup>20</sup>

Also acknowledging the Hellenistic Jewish influence, John Painter declares that "in its 'Hellenist' form, the hymn praised Christ as the Wisdom of God for his role in creation."<sup>21</sup>

The third viewpoint of the revisionist hypothesis is the one that traces back the "original hymn" to the cultic setting of the Johannine community. Both authors, Robert Kysar<sup>22</sup> and Ernest Haenchen<sup>23</sup> observe a close connection between the narrative of the Gospel and the themes of the Prologue and argue that the Evangelist used a hymn composed by a member of his community. "If it were a later addition to the Gospel, it was surely added by someone who fully and correctly understood the ambiance of the entire work," affirms Kysar, "[since] it constitutes an important part of the whole Gospel."<sup>24</sup>

Raymond Brown also believes that the Prologue was composed within Johannine circles. De Aulsebrook, who holds a

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<sup>20</sup> See Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 226-27.

<sup>21</sup> John Painter, *The Quest for the Messiah: The History, Literature and Theology of the Johannine Community*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 149.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Kysar, *John*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986) 28.

<sup>23</sup> Ernst Haenchen, *John*, Heremeneia, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 129.

similar position, states that "the Prologue was a hymn that emerged from the Johannine church located in Ephesus."<sup>25</sup>

With the intention of explaining the differences in style and form in the Prologue, as well as the double mention of both John the baptizer and the incarnation of the Logos, Mathias Rissi formulated a theory affirming that the Prologue is the merging of two hymns. According to Rissi, these two hymns were composed within the community of the Evangelist. The first hymn focuses on the creative Word, which is presented in verses 1 to 13, and the second focuses on the salvation event, found in verses 14 to 18. In both cases, the central element is the incarnation of the Word.<sup>26</sup>

Overall, although most of the scholars who subscribe to the revisionist hypothesis offer attractive explanations about the origin and formation of the Prologue, none of the postulated reconstructions of the hymn(s) have been able to recover the poetic form of the original source. If ever there was an "original hymn," we will never be able to reconstruct it "because of the difficulty of identifying all of the additions and because there might also have been

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel*. Rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993) 29.

<sup>25</sup> Brown, *John*, 20-23.

deletions,"<sup>27</sup> affirms John Painter.

So far, there is no agreement on which verses belonged to the original hymn and how it was joined to the Gospel. There is only general agreement on verses 1-5, 10-11 and 14 as being part of the original poem based on "the poetic quality of the lines such as the length, number of accents and coordination."<sup>28</sup>

The second hypothesis, which I call the creationist approach, advocates for the creativity of the Evangelist, acknowledging the Prologue as a text written especially as an introduction to the *Fourth Gospel*.

Among scholars who believe there is a clear and intentional connection between the Prologue and the *Gospel of John*, we find J.A.T. Robinson who insists that both texts were written by the same author, the Gospel first and then the Prologue.<sup>29</sup> Following a similar line of thought, Francis Moloney affirms that the Prologue was the last piece of the Gospel to be shaped and the Evangelist purposefully connected the themes of the Prologue with the

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<sup>26</sup> Painter, *Quest*, 144.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>28</sup> Brown, *John*, 21.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 19.

narrative of the Gospel.<sup>30</sup>

Robert Kysar also views the Prologue as closely connected to the Gospel through the several themes that they share, just "as [an] overture to an opera captures the mood of the entire work (Gospel)."<sup>31</sup>

Also in favor of acknowledging the Prologue as an original work from the Evangelist's hand are Morna Hooker<sup>32</sup> and C.K. Barrett<sup>33</sup>. Their adherence to the creationist hypothesis is confirmed by their belief that the verses of John the Baptist are essential to the Prologue; they read the verses as an intentional inclusion of the Evangelist and not as an intrusion made into an original independent poem.

Gail O'Day also asserts the compositional abilities of the Evangelist and sees the Prologue as an introduction composed especially for the Gospel, but does not deny the

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<sup>30</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word. Reading John 1-4* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 23.

<sup>31</sup> Kysar, *Maverick*, 29. What seems to be important for Kysar regarding the debate on the composition of the Prologue is to affirm that the close link of content that exists between the Prologue and the Gospel is the result of an intentional act of a redactor who put both pieces together. Whether the Evangelist used a hymn from his/her community or wrote the Prologue on his/her own is secondary for him. Therefore, I acknowledge him as supporting both, the third viewpoint of the revisionist hypothesis as well as the creationist hypothesis.

<sup>32</sup> Morna Hooker, "John the Baptist and the Johannine Prologue," *NTS* 16 (1969-70) 354-58.

high probability of the incorporation of phrases that belonged to a pre-existent hymn, even those phrases which can no longer be identified in verse form in the Prologue.<sup>34</sup> She believes that the Evangelist created a new piece by bringing together "two strands of early Christian tradition [...]: a hymn that celebrated the cosmic origins and pre-existence of Jesus the Word, and the John the Baptist material."<sup>35</sup>

Whether we consider the Prologue as emerging from an independent poem or as coming out of the Evangelist's inventiveness, the influence of Jewish Wisdom traditions is clearly woven throughout its verses. In the end, what comes across as the common element shared by all these hypotheses is the recognition of a hybrid origin of the Prologue. Eventually, this textual hybridism will prove helpful in the process of constructing Jesus' identity from a postcolonial hybrid perspective.

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<sup>33</sup> C.K. Barret, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) 149-50.

<sup>34</sup> O'Day, "John," 518.

### ***Reading the Prologue with others***

As I read the Prologue in the company of other readers, I have centered my attention on those elements that demarcate the identity of the Logos. I am interested in the ways readers represent the Logos: how it is depicted, what they say about its origin, nature, and other distinctive traits.

Before I review some of the contemporary constructions of the Logos within Johannine scholarship, a brief look at the Church's early controversies regarding the nature of the incarnate Word, and its representations, is in order. Although the decrees make no direct reference to the *Gospel of John* the subtext of the controversies seems to be *John's* Prologue and its preexistent Logos. Therefore, an examination of the decrees promulgated by the nascent institutionalized Church of the fourth and fifth century will offer a helpful framework to appreciate how some current representations of the Logos have moved away from the somewhat imperializing views of the Church, and how others have been deeply influenced by and conformed to them.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Although no clear evidence exists that Constantine imposed his will on the Councils' decree, I find his participation as convener and presider of the council highly compromising for the



### *The Logos and the Ecumenical Councils*

Almost seventeen centuries ago, in 325 CE, in an effort to standardize the faith of the Christian Church, the First General Council assembled at Nicaea issued the first official Christological statement.<sup>37</sup> The convocation of this first ecumenical council of the Christian Church was an imperial favor bestowed upon the Church by the recently converted Roman Emperor, Constantine the Great.<sup>38</sup>

One of the main issues on the agenda of the council gathered at Nicaea was to resolve the disagreement that had emerged within the church of Alexandria between the bishop Alexander and the presbyter Arius. The discord regarded the nature of the Trinity, particularly the nature of Jesus. According to Arius, since Christ was created by God, there must have been a time when the Son did not exist and, as a creation of God, the Son was of a separate and not of the same nature as God. To counteract the Arian controversy, the council issued the famous Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God the Father all powerful, maker of all

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autonomy of the Church. The fact that the dissenters were exiled by Constantine demonstrates the imperial control he had over the Church which, in turn, imperialized the Christian world with its decrees.

<sup>37</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament. A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 390.

<sup>38</sup> Philip Hughes, *The Church in Crisis: A History of the General Councils 325-1870* (New York: Hanover House, 1960), 22.

things both seen and unseen. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten begotten from the Father, **that is from the substance** [Gr. *ousias*, Lat. *substantia*] **of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten** [Gr. *gennethenta*, Lat. *natum*] **not made** [Gr. *poethenta*, Lat. *factum*], **CONSUBSTANTIAL** [Gr. *homousion*, Lat. *unius substantiae (quod Graeci dicunt homousion)*] with the Father, through whom all things came to be, both those in heaven and those in earth; for us humans and for our salvation he came down and became incarnate, became human, suffered and rose up on the third day, went up into the heavens, is coming to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup>

What the council emphatically highlights with this creed is the concept of *homooúision*, to avow that, as the only-begotten Son (*begotten*, not made), Jesus Christ is made up of the same substance as the Father. Apparently, the metaphor of a self-engendering God, who reproduces God-self as if from within, was not problematic but rather helpful in making believable the idea of a common substance shared by the offspring and the parent. It is interesting to highlight that, although the creed mentions the incarnation, Jesus becoming a human, it completely ignores the participation of a human mother in the process or the ramifications that being born as a human has in Jesus' identity.

Certainly the metaphor of the self-engendering God

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<sup>39</sup> Daily Catholic, Documents of the Council of Nicaea 325 AD, <http://www.dailycatholic.org/history/lecumen.htm>, translation taken from Norman P. Tanner, SJ, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical*

raises questions, but it is less conflictive than the metaphor of a God who creates God-self externally, since it implies a difference in substance between the creator and the creation, which was the issue at stake. Besides the matter of substance, the connotation behind the Arian controversy is the denial of the pre-existence of the Logos. If Christ was created, it is assumed that he had a beginning. However, if Christ was begotten it means that somehow he had always been present within God. Therefore, by declaring the consubstantiality of Father and Son, the council affirmed the pre-existence of Christ.

The formulation of the Nicene Creed, however, did not put a stop to the controversies; in 381 CE, a second General Council gathered in Constantinople.<sup>40</sup> This time, the council "was summoned primarily as a solemn demonstration of the unshakable loyalty of the eastern bishops to the faith as set forth at Nicaea."<sup>41</sup> At the end of the council, the bishops issued a declaration of faith renewing their adherence to the definition of *homooúision* established in Nicaea.

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*Councils* (London: Sheed and Ward; Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 1990).

<sup>40</sup> Hubert Jedin, *Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church. An Historical Survey* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1960), 24.

<sup>41</sup> Hughes, *Church in Crisis*, 37.

Additionally, the bishops also issued a meticulous declaration of faith "in the consubstantiality of the Divine Logos with the Father, in the distinctness of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, and in the reality of the Incarnation of the Second Person."<sup>42</sup> This statement of faith, was issued to condemn the theory of Apollinaris, bishop of Laodicea, who believed that "in the Logos Incarnate—in the God-human, Jesus Christ—the Divine Logos functions in place of a human soul: Christ, who is truly God, is not truly a man."<sup>43</sup> Judging by Apollinaris' statement, it is evident that the physical implications of the human incarnation continued to be ignored; "the reality of the Incarnation of the Second Person"<sup>44</sup> was still only a metaphorical concept, not a concrete reality.

The heresy of Apollinaris continued to be spread in various forms and, fifty years later, in 431 CE, a third Ecumenical Council was summoned in Ephesus to neutralize one of the heresies derived from Apollinaris' beliefs. On this occasion, the concern of the council regarding the nature of the Logos was to contest *Nestorianism*, the belief spread by Nestorius, Archbishop of Constantinople, that

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Christ existed as two persons, the Son of God and Jesus the human being, living in the body of a man. In opposition to this idea, the Council clearly stated that, even though Christ had two natures-*Divine and human*, he only had one Person, Divine.<sup>45</sup>

In his second letter to Nestorius, a document presented at the Council of Ephesus, Cyril, Pope of Alexandria and leading voice of this Christological controversy,<sup>46</sup> issues the following proclamation attempting to correct Nestorius' false teachings:

We claim that the Word, in an unspeakable, inconceivable manner, united to himself **hypostatically** flesh enlivened by a rational soul, and so became man and was called son of man, not by God's will alone or good pleasure, nor by the assumption of a person alone. Rather did two different natures come together to form a unity, and from both arose one Christ, one Son. It was not as though the distinctness of the natures was destroyed by the union, but divinity and humanity together made perfect for us one Lord and one Christ, together marvelously and mysteriously combining to form a unity.<sup>47</sup>

The core idea here is that two distinct natures, divine and human, joined to form a unity without losing their individual distinctness. What is most captivating about this statement, however, is not the mysterious union

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<sup>45</sup> Daily Catholic, *Documents of the Council of Ephesus 431 AD*, <http://www.dailycatholic.org/history/3ecumen1.htm>

<sup>46</sup> Hughes, *Church in Crisis*, 39.

<sup>47</sup> Translation taken from Norman P. Tanner, SJ, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London: Sheed and Ward; Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 1990).

of two substances, but what sounds like the marvelous union of two wills. The hypostatic union, according to this statement of faith, is not something that comes from God's will alone or from a person's will alone, rather it is the union of the two wills and two natures: "divinity and humanity together made perfect for us one Lord and one Christ."<sup>48</sup>

This time, Cyril's proclamation clearly embraces the human aspect of the incarnation as a distinct nature that is not ignored nor obliterated by the divine encounter, rather it is "marvelously and mysteriously combin[ed]ing to form a unity" with the divine. Even though Cyril would not dare to speak of a mixture of natures, or of a hybrid Christ who is neither human nor divine but something else, his language of the perfect unity of "two different natures" from which "arose one Christ, one Son" resembles the language used to speak of a hybrid representation, or at least contains the seeds from where such representation could emerge.

While Cyril clearly establishes in this letter the distinctness of the two natures and the mystical union that happens between them, he also opens new venues for

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

speculation regarding the nature of the Logos. One of them is the doubt that he generates about the pre-existence of the Logos. By ruling out the idea that an absolute divine sovereignty decided to manifest the hypostatic union and, instead, suggesting that the act was a collaborative effort between the divine and the human, Cyril seems to be more in line with the adoptionistic or agency Christologies rather than the incarnational model which, as we see in the Prologue of John, presumes the pre-existence of the Logos.<sup>49</sup>

However, if any doubt had emerged about the pre-existence of Christ from Cyril's second letter, that doubt disappears with the affirmation of the unalterable nature of the Word before the hypostatic union, which he presents in his third letter to Nestorius. Cyril declares:

He (Christ) did not cast aside what he was, but although he assumed flesh and blood, he remained what he was, God in nature and truth. We do not say that his flesh was turned into the nature of the godhead or that the unspeakable Word of God was changed into the nature of the flesh. For he (the Word) is unalterable and absolutely unchangeable and remains always the same as the scriptures say.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> According to Robert Kysar there are three main Christological models in the New Testament: adoptionistic, agency and incarnational Christology. In the earliest model, Jesus, as an obedient man, is adopted by God as God's Messiah. In the second model, Jesus is seen as a prophet, a representative or ambassador who is more than a regular man, because he is an agent sent by God, shaped by God's special action. The incarnational model asserts the prior, purely divine existence of Christ before his appearance as a man in the world. See Robert Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993) 33-34.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., <http://www.dailycatholic.org/history/3ecumen2.htm>

In speaking of how Christ still remains the same, even after assuming flesh and blood, Cyril reinstates a belief in the pre-existence of the Logos. However, the statement about the unalterable nature of the Word is still open to questioning, since the union of a divine being with human flesh and blood, in itself, represents an undeniable metamorphosis, which in turn brings about a hybrid being. In the end, after adopting these statements, the synod of bishops at Ephesus condemned *Nestorianism* and removed Nestorius from his position as Archbishop of Constantinople.<sup>51</sup>

There is one last controversy regarding the nature of the Logos that is relevant to the dialogue I want to establish with contemporary Johannine re-constructions. The controversy is *Eutychianism*, the false teaching spread by Eutyches, presbyter at Constantinople, declaring that Christ only had one nature, the Divine, which had overcome the human nature. Such heresy was among the reasons compelling Pope Saint Leo the Great to call for the fourth General Council, celebrated in Chalcedon in 451 CE.<sup>52</sup>

The following statement is an excerpt from the letter Pope Leo presented at the Council to condemn the heresy of

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<sup>51</sup> Hughes, *Church in Crisis*, 36.

<sup>52</sup> Jedin, *Ecumenical Councils*, 40-41.



the priest Eutyches:

Pope Leo declares that the Church opposes...

Those who attempt to tear apart the mystery of the economy into a duality of sons; and it *expels* from the assembly of the priests those who dare to say that the divinity of the Only-begotten is passible, and it *stands opposed* to those who imagine a mixture or confusion between the two natures of Christ; and it *expels* those who have the mad idea that the servant-form he took from us is of a heavenly or some other kind of being; and it *anathematizes* those who concoct two natures of the Lord before the union but imagine a single one after the union.<sup>53</sup>

Once again, the Church seeks to protect the purity of the divine nature of the Logos, freeing it from mixture and confusion; without a doubt, each decree reinforces the notion that a Christ of a hybrid nature must be ruled out. Paradoxically, one could argue that it is exactly the mixture and closeness with humanity that God seems to be looking for through the incarnation of the Logos.

Certainly, the fear of being anathematized by the Church has not stopped Christians, and non-Christians alike, from concocting varied Christological statements throughout the history of Christianity. In speaking of the Christological formulae crafted by the ecumenical councils, Kwok Pui-Lan observes that "they were never accepted as normative by all Christians . . . and never succeeded in silencing the debates or shutting out the voices of

dissent.”<sup>54</sup>

Four main concepts emerge as fundamental traits of the Logos according to the Church of the fourth and fifth centuries in the reviewed declarations of faith. First, the Logos incarnate, Jesus Christ, is depicted first and foremost as the **begotten**, not the created, Son of God the Father. Second, the Logos **shares the divine substance of God**. Third, as the incarnate Son, the Logos adopts human nature without losing its divine nature, thereby representing the miraculous feat of the **two natures**. Fourth, the two natures coexist harmoniously in **one Person**.

I argue three particular statements taken from the declarations of faith have important ramifications for the representation of the Johannine Logos. The first statement is from the pronouncement of the Nicene Creed which affirms that “the only-begotten begotten from the Father, **that is from the substance** [Gr. *ousias*, Lat. *substantia*] **of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten** [Gr. *gennethenta*, Lat. *natum*] **not made . . .** He (Jesus Christ) came down and became incarnate, became

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<sup>53</sup> Daily Catholic, *Documents of the Council of Chalcedon* 451, <http://www.dailycatholic.org/history/4ecumen2.htm>

<sup>54</sup> Kwok Pui-Lan, “Engendering Christ,” in *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 303.

human."<sup>55</sup> The second statement, from Cyril's second letter to Nestorius, part of the proceedings of the Ephesus' Council, declares that "He (Jesus Christ) became man . . . not by God's will alone or good pleasure, nor by the assumption of a person alone. Rather did two different natures come together to form a unity."<sup>56</sup> The final statement, from Cyril's third letter exhibit at Ephesus, states "although he assumed flesh and blood, he remained what he was, God in nature and truth . . . unalterable and absolutely unchangeable."<sup>57</sup>

At first glance, all three statements appear to reference the same idea: the journey of the Logos crossing from the divine realm into the flesh and blood reality of humanness to become human. However, upon closer look, one could argue that the sanitized way in which Cyril attempts to remove all human traits from the Logos cancels the Logos' metamorphic effort to become human. The statements of faith resulting from each council render the humanity of the Logos as a mirage, almost as a divine trick to simulate closeness to humanity, but not a real immersion into the

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<sup>55</sup> Daily Catholic, *Documents of the Council of Nicaea 325 AD*, [www.dailycatholic.org/history/1ecumen.htm](http://www.dailycatholic.org/history/1ecumen.htm).

<sup>56</sup> Daily Catholic, *Documents of the Council of Ephesus 431 AD*, [www.dailycatholic.org/history/3ecumen1.htm](http://www.dailycatholic.org/history/3ecumen1.htm)

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., [www.dailycatholic.org/history/3ecumen2.htm](http://www.dailycatholic.org/history/3ecumen2.htm)

vulnerable existence of human beings. Inconsistently, the Church seems to return to the Docetism<sup>58</sup> that the author of John attempted to eradicate by insisting on the real, and not apparent, humanity of the Word. Maybe the idea of a God who becomes susceptible to pain, suffering, laughter and lust is too much to bear because it challenges the nature of the gap, or lack thereof, between divinity and humanity. As we perceive through Cyril's statement, there is a need to firmly mark and protect the border between heaven and earth, so much so that not even the Divine being has real access to the other side but only as a holographic presence. If it is true, that the incarnation of the Logos is only mysteriously-hypostatically conceived, and that the Logos is ultimately unchangeable and unalterable, then, the possibility for change or transformation on either side of the border is null. Therefore, there is no need to fear the challenge brought upon by the possibility of crossing to the divine realm, to meet halfway, in response to the Logos-divine initiative of coming to our realm. The more distance we create between the humanity and the divinity of the incarnate Logos, the easier it is to deny the potential of our own hybrid nature, our attainability of the divine

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<sup>58</sup> David J. MacLeod, "The Incarnation of the Word: John 1:14," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161 (January-March 2004): 74.

and any co-creative accountability. Additionally, the more impossible it is for us to cross the divine/human border, the less responsibility we take in our own fate and the more we surrender to our errant human state; with no likelihood to reach the divine state, we slack in our efforts to attain it. Borders can be self-imposed limits to shed responsibilities and create the idea of "the impossible;" the Logos' crossing to the human realm shatters the idea of limits, of borders, of impossibilities, and ultimately of excuses to hold back and not fight for political change and social transformation.

These are some of the political ramifications I inferred from my ideological critic of the statements of faith regarding the incarnation of the Logos. I will return to them in the final section of the analysis of the Prologue, as I present my own hybrid representation of the Logos.

### *The Logos and Johannine scholarship*

When moving out of the ecclesiastic debates and into the academic discourse the commonly highlighted features of the Logos expand beyond its physicality. Although we see the faith concerns of the Church Councils evolve into intellectual concerns, the subjacent theme continues to be

the intriguing identity of the Logos. Shifting from an interest in the material aspects of the Logos, such as its substance, nature, and number of persons in which it manifests, the focus of Johannine scholarship seems to point to the abstract aspects that have shaped the construct of the Logos. Four main aspects are highlighted in this section: the cultural origin of the concept of the pre-existent Logos; one of the main ideological perspectives behind its representations; its rhetorical functions within the Prologue; and the academic, exegetical view of the nature of the Logos.

Concerning the cultural identity of the concept of a pre-existent Logos, Jacob Neusner points to the traditional notion, common in Second Temple Judaism, that before creating the world, God created seven things in preparation "Torah, repentance, the Garden of Eden, Gehenna, the throne of glory, the house of the sanctuary, and the name of the Messiah."<sup>59</sup> According to Francis Moloney these traditions of preexistence, which became popular concepts within Judaism, eventually "produce the idea of a preexistent Son of Man in the apocalyptic traditions and preexistent wisdom in the

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<sup>59</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Theological Dictionary of Rabbinic Judaism. Part 1, Principal Theological Categories. Studies in Judaism* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2005), 125. In reference to the

wisdom traditions."<sup>60</sup>

Another important influence behind the Johannine Logos, acknowledged by Robert Kysar, is the philosophical thought of Hellenistic Stoicism which understood the Logos as a cosmic reason, the mind at the center of the universe; ideas which are similar to the preexistent Wisdom, the divine being present with God since the beginning and central at the moment of creation.<sup>61</sup> Speaking from his social-scientific perspective, Bruce Malina seconds Kysar's statement affirming that "the existence of the Word with God from the beginning was the commonly shared perception of various Hellenistic thinkers in the first-century Mediterranean."<sup>62</sup>

As a way of exemplifying the pervasiveness of this common cultural-religious heritage of divine preexistence, Moody Smith points to the hymns and early prayers found in the New Testament (cf. Phil 2:6-7; Col 1:15-16) which "frequently speak of the pre-existent Christ; in 1 Cor 8:6 Paul, in a liturgical or semi-liturgical formula, refers to

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preexistence of the Messiah Psalm 72:17 declares: "His name shall endure forever and has existed before the sun."

<sup>60</sup> Moloney, *Belief*, 29. See also R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, *Pre-Existence, Wisdom and the Son of Man* (Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series 21; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1973), 15-21.

<sup>61</sup> Kysar, *Maverick*, 30.

'one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist,' as if Jesus Christ were God's instrument in creation (cf. also Heb 1:2-3)."<sup>63</sup> Evidently, the idea of the preexistence of Christ was a prevalent one in early Christian faith rather than an exclusive concept created by the Johannine community.

However, as common as the concept may have been, Bruce Malina asserts that "what is distinctive of John's group is the identification of this Created/Uncreated Word with the Israelite personage, Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>64</sup> Maybe, this hybridization of an abstract belief made flesh in the concreteness of a human being raised doubts of whether the Johannine community or the Evangelist actually thought of Jesus as the creator of the world. According to Moody Smith, the author of the *Gospel of John* "clearly thinks of the pre-existence of Jesus, not merely of the Word of God (cf. 17:5)."<sup>65</sup> If that is the case, then s/he clearly shows the Johannine community's adoption of Jesus as the one who fulfilled the traditional belief that the Messiah's name was preexistent, as it is stated by the psalmist "His name

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<sup>62</sup> Malina, *John*, 39.

<sup>63</sup> D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 30.

<sup>64</sup> Malina, *John*, 39.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, *John*, 30.



. . . has existed before the sun."<sup>66</sup>

For Malina, this identification of the preexistent Messiah with Jesus is the result of the Johanne community's experience of Jesus; "the group that celebrated God's mediating, creative Word with this poem at the opening of John's Gospel makes the claim that this creative and powerful Word had to be identified with Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>67</sup> Conceivably, whether it emerged as a religious belief, a philosophical concept, or as a traditional myth, the cultural roots of the Logos eventually merged into the ideological-theological construct of a community that decided to embrace their faith, and in doing so gave birth to a belief that helped them survive their experience of exclusion and otherness.

One of those ideological constructs that is important to highlight here, because of its hybrid value, is the re-feminized Logos. This re-feminization is the process by which the concept of the Logos is read within its context of production to recover what John Ashton calls:

The mysterious and decidedly feminine figure whom Jewish tradition calls Wisdom, God's darling and delight (Prov 8:30, NEB), who assists him at the creation of the world, "playing in his presence continually," [who] appears in the opening of John's Gospel as the masculine Logos, equally

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<sup>66</sup> Psalm 72:17.

<sup>67</sup> Malina, *John*, 39.

mysterious but more severe.<sup>68</sup>

According to Adela Yarbro Collins, the portrayal of Jesus in the *Gospel of John* presents the feminine elements reminiscent of Wisdom's role represented in Sophia. In the same way in which Wisdom, the feminine maternal figure, is portrayed as inviting her hearers to eat and drink from her, the Jesus of John offers his-self as bread and water to nourish the hunger and thirst of those who believe in him.<sup>69</sup>

Collins affirms that the representation of the Logos in the Prologue parallels the typical representation of Wisdom in the Jewish Wisdom Tradition as they are almost interchangeable characters within the *Wisdom of Solomon* as well as they are in Philo's writings.<sup>70</sup>

Along a similar vein, Martin Scott affirms that there is a well-developed "Sophia-Christology" in the *Gospel of John* and it is precisely because of her femininity that Sophia was chosen to serve as "the expression of God in a new way, in a new world."<sup>71</sup> In the *Wisdom of Solomon* we find

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<sup>68</sup> Ashton 527.

<sup>69</sup> The following are some of the passages where Jesus offers himself as wine, water or bread in order to feed those who believe in him: John 2:8; 4:10; 6:11-14, 35.

<sup>70</sup> Collins, "John," 50.

<sup>71</sup> Scott, *Sophia*, 79.

an "unrestricted picture of Sophia as God herself at work in the life and salvation history of Israel . . . she was seen to be almost indistinguishable from God (See Wisdom 7.25-26)."<sup>72</sup> Some scholars consider this representation as the writer's attempt to reduce the effect and influence of Isis on Hellenistic Jews, "Sophia is God herself over against Isis, and in this role her gender is of paramount importance."<sup>73</sup> We should emphasize that by the time the New Testament was written Sophia had already achieved the status of being the expression of the one God in female form.<sup>74</sup>

It is intriguing to consider the motivation of the author of the Prologue to change the name of the main character from Sophia to Logos. According to Scott, the author of the Fourth Gospel was conscious of the problem that gender would create in trying to associate the incarnation of Jesus with the feminine figure of Sophia. Therefore, s/he used the masculine Logos in the Prologue as introduction to Jesus "the imminent Son who makes the transcendent Father visible . . . and at the same time an introduction to Jesus as Sophia, the feminine face of

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 80-81.

God."<sup>75</sup> Once this double representation takes place in the Prologue, "the title Logos is dropped and the rest of the Gospel goes on outlining the ministry of Jesus Sophia."<sup>76</sup> Since first-century readers/hearers were familiar with the image of Sophia from the Jewish Wisdom Tradition, the identification provided a model for the relationship between Jesus and God in John.

According to Scott, John's Wisdom Christology presents Jesus Sophia not as a man but rather as "the incarnation of both the male and the female expressions of the divine, albeit within the limitations of human flesh."<sup>77</sup>

In the exposition of his "Non-Androcentric Christology" E.A. Johnson also refers to Jesus Christ as the place of encounter where "the mystery of God who is neither male nor female, but who as source of both and Creator of both in the divine image can in turn be imaged as either."<sup>78</sup> For Johnson, the gender of Jesus is not a sign that God can only be conceived as male. In the same way in which Sophia, as the expression of the feminine face of God, did not make God into a woman, the male figure of

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>78</sup> E.A. Johnson, "Jesus, the Wisdom of God: A Biblical Basis for Non-Androcentric Christology," *ETL* 61 (1985), 280.

Jesus should not make God into a man. In the *Gospel of John* Jesus reveals the fullness of God, both male and female, states Scott.<sup>79</sup> From a postmodern and border theory perspectives this transgender construct of the Johannine Jesus offers another valuable layer of inclusiveness to his already hybrid identity.

Also fundamental to the Logos' identity are its purpose and function in the Prologue. According to Mark A. Matson there are three major impulses that can be clearly identified in the Prologue:

The first is to identify the Word with God's creative and life-giving activity. The second is to speak of the incarnation of the Word in Jesus, as incarnation that revealed God's glory, but that was rejected by much of humanity. The third is to emphasize the role of belief in the Word, based on testimony about Jesus.<sup>80</sup>

In other words, the first impulse acknowledges the divine identity of the Logos through its association with God's activity, the second affirms his humanity in Jesus as means of revelation of God's glory, and the third highlights his redemptive role through belief in the Word.

In a similar way, but drawing from the textual precedent of the Logos, Malina states that "In the Old Testament God's word is associated with two functions:

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<sup>79</sup> Scott, *Sophia*, 172.

God's creation (Gen 1; Ps. 33:6) and his self-revelation to the prophets (Jer 1:4; Ezek 1:3; Amos 3:1)."<sup>81</sup> Certainly, in a typical Johannine twist one could argue that such functions can be identified in the Prologue. There the Logos brings a new creation that permeates the entire Gospel and its self-revelation becomes public, to all those who believe, not just to the prophets. However, for Malina, the function of creation seems to follow into the traditional patterns, since for him "the Word that was with God in the beginning refers to God's total utterance that has resulted in everything created, visible and invisible."<sup>82</sup> There is no reference to the new creation that is subtly and sometimes boldly brought forth by the Jesus of John who offers himself in replacement of traditional religious practices.<sup>83</sup>

Following the same textual reference to *Genesis* Moody Smith acknowledges also the creative power of the Logos, but adds a redemptive function, stressing that "John affirms that the Word by which God creates the world is the

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<sup>80</sup> Mark A. Matson, *John*. Interpretation Bible Studies (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 8.

<sup>81</sup> Malina, *John*, 31.

<sup>82</sup> Bruce Malina & Richard Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 35.

<sup>83</sup> Jesus offers himself as the new Temple, the light, the bread, in reference to the key elements of the main Jewish festivals.

same Word by which he redeems it."<sup>84</sup>

Moving to a more concrete function Robert Kysar affirms that in the Logos, "the expressive side of God's being is physically present. It is made sensual so that it can be touched, seen, heard, and felt."<sup>85</sup> The purpose of the Logos is to make God accessible to the human realm. In a similar vein Malina asserts that "This Word was not abstract Reason, but God's self-revelation and self-communication. This Word is to be found in all creation, which is God's communication and revelation."<sup>86</sup> Not only have the performative utterances of the Word become the concreteness of creation, but the Word itself as a discursive performative has become the concrete person of Jesus, who in turn continues to emit performative utterances, communicating constantly the divine presence in all that have come to be, through the Word.<sup>87</sup>

Likewise, stressing the communicative and revelatory roles, John Painter states that "the essential function of

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<sup>84</sup> Smith, *John*, 31.

<sup>85</sup> Kysar, *Maverick*, 32.

<sup>86</sup> Malina, *John*, 39.

<sup>87</sup> According to Judith Butler, "discursive performativity appears to produce that which it names, to enact its own referent, to name and to do, to name and to make;" which is the process of creation present in *Genesis* 1. Quote from Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "sex"* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 107.

the Logos is to realize the will and purpose of God and to make him known, but this does not mean that he reveals all that God is."<sup>88</sup> If for Painter the revelatory role may seem limited since the Logos does not necessarily reveal all that God is, for Demetrius Dumm the fact that John identifies Jesus as the Word of God means potentially a total disclosure of God since, "Just as a human word reveals a hidden thought, so Jesus' mission is to reveal to us the hidden nature of God."<sup>89</sup>

Regarding the academic, exegetical views of the nature of the Logos, Johannine scholarship offers a spectrum of possibilities from which I have underscored six examples. In a continuum that moves from the pure divinity of the Logos to a fully human manifestation of the divine in Jesus, I find the position of Herman C. Waetjen closer to the pole of the divine when he affirms that,

The Logos does not cease being itself, nor will its primordial movement towards the God be terminated. In its union with flesh it will continue to be God's surrogate, but its function as the Logos-Sophia will be fulfilled in drawing all humanity into the same relationship that it enjoys with its Originator.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Painter, *Quest*, 81.

<sup>89</sup> Demetrius Dumm, O.S.B. *A Mystical Portrait of Jesus: New Perspectives on John's Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 162.

<sup>90</sup> Herman C. Waetjen, *The Gospel of the Beloved Disciple* (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2005), 77.



For Waetjen the centrality of the incarnation seems to be the fact that the Logos remains divine. Four phrases of his statement stress the divinity of the Logos, as if trying to reassure us that its incarnation did not damage its divine identity or essence, subtly pointing to the primacy of divine over human within the binary logic. The Logos "does not cease being itself," its "primordial movement towards the God" is not interrupted, regardless of its union with flesh the Logos continues to be "God's surrogate," and its function as Logos-Sophia of "drawing all humanity" into a similar relationship with God still remains. This incarnation of the Logos, as described by Waetjen, seems rather the sterilized incursion of a distant God who in a quick move of compassion goes in and out of the world to draw humanity out of it without having to take much part of the human experience.

Moving towards the human pole of the spectrum of the Logos' nature, but still closer to the divine side, Colin G. Kruse states that "the Word became flesh. He entered the world by becoming flesh (sarx), i.e. by becoming human. The Word did not cease to be the Word, but in the incarnation he changed his mode of being the Word. How the Word who

'was God' could become human is not explained."<sup>91</sup> Kruse's position about the Logos' natures moves closer into the direction of a Logos who became flesh, but there remains some ambiguity about how this act of becoming human could have happened, and therefore the attention goes back to the close connection of the Logos with its divine origin. And yet there remains a sense that a change has occur, since the Logos has "changed his mode of being in the Word."<sup>92</sup> In a close position, and moving a little towards the human pole, is the affirmation that "Jesus was the divine glory incarnate and manifested it to men,"<sup>93</sup> expressed by A.M. Hunter in which still the divine aspect of the Logos seems to be more important.

Jumping ahead to what seems to be an extreme position about the Logos' humanness in contrast to Waetjen's divinization of the Logos, Peter M. Phillips appears eager to highlight the human pole of the continuum by exacerbating the crudeness of what meant for the Logos to become human. He concentrates on defining flesh and its implication for the incarnate Logos, he says,

Sarx refers to the physicality of the incarnation: what has

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<sup>91</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *The Gospel According to John* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 68.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> A.M. Hunter, *According to John* (London: SCM Press, 1968), 33.

been said to be eternal, with God, light, life and Logos is reified, instantiated, corporalized, made incarnate. Moreover, this reification is in human form with all the potentiality that this form gives: la chair désigne l'homme tout entier, corps et âme, mais considéré dans sa faiblesse inhérente à sa qualité d'être voué à la corruption. La chair désigne donc l'humanité, corps et âme, livrée à sa propre faiblesse, mais susceptible de recevoir l'Esprit de Dieu, source de vie et d'incorruption.<sup>94</sup>

According to Phillips, the key for understanding the incarnation of the Logos is its physicality, made possible by the flesh.<sup>95</sup> Through the incarnation event the abstract sense of God not only becomes material and concrete, it becomes human, which for Phillips means the complexity of humanity, although such complexity is quickly reduced to weakness and corruption—even if for a moment capable of receiving life and incorruptibility through the Spirit—when defined against the oppositional value of the divine.

Paradoxically, although the incarnation event could be read in and of itself as a hybrid moment bringing together two realities, which speak of inclusiveness within such spectrum, the polarized positions stated by Waetjen and Phillips seem to reinstate the exclusiveness of the binary logic. As a borderlander, I choose to understand life using

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<sup>94</sup> Peter M. Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel. A sequential Reading* (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2006), 196-7.

<sup>95</sup> A similar position, but not as extreme as Phillips, is held by John Marsh who affirms that "He [Logos] became flesh. Flesh means human nature in its totality, not just the physical constituent

a spectral lens; from there I see in all binary oppositions the possibility of inclusion, just like I see the danger of exclusion within every spectrum, since both models are in themselves poles of another spectrum. How we decide to understand the hybridity of incarnation can take us to a spectral or a binary logic. However, if within a spectrum we highlight one pole in opposition to the other we cancel the central message of the incarnation—the hybridized Logos. Equally, if within a binary opposition we refuse to take sides and mix both sides then we break the oppositional pair and open its spectral and hybrid possibilities.

Although in themselves the views of Waetjen and Phillips could be read as reinstating the binary exclusion, as I mentioned before, they can also be seen as the extreme poles of the incarnation-continuum which ultimately serve to open a central point of inclusive balance by the tension they create from where the hybridity of incarnation gives human beings the possibility of transcendence and transformation.

I see such balanced position in the reading of the Logos offered by Gail R. O'Day and Susan E. Hylen. For

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of a human body." John Marsh, *The Gospel of St John* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1968), 108.

O'Day and Hylen the central message of the incarnation is not the divine or the human sides of the spectrum, but the mixture of their two stories:

The move from logos in verse 1 to logos in verse 14 is the key to understanding the Gospel of John. The eternal Word of verses 1-2 now completely enters the human and time-bound sphere by becoming flesh (Greek, *sarx*). The story of God and the Word is no longer a cosmic story, but is an intimately human story. . . . God comes to us in the Word-made-flesh. . . .The metaphor of the 'Word' enables John to speak about the unity of God and Jesus in fresh ways. Jesus shares in God's character and identity, and as the 'Word [made] flesh' (1:14), Jesus embodies God in the world.<sup>96</sup>

By highlighting the trajectory of the logos, the eternal Word moving from its cosmic realm and entering into the human-time realm, O'Day and Hylen close the distance between the two worlds. The metaphor of the Word-made-flesh that speaks of the unity of God and Jesus opens the possibility of a narrative of intimacy between the divine and the human. The middle point of the incarnation-spectrum where the divine meets the human offers a common border, a third space that fosters mix identities, promoting change and transformation.

Ultimately, the character of the representations of the Logos emerging from Johannine scholarship is one of mixture and hybridity, in at least four aspects. From the perspective of its cultural origin the identity of the

Logos reflects the mixture of religious and philosophical concepts from the cultural milieu of Jewish and Hellenistic traditions. From its view as an ideological construct, the re-feminized Logos reveals a hybrid process of genderization which moves from the feminine Wisdom-Sophia to the masculine Logos to a transgender Sophia/Logos which in turn, in its role as the revealer of God, renders a degenderized inclusive representation of the Divine. From the perspective of its purpose and function the Logos also appears mixed and hybrid since it is at once the revealer of God, the performative Logos through whom creation came to be and also its redeemer, and as revealer manifested in flesh he is the self-product of its performative utterance. From the academic views of the Logos' nature the Word-made-flesh is ultimately the metaphor that speaks of the intimate story of the divine-human present in Jesus.

With this background of arguments and statements pointing to the mixture and hybridity of the Logos I move to the construction of my own understanding of the incarnate Johannine Logos, Jesus the borderlander.

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<sup>96</sup> Gail R. O'Day and Susan E. Hylén, *John* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 26-7.

### ***Jesus the borderlander: postcolonialisms and identity***

Emerging out of the tumultuous waters of postcolonial writings Sugirtharajah has aptly identified three streams of postcolonialism, "the first carries the notion of invasion and control; the second places enormous investment in recovering the cultural soul; and the third stresses mutual interdependence and transformation."<sup>97</sup> Although I concur with Sugi's assertion that these three streams are not categorized chronologically, rather they "sit side by side and interact constantly"<sup>98</sup> in my particular postcolonial journey, I have chronologically encountered and swam through these three streams.

During my first encounter with postcolonial studies, my initial impulse was to concentrate on issues of imperial invasion and control in both the biblical texts and my context. In my early years, all my academic passion was directed towards finding and accusing the guilty parties while demanding restitution. Eventually, once my rage as a colonized subject had found its right valve of escape through term papers and speaking engagements, I imperceptibly slid into a second stage. Moving inwardly, in search of some pre-colonial traits from my national

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<sup>97</sup> Sugirtharajah, *Bible and the Third World*, 248.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

culture, I reclaimed my personal sources of identity. Lately, although I am still hoping for restitution and my identity continues to be in flux, I realize that it is only through interdependency, breaking away from the violence of a binary logic, that inclusiveness and transformation can occur.

By no means is my personal journey an attempt to oversimplify the complexities of postcolonial discourses. At this point in time it just happens to be my preferred method for making sense of my biography and my scholarship; considering how they intersect with history helps me connect my stories and experiences with the biblical text from my social location. Ultimately this is how we do cultural studies, side-by-side with the construction of our identity; "biography is the regular form of our method,"<sup>99</sup> concurs Fred Inglis.

Reading from this converging point, a vertex of personal and political engagement with the conceptualization and construction of a better world where interdependence is recognized and pursued as part of the ongoing process of decolonization, my aim in this cultural analysis of the Prologue is dual, to demarcate the space inhabited by the Logos-Jesus and to establish Jesus' hybrid



nature as the incarnate-Logos. From the perspective of cultural studies, a political endeavor committed to social transformation by way of exposing and criticizing the relations of power and the ways they influence and shape cultural practices, I pursue such dual aim in two stages via a close reading of my borderland reality vis-à-vis the reality of the Johannine Logos and its community. I first establish the construct of a heaven-earth borderland in light of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands; second, I speak of the hybrid identity of Jesus as the incarnate-Logos, the heaven-earthly borderlander in relation to the hybrid Mexican-American borderlanders. Eventually, this dual finding will help me explore the potentiality of borderlands and borderlander-identities within the Johannine narrative as a model for political change, an invitation towards integrated U.S.-Mexico borderlands where interdependence and cooperation lead the way in the construction of a decolonized global reality.

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<sup>99</sup> Inglis, 235.

## Life in the borderlands: on earth as it is in heaven?

*The longest border in the world where the richest nation on earth coexists with a very poor neighbor is that between the United States and Mexico. A dividing line. As President Porfirio Diaz stated at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "Poor Mexico, so far from God, and so close to the United States". Nearly 20% of the population of contemporary Mexico now resides in the United States.*<sup>100</sup>

Story # 1 -

The Father and I are one . . . I ask . . . on behalf of those who will believe in me . . . that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us.<sup>101</sup>



It is a Sunday afternoon, we are in Reynosa, and my dad has just picked us up from church. My mom, three sisters and I are now in the car with my dad on our way to McAllen to have lunch. It is a short distance, but to cross the bridge that brings together the border between U.S. and Mexico we have to wait in line at least half hour if not an hour. As we wait, we make plans for lunch, asking Dad to take us here, there and everywhere. As we continue to name places, one of my sisters keeps insisting on this one restaurant while Dad keeps saying "No." Finally she asks him, "What are we, poor or Americans?"

I was six years old at the time and my sister was eight, but I still remember distinctively the incident, because of the confusion it created in my mind. As far as I could tell, I knew we were not poor, but were we "Americans"? That seemed to be the obvious choice, since according to the binary logic of my sister "poor" was the opposite of "American!"

I never asked her why she made such remark, and I doubt she remembers now, but I suspect that our "intimate" proximity to the richest country in the world created a crisis of identity in my sister. Somehow she was mesmerized and hybridized at the same time by the American dream. In her mind, if we could afford to cross to the U.S. three or four times a week to buy food, clothing, entertainment, and all sort of goods, that meant we were part of them, like them, rich according to my sister's view, just living on the other side of the fence!

Little did she know she was being very clever by bringing to the table the complexities of economic status and race in the formation of our cross-border identity.

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<sup>100</sup> <http://zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/newam/default.html>

<sup>101</sup> *John* 10:30; 17:20, 21.

a) On earth...

*Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Identities are names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.*<sup>102</sup>

If identity can be explained in terms of both, space, as the "somewhere" and time as the "narratives of the past," following Stuart Hall's idea, I would say that, within the space of the borderlands and the time of invasions, the identity of the Mexican-American community in the United States has been shaped meaningfully by the history of its homeland. In 1848, with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, the life of the inhabitants of the old northern states of Mexico changed drastically. The unjust appropriation of half of the Mexican territory gave birth not only to a new population with an ambiguous identity, but also to a new reality: the unique world of the Northern Mexican borderlands, a place where the lives of many poor Mexicans turn into their loftiest dreams or their worst nightmares.<sup>103</sup>

From its inception, the U.S.-Mexico borderland has

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<sup>102</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 225.

<sup>103</sup> This brief summary of the history of the Mexican-American community is just an evocation of the more complex account of the history of the U.S.-Mexico relationship presented in chapter 2,

been characterized by its asymmetry. In fact, the major aspects of this complex reality emerge from such unevenness, like the "unauthorized migration into the United States [which] is the result of many factors: modern-day forces of globalization, economic disparities, binational economic arrangements between the United States and Mexico such as NAFTA, and the long, complicated historical relationship between these two adjacent nations."<sup>104</sup> Unquestionably, the border has not been a line of neutral separation in the history of U.S.-Mexico relations. Rather it has been a symbol of power used to grant inclusion and to inflict exclusion whenever convenient for "the more privileged-dominant, hegemonious-side [which] will actively control the border to keep border-crossers out."<sup>105</sup> A good example of this manipulation of power in the hands of the dominant side of the border was captured "in a recent CNN commentary [by] Ruben Navarrete Jr. [who] complained about the "hypocrisy" of American immigration policy . . . [saying] we have two

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against which this chapter and my cultural reading of the Prologue should be read.

<sup>104</sup> Raquel Rubio-Goldsmith, M. Melissa McCormick, Daniel Martinez & Inez Magdalena Duarte, "A Humanitarian Crisis at the Border: New Estimates of Deaths Among Unauthorized Immigrants" (February 2007) <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/index.php?content=B070201>

signs on the Mexican border: 'Keep Out' and 'Help Wanted.'"<sup>106</sup>

This "hypocrisy" of the double signs became internationally evident when in September 1993, after almost a year of signing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and in the eve of signing it as a law by Bill Clinton, the U.S. Border Patrol of El Paso Texas launched the Operation Blockade. This simultaneous contradictory move "constituted an irony that was not missed by human rights activists concerned with the treatment of Mexican migrants: wasn't it a contradiction—and an unjust one at that—to be opening the border to the movement of goods and services but not to people?"<sup>107</sup> Unfortunately, this unjust contradiction is still present at many levels, NAFTA being one of them,<sup>108</sup> the wolf clothed as sheep, as we can judge by the disparities that continue

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<sup>105</sup> Chang, H. (1999). Re-examining the Rhetoric of the "Cultural Border". *E-Magazine of Multicultural Education* [www.eastern.edu/publications/emme/1999winter/chang.html](http://www.eastern.edu/publications/emme/1999winter/chang.html) (January 13, 2009).

<sup>106</sup> Stephen Kenney, "Immigration through the ages," *The Boston Globe*, January 3, 2009.

<sup>107</sup> David Spener and Kathleen Staudt, editors, *The U.S.-Mexico Border: Transcending Divisions, Contesting Identities* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 235.

<sup>108</sup> "Under NAFTA, the United States, Canada, and Mexico become a single, giant, integrated market of almost 400 million people with \$6.5 trillion worth of goods and services annually. Mexico is the world's second largest importer of U.S. manufactured goods and the third largest importer of U.S. agricultural products." <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0104566.html>.

to grow:

Since NAFTA took effect, Mexico's overall exports shot up from 60.9 billion dollars in 1994 to 158.4 billion dollars in 2001. In that same period, imports jumped from 79.3 billion dollars to 168.4 billion dollars annually. More than 85 percent of Mexican trade is currently concentrated in exchange with the United States. But for Mexico's rural areas, where 75 percent of the population living in extreme poverty is concentrated, the three-country treaty has meant the loss of more than 10 million hectares of cultivated land.<sup>109</sup>

Although the numbers create an illusion that at a certain level some good has come out of NAFTA and maybe some has, the reality is that Mexico has become a vassal of the U.S., the 21<sup>st</sup> century feudal lord. For many international critics of NAFTA the disparity was evident and a good reason not to enter in to an agreement, they insisted "that because of their tremendously different levels of income and development, it was simply inconceivable to have a social as well as an economic union between the United States and Mexico—this was not Europe, after all."<sup>110</sup> It seemed that, trapped by its geographical reality, there were not many options for Mexico.

During the 232 years as official neighbors, the history of the U.S.-Mexican border has passed through many stages. Mostly, however, "the USA has displayed two

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<sup>109</sup> Diego Cevallos, "NAFTA Equals Death, Say Peasant Farmers" Published on Wednesday, December 4, 2002 by the Inter Press Service. <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines02/1204-02.html>.

distinct political personalities throughout its history and around the world—expansionist and isolationist.”<sup>111</sup> This self-serving cross-border interaction has certainly been at work in the U.S.-Mexico relationship. The long standing battle of migratory regulations has been at the top of the list of the isolationist personality. After so many years, no real solutions have been made to equally benefit both sides. In fact, selfish isolationist efforts have created even bigger problems, such as “the rising number of unauthorized border-crosser deaths along the U.S.-Mexico border coinciding with intensified militarization and fortification of the border.”<sup>112</sup> The estimated number of bodies of unauthorized border crossers recovered on U.S. soil from 1995-2004 amounts to 2978.<sup>113</sup> To highlight the catastrophic magnitude of deaths, Wayne Cornelius, a leading scholar of immigration states: “To put this death toll in perspective, the fortified U.S. border with Mexico has been more than 10 times deadlier to migrants from

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<sup>110</sup> Spener and Staudt, *The U.S.-Mexico Border*, 236.

<sup>111</sup> Thomas P.M. Barnett, “Will Democrats build bridges or walls?” (Sunday, November 26, 2006), [http://www.knoxnews.com/kns/opinioncolumnists/article/0,1406,KNS\\_364\\_5163655,00.html](http://www.knoxnews.com/kns/opinioncolumnists/article/0,1406,KNS_364_5163655,00.html).

<sup>112</sup> Rubio-Goldsmith, “A Humanitarian Crisis,” <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/index.php?content=B070201>

<sup>113</sup> Wayne A. Cornelius, “Controlling ‘Unwanted’ Immigration: Lessons from the United States, 1993-2004,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31(4), July 2005: 775-794, 784.

Mexico during the past nine years than the Berlin Wall was to East Germans throughout its 28-year existence.”<sup>114</sup>

Without a doubt it is possible to avoid these deaths by improving the U.S. immigration-control policies. According to Rubio-Goldsmith,

The best chance of reducing the number of unauthorized border-crossers entering the United States does not lie with misconceived border-control measures. Many years worth of research now makes it perfectly clear that the underlying logic of the current border-enforcement system is to eventually scare off would-be unauthorized border crossers via seemingly predictable, if unacceptable, levels of injury, suffering, and death for those who dare try. Rather, the solution is comprehensive immigration reform rooted in an honest assessment of the role of migrant labor in the United States as well as the forces of globalization in North America, Central America, and South America.<sup>115</sup>

The day the U.S. truly embraces the positive role of migrant labor in the national economy, beginning first by offering real data about the cost and revenue they represent within the country's budget instead of adopting the false widespread fear that they are stealing the jobs from U.S. citizens, that day the benefits for both nations will multiply. For starters, "a system that allows Mexican workers to enter the United States legally, would free up thousands of government personnel and save an estimated \$3

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 783.

<sup>115</sup> Rubio-Goldsmith, "A Humanitarian Crisis," <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/index.php?content=B070201>



billion a year.”<sup>116</sup> During his inept governmental tenure, even the not so bright former president George W. Bush, while trying to propose a solution to the problem of illegal immigration of Mexican workers, in a rare moment of lucidity he pertinently acknowledged the value of migrant workers. He said,

As Texan, I have known many immigrant families, mainly from Mexico, and I have seen what they add to our country. They bring to America the values of faith in God, love of family, hard work and self reliance—the values that made us a great nation to begin with. We’ve all seen those values in action, through the service and sacrifice of more than 35,000 foreign-born men and women currently on active duty in the US military. . . . As a nation that values immigration, and depends on immigration, we should have immigration laws that work and make us proud. . . . The system is not working. Our nation needs an **immigration system that serves the American economy, and reflects the American Dream**. Reform must begin by confronting a basic fact of life and economics: some of the jobs generated in America’s growing economy are **jobs American citizens are not filling**. Yet these jobs represent a tremendous opportunity for workers from abroad who want to work and fulfill their duties as a husband or a wife, or a daughter. . . . Our laws should allow willing workers to enter our country and **fill jobs that Americans are not filling** . . . and I believe we can do so **without jeopardizing the livelihoods of American citizens**.<sup>117</sup>

As sweet as it sounds, however, it is clear this speech is a political cover up for a more friendlier and legal exploitation of migrant workers who, given the economic crisis, will jump to any opportunity to find a job

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<sup>116</sup> Bill Ong Hing, *Deporting Our Souls ... values, morality, and immigration policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 48.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

that will help them survive, even if it means taking the jobs that "Americans are not filling," which actually means the jobs that "Americans do not want," such as the lowest wage jobs in the meat packing industry, considered by the Human Rights Watch "the most dangerous factory job in America".<sup>118</sup> Evident in his speech is the unilateral interest of this solution to help the "American economy," and save the "American dream" without jeopardizing the status of "American citizens." I argue that when the issue at stake is immigration, the solution should be bilateral, if it is going to seriously address the binational reality of the borderlands.

In considering the expansionist personality of the U.S. as opposed to the above quoted isolationist, it is interesting to observe not only the ways in which the U.S. expands its borders, but the role of the less privileged neighbor, the none-dominant side of this binominal partnership, which repeatedly accommodates its neighbor, mostly for obvious economic reasons, but also out of a deeper understanding of our intrinsic interdependency which is always experienced at a deeper level by the weakest side

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<sup>118</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meatpacking\\_industry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meatpacking_industry)

of asymmetric relationships.<sup>119</sup> For years there has been a slow migratory movement from North to South by U.S. citizens retiring in Mexico. Within the past decade, both migratory speed and the number of immigrants have increased. As stated by Jeff Shelley, in speaking of the North to South migration,

Once considered one of the most desolate places on the North American continent, Mexico's Baja Peninsula is slowly becoming a colony of the United States. Acre by acre beachfront properties are being snapped up by Americans. English is gradually becoming the primary language, and the dollar has supplanted the peso as the monetary unit of choice.<sup>120</sup>

There are no official statistics about the number of U.S. citizens living in Baja but the estimate, according to Shelley, is of at least 100,000; and has been growing after the September 11 attacks and the downturn in the U.S. economy over the past two years. There are an estimated 600,000 Americans living in Mexico - an acknowledged undercount based on government records, by far the largest number of U.S. citizens living in any foreign country. The number of Americans moving to Baja to escape U.S. government's policies and the costs of living is

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<sup>119</sup> "Mexico is among the world's most open economies, but it is dependent on trade with the U.S., which bought about 82% of its exports in 2007." See <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35749.htm>

<sup>120</sup> <http://www.cybergolf.com/golfnews/americansflockingtobajainlandgrab>

increasing. What attract them are a higher standard of living and a greater degree of freedom.<sup>121</sup>

This increasing southward immigration responds to both, the interest of U.S. citizens to live elsewhere as they stretch their dollars in a devalued economy and the interest from the Mexican government to attract foreign investment. Out of the need for interdependency, or mainly responding to the economic dependency, the Mexican constitution preventing foreigners to directly own land on the coasts has changed to adapt to a new transnational reality:

According to an October 26, 2003, story in the New York Times by reporter Tim Wiener, the American migration to Baja was greatly aided in 1997 when the Mexican government changed its beach-home law to allow foreign ownership through locally administered land trusts. Since that change the land rush has been fueled by billions of dollars in investments by tens of thousands of Americans in hundreds of miles of Baja coastline.<sup>122</sup>

Whether via isolationism or expansionism it is evident that the shared reality of the U.S.-Mexico borderland has gone through many stages, some deadlier some hopeful, and that there is still much work to do if we are to survive in a shrinking world, where the only currency accepted is interdependency.

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<sup>121</sup> [http://www.cybergolf.com/golf\\_news/Americans\\_flocking\\_to\\_baja\\_in\\_land\\_grab](http://www.cybergolf.com/golf_news/Americans_flocking_to_baja_in_land_grab)

From his analyses of borderlands around the world, Oscar J. Martínez has derived four models that define the most common types of borderlands interaction. The first model is the alienated borderlands, characterized by a prevailing political tension, where ideological animosity and intense nationalism among the residents makes almost absent any cross-border activity. The interaction between the residents of each country is one of strangers, as it was during some periods of the common history of U.S.-Mexico borderlands.<sup>123</sup> Metaphorically speaking, the separation that occurred in the Garden of Eden between the divine and human realms created an alienated cross-border interaction, where the communication between these two disparate groups takes place in a minimal level through the mediation of agents who negotiate their communication—the role of prophets—but there is never a long term interaction. A similar alienated cross-border relation seems to be present between Jews and Samaritans according to the Johannine narrative. But in both cases such alienation changes in time with the invitation to a common ground that is initiated through the incarnation of the Logos.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

The second model of borderland interaction is the coexistent borders. In this model there is some level of stability, and the border is slightly open, giving the opportunity for a limited binational interaction. The relationship between residents of each country is that of the casual acquaintances, but the possibility for closer interaction between borderlanders is opened, examples include Ecuador and Peru, or Israel and Egypt, Russia and China.<sup>124</sup> Although is not an exact match, a similar border is present between antagonist groups within the Johannine narrative that learn to collaborate out of necessity, like the Jewish and Roman authorities.

The third model, the one currently in place between Mexico and the U.S. is the interdependent borderland, which is similar to the one I locate in the new relationship that the Prologue of John is offering between heaven and earth through the Logos made flesh. In the interaction of interdependent borderlands there is a stability that is ordinarily present. Also present is an economic and social interdependency which offers increased cross-border interaction and the possibility for the expansion of the borderlands. Within this model of interaction the

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<sup>123</sup> Oscar J. Martínez, *Border People. Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson: U. of Arizona Press, 1994), 6.

borderlanders have friendly relationships and work cooperatively, even when this model of interdependence is most of the time established between disparate nations creating an asymmetrical interdependence.<sup>125</sup> Such asymmetric reality, where power relations are still very much at play given the unevenness of economic development and technological advancement, is what I have exposed about the U.S.-Mexico cross-border relations and status of their borderlands.

The final model of border interaction is the integrated borderlands, with a permanent strong stability. The two countries have a merged economy and unrestricted flow of people and goods across the border. In this setting the borderlanders live as members of one social system, for example Switzerland, France, and Germany.<sup>126</sup> The ultimate invitation of the incarnate Logos, Jesus the borderlander, is to come and live as one with him and the Father, in a similar integrated borderland that reminds us of the common ground the divine and human shared in the Garden of Eden.

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

b) ...as it is in heaven?

*It is clear that there are two principal biblical themes presupposed by the Johannine Prologue. The first is creation, primarily alluded to in the opening five verses. The second is the Sinai covenant primarily alluded to in the final five verses.*<sup>127</sup>

From a literary perspective, according to Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, the beginnings of the gospels have three functions: interactional, intertextual and intratextual.<sup>128</sup> The first function refers to the interaction or relationship established between the implied-real reader and the implied-real author. The gospel's beginning helps reader and author to connect according to the terms that the story's world demands. The second function, the intertextual, suggests other texts the reader should consider when interpreting the gospel. It also points to the literary context of production within which the gospel should be read. The third function, the intratextual, introduces the reader to the narrative settings, the themes, characters, plot, frames and rhetoric of the story, previewing the gospel story for the reader.

Considering the intertextual function, the consensus among scholars regarding the Prologue of John is that the

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<sup>127</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Word and Glory. On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John's Prologue* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 82.

<sup>128</sup> Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Ending at the Beginning: A Response," *Semeia* 52 (1990): 177.



story should be read in light of the beginning of beginnings, the creation story in *Genesis* and in light of Sophia, the forerunner of the Logos. Most scholars assert that John 1:1 makes a direct reference to the moment of creation described in *Genesis* 1,<sup>129</sup> and that the *Wisdom of Solomon* provides the blueprints for the theological construction of the Logos.<sup>130</sup>

Following the lead of the intertextual function I have re-written the story of John 1:1-18 in light of *Genesis* 1. On one side is my translation of the Prologue, on the other is my intertextual version, interweaving the *Genesis* story into John's new creation, which appropriately serves as the background story preceding the re-demarcation of the heaven-earth borderlands, this time via the incarnate Logos. The hidden subtext from *Genesis* acts as the seed of a performative utterance which in a full-circle-move begins to recreate the borderlands of a future new divine-human common ground, similar to the one originally created in *Genesis* 1.

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<sup>129</sup> Among them Bultmann affirmed that John intended "his Prologue to correspond to the beginning of the sacred book of the Jews," see John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 37; also see Evans, *Word and Glory*, 82.

<sup>130</sup> See Collins, "The Gospel of John," 50; Scott, *Sophia*, 78.

### John 1:1-18

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and God was the word.

<sup>2</sup> This one was in the beginning with God.

<sup>3</sup> All by it came into being, and apart from it came into being not even one thing that came into being.

<sup>4</sup> In it was life, and the life was the light of human beings.

<sup>5</sup> And the light in the darkness shines and the darkness did not overtake it.

<sup>6</sup> Came to be a man sent by God, named himself John; <sup>7</sup> this one came for witness, that he might witness about the light, that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> That one was not the light but that he should be witnessing about the light.

<sup>9</sup> It was the true light, which is lightening all humans, coming into the world.

<sup>10</sup> In the world was, and the world by it came to be and the world not knew it.

<sup>11</sup> To its own came and the own not received it.

<sup>12</sup> But as many as received it gave them authority to become children of God, those believing in the name of it.

<sup>13</sup> Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

<sup>14</sup> And the word/saying became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld the glory of it glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

<sup>15</sup> John witnessed about it and he cried saying this one was whom I said the one coming behind me has come before me, because was first of me.

<sup>16</sup> And out of it fullness we all received, and grace upon grace, <sup>17</sup> because the law through Moses was given, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

<sup>18</sup> Nobody has seen God at any time, the only begotten God the one being in the bosom of the father that one explains (him).

### Inter-textual version

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning, God began to speak in the midst of the dark void, and God's word was God's only company, <sup>2</sup> both were one and the same, in the beginning.

<sup>3</sup> By speaking God created the world, everything God created through the spoken word.

<sup>4</sup> God's word was life itself, and this life was the light of human beings.

<sup>5</sup> And the light sprung in the dark void and God created day and night.

<sup>6</sup> God sent a man named John <sup>7</sup> that he might witness about the true light so all might believe through him.

<sup>8</sup> He was not the light coming into the world, he was witnessing about that light. <sup>9</sup> The creative light, which illumines all humans, was coming into the world.

<sup>10</sup> It was already in the world, though not in human form, thus not many knew it even when the world was created by it. <sup>11</sup> To its own came and its own did not receive it.

<sup>12</sup> But those who believe and received it gave them authority to become children of God. <sup>13</sup> Not by blood, will of flesh or will of man, but of God.

<sup>14</sup> So this time, instead of waiting for humans to acknowledge God's presence in creation (Psalm 8), God gave human form to its creative word, and God's word became flesh and humans were able to see God's glory in this human who was born out of God self.

<sup>15-18</sup> John testified about this word and how it was before him because it was God's word in the beginning. What God gave us through Jesus was better than what s/he gave us through Moses since this time it was God-self through God's word as human being who was coming into the world. Who could be better than God's word, as born out of God, to explain God since nobody has ever seen God before?

The first 18 verses of *John* 1 traditionally receive the label of the **Prologue**, meaning literally **a speech beforehand**.<sup>131</sup> However, when read in light of its intertextual reference to *Genesis* 1, it seems that in the *Fourth Gospel* the label **Prologue** given to this introduction is more than a speech beforehand; it actually functions as a discourse **in favor of the Logos** or **in place of the Logos**.<sup>132</sup> The Prologue of *John* not only hints as to how we should read the narrative in general but also, rhetorically speaking, attempts to persuade us with its **Pro-Logos** language that we should believe in the Logos and become children of God. This **Pro-Logos** discourse is at the same time the literary **incarnation**, or the discursive representation that the author offers to the readers **in place of the Logos**. As readers of the Prologue, in the eyes of the narrator, we are the blessed ones "who have not seen and yet have come to believe"<sup>133</sup> through the discursive Logos. The one about whom we are reading came in flesh and went back to the Father, but remained with us in **printed**

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<sup>131</sup> From Gk. *prologos*, from *pro-* "before" + *logos* "discourse, speech," from *legein* "to speak." See <http://www.etymonline.com/>

<sup>132</sup> The prefix *pro-* also means "forward, in favor of, in place of" from the Latin *pro* "on behalf of, in place of, before, for." For detailed information see <http://www.etymonline.com/>

<sup>133</sup> *John* 20:29.

**form** and through the Spirit,<sup>134</sup> opening a new reality of interaction for the divine and the human.

According to the first five verses of the Prologue, God and his/her Word are united in the beginning, in a temporal and spatial realm that seems outside human reach. However, if we continue to read the Prologue as a parallel of the creation story in *Genesis*, we see that in the beginning, God and his/her creation previously had a close relationship, intimately interacting in a common ground for God and humans, the Garden of Eden. In the story in *Genesis*, humans are expelled from the Eden as a consequence of their disobedience. This expulsion creates alienation between God and humans; their shared common space is lost and they are separated by a border. As learned through the Hebrew Bible, there will be a long journey from alienation to reconciliation before a divine-human common ground can be shared again. A long journey for the Word to become closer again to humanity, a journey that Alexander Jones expresses by saying that,

. . . the initial divine word was the fiat, or 'Let there be,' of the original creation, followed by the 'words' of the Law, and the Prophets and the Wisdom writings. Finally, the story of this divine communication ends with the arrival in our world of the perfect and ultimate word, who is Jesus.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> John 14:16, 25.

<sup>135</sup> Dumm, *Mystical*, 163.

It will be the event of the incarnation of the Logos that will bring again the possibility of a common ground, of a shared borderland where two disparate groups have the potential for transnational interaction.

In light of *Genesis*, this new creation depicted in the Prologue brings the restoration of a common borderland that although comes as an asymmetric reality, is reminiscent of the integrated common ground that can be recovered as the story of the Logos-Jesus unfolds in *John*.

This re-creation of a shared borderland can be understood as the new expedition-mission the divine is attempting by entering into the human realm in a new form. Rudolf Schnackenburg captures this idea of the fusion of realms when he states that "The Logos who dwelt with God, clothed in the full majesty of the divinity and possessing the fullness of the divine life, entered the sphere of the earthly and human, the material and perishable, by becoming flesh."<sup>136</sup> This crossing of spheres of the divine into the human opens a new reality previously not present in the creation story of the *Genesis*, where the common ground appeared more divine than human, and where God was not visible to humans, rather was a sound and a spiritual

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<sup>136</sup> Schnackenburg, *John*, Vol. 1, 266.

existence, but not a physical presence.<sup>137</sup> In a way, although we are still considering a disparate, asymmetric reality between the divine and the human, the fact that in *John* the Logos takes human form, the asymmetric gap begins to close. The physicality of the Logos demonstrates a move towards integration not present in *Genesis*, since in Johannine terms, "Sarx expresses that which is earth-bound (3:6), transient and perishable (6:63), the typically human mode of being, as it were, in contrast to all that is divine and spiritual. In the mind of the evangelist, it is linked up with the cosmic dualism of 'above-below' (cf. 3:3; 8:23) and 'earth-heaven' (3:31); in the incarnate Logos heaven sinks to earth."<sup>138</sup> It is not longer the invitation to remain in the semi-heavenly realm of the Eden; God's realm drops into earth and two realities are united. By sinking fully into the human realm God comes closer and creates a reality different to the reality in *Genesis*: "God now has chosen to be with his people in a more personal way than ever before."<sup>139</sup>

As John Marsh explains, "When he came in flesh it

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<sup>137</sup> *Genesis* 3:8-10.

<sup>138</sup> Schnackenburg, *John*, Vol. 1, 267.

<sup>139</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991; repr. 2000), 127.

could be said that, like the Tabernacle, there was on earth a human embodiment of a heavenly reality; that, as on the tent of meeting, the glory of God could be seen to rest on him; and that now at last God had indeed taken up residence among his people."<sup>140</sup> The long awaited promise of God residing among God's people in a common ground, in a shared borderland becomes real in the incarnate Logos. Or as Raymond Brown expresses it, "the flesh of Jesus Christ is the new localization of God's presence on earth. . . Jesus is the replacement of the ancient Tabernacle."<sup>141</sup>

The long journey of cross-border struggles began to end, "God, who had revealed or expressed himself-'sent his word'-in a variety of ways from the beginning, made himself known at last in a real historical human person: when 'the Word became flesh', God became man."<sup>142</sup> By becoming human, the alienated borderlands began to move towards interdependency with a clear intention of creating a cross-border interaction where integration was available. In this situation the misunderstandings typical of an alienated borderland begin to disappear when the terms of negotiation

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<sup>140</sup> John Marsh, *The Gospel of St. John* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1968), 108.

<sup>141</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, i-xii (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 33.

<sup>142</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 40.

between the borderlanders are expressed in a common language,

The Word was God's language addressing men. He did not speak in some foreign and incomprehensible tongue, or with the expertise of the intellectual aristocrat or priestly favorite. No, God spoke in the simple speech of common humanity so that all men could hear and grasp what he had to say. Jesus Christ is that word of truth, John believes, and those who recognize him for who he is can hear it.<sup>143</sup>

At an initial look the cross-border interaction that takes place in the Prologue suggests the model of interdependent borderlands with a clear asymmetric status. In this model the Logos crosses from the affluent realm of the divine into the poor realm of the humans. However, because the divine is willing to become human and to abandon Its position of power in order to relate to humans on equal terms, a shift occurs, moving from the seemingly interdependent asymmetric borderland to an integrated borderland. Throughout the *Gospel of John* we witness Jesus calling those who believe in him to follow the model of Jesus' relationship with the Father, to become one, as he and the Father are one, until the integrated borderland becomes a reality. An integrated borderland reminiscent of the one shared in the Garden of Eden, where the cross-border interactions between the divine and the human were

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<sup>143</sup> Ernest W. Saunders, *Coming to Life: A Study of the Gospel of John* (New York: Board of Mission UMC, 1968), 31.



fluid and without conflicts until the serpent destroyed such stability. This new integrated borderland, however, is an invitation to an even closer cross-border interaction where the asymmetry is virtually erased through the humbling act of a God who, after long failed debordering negotiations, ultimately becomes Itself the concrete bridge uniting both spheres. As the incarnate Logos Jesus becomes the border fusing the divine and human realms, opening the possibility for fluid cross-border interactions in both directions. This bidirectional traffic between heaven and earth is implied by Rudolf Schnackenburg when he states that "the way of the Redeemer down into flesh, and the way upwards through the flesh to heavenly glory also becomes a way for all who attach themselves to him in faith . . . for John, Christ in the flesh is . . . the leader who brings earth-bound man home to the heavenly world of life and glory (cf. 6:62f.; 14:6; 17:24)."<sup>144</sup> The border has opened; a new era has begun to create a new reality.

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<sup>144</sup> Schnackenburg, *John*, Vol. 1, 267-8.

## Walking in our Fathers' footsteps: migration and mixture

*America's 4,000-mile border with Canada is basically defended by a couple of fire trucks, and most Americans think that's about all we need. The southern border is half as long, has the equivalent of an army division patrolling it, and many Americans say it should be buttoned down even tighter. At the beginning of a new century, there may be no country on earth with as much potential as Mexico to destabilize the U.S.—and to preserve its standard of living. No wonder people can't decide how much the border should be a barrier, how much a bridge.<sup>145</sup>*

Story # 2 -

And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the humans whom he had formed . . . They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise' . . . I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father . . . As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.<sup>146</sup>



This is the saga of five generations of my family who in the process of being has taught me that life and family extend beyond geographical borders and that dreams know no boundaries.

1910

The revolutionary leader Francisco Madero is imprisoned in San Luis Potosí. Mexico is in turmoil; 30 years of Diaz's dictatorship have taken its toll. Struggling to provide for his family, my great-grandfather Alvino Guardiola, a local miner from San Luis considers crossing to the U.S. to work during the harvest season. A few months later, as Alvino is preparing to leave, Madero escapes from prison promulgating his "Plan San Luis," calling the nation to a revolution. Afraid of leaving his family behind Alvino brings his wife and young daughter along and move to Texas in search of a better life.

1932

The economic depression in the U.S. has reached all sectors, but those suffering the most are the farming and mining industries. The crops are not selling; the prices have dropped 65% and the farm where Alvino and his sons work closes. Again, in search of a better life he gathers his wife, three sons and younger daughter and returns to Mexico, leaving behind the oldest daughter who is now married with children. This time they establish themselves in

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<sup>145</sup> <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101010611/opener.html>

<sup>146</sup> Genesis 2:8; 3:8; John 5:19; 16:28; 17:18.

the bordering state of Tamaulipas where they find various jobs and modestly live their lives.

1944

After two years of war and 12 million men in uniform, there is a shortage of human-power in the U.S. labor force. The news of job opportunities reaches Alvino and his family. They sell their belongings and begin their return journey to the U.S., this time as five families. They move to Texas via Reynosa where they cross the border without problems, except for Crispin's family. While attempting to cross the border he proudly mentions he had worked for the Mexican government. Immediately the immigration officers destroy his documents and deny him entrance to the U.S. They accuse him of betraying his country. Frustrated and confused by the accusations of a crime he did not know existed, and frightened by the violence inflicted on him, Crispin returns to Reynosa where he establishes with his wife and son while his family returns to his hometown of Marlin, Texas. Fifteen years later my grandfather attempts to cross the border again, this time with success as he shows the new birth certificate his family has sent him—he is after all a U.S. citizen.

1958

Samuel Guardiola marries Imelda Saenz, and during their first seven years of marriage they move nine times before they arrive to their current home; curiously all of them within a twenty-block perimeter from the international bridge. Ten years into their marriage they are a family of six.

1976

Imelda and her four daughters move to Monterrey, in what will become a twelve-year educational journey. Samuel remains in Reynosa. Many hours, days, weeks and maybe months are spent traveling between the cities.

1982

After witnessing his savings shrink under the biggest devaluation ever in Mexico's history of 866.80%, Samuel considers moving the family to the U.S. to live, and later retire, in a more stable economy. He applies for a resident visa, but disappointed by the eight year waiting list, my father decides to forgo the visa.

1983

Twenty-five year old David Lee Reimer, from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, is saving for his visit to Mexico. In the summer David travels south for his two weeks of adventure in the South of Mexico.

1988

Following a call to ministry, and after realizing the financial impossibility of attending a theological school in South America or Europe, I reluctantly move to the U.S. to complete a two-year theological degree.

1990

My father learns from a friend that, as a son of a U.S. citizen, he may not have to wait long for a visa. He brings my

grandfather's birth certificate to immigration services and a month later he is summoned. He is surprised when they give him a passport, not a visa. As the first-born of a U.S. citizen, born outside U.S. territory before 1940, he is by birth a U.S. citizen. For the next fourteen years (1990-2004) my mother and father live a highly hybridized life, spending part of the week in Reynosa and the other in McAllen.

1991

Eight years later, after his planned two-week summer trip, David Lee returns to the U.S. During his first visit David Lee falls in love with Mexico and decides to stay longer (in the devalued economy of 1983 his dollars lasted longer than the two weeks planned). When the money becomes scarce he finds various jobs. He lives in San Miguel until a fire destroyed all his belongings. David returns to the U.S. where he believes it would be easier to restart. He moves to the border town of McAllen, Texas to live close to Mexico. He works as vacuum salesman in McAllen. Few months into his job he offers a demonstration in my father's office where he meets my sister Martha. They fall in love.

1992

I have lived in Chicago for four years. After obtaining a second theological degree I decide to pursue a Ph.D. but realize it would be easier if I change my status from an international student to resident. Because my father is U.S. citizen my sister Martha and I receive our "green cards." By the end of the year Martha and David marry and settle in McAllen, Texas. During the next seventeen years I move twelve times and live in six cities.

1995-2004

In less than a century, ninety-four years after Alvino crossed the U.S. border in 1910, five generations of a family living between two countries have exemplified through their lives different cross-border interactions, and now, Carla, ImeLee, Samantha and Ricky, four bilingual, bicultural, fully-hybrid-borderlander-children comfortably live in what for them is an integrated U.S.-Mexico borderland, easily navigating between both worlds.

a) migration and mixture in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands

The U.S.-Mexico border region has undergone perhaps the greatest demographic and economic transformation of any border zone in the world, and certainly in the Americas. By 1980 in this border lay some of the fastest-growing cities on the continent: San Diego-Tijuana (over 3.0 million); El Paso-Ciudad Juárez (1.2 million); Brownsville-Matamoros (450,000); McAllen-Reynosa (604,000); Calexico-Mexicali (460,000). Growth rates on the U.S. side of the border hovered between 3.7 and 5.1 percent per year, while the national figure was 1.0 percent (1970-1980). In Mexico, border city growth rates ranged between 4.1 and 8.9 percent per year, while the national average was about 3.0 percent (1970-1983).<sup>147</sup>

Migration and mixture have always been part of the Mexican people, from its nomadic origins dated at the end of the Pleistocene Epoch, the North-South migration that occurred fifteen thousands years ago, passing through its violent ethnic mixture that came out of the colonial rape perpetrated by the Spanish empire, all the way through the present cross-border experiences of the new generations.

According to Octavio Paz, Mexican writer and diplomat, Mexican national identity is undeniably hybrid. This hybridism stems from the negative maternal representations of the 'Malinche complex,' the violated woman. For Paz the people of Mexico are the children of a primal violation, that of conquest. Malinche is the Indian woman who gave herself to the conquistadors. Cortez claimed her as his mistress; she learned his language becoming both his lover

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<sup>147</sup> Lawrence A. Herzog, ed. *Changing Boundaries in the Americas: New Perspectives on the U.S.-Mexican, Central American, and South American Borders* (San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 1992), 9.

and his guide. She revealed everything until there was nothing else to take, then was abandoned. The ancestral drama of the Mexican identity is thus poised between a traitor and a violator. The violated mother who is abandoned to give birth to the hybrid nation, while the conqueror father escapes, is seen as a victim who facilitated violence.<sup>148</sup>

According to Stuart Hall, cultural identity is always hybrid; this hybridity is diverse and takes many forms that are "determined by specific historical formations and cultural repertoires of enunciation."<sup>149</sup> Such metamorphic hybridity has underscored the cultural identity of the Mexican nation throughout its history. Besides the obvious physical hybridization produced by the rape of the conquerors, the encounter with the Spanish empire also produced a cultural hybridization that marked the Mexican identity. Subsequent hybridizations have since continued to occur, and many are linked to historical formations

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<sup>148</sup> Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (Grove Press, 1961), 77. Coming out of the pen of a misogynist like Paz, I have never embraced his negative image of la *Malinche*, nor have I subscribed to his famous essay on the formation of the Mexican identity. However, since I consider the violence of the conquest to be an integral part of the Mexican identity I quote his work here to highlight such point. Contemporary feminist writers have rendered more complex and fair images of la *Malinche*, such as the one Sandra Cisneros presents in her work *Woman Hollering Creek: And Other Stories*, published in 1992.

involving the Mexican territory and its proximity to the United States. These hybrid encounters have continuously altered the cultural identity of both nations as well as their physical appearance which is expressed in the opening story. It seems that hybrid identities continue to maintain their hybrid impulse. However, when Hall speaks of hybrid identities as always incomplete he "does not imply that they aspire to a sense of wholeness and invariably fall short of becoming a finished product but, rather that their energy for being is directed by the flows of an ongoing process."<sup>150</sup> Such ongoing process lives through the cross-border interactions present throughout the borderlands of U.S.-Mexico.

As explained before, reasons for crossing the border are many, but lately they are mainly in response to the economic crisis prevalent in the Americas. Because of such reality, "the Mexico-U.S. border has become one of the most transgressed boundaries in the world."<sup>151</sup> Such transgression

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<sup>149</sup> Nikos Papastergiadis, *Hybridity*, 273.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 274-5.

<sup>151</sup> Víctor Zúñiga, "Nations and Borders: Romantic Nationalism and the Project of Modernity" (35-55) in *The U.S.-Mexico Border: Transcending Divisions, Contesting Identities*, ed. David Spener and Kathleen Staudt (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 51.

has created a level of cultural hybridity that has more to do with national legal identities than with ethnic mixture,

Most undocumented immigrants are adults (8.8 million); 56 percent of these adults are men, and 44 percent are women. About 1.5 million families have at least one parent who is undocumented along with children who are all U.S. citizens. Another 460,000 are mixed-status families in which some children are U.S. citizens and some are undocumented.<sup>152</sup>

While a large number of crossings occur as transgressions, it is also true that legal migration has also reshaped the appearance of this nation. "In 1996, 280 million legal land crossings were made from Mexico into the United States, making this border one of the busiest in the world."<sup>153</sup> Due to the economic interaction transpiring between the two nations, and in spite of the "conflict between Anglos and Mexican Americans, there has also been substantial ethnic and cultural fusion. Here again, an indicator of that integration is the high incident of intermarriage between the two groups, especially in recent decades."<sup>154</sup>

Another way in which the climate of the borderlands has changed as a result the massive invasion of the Maquiladoras emerging with NAFTA, has been the creation of

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<sup>152</sup> Bill Ong Hing, *Deporting Our Souls: values, morality, and immigration policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 13.

<sup>153</sup> Spener and Staudt, "Conclusion: Rebordering," 237.



a new hybrid reality, "*lo transfronterizo*" which also implies a new hybrid identity produced by the mixture of cultures,

"*Lo transfronterizo* refers simultaneously to both the Mexican and U.S. sides of the border and, in general, is defined as a mode of life characterized by a continuous interaction among individuals and institutions belonging to two distinct socioeconomic structures (in this case, nations) in the region where they share a common border. *Lo transfronterizo* is reflected in both material activities and ways of thinking."<sup>155</sup>

In considering the transformations that have occurred in the history of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands it is essential to remember that only a century ago, most of the borderland regions around the world were underdeveloped and under-inhabited. Within the last four decades international borders began to be questioned and redefined "the internationalization of the world economy . . . has led to an inevitable reshaping of boundary functions. The most obvious change has been the shift from boundaries that are heavily protected and militarized to those that are more porous, permitting cross-border social and economic interaction."<sup>156</sup> Evidently, as interdependence between nations becomes more obvious in a global economy, migration

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<sup>154</sup> Martínez, *Border People*, 18.

<sup>155</sup> Olivia Ruiz, "Visiting the Mother Country: Border-Crossing as a Cultural Practice," 105-120 in *S & S*, 105-6.

<sup>156</sup> Herzog, *Changing Boundaries*, 5-6.

and mixture in the borderlands becomes more the norm than the exception.

According to Robert Young, "today's self-proclaimed mobile and multiple identities may be a marker not of contemporary social fluidity and dispossession but of a new stability, self-assurance and quietism. Fixity of identity is only sought in situations of instability and disruption, of conflict and change."<sup>157</sup> In our shrinking world, where the function of borders is constantly questioned, it is reassuring to consider the growing number of hybrid identities as contributing to create a new stability.

b) migration and mixture in the heaven-earth borderlands

*. . . hybridity . . . invariably acknowledges that identity is constructed through a negotiation of difference, and that the presence of fissures, gaps and contradictions is not necessarily a sign of failure. In its most radical form, the concept also stresses that identity is not the combination, accumulation, fusion or synthesis of various components, but an energy field of different forces. Hybridity is not confined to a cataloguing of difference. Its 'unity' is not found in the sum of its parts, but emerges from the process of opening up what Homi Bhabha has called a 'third space,' within which other elements encounter and transform each other. Hybridity is both the assemblage that occurs whenever two or more elements meet, and the initiation of a process of change.*<sup>158</sup>

By now, after the postcolonial reading of the main Christological statements of faith from the Church's councils and some of the representations of the incarnate Logos from Johannine scholarship, it is evident that the

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<sup>157</sup> Young, *Colonial Desire*, 4.

emphasized idea of a hybrid Logos, of a divine-human mixture that gives birth to a new reality, is at the core of my representation of Jesus the borderlander. Although the Councils' decrees' construction of the image of the incarnate Logos is contrary to our postmodern understanding of how identity is constructed, there lies a paradox in the compulsory polarization of the divine pole by the emphatic negation of the human side in the end which causes the collapse of the binary opposition rendering more evident not only the negotiation of differences, but the contradictions, gaps and fissures involved in such constructions. An opposing process with similar results occurs in the evaluation of the constructs from Johannine scholarship, where the polarization of both elements, divine and human, makes it easier to clearly see the negotiation of difference taking place in the incarnation and therefore the inclusiveness that can be found at the center of the spectrum, where a third space is inevitably opened.<sup>159</sup>

Ultimately, the purpose of this section, prefigured by the previous analyses of the incarnate Logos, is to call attention to the emergence of the 'third space' as a

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<sup>158</sup> Nikos Papastergiadis, *Hybridity*, 258

central trait of the identity of the Logos in the Prologue; to stress its prevalence throughout the *Gospel of John* in the form of Jesus the borderlander who, directly or indirectly, invites people to this new space where mutual transformation occurs among those accepting the invitation; and to illustrate the processes of hybridization, both as the coming together of two or more elements and as the initiation of multiple and continuous processes of change that take place all through the Johannine narrative.

Affirming the presence of the third space, already highlighted in the two above mentioned sections, is the following quote from Raymond Brown stating that "the Prologue does not say that the Word entered into flesh or abided in flesh but that the Word became flesh . . . the Word of God was now inextricably bound to human history."<sup>160</sup> This quote speaks not only of that moment of transformation happening in the third space where the Word is becoming something else and the flesh is also adopting a new state, but also of the presence of a permanent locus of transformation available on earth, now that the Word has become so inescapably enmeshed with the world, creating a

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<sup>159</sup> See discussion on academic, exegetical views of the nature of the Logos from page 165 to 170 for more details.

<sup>160</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, i-xii (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 31.

permanent borderland between heaven and earth. This idea is reaffirmed by Joseph N. Sanders who declares "By saying that the Logos became flesh, John means that Christ was both divine, being the Logos, and, in the full sense of the word, human, being flesh."<sup>161</sup> Although Sanders does not clearly establish the third space, just as we had to infer it from Brown's statement, the acceptance of a balanced divine/human encounter in the Logos suggests the presence of that energy field of different forces where change and transformation can happen.

Once this 'energy field of different forces' or 'third space' is opened in the Prologue the opportunity for transformation is open for all. Throughout the entire *Gospel of John* there are several brief instances where the negotiation of differences occurs and at least fifteen more complex encounters of people who meet other people and in their exchanges they help to open new territories and create energy fields of different forces where transformation and change is initiated. In the following overview of the Johannine narrative I briefly refer to nine of those encounters.

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<sup>161</sup> Joseph N. Sanders, *A Commentary on The Gospel According to St. John* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968), 79.

One of the first instances where we see this third-space drawing people into the field of mutual transformation is the scene where the disciples of John the Baptist engage Jesus and he invites them saying "'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day" (John 1:39). Once that first encounter and moment of transformation occurs it extends as a chain reaction when Andrew brings Simon Peter to Jesus, then Philip brings Nathanael. Through the common Johannine phrase "come and see" the characters of the Gospel are engaged in a continuous assemblage of people who meet other people and initiate processes of change.

One of the most significant encounters in the Gospel is the visit Nicodemus pays to Jesus. He appears willing and receptive to Jesus' message but at the same time he seems afraid, coming to meet Jesus at night. Doing what he has been sent to do, Jesus extends his invitation to the third-space, the borderland of transformation he has brought, and tells him "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above;"<sup>162</sup> Jesus gives him direct instructions on how the process of hybridization can occur if he wants to be part of this inclusive space he is opening. Nicodemus responds, "How can

anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?"<sup>163</sup> Evidently, the hybridization process is neither forced nor automatic; it requires the volition of the parts involved. The moment of change is offered, some level of mixture happens through their encounter since we know Nicodemus is significantly interested in Jesus and his message—as we see him later interceding for him before the Pharisees and later on joining Joseph of Arimathea to bury Jesus' body—but it seems that the relations of powers by which he lives, or his fear of losing his position of power-status within his religious party keeps him from fully accepting the challenge Jesus to live in an integrated borderland. His interest in keeping the asymmetric relation of power prevents him from joining an attractive but an unknown reality. In response to his doubts Jesus affirms, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit,"<sup>164</sup> and Nicodemus resumes to a safe coexistent, cross-border interaction with minimum demand or engagement.

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<sup>162</sup> *Gospel of John* 3:3, NRSV.

<sup>163</sup> *John* 3:4.

<sup>164</sup> *John* 3:5.

The classic betrothal scene from chapter four offers the perfect space for the negotiation of differences and the initiation of a process of change within the Samaritan community. In a playful and symbolic way the narrator of the Gospel announces the opening of a third-space that is about to happen between Jesus and the Samaritan community. Although the scene might suggest a physical more than an ideological hybridization, at the beginning of the dialogue between the Samaritan woman and Jesus starts, we see the energy field of different forces at play and the transformation of identities. The theological exchange with Jesus, as well as his prophetic abilities, ignite the process of transformation for the Samaritan woman who, in keeping with the traditional pattern of chain reaction in *John*, goes to her community and proclaims, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"<sup>165</sup> The community comes to Jesus, he stays two days and apparently the hybridization process proves to be effective, since the Samaritans believe when coming in contact with Jesus. Apparently that contact was thought to be of a different kind, since in a later scene someone accuses Jesus of having a demon and being a

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<sup>165</sup> John 4:29.



Samaritan. Right away Jesus denies the accusation of having a demon, but says nothing about being a Samaritan,

The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it and he is the judge. Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death." The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, 'Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.'" John 8:48-52

It is not clear if the narrator is still extending the imagery from the story of the Samaritan woman and the inclusion of the Samaritans into the Johannine community,<sup>166</sup> or if it is an insult that relates to the unapproved mingling of Jesus and the multiple hybridization processes he triggered throughout the Gospels or simply the confusion from the part of the Pharisees who remain intrigued about Jesus' identity, since "we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture . . . We are all, in a sense, ethnically located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are."<sup>167</sup> Because the identity of Jesus constitutes a mystery for most of the Gospel's characters, particularly those who are not willing

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<sup>166</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (Paulist Press, 1978), 34.

<sup>167</sup> Stuart Hall, 1988:5.

to establish amicable cross-border relations with him, the use of the ethnic label Samaritan may demonstrate either their difficulty in understanding Jesus thus the need to defining him as an outsider, or their interest in segregating Jesus which explains their need to label him as an outsider, as the other of lesser social value whom they despise and therefore can ignore.

The next energy field where different forces converge is the space Jesus opens in the synagogue of Capernaum where he offers one of his most sacramental discourses in *John*, which is also one of the most debated passages since several scholars believe it is a later addition.<sup>168</sup> After performing his fifth sign in the Gospel, the feeding of the multitude, in itself another hybrid moment, Jesus announces in the synagogue,

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. John 6:51-57

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<sup>168</sup> See Helmut Koester, *From Jesus to the Gospels*, 127; also the position offered by Robert Kysar, *The Gospel of John (The Anchor Bible Dictionary, v. 3, pp. 919-920)*, 922.

In what results in one of the most shocking moments for Jesus followers, a massive moment of hybridization, he opens a third-space for his audience who is invited to be transformed by accepting Jesus message to communal meal where the symbolic ingestion of Jesus' flesh and blood results in a transformation and hybridization that begins from within as the audience is invited to what seems a cannibalistic feast. Unfortunately most of the audience is confused by the disgusting message and misses the new space Jesus is open for transformation, but in the end is there for the reader to seize it, which ultimately is the goal of the evangelist, who is sacramentally offering this printed Logos, this borderlander Jesus as the message we can ingest and digest as we degust and savor every word of the written gospel.

Another key hybrid moment of transformation presented by Jesus is the one he offers in the story of the Accused Woman, which I do not discuss here because is the subject of the next section of this chapter, where I discuss it in depth.

One of the most beautiful stories of irony, ambiguity, misunderstanding and change in John is the story of the blind man. Another energy field where multiple forces converge and debate as they give birth to a new light of

understanding, to a new vision of what the third-space Jesus offers means. The rich dialogue between characters not only exemplifies well the complex negotiation of differences, but it also plays with the reader and invites her into an exchange where transformation can open our eyes to the new reality that Jesus is offering where the old ways of seeing life and perceiving the borders is limiting and therefore need to be expanded and brought into a new light.

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see'. . . We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from. The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' John 9:24-33

Having been transformed himself, the blind man is now an agent of change and transformation who although affirms not know where Jesus comes from, he is able to see that he must be coming from God, otherwise this new reality he is bringing would not be possible. In turn, by seeing the blind man who sees, the reader who can see is challenged to see again, and take a second look at the third-space and what the meaning of being able to see really means.

If what transforms us and hybridizes us is the Word, the incarnate Logos that dwells in Jesus the borderlander, then the next story clearly exemplifies, irreverently and maybe blasphemously for some, how such transformational process functions, and how the power of the Word operates,

The Jews answered, 'It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God.' Jesus answered, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'? If those to whom the word of God came were called 'gods'--and the scripture cannot be annulled-- can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, 'I am God's Son'?" John 10:33-36

Although further elaboration would be necessary to explore the transformational value of such statement, it is evident that the coming of the Word of God in the life of those who accept it initiates the metamorphosis into hybrid divine-human beings that the Logos announces through its incarnation in Jesus the borderlander, who in fulfilling his mission of hybridization and creation of a new reality boldly announces to those who are moving into the new space, third-space, that he is in deed making room in the new integrated borderland,

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. John 14:2-3

The final story of hybridization I mention here, but not the final in John, is the transformation operated via the performative prayer of Jesus for his disciples, which is a conceptive moment rightfully acknowledged by Herman Waetjen saying, "The goal, as Jesus verbalizes it in his Prayer of Consecration, is no longer generating "children of God" but constituting a New Humanity that, like the Logos-Sophia itself, participates in the being of God."<sup>169</sup> This is the new creation that is announced in the Prologue, this is the third-space that the new humanity is invited to inhabit,

As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Jn 17:18-23

A full cycle of hybridization, change and transformation is occurring and the reader is invited to participate in the New Humanity through the transformational value of the word of the Word.

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<sup>169</sup> Herman C. Waetjen, *The Gospel of the Beloved Disciple* (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2005), 77.

According to Kathleen Kirby "national origins predetermine ideological formations; individual cultures, set apart by the bounds of continents and countries, rivers and mountains, form their realities in divergent ways. As subjects, we vary widely depending on the actual place we came from and the subsequent places we occupy."<sup>170</sup> This conceptualization of identity is what seems to permeate the whole Gospel. Jesus, the heavenly immigrant, and now true borderlander, brings heaven to earth and with his particular ideology predetermined by his national origin he is able to adapt and hybridized, as he is and being hybridized, by the subsequent places he occupies.

It is no a secret that power relations are inherently linked to the construction of identities. Identities are created in relation to outsiders, the other, and that is also part of the reality on how the identity of Jesus and his followers are presented in the Gospel. What is important to keep in mind ultimately, is that identities are not unified, but always fragmented, ruptured, discontinued and contradictory and it is there, in those interstices where change and transformation can constantly occur, since identities are constantly changing; they are

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<sup>170</sup> Kirby, 11.

not final products but productions in process. As Bill Ashcroft declares, "not only is identity constructed but it is variable and provisional."<sup>171</sup> For many theorists identity cannot be fixed, it is "perpetually in flux, pursuing an illusion of wholeness and selfhood that is ultimately unattainable."<sup>172</sup> And as observed above, although identities are closely dependent on the space of a nation, and influenced not only by the geographical space but by its political ethos, I do believe that through the process of hybridization of coming in contact with other elements that can bring new challenges as we negotiate our differences, we can create third-spaces where neither side of the border is better than the other, but the new reality created through the integrated borderland is bigger than the mere sum of both or both on their own. This is the conceptualization that I explore in the last chapter.

### ***Concluding remarks on the Prologue***

Reflecting back on the images of the Logos approved by the Church councils, what we read between the lines of Cyril's letter and what we see is a God who negotiates

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<sup>171</sup> Bill Ashcroft, *Post-colonial transformation* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), 175.



his/her existence with humanity in order to create the perfect harmony between the creator and the creatures. The willful hypostasis created between Son and Father becomes a model for the future relationship between God and the children of God who are invited in Christ to become hybrid beings, perfect union of human and divine nature, not by force but by mutual will.

If God does not decide on his/her own the hypostatic union, then the result is a divine-human endeavor, Jesus-Christ is the hybrid result of a collaborative effort that brings together the creators and the creatures in a transformative way that creates a new model of communication between the two realms.

Within integrated borderlands "nationalism gives way to a new internationalist ideology that emphasizes peaceful relations and improvements in the quality of life of people. Each nation willingly relinquishes a significant part of its sovereignty for the sake of mutual progress."<sup>173</sup> This is the relinquishing of wills that Cyril highlights in his letter, which serves the purpose of modeling the

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<sup>172</sup> Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi, eds., 'Identity,' *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 148.

<sup>173</sup> Martinez, *Border People*, 9.

interdependence by which we are invited to live by the Johannine Jesus. Although the Evangelist is never talking about cross-border interactions when s/he is writing this Gospel, the reality the community was living, as an expelled community, excluded from the cultural, religious and political life of their people probably is the reason the Johannine community is trying to find a way to make Jesus like them in order to authorized their understanding of Jesus public agenda. Also here can be applicable the idea the evangelist presents of the interdependence of the Son with the Father, and how we the readers, but first the Johannine community, are being invited to have this new unity, interdependence that Jesus has with the Father and to which he is calling them to have. Paradoxically, as exclusionist as the message from the *Gospel of John* may sound, in reality is an invitation to interdependence, but not by keeping things as they are, but by opening a new space, a new model of borderlands where neither side prevails in imposing their own identity, but it is a new reality.

Jesus as a borderlander, coming from the heavenly realm into the earthly realm opens the possibility for a new borderland between God and humans, and ultimately the possibility of a new reality which is the third space that

Jesus invitation to become one with him and the Father is offering.

### **Jesus and the Accused Woman: ideological border-crossing**

Having established the identity of the hybrid Logos and Jesus as borderlander in the previous section, this section explores some of the ramifications of such borderlander existence, and the possibilities they offer for the construction of a better world.

### ***The story of the Accused Woman and its context of production***

Although the historicity of the incident of the Accused Woman has been widely accepted as part of the Jesus tradition by most scholars, its textual location is still debatable. What is important from the perspective of border theory in this case is that the story has crossed canonical borders and seized a place in the text for more than sixteen centuries. As Gail O'Day has precisely said: "John 7:53-8:11 is a story without a time or place, a story to be read on its own terms without sustained reference to its larger literary context."<sup>174</sup> In a sense, John 7:53-8:11 has

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<sup>174</sup> G.R. O'Day, "John," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, eds. C.A. Newsom and S.H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 297.

become a hybrid story in the midst of a Gospel that has been adopting it and rejecting it through the readings of millions of readers who have debated its validity. Oddly, this crossroad, hybrid-text depicts the existence and survival strategies of two border-crossers living at the crossroads.

Due to the mobile nature of this pericope in the written sources, the opinions about the spatial location of the text are divided. Frederick Schilling considers the story as an *intrusion* into the original text, since the earliest manuscripts do not include it.<sup>175</sup> Herman Ridderbos says the story is "a clear *interruption* and it differs sharply in language and style from John."<sup>176</sup>

H. Riesenfeld explains that the reason for the late inclusion of the pericope in the *Gospel of John* was the strict penitential discipline at work in the early church. The tolerant forgiveness Jesus gives to the Accused was against the teachings of the church. Later, when penitential practice became more liberal, the story

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<sup>175</sup> F. A. Schilling, "The Story of Jesus and the Adulteress," *ATR* 37 (1955): 92-3.

<sup>176</sup> H. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John. A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 285-6; R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*. Volume 2 (New York: Seabury, 1980), p. 162.

received acceptance in the text.<sup>177</sup> This incident shows how the weight of popular readership/consumption, and not the written text itself, is what determine its textual borders. Such ecclesial practices make evident the hybridity in this pericope: the borders of the text were subjected to the interests and values of the culture that consumed it; the text was altered because of external events, which in turn were shaped by the text.

For Rudolf Schnackenburg, the text is not from "the original fabric of John's gospel."<sup>178</sup> Leon Morris<sup>179</sup> and Daniel Wallace take a similar position.<sup>180</sup> For Fausto Salvoni<sup>181</sup> the pericope's style is Lukan, and it is, as per Eugene Nida and B. Newman, who favor the Lukan origin, an interruption of the sequence of John 7:52 and 8:12.<sup>182</sup>

Among the scholars in favor of the present location

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<sup>177</sup> See R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i-xii) The Anchor Bible*, volume 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 335; Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, p. 286.

<sup>178</sup> R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*. Volume 2, p. 162.

<sup>179</sup> L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 779.

<sup>180</sup> D.B. Wallace, "Reconsidering 'The Story of Jesus and the Adulteress Reconsidered'," *NTS* 39 (1993), pp. 290-296, p. 296.

<sup>181</sup> See F. Salvoni, "Textual Authority for John 7:53-8:11," *Restoration Quarterly* 4:1 (1960), pp. 11-5.

<sup>182</sup> B. Newman and E. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on The Gospel of John* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1980), p. 257.

and its Johannine origins are: Allison Trites,<sup>183</sup> and Alan Johnson, who argues that "the traditional and popular internal linguistic criticism of this disputed passage is not as strong as it has usually been represented."<sup>184</sup> According to John Paul Heil, who uses linguistic theories, the narrative sequence in this "masterfully dramatic story adeptly contributes to, rather than disrupts, the narrative flow in John 7-8."<sup>185</sup>

Whether the scholars consider this pericope Johannine or non-Johannine, the fact is that the text has secured its place in the canon by popular demand, and the choice is now ours to read or reject it. Either way, our decision to accept the conditions of the text's production enacts, already, a cultural reading. Explicitly or implicitly, our rejection or acceptance of the text shows the imprint of our cultural values, political agendas, and, in sum, maps out the borders of our subjectivities in the context of our cultural conditions of consumption of such story.

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<sup>183</sup> A. A. Trites, "The woman taken in adultery," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131 (1974), pp. 137-146, p. 146.

<sup>184</sup> A.F. Johnson, "A Stylistic Trait of the Fourth Gospel in The Pericope Adulterae?," *BETS* 9 (1966), pp. 91-96, p. 96.

<sup>185</sup> J.P. Heil, A Rejoinder to "Reconsidering 'The Story of Jesus and the Adulteress Reconsidered'," *Église et Théologie* 25 (1994), pp. 361-366, p. 366.

### ***Reading the Story of the Accused Woman with others***

Historically, the biblical text has proven to be powerful. The Bible has gone beyond its temporal and spatial boundaries not just for good but also for evil, including massive destruction. Because of some evil interpretations of the biblical text, many people have been erased from the face of the earth and others subjugated and oppressed for not conforming to hegemonic, often biblically grounded ideologies.<sup>186</sup> Evidently, there is more power in the way in which readers consume biblical texts than we would like to acknowledge. The Bible, read by a variety of readers, has certainly been proven to be redemptive, destructive, and all the possibilities in between.

Although the interpretations of the story of the Accused Woman might seem harmless and have not caused the physical extermination of a people, the fact is that they have been equally destructive by reinforcing the patriarchal morality of double standard that has oppressed women. Analyzing some interpretations of John 7:53-8:11

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<sup>186</sup> Five centuries ago, faithful to the endeavor of Christianizing the New World (cf. Matt. 28:18-20), the Spaniards massacred hundreds of indigenous people in Latin America. Last century, the U.S. with the myth of the *Manifest Destiny* based on the ideology of God's chosen people, seized half of the Mexican territory as their "promised land." The expansionist dreams ended up in massacres. In both cases, the Bible was the excuse to mask political ambitions, justifying appropriation of lands and subjugation of peoples.

done during the last 40 years, I would say that Johannine scholarship has explained the story of the Accused Woman using mainly two scenarios or hypothetical plots. It has not been until the last decade that third and fourth scenarios or hypothesis have joined the academic dialogue. The first interpretive scenario focuses on God's grace and Jesus' example of forgiveness. The woman in the story is used to display Divine mercy; she is a passive recipient of God's love. The second scenario is more interactive. God and Jesus call sinners to forgiveness, but it is still God or Jesus who has the central voice in the story. These two first scenarios assume that the woman is guilty of adultery. However, in the third scenario, the image of the merciful God disappears. The focus is on the characters, the woman and the Pharisees, and the equal treatment they receive from Jesus. The guilt of the woman is not the point of entry into the text; in fact, the men are also confronted with their sins. Jesus is seen as sharing the experience of being on trial together with the Accused Woman. In the fourth scenario, I see the focus on the structural sin, that is, the patriarchal system. Jesus confronts the religiosity of a patriarchal system that has restrained women and men from having a more fulfilling life. The following review of scholars' interpretive



scenarios reveals their conclusive ideas on the main teaching of the story and emphasizes their approaches to the woman's situation.

In the first scenario, focused on God's mercy, Frederick Schilling states that the purpose of the story is to "illustrate the principle of forgiveness, the unearned grace of God."<sup>187</sup> Schilling decides to focus on forgiveness, a word never mentioned in the story, and ignores the patriarchal oppression inflicted on this woman who is taken as an object to send Jesus on trial. Likewise, for Beverley Coleman the story is about "our Lord's divine authority as Law-giver, the giver of the love which can save every repentant sinner and give eternal life."<sup>188</sup> She climbs into divine heights, praising God's authority, and ignores the dehumanization of the woman perpetrated by the Pharisees. Coleman's focus on the act of repentance is not even clearly stated or represented in the story, since no confession is involved.<sup>189</sup>

For Bart Ehrman, the story is about "Jesus' teaching

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<sup>187</sup> Schilling, "The Story of Jesus," p. 96.

<sup>188</sup> B. W. Coleman, "The Woman taken in Adultery [John 7:53-8:11]," *Theology* 73 (1970) pp. 409-10, p. 410.

<sup>189</sup> See also in the first scenario: R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols. (*Anchor Bible* 29; New York: Doubleday, 1966-1970), pp. 336-7; B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John (New Century Bible)*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 310-12.

of love and mercy even to the most grievous of offenders," a most interesting observation since no ranking of sins is given by the text. Nevertheless, he ends his statement generously by affirming that "judgment belongs to God alone, who forgives sinners and urges them to sin no more."<sup>190</sup> The "offender" is the woman, of course, the one who Jesus "urged to sin no more." Paradoxically, if we follow this reading, the accusers, the only ones in the story who admit to being sinners as they began to walk away from the scene without stoning the woman, are the ones who leave free of guilt, as if they were in no need of forgiveness.

In the second scenario, Rudolf Schnackenburg argues that the theme of the story is not the condemnation of sin but the calling of sinners: "Jesus accepts sinners in God's name; his will is not to judge but to save."<sup>191</sup> Again, just like Ehrman did, Rudolf Schnackenburg only refers to the woman when speaking of sinners, and he is conveniently blind to the sin of the male characters of the story.

For Leon Morris "the guilty woman had as yet given no sign of repentance or of faith [,] what Jesus does is to

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<sup>190</sup> B.D. Ehrman, "Jesus and the Adulteress," *NTS* 34 (1988), pp. 24-44, p. 38.

<sup>191</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 168.

show mercy and to call her to righteousness."<sup>192</sup> Morris is so eager to show that Jesus is calling the sinful woman to make a "clean break with sin" that he forgets to extend the same call to the accusers, the faceless mob that enforces the Law partially to commit adultery blamelessly, as did the absent adulterer of this story.

The shift to the third scenario comes with Patricia Castro. In this scenario, the image of the merciful God disappears and the focus is on the characters. Reading from a feminist perspective, she observes that the presence of the adulterer is neither important nor needed; Jesus, as a man, has symbolically taken his place. The accusers "not only want the death of the woman, but also the death of the man-Jesus."<sup>193</sup> In this reading the woman and Jesus are considered equals, two law-breakers, two border-crossers who are judged equally.

Robert Maccini focuses on the woman and addresses gaps in the story that need to be questioned when he states, "the narrator takes for granted that the woman is guilty of adultery and does not discuss background details or address

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<sup>192</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 786.

<sup>193</sup> P. Castro, "La mujer en la pastoral de Jesús y de los fariseos," in *Teología desde la Mujer en Centroamérica*, ed. I. Foulkes (San José: Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano, 1989), pp. 105-19, p. 113.

tangential issues." <sup>194</sup> The woman who comes into the scene as the pawn of the accusers leaves as a free person. Silent in the story, she did not have a chance to defend herself, but "no one has condemned her; her simple statement to that effect is her only testimony, and her testimony is true".<sup>195</sup> By pointing to the gaps and the partiality of the narrator Maccini's reading begins to call into question the oppressive ideology behind the text.

Gail O'Day, in her commentary on John,<sup>196</sup> argues that the story's structure demonstrates how Jesus' attention is equally divided between the Accused Woman and the accusers. Both are treated as social subjects and human beings at equal levels. Jesus speaks to both about their sins. Both receive the invitation to live life anew. When the male accusers dehumanize the woman, Jesus humanizes her by addressing her as the men's equal. Under Jesus' care, women and men are invited to live life anew, to become part of a new system where Jesus humanizes them equally.

Two years later, in her commentary "*The Gospel of John*," Gail O'Day inaugurates what I argue is the fourth

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<sup>194</sup> R.G. Maccini, *Her Testimony is True. Women as Witnesses According to John* (JSNT Suppl. Series, 125; Sheffield: JSOT, 1996), 235.

<sup>195</sup> Maccini, *Her Testimony is True*, 235.

<sup>196</sup> See O'Day, "John," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, 297.

scenario. She strongly emphasizes that the story is not about the accusers' sin or self-righteousness, nor about the woman's sexual sin, but is about the structural sin, the accusers' religious authority which is challenged by Jesus: "Jesus places his authority to forgive and to offer freedom over and against the religious establishment's determination of the categories of life and death."<sup>197</sup> Jesus attacks what needs to be changed, the system, so that men and women can live new lives and a new vision in a new age.

Mostly, the interpretations that have prevailed both within and outside of academia are those performed by male readers who adopted the two first scenarios. The first is focused on God's grace, Jesus' example of forgiveness, and the woman as passive recipient of God's love; the second is centered on God and Jesus calling sinners to forgiveness. Both scenarios assume that the woman is guilty of adultery. The subscribers of these scenarios took the woman as sinner and believed the testimony of the patriarchal accusers, overlooking the fact that the Pharisees are breaking the Law by not bringing the adulterer to the trial they have orchestrated. They do not express any regrets for using the woman, whether guilty or innocent, as bait.

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<sup>197</sup> G.R. O'Day, "The Gospel of John. Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*. Volume 9.

In order to bring about political change, a re-articulation and transformation of the present, and, with it, the fracture of the patriarchal system, we need more interpretations from the point of view of the third and fourth scenarios. Working within the fourth scenario, my proposed hybrid reading seeks to highlight the redemptive power involved in the act of crossing oppressive and tyrannical boundaries. In doing so, new ways of re-defining the borders of marginalized identities emerge, contouring new territories and inviting social transformation and political change.

***Jesus and the Accused Woman crossing borders: opening third spaces***

The first step towards a liberating reading of this story is to approach the pericope with a new title. Whenever a new edition, revision, or translation of the Bible is prepared, the cultural context, language, values and preferences of the scholars working on the project permeate the translation of the text and titles assigned to the pericopes. The suggestive and categorical titles given to the pericope of John 7:53-8:11 in most translations and studies of this text have explicitly proven the common and

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(Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 496-865, 630.

undisputed biased conclusions of male readers about the guilt of the woman. In order to treat her fairly, with the benefit of the doubt, I address her as *the Accused*, not the adulteress.<sup>198</sup>

As a way of mapping my reading strategy, I have identified four general contact zones in the story to analyze the text from my border perspective: spatial borders, gender/moral codes, political/religious factions, and communication codes. Regarding space, there are two contact zones in the story: one is between public (Mount of Olives - 8:1) and private (people's homes - 7:53) space, the other is between sacred (temple - 8:2) and profane (other than temple) space. These spatial contact zones are closely related to the second one, the contact zone of gender, which defines the cultural roles of women and men. According to each culture, women and men tend to have different spatial privileges and different moral codes. The third contact zone is between politico-religious factions: Moses' Law vs. Roman ruling, the Pharisees and scribes vs. Jesus and the Accused. The fourth contact zone is established by the communication codes between groups and

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<sup>198</sup> To my knowledge, the only biblical scholar who also mentions something about the bias displayed in the titles given to the pericope, is Gail O'Day. See G.R. O'Day "John 7:53-8:11: a study in misreading," *JBL* 111 (1992), 631-40.

their verbal and non-verbal discourses.

Beginning with John 7:53-8:1 the first contact zone is located between private and public space: "Each of them went home, while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives." (7:53, 8:1) Although there is no explicit reference to the time when the people and Jesus withdrew from the scene, it can be inferred that it was at the end of the day, since verse 8:2 refers to the next morning. So, while the multitude from verses 7:40-44 (and/or the group from verses 7:45-52)<sup>199</sup> seems to conclude the day in the private spaces of their homes, Jesus spends the night in an open public space, on a hill at the margins of Jerusalem. Jesus, as an alien, non-resident individual of the city, wanders outside the walls of Jerusalem.

Excluded from the private spaces of the people's homes, voluntarily or involuntarily, Jesus takes over some of the public spaces, like the Mount of Olives, and transforms them into his private space/home. He knows how to use the public spaces for his benefit so that, whenever

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<sup>199</sup> When the narratives in 7:45-52 and 7:40-44 are read as separated, but simultaneous, stories, verse 7:53 becomes the perfect link between verses 7:44 and 8:1. The narrative is ended with the typical Johannine way of concluding conflict scenes (cf. 6:15: "he withdrew again...;" 8:59: "Jesus hid himself and went out...;" and 10:39: "he escaped..."). Reading verse 7:44 as the conclusion of a conflict scene brings a smoother continuity between verses 7:44 and 7:53, than the one between verses 7:44 and 8:12.



he needs to hide from the mob (6:15), he almost becomes invisible to the point of even crossing among them without being harmed (8:59, 10:39). According to Renato Rosaldo, "Immigrants and socially mobile individuals appeared culturally invisible because they [are] no longer what they once were and not yet what they could become."<sup>200</sup> This is shown in Jesus' life through John chapters 1 to 11. Culturally, as a heavenly immigrant (6:38), Jesus becomes invisible for those who seek to arrest him (7:30). He is no more who he was while with(in) God, and he is not yet what he could become with(in) us. Through the signs he performs and because the people begin to believe in him (2:23), the authorities will realize that Jesus is a menace to their culture, the powerful leader that could fracture their authority (11:45-53). When his "hour comes," his hybrid presence and identity will no longer be invisible to the law-enforcers and border-keepers of the culture. Jesus' hybrid identity helps him survive while crossing borders and moving frontiers in his subversive acts of creating spaces for transformation. In the end, when his hour comes, he will pay a high price for his behavior as a border-crosser.

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<sup>200</sup> Rosaldo, *Culture*, 209.

The next day Jesus returns to the temple (8:2), the sacred-public place he adopts as his personal teaching space. In the *Gospel of John*, where the community is depicted as a marginal group, Jesus has no synagogue in which to teach. The fact that the synagogues, the common forums of Jesus' teaching in the synoptic gospels, are replaced by the temple in the *Gospel of John* reveals the tension of a community expelled from the sacred space of the synagogue.<sup>201</sup>

This experience of being expelled from the synagogue shaped and moved the Johannine community to construct a Jesus who inhabits not just the margins of the city, but who teaches at the borders of the sacred places of the temple and the synagogue, and in fact advocates for an in-between and different worship space, a third space that breaks away from the typical binary (4:21). Living on the fringes of their religious society, the Johannine community re-creates its story in search of its new identity as border people. Their struggles and conflicts are personified in the Johannine Jesus, who creates alternative spaces out of the traditional, exclusive sites. Jesus, the border-crosser who has come from above, becomes the model

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<sup>201</sup> See footnote 2; Kysar, "The Gospel of John," *ABD*, v. 3, 918.

for survival in the hostile world which the Johannine community inhabits.

Suddenly, the alternative space that Jesus opened for all who came to receive his teachings is invaded (8:3). Those who dare to cross the oppressive boundaries of the system and liberate others by teaching them how to cross those borders, live in constant risk. The scribes and the Pharisees break into the scene, interrupt Jesus' teaching discourse, and impose their own discourse (8:3-5). Apparently the authorities realize that several borders are under attack. Care is needed to ensure they are kept in the right place and under control to preserve the system's order. Scott Michaelsen says that, "the 'border' is always and only secured by a border patrol."<sup>202</sup> If imposed borders were meant to benefit equally all the subjects in contact zones, there would be no need to secure them, everybody would respect them. The Pharisees, "ever-watchful and suspicious adversaries of Jesus,"<sup>203</sup> know they need to rise as the *border patrol*, ready to secure their side of the border: the benefits of their gender, their religious

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<sup>202</sup> D.E. Johnson and S. Michaelsen, "Border Secrets: An Introduction," in *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*, eds. D.E. Johnson and S. Michaelsen (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 1.

group, and mostly their political authority. They need to defend and watch closely the borders of their gender/moral codes established by their patriarchy and supported by their interpretations of Moses' Law. They must guard their teaching authority (12:42), which is being threatened by the marginal presence of Jesus' new teachings; and they must secure their political power, endorsed by the chief priests' allegiance with the Roman Empire,<sup>204</sup> which is now being menaced by Jesus' subversive power.

Next in the story, we see the Pharisees and scribes who bring a woman whom they say has been caught in adultery and, therefore, deserves punishment. They have come to protect the territory that patriarchy has granted them. They do not hesitate to cross personal borders and invade the private space of the woman's house to bring her to trial. Several pieces are missing in this puzzle: Who found the woman in the act and where? Where is the adulterer? Where is the husband? There are several loose strings in the scene worth speculation, and that has kept scholars debating these questions without definite answers.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> A.J. Saldarini, "Pharisees," in D.N. Freedman (editor-in-chief), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Volume 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 297.

<sup>204</sup> Saldarini, "Pharisees," 296.

<sup>205</sup> For legal details on the arrest and historical considerations on adultery in first-century Christianity see, J.D.M. Derrett,

However, after much research, scholars have found several reasons to prove that the woman was married and, therefore, deserved to be punished.<sup>206</sup> Married or not, the fact is that she is there by herself while the adulterer has run away from the consequences of his actions (cf. Deut. 22:22-24); and there is no husband fighting to get her back. Maybe, as Duncan Derrett says, the husband was the one who arranged the situation to catch her intentionally and somehow benefit from the act.<sup>207</sup>

After arresting the woman, the scribes and Pharisees go to find Jesus, trap him and defend the borders of their religious authority. They call him "Teacher," preparing him for the trial where he will have to prove himself as such. Then the *border patrol* informs Jesus of the arrested woman being accused of crossing the borders of her marriage and defying the power of patriarchy to control her body and will. The interrogation begins: What do you say? What should we do with such a woman? You know that Moses' Law commands us to stone "such women." Using the woman as bait, they want to trick Jesus into confessing that he, like her,

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"Law in the New Testament: The Story of the Woman Taken in Adultery," *NTS* 10 (1963-64), 1-26.

<sup>206</sup> See Schnackenburg, *Gospel According to St. John*, p. 164; Morris, *Gospel According to John*, p. 782, note 15; Nida and Newman, *Translator's Handbook*, 259.

<sup>207</sup> See J.D.M. Derrett, "Law in the New Testament," 4.

is also a border-crosser, so that they can accuse him as well. Likewise, the U.S. immigration patrol uses illegal border-crossers to catch others in similar situations in order to deport them to their places of origin, once they have confessed from where they come. Similarly, the Pharisees corner Jesus and ask him to confess his *place of origin*. If they want to *deport him to where he belongs*, they need to know where he came from, and whose side is he going to take. They want to know where he belongs and if he is with or against them.

Jesus and the woman are on trial for trespassing boundaries. The Pharisees are expectant, waiting for Jesus' response that will decide his, as well as her, destiny. Many possible responses can be expected from the question asked; evidently, they are looking for one in particular. "They said this to test him" (8: 6); they could be testing his subversiveness, his knowledge of the Law, or his ability to teach. Allison Trites says that the Pharisees see him as a lawbreaker,<sup>208</sup> and that is why they go to him with a question regarding the Law. They want to test him and *catch him in the very act of breaking/crossing the Law*.

According to the historical construction of the story's context, the Sanhedrin no longer had the power of

execution under the Roman Empire. The trap becomes evident: no matter what Jesus says, he will be wrong. He is between two dangerous borders, the religious border of the Mosaic Law, which he will violate if he is in favor of the woman, and the political border of the Roman Empire, which he will violate if he allows them to stone her.<sup>209</sup>

Jesus actions create silence. His discourse, invaded by the Pharisees' discourse of punishment, violence, and death, is a subversive, liberating message. Jesus opens a space of silence between his and their discourse while he bends down and writes with his finger on the ground (8:6).<sup>210</sup> It is a space of transformation, a hybrid moment in which the accusers are invited to re-define their own borders and allow the other, the Accused Woman, to also re-define her own borders. Jesus waits for a reaction from the crowd, together with the woman who is still standing as a border between him and the Pharisees, her accusers.

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<sup>208</sup> Trites, "The woman taken in adultery," 146.

<sup>209</sup> See Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 337. See Derrett, "Law in the New Testament," 11. It was not until the third century that adultery became a capital offense for the Romans.

<sup>210</sup> Several versions have circulated about Jesus' writing in the dust, but none of them offers convincing evidence of what Jesus wrote. See Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 165-6; Derrett, "Law in the New Testament," 19. I agree with the argument that "if what Jesus wrote on the ground had been of importance as far as the account itself is concerned, doubtless the author would have included it" (Nida and Newman, *Translator's Handbook*, 260).

Facing such a wall and listening to the intensity of Jesus' silence, the men are confronted with the validity of their male system. They, like the men in most Mediterranean cultures at the time, are the ones "responsible for the shame of their women which is associated with sexual purity and their own honor derives in large measure from the way they discharge their responsibility."<sup>211</sup> In this scene, however, there is only an abandoned woman, considered by the patriarchal system as someone "not self-contained, with personal boundaries diffuse and permeable,"<sup>212</sup> who stands by herself with no responsible husband fighting for his honor. She is accused of bringing shame to the male system by not living within the established boundaries. Women were not considered as autonomous beings, self-defined or self-bordered. Therefore, borderless as they were, they had no way to negotiate their existence as equal human beings. Paradoxically, this borderless woman, incapable of mapping out her own identity because her body/territory has been occupied by patriarchy, becomes the metaphorical border between the Pharisees and Jesus.

The Pharisees compel Jesus to continue overriding the

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<sup>211</sup> D.D. Gilmore, "Introduction: The Shame of Dishonor," in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*, ed. D.D. Gilmore (Washington: American Anthropological Association, 1987), 4.



woman's borders, those they have erased by dehumanizing her and treating her as an object "to achieve narcissistic gratifications and dominance over other men."<sup>213</sup> They want him to trespass this woman, to ignore her voice, and deny her the chance to break away from the oppressive system. If Jesus condemns her, he condemns himself as well; his decision will help the Pharisees retain their privileges and, therefore, control and confine him to their borders.

The Pharisees insist on trespassing Jesus' silence, ignoring the first moment of transformation given to them by Jesus (8:7). Since they continue to question him, Jesus breaks his silence and, much to their surprise, he says: "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her (8:7)."<sup>214</sup> Again, a space of silence is opened (8:8), the second hybrid moment. This silence between discourses is a possible interstice to subvert their oppressive system; it is an opportunity for them to reflect, to be transformed and blow apart the patriarchal

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<sup>212</sup> C. Delany, "Seeds of Honor, Fields of Shame," in *Honor and Shame*, ed. D.D. Gilmore, 41.

<sup>213</sup> Gilmore, "Introduction," 4.

<sup>214</sup> According to Nida and Newman, Jesus was referring to Deut. 17:6-7, "a person could not be given the death penalty apart from the testimony of two or three witnesses. They were to throw the first stones at the condemned person" (261). But Jesus offers a different interpretation of the Law, challenging the system by ironically stating that only a witness who is sinless may be the first to throw the stone, implying the need of a new way of life.

ideology behind their actions.

Unlike those who are afraid to oppose the empire at the expense of their minimal power, Jesus, having nothing to lose, declares himself subversively against the imperial control by telling them, *go ahead, stone the woman, do it if you are free of sin*. Even though he lives under the Roman jurisdictions, he dictates his sentence under the Jewish Law. This assertion suggests that Jesus, by responding positively to the Pharisees' demand, was being insensitive to the woman, and in complete agreement with the Law. However, from his position at the borderland, his response indicates that he does not subscribe to the Roman Empire. The empire does not define the limits of who he is; he defines his borders and constructs his identity. Similarly, he reveals that he is not subscribing to Moses' Law either. Jesus offers to the inquisitive crowd a new alternative, a middle ground between their discourses. If they want to follow the Law, they can do it, but first, they must fulfill the whole Law and obey every detail if they consider themselves righteous people. Jesus challenges them to realize that their system is collapsing: first, because they themselves are not respecting the borders they seek to secure and, second, because their interpretations of the Law are co-opting the Other's possibility of

defining her borders and mapping her own identity. Any system that takes away the individuals' privilege of defining their own borders and identities is an oppressive system.

The teaching space that Jesus opens up (8:9), together with the hybrid moment provided by his spoken and silent discourses overcomes the Pharisees' intrusion, suppressing their discourse of violence and death. Unable to relinquish their privileges, but aware of their fault in nullifying the borders of the Others, the scribes and Pharisees retreat from the hybrid territory Jesus opened for transformation. Like the adulterer who fled from the consequences of his action, one by one they disappear silently, running away from the accountability of their false discourse of righteousness.

Ironically, the leaders who expelled the Johannine community from the sacred space of the synagogue are expelled by their guilt from the sacred border/space of Jesus. The space is empty, and only Jesus and the woman remain in that new space, a site for the new community that is "neither the One, nor the Other, but something else besides which contests the territories of both."<sup>215</sup> Yet,

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<sup>215</sup> Sim, *A-Z Guide*, 50.

this is another site where the hybrid community of Jesus begins to emerge. By helping this woman who is willing to live at the crossroads, to define the borders of her identity, Jesus begins to map the borders of his new hybrid community. The two border-crossers are left alone, face to face. In a moment during which she also could have run away like the Pharisees did, the Accused woman decides to stay; perhaps she is innocent and has nothing to fear, or maybe she, like Jesus, is tired of the system and wants to change it.

Jesus speaks to the Accused (8:10). He now privately addresses the woman who was invaded in her space, accused, silenced, and publicly exposed by the Pharisees and their oppressive system. She now speaks for herself. Freed from her accusers and their criminal charges, Jesus invites her to the alternative space that he offers to those who, oppressed by the structures, are looking for liberating spaces. The Pharisees and their male system were not treating women as separate entities, as subjects with their own borders who deserve to be respected equally. In addressing the Accused as equal to the Pharisees Jesus offers her the opportunity to express herself and her identity, to build her own borders, and to reclaim for herself the territory of her body.

"Has no one condemned you?" Jesus asks the woman. And for the first time in the story the woman is enabled to express herself, "No one, sir" (8:11). She is accused, but not condemned. Jesus releases her from that predicament as he respectfully acknowledges her presence and invites her to speak for herself. Through the dialogue, "the potential of borders in opening new forms of human understanding"<sup>216</sup> becomes real for the woman. Only within self-defined borders can a respectful dialogue can take place and fair demarcation of identities come true.

Inhabitants of contact zones are at risk of extinction when their particular cultures exist in isolation. It is only through interdependent relationships that such contact zones can save their culture and, therefore, the identity and borders of their inhabitants. For borderland subjects "salvation involves increasing attention to border crossing: a kind of coming to consciousness of proliferating psychological crossing."<sup>217</sup> This is part of the salvation that Jesus is granting the woman, the Pharisees, and the rest of the crowd, the realization that contact zones such as gender can only be constructive through interdependency. Crossing institutional borders in

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<sup>216</sup> Rosaldo, *Culture*, 216.

<sup>217</sup> Michaelsen, "Border Secrets," 11.

order to allow the Other to *assemble* the borders of her identity is the only way in which all the inhabitants of the borderlands have access to salvation and liberation. The scribes and Pharisees do not want to acknowledge the redemptive power of border-crossing which Jesus demonstrates as a possibility for a new way of life. They certainly consent to the crossing of institutional borders, but for their own benefit, not for the benefit of all. When Jesus challenges them to subvert the system that oppresses them through their isolation, they refuse and therefore miss the opportunity of salvation, the invitation to live in balanced interdependence with the Other.

The Accused is now a free woman. Jesus tells her "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again" (8:11). The accusers who arrived with a self-righteousness attitude are accused by their own consciousness and silence, and therefore are bound to their systemic/institutional sins. They refuse to relinquish their oppressive borders and squander their chance for transformation. The woman, on the other hand, is freed from the sins of the system and is told not to return to it, nor to sin again by entering into relationships that are dictated by an oppressive and dehumanizing system. She is now a free human being, redeemed and called by Jesus to

become a border-crosser, in search of new and better ways of life. The Accused, like all the other "border crossers [who] create new myths . . . provide[s] radical alternatives to the existing social structures."<sup>218</sup> By redeeming the border-crosser, Jesus the border-crosser becomes not just the new myth for radical alternatives, but also the new ethos for survival for those who strive for a better world.

***Concluding remarks on John 7:53-8:11***

In his broader context, the Johannine Jesus apparently lives between borders, in a hybrid space, which is an experience similar to that of Latinas/os and Latin Americans in the post-colonial and neo-colonial era. Jesus, *the border-crosser*, the traveler between cities and villages, between heaven and earth, between suffering and bliss, comes to redeem the *border-crosser* who refuses to conform to the limits and borders of a society that has ignored her voice, her body, and the borders of her identity as the Other.

The hybrid moment of transformation perceived in the

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<sup>218</sup> A.L. Keating, "Myth Smashers, Myth Makers: (Re)Visionary Techniques in the Works of Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Audre Lorde," in *Critical Essays: Gay and Lesbian Writers of Color*, Ed. E.S. Nelson (1993), 73-95. [Volume also published as

story of the Accused is an affirmative statement of the redemptive power involved in the border-crossing behavior. The borders traced in the story become the sites of transformation for the future that emerge in the in-between of the present needs. By confronting the Pharisees and addressing the Accused Woman, Jesus reconciles a past of oppressive traditions and a silent present of subversiveness into an "in-between space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present."<sup>219</sup> The new identity of the Accused Woman announces the interstitial creativity of the future: freed from the oppressive borders of the system, she is sent as a border-crosser, a model for building the future of the hybrid Johannine community and a model for a better life.

On his part, Jesus, the hybrid being par excellence in John's Gospel, contests all contact zones. He removes the structures adopted by those in power and acts in ways that respond to a reality different from the one in which he is located. He is a model for transformation for readers who, like him, live in the interstices, the in-between, and who look for a political change to alter reality. Reading and inhabiting the interstices that the Johannine Jesus reveals

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*Journal of Homosexuality*, v. 26, Numbers 2/3, 1993].

<sup>219</sup> Bhabha, *Location*, 7.



in the text opens the opportunity to trigger a hybrid moment for political change. It is an invitation to re-articulate or translate the elements of the contact zones, which are neither the One nor the Other, but *something else besides* as Homi Bhabha explains, giving way to the transformational value of change.<sup>220</sup>

The relationship of Jesus and the Accused opens redemptive possibilities for all border-crossers who are looking for another way of being outside of the traditional and oppressive boundaries of present society.

As a Mexican-American I read the story of the Accused Woman as a hybrid subject, living an experience of conflicting border zones like the experience of John's community. In their need for affirmation in a transitional process, the Johannine community constructs a narrative that allows them to accept their new identity. Once belonging to the official religious institution, the excluded community is now confronted with the system. They must decide to go in silence and do nothing to change the system, or be free from condemnation and aware of the oppressive borders that must be transgressed in order to create alternative spaces for liberation.

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<sup>220</sup> See Sim, *A-Z Guide*, 50.

## Conclusion

As I have presented through the reading of the Prologue and the Story of the Accused Woman, the representation of Jesus as a borderlander within the *Gospel of John* is certainly ubiquitous. The particular context of cross-border interaction that is present in this Gospel opens the opportunity for the construction of a hybrid Jesus who speaks and acts as a borderlander, an inhabitant of a third space where a new reality of interdependence and inclusivity is offer to those who are willing to risk their present stability in search of social transformation and political change through a new model of existence, as borderlanders.

The following chapter explores the implications of the hybridity of the Johannine Jesus as strategy of survival and model for political change.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION JESUS' HYBRIDITY: SURVIVAL STRATEGY AND MODEL FOR POLITICAL CHANGE

#### **Introduction**

Meaning is con-textual; it is woven-together with the fibers of our social location. Meaning binds together our biographies and histories and helps us make sense of our surroundings by organizing our reality in particular patterns. In the past two decades traditional views of biblical criticism have been challenged by the complexities of a postmodern world that insists on questioning our processes of reading texts and making meaning. As a result, the undeniable interconnectedness of our texts and cultures becomes evident, and with it the realization that storytelling is central to the processes of making sense of our lives. Storytelling helps us tidy up what otherwise would be a chaotic world.

Across cultures, "narrative is a fundamental character of human being(s), which find(s) the meaning of human

existence in story form."<sup>1</sup> There is always a foundational saga, a web of legends knitting together the identity of nations. Tales and dreams suggest better worlds to come, and ritual stories help us go through the stages of life. The various political, religious, philosophical, and scientific accounts we tell each other help us, both as individuals and as nations, cope with the messiness of our world.

Just as "in the beginning" the story tells us that God organizes the dark void, creates life and makes sense of the world, through narrative—uttering the creative Word, telling the foundational tale—the subsequent narratives and stories following and interpreting the journey of the germinal Word. This Word continues to create life, and we find new meanings, which in turn continue to engender new life.

My narrative, presented in four acts and made from the threads of multiple converging stories, in which I have entered in dialogue, is my way of finding meaning in my human experience as I contribute to the construction of a better world. In this better world the uniqueness and value

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<sup>1</sup> Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville, London, Leiden: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 120.

of our personal and national stories is honored and at the same time their interdependence is acknowledged—without having to conform to oppressive and controlling mega-narratives to validate their existence.

Twenty years ago, when I caught the first glimpse of my reflection in the Johannine representation of Jesus—an irreverent borderlander, averse to rules and authorities that oppose life, defiant of unjust boundaries, inhabitant of interstices, seeking new spaces and ways of being, stealthily escaping the traps of the empire—I had no idea of the significance and ideological potential for today that I would find in such a narrative. All I knew then was that I loved the Johannine Jesus because, contrary to what I have been taught, I saw him as a very human Jesus, trying to survive in a hostile environment, just as other human beings do.

Five years later, after learning about postcolonialism, border theory and social location, I realized I could use my hybrid identity, both as hermeneutical lens and reading strategy, to explore new meanings for my Johannine alter ego.

Cultural studies, the reading paradigm I described in chapter two and drew on in chapter three to construct my own representation of the Johannine Jesus, has at its core

a triple focus: analytic, pedagogic and political.<sup>2</sup> The analytic purpose exposes structures of power and domination to promote a consciousness that can advance social transformation. The pedagogic purpose offers "a variety of storytelling that can act as a symbolic guide or map of meaning and significance in the cosmos."<sup>3</sup> The political aspect seeks to "assist in comprehending and changing the world."<sup>4</sup> Following this paradigm, I have exposed the structures of power and domination existing in the cross-border relations between the U.S. and Mexico; it is my hope that social transformation can be advanced, at both global and local levels. I have constructed, by rereading the Johannine narrative of Jesus, a storytelling about Jesus the borderlander that acts as a symbolic guide or map of meaning and significance in the cosmos, or at least a local cosmos. In this chapter, to conclude my proposed narrative, I tap into the political vein of cultural studies to show how this storytelling I have concocted, of Jesus as a borderlander, may assist us in the process of comprehending and changing the world today.

As a politically engaged and ideologically positioned

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<sup>2</sup> Chris Barker, 'Introduction,' *SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies*, xviii.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

self-conscious reader myself, as most readers using the cultural studies platform are, my aim and the core task of this final chapter is to explore the ideological potentiality of Jesus' hybridity, his borderlander identity, as survival strategy and as a model for promoting social transformation and political change in the ongoing process of decolonization and liberation of the two-thirds world until respectful, global interdependency is achieved.

As a Mexican-American woman from the Rio Grande Valley borderlands, I am highly aware of my hybrid identity. I know how it has shaped the ways I read biblical texts, and so I undertook this project of representing the Jesus in *John* as a borderlander because, like Gloria Anzaldúa, I believe "the borderlands are the privileged locus of hope for a better world."<sup>5</sup>

### **Jesus, the borderlander: a survival strategy**

According to Louis Martyn, who interprets the *Gospel of John* within a Jewish-Christian context, the narrative is presented as a two-level drama: first, the story of Jesus;

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<sup>5</sup> As quoted in Scott Michaelsen and David E. Johnson, 'Border Secrets: An Introduction,' in *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*, ed. S. Michaelsen and D.E. Johnson (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 3.

second, the story of the Johannine Community.<sup>6</sup> As this Johannine two-level drama evolves, Martyn identifies a Christological shift revealing the growth stages of a Christian community's faith. This community is experiencing a fracture from its Jewish context.<sup>7</sup> This drama represents for Martyn the conversation between the church and the synagogue, as John leads the former to what he considers a more adequate faith.<sup>8</sup>

In a similar way, highlighting the growth stages theory within the Johannine community, Raymond Brown offers his sociological presuppositions of a mixed community integrated by Jews, Gentiles and Samaritans striving to accommodate their various theological positions.<sup>9</sup> For Brown, the Johannine community represents a marginal group struggling with their "relationship to Judaism, with questions of self-identity, and with Christian life in a situation of minority status and some oppression."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>9</sup> C.R. Koester, "R.E. Brown and J.L. Martyn: Johannine Studies in Retrospect," *BTB* 21 (1991):53.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Kysar, "The Gospel of John," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Volume 3. Editor-in-chief D.N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 918. The three most common causes used to explain the expulsion from the synagogue are: "the introduction of another group of Christians into the community [...], the



For David Rensberger, this community has suffered ostracism not only from the synagogue but also from the public liturgy, festivals and their entire ideological universe; in turn, they have become an inward group.<sup>11</sup> Using Bryan Wilson's model of sectarianism, Rensberger identifies the Johannine community as an introversionist group seeing the world as irredeemably evil, renouncing it and establishing a separate community. Although the group became isolated, it also retains features of the conversionist and revolutionary groups, because it demands public expression in testifying to the truth.<sup>12</sup>

Given its imposed marginal condition—generated by the expulsion from the synagogue and their public life—it is understandable that the Johannine community began to live as an outsider even in the midst of its own people. I appreciate how they developed the character of a borderlander community, living in the interstices between worlds. It is also not surprising that the accompanying narrative and message preached by the community depicts Jesus as an outsider, mirroring the situation of its members. Therefore, for the Johannine community, "the King

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enforcement of a formal benediction against the heretics [...], the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E" (918).

<sup>11</sup> David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 27.

of the Jews is he who is not of this world, who creates the community of those who hear his voice and draws their allegiance away from the world, its authorities, and its violence, toward God."<sup>13</sup> With such salvation narrative, confessing Jesus as Messiah acknowledges that one lives already in the kingdom of God.<sup>14</sup> As an ostracized group, the Johannine community confronts the world with a model of an alternative society, a counterculture in which the message of Jesus' messiahship is realized.<sup>15</sup>

Jesus' kingship offers hope to a community oppressed under the sovereignties of this world by offering them the sovereignty of God.<sup>16</sup> As a character Jesus represents the Johannine community and its struggles with social oppression; Jesus is the matrix for the community's life. This double image of Jesus becoming the alter ego of the community is what Martyn expresses in his theory of the two-level drama; it is the narrative telling both the story of Jesus and the Johannine community.

Consequently, this Johannine Jesus not only reflects the community's hybridism and their new reality as

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 116.

borderlanders, it also acts as a model story created to solidify their newly found identity. Although the Evangelist never discusses cross-border interactions in writing this Gospel, the reality the community was living—as a liminal group, excluded from the cultural, religious and political life of their people—is arguably the impetus for why the Johannine community must construct this borderlander Jesus, who comes from an outside world and in so doing embraces the outsiders and teaches them survival skills for a hostile world. Jesus is a model of survival for those who live in the midst of a crossroads reality, where the skills of a borderlander are necessary to survive in a new territory. In the third space they inhabit, the in-betweenness engages both sides and demands a new way of being—a reality where transformation and change are constant—to negotiate a third space that exists and strives to be inclusive.

Living on the borders of their religious society, the Johannine community creates its own narrative, a story that helps them understand their new identity as border people. Their struggles and conflicts are incarnate in the Johannine Jesus, who opens for them alternative spaces out of the traditional sites. Jesus, the borderlander who has come from above, becomes their model for survival.

"Borderlanders stand apart, especially in relation to people who live in heartland regions, because of the singular world in which they live."<sup>17</sup> According to Renato Rosaldo, "Immigrants and socially mobile individuals appear culturally invisible because they [are] no longer what they once were and not yet what they could become."<sup>18</sup> It is this temporal invisibility and ability to move and exist without detection by the oppressive system that saves the Johannine Jesus until his hour comes; and it is this ability to cross borders that he models for his community's survival and for those minorities living in hostile environments.

**Jesus, the borderlander: a model for political change**

Using border theory to read, decipher, interpret, and understand the geographical interaction taking place between the heavenly and human realm—in the highly dualistic ideological system of the Johannine world—helps me appreciate a different anthropological dimension and the emergence of hospitable spaces created by the evangelist for the Johannine community as they adopt and adapt to the their new identity. This is a third space opened for those who, excluded from the system, are now included in a

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<sup>17</sup> Martínez, *Border People*, xvii.

<sup>18</sup> Rosaldo, *Culture*, p. 209.

liminal, borderland reality under an interdependent model of cross-border interaction. Through his familiar statement "come and see" the Johannine Jesus extends an invitation, to those who listen to his message, to experience the dimension of transnational relations and to inhabit heavenly dwellings.

Jesus as a borderlander, descending from the divine realm into the earthly realm opens the possibility for a new transnational reality between God and humans—the possibility of a new divine-human common ground—a hybrid space offered by the Father through Jesus. Ultimately, the point here is not so much whether heaven is literally or figuratively open, but whether we believe that we can transcend our limited physicality and embrace the wholeness of our human spirit, our global interdependence, to become one with God and with the Other as the Jesus in *John* persistently invites us to do. Jesus asks us to follow the example of his relationship with the Father, a relationship of integrated borderlands, until we all become one in our efforts to transform the world and create inclusive and interdependent spaces where all are respected. We are called to incarnate the oneness modeled by Jesus and the Father.

### ***Creating hybrid worlds, opening third spaces***

*Borders are permeable realities, always changing and open for negotiation. Constantly guarded, reinforced, destroyed, set up, and reclaimed, boundaries... expose the extent to which cultures are [a] product of the continuing struggle between official and unofficial narratives: those largely circulated in favor of the state and its politics of inclusion, incorporation and validation, as well as of exclusion, appropriation and dispossession.*

Minh-ha, "An Acoustic Journey" <sup>19</sup>

The world has witnessed, through the centuries, the construction of hundreds of miles of walls, barriers, barricades and fences. These structures have been promoted by ideologies of exclusion that respond mostly to fear, prejudice and a mindset of scarcity. Usually, the walls and barricades exclude some people from particular countries or territories. On the other hand, although the demolition of walls, opening of gates and construction of tunnels and bridges may suggest inclusion, assimilation or validation of adjacent groups, we should not be so quick to celebrate these actions, which are not always done for the benefit of all. Full consideration of all the actions and impacts involved is needed before we condemn or celebrate the erection or destruction of walls and borders.

Life in the borderlands is about multifaceted interactions between two or more entities. As they struggle to coexist in a shared space, they know that this space is

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<sup>19</sup> Donnan, *Borders: Frontiers of identity*, 107.

constantly being altered by the presence of the other. The identity of those who interact in the contact zones is also altered. There is no doubt that, "Borders simultaneously divide and unite, repel and attract, separate and integrate . . . pulling borderlanders in different directions."<sup>20</sup> In his poem *La Frontera*, Oscar Martínez affirms,

It is the best and it is the worst,  
*la frontera*, the borderlands,  
a world of acute contradictions,  
a place of pungent human drama.<sup>21</sup>

Boundaries by nature are "a source of friction" says Martínez, and such friction will "not disappear unless the border itself completely disappears."<sup>22</sup> However, as difficult as the cross-border interactions might be, borderlands are at risk of extinction when their particular cultures exist in isolation. It is through their interdependency within contact zones that borderlanders' culture and identity are saved. For borderlanders, "salvation involves increasing attention to border crossing: a kind of coming to consciousness of proliferating psychological crossing."<sup>23</sup> Such salvation

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<sup>20</sup> Martínez, *Border People*, 25.

<sup>21</sup> Oscar J. Martínez, ed., *U.S.-Mexico Borderlands. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (London, New York: SR Books, 2006), 256.

<sup>22</sup> Martínez, *Border People*, 15.

<sup>23</sup> Michaelsen, "Border Secrets," 11.

implies the need to "overcome mutual antagonisms and begin to allow substantial social and economic interchange at their common border."<sup>24</sup>

Today, our reality is transnational; at any given moment, the least affluent peoples consume goods from countries around the world. Even though some will probably never visit the countries that export products in common use, our globe is shrinking, as evidenced by the daily import and export of many countries' goods. In the midst of such multinational interactions at the level of our most basic needs, one wonders how long it will take for the earth to be reshaped by categories that surpass the current geographical and physical limits into something that responds to the hybridization we already experience nationally and individually. David Spener and Kathleen Staudt aptly appraise this changing situation and call into question the categories we currently use to understand the world:

The border now represents a global crossroads in which the forces of world historical change inscribe themselves in stark relief in the lives and ways of life we encounter there . . . today the borderlands have become an important staging ground for economic, cultural, social, and political forces that transcend the nation-state and, in so

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<sup>24</sup> Martínez, *Border People*, 11.



doing, call into question its continued relevance as a unit of analysis.<sup>25</sup>

### Creating hybrid worlds— Heavenly dwelling-places

<sup>34</sup>Jesus answered, 'Is it not written in your law, "I said, you are gods"? <sup>35</sup>If those to whom the word of God came were called "gods"—and the scripture cannot be annulled— <sup>36</sup>can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, "I am God's Son"? Jn 10:34-36  
Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? Jn 14:1-2

In no other canonical gospel have the heavenly borders moved this close to earth as they have in *John*. From the beginning, the Johannine narrative offers an alternative reality that defies the traditional parameters by which the world and human beings are perceived and defined. This complex storytelling—of a cosmic Word translating itself into an earthly narrative—serves as a symbolic map guiding the Johannine community in its journey into self-definition. After being ostracized by the synagogue and struggling to find their place in a new context, the community is offered a new creation. The evangelist offers a hybrid space—the heaven-earth borderland. In this space the possibility of social and political transformation

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<sup>25</sup> David Spener and Kathleen Staudt, ed., *The U.S.-Mexico Border: Transcending Divisions, Contesting Identities* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 3.

emerges, and the Johannine Jesus models it by challenging the borders and limits of the power structures of his time.

No other canonical gospel has so boldly invited and challenged us to reclaim and embrace the divine spirit imparted in creation as does *John* in the new genesis opened in the Prologue. As spiritualized as this call may sound in our highly rationalized world, it is rather a spectral appeal to step outside the ossified structures of power that alienate the human spirit. It is an appeal to embrace our transcendence and capacity to care for others as well as an invitation to consider seriously: Are we committed to transforming the oppressive structures of our world, at all levels, personal and global? In Jesus the borderlander, *John* offers a model for an alternative reality to those who find themselves trapped by limiting, oppressive, and obsolete religious, political and social structures that fail to recognize the boundless nature of the human spirit—a spirit created in the image of the divine spirit.

With a daring God who willingly leads the way into this new hybrid space by crossing the border from the affluent, powerful realm into the meager, powerless side—by becoming a hybrid being at one with creation—the invitation to dwell in heavenly places and embrace our divine nature becomes a concrete call for transformation

and change. According to Joseph Sanders "John's theology is sacramental rather than mystical—i.e. he teaches consistently that the divine is perceived and received through the material, the flesh, and, conversely, that what is perceived and received through the flesh is the divine."<sup>26</sup> This invitation extended by the Johannine Jesus is a tangible reality whereby the divine becomes integrated with humanity; through the materiality of our lives and in the third spaces we open, we make real the dwelling of the divine in us. In *John*, the incarnation of the divine is more a modeled event than an isolated incident. With the inauguration of this hybrid space where the Word of God come to us, we become hybridized, divinized, gods (Jn 10:35). According to the Johannine narrative this hybridization is mutual; the divine comes and dwells among us, in the same way that we are invited into the dwelling places Jesus has prepared for those who embrace his project. Rudolf Schnackenburg speaks of this process saying that "The way of the Redeemer down into flesh, and the way upwards through the flesh to heavenly glory also becomes a way for all who attach themselves to him in faith."<sup>27</sup> This attachment is a way to acknowledge our hybridism, a way to

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<sup>26</sup> Joseph N. Sanders, *A Commentary on The Gospel According to St. John* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968), 86.

transform the system we live in to match our complex reality so we can embrace its richness, rather than crush it.

Opening third spaces—Amexica<sup>28</sup>

*When in 1994 Californians voted to enact Proposition 187, which among other minutiae intended to deprive undocumented immigrants of their rights to basic health and education benefits, none of the politicians ever imagined the backlash that such a measure would provoke. Mexicans who had never bothered before to pursue their legal rights as US citizens started to apply in droves for citizenship papers, and in the process altered the political landscape of California forever. These new voters have become a political force to be reckoned with, and also form part of the THE NEW AMERICANS."*<sup>29</sup>

The realities of life in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands are unfolding: Amexica is here. What we do with it and how we live within it are questions that require a serious response because it is evident that, currently, things are not working; something needs to be done to embrace the potentiality for social transformation hidden in the interstices of such a hybrid reality. Otherwise, fully living the transformational value of the third space cannot occur.

This reality has coexisted for many years and most of the solutions offered have failed because the approach and

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<sup>27</sup> Schnackenburg, *St. John*, Vol. 1, 267

<sup>28</sup> Amexica - n. the zone where the U.S. and Mexico share a border, culture, language, and economic conditions.

<http://www.doubletongued.org/index.php/dictionary/amexica/>

attitude used to address such a reality is wrong. Ironically the empire always carries the seed of its demise: the arrogance of its perceived independence and superiority. There is always a fundamental belief that those within the empire are superior to those it subjugates, regardless of the categories used to determine their real or perceived differences. This arrogance, i.e., seeing the other as inferior, as less valuable, always entails exploitation and the relationship between Mexico and the U.S. is no exception. Economically we are unequal partners, but through the creation of NAFTA we have been made to believe that we are coming to the table as equals. In reality, we are giving the empire the power to legally and officially exploit our people. While the *Maquiladoras* certainly create jobs, they mostly benefit their owners and governments, not the workers. Often the closing of a factory in the U.S., leaving many families without their only source of income, represents the exploitation of workers on the other side of the border who are so desperate to eat and survive that they willingly become slaves of the transnational mega-corporations feeding on the blood of these trapped slaves. In many ways, the *Maquiladoras* have become a symbol of oppression, and lately

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<sup>29</sup> <http://zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/newam/default.html>

also a symbol of death. In the past 15 years "More than 300 young women have disappeared in Juarez. One third of them have been found dead, horribly brutalized, raped, and unrecognizable."<sup>30</sup> Although many of these crimes have remained unsolved, the connecting element between them is that most of these women were employees of *Maquiladoras* in Juarez. Crosses at the side of the road, placed by family members in their remembrance, are the silent witnesses of the crimes that result from the empire's economy.

As a nation, the U S ought to do the right thing when it comes to undocumented immigrants. Given our long historical ties with Mexico, doing the right thing is especially in order in the case of Mexican migrants. We demonize the undocumented, rather than see them for what they are: human beings entering for a better life who have been manipulated by globalization, regional economies, and social structures that have operated for generations.<sup>31</sup>

This is a critical reality that needs solutions, not actions taken out of pity or guilt, but those arising out of genuine interest in finding solutions that work best for both sides. During our problem solving we must strive to gain a deeper understanding of our cross-border

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<sup>30</sup> Dionne Espinoza, *Feminist visions: women and maquiladoras on the U.S.-Mexico border*. (Maquila: A Tale Of Two Mexicos) (Senorita Extraviada, Missing Young Woman). Publication: *Feminist Collections: A Quarterly of Women's Studies Resources*, 22-SEP-03. [http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary\\_0286-20466869\\_ITM](http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-20466869_ITM)

<sup>31</sup> Bill Ong Hing, *Deporting Our Souls: values, morality, and immigration policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 51.

interactions and pursue the possibility of an integrated reality.

Currently, we see the violent persecution of those who illegally cross the border; they are usually seen as inferior intruders who are coming to steal from the empire. On the other hand we see also the unspoken acceptance of the interdependency of the empire with its unlikely neighbor. This is not a new phenomenon; it has existed since the new northern neighbors moved next door in the seventeenth century, although it did not represent a real conflict until two centuries later, as explained in chapter 2. What has been evident, in any case, is that the encounter of these two nations has been shaping and hybridizing their people as the distance between them has closed, or as Lawrence Herzog expresses it:

As the landscape of nineteenth-century frontiers gave way to twentieth-century nation-state boundaries, new territorial patterns have taken shape. The Americas, two cast continents that once separated distant and distinct cultures and societies, are 'shrinking.'<sup>32</sup>

Our realities are tied together in an irreversible way and the sooner we honestly acknowledge this the better will be the solutions we reach through thoughtful decision

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<sup>32</sup> Lawrence A. Herzog, ed., *Changing Boundaries in the Americas: New Perspectives on the U.S.-Mexican, Central American, and South American Borders* (San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies,

making. In fact, hybridization is so significant, because of the numbers of people it affects, that we cannot afford to overlook it. Many lives depend not only on our acknowledging the reality of hybridity but also on our willingness to seek solutions that benefit all sides.

The international boundary is nearly 2,000 miles long. In 1990, the combined population of Mexican municipios and U.S. counties that abut the border was 8.9 million, but if we construe the borderlands as comprising six Mexican and four U.S. border states, the borderlands population leaps to nearly 52 million persons.<sup>33</sup>

With such a monumental hybrid reality in our midst it would seem obvious that we should by now have developed better cross-border relations. We should have fostered better ways of life for people on both sides of the border, and modeled new transnational relations to benefit the rest of the globe. Borders are complex realities that require attention, they are "diachronic and diatopic space(s) in the sense that in [them] it diverse times and diverse spaces converge,"<sup>34</sup> we can appreciate such multiple convergence in "the Mexico-U.S. border [which] separates two States, but at the same time divides Anglo-Saxon

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1992). "Changing Boundaries in the Americas: An Overview," (3-24), 8.

<sup>33</sup> Oscar Martínez, "Introduction," (xiii-xix), in *U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Oscar J. Martínez (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1996), xviii.

<sup>34</sup> Zúñiga, "Nations and Border," 39.



America from Latin America, a military superpower from a Third World state."<sup>35</sup> Borders are magnets for diversity, where the richness of difference can bring growth and creativity; it can also breed violence and resentment. Certainly as Martínez affirms, "Borders are at once essential to the human enterprise and an indicator of its greatest failures."<sup>36</sup> Without a doubt we need borders to survive, but we need the kind of borders that are self-determined, not imposed, so that healthy negotiations of life can take place, not those that prevent us from living. And that is probably the direction that we are moving globally, since according to Thomas Wilson "We are living in a world where state borders are increasingly obsolete . . . international borders are becoming so porous that they no longer fulfill their historical role as barriers to the movement of goods, ideas and people, and as markers of the extent and power of the state."<sup>37</sup> As a borderlander myself, always seeking to create third spaces where interdependence

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<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucher, *L'invention des frontières* (Paris :Foundation pour les Etudes de Defense Nationale, Collection les 7 Epées, Documentation Francaice, 1986), 46-47.

<sup>36</sup> David Spener and Kathleen Staudt, eds., *The U.S.-Mexico Border: Transcending Divisions, Contesting Identities* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998). "The View from the Frontier: Theoretical Perspectives Undisciplined" (3-33), 7.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan, eds, *Border identities: Nation and state at international frontiers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). "Nation, state and identity at international borders," (1-30), 1.

and inclusivity is promoted, I am aware that we need to find new ways to negotiate our existence in a world that is becoming highly hybrid. Lessons can be learned from the realities of the borderlands and the borderlanders, because "Tolerance of ethnic and cultural differences is a major trademark of borderlanders with a binational orientation. Because of their unique geographical circumstances, border people are constantly exposed to foreign values and attitudes. This contact fosters open-mindedness and cosmopolitanism, impelling borderlanders to understand and appreciate the perspective of their neighbors much better than do people in interior zones."<sup>38</sup> Also, as we ponder these hybrid moments and third spaces emerging in our midst, we need to see them as invitations to re-articulate the elements of the contact zones, which are neither the One nor the Other, but "*something else besides*."<sup>39</sup> It is advisable to equip ourselves with the proper traits to survive in the borderlands, where "Considerable versatility is required to be an active participant in all of these universes, including the ability to be multilingual and multicultural."<sup>40</sup>

As we enter into a new era of promised change as a nation, with the first African-American president leading the United States, I am hopeful that a major change can happen in U.S. immigration policies. Perhaps I should send to President Barack

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<sup>38</sup> Martínez, *Border People*, 19.

<sup>39</sup> See Sim, *A-Z Guide*, 50.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 20. (Mtz. BP)

Obama my dream for a better Amexica, and a rich, multiculturally hybrid U.S. Such change could serve as a model for a better world, and we are encouraged in this endeavor by the words of an Asian American Studies and School of Law professor, Bill Ong Hing, a great supporter of President Obama, who also, in hopes for a better America, states:

Once we recognize that the promotion of civic engagement among newcomers is in our own best interest, we can begin the process in earnest . . . We have a choice of Americas—one narrow and one broad. One choice is closed minded, resistant to continuing changes that will continue to breed tension and violence. The other is one that embraces change and encourages integration in the hopes of building a stronger, better community. The choice we make, individually, locally, and nationally, will tell us much about ourselves as a country, as a community, and as human beings. The goal must be to avoid the pitfalls of division, insular living, and unknowing bias. Instead, we should fully embrace newcomers in our midst with open arms, for they are our neighbors and, in a real sense, our own collective relatives.<sup>41</sup>

The hopes for better cross-border interactions between the U.S. and Mexico are already here; we need to continue to strive to find many new ways in which this reality might be expanded to all other borders:

It's often said that the border is its own country, "amexica," neither Mexican nor American. "The border is not where the U.S. stops and Mexico begins," says Laredo mayor Betty Flores. "It's where the U.S. blends into Mexico." Both sides regard their sovereign governments as distant and dysfunctional. They are proud of their ability to take care of themselves, solve their problems faster and cheaper than any faraway bureaucrat. The Brownsville fire trucks answer sirens on the other side; in Tijuana, health clinics send shuttle buses every morning to meet people coming over

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<sup>41</sup> Hing, 197.

for everything from dentistry to dialysis. The school district in Mission, Texas, among the state's poorest, sends its old furniture over the border to help Mexican schools that are lucky to have roofs, much less desks and chairs. El Paso is redesigning the kilns of Juarez brickmakers to cut the soot from burning old tires; the twin cities have signed more treaties than their national governments can keep track of, much less ratify. "The only way the cities in this region can make it," says Juarez mayor Gustavo Elizondo, "is to forget that a line and a river exist here."<sup>42</sup>

### **Final remarks**

In this process of making the world comprehensible for myself and others who promote social change, one of the central tasks has been to analyze and expose the structures of power and domination that exist in the cross-border interactions between the U.S. and Mexico. The hope is to promote a consciousness that will advance social transformation. The other task has been to provide storytelling as a symbolic guide or map of meaning for this endeavor. I have done this throughout my cultural representation of the Johannine Jesus as a borderlander.

Because borders are everywhere, not just between the U.S. and Mexico, this model of border integration is applicable wherever borders or contact zones occur. This can happen within diverse religious groups, in interfaith

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<sup>42</sup> Reported by Hilary Hylton/Laredo, Tim Padgett/El Paso, Julie Rawe/New York, Elaine Rivera/Nogales and Cathy Booth

dialogue, in ethnic/racial conflicts, or where communities seek to eliminate discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation. Many other opportunities for integrated cross-border interactions exist.

This narrative contests both poles of the reason/faith binary which are represented within the church and academia. I advance a cosmic-political representation of Jesus that invites us into the entire spectrum of human experience.

In a world that is becoming increasingly aware of the interdependency of human actions in a global environment, a more intentional embrace of our hybrid identity is necessary. We need to adapt to the new hybrid reality and understand the interdependency we have with the earth and its people. The model of Jesus presented here can be helpful for those who want to understand their role as co-creators, and how—by being invited by the hybridization of God to become better humans, suprahumans—we can transform society. It is an option for a more conscious identity, one that considers that our very existence depends on the existence of others.

For me, a borderlander who has many times experienced

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Thomas/McAllen. September 11, 2002.  
<http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101010611/opener.html>

that real life bleeds outside the borders, this narrative brings comfort. I find comfort in knowing that in this Johannine narrative God understands that borders do not always work. Borders can be helpful, but they are not the only way or even the best way to advance the human spirit. Through the Incarnation God connects creator and creation, ratifying the need for interdependence and, therefore, for constant change. The Incarnation empowers us to acknowledge the importance of our mixed identities and challenges us to engage the other side of the border.

If, as the Johannine narrative establishes, God needs us in order to be God, and was willing to become a hybrid being in order to bridge the gap between two disparate, but clearly interdependent realms, it becomes increasingly obvious how much we need each other, as nations and as individuals. If we are interconnected at the most intimate level, still inhaling and exhaling the same air since creation, then to survive in our finite, clearly interconnected world we need to understand that "Borders are lines of encounter rather than of isolation. They are a way of regulating proximity, not distance."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Mathias Albert and Lothar Brock, *New Relationships Between Territory and State: The U.S.-Mexico Border in Perspective* (215-232) in *The U.S.-Mexico Border: Transcending Divisions, Contesting Identities*, ed. David Spener and Kathleen Staudt, (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 231.

Having said that, we should ponder the fact that the world's largest and longest human-made structure is a 4000-mile-long dividing wall, the Great Wall of China. I prefer, however, to believe that there is hope for a better world—even though the longest bridge in the world is a mere 22 miles long or 3,978 miles shorter than the Great Wall. I am sure there is another way of being, of doing things better, and I hope we create something soon, before more people die at the hands of the empire. In the land of plenty the easiest way to manipulate people is through the fear of scarcity; as long as this fear is exploited, walls will continue to exist and more will be erected.

As a postcolonial reader, I have come to the biblical text with my particular agenda: searching for a narrative to help me make sense of my world, while I attempt to advance the processes of liberation and decolonization.

#### La Frontera

By Oscar J. Martínez

It is the best and it is the worst,  
*la frontera*, the borderlands,  
a world of acute contradictions,  
a place of pungent human drama.

It lifts the spirit and sinks the heart,  
for *la frontera* is laced with intense passions.  
Devotees feel exuberance, vitality, zest;  
detractors see drabness, ugliness, crassness.

On one side dollar power, freeways,  
skyscrapers, malls, radiant suburbs.  
On the other boom and bust, gaudy tourism,  
*maquiladoras* sprawl, shantytowns.

A land of abundant sunshine  
that keeps the body warm, the soul aglow.  
Yet that same *frontera* sun  
turns summer into scorching hell,  
an inconvenience for the fortunate,  
a life-threat for the destitute.

Generations of poor migrants from the south,  
driven by poverty and despair,  
have headed to the imagined desert paradise,  
enticed by the promise of a better life.

Embraced by those who profit from their labor,  
quite dependable, plentiful, and cheap.  
Abhorred by those who see social blight,  
economic threat, cultural menace, demographic peril.

Affluent and leisure-conscious northerners,  
captivated by *la frontera's* mildness,  
its picturesque scenery, its relaxed way of life,  
gleefully descend upon its cities, towns, and trailer parks.

These settlers and sojourners revere this land,  
its desert beauty, its resplendent sunsets,  
and some hold dear the indigenous human landscape,  
the Indians, the Spaniards, the Mexicans.

But far too few of the northern newcomers  
find enchantment in the native heritage;  
indifference and token recognition are more the norm,  
and all too often contemptibility and overt hostility.

*Los fronterizos*: people of one, or more, identities,  
mono or multi-national, ethnic, lingual, cultural.  
*Borderlanders*: neglected, misunderstood, disdained,  
at once defensive and proud of their aberrant world.

Yes, *la frontera* has them all:  
those who live behind their cultural wall,  
and those who wish to see it fall;  
those who would keep foreigners out,  
and those who want them all about;  
those inclined to alienate,  
and those who prefer to ameliorate;  
those driven by a nationalistic bent,  
and those committed to a global tent.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Oscar J. Martínez, ed., *U.S.–Mexico Borderlands. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (London, New York: SR Books, 2006), 256.



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