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HEALING OF VIOLENCE AND VIOLENCE OF HEALING:  
MARK'S HYBRID JESUS IN MARK 5:1-20

A Thesis by

Pierre Célestin MUSONI, SJ

Presented to

The Faculty of

Jesuit School of Theology

Of Santa Clara University

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of

Licentiate in Sacred Theology (STL)

Berkeley, California

April 2021

Committee Signatures

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Gina Hens-Piazza, PhD Director 04/23/2021

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TO MY FATHER, NYABIBONA CYPRIEN

## HEALING OF VIOLENCE AND VIOLENCE OF HEALING: MARK'S HYBRID JESUS IN MARK 5:1-20

A thesis by

Pierre Célestin MUSONI, SJ

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this thesis is to determine whether, in Mark 5:1-20, the author of Mark portrayed Jesus as an assimilated Jew or a transformative resistant. After preliminary matters concerning methodology, nature and scope, and significance, the theoretical framework is established (chapter 1). I discussed the origin of postcolonialism as a field of study, its relationship to biblical studies, and the postcolonial readings of Mark's Gospel. Then, the thesis focuses on the Roman empire and its arrival in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine (Chapter 2). In this chapter, the roman imperial *Weltbildung* becomes the focus of the analysis. Subjugated people responded to this world-formation.

The thesis proceeds inductively. Chapter 3 describes the interpretive context of Mark 5:1-20, which provides a grid to understand Mark's Jesus as a postcolonial hybrid character. Imperialism as a context, subtext, and pretext offers sufficient ground to account for the colonized people's thingification. By the same token, Jesus' identity becomes the focus of the thesis' analysis. In the second part of this chapter, violence constitutes the thread binding it together. Mark 5:1-20 begins with violence and ends in violence. Critical Race Theories enables us to understand how imperial violence induces a state of chronic trauma. Moreover, such violence sustained by

ruling structures finds its way to the people down the ladder. Hence, healing violence sometimes necessitates a little dose of violence.

Chapter 4 focuses on Mark's Jesus as a hybrid character. To undertake His mission, he needed to stay within the boundaries and disrupt the binaries created by the empire. Mark's hybridization of Jesus allows us to view Him as capable of challenging the empire and healing the ills caused by the imperial context. Espousing the imperial masculinity values, Mark's Jesus proves to be strong enough to face the possessing forces. Portraying Jesus as such, Mark lactifies Jesus to resemble the imperial image of a man. However, Mark's Jesus is disgusted by the harmful impact of such an oppressive system. Hence, the thesis confirms that Mark's Jesus is not just an assimilated Jew but also a transformative resistant.

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Gina Hens-Piazza, PhD., Director      April 23, 2021

## Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Contents</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>General Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
Scope and Nature	<i>2</i>
Thesis Statement	<i>3</i>
Method of Approach	<i>4</i>
Significance	<i>5</i>
Chapter Outline	<i>6</i>
<i>Chapter One: Theoretical Framework</i>	<i>9</i>
1.1. The Origin of Postcolonialism as a Field of Study	<i>9</i>
1.2. Postcolonial Criticism in Biblical Studies	<i>13</i>
1.3. Postcolonial Readings of Mark	<i>16</i>
1.4. Postcolonial Hybridity	<i>19</i>
1.5. Postcolonial Lactification	<i>22</i>
1.6. Postcolonial Disgust	<i>26</i>
<i>Chapter Two: Roman Empire and the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine</i>	<i>29</i>
2.1. Roman Empire's First Contact with Judea And Galilee	<i>30</i>
2.2. Roman Imperialism's <i>Weltbildung</i> of the Jewish Palestine	<i>32</i>
2.3. The Subjugated People's Postcolonial Responses	<i>35</i>
2.4. Mark as A Story to the History and Empire's History to the Story	<i>38</i>
<i>Chapter Three: Postcolonial Exegesis of Mark 5:1-20</i>	<i>42</i>
Part I: Exegetical Considerations of Mark 5:1-20	<i>42</i>
3.1.1. The Pericope Under Discussion	<i>42</i>
3.1.2. Delimitation of the Text	<i>43</i>
3.1.3. Structure of Mark 5:1-20	<i>45</i>
3.1.4. Verse by Verse Analysis	<i>46</i>
3.1.5. Elements of Textual Criticism	<i>61</i>
3.1.6. Cultural Aspects of Mark 5:1-20	<i>63</i>
3.1.7. Imperialism as Context, Subtext and Pretext	<i>65</i>
3.1.8. <i>Thingification</i> Process and The Gerasene People	<i>70</i>

3.1.9. Jesus' Identity and the Contextual Analysis of Mark 5:1-20	72
Part II: Postcolonial Considerations of Mark 5:1-20	75
3.2.1. Joining Us Living in The Tombs: Healing Violence	75
3.2.2. Violence of Healing: Negotiation and Rejection	79
<i>Chapter Four: Hybridity, Desire, And Disgust - Earmarks of the Postcolonial Jesus</i>	<b>88</b>
4.1. Mark's Jesus And Imperial Masculinity	89
4.2. Jesus, Son of God	90
4.3. Jesus, As a Hybrid Person	93
4.4. Desire of Hybrid Jesus	95
4.5. Disgust of Postcolonial Jesus	97
4.6. Jesus, a Transformative Resistant	100
4.7. Postcolonial Jesus Liberating an African Person	102
<i>General Conclusion</i>	<b>105</b>
<i>Bibliography</i>	<b>111</b>
<i>Index</i>	<b>117</b>



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One of my core arguments in this thesis is that “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” (a person is a person because of other people). My own ideas are inextricably intertwined with those of others. To be able to complete this enterprise, it comes down to many great people who dedicated their scholarship and time to help me understand, announce, apply or even connect ideas. Hence, this work was completed thanks to the support of many people some of whom deserve special mention.

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moral support. Finally, I thankfully acknowledge the support of my family and Rwanda-Burundi Jesuits.

## General Introduction

This thesis reads Mark 5:1-20 from a postcolonial perspective. A postcolonial reading of the New Testament encourages one to read the text in a setting informed socio-politically by the Roman Empire in its various forms. Such a reading explores the Bible in contradistinction to Mark's myopic interpretation as a timeless theological treatise or religious sermons disconnected from the 1<sup>st</sup>-century political context.<sup>1</sup> Exploring Markan text postcolonially begins with recognizing the empire's influence on the writing of these ancient texts.

Sugirtharajah argued that postcolonial reading focuses on "the often-neglected dimension of the empire and the politics of imperialism."<sup>2</sup> Reading Mark's Gospel through postcolonial lenses reveals Jesus as a person who lived in the third space. Jesus historically grew up under Roman rule. As a person living in his native culture and the empire's culture, he learned how to negotiate his identity as a Roman-subjugated citizen and Jew. Homi Bhabha contended, "it is the power of hybridity that enables the colonized to challenge 'the boundaries of discourse', and which 'breaks down the symmetry and duality of the self/other, inside/outside' and establishes another space of power/knowledge."<sup>3</sup> Hence, hybridity mimics, mocks, desires, and is disgusted by the

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<sup>1</sup> The myopic interpretation of the Bible reduces the whole biblical message to spiritual meaning. Such a reductionist way of interpreting the Bible ignores social, economic and political elements that are important in understanding the text in a deeper way.

<sup>2</sup> R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 1st edition. (New York: Oxford University Press, U.S.A., 2002), 46.

<sup>3</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 125.

Roman imperial colonial culture. From this context, neither the essentialist anti-imperial context nor the pro-imperial tendencies exclusively fit Jesus' description.

### **Scope and Nature**

This research explores the exorcism story of the Gerasene-possessed man found in Mark 5: 1-20. This text's postcolonial approach will enable us to uncover how a minority community lived under the Roman empire's rule and subjugation. In this way, this research narrows down its focus on Mark's portrayal of Jesus. And the question becomes, "was Jesus portrayed as an assimilated Jew or a transformative resistant?"

This research does not pretend to be a pioneer in this postcolonial field. It instead continues the discussion started by earlier scholars. For instance, Richard Horsley, studying the New Testament, criticized the past depoliticizing Biblical accounts and reducing Biblical narratives to theology.<sup>4</sup> Simon Samuel rebuked Horsley's confidence that Mark's reading can discern the native agenda for decolonization. He proposed that Mark's Gospel is "a resistant as well as a colonizing discourse."<sup>5</sup> The third scholar who intervened in this debate is Tat-Siong Benny Liew. Benny Liew looked at the Gospel of Mark as a "colonial mimetic discourse representing tyranny, boundary and might."<sup>6</sup> Hence, this research pays attention to previous scholarly literature.

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<sup>4</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire* (New York: Fortress Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Simon Samuel, *A Postcolonial Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, vol. 340, T and T Clark Library of Biblical Studies (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 78.

Following the above-mentioned scholarly literature, this research tries to answer the following question: “How is Jesus depicted in Mark 5:1-20?” It will begin from the hypothesis that Jesus, living under the Roman empire’s rule, could not escape getting entangled in the hybrid space. Frantz Fanon demonstrated how a subjugated person – having interiorized the imperial stereotypes – desires to “whiten the race.” This desire to whiten the race refers to the concept of lactification.<sup>7</sup> As Jesus endeavors to assert himself in imperial terms, he begins to imitate (through Bhabha’s mimicry) the empire. In this case, mimicry becomes a powerful weapon to resist the empire’s representations. Hence, hybridity in Mark 5:1-20 encapsulates Jesus’ desire and disgust for the Roman Empire, exemplified through his mimicry and mockery.

### **Thesis Statement**

This study demonstrates that Mark’s Jesus is a hybrid subject who displays the affects of desire and disgust toward the Roman Empire in Mark 5:1-20.

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<sup>6</sup> Tat-siong Benny Liew, “Tyranny, Boundary and Might: Colonial Mimicry in Mark’s Gospel,” *Journal for the study of the New Testament* 21, no. 73 (July 1, 1999): 7–31.

<sup>7</sup> Frantz Fanon defines whiteness as a symbol of purity, of justice, of truth and virginity. It determines what it means to be civilized, modern and human. Alfred J. Lopez argues that there are examples of nonwhites not “looking white” who claim superiority by virtue of their relative whiteness and establishing economic and cultural hegemony over other less-privileged groups on racial grounds. Being “white” in this context has less to do with the color of one’s skin than with one’s relation to a colonial history in which “white-ness” is bound up with both colonial dominance and cultural hegemony. For more information, see Alfred J. López, *Postcolonial Whiteness* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 17–18.

## Method of Approach

Several presuppositions and reasons underlie the use of postcolonial criticism in this research. First, Mark did not redact this Gospel in a socio-political context other than the Roman empire's rule.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, "imperial power relations operated in complex ways through cultural-religious forms integrally related to social-economic forms of domination, and not simply by the sword."<sup>9</sup> Finally, the imperial setting largely informed and determined the daily lives and minds of the Jews in the first century. Hence, this research aims at uncovering the empire's influence on the description of Jesus as a hybridized character in this pericope.

Social science criticism will enable the researcher to explain how the Roman empire influenced the everyday lives of the Jews in the first century. The researcher endeavors to interpret the description of Jesus in Mark 5: 1-20 as "woven into the complex fabric of social structures and symbolic matrices."<sup>10</sup> It is essential to recognize that sociology and anthropology can provide useful tools to grasp such a hybrid identification. Moreover, psychoanalytic categories unveil how the colonial world (empire) seems pathological and pathogenic by its function as a space of desire and disgust, ambivalence, and hybridity. Finally, the critical race theories enable us to

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<sup>8</sup> Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 57. Segovia refers to "the massive presence and might of the Roman Empire, master and lord of the entire Circus-Mediterranean, with its thoroughly accurate if enormously arrogant classification of the Mediterranean Sea as *mare nostrum*."

<sup>9</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *Religion and Empire: People, Power and the Life of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen R. Haynes and Steven L. McKenzie, *To Each Its Own Meaning* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 132.

debunk the power relations at play in the story. It examines the dynamics of identity construction between the Jews and gentiles. In this case, it is crucial to question the effect of Jesus' race on his social standing.

### **Significance**

The importance of assessing postcolonially Mark's Jesus in Mark 5:1-20 lies in the fact that Jesus' context of domination and subjugation displayed many traits common to our context today. Many peoples, myself included, live in contexts marked by colonialism (imperialism or cultural domination), alienation and discrimination. I want to argue that Mark's Jesus - as a hybrid character - lives in a third space created by the Roman Empire's influence on the Jewish culture. The concept of hybridity challenges the imperial binary relationship (of center and periphery, elite and subaltern, of the one dominating and the other dominated). A hybrid person defies binarity by pulling and pushing against the dominant ideal. By pulling, such a person mimics the culture of the empire. Through mimicry, an ontology of desire characterizes the shift from the static 'to be' to the fluidity of 'becoming'. However, by pushing against, a hybrid person seeks to differentiate oneself from this imperial culture. At this stage, disgust comes to reestablish the equilibrium to the person whose meaning has been disturbed, for instance, by the imperial conceptualization, by affirming a moral framework that binds society together. However, it remains crucial to understand that "disgust bears the imprint of desire."<sup>11</sup> The hybrid person - Jesus in this case - resists from inside. Hence, a transformative resistance disrupts the imperial representation of the subaltern.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 191.

## Chapter Outline

### *Chapter 1: Delineating the Approach*

This chapter provides the theoretical component of this research. It will cover the contribution of Frantz Fanon in the appreciation of the people living under colonial domination. Fanon studied the reach of coloniality in the definition of the identity of the colonized. According to Fanon, the concept of laccification describes a colonized person who rejects her self-identity and assumes the imperial worldview through a relationship of symbols. This concept is related to the idea of hybridity. Hybridity is another theoretical concept that will enable us to talk about the person of Jesus in Mark's Gospel. Hybridity occurs in postcolonial societies as a consequence of cultural and political expansion and control. Bhabha unveils hybridity as a cultural process that gives rise to the negotiation of meaning and representation.<sup>13</sup> A hybridized person tends to mimic the colonizer. Mimicry, in this case, unveils itself as a technique of resistance. In this last part, using resistance theories, the research will demonstrate how a hybridized person does not embrace identity imposed by the empire, instead negotiates through mimicry and adopts a transformative and liberating identity.

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<sup>12</sup> Resistance becomes transformative when it transforms the structure of power assumed within colonial discourse by recognizing and fostering an order in which the relationship between Self and the other is one of mutual interdependence rather than antagonism.

<sup>13</sup> Bhabha argues that hybridity and mimicry were strategies forged by the colonized to respond to colonial rule. Hybridity is an "in-between space" in which the colonized translate or undo the binaries imposed by the colonial project. (Bhabha, 139).



*Chapter 2: Socio-Historical World of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman Empire*

Here, the research will expose how the Roman empire used military, political, and ideological power to subjugate nations, in this case the Jewish nation. According to Louis Althusser, the ideological state apparatuses serve to maintain the dominant social stratification. Ideological discourses acted on Jewish people to see themselves and others as standing within the Roman imperial ideology, subject to it, and willingly supportive - consciously or unconsciously - of the Roman empire's reproduction. Furthermore, Josephus exploration of the 1<sup>st</sup> century period will enable us to understand the relationship between Roman occupants and the Jewish people, including the conflictual relationship. Hence, considering the ideological discourse and the 1<sup>st</sup>-century context will contextualize the hybridized nature of Jesus' identity.

*Chapter 3: Postcolonial Exegesis in Mark 5:1-20*

A postcolonial study of Mark 5: 1-20 enables us to deconstruct Mark's Jesus as a hybridized character. This pericope involves the healing of the Gerasene demoniac. Moreover, a non-Jewish land (Decapolis) becomes the recipient of the healing. The heathen becomes a critical part of the analysis. Furthermore, the name "legion" that haunts the man calls for a careful interpretation of anti-colonial tendency. Third, the concern of ethnicity and race plays a vital role in this pericope. These three considerations will allow the research to grapple with the question of hybridized identity presented by Mark in this pericope.

*Chapter 4: Hybridity, Desire, and Disgust – Earmarks of a Postcolonial Jesus*

At this level, the research will focus on Jesus as described in Mark 5:1-20. Fanon's lactification and Bhabha's hybridity will provide the framework for the hybridized nature of Jesus. In this part, the researcher will look at the juxtaposition of the imperial language applied to Jesus. Who between the emperor or Jesus is the real "Son of God"? Mark used the political dimension to make Christological claims. This realization points out that Mark found the Roman empire as the ideal *topos* and *telos* (place and orientation) for his writing. It is in this way that Mark's Jesus becomes hybridized. However, by becoming hybridized, Mark's Jesus presents characteristics of desire and disgust.

## **Chapter One**

### **Theoretical Framework**

A central feature of this research is the postcolonial approach to the study of Mark 5:1-20. This study seeks to uncover the hybrid identity construction in the time of Jesus. The realization of Jesus growing up in a Palestinian community and under Roman rule influenced me to question his identity. Hence, the question is, “What is the relationship between the cultural identity and the imperial construct in the person of Jesus?” The Roman imperial project, rooted in the colonial project, contributed to the cohesion of multicultural communities. Identities of these communities’ members, from a postcolonial perspective, proved to be hybrid. By hybrid, these people maintained the identities and social status from their native cultural setting and the imperial context. Herod, the chief priests, and the local people displayed such hybrid identities. And it was the same case for Jesus. To explore the nature of hybrid identity, the following paragraphs will begin by exposing postcolonial studies in general terms. Then, we will look at the relationship between postcolonial studies and biblical exegesis. And this section will end in the exploration of three concepts that will enable us to grapple with Jesus’ hybrid identity.

#### **1.1. The Origin of Postcolonialism as a Field of Study**

Postcolonial criticism became a recognized field of study in literary and cultural studies with the publishing of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, an influential book critiquing the Western constructed representation of the Orient.<sup>1</sup> In this book, Said

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 169. Orient refers to someone non-Western, a colonized ‘other’ who is different from the

problematized the historical, political, and cultural considerations of the East held by the West and demonstrated their origin and development. After the publication of *Orientalism*, Postcolonialism gained ground in the Western academy with *The Empire Writes Back*.<sup>2</sup> Since then, many scholars have endeavored to study and engage the Postcolonial literature. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman explored many issues such as the nature of colonized cultures, anti-colonial resistance, construction of Western subjectivity, and postcolonial intellectuals.<sup>3</sup> Leela Gandhi approached the postcolonial study by tracing back the broader philosophical and intellectual context, making connections between postcolonial theory and Poststructuralism, postmodernism, Marxism, and feminism.<sup>4</sup> Robert J.C. Young analyzed the concepts and issues involved in Postcolonialism and highlighted major theorists' works in the field.<sup>5</sup> In a nutshell, most of these scholars postulated either the political and economic or the cultural and discursive practices of the colonial powers of Europe in light of the nascent postcolonial writings and insights from formerly colonized countries.

Postcolonialism is deeply rooted in a variety of western theoretical landscapes. First, Marxism reveals itself to be one of the earlier anti-imperial thought systems.<sup>6</sup> In

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dominant, cultured European, a subject or object of knowledge waiting to be dominated.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Young, *Postcolonialism* (New York: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

this field, it is essential to look at how Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, and other Marxists focused on the dominant ideologies to explain how social relations helped cultural studies to analyze the dynamics of race, ethnicity, and colonialism. For instance, Gramsci looked at how the state and ruling capitalist class use cultural institutions to maintain power and coined cultural hegemony.<sup>7</sup> By exposing this cultural hegemony, he created an anti-hegemonic discourse. Louis Althusser criticizes capitalist societies that use Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) to ensure social control.<sup>8</sup> With ISAs, on the one hand, ideology is imposed on us, and at the same time, we act as willing actors of that ideology. On the other hand, states coerce people to behave as expected through police, armies, courts, and prisons (RSAs). Though Marxism constituted the first trend to account for the anti-imperial thought, many critics blamed it for limiting modern colonialism's material and social base to the economic model.

In addition to Marxism, Postcolonial scholars drew insights from Poststructuralism.<sup>9</sup> Such scholars tended to address the racial, discursive, cultural, and psychological aspects of colonialism. These scholars paid attention to racial, cultural,

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<sup>6</sup> JOHN MAGUIRE, "KARL MARX: Political Writings. Vol. I: The Revolutions of 1848. Vol. II: Surveys from Exile," *New Blackfriars* 56, no. 663 (August 1, 1975): 379–381.

<sup>7</sup> Antonio Gramsci, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 258.

<sup>8</sup> Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (London: Verso, 2014), 70–92.

<sup>9</sup> According to Britannica Encyclopedia, poststructuralism is a movement in literary criticism that held language, not as a transparent medium that connects one directly with a 'truth' or 'reality' outside it, rather as a structure or a code, whose parts derive their meaning from their contrast with one another and not from any connection with an outside world.

psychological, and discursive implications that rendered possible the colonized people's economic exploitation and political submission. Edward Said argued that a postcolonial reading strategy engages the socio-economic and perceptual sphere, bearing on both the colonizers and the colonized's socio-economic and political life.<sup>10</sup> Hence, a postcolonial reading involves critically examining all discursive forms emanating from the colonial background to decipher power disparities. A binary description of an "elevated colonial self" and "otherized colonized" unveils this disparity of power. Thus, such difference paves the way for the colonizer's cultural domination and economic exploitation.

The notion of binary opposition propounded by Said, however, did not meet general approval. A few postcolonial theorists, such as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, disagreed with such a rigid binary opposition. In a colonial or postcolonial context, they argue that colonizers and colonized relate to each other in a complicated relationship of desire and disgust. Consequently, "cultural hybridity" comes in handy to dignify the phenomenon of mobility and crossovers of ideas and identities generated by colonialism between the colonizers and the colonized.<sup>11</sup> In other words, colonialism does not affect only the colonized's subjectivity but also that of the colonizers. Hence, cultural hybridity refers to a site of identity negation and contestation.<sup>12</sup> The negation and contestation constitute the point of contention with the rigid binary system purported by Said's theory. In light of the above exploration

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<sup>10</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: 1st Vintage Books ed., 1993), 268.

<sup>11</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, Routledge key guides (London: Routledge, 2000), 118–120.

<sup>12</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1.

of postcolonial studies, the next section will delve into applying these studies in the Biblical scholarship.

## 1.2. Postcolonial Criticism in Biblical Studies

Scholars looked at postcolonial studies as a field that engages modern European colonialism. Then, how can one apply this field of inquiry to a context two thousand years old? To answer such a question, we need first to focus on traces of social formations and cultural discourses deriving from an ancient postcolonial context. Second, considering biblical texts' context, Palestine had passed through a succession of colonial occupation and deportation at the hands of the region's powers. In such a way, the context of imperialism in which biblical texts' authors redacted left a textual imprint in those ancient texts.<sup>13</sup> Third, according to Mark G. Brett, postcolonial criticism endeavors to uncover the political and economic relationship in postcolonial Palestine, the cultural subjectivities, and hybridities.<sup>14</sup> Hence, in applying postcolonial studies to the Bible's world, this research is not uncommon; instead, it contributes to the continuing scholarly discussion.

The application of postcolonial theory to biblical studies enriches the journey of searching for the Bible's meaning. From *Orientalism*, Said's work influenced biblical scholars to engage and problematize the Eurocentric (and American-centric) discourses and commentaries on the Bible. Furthermore, applying Said's insights on

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<sup>13</sup> In history, Palestine became a vassal to Egypt and Assyria; Part of its population was deported by Babylon; It was under Persians and Hellenists. And by the time of Jesus, they were colonized by the Romans.

<sup>14</sup> Mark G. Brett, "The Ethics of Postcolonial Criticism," in *Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading*, ed. Laura E. Donaldson, Semeia 75 (Atlanta, GA.: SBL, 1996), 219.

biblical texts helped uncover the postcolonial elements in the text, such as the formation of subjectivities and the colonizer's culture and practices. Some biblical scholars responded to this call by engaging a postcolonial look into their field.<sup>15</sup> The first work to be published was "Postcolonialism and Scripture Reading," edited by Laura Donaldson in 1998. "Postcolonial criticism helps to fill in this intellectual and ethical void since it would require not only a systematic accounting of Christianity's participation in imperialism but also that individual congregations actively become involved in the work of decolonization."<sup>16</sup>

Another postcolonial scholar known for his contribution to postcolonial biblical studies is the Sri-Lankan Biblical scholar R.S. Sugirtharajah. In 1998, he published the *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, applying a postcolonial perspective to textual production, commentarial writings, and translations in colonial times in this work. Furthermore, he investigated the Eurocentric approach to Biblical interpretations. In 2002, Sugirtharajah published another work entitled *Postcolonial Perspectives on the New Testament and Its Interpretation*. This book examines the implications of postcolonial criticism to biblical studies. Fernando Segovia, in his *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* and enl the terms of

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<sup>15</sup> Laura E. Donaldson, ed., *Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading*. *Semeia* 75 (Atlanta, GA.: SBL, 1998);

Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel* (London: Routledge, 1995).

Musa W. Dube Shomanah, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Nashville: Chalice Press, 2000).

R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism*, The Bible & liberation series (New York: Orbis Books, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Donaldson, *Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading*. *Semeia* 75, 2.



“Decolonization” and “Liberation” to read postcolonially the Bible and retrieve the voices of those at the margin of the society.<sup>17</sup> Postcolonial criticism is a tool that can enable us to read and understand the Bible in a much deeper way.

African theologians engaged the Bible postcolonially. It is important to remember that, for some African minds, Berlin’s scramble for Africa stands as the scramble through the Bible. And conversely, for the African theologians, the fight to get Africa back from the colonial grip should occur through the Bible. To engage the Bible in a postcolonial way reflects an African way to win the Black spirit back. Mercy A. Oduyoye’s *Sankofa* becomes a symbol that “encourages a critical appropriation of one’s heritage.”<sup>18</sup> Oduyoye, in other words, proposed the spiraling circle as a critical contributor to African theologies. For her, the process is eternal, expansive, evolving, and sustained by self-critique, accountability, inclusiveness, and connectedness to the reality around it. Another key contributor to African postcolonial theology is Gerard West. West used the case study of Queen Mmahutu of the Batlhaping. And he pointed out how biblical interpretation between the colonial missionaries and the early indigenous readers was radically different. Hence, West appeals to African scholars to investigate indigenous biblical interpretation in the earliest contact-zone encounters. Finally, Justin Ukpong – though not postcolonial in his writing – challenges the African theologians to be creative in developing methods that serve hermeneutical concerns of the African Context.<sup>19</sup> According to Ukpong, African biblical critics face

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<sup>17</sup> Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, x.

<sup>18</sup> Elisabeth Amoah, ed., *Poems of Mercy Amba Oduyoye* (Accra: Sam-Woode, 2001), 47. For more, see Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “Feminist Theology in an African Perspective,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Giberini R. (New York: Orbis Books, 1994).

the predicament of not rising to the challenges that come from the diversity of African social settings and the contextual nature of African reading of the Bible. Hence, his work constitutes a ground-breaking theological insight into African postcolonial studies. With this general appraisal of postcolonial endeavor and its relationship to biblical scholarship, I will elaborate in the next section the postcolonial contribution to Mark's Gospel.

### **1.3. Postcolonial Readings of Mark**

One of the most critical postcolonial criticism insights is that reading practices vary following identities, and experiences. This fact remains true when reading Mark postcolonially. As a way of introducing the postcolonial reading, this research will focus on three postcolonial reading models. The first model is the “essentialist or nativist model.” In this model, the scholar focuses on culture's essence before the emergence of another (or imperial) culture. In this way, the postcolonial reading aims at reviving the pure nature of the pre-colonial societies and cultures. Richard Horsley argues, “postcolonial biblical studies include in its agenda the emancipation of previously submerged or distorted histories of the literature later included in the Bible - partly by avoiding, opposing and replacing the essentialist and depoliticizing

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<sup>19</sup> Justin S. Ukpong, “New Testament Hermeneutics in Africa: Challenges and Possibilities,” *Neotestamentica* 35, no. 1 (2001): 147–167.

Justin S. Ukpong, “Bible Reading with a Community of Ordinary Readers,” in *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa*, ed. Mary N. Getui (Nairobi: Acton, 2001), 188–212.

Justin S. Ukpong, “Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 108 (2000): 3–18.

categories and approaches of imperial Western biblical studies.”<sup>20</sup> Hence, in his view, doing a postcolonial reading in an essentialist or nativist model strives to strip all aspects of the universalizing imperial culture to get the pure essence of the local society or culture. Focusing on Mark’s Gospel, Horsley contended that this Gospel portrays an essentialist and alternative vision for the 1st-century local community. “Remote from the universalizing discourse of the Roman imperial culture, Mark strives to build on the people’s history and revitalize its traditions. Indeed, Mark exhorts an indigenous people’s movement of resistance to the imperial order to embody an alternative order, understood as the fulfillment of history of the subjected people of Palestine.”<sup>21</sup> In such a case, Mark emerges as a narrative that forms a movement aiming at revitalizing a social fabric based on the indigenous culture of independence of both exploitative local ruling institutions and imperial domination.

The second type of postcolonial reading is the “resistant/recuperative” model. The leading proponent of this model is R. S. Sugirtharajah. In expounding this model, Sugirtharajah contended two basic assumptions regarding the relationship between Postcolonialism and biblical studies. The first assumption is that colonialism dominates and determines the interest of biblical texts, and the second, there is a lack of concern with colonialism in the colonial western academy. Hence, in his approach, he advocated

to open a new era of academic inquiry which brings to the fore the overlapping issues of empire, nation, ethnicity, migration, and language; to scrutinize and

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<sup>20</sup> Richard A. Horsley, “Submerged Biblical Histories and Imperial Biblical Studies,” in *The Postcolonial Bible*, ed. Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 154.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

expose the colonial domination embedded in biblical texts; to overturn the colonial assumptions inherent in western interpretations, and to search for alternative hermeneutics; and, finally, to interpret the text in our terms and read them from our specific locations.<sup>22</sup>

Such a biblical text reading is deemed resistant because it interrogates the Bible and its early interpretations to uncover embedded imperial ideology and practices. In invoking a rival ideology to the imperial one, Mary Ann Tolbert argued that Mark advocates a resistant postcolonial discourse against the Roman empire. “Their resistance would end in victory when the oppressive powers who persecute them now were in their turn to be destroyed by a more powerful ruler, God.”<sup>23</sup> Hence, for Tolbert and Sugirtharajah, a postcolonial reading of the biblical narrative should be resistant.

The diasporic experience causes some scholars to focus on another model, “the diasporic intercultural model”. Stuart Hall defined the diasporic intercultural model “not by essence or purity, but by recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of an identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, according to Segovia, there is a recognition of the biblical narrative being a poetic, cultural, rhetorical or ideological construct of not only the Palestinian reality but also of imperialism and colonialism in

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<sup>22</sup> Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, “Biblical Studies after the Empire: From a Colonial to a Postcolonial Mode of Interpretation,” in *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), x.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel* (New York: Fortress Press, 1989), 305.

<sup>24</sup> Stuart Hall and Ferial Ghazoul, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” *Alif (Cairo, Egypt)*, no. 32 (January 1, 2012): 410.

biblical Antiquity.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, it encourages acknowledgment and respect of the otherness of texts, readers, and interpretations. Benny Liew recognized Mark's Roman imperial context and its anti-colonial resistance and viewed it as a colonial discourse that duplicates and internalizes the colonial ideology.<sup>26</sup> To exemplify this claim, Benny Liew points out how Mark depicted Jesus' authority as absolute, almost tyrannical, oppressive, and hierarchical terms. "The claim of singularity is, of course, an effective ideological weapon that leads to absolutism by allowing no comparison or competition."<sup>27</sup> Benny Liew argued, "by defeating power with more power, 'might-is-right' ideology reflects the imperial ideology and its various forms of oppression".<sup>28</sup> With various postcolonial approaches to Mark's Gospel seen above, the following paragraphs will concentrate on three key concepts that will enable us to critique Mark 5:1-20, namely hybridity, lactification, and disgust.

#### 1.4. Postcolonial Hybridity

Hybridity occupies a central place in postcolonial literature. Homi Bhabha, one of the leading figures in postcolonial literature, is better known for defining it. He argued that, in imperialism/colonialism, cultural statements and systems are constructed in a "third space."<sup>29</sup> "It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space

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<sup>25</sup> Fernando F. Segovia, "Toward Intercultural Criticism: A Reading Strategy Form the Diaspora," in *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*, ed. Mary Ann Tolbert and Fernando F. Segovia, vol. Vol.2 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1995), 323.

<sup>26</sup> Benny Liew, "Tyranny, Boundary and Might," 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>29</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 37.

have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity."<sup>30</sup> In this third space, identity, which is a product of such a contradictory and ambivalent space, defies the claims to a hierarchical and essential purity of cultures. Such an identity is hybrid. Hence, such hybridity is a result of miscegenation, mixed breed.<sup>31</sup>

Hybridity refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the third space produced by colonization. It is crucial to understand that hybridization can bear many conditions, such as linguistic, cultural, political, or racial hybridization. However, Bhabha's analysis emphasized the interdependence and the mutual construction of the colonizers and colonized's subjectivities. "The recognition of this ambivalent space of cultural identity may help us overcome the exoticism of cultural diversity in favor of the recognition of an empowering hybridity within which cultural difference may operate."<sup>32</sup>

From the discussion above, one could understand that there are two critical notions central to this hybridity: culture and identity. Starting with cultural hybridity, Bhabha believes that culture is not a static entity. For him, it is not a 'static' essence in time and space. Here, one remembers the first trope of Rudyard Kipling's *The*

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 76.

<sup>32</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, 118.

*Ballad of East and West*, stating, “Oh East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.” Such a conception constitutes a framework through which the Eastern or Western culture has to keep its essence and purity. One remains superior and objective, another inferior and exotic. On the contrary, culture for Bhabha is something that is fluid. It is in perpetual motion, combining disparate elements being added or transformed upon its contact with alien reality or culture. Bhabha sees culture as characterized by change, flux, and transformation and, most notably, by mixed-ness or interconnectedness. This character of culture refers to “hybridity.”

The notion of hybridity enables us to understand the postcolonial context. In Bhabha’s words, change, flux, and transformation characterize culture. Then, the binary colonizer’s superior culture /colonized’s inferior culture is consequently untenable. For example, to talk about superior Roman culture and inferior Palestine culture would entail the uncontaminated and pure essence of these two cultures. However, as we saw above, cultures are not fixed in time and space, but they change and transform over time and contact other cultures. Here, the colonial discourse comes to grips with the hybridity discourse, as the colonial discourse wants to exalt the colonizer’s superiority while maintaining the colonized’s inferiority. Understanding that there is no pure and uncontaminated superior culture renders illusory the civilizing or saving mission. And colonialism is seen as it is, the exploitation of colonized people’s land and resources through brute force.

The next important notion to hybridity is identity. Hybrid identity is born out of this colonial context. One of the critical features of this identity is mimicry. According to Bhabha, the attempt to stabilize the cultural flux and hybridity of the

colonizer/colonized relationship led to the realization that native people exposed to the colonizer's culture would ultimately learn from it. Hence, in this view, the colonizing mission wants to make the colonized more and more like the colonizer. Here, one would remember Macaulay's statement, "the colonial government should spend more on education in India to create a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and intellect."<sup>33</sup> Following such a statement, Bhabha argues that such a mission expects the colonized to mimic the colonizer but never catch up. Hence, this very idea of a lesser culture mimicking a superior culture turns the act into a sort of mockery of the colonizer's superior culture. The mimic men of the colonial periphery are, therefore, from the perspective of the colonizer, ever to remain people who are "not quite, not white."

### **1.5. Postcolonial Lactification**

Frantz Fanon engaged fundamental questions of his time, namely sexuality, gender, race and racism, religion, and social formation. Born in Martinique, a French colony, he studied and practiced psychoanalysis in France. There, he had an existential experience that prompted him to question the reality of colonization. Such an incident occurred as follows: *once Fanon was sitting in a bus, and across the aisle, there were a young girl and her mother. And the young girl pointed to him and said to her mum, 'See, mum, a black man.'* And Fanon has never thought of himself as a black man. He suddenly realized that such an identity attributed to him has never existed for him, but now he is gazed upon as a black man. Such a realization shuttered

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<sup>33</sup> "Minute on Education (1835) by Thomas Babington Macaulay," accessed March 31, 2021, [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt\\_minute\\_education\\_1835.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html).



Fanon's identity, thinking of himself as a French man, speaking French, and knowing the French culture. He had nothing to replace the performative identity in a racialized space. Such a fundamental existential experience led him to problematize the effect of colonization on the colonized's identity. This problematization led him to focus on the issue of Blackness.<sup>34</sup>

With the issue of Blackness, he aimed to explore the African psyche. He wanted to probe Black people under colonial rule, what kind of traumas they experience in a colonial setting or within a racialized system. Fanon discovered the problem of psychological alienation and advocated for disalienation. "Those negroes and white men will be disalienated who refuse to let themselves be sealed away in the materialized Tower of the Past. For many other negroes, in other ways, disalienation will come into being through their refusal to accept the present as definitive". In other words, the problem of psychological alienation, for Fanon, is temporal. Humans feel alienated when not in sync with their situatedness in time. In the quotation above, Fanon used two terms concerning time: the materialized tower of the past and present as definitive. In these two instances, Fanon contends that those who wish to be disalienated ought to get past the oppressive past or present logic by conceiving time as fluid and mutable.

Fanon, looking at the identities of the colonized, proposed the concept of lactification. Lactification is a term coined from French *lactification* (with its root'

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<sup>34</sup> The issue of Blackness constitutes the core of Fanon's work; however, in a particular way, *Black Skin, White Masks* focuses psychoanalytically on this issue. Hence, Fanon explores the language, subjectivity and reality of the Black person in the colonial setting. He analyses the interracial sexuality, sexual desire, and racial identity.

*lait*, ' which means milk). By lactification, Fanon meant the process by which colonized people tend to despise their native culture and try to become white (like milk, figuratively) by assimilating the culture and language of the colonizer. The lactification takes shape in the examples that Fanon used to prove this point. Fanon cited the case of Mayotte Capecia's autobiographical novel "*Je Suis Martiniquaise*," in which the black woman - to get out of her lower social status - wanted to be married to a white man. Considering such a case, one would agree that racial ideas are not limited to the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized; instead, the colonized's psyche internalizes these ideas. This internalization of the racial hierarchy in the black mind is what Fanon referred to as being lactification. Myths created by the (white) colonizers to maintain their superiority find their way into the colonized (black) mind. Such a person, in turn, rejects their own identity and engages in self-deprecation.

While focusing on the definition of lactification, it would be normal to look at the cases that happened during colonial times. During the colonial period, the term "*évolués*" would refer to the Africans from French and Belgian colonies who had assimilated the European way of acting through education of accepted European values and manners of behavior. In the style of Fanon, to speak the French language was to participate in a world, to adopt a civilization. Most *évolués* would desire to behave like their European masters to gain special privileges. In some sense, these special privileges were marks of upward mobility.

To understand well the concept of lactification, one has to look at Lacan's influence on the conception of Fanon. Two Lacanian insights were inspiring for

Fanon when he tried to understand the phenomenon of lactification. First, Lacan understood desire as a link between the individual's biographical development, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, this individual's lived experience (*erlebnis*), his ego ideal, and his relationships (and tensions) with others.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the process of individuation does not happen in a vacuum; instead, it develops depending on one's historical, social, economic, and religious whereabouts. Second, Lacan formulated the notion of personality. He views it phenomenologically as both grounded in genetics and integrating human relation of the social order.<sup>36</sup> Lacan reminded us that the root of the concept "personality," *persona*, means "mask." Such a mask may come to be taken as one's character because it is fixed in expression. However, it hides the heterogeneity of feeling, ambivalence, and hybridity. Hence, it creates a singular and whole expression. Because of these two notions of Lacanian insight, one can comprehend the concept of Lactification in Fanon's work. Simultaneously, the personality in contact with the *erlebnis* will breed another unwished consequence, the epidermalization of racial condition.

Even though the colonized are lactified, they cannot escape the epidermalization of their racial condition. The fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* depicts well the epidermalization of Blackness. Fanon, sitting on a bus, was singled out by a young white girl. *Look, here is a negro!* Such a short experience revealed the phobia of the colonizer toward the colonized. For Fanon, all phobias do not come from a traumatic experience. He contended that Negrophobia is a result of the racist colonial culture.

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<sup>35</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Alienation and Freedom*, ed. Jean Khalfa and Robert Young (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 264.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2006), 198.

Such a young girl displayed a negrophobic attitude toward Fanon. Negrophobia poses a gaze upon a black person in a sexualized way or a demeaning way. Hence, this gazed black person is assigned an inferior racialized being's identity. Here, Fanon became critical as he focused on the psychological effect of such a gaze. And the question he asked was, "What does such a gaze do to one's self-esteem, one's consideration as human beings, one's relationship to people of a different gender?"

### **1.6. Postcolonial Disgust**

The concept of disgust refers to "something revolting, primarily concerning the sense of taste, as actually perceived or vividly imagined; and secondarily to anything which causes a similar feeling, through the sense of smell, touch or even eyesight."<sup>37</sup> To say this differently in our case, we will use disgust on the secondary level. In this sense, disgust displays the characteristics of revulsion and rejection. These two concepts, revulsion, and rejection have to do with distancing oneself from the disgusting object. With regards to revulsion, disgust has to do with the degree of intimacy of contact. In this sense, disgust appears as a reaction to an object or a person deemed contaminant, dirty, or foreign. For instance, from the study conducted by Rozin Nemeroff, "virtually all Americans reject foods that have been handled or bitten by either unsavory or disliked persons."<sup>38</sup> Kelly argued that the first step in disgust is a linkage of the innate bitter rejection system to a pathogen avoidance

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<sup>37</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Original edition. (London: Penguin Classics, 2009), 253.

<sup>38</sup> Nemeroff P. Rozin, M. Wane, and A. Sherrod, "Operations of the Sympathetic Magical Law of Contagion in Interpersonal Attitudes among Americans," *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society* (1989), 637 -653.

system.<sup>39</sup> In other words, rejection has to do with rejecting everything potentially pathogen. Speaking of the pathogenic character, Fanon argued that the colonial environment induces a pathological response. Hence, in this paper, disgust can be understood as a revolting feeling that centers on revulsion and rejection.

In an interpersonal group, disgust in the form of revulsion and rejection has a moral role. Moral disgust is a reaction not just to any ethical violation but to actions that make a person seem to be moving downward, and so the person becomes degraded, base, or subhuman. The moral role of disgust manifests in three ways. First, from the ethics of autonomy, disgust occurs whenever something hampers the person's ability to act freely, without interference or harm from others. Secondly, community ethics promotes the fact that people have roles to play within the social structure. Here, there is an emphasis on duty, hierarchy, and interdependence. Moral disgust appears whenever circumstances hinder an individual from participating fully in the community. Finally, people are spiritual beings created by God, having the soul protected from acts or contact with degrading things. In this sense, divinity's ethics posits moral disgust as a reaction to something polluting divine element in us. From these three ethical positions, one understands the moral disgust in people's lives.

Disgust plays a functional role. Any 'otherized' person becomes the object of revulsion and rejection. Among these people, we can find strangers or people with some negative characteristics, such as members of despised groups or people with

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<sup>39</sup> Daniel Kelly, *Yuck!: The Nature and Moral Significance of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA: Bradford Book, 2011), 67.

disabilities. These people become disgusting “not just to the extent they show signs of infectiousness, but to the extent that anything about them makes us want to avoid associating with them.”<sup>40</sup> In the same vein, Sara Ahmed posits that “what makes ‘the not’ insecure is the possibility that what is ‘not not’ (what is me or us) can slide into ‘the not,’ a slippage which would threaten the ontology of ‘being apart’ from others.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, even the possibility becomes the cause of disgust. Disgust, in this case, plays the role of a boundary marker.

Furthermore, disgust is so crucial to power. “The relationship between disgust and power becomes evident in the spatiality of disgust reactions and their role in the hierarchizing of spaces as well as bodies.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, disgust reactions come as a response to things or people (a) that threaten the person’s boundary and (b) below or lower than the person. Hence, the disgust’s function in such a situation maintains the differentiation between above and below, pure and impure, humanly and degrading.

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<sup>40</sup> Paul Rozin, Jonathan Haidt, and McCauley Clark, “Disgust,” in *Handbook of Emotions*, ed. Lisa Feldman Barrett, Fourth Edition. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2016), 821.

<sup>41</sup> Sara Ahmed, “Performativity of Disgust,” in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd Edition. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 87.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

## Chapter Two

### Roman Empire and the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine

Contemporary historians have disagreed on how to define Roman *Imperium*. The bone of contention resides in the modern (mid-nineteenth century) conception of this term that could not encompass *Imperium*'s antiquity sense. In the modern concept, one understands the word 'imperialism' in terms of economic (capitalistic), political ambitions, and aggressive colonial domination of the imperial nations of Europe. However, many Roman historians denied any aggressive economic or imperialistic intent in the Roman *Imperium*.<sup>1</sup> These historians tended to view the Roman empire more positively. But their conceptions of history did not seem to convince everyone interested in the discussion of Roman imperialism. Hence, in what follows, we endeavor to set the debate's context in this research.

Postcolonial biblical reading explores the relationship between the Roman empire and the Hellenistic East in general and Palestine in particular. The Roman contact with Palestine stretched from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE to the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. This period coincided with the time of the redaction of Jesus' narrative *kata Mapkov*. This second chapter explores how Roman imperialism came in contact with 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine. Next, we will discover how it imposed its *weltbildung* through military, political, and ideological power. We shall then focus on the Jewish people's responses that rank from acceptance and cooperation to resistance and insurrection. Finally, we will look at the relation between Mark's Gospel and Roman imperialism.

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Freeman, "British Imperialism and the Roman Empire," in *Roman Imperialism: Post-Colonial Perspectives*, ed. J. Webster and N.J. Cooper, Monograph 3 (Leicester: University of leicester, 1996), 19–34.

## 2.1. Roman Empire's First Contact with Judea And Galilee

The early contact of the Roman empire with the East (namely in Illyria, Macedonia, Greece, Thrace, Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt) dated in the third and second centuries BCE.<sup>2</sup> Rome's imperialism in the East in its early stages formed relationships of *amicitias* and *societas* with small cities, communities, and kingdoms with a view of diffusing the subjugating ambitions of powerful neighboring kingdoms, such as Syrian or Macedonian. This capacity of arbitrating over disputes and forming an alliance (*amicitias* and *societas*) enabled the Roman empire to expand, dominate and exploit the influence over the people in the east. In general, the coming of Rome in the Hellenistic East happened slowly but steadily. For this research, it becomes crucial to focus on the Roman occupation of Palestine.

The Jews in Palestine were already a colonized community under the Ptolemies' colonial imperialism (301 - 200 BCE) and Seleucids (200 - 135 BCE). The Hellenistic occupation of the Jews began with the conquest of Alexander. After he died in 323 BCE, Palestine became a disputed territory between the Ptolemies and Seleucids (the so-called Syrian wars). Palestine in 200 BCE fell into the hands of the Seleucids. Seleucids seemed to have received help from a section of the Jewish people. In return for this support, the Jews received permission to rebuild the temple and resume rituals of daily offerings.<sup>3</sup> However, the Seleucids' control over Palestine did not last long as

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<sup>2</sup> Bettie Forte, *Rome and the Romans as the Greeks Saw Them*, American Academy in Rome. Papers and monographs: v. 24 (Rome: American Academy, 1972), 5–12.



the Romans defeated them at Magnesia's battle and by the treaty of Apamea (188BCE).

Native people of Palestine sought Rome's might to settle their internal fights and encouraged her patronage. At the time Antiochus Epiphanes accessed Seleucids' power, internal factions erupted. Under the pretext of the freedom of the Jews from the Seleucids, Rome extended its control into Palestine. Moreover, at that time, the Maccabeans had revolted against the Hellenistic occupants. In 161 BCE, Judas Maccabeus planned to sign a pact with Rome. He sent a delegation to the senate to secure a treaty and "eliminate Syrian oppression since the Jews saw that they were being reduced to slavery."<sup>4</sup> Josephus mentioned in his *Antiquities* two more attempts by the Jews seeking Roman assistance during the reign of Hyrcanus I. From the above consideration of Rome's first contact with the Jews in Palestine, one could conclude that Jews considered Rome a "well-disposed power toward all who allied with her" (Macc. 8:1ff).

Jews seemed to have enjoyed a sense of freedom under the wings of Roman imperialism. The advent of Pompey put a halt to such a sense of freedom. From 66 up to 63 BCE, Pompey led a campaign that would alter Roman-Jewish relations. He interfered in a civil war between the Hasmonean brothers (Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II). In 63BCE, Pompey decided in favor of Hyrcanus II, defeated Aristobulus II's supporters, and captured Jerusalem's Temple. This campaign cost the

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<sup>3</sup> Leonard J. Greenspoon, *Between Alexandria and Antioch: Jews and Judaism in the Hellenistic Period, The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (New York: OUP, 1998), 301.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Macc. 8:17-39

lives of more than twelve thousand Jews. Such an event marked the beginning of Rome's imperial suzerainty over Palestine, culminating in complete annexation a century later. Hence, the Jewish nation became a vassal nation under the high priesthood of Hyrcanus and the watchful eyes of the Roman governors of Syria.

## **2.2. Roman Imperialism's *Weltbildung* of the Jewish Palestine**

Roman imperialism reshaped the world of Jewish Palestine. The reshaping targeted political, social, cultural, and economic symbolic worlds. In politics, Rome maintained the eastern aristocracy's right to uphold imperial control. "Wealthier provincials had much to gain from Rome, and with Rome's help, they maintained the empire's administration."<sup>5</sup> Such a treatment of the local aristocracy enabled Rome not to send troops to hold down the cities, as the most powerful native elite - men and women enjoying Rome's rights and privileges - kept their towns and communities loyal to Rome. Some of these rights and licenses granted to the aristocracy were Roman citizenship and Roman legions' protection. This policy aimed at "privileging of the powerful and the empowering of the privileged."<sup>6</sup> However, cooperation and collaboration with fellow citizens proved difficult by the persistence of old jealousies and rivalries.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> P. A. Brunt, *Roman Imperial Themes*. [Electronic Resource], *ACLS Humanities E-Book*, ACLS Humanities E-Book (New York: Clarendon Press, 1990), 267–281.

<sup>6</sup> Gina Hens-Piazza, "Forms of Violence and the Violence of Forms," *Journal of feminist studies in religion* 14, no. 2 (October 1, 1998): 91.

<sup>7</sup> Brunt, *Roman Imperial Themes*. [Electronic Resource], 272.

Furthermore, at their contact with Roman imperialism, Jewish people adapted some social and cultural categories to maintain and ensure loyalty to their imperial masters. The natives accepted Roman symbols as a means of self-preservation and survival under Rome.<sup>8</sup> This adoption or adaptation refers to the process of Romanization. Romanization was part and parcel of the imperial policy of Rome. By Romanization, one has to understand the adoption or renegotiation of the Roman ways of behaving, culture, and religious practices by the native people within the Roman empire. Places, for instance, were named after the names used for the districts at Rome.<sup>9</sup> Caesarea is a port-city built in honor of Rome. Moreover, imperial cult emerged as public festivals, local celebrations, religious feasts, and most importantly, imperial anniversaries. For the people of Palestine, the adoption of such alien religious practices was a divisive force. Herod built a temple containing statues to Augustus in a bid to please his master, Rome. Such figures disregarded the Jewish law. However, as the imperial cult could not formally operate in Palestine, Jewish feasts to affirm loyalty to Rome became essential. This political aspect of religious celebrations rendered annual high holy days occasions of political tension and potential violence.

The constraints of the empire also influenced the socio-economic context of Jewish Palestine. In such a context, “the complex interpenetration of the political economy of market-exchange and ‘a sub-Asiatic’ agrarian” combined to form the

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<sup>8</sup> Ronald Mellor, *The Worship of the Goddess Roma in the Greek World* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Rupert, 1975), 143–180.

<sup>9</sup> W.S. Hanson, “Forces of Change and Methods of Control,” in *Dialogues in Roman Imperialism: Power, Discourse and Discrepant Experience in the Roman Empire*, ed. D.J. Mattingly, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* (Rhode Island: Cushing-Malloy, Inc., 1997), 76–78.

economic landscape of that time. By ‘Asiatic,’ Belo meant “an opposition between the peasant class, organized into village communities (where relations of kinship play an important role in the social organization), and the class-state which directly appropriates the surplus for itself.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, Belo applied the concept of Sub-Asiatic to the Jewish communities as the state, meaning the Romans, Herodians, and priests appropriated the surplus in advance through tribute and controlled exchange of goods. This form of economy favored those with power and status and exploited the rural peasant farmers. The elite-dominated surplus extraction reinforced the cycle of poverty within the rural peasants’ communities.

It is crucial to understand the burden of the peasants’ production. According to Richard Horsley, the peasant had first to grow enough food to feed their families, care for their animals, and have the seeds for the following planting season.<sup>11</sup> Second, they needed to provide a surplus to meet the demands of reciprocity and redistribution.<sup>12</sup> Third, they had to toil to be eligible for the peasant social insurance at the village or community level, obtain the occasional iron utensil, contribute to the local festivities, and make a loan to a neighbor’s need. By peasant social insurance, Carney defined it

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<sup>10</sup> Fernando Belo and Fernando Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1981), 60.

<sup>11</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark’s Gospel*, 1st edition. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 32–34.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas F. Carney, *The Shape of the Past: Models and Antiquity* (Lawrence, Kan: Coronado Press, 1975), 167. Carney defined reciprocity as a clan-based system (for the Jews were rooted in tribal system). Among family members, goods and services were freely given (full reciprocity). Among members of a cadet line within a clan, gifts would be given; but an eye would be kept on the balanced return-flow of counter-gifts (weak reciprocity). Where distant tribal kin were involved, the element of watchful calculation grew greater, the time within which the counter gift would have to be made less (balanced reciprocity). Outside the tribe mutuality ends (negative reciprocity).

as the reciprocal rights one has to call on one's neighbor once they find themselves in difficult or adversity. Fourth, such obligations came as an addition to the rent some peasants had to pay to their landlords. "A Galilean tenant farmer could have up to half his harvest extracted as rent." Finally, according to Oppenheimer, the tithing structure stipulated that (a) a tenth of the harvest is a *terumah* for the priests, (b) a tenth of the remainder, a first tithe to the Levites, and (c) a tenth of the rest - according to the sabbatical cycle - the second tithe to the Levites or the poor man's tithe.<sup>13</sup> These burdens on the peasants' production constituted the principal reason for the peasants' disenfranchisement.

### 2.3. The Subjugated People's Postcolonial Responses

Roman imperialism introduced a new form of culture and ideology in Jewish Palestine. In this section, our consideration will focus on the postcolonial responses of the subjugated Jews in the first century. Holzner contended, "any dominant ideology, especially the one maintained defensively by a group threatened by change or by hostile forces, tends to emphasize collective identities and group boundaries."<sup>14</sup> The threat to the Jewish culture and ideology found its essence in the emergence of a new and influential imperialist culture and ideology. However, as we will see, not all the Jews assembled around a unique collective identity. Depending on their social status, power, or interest, their responses were diverse. Some accommodated and collaborated with the new ideology through legitimating strategies. And there were

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<sup>13</sup> Aharon Oppenheimer, *The 'am Ha-Aretz: A Study in the Social History of the Jewish People in the Hellenistic-Roman Period*, *Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums* 8 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), 23.

<sup>14</sup> Burkart Holzner, *Reality Construction in Society* (New York: Schenkman Pub. Co., 1968), 157.

those who, through subversive strategies, reformed or resisted the imperialist ideology.

As seen above, Rome would enable the aristocracy to keep their power to maintain order in the ranks of the natives. This strategy of allowing limited internal self-determination depended upon the collaboration and accommodation of the native aristocracy. According to Fears, this strategy was “a notably successful attempt to bring a large number of different ethnic groups and their political units under a single government, accomplished largely through a network of personal alliances with the ruling classes throughout the empire.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, collaborating with the native ruling classes satisfied in a certain way patriotic longing of self-independence and at the same time served the interest of the Roman masters. It constituted in some sense a win-win situation as the empire secured cooperation and the natives had at a limited degree a sense of self-determination. Furthermore, it was up to the native ruling class to enforce the imperial ideology to manifest their loyalty to the imperial masters. Hence, collaboration and accommodation to the imperialism guided the ruling classes and their enablers and sympathizers’ *modus operandi*.

However, not all of the elite Jewish classes embraced collaboration and accommodation. There are two groups, namely the Pharisees and Essenes, that used subversive strategies to reform or resist the dominant imperial ideology. The Pharisees’ attitude during this time is hard to discern. A century earlier, they had aligned with the Romans against the Hasmoneans’ abuses. Later, Herod executed

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<sup>15</sup> J. Rufus Fears, “Rome: The Ideology of Imperial Power,” *Thought: Fordham University Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (February 1, 1980): 98–109.

them for subversion. However, Ched Myers argued that Pharisees endeavored to build an alternative political base, challenging the elitist imperialistic agenda. They did not conform to the dominant ideology but somewhat reformed it by extending “the redemptive media of the existing order”.<sup>16</sup> There is little doubt that many took part in the insurrection. On the other side, Essenes’ strategy of renewal refers to an attitude ranking between reformism and escapism. Holzner defined escapism as an attitude by which a group of people resolves its conflict with the dominant order through disengagement.<sup>17</sup> Carlton challenged this attitude as “reflecting no ostensible desire to change the existing social order.”<sup>18</sup> Though perceived as not engaged politically, Essenes challenged both Jewish collaborators and Roman imperialists. But their challenge did not include any real strategy of action against imperialism.

The lower strata endured greed and war without any hope of being compensated. Such a treatment occasioned moments of discontent and insurrection. These strata engaged in what Holzner calls “the alienated/confrontative” stance. “For the Galilean peasantry, the perennial tribute of imperial tribute, the social pressure of the nearby Hellenistic cities, and then the repeated experience of retribution at the hands of Roman legions would have been more than enough to sow deep-seated alienation.” Such a sense of alienation prompted the native peasant to look at their ruling classes not as leaders but as collaborators and landlords. Hence, an antipathy towards collaborators and sympathy toward zealots and insurrectionists. Josephus<sup>19</sup> cites the

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<sup>16</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man* (New York: Orbis, 2008), 83.

<sup>17</sup> Holzner, *Reality Construction in Society*, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Eric Carlton, *Ideology and Social Order*, International library of sociology (Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1977), 35.

<sup>19</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 85–6.

example of Judas of Galilee, who founded a sect in 6 AD. Judas' sect held the obedience to God alone, excluding any allegiance to any gentile ruler. Here, one could understand that this sect did not tolerate Roman rule adherence or its local handlers. They believed that God would help the faithful remnants who resisted Rome and took vengeance on Jews who disobeyed His law by submission.<sup>20</sup> Another instance to exemplify this discontent concerns Jesus and his disciples, who were poor people living at the society's margin. Looking closely at their way of life, one could agree that their allegiance was not with the Roman occupants or their local handlers.

However, once the conquered had recognized that further resistance was futile, they could gradually come to see that assimilation had its rewards and charms.<sup>21</sup> Most of the Jews in Palestine likely embraced a complex attitude toward imperialism as is characteristic of people in such circumstances. In other words, they appeared to have an ambivalent affiliative-disruptive attitude toward the imperialist cultural and religious context. In such a context, the early Christian response to Rome and to Jewish political and religious institutions and discourses of power seemed similar to the ambivalent attitude. This ambivalent attitude will be the object of this research in its fourth chapter when we focus on the person of Jesus.

#### **2.4. Mark as A Story to the History and Empire's History to the Story**

Mark's Gospel is a narrative for and about the common Jew in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine. This discourse reflects the everyday challenges of colonialism, exploitation,

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<sup>20</sup> Brunt, *Roman Imperial Themes*. [Electronic Resource], 283.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.



poverty, diseases, and death. Mark is a story about his history, a history marked by Roman imperialism. For instance, Vespasian led a military campaign in Gadara. While besieging Jerusalem, Vespasian decided to cross the sea to the capital of Peraea, Gadara. According to Josephus, the leading men in Peraea sent an embassy offering to surrender. However, the pro-war factions killed those choosing to surrender. The Roman troops advanced and captured the city. Many of the pro-war faction fled the city. Placidus (at the head of an army of 3000 horsemen and 3000 foot-soldiers) pursued the fugitives. The latter took refuge with other rebels in Bethennabris (a village bordering Jericho). Placidus took the village with much slaughter, pillages and burned it. The remaining fugitives took the way to Jericho. Placidus trapped them against Jordan river (swollen by rain), slaughtering 15,000, capturing 2,200 and many livestock. Many were swept into the river that even the Dead Sea filled with bodies.<sup>22</sup> I choose to account this campaign in length to highlight everyday challenges faced the common Jew in that period. Another reason is that, looking closely to this text, one could see structural similarities with Mark 5:1-20.

Many scholars, among them theologians and historians, approach New Testament narratives depriving them of some critical features, namely their relation to political, social, economic or religious reality of the time. Some theologians look at this discourse without considering the history around it. With regards to historians, Thomas F. Carney argued,

“Antiquity...is an ideologically important era. It is re-mythicized by each generation of ancient historians. The voices that speak to us from the Antiquity are overwhelmingly those of the cultured few: the elites. The contemporary voices

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<sup>22</sup> For more information, see Josephus, 4.7.4-6 419-439.

that carry on their tale are overwhelmingly white, middle-class, European, and North American males. These men can, and do, laud imperialistic, authoritarian slave societies. The scholarship of Antiquity is often removed from the real world, hygienically free of value judgments. Of the value judgments, that is, of the

voiceless masses, the 95% who knew how the other half lived in Antiquity.”<sup>23</sup>

In other words, Mark’s story concerns the livelihood of 95% whose history constitutes no concern for the elite or the spiritualizing theologians. Hence, considering the past embedded in the story opens up the relationship between the empire’s account and Mark’s Gospel.

The comparison between the world of Mark’s story and Mark’s world may give us a proper consideration to the history and the story. Conflicting interpretations result from this comparison. First, there is a school of thought believing that a Jewish author wrote Mark in Rome for a predominantly gentile audience. This school is not, however, the dominant. Second, another school of thought places the redaction of Mark in or near northern Palestine. Following this second school of thought, one could understand that the late second-temple Jewish Palestine under the Roman occupation constitutes both worlds’ locus (of Mark’s Gospel and Mark). This period began with Herod the Great’s death (4 BCE) and ended with the rebels’ defeat and the temple’s destruction by the Roman general Titus in 70 CE. Mark’s Gospel has emerged in such a context where different factions were trying to get support from the Jesus’s movement members. Mark as a story to the history delegitimized the Roman imperialism and the collaboration of the native Jewish aristocracy. However, the empire’s history embedded in the story is worthy of analysis. From such a

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<sup>23</sup> Carney, *The Shape of the Past*, xvi.

perspective, the next chapter will focus on the exegesis of Mark 5:1-20 to discern the postcolonial dynamism contained in it.

## Chapter Three

### Postcolonial Exegesis of Mark 5:1-20

#### Part I: Exegetical Considerations of Mark 5:1-20

##### 3.1.1. The Pericope Under Discussion

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. <sup>2</sup>And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. <sup>3</sup>He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; <sup>4</sup>for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. <sup>5</sup>Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. <sup>6</sup>When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; <sup>7</sup>and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." <sup>8</sup>For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" <sup>9</sup>Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." <sup>10</sup>He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. <sup>11</sup>Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; <sup>12</sup>and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." <sup>13</sup>So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea. <sup>14</sup>The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. <sup>15</sup>They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. <sup>16</sup>Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. <sup>17</sup>Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. <sup>18</sup>As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. <sup>19</sup>But Jesus refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you." <sup>20</sup>And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 5:1-20 (*New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*).

### 3.1.2. Delimitation of the Text

The narrative falls within a chain of four miracles located in close proximity to the sea. The miracle sequence begins when Jesus calmed the stormy sea (4:35-41). The narrative story continues with the healing of the Gerasene demoniac (5:1-20). The two next miracle acts come in an intercalated form, the healing of Jairus' daughter and of the hemorrhaging woman (5:21-43).

4:35-41 Calming of the stormy sea (Nature)

5:1-20 Healing of the Gerasene Demoniac (Spirits)

5:21-24 Jairus approaches Jesus

5:25-34 Healing of the Hemorrhaging Woman (Disease)

5:35-43 Raising of Jairus' Daughter (Death)

Having in mind Mark 4:35-41, on the one hand, Mark 5:1-20 flows naturally from it. In 4:35, Jesus orders the disciples to cross the sea to the other side. Verse 36 tells us how leaving the crowd and the disciples took Jesus in the boat. Mark 5:1 begins when they had reached the other side, "they came to the other side of the sea." The location marker points at the continuity between these two pericopes. On the other hand, Mark 5:18 recounts the disciples and Jesus getting into the boat after the people in Decapolis begged him to leave their area. The next pericope, starting with 5:21, shows how Jesus and the disciples reached the other side. The location markers delimit this pericope as well as connect it to the previous and following passage. Norman Petersen, reflecting on the location markers, argued, "a combination of topographical content and repeated content is an unambiguous key to the formal structure."<sup>2</sup> Thus,

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<sup>2</sup> Norman R. Petersen, "The Composition of Mark 4:1-8:26," *The Harvard theological review* 73, no. 1-2 (April 1, 1980): 185.

Mark 5:1-20 fits with its immediate division of the four miracle stories found in Mark 4:35 – 5:43.

Focusing on the larger Markan Gospel, there are elements that suggest Mark 5:1-20 contribute to the whole Gospel. Kelber agreed with this position by offering a scheme in which the two sides of the Sea of Galilee symbolize Jewish and Gentile territory. The two major boat journeys represent the crossing from one side to the other. Kelber’s scheme was as follows:

<b>Event</b>	<b>Jewish side</b>	<b>Gentile side</b>
Inaugural exorcism	1:21-28	5:1-20
Popular ministry	1:29-39	6:54-56
Symbolic healings	5:22-43	7:24-37
Wilderness Feedings	6:32-44	8:14-21
Non-comprehension of loaves	6:51- ff	8:14-21

In devising this scheme, Kelber justified it by pointing at the use of location markers. Three location markers serve to prove his point. First, Mark used the marker of “*eis to peran*” (to the other side) found in 4:35; 5:1,21; 6:45; 8:13). Second, he used the verb “*ἐμβάινω*” (to embark) to mark the change of the location (4:1; 5:18, 6:45; 8:10, 13). Finally, the verb “*διαπεράω*” (to cross over) served to mark the change of location in this context of the sea (5:21; 6:53). Based on the above scholars’ insights, Mark 5:1-20 is part of the larger context of the Gospel and flows from its preceding and following texts.

### 3.1.3. Structure of Mark 5:1-20

Rudolf Pesch argued that there were three stages in the history of this miracle story. The first stage was the oral telling of the exorcism act, perhaps in Hellenistic-Jewish Christian circles in Galilee. Such an oral story might have been similar or modeled on the one found in Mark 1:21-28. The second stage involved the story's expansion that demonstrated Jesus' victory over the disturbing Gentiles' way of life. The last stage concerned the text's collection and edition. It added vv.18-20 to transform an exorcism story into a narrative of mission to the Gentiles (reflecting the church's situation).<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this research, I elaborate the following structure for Mark 5:1-20:

[A] Introduction: the violence of the empire in the possessed man (5:1-5)

[B] Jesus encountering the man under the influence of the empire (5:6-10)

[C] The healing of the possessed man (5:11-14a)

[B'] Jesus encountering the townspeople (5:14b-17)

[A'] Conclusion: the mercy of the kingdom of God by the healed man (5:18-20)

In other words, the pericope comprises five parts in a concentric form. The first part [A] concerns the description of the empire's violence as manifested in the possessed man. Then, part [B] describes the encountering of Jesus and the demoniac. The third part [C] constitutes the center of the story: the healing of the empire's violence. Next, the fourth part [B'] reveals the encountering of Jesus with the people in Gerasa and its neighborhood. Finally, the last part [A'] reflects the mercy of God's kingdom preached in the gentile territory.

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<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Pesch, *Der Besessene von Gerasa* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1972), 292.

### 3.1.4. Verse by Verse Analysis

#### a) Introduction: Empire's violence in the Possessed Man

v.1. "...*To the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes*" - reflects what is in 4:35 (let us go across to the other side), a continuation of this pericope from the preceding one. However, it contains a disputed locator name "the country of Gerasenes." In Matthew, the word used is "Gadarenes," while Luke uses the term "Gerasenes."<sup>4</sup> Dispute aside, the location of the pericope is in a gentile socio-symbolic space.

v.2. "... *Immediately a man out of the tombs*" – Jewish law strictly forbade physical contact with the deceased (Lev.21:11), tombs were considered places of ritual impurity<sup>5</sup> due to their association with the dead. Rabbinic literature asserted that living in the burial places was a sign of madness, along with running about at night

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<sup>4</sup> This term is disputed as it can refer to two places that are different. Gerasene comes from the place called 'Gerasa' which was a leading city of Decapolis, located thirty-seven miles southeast of the sea. It is consistent with Mark 5:20. Gadara, mentioned in Matthew, was located five miles from the sea. But it has no steep cliffs nearby. What is crucial to notice here is the unfamiliarity with the geographical location by the author (or editor) of this Gospel.

<sup>5</sup> In ancient Palestine, there were two sorts of purity, moral and ritual purity. In biblical texts, the impurity of the Gentiles is not ritual, but moral (with the exception of corpse impurity to which Gentiles are susceptible). However, there are other two kinds of impurity with regards to Gentiles: carnal and genealogical. Genealogical impurity, on the one hand, is an impurity intrinsic to a nation. The idea that Gentiles are intrinsically profane is introduced by Ezra, who conceives of all of Israel as a holy seed. Such a conception prohibits and polemicizes against intermarriage and is intolerant of any conversion. On the other hand, carnal impurity is contagious, and is passed from the flesh of someone profane through bodily contact. From such an understanding, one could grasp better the discrimination and segregation suffered by Gentiles in ancient Palestine. For more information, see Christine Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).



and causing oneself harm.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the triple mention of the tomb (Vv. 2, 3, and 5) might parallel with the narrative of Jesus's struggle with the power of death (15:46, 16:2,5).

"...with an unclean spirit met him." - Instead of "δαιμονιζόμενος" (possessed by a demon), the author uses "ἀκαθάρτῳ πνεύματι" (with an unclean spirit).

v.3. "... No one could restrain him anymore, even with a chain" - With this word "ἄλυσις" (chain), vv.3 and 4 displays a chiastic form.

A: No one could restrain him anymore, even with a chain.

B: For he had often been restrained with shackles and chains;

C: But the chains he wrenched apart,

C': and the shackles broken into pieces.

B': (No one ever dared to restrain him with shackles and chains)

A': And no one had the strength to subdue him.

The center of this chiastic structure points at how much strength the demoniac had.

This mark of power recalls John the Baptist's words, "one mightier..."<sup>7</sup> or the strong man parable.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, his strength was inhuman but also purposeless, enabling him to harm himself.

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<sup>6</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins and Harold W. Attridge, *Mark*, Hermeneia--a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 269.

<sup>7</sup> Mark 1:7

<sup>8</sup> Mark 3:27

v.5. “*Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains...*” - Mountains in the Jewish imaginary were a place of revelation, but also a place of refuge or danger. Mark, in this verse, echoes Isaiah 65: 4 “who sit inside tombs and spend the nights in secret places, who eat swine’s flesh...” The similarity between these two verses points at the fact that living in the tombs and the pigs’ presence reflected a Gentile symbolic place, an impurity-laden environment.

“...*howling and bruising himself with stones*” - These five words denote not only the violence he was capable of inflicting on himself but also others. As above, the analysis shows that he was a stronger man.

The first section (vv.1-5) serves as an introduction to this pericope. It introduces the setting of this exorcism. Mark and Luke placed it in the country of the Gerasenes, while Matthew referred to the country of Gadarenes. Scholars attribute the difference in situating this story’s setting to the orality of Mark’s sources. “The specification must have been made by someone who did not realize how far Gerasa was from the Sea of Galilee.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, the area of Decapolis was not likely the home of the Markan community, for the author (or editor) seemed to be unacquainted with the geographical situation of the Transjordan Region. According to v.14, one could argue that Gerasa stretched to the Sea of Galilee. In reality, Gerasa was situated about 55 kilometers from the Sea; and its territory was separated from the Sea by the territories of two other cities, namely Gadara and Hippos.

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<sup>9</sup> Collins and Attridge, *Mark*, 266.

The journey taken by Jesus and His disciples took them from the Jewish land to Gentiles' land. The allegorical meaning here points to a movement from the familiar to the unknown, perhaps sinister land. Jean Starobinski argued, "it is the other, in its quality not just an opposing side, but an opposing power. Beyond the shore is an anti-shore; beyond the day is an anti-day; the tombs, sojourn of the dead, are anti-life; the devils are rebels."<sup>10</sup> Though, the tombs were natural caves or man-made excavations, often left uncovered, they were the last resort for those ostracized from their community, the dejected of the community. The journey taken by Jesus brought him where people really needed his help and care. "Spaces representing threat to civilization, the typical haunts of demons and other dangers, borderland territories, wilderness and desert, sea and mountains, become the place of refuge and places where epiphanies occur, and kingdom teaching and practice are most effective."<sup>11</sup> Jesus' journeys aimed at putting Him in touch with the dejected, lost, last of his people. And that was what he meant in Mk 1:38 (Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out.)

In Mark, compared to Matthew and Luke, the description made of the possessed man was really extensive. Mark used a language of pain and struggle. Mark described the ferocity and hopelessness of the possessed man's behavior by accumulating details to accentuate the extremity of the case: the man lived in the tombs, strong to bind. The text is very specific to mention that many attempts to put

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<sup>10</sup> Jean Starobinski, "Struggle with Legion: A Literary Analysis of Mark 5:1-20," in *Modern Critical Interpretation* (New York: Bloom, ed., 1989), 43.

<sup>11</sup> S. Barry Crawford and Merrill P. Miller, eds., *Redescribing the Gospel of Mark* (Atlanta, GA.: SBL, 2017), 65.

him in chains failed. The possessed man roamed around day and night, screaming and cutting himself. His dwelling among the tombs signifies that he was socially an outcast because of demonic possession. In other words, such detailed and vivid portrayal of the possessed man aims at showing how the possession degraded the person's humanity. Mark's narrative, inspired by Jesus' life and ministry, chose to include those excluded from social, cultural or political power. The demoniac constitutes one of these cases. Mark 5:1-20 questioned the ritual purity standards and expectations, namely by healing the impure mad person residing in the burial place. And Jesus dismissed the opposition between Jew and Gentiles, by seeking those outside his own ethnic clan. Hence, Jesus' salvific mission took Him to the Gentiles.

#### **b) Jesus Encountering the Man under the Empire's Influence**

v.6. "*He ran and bowed down before him.*" - Προσκυνεῖν (bowing down) was an expression of respect and worship. This gesture constitutes an opening to the conversation that follows in v.7. There is a reversal of situation: the same man who cried out among the tombs and on the mountains, cut himself with stones, and was incapable of being subdued now presented before Jesus in an attitude of submission. Pesch questioned why there are doublets of the demoniac meeting Jesus (vv.2 and 6).

v.7. "*...what do you have to do with me?*" - The conversation began on a tone of tension. Κράζω (to shout out, cry out) is the verb describing how the demoniac addressed Jesus. The question asked here reflects the same question in Mark 1:24. Mark paralleled these two exorcism scenes: Capernaum (Jesus' homeland) and Gerasa (a Gentile community). Moreover, this question proved to be rhetorical as Jesus did

not answer. Finally, looking at this question, one would grasp the New Testament using the Old Testament text of 1 Kings 17:18 (what have you against me, O man of God?)

“...*Jesus, Son of the Most High God.*” - Unclean spirits, in Mark’s Gospel, tended to know who Jesus was (Mark 1:24 and 3:11). This knowledge came in contradistinction to the disciples’ ignorance. They knew that Jesus was the stronger man around. His strength calmed a stormy sea and was capable of tormenting mighty demonic powers. The demons’ reference to Jesus has a gentile flavor. “Son of the Most High God” (unlike ‘the Holy One of God in 1:24) is a Hellenistic title found elsewhere in Hebrew 7:1 and Luke’s writing

“... *I adjure you by God...*” - This juridical phrase used by the possessed man resembles the one used by the exorcist before the healing or exorcising act. In the act of exorcising, the one performing it invokes God in their action to purge any force hostile to God. The demons, while using this phrase, wanted to negotiate with Jesus, not to expulse them. This reversal of role aimed at binding Jesus in his healing act.

“...*do not torment me.*” - Βασανίσης (torment, torture) is a verb often used to describe the eschatological judgment (Matt. 18:34; Luke 16: 23, 28; and Rev. 18:7, 10, 15). In Matthew 8:29, the demoniacs asked Jesus why he came to torment them ‘before the time.’ This ‘before the time’ presupposed a set time, an eschatological time in which demons’ powers would be chained (Rev.20). Here, also, there was a reversal of role. It was not Jesus who tormented; instead, the demons were the ones tormenting this man. Yet, they accused Jesus of persecuting them.

v.8. “*Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!*” - unclean spirits were supernatural beings, most often malevolent towards human beings, often possessing them and influencing their activities in negative and harmful ways.

v.9. “*What is your name?*” - To refer back to v.7, the question asked by Jesus was not rhetorical. It demanded an answer. In some cultures and contexts, the naming of a thing implied power, authority, or control over the thing named by the one conferring the name. In other cases, the act of naming something described an experience about the named thing. In other words, being able to name the demons as Legion conferred on Jesus the right to have authority over them.

“*My name is Legion.*” - ‘Legion’ is a Latin word, designating a basic military unit of 6000 soldiers. Using a Rome appellation in an imperial context, Mark probably wanted to allude in a veiled way to Roman occupation brutality. Then, Jesus would be enacting a symbolic expulsion of the Romans. Paul Winter argued, “after 70 CE, the 10<sup>th</sup> Roman legion, whose emblem was a wild boar, was stationed near Gerasa.”<sup>12</sup> This research will discuss the imagined violence against the oppressor later.

v.10. “*He begged Jesus earnestly...*” - παρακαλεῖν (to beg, entreat) is a verb that signifies a request from an inferior to a superior or a person in need (Mark 1:40, 7:32, and 8:22). The use of such a verb emphasized the prominent position of Jesus; he was

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<sup>12</sup> Paul (Writer on religion) Winter, T. Alec Burkill, and Géza Vermès, *On the Trial of Jesus*, vol. Bd.1., Studia Judaica (Walter de Gruyter & Co.) (New York: De Gruyter, 1974), 64.

stronger than the demonic powers. This mark of superiority transpired in v. 12 when the demons entreated Jesus to let them into the swine.

“...*not to send them out of the country.*” - demons tended to be territorial as described in Luke 11:24-7. Being assigned in a specific location may point to Roman legions located in a particular area to safeguard it.

The second section (vv.6-10) highlights the encounter of Jesus with the possessed man. V. 6 reflects a point of editorial expansion as it recapitulates v.2. The possessed man displayed an act of reverence (bowing down) to Jesus in the same manner that one would to royalty. For a man who lacked control over his action, such act of reverence might point at the demons’ recognition of Jesus. The demoniac called Jesus, Son of the Most High God. This title “Most High God”, in Old Testament, referred to Yahweh, Israel’s God (Deut. 32:8; Dan. 4:17). And in Mark’s Gospel, this title appears uncommonly compared to the title “Son of Man.”<sup>13</sup> Hence, Mark developed the theme of Jesus’ identity by narrating exorcisms and other mighty deeds. Right from the beginning, the demons recognized Jesus as “the Son of God” for they belonged to the supernatural sphere (hence, possessing supernatural knowledge). However, with regards to other characters in the Markan narrative, especially the disciples, they did not know who Jesus was.

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<sup>13</sup> The title of Jesus as “Son of God”, implicitly or explicitly, appears rarely and at the crucial moments. Mark used it in some key moments: (a) baptism (1:11), transfiguration (9:7), and death (15:39). Moreover, demons – supernatural beings – knew who He was (3:11 and 5:7). Once, it was used as an accusation by his opponents (14:61). And once, implicitly, by Jesus himself (13:32).

However, the reverence suddenly turned to resistance in v.7. Resisting, the demons asked a question analogous to one in Mark 1:24. In both of these cases, the unclean spirits attempted to control Jesus by pronouncing his name. Furthermore, the demons' use of "ὀρκίζω" (to make one swear, to bind by an oath) signified their resistance to Jesus and that a struggle was taking place. Moreover, v.8 introduced by "γάρ" (for) demarcates itself as an editorial afterthought. Its purpose is to explain why the demon resisted Jesus in such a manner. Some commentators argued that this verse was a later addition. For Pesch, vv.8-12 were inserted later to answer the questions of that time. These verses reflected the anti-Roman sentiments in the early Christian communities. However, for other commentators, Mark calling the demons 'legion' might simply point to the "Legion X *Fretensis*" that fought in the first Jewish war. This legion had a boar as its symbol, hence the presence of the pigs in the story.

### c) **The Possessed Man's Healing**

v.11. "... *A great herd of swine...*" - The mention of the 'herd' (ἀγέλη) is unusual as swine naturally do not assemble as a herd. Herd often referred to a group of military recruits. Thus, it may suggest a Roman garrison nearby.

v.13. "*Jesus gave them permission...*" - ἐπέτρεψεν αὐτοῖς rendered as 'he gave them permission' could mean also "he dismissed them" (as in military order). Such an order served the function of exorcism command of sending out fulfilling the expectation of v. 8. Considering the military context, the person granting permission is an authority. Does this statement reflected the accusation done before about Jesus being Beelzebul (Mark 3:20-27).



“... *Rushed down the steep bank into the sea and were drowned in the sea.*” - The motif of sea refers us to the previous pericope where Jesus calmed the stormy sea. Sending the demons there proved the point that Jesus was more significant than the demonic powers. However, there is a second powerful reminiscence in the Jewish memory, the drowning of the Pharaoh’s army in the Red sea. Horsley agreed with this position,

This episode thus tells of the people’s liberation from the Roman legions and the destruction of those legions, as it evokes memories of God’s original deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage in the exodus. Symbolically in this episode, as in the first exorcism of Mark’s story, Jesus is in control of, even destroying, the demonic forces that possess the people and establishing God’s rule.<sup>14</sup>

v.14. “*The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and the country.*” - Ἀπήγγειλαν (to spread the news, to announce) is a verb that has an overtone of carrying a message. This reaction from the swineherds introduced the effect of an exorcism act. This action repeated itself in v.16.

The center of our concentric pericope comprises vv. 10-14. These verses highlight the healing of the possessed man. This healing constituted the crux of Jesus’ mission. How did He achieve it? V.10 introduced the image of the demons entreating Jesus to let them remain in the area. However, this image came to contrast the early picture of the powerful and uncontrollable spirits. In the previous section, one wonders whether bowing down before Jesus was the devil’s act or the possessed man’s initiative. To be consistent with what v.4-5 narrated, it was the demons’ act considering the unnatural strength. Yarbrow pointed to this possession saying, “the

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<sup>14</sup> Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, 141.

unclean spirit became the souls of the local dead.”<sup>15</sup> Such a conception of a possessed person points to their dehumanization.<sup>16</sup> Full humanity engages the full control of one’s soul, mind and heart. Hence, Jesus’ mission was to give people’s life, life in abundance (John 10:10).

Jesus’ firm resolve to heal the man turned the resistance seen previously to a capitulating concession. The demons offered their capitulating price: (a) to remain in the area, and (b) to have a body (in the pigs). Jesus’ aim was to drive the demons out of the man. He granted the demon’s request. From there, one saw visible signs of the deliverance, including the pigs rushing down the steep bank and drowning, and the feared herdsmen running to the city. This act of physical violence bore witness to the expulsion act. Jesus’ exorcism gave back humanity to the possessed man. In this sense, I may argue, Jesus’ acts of exorcism prefigured and anticipated God’s victory over the evil.

#### **d) Jesus Encountering the Townspeople**

v.15. “*They came... and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind...*” - This description of the healed man counterbalances the one found in vv. 3-5: then, crying out, but now quietly sitting; then, breaking things apart and bruising

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<sup>15</sup> Collins and Attridge, *Mark*, 270.

<sup>16</sup> The notion of humanization expresses the idea that human persons is not a passive role player, but a coauthor of one’s life drama. In such a way, the human does not blindly adhere to a certain political regime established by specific laws of the empire (or other institution), nor is shaped by unavoidable social, cultural and psychological constructs. In a nutshell, humanization aims at granting total freedom to act without any socio-cultural bonds.

himself, but now clothed and in right mind. These differences signaled that the exorcism was successful.

“*And they were afraid.*” - Ἐφοβήθησαν appears in translation as ‘they were afraid’; however, it reflects the same emotion the disciples had in Mark 4:41 when the disciples witnessed Jesus calming the stormy sea. This feeling was the kind of emotion one felt at the sight of God’s mighty work.

v.17. “*Then, they began to plead with Jesus...*” - παρακαλεῖν is once again used in this pericope. The first time was the demons who used it bargaining with Jesus. Moreover, the same verb appears in v.18. Such repetition of the same verb reveals the power of the one whom this verb addresses: Jesus. And the request they were making has similarity to the one made by the demons: “to leave the area.” There is an issue with the place.

One of the visible signs of the healing was the man “clothed and in his right mind”. The people from Gerasa and the surrounding area came to witness themselves. The herdsmen’s testimony was not enough to convince them. The word “ἵματισμένον” (clothed) points to the fact that the possessed man was naked or had dilapidated clothes. Also, such a detail aimed at reinforcing the fact that the healed man was in right mind.

The sight of the transformation caused fear in the mind of the local people. The encounter with Jesus did not pacify them, rather it was fear. How do we account for this turn of events? First, the Bible is full of people who displayed fear as a

response of God's mighty works. Timothy Dwyer interpreted this fear as "the awe which attends the supernatural."<sup>17</sup> Secondly, ἐφοβήθησαν (they were afraid) reflected the same attitude in v.4 from these local people. Fear seemed to characterize the motives behind every action of these people. As the local people tried to tame the possessed man, here they tried to control or ward off Jesus by asking him to leave. Though stronger than the demons, Jesus complied with the people's request. In Mark, φοβέομαι signifies "fear" related with the presence of the supernatural occurrence (4:40-41; 5:15; 6:49-52; 16:8), but also "cowardice" (5:33, 36; 11:18, 32; 12:12). In both cases, fear is due to lack of faith.

**e) Conclusion: The Proclamation of God's Mercy by the Healed Man**

v.19. "*But Jesus refused*" - Jesus' refusal to the healed man's request to follow Him was characteristic of Jesus' choice of his disciples. Except in 10:52, every other instance corroborates that Jesus took the initiative to call whom He desired (3:13). But the refusal had another purpose: to make the healed an apostle to his own *oikos* (house and community).

"*Go home to your friends...*" - Jesus' answer to the healed man comprised three elements: (a) the restoration of familial bond disrupted by demoniac possession; (b) ἀπάγγελον is again used here for the third time. Once one witness God's mighty work, one becomes the herald of God's merciful deeds; and (c) the use of κύριος (Lord) points at the fact that any act of mercy was generally associated with God.

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<sup>17</sup> Timothy Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 113.

v.20. “*He went and began to proclaim...*” - κηρύσσειν (to proclaim) is a verb that characterizes John the Baptist (1:4,7), Jesus (1:14, 38, 39), the disciples ((3:14, 6:12), people who witnessed the healing power of Jesus (1:45, 5:20, 7:36) and the post-resurrection church (13:10, 14:9).

“*In the Decapolis...*”- This name comes from a Greek compound word meaning ten cities. Decapolis was a confederation of ten Greek cities, namely Damascus, Philadelphia, Raphana, Scythopolis, Gadara, Hippos, Dion, Pella, Gerasa, and Canatha. These ten cities represented the eastern border of the Roman empire, beyond which lay the Arabian steppes. The use of Decapolis as the locus of this exorcism might suggest that the audience of the Gospel included those living in the regions near Palestine. According to Smith G. A., “Herod Antipas had built a major Hellenistic city that became his capital, Tiberias, on the shores of the sea not far from where Mark places this story.”<sup>18</sup> And Jesus’ attitude toward this demoniac encouraged an atmosphere of acceptance in a mixed community. From the accounts in the Acts 6:1-7 and Galatians 2:11-14, one understands that the mixed living among the Jews and the Gentiles was not always easy. Thus, a pericope - like Mark 5:1-20 showing Jesus healing a Gentile man – disrupted the ethnic-based barriers and oppositions. In such a way, the humanizing mission does not end with one’s own tribe or clan, it has to be all-inclusive.

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<sup>18</sup> George Adam Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, (London: Harper & Row, 1966), 289.

This last section (vv.18-20) opened up to a new sort of discipleship. Jesus refused the healed man's request and sent him back to his own house and family. The healed man's request was in line with Jesus' appointment of the twelve in 3:13-19. The importance of the symbolic association of the twelve disciples to the twelve tribes weighed in to justify Jesus' refusal. Moreover, Jesus had another mission for him. This man had to report to his family and friends all that the Lord in His mercy has done for him (v.19). V.20 reflected the Gerasene man's twist to the mission, as he started preaching the message concerning Jesus.<sup>19</sup> The following paragraph shows that the lack of the messianic secret occasioned this man's twist to the Jesus' commission.

Jesus in this section did not impose the healed man "the messianic secret". This secret was a prohibition to tell anyone about the healings or exorcisms Jesus performed. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus urged people not to tell others: exorcisms (demons ordered to silence 1:23, 34; 3:11-14), leper (1:43-45), Jairus' daughter (5:43), deaf man (7:36), blind man (8:26). The messianic secret extended to his disciples (8:30; 9:9). However, in Mark 5:1-20, Jesus did not prohibit the healed man, rather He ordered him to go and proclaim God's mercy to his own people. Moreover, this instance was not unique. A command to silence is lacking after the miraculous healings in Mk 1:23-28, 29-31; 2:1-12; 3:1-6; 5:25-34; 7:24-30; 9:14-27; 10:46-52. Hence, coming back to the healed man, twisting the message did not go against Jesus' mission to go and proclaim among his Gentile brothers and sisters.

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<sup>19</sup> There is a pattern of people disobeying Jesus' instruction. Mark 1:44-45 narrates the story of the leper who disobeyed the secrecy command. In Mark 7:36-37, the healed deaf man and those who were with him disobeyed Jesus' intimation to secrecy.

### 3.1.5. Elements of Textual Criticism

#### A. Examination of Imperatives and Their Function

This pericope contains six instances of commands. Examining who used them, we arrive at a thorough understanding of this text. These commands occurred as follows:

5:7, do not torment me.

5:8 Come out of the man, you unclean spirit

5:10 not to send out of the country

5:12 Send us into the swine; let us enter them

5:19a Go home to your friends

5:19b and tell them what mercy he has shown you

The text looked from the perspective of the commands given offers the following insights. The demons accused Jesus of tormenting them (v.7). “μή βασανίσης με” used in Greek manuscript is not in the imperative mood, rather subjunctive mood. The use of subjunctive in this case may convey an idea of desire or expectation. In other words, Jesus does not torment, but heals and frees from torment and possession (as seen in v. 19b). Jesus’ mission aimed consistently at liberating those oppressed or possessed by the powers (1:21-28; 29-34; 40-45; 2:1-12; 3:1-6). He wanted the unclean spirits to come out of this man (v.8) to return to his family and friends (v.19a). However, at the center, demons were entreating Jesus not to let them out of the country. In all, Jesus appeared to be the stronger man (1:7; 27; 3:19b-29). He frees the man from the possession of the demons (v.13). Once recovered the right mind, the healed man returned back to his own family and friends. The possession by the

demons ostracized him from his social environment. Aware of the importance of belonging to a community, Africans insist on the philosophy “Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (A person is truly a person through one’s relationship to other people). Hence, Jesus’ act of exorcizing this man denoted not only a healing act but also giving the man back his humanity.

### *B. Use Of Παρακαλεῖν and its Role*

In the whole passage, Mark used the verb ‘παρακαλεῖν’ (to beg) three times. First, v.10, ‘he begged Him not to send them out of the country’ makes use of παρακαλεῖν. In the context of imperialism, the legion represented the military power of Rome. Such an act of exorcism suggested a cleansing of Roman occupancy, thus a rebellious action against the Romans. This defiant act would justify the second instance of παρακαλεῖν in v.17. The people in the city and the country begged Jesus to leave their neighborhood. "It is not surprising that there would be worried opposition to such an expulsion from the residents of Decapolis, given the concrete experience of the Roman scorched-earth campaign of reconquest."<sup>20</sup> In other words, the residents of Gerasa and the neighboring countryside feared the reprisal campaign and urged Jesus to go. Finally, the last instance of παρακαλεῖν in this passage was about the healed man. In v.19, the healed man begged Jesus to follow Him. However, Jesus declining the man’s request sent him back to his own to preach the liberation at hand. Hence, παρακαλεῖν served also to point where the real strength resided. It reinforced the alternative narrative that Jesus is the Son of God, worthy to be followed. This healing act emphasized the alternative power of Jesus as the true Son of God.

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<sup>20</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 192.



### 3.1.6. Cultural Aspects of Mark 5:1-20

Mark 5:1-20 exhibits many clues for consideration in social-science criticism. First, the treatment of a person presenting deviant behavior constitutes a ground for analysis. In Palestine, people showing deviance or powers considered abnormal constituted a potential or actual threat to the community. The community often ostracized them to maintain equilibrium. Demon-possession was one of the kinds. The diagnosis of demon possession followed four customary test criteria. These criteria are: “(1) spending the night in a tomb; (2) tearing one’s clothes; (3) walking around at night; and (4) destroying things received from others.”<sup>21</sup> For the people in Palestine, there was little doubt that the man in Mark 5:1-20 was under demonic possession. Hence, the possessed man got ostracized and lived in a tomb place.

Jesus joined the ostracized man in the tombs of social discrimination. “But who was Jesus to defy social structures and to restore the man’s humanity?” The title “Son of the Most High God,” in social-science criticism, bore on the concept of genealogy. “Genealogies serve a wide range of social functions: preserving tribal homogeneity or cohesion, interrelating diverse traditions, acknowledging marriage contracts between extended families, maintaining ethnic identities, and encoding key social information about a person.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, using the “Son of God” to designate Jesus legitimized Jesus’ ministry. In a society of shame and honor, tradition assumes that everyone acted according to one’s public recognized honor. A son of a rural Galilean carpenter would not have taken a leading role in his time when there

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<sup>21</sup> Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2003), 165.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

were highborn people around. Born from a village family, Jesus' legitimacy as a public figure would be in jeopardy. Hence, the title "Son of God" legitimized him in his social context.

Moreover, an exciting aspect is the verb describing the encounter between Jesus and the possessed man. *Προσεκύνησεν* (he bowed down) is a verb used. In Palestine, the patronage system required a servant to bow down before the master. "Throwing oneself before the feet of the patron was a typical gesture by which a client sought favors."<sup>23</sup> Such a realization triggered the questions, "Who bowed down before Jesus? Was it the possessed man or the demons?" From such a perspective, two options offered themselves to us. First, it could be the man who sought Jesus' assistance for healing. Second, if the demons were the ones who threw themselves at Jesus' feet, such a gesture would mean the recognition of a superior. "If the prostration is the action of the demon, then he thereby recognizes that the holy man, Jesus, is higher in the cosmic hierarchy than demons such as himself."<sup>24</sup> This action proves to be that of the demons, as shown in v.7.

From the social-science criticism, another element worthy of our attention is the relationship between Jesus and the healed man. Drawing from his time's patronage system, the healed man found himself indebted to Jesus, who restored him to social life. Such a debt extended not only to the man's family but also to his community. In a bid to pay his debt, he wanted to stay with Jesus (5:18). "Jesus directed his attention to the proper place where honor is due: God, the mercy-giving

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<sup>23</sup> Bruce, *Social-Science Commentary*, 165.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

Patron.”<sup>25</sup> It is essential to notice how the man did not take heed of Jesus’ words and started giving honor to Jesus (v.20) – instead of God. From such a realization, Jesus – Son of God to whom demons bowed down – was the Word sent to restore broken social bond for those ostracized by the imperial, cultural or religious institutions. In the following section, I look at the imperialism as a context, a subtext and a pretext.

### **3.1.7. Imperialism as Context, Subtext and Pretext**

Postcolonial criticism unveils the historical and sociological conditions of colonialism/imperialism. At that time of Jesus, no one would have missed the allusion to the Roman legions in Mark 5:1-20. Such an allusion revealed Mark’s community disposition toward Roman imperialism. Moreover, “it may also imply local sentiments hostile to the intrusion of Hellenistic culture into the region and the demonic influence of Hellenism, driven by Rome.”<sup>26</sup> Analyzing Mark 5:1-20 through the sociological lenses will open the text under three headings: imperialism as a context, as a subtext and as a pretext.

#### **(a) Context:**

The first heading concerns the context. By context, one understands the historical context of Roman imperialism. Mark 5:1-20 as context helps us to understand the reality of empire and imperialism in ancient Palestine. Looking at the text’s background, I contend that the use of specific words, such as “legion, herd, dispatch, and charge,” pointed to the empire’s subjugation of Palestine and the surrounding area. Here, it becomes crucial to highlight that the context is closely linked to history.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce, *Social-Science Commentary*, 166.

If the Vespasian's campaign in Gadara serves as the Markan passage background, how can we appreciate this text?

Vespasian led a military campaign in Gadara. While besieging Jerusalem, Vespasian decided to cross the sea to the capital of Peraea, Gadara. According to Josephus, the leading men in Peraea sent an embassy offering to surrender. However, the pro-war factions killed those choosing to surrender. The Roman troops advanced and captured the city. Many of the pro-war faction fled the city. Placidus (at the head of an army of 3000 horsemen and 3000 foot-soldiers) pursued the fugitives. The latter took refuge with other rebels in Bethennabris (a village bordering Jericho). Placidus took the village with much slaughter, pillages and burned it. The remaining fugitives fled to Jericho. Placidus trapped them against Jordan river (swollen by rain), slaughtering 15,000, capturing 2,200 and many livestock. Many were swept into the river that even the Dead Sea filled with bodies.

Ignoring Vespasian's campaign as the context of Mark 5:1-20 would let many elements go unnoticed. Here are three instances. First, the various attempts to put the man in the shackles and chains referred to the many revolt attempts. Such attempts, as the texts narrated it, failed as the imperial soldiers were many and strong. Second, the slaughtering and enslaving that ensued from revolt attempts justified the local people's fear. Pleading Jesus to leave their area was not out of cowardice but out of lived experience in the past. Third, Mark reversed the result-end of the situation that occurred in the region. Instead of having the local people perishing, he imaginatively narrated the end of Rome's subjugation as soon as Jesus appeared on the scene.

Hence, critiquing this text from its imperial context enables us to get a deeper understanding.

**(b) Subtext**

In Mark 5:1-20, one looks at the subtext to understand the forms of the empire and imperialism. In other words, imperialism as a subtext allows us to grasp the changing forms of imperial belief and behavior in this text. It is in this way that subtext is tied to culture. Sociologically, culture is a dialectical reality. It is first a human product (externalization) that becomes a reality *sui generis* (objectification); and this reality becomes part of us, and we become cultural products through internalization. To substantiate this relation between imperialism as a subtext and culture, one needs to focus on the local people's reaction after witnessing the healing act. It was not joy, rather fear. Local people had internalized the imperial culture of reprisal and violence to the point that anything against the empire inspired fear.

To understand this fear, one ought to look at the cycle of socialization.<sup>27</sup> Most of the people in Gerasa (or Gadara) found themselves in a world with the mechanism of oppression in place. With no choice, no consciousness, no blame nor guilt, they inherited a history of biases, stereotypes, prejudices, and oppressions. Socialization began with the people they loved and trusted. Such a process of socialization taught them to play their roles and to follow the rules. It shaped their self-concept and self-perception, as well as how they perceived others. Moreover, cultural institutions reinforced that socialization process. And a system of rewards and punishment kept

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<sup>27</sup> Bobbie Harro, *The Cycle of Socialization* (2008) Accessed March 31, 2021 <https://depts.washington.edu/geograph/diversity/HarroCofS.pdf>

them playing by the rules. Those who stayed in line lived in peace with the empire, while the rebels got punished, persecuted, stigmatized, or ostracized. Hence, such a socialization process' result – for those without power, at the margin of the empire – is negative; it ended in dissonance, silence, stress, hate, anger, and self-destructive behaviors.

Reading imperialism as subtext unlocks Mark 5:1-20 to a deeper level. The Gerasene man was born in such an environment of subjugation. He might have witnessed the slaughtering of those who rebelled against the empire. Slaughtering was a punishment mechanism for the people to remain in line. Such an atmosphere of brutality and violence begot his frustration, fear, and confusion. However, he needed to remain in line so that he could live. Such a level of repression pushed him on edge, and he became either mad or confused to the point of threatening the community's balance. Either way, he got ostracized by his family and community. The victimization by discrimination was the price to pay for having lived in that oppressive environment created by Roman imperialism.

### **(c) Pretext**

Finally, imperialism comes as a pretext in that one grasps its function in the text. Imperialism, viewed as a pretext, increases our understanding of imperial justification. In other words, the emphasis on justification points to the way empire functioned to ensure legitimacy through imperial culture and ideology. Following the socialization process' exposition, the imperial culture's proponents grounded their arguments in the promises of *Pax Romana*. According to Tite L. Philip, *Pax Romana* was “a power of pacification of foreign nations in order to enable concord and

harmony to continue at home.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, I contend that the Roman empire established and maintained peace through the threat or exercise of violence.

In this section, I want to explore the relationship between imperialism understood as a pretext and the analysis of Mark 5:1-20. The imperial justification of peace and harmony constituted the background justification of the local people’s response to Jesus’ act of exorcizing. The ideological peace and stability preached through *Pax Romana*, sustained by the conceptual violence, demanded the local people to behave and remain in line. Having internalized *Pax Romana*, the local people pleaded with Jesus to leave their area. In order to make sense of the local people’s treatment of Jesus, I appeal to Louis Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). “Ideological discourses produced by ISAs act on individual subjects in such a way that they see themselves and others as standing within the dominant ideology, subject to it, and willing supportive – consciously or unconsciously – of the replication of this ruling power.”<sup>29</sup> Hence, the power of ideological justification shed light on the Gerasenes’ unhospitable treatment given to Jesus.

In *Discipline and Punishment*, Michel Foucault spoke of this attitude. To explain it, Foucault coined the concept “Panopticism.” By Panopticism, he explained

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<sup>28</sup> Tite L. Philil, *Conceiving Peace and Violence. A New Testament Legacy*. (Lanham: University of America Press, 2004), 6–16. For him, *Pax Romana* displayed six elements reflected in the New Testament: (a) end to conflict (See Rom 11:1-12; Heb 12:14), (b) the insider-outsider concept, with its focus on unity among insiders and harmony with outsiders (1 Pet. 1:6-8), (c) submissiveness to power (Acts 5:1-11), (d) *imperium* (2 Th 1:7-8), (e) taxes or financial support (Mk 12:13-17; 2 Cor 8-9; 1 Cor 15:58), and (f) the personification and worship of Pax (Rom 1:7b).

<sup>29</sup> William E. Deal and Timothy K. Beal, *Theory for Religious Studies* (London: Routledge, 2004), 29.

how institutions utilize power and knowledge to establish control. The institutions do so to create docile bodies. And they use two components: (a) observe and record the subjects' behavior, and (b) ensure that the subjects internalize the disciplinary gaze. Such internalization of disciplinary gaze renders the oppressed people docile and self-censored. Once again, the local people's reaction to Jesus exemplified the internalization of the disciplinary gaze. The empire was able to observe, record, and instill normative behavior among the people at the margin. The fear of potential reprisals was enough in the local people's minds to behave according to the Romans' expectations. "Imperial power cannot gain the affections of a people, only their fear."<sup>30</sup> Hence, individuals acted obediently insofar as there was a real punishment for dissent.

### **3.1.8. *Thingification* Process and The Gerasene People**

In order to understand the subjugated people's docility, I invited anthropology in the discussion. The discussion of imperialism as a context, subtext, and pretext highlighted aspects of Palestinian society and culture's evolution under Roman imperialism. Anthropological reading of this biblical passage enables us to look at the people in Palestine through time and space in relation to the imperial environment and social relations. Edward Said rightly pointed out how imperial anthropology occupied a discursive and practical space defined by the West/East, colonizer/colonized binary. Such a binary system otherizes the oppressed person. In ancient Palestine, the process of otherization renders the oppressed person into an object of the disciplinary gaze.

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<sup>30</sup> Adam Winn, *An Introduction to Empire in the New Testament* (Atlanta, GA.: SBL, 2016), 115.



Tsenay Serequeberhan defined this otherization process in the terms, “so far as they are colonized and remain so, they are nothing more than a *thingified* biological organism.”<sup>31</sup>

For Aimé Césaire, *thingification* denotes the way colonialism/imperialism – as an institution and its systems of knowledge – destroyed the otherized subject’s subjectivity and agency.<sup>32</sup> The concept of thingification is pertinent to the discussion of Mark 5:1-20. As seen in the previous debate, people in Palestine and its surroundings should be docile through an imperial socialization process. They had to sacrifice their subjectivity and agency at the altar of *Pax Romana*. Such a context expected passivity, non-participation, and lack of autonomy from these people. Hence, there is a need for a postcolonial anthropological solution. In postcolonial anthropology, the third space comes an arbitrating space between the desires of empire (to control) and the defense of the *thingified* subjects’ voices, autonomy, and participation.

Mark 5:1-20 from the imperial context depict *thingified* subjects in the Gerasene people. Particularly, the demoniac man displayed the worst aspect of the thingification process. He lost subjectivity and agency in the empire’s eyes and his community’s conception in his state. Talking about the colonial subject’s thingification in the Roman empire amounts to uncovering how they became a tool

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<sup>31</sup> Tsenay Serequeberhan, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse* (London: Routledge, 1994), 72.

<sup>32</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (London: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 42.

used by the empire to further economic, military, and religious domination. The local people were no longer an end in themselves; instead, they became a means towards imperial interests. Of course, Althusser's ISAs used their influence to portray the thingification process as geared toward the local people's improvement. However, one can problematize this process and ask who this system was benefitting. For sure, those benefitting the imperial system were those at the center and the handlers of the empire. The thingification process was in no way beneficial for the common person living at the margin of the empire, devoid of freedom and autonomy or suffering from taxes burned, Hence, I postulate that a postcolonial anthropological reading of Mark 5:1-20 is necessary to grasp the thingification process and its effect on the local people.

### **3.1.9. Jesus' Identity and the Contextual Analysis of Mark 5:1-20**

Having explored the features of imperialism as a context, subtext and pretext, I embark on elaborating Jesus' identity in the context of colonial Palestine. The 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine was a historical context of resistance and conflict between the Jews and the Romans. It was a context marked by defiance, confrontation, and righteous resistance. According to Marcus Borg, "conflict was endemic in the first-century Palestine."<sup>33</sup> Under the Roman occupation, Jews had traumatic experiences. This experience marked Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus came from a colonized and oppressed people as a result of Roman subjugation. Such experience was the same for the neighboring cities, namely the gentile cities and village around Galilee. In Mark

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<sup>33</sup> Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (New York: Edwin Meller, 1984), 41.

5:1-20, there were traces of the Roman occupation. And the most apparent trace was the possession of the gentile man by legion. Gerd Theissen said, “the allusion to the Roman occupation is unmistakable. The hostility towards the Roman occupiers is made clear when demons clearly express their wish to be allowed to remain in the country (5:10).”<sup>34</sup> Hence, Mark 5:1-20 depicted the Roman occupation as a moment of conflict and contention.

In the text under consideration, the evil was presented in terms of the “foreignness” or “gentileness”. This presentation corresponds to the traditional conception of the non-Jewish as “unclean.”<sup>35</sup> Mark 5:9 and 15 indicates that Jesus indeed recognized the nexus between the evil possessing the demoniac and the Roman subjugation of the land. Theissen added, “the presence of a foreign political power was always the presence of a threatening numinous, a pollution of the land. Roman rule could thus be interpreted as a threat from a demonic power.”<sup>36</sup> Though the demonic power proved to be stronger than anyone in the neighborhood, its “foreignness” and impurity did not constitute a stumbling block for Jesus in His mission. Crossing ‘to the other side’ (5:1) pointed at Jesus’ desire to engage the other. In this context, Jesus illustrated his firm engagement with those oppressed by the Roman occupation. He challenged the occupation, in other words the whole concept of *Pax Romana*. Jesus noticed the colonized’s exploitation. And this exploitation hurt the common

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<sup>34</sup> Gerd Theissen and Margaret Kohl, *Social Reality and the Early Christians: Theology, Ethics, and the World of the New Testament*, First American edition. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 45.

<sup>35</sup> Deut. 7:1-6; Ezra 9

<sup>36</sup> Theissen and Kohl, *Social Reality and the Early Christians*, 46.

people and dehumanized them. This constitutes the reason why the possessed man remained unnamed, even after the healing. The fact of being unnamed denotes the shared character of this man's situation. Foreign-ness, be it in Romans or Gentiles, could not hinder Jesus from restoring humanity to those at the margin excluded at the margin.

More important in the analysis of this pericope is the relationship insider/outsider. With this relationship insider/outsider, one has to understand the relationship between Jews and gentiles. Though, in the Jews' cultural understanding, salvation was the privilege reserved only to God's elected people, Jesus recognized such frontier separating and oppressing the gentiles. Jesus subversively included the gentiles in the history of salvation. Such inclusion utterly disrupted loyalty boundaries. In coming to the rescue of a gentile suffering from the possession, Jesus took God's salvation beyond the boundaries of Palestine. Such healing act manifested great compassion to the desperate gentile character. Jesus' first visit in the Gentile territory brought him face to face with a self-destructive, powerful and demon-possessed man. As Jesus broke the boundaries between Jews and Gentiles, the possessed man – a gentile – declared who was Jesus, the Son of God. This boundary breaking recalls us of the third space in which Jesus and the possessed man met and forged a new identity and history in the face of the empire. The message of mercy (message of God's kingdom) replaced the might-is-right (message of the empire).

The reader has a privileged vantage point in understanding who was Jesus at that time. The confession of the demoniac did not come as a surprise for the reader. From the beginning, Mark demonstrated to the reader that Jesus is the Son of God

(1:1). Next, Mark 1:1-13 introduced the heavenly voice calling Jesus the Son. Then, all the mighty healing and exorcising acts pointed at the exceptional nature of Jesus. With this sense of Jesus as the mighty Son of God, the reader understands that Mark's Jesus negotiated and struggled with the oppressive structures. Jesus' struggles created new meanings and histories for those He encountered and delivered from these oppressive structures. Mark's Jesus in this pericope reflected a resistance to the oppressive forces and a desire for social justice. In other words, as we will discover it in the following section, Jesus joining us where the empire oppresses us frees and transforms whoever meets Him with a desire to be healed. Hence, Jesus came out as a transformative resistant. By not letting the empire dictate his life and mission, Jesus embarked on liberating others. However, this liberating mission occurred in a context of violence, violence initiated by the Roman occupation and at the same time required for healing.

## **Part II: Postcolonial Considerations of Mark 5:1-20**

### **3.2.1. Joining Us Living in The Tombs: Healing Violence**

In 1<sup>st</sup>-century Palestine, the military presence was the most visible face of Rome's power for local Jews.<sup>37</sup> And in the unveiling of the drama seen in Mark 5:1-20, the demoniac was under the control of the "Legion." According to Frantz Fanon, the imperialist context caused violence upon the subjugated people. Fanon argued that violence was not always physical. It manifested also as cultural discrimination or outward dehumanization of the native subjects.<sup>38</sup> This violence proved to be

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<sup>37</sup> The Centurion in Capernaum (Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10); Soldiers mocking, torturing and crucifying Jesus (Mark 15:16-20); At the Calvary, another centurion (Matt 27:54; Mark 15:39); Cornelius, a centurion (Acts 10 and 11).

pathogenic by causing anxiety, depression, or madness to these people. Paul Hollenbach agreed with this position. He contended, “demon possession in traditional societies is often a reflection of class antagonisms rooted in the economic exploitation or a socially acceptable form of oblique protest against, or escape from, oppression.”<sup>39</sup> He later explained how the tension between the possessed man’s hatred for his oppressors and the necessity to repress his hatred to avoid undesirable reprisals rendered him mad. Madness, hence, comes as a manifestation of the empire’s violence upon the subjugated people. In this pericope, madness manifested as demon possession. V.5 says it so well, “night and day, among the tombs and the mountains, he was always howling and bruising himself with stones.” These self-destructive behaviors point at the violence of madness.

In Critical Race theory, scholars established the relationship between mental illnesses and racism.<sup>40</sup> The researcher uses the word ‘racism’ to denote any system that oppresses and mistreats people on the basis of their race. Racism, like imperialism, establishes boundary between people, segregating those deemed of the

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<sup>38</sup> According to René Girard, two individuals desiring the same object attempt to obtain it, and such an attempt becomes conflictual since there is one object and two people desiring it. Violence, in this case, is generated by this process; or rather, it is this process itself when two or more partners try to prevent one another from appropriating the object they all desire through physical or other means.

<sup>39</sup> Paul W. Hollenbach, “Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities: A Socio-Historical Study,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 49, no. 4 (1981): 573.

<sup>40</sup> Cheryl Temple Herr, “The Color of Schizophrenia,” in *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire*, ed. Alfred J. Lopez (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 138. Cheryl Herr argued, “because it is a systematic negation of other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates into madness.”

lower or lesser origin. Racism and mental health become connected in many ways. In many societies, black, indigenous or people of color are victims of prejudice, systemic discrimination, microaggressions, and physical acts of violence due to the color of their skin. Such acts of violence cause stress, but also long-term mental health issues that become more severe with each experience. In an immediate situation of racism, victims display fight or flight responses. One could arguably assert that the encounter between Jesus and the demoniac presented such a fight response. As Jesus approached, the demoniac's aggressiveness could be symptomatic of such a traumatic experience. Over time, racism cumulative effects might be chronic stress, heightened stress response, poor mental and physical issues. The demoniac might have suffered these issues, as vv.3-5 presented him as someone who had self-destructive behavior, cried out among the tombs and mountains, and might be harmful to others.

In the imperial oppressive context, the possessed man's condition might point out to an individual deficiency but also a communal predicament. For the moment, the focus will be on the communal predicament. Jesus' healing act brought to light the repression and alienation of the local people. Being part of a marginalized group can of itself be the source of mental issues. Witnessing oppression and discrimination of the people from one's community can cause vicarious trauma and even symptoms associated to mental stress disorder. Hollenbach spoke of this situation in the following terms: "He (the possessed man) retreated to an inner world where he could resist symbolically Roman domination... Jesus' disruption of the prevailing accommodation brought the man's and the neighborhood's hatred of the Romans out into the open, where the result could be a disaster for the community."<sup>41</sup> In other

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<sup>41</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities," 573.

words, the demoniac appeared to be a representative of collective anxiety over Roman imperialism.<sup>42</sup> Fanon referred to this situation as the “colonization of the mind.” The dehumanization from imperialism displays a communal character. The people from the neighborhood manifested the collective affect of imperialism in how they reacted to the exorcism operated by Jesus (vv.15-17). Jesus, in some sense, did not heal only the possessed man but addressed a communal ailment characterized by alienation and fear.

Exorcism of demonic possession becomes a symbolic act in the context of such oppression. And here, A symbolic act signifying the struggle is between Jesus and the Roman empire. This struggle aimed at liberating those who feel unhomed because they are caught under two cultures. Performing a symbolic act, Jesus has entered a symbolic space recognized as being under the Roman empire. This symbolic space was haunted by a mad man, an ostracized man. Such a space was unhomely for this man. The burial space was not a home for any living person; yet, for this man - through an oblique protest – this space became a safe hub against the reprisals of the empire. To problematize the situation, I argue that the tombs became home, as his home became unhomely. Homi Bhabha argued that to be unhomed is to feel not at home even in one’s own home because one is not at home in oneself; one’s cultural identity crisis has made one a psychological refugee. Hence, the empire’s violence rendered subjugated people unhomed, even in their own home and community.

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<sup>42</sup> I want to highlight that the collective anxiety is a good reflection of Mark’s Gospel redaction period. The writing of this Gospel is considered to have been completed sometimes shortly after the Temple’s destruction. A type of guerilla warfare between the Romans and the Jews went on for a period of time. The destruction of “Legion” somehow spoke to the anxiety of the people about what was going on at that time.



### 3.2.2. Violence of Healing: Negotiation and Rejection

The empire's violence unveiled the symbolic reproduction of social conflict. As seen above, the unhomeliness brought about by the empire gets replicated in the ostracization of the possessed man. Howard Kee argued, "the details presented are not concerned with the specifics of the cure, but with the manifestation of the struggle."<sup>43</sup> This struggle evoked the violence brought about by the empire. In oppressive societies, "the violence that maintains and characterizes the ruling structure cultivates and necessitates violence among its citizens."<sup>44</sup> Moreover, as hegemony pervades all social systems, "the paths that seem to exit from (violence's) madness so often lead deeper into its maze."<sup>45</sup> The replication of violence found its way down among the low class of the population. However, "exorcism represents an act of confrontation in this struggle in which Jesus asserts his alternative authority."<sup>46</sup>

For a long time, the Christian conception of Jesus usually portrays Him as an apolitical God-oriented movement, basically as a foil for the zealots. However, such an image differs from what the biblical texts reveal. Jesus' mission unveils him to be

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<sup>43</sup> Howard Clark Kee, "The Terminology of Mark's Exorcism Stories," *New Testament Studies* 14, no. 2 (January 1968): 238.

<sup>44</sup> Gina Hens-Piazza, *Nameless, Blameless, and Without Shame: Two Cannibal Mothers Before a King* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 89.

<sup>45</sup> Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 90. Quoted by Gina Hens-Piazza, in her *Nameless, Blameless and Without Shame*, argued that the structural similarity between the violence [people loathe] and the violence [people display], 99.

<sup>46</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 143.

in constant conflict with the ruling elites by proclaiming God's revolutionary kingdom. In studying the healing of violence, the violence of healing becomes the evident other side of the same coin. Gabriel Andrade argued, "the problem of violence is frequently solved with a lesser dose of violence."<sup>47</sup> By the violence of healing, one should understand that the healing process disrupts the status quo.<sup>48</sup> In this section, the disruption came in two ways. First, the Jews and other subjugated people negotiated their place in the imperial context. In negotiating their place and identities, they redefined their relationship to and involvement in the imperial world. Hence, the study of subjugated's hybridity would account for this first aspect of disruption. Second, the disruption occasioned the rejection of the hybridized subjectivities. This rejection is present in the pericope under study. Also, it is a thread that would characterize the relationship of the empire toward the hybrid subjugated people.

### 3.2.2.1. *Negotiation with the Empire*

The Roman imperial system pervaded everything. Michael Haidt and Antonio Negri argued that the empire is not a system in which tribute flows from peripheries to great capital cities, but it refers to a more Foucauldian figure – a diffuse,

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<sup>47</sup> "Girard, Rene | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy," n.d., accessed April 22, 2021, <https://iep.utm.edu/girard/>. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory, Continuum impacts (New York: Continuum, 2005), 155. When mimetic rivalries accumulate, tensions grow even greater. However, the tension reaching its paroxysm and the violence at the point of threatening the very existence of the community, René argues, a psychosocial mechanism arises frequently: communal violence is all of the sudden projected upon a single individual.

<sup>48</sup> Frantz Fanon, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Constance Farrington, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1st Black Cat ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 94. Frantz Fanon argues that, "violence frees the native from their inferiority complex and from their despair and inaction. It makes them fearless and restores their self-respect."

anonymous network of all-englobing power. In order to understand the all-pervasiveness of the empire, I demonstrate two aspects of its nature. First, the empire was legionary. A legionary empire coerced people to do its bidding through its military prowess. Such a coercive exercise of power was characteristic of Roman legions' presence in many parts of the empire to ascertain the local population's allegiance. Such a presence had two purpose: (a) the administration of local people, and (b) the dissuasion of any rebellion. Second, the empire was an agricultural one. In this way, it located its wealth and power in the land and farming resources. For instance, fishing industry and fishermen were deeply embedded in the Roman imperial system. The emperor was sovereign over the sea and the land - sovereignty expressed in fishing contracts and taxes on the catch. In other words, the local elites supported by the empire controlled the primary resources of land, labor, and production. They lived off the back of the peasants at the margin of the society.

“One of the most important contributions of the postcolonial perspective is to complicate notions of authority, to see authority not as a force imposed on passive subordinates but rather as a dynamic process constantly being negotiated in all social spheres.”<sup>49</sup> Understanding power in a dynamic process led me to question how the 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine negotiated with the empire. The local peasants at the margin learned how to negotiate their role and place in the imperial cosmos. “Since the non-elite comprised about 97 percent of the population, it is not surprising that most early Christians belonged to this group.”<sup>50</sup> Facing everyday forms of domination and

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<sup>49</sup> Beth A. Berkowitz, *Execution and Invention: Death Penalty in Early Rabbinic and Christian Cultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 10.

exploitation, the population at the margin had to face power through resistance. Resistance was the first way to negotiate, and it needed not be violent. “The absence of violent revolt, however, does not mean the absence of protest. Sometimes protests took more public forms such as pilfering elite property, evading taxes, working slowly, refusing to work at all, or attacking a symbol of domination.”<sup>51</sup> Peasants’ protests provoked retaliation from the elite. Hence, protests and resistance were often “disguised, calculated, and self-protective.”

Mark, in this pericope, disguised the protest by portraying the empire as the devil. Creative imagination constituted the second way of negotiating. In such a way, the protest against the empire manifested as the struggle between good and evil. In this research, Mark narration of Jesus’ exorcism was a way to present an alternative discourse narrating the victory of God’s kingdom over the Roman empire. Here, I insist on the notion that “empires are more ideological than they are physical.”<sup>52</sup> Such ways of narrating created subversive conviction and invitation to resist imperial ideology. Imperial ideology appears in such a way as an “external system of identity and belonging that predetermines our way of life so much that the system seems natural and inherent but is much constructed and ultimately destructive to human life.”<sup>53</sup> This creative narrative represented Rome as the evil forces possessing the man in Mark 5:1-20. The demons’ name was *Legion*, the central unit of the Roman

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<sup>50</sup> Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide*, Abingdon essential guides (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 10.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>52</sup> Winn, *An Introduction to Empire in the New Testament*, 109.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

imperial army. “The possessed man’s life was marked by death (5:3), by a lack of control ((5:3), unshackled power (5:3-4), and violent destruction (5:5).” In other words, Rome was representative of a destructive force, a demonic power that destroys anything it took hold of. However, despite the unshackled-ness of its power, Mark’s text unveiled hope that God’s power would remove it and clothe His people in their minds (5:15). In this pericope, the subjugated people also imagined the destruction of Roman imperialism in the pigs’ drowning. Such an imagination was influential in the minds of Jews as it reminded them of the drowning of another powerful force that subjugated them, the Pharaoh’s army. Awareness of God’s power gave subjugated people tools to negotiate their identity and roles in the imperial context. Hence, the creative narrative manifested a new way of negotiating subjugated people’s identity without using imperial binary categories.

Subjugated people’s negotiation proved to be complex. “Survival, engagement, and accommodation mix with protest, alternative ways of being and imagined violent judgment.”<sup>54</sup> The peasants had to survive in this environment of domination. To do so, they had to engage and accommodate the imperial way of life. A subversive accommodation constituted the third way of negotiating. “The followers of Jesus led a hybrid existence that results from their participation in two worlds, that of Roman domination and the alternative community of followers of Jesus.”<sup>55</sup> Such an imagination was symptomatic of disgust resented toward the pressure exerted on them.

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<sup>54</sup> Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, 24.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

Such disgust for the Roman empire counterbalanced the desire to resemble it. A desire resulted out of the need to exercise power over the surrounding environment. “Recipients of the violence, the powerless, trade violence among themselves as the only currency with which to purchase survival.”<sup>56</sup> Even today, it is innate to want to be in control of one’s environment. In an imperial context, such force exerted by the empire and its handlers appeared appealing. Subjugated people’s ambivalent behavior pointed at this appeal to something that was basically appalling. “It is not surprising that people living in a context of military power and subordinated to its power should absorb this military ethos and language whether they want to or not.”<sup>57</sup> In other words, they borrowed from the pervasive way of life around them. As a matter of fact, Mark used the military terms to express the situation at hand, “legion, herds, dispatch and charge.”<sup>58</sup> Such a way of life was so strong in the minds that no one could resist its influence. It became a taken-for-granted culture, so far as to express even aspects of their alternative culture. This ambivalence was one key feature of hybrid people searching to negotiate their role and place in an imperial context. Thus, they cleverly used deference and subversion in their daily interaction with the empire. In this section, I argue that the healing’s violence occurs at the taxonomic and epistemic level.

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<sup>56</sup> Hens-Piazza, “Forms of Violence and the Violence of Forms,” 91.

<sup>57</sup> Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, 24.

<sup>58</sup> A soldier’s armor frequently provides imagery of Christian living. Paul used the ‘armor of light’ (Rom. 13:12), the “weapons of righteousness” (Rom. 1:16-7), Battle against “power” (Eph. 6:10-7), “flaming arrows” (Eph. 16:16). For more, See Carter, Warren. *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, 41-43.

### 3.2.2.2. *Rejection*

The other face of the violence of healing revealed itself in rejection. Rejection came as rejection of imperial *Weltbildung*. The creative imagination mentioned in the previous section ensured new possibilities for the subjugated people's minds. It proclaimed that the oppressive forces were not there to stay, hence the violent destruction of "Legion" into the abyss.<sup>59</sup> "Mark's Jesus identifies Rome and the military power of its legions as demonic. He anticipates God's powerful destruction of Rome by casting the demons called Legion into the sea (5:9-13)."<sup>60</sup> In other words, the hybrid person absorbed the cultural ethos by modeling constantly violent power as the means to a very desirable end. Or, to paraphrase Hens-Piazza's statement, subjugated people opted to violence as the ultimate means to survival. Thus, upon destruction suffered, subjugated people desired a reversal of the situation by imagining God incurring an act of violent revenge upon the empire.

In a more concrete terms, this creative imagination rejected the imperial socialization process. While looking at the imperialism as a subtext, we came to understand how the socialization process enforced the imperial culture and ideology in the subjugated people. However, once the process was completed, one had a choice to make: to continue living in the deadly imperial cycle or to move out of it. By doing nothing, the cycle survived and continued. Like the Gerasenes, people chose to promote the status quo – follow rules and remain in line. The other side of the same

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<sup>59</sup> The imaginary of such destruction could also be reflected in a punitive rhetoric. 1Cor. 15:24 states that Christ would destroy every ruler and power, when God's kingdom is established.

<sup>60</sup> Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, 121.

coin was to challenge, question and think what was wrong with the imperial normalcy, *Pax Romana*. Moments of unhomeliness, like the possessed man living in the tombs, were indicative of something wrong with the imperial system.

Unhomeliness triggered the decision to interrupt the cycle and stand up for change. Such a decision characterized Jesus' ministry to heal or exorcize, whether at home or in the gentile lands. Moreover, from Mark's exposition of the possessed man's situation, things had become intolerable that meeting with him pushed Jesus into action. Exorcism became a form of resisting the dehumanizing systems of empire. However, Jesus' healing began a new era in the healed man's life. The awareness or consciousness gained sparked the action of preaching an alternative liberating story amidst his own people. A change movement was born. And around this man and his message of God's mercy, a movement introduced new possibilities to interrupt the imperial socialization cycle and the system of oppression.

In this research, the second way to understand rejection came as the one who heals suffers the violence. In this case, I consider how rejection became the lot of Jesus in this pericope and elsewhere in the Gospel. Jesus, as well as his disciples, suffered rejection from the local faces of the empire. By local faces of the empire, one has to understand the kings, governors, soldiers, the chief priests and Pharisees, and the local elite. In brief, those who benefitted from the imperial structures did not remain passive in the face of this movement of change. They wanted things to remain unchanged, even with the people facing dehumanization and the unhomeliness of their own cities or villages. Moreover, the violence of rejection came from the ordinary people who had accepted the empire. Seeing what Jesus had done and imagining the



empire's reprisals, they urged Jesus to depart from their country. In the logic of the imperial socialization process, the ordinary people were interested in their survival. It was not out of certain particular interests, but a sheer sense of survival, that they urged Jesus to depart from their neighborhood. In this sense, the one healing the empire's violence should expect the rejection from the real or imagined retaliation of the empire, from empire's handlers or ordinary people.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Hybridity, Desire, And Disgust - Earmarks of the Postcolonial Jesus**

This final chapter focuses more on Jesus' person and role in a context marked by Roman imperialism. In light of the first chapter, the postcolonial approach sheds light on a politicizing reading of the pericope at hand. The focus is on the particular historical conditions that produced such a personality of Jesus; we will examine the concept of hybridity. Working out of the Palestinian cultural identity will open up the idea of desire and disgust in the person of Jesus. Jesus emerged as a hybrid person by adapting a particular social role in the third space created by empire conditions. This identity of Jesus became the hallmark for Jesus' ministry as we uncover how identity was relational and negotiated.

Jesus' relational and negotiated identity challenged values or norms received from oppressive structures. This challenge constitutes the crux of this research. First, it is important to focus on Jesus as historically embedded and culturally responsive. Jesus lived in an environment conditioned by the Roman empire. He suffered the violence of the empire like most of His contemporaries. His life and ministry, as seen above, challenged the empire's violence. The image of Jesus emerging from this text revealed a God standing by the side of the oppressed, the possessed, the forgotten and the excluded. Jesus endeavored to uproot the social apartheid caused by the empire's violence and privileging of the powerful.

#### 4.1. Mark's Jesus And Imperial Masculinity

Mark portrayed Jesus' personality following the cultural and taxonomic features of his time. As Carlin A. Barton argued, "one is ontologically a male but existentially a man. Born a male (*mas*) or a human (*homo*), one becomes a man (*vir*). A *vir* is not a natural being."<sup>1</sup> This *vir* becomes apparent in relations and negotiation with the surrounding environment. Maud Gleason adds, "Manhood was not a state to be definitely achieved but something always under construction and constantly open to scrutiny."<sup>2</sup> The concept of gender slippage would explain well this situation. If a man behaved in a manner that was not manly by demonstrating weakness of character, he proved to be womanly. Hence, Mark portrayed the personality of Jesus in accordance with relations and negotiations of his time.

Mark's Jesus proved to be manly in Mark 5:1-20. The description of Jesus' masculinity in this pericope comes as an answer to the disciples' question in 4:41 (who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?) Mark did not include the infancy narrative in his account. However, from the beginning, Jesus was the "ἰσχυρότερός" (the more powerful) (1:7). The description of Jesus as a strong man recalls of Mark 3:19-30 (Jesus telling the story of the strong man's house being plundered). In Mark 5:1-20, the demoniac appeared as someone whom no one could bind, even with shackles or chains. However, at the sight of Jesus, the one who used to stronger than

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<sup>1</sup> Carlin A. Barton, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 38.

<sup>2</sup> Maud W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Preservation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 182.

anyone in the region came (5:3-4) and knelt before Jesus. Mark's Jesus – in terms of imperial masculinity – proved to be stronger than the demons.

Mark's Jesus in this pericope was a strong man. First, Jesus bettered the demons that possessed this man and rendered him unrestrainable. Second, referring to the section 3.5 and 3.6, Jesus used commands to exorcise as someone superior to the demons. Third, he outdid the demons in verbal contestation of honor. In a text filled with military concepts, Jesus symbolically brought about the destruction of the Roman empire. Jesus' masculinity in this pericope corresponded to the context of his time's ideals. An ideal man for the people subjugated by the Roman power draws on the criteria of masculinity capable of resisting the Roman domination.<sup>3</sup> In other words, upsetting the hierarchical relationship between the empire and the periphery revealed Jesus' masculinity in his context. The way Jesus upset the status quo revealed that he was assertive in public affairs, powerful, and superior. These features were characteristics of hegemonic masculinity in the Greco-Roman world. Hence, in the next section, we focus on the title given to Jesus as "Son of God."

## **4.2. Jesus, Son of God**

Following the death of Jesus Christ, a competition raged for the allegiance of the individuals' hearts, minds, and souls to the Roman empire, or this nascent religious

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<sup>3</sup> While discussing the concept of masculinity in the Greco-Roman world, we need to ascertain of four features that characterized a man (in other words, the social construct of being a man). These four features were relationality (avoid what is unmanly), penetrability (capacity to protect one's space or body from being penetrated), power (mastery over oneself and one's surrounding), and violence (aggressiveness in battle).

movement called “the Way.”<sup>4</sup> Opposing claims to the true “Son of God” (in Latin, *Divi Filius*; in Greek *uios tou theou*) required a clear and unambiguous decision.

Some claims attested that Caesar was the Son of God, and others, Jesus Christ. Jesus’ confrontation with the legion symbolized the inevitable conflict between Jesus’ followers and the empire’s supporters. To instantiate this unavoidable conflict, we are going to focus on parallelism made between Jesus and the emperor Vespasian who ruled the Roman empire from 69 to 79 CE (probably the time of Mark’s Gospel redaction):<sup>5</sup>

	Vespasian	Jesus
(I)	Travels to a foreign land (Josephus, J.W. 3.8)	travels to a foreign land: Gerasa (5:1)
(II)	Is declared <i>Divi Filius</i> in the East (Josephus, J.W. 4.618)	Is declared Son of God in the East (5:9)
(III)	Established Rome’s empire by	Manifests God’s kingdom by driving

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 24:14

<sup>5</sup> Hans Leander, *Discourses of Empire*, vol. no. 71, Semeia studies (Atlanta, GA.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 214. To reinforce this parallelism between Vespasian and Jesus, Davina C. Lopez argues that “the Romans, represented with and by the emperor, are conquerors who are free; they are designated by strength, maleness, and status as victorious and capable of penetration. Such maleness, achieved through victory and strength, is defined by and defines the weakness, femaleness and penetration symbolizing defeat.” See Davina C. Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul’s Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 124 - 131. Moreover, Adam Winn contended that “Mark’s presentation of Jesus’ divine sonship and the prominent place he gives to the title “Son of God” does not appear in Vespasian’s imperial résumé, namely his inability to provide a divine lineage.” Adam Winn, *The Purpose of mark’s Gospel: An Early Christian Response to Roman Imperial Propaganda* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 141-183. For more information, see Publius Cornelius Tacitus (*Historie* 4.81.1-3), Gaius Suetonius (*Vespasian* 7.2) and Lucius Cassius Dio (*Roman History* 64.9.1).

crushing rebels with his legions	out Legions (5:9-13)
(IV) Rescued the empire from internal instability	Rescue the man from self- destruction (5:3-4, 15)
(V) Sends troop to Gerasa (Josephus, J.W. 4.488)	Sends the healed demoniac to Gerasa (5:19)

Despite these similarities, those believing Jesus of Nazareth to be their Savior could not uphold such a claim that Caesar was the Son of God. And they stood their ground despite the ideological claims and the emperor's cult attesting such a title to Caesar. It was clear for Caesar's supporters that, having the power of life and death, he was the son of God (*Divi Filius*). However, as Christians could not accept Caesar's role as the leader, they could not assign godly life and death functions to him. Hence, to affirm Jesus' Sonship was certainly the rejection of Caesar being the Son of God.<sup>6</sup> In this background, Mark's Gospel used the title "Son of God" for Jesus. The pericope under discussion insisted on calling Jesus the Son of God. Even the Gospel bore the title "of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God."<sup>7</sup> Mark sets the tone of who Jesus

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<sup>6</sup> Assigning the title "*divi filius*" in the context of the 1st century Roman empire would amount to critiquing the reigning emperor, or at least recognizing that there was another source of goodness. Winn argues that "in Roman imperial cult, Julius Caesar was deified and was called *divus Iulius*. His adopted son, Octavian, took for himself the title *divi filius* or son of god." (101)

<sup>7</sup> This title "Son of God" was deeply rooted in the context and controversy of the time. This rootedness in the controversy of the time, however, does not meet the agreement of every Markan scholar. Some evidence from old manuscripts points at the fact that this title was not part of the earlier texts. To address this discrepancy, Haines-Eitzen stresses the role and importance of the scribes in the redaction of the Gospels. "The scribes who copied early Christian literature were also involved in the study of these texts. Unlike scribes in larger societies, Christian scribes were not a hired professional group separated from the users. Thus, their work was not only preservative but also performative". Haines-Eitzen's position proves that there were motives for using this title in that period. Hence, using such a title to someone other

was from the onset. Not only is Jesus the Christ, but He is also the Son of God. For Mark, the preferred title for Jesus was “the Son of God” (1:1, 11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 13:32; 14:61; 15:39). To use this title to designate a rural Galilean at the margin of the empire, Mark destabilized the title’s profound meaning, associated with the power, attitude, and social practice. He presented a new image of Jesus as the Son of God. By using this image on a community level, Mark opened up historical possibilities for the people whose the empire used to define the reality. Hence, I believe that Mark’s subversive imagination de-absolutized imperial modes of reality.

### **4.3. Jesus, As a Hybrid Person**

Homi Bhabha approached the colonizer-colonized relationship in its complex impact on identity and culture. Hybridity is a way of understanding colonial responses to imperial power. Specifically, hybridity denotes the “ambivalent posture that colonized communities may elect; a posture that seemingly sanctions the identity imposed by the colonizer while simultaneously undermining this very same identity.”<sup>8</sup> From such a perspective, Mark’s Jesus appears to be a hybrid person. Above, I stated that identity is relational and negotiated. A relational and negotiated identity revealed the unstable and unsettling relation between colonizer and colonized within the third space. Thomas Eriksen agreed with this aspect of the identity by contending that “if a setting is wholly mono-ethnic, there is effectively no ethnicity since there is nobody there to communicate cultural difference to.”<sup>9</sup> The presence of the imperial culture

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than the emperor would amount to provoking the imperial culture for a marginal movement negotiating its identity in an imperial political-religious environment

<sup>8</sup> Winn, *An Introduction to Empire in the New Testament*, 108.

and the native one allows the subjugated people to relate and negotiate each of these two cultures. This fact corroborated with Mark's Jesus portrayal, which undermined the colonial power through the colonizer's imitation (in the case of the emperor Vespasian seen above). In other words, "the notion of hybridity opens a valuable, complex, in-between space that can better comprehend the gradation evident in colonial contexts between resistance and accommodation, between rejection of one's former identity and an identity imposed by the colonizer."<sup>10</sup> In Bhabha's perspective, hybridity - far from being a complete harmonization - appears as a metonymic resemblance, in other words, a repetition with a difference. Thus, Comparing Vespasian and hybrid Jesus also reveals their differences.<sup>11</sup> In other words, while Vespasian won the people's fear, Jesus heals people and communities' fear. Jesus as the true Son of God turned the world upside down, by healing instead of wounding, by installing faith instead instilling fear. And faith, in this sense, amounted to seeing possibilities of a world renewed by God's mercy.

The subversive effect of hybridity was not primarily a conscious counter imperial tactic; instead, it became a resistance process to a dehumanizing imperial discourse and context. However, in portraying Jesus in contradistinction to the emperor's divine sonship, Mark wanted consciously to undermine the imperial cult and its ideology.

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Anthropology, culture, and society (London: Pluto Press, 2010), 34–35.

<sup>10</sup> Winn, *An Introduction to Empire in the New Testament*, 108.

<sup>11</sup> As seen above, differences between Vespasian and Jesus are numerous. First, Vespasian was the emperor, while Jesus a rural Galilean living at the margin of the empire. Second, they both crossed the sea. However, Vespasian had a conquering intent, whereas Jesus was on a liberating mission. Vespasian sent his legions to destroy any of Rome's enemies. Jesus sent the healed man to preach God's mercy. Mark's narrative subverted wholly the imperial narratives of the time.



Remembering that Mark's Gospel was written in a politically charged environment<sup>12</sup>, the portrayal of a hybrid Jesus served as an exemplar of how his followers ought to live and behave. The life and behavior of hybrid Jesus unveiled the existence of a third space. This space is different from the essentialist space of the native or the colonizer. In this space, two or more cultures intermingle, new structures of authority and social statuses emerge to delineate and negotiate previous discourses and histories.<sup>13</sup> Lacan echoed Bhabha's hybridity as follows, "identification is a process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness, at which point the agency of identification - the subject - is itself always ambivalent, because of the intervention of that otherness." In other words, hybrid Jesus created new social reality out of the imperial context. He invited the healed man to preach God's mercy. This new social reality disengaged from dominant reality. From my point of view, this new reality (third space) inaugurated by hybrid Jesus was a space of new historical possibilities, a space of a new humanity. Hence, far from a naïve embrace of the imperial context or a frozen state of hopelessness and powerlessness, Jesus' hybridity availed a space where one could reject oppressive forces while still living in imperial world.

#### **4.4. Desire of Hybrid Jesus**

Looking at the story of Mark 5:1-20 through the hybridity lenses, one deciphers its relation to imperial discourse. A way of conceptualizing this relationship was through the desire of a hybrid Jesus. What Mark depicted in Jesus' person revealed

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<sup>12</sup> One should recall that the writer or editor of Mark's Gospel is aware of the uprising that led to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the other sieges and battles against the Zealots.

<sup>13</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 211.

the desire to identify Jesus in imperial terms. Three concepts show this relationship. First, describing that Jesus crossed to the other side of the sea (3:1) in the same way emperors had crossed the sea to conquer. Second, Jesus bears the same title “Son of God” (*Divi Filius/uios theou*) as the emperors. Third, the verb used to expel the demon resembles the verb ‘dispatch,’ in the same way Vespasian dispatched his legionnaires to quench insurrection. Such a Markan portrayal of Jesus as the *doppelgänger* of Caesar revealed a desire on Mark’s part to mimic the emperor. In other words, as discussed earlier, Mark’s Jesus displayed the desired resemblance to the emperors with a difference. Hence, the desire to depict Jesus unveiled what Fanon calls *lactification*.

Fanon’s concept of *lactification* enables us to tackle the idea of desire as purported in Mark’s Jesus. As the whitening of a black race, *Lactification* points at the colonized people’s desire to behave like their colonizer and adopt the colonizer’s culture. As seen previously, some variables help us understand this concept. The first of these variables was the *erlebenis* (the lived experience). The *erlebenis* of the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Jews required them to identify themselves against the dominant forces of the time. Such powers revolved around the Roman empire and its handlers. Mark 5:7 Thus, being a man or a human in such a context, one ought to be valued against the empire’s taxonomy. Second, the personality of Mark’s Jesus was able to integrate the power relations of its time. The manliness in Mark’s Jesus reflected a personality able to confront the empire’s forces. Such a portrayal of Mark’s Jesus depicted a desire to have Jesus understood in imperial terms as having imperial masculinity.

Thus far, I have resisted defining desire. By “desire,” one understands the force to resemble, the will to action, toward self-assertion. This will toward self-assertion intervened in to challenge the imperial discourse that essentialized people in a binary way. Desire enabled one to craft new ways of being. In desire, a hybrid person refused to be defined by external forces. Hence, desire produced social relations and relations of power that are new and disruptive. To substantiate the above definition of desire, one could look at Jesus in the pericope under study. Jesus refused to be passive in the face of the possession and oppression by the legion. He assumed a position of authority and expelled the forces of evil. In other words, the imperial context wanted to silence those at the margin of power. By reclaiming this agency, Mark’s Jesus proved the force of desire, the will toward self-assertion. Here lies the importance of portraying Jesus in hybrid. I contend that hybrid Jesus accommodated but at the same time disrupted the conventional assumptions.

#### **4.5. Disgust of Postcolonial Jesus**

Reading Mark 5:1-20 through the lenses of disgust opens up new horizons to the understanding of this passage. The possessed man could only express his disgust through his madness by identifying the occupying forces as the demons. For Hollenbach, this man “retreated to an inner world where he could symbolically resist Roman domination.”<sup>14</sup> Jesus recognized himself in this man. He saw his shadow in the man who displays madness under the oppression of *Legion*.<sup>15</sup> As a person living

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<sup>14</sup> Hollenbach, “Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities,” 581.

<sup>15</sup> Diarmuid McGann, *The Journeying Self: The Gospel of Mark through a Jungian Perspective* (New York: Paulist, 1985), 74. The demoniac, as the shadow figure, comes as a messenger of the unconscious inviting us to pay attention to something bigger than our little ego concerns. The shadow leads us to ourselves, to the deeper self, if we listen attentively.

under Roman, Jesus perceived the collective anxiety reflected in the madness of this man. Thus, experiencing the same oppressive conditions of the Roman occupation, Jesus performed this exorcism as a political rejection. Jesus, by exorcizing this man, allowed him to reject a false home, the unhomeliness. By false home, I mean a setting essential impure and inhospitable to a man's true self. Above, I discussed that madness was an acceptable way to revolt against the empire. But madness was not a state fit for a man in God's plan. Disgust, in my opinion, came as a response to the imperial thingification process. It came from realizing that the colonial context robs him of autonomy (ethics of autonomy). Subjugated people, in the image of this possessed man, lived in such a condition that they could not lead their lives according to reasons, values or desires that were authentically their own. Hybrid Jesus who wanted to open up historical possibilities for his contemporaries.

The Gerasene community encountered hybrid Jesus in a rather hostile manner. "Jesus' disruption of the prevailing accommodation... brought the man's and the neighborhood's hatred of the Romans out in the open, where the result could be the disaster for the community."<sup>16</sup> Disgust came as a reaction to the community's servitude. Hybrid Jesus noticed how, by fear of reprisals, they had accepted and accommodated the colonial submission. Anything that could cause punishment disrupted the community's precarious peace with the Roman masters. They had accepted their role and tried hard to remain in line with the Roman empire. Even after seeing the healing man, the people who had internalized the empire's disciplinary

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<sup>16</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities," 573. Here, I could make a historical reference to what happened to the fugitives of Gadara when they resisted Vespasian.

gaze chased Jesus away. The distantiation had to do with the disruption of an accepted imperial social context, a disruption of the status quo. As the empire's violence is so pervasive, even the simple act of exorcizing was a disruption. Hence, the moral responsibility privileged the community over the individual. Jesus' act of exorcism is a seed planted that would grow into a change movement.

Imperialism oppression was both external and internal. Externally, there is the expropriation of land, resources, and labor from indigenous populations. Internally, new forms of values are imposed on colonized people. Here, I focus on this internal imposition of colonial values. These values come in contradistinction to the land's values. These imposed values bind everyone under the penalty of disaster. Yarbro argued that the unclean demons – in Mark 5:1-20 – had become the soul of the local dead. This statement is pregnant of a crucial truth. The realization of such a truth brought about the disgust noticed in the text under consideration. The truth is that Hybrid Jesus' disgust responded to whatever disrupted the divine image in the possessed man's being. Disgust came as a reaction that wanted to retrieve the divine image in this man, an undefiled man. Having a demonic soul corrupted all relationship to God. Under demonic possession, man could not realize their divine potential to be rational, relational, creatively free, to enjoy the possibility for self-actualization and self-transcendence. Hence, I contend that Jesus' disgust recreated the possessed man in God's image.

#### 4.6. Jesus, a Transformative Resistant

My thesis' position comes as a contribution in the existing scholarly discussion in postcolonial studies. This discussion considers three categories of postcolonial scholars. The first category of scholars holds the essentialist or nativist model. These scholars insist on culture's essence before the imperial culture's emergence. I do not agree with the essentialist scholars, as they may fall easily into the romanticization trap. The second group of postcolonial scholars follows the resistant or recuperative model. The scholars in this category seek to resist all biblical discourses and readings dominated by colonial interest. I agree with this school of thought, but I want to make a step further. The third category is the intercultural model. Scholars in this model recognize the heterogeneity and diversity by a recognition of an identity lived through differences. This identity is hybrid and constitutes the kernel of Mark's depiction of Jesus in Mark 5:1-20. I espouse the two last models for the reasons given in the next paragraph.

From the discussion concerning the imperial context, I contend that the subjugated people's identity needs to be relational and negotiated. The relational and negotiated aspect rendered Jesus' identity complex. Jesus, living in an imperial context which was violent, had to engage the violence and heal the trauma caused by this violence. Such an engagement required an identity capable of self-assertion and will to action. Depicting Jesus in terms of imperial masculine values, Mark achieved a lactification to the person of Jesus.<sup>17</sup> However, the complexity of Mark's Jesus

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<sup>17</sup> To ascribe whiteness to Jesus is not to mean that Jesus was white. Whiteness in postcolonial moment retains its status of desirability as "a passport to privilege" (in the words of Richard Dyer). In other words, whiteness here should not be understood

enabled the lactified persona exist alongside the resistant one. The resistant came as the one who restored autonomy, community and divinity ethos in the possessed man (or the subjugated community). And it is here that my position arguably corroborates Bhabha's definition of hybridity. Hybridity enables the colonized to challenge the boundaries of imperial discourse and establishes another space of power/knowledge.

Such a conception of hybrid identity allows me to elaborate the three levels of liberation. The first level concerns the epistemic co-ordination. This level shapes our shared social knowledge. "Injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere". Hybrid Jesus would not have allowed the emasculation of the demoniac. Engaging with his predicament opened up new possibilities in shared social knowledge. And it went against the conformity bias found in many oppressed societies. Second, postcolonial engagement requires joint performance. The joint performance becomes evident during George Floyd demonstration. The kneeling stance was a sign of protest. It bore the form of joint performance and created a sense of consensus. Hence, the Gerasene community needed to stand together against oppressive imperial structures. Finally, the third level of liberation deals with collective agency. Collective agency is an ontological paradigm-shift, especially in oppressed community. Hybrid Jesus healing the demoniac unleashed forces that would change the community. Just like the demoniac was representative of the collective anxiety, so he could become the beacon of collective agency in his proclaiming God's mercy. Hence, my thesis argues that the nucleus of hybrid Jesus reveals God on the side of the oppressed, possessed and subjugated.

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in terms of race, rather as a mindset of privilege and power. Whiteness has historically used its normative power to suppress and marginalize those considered as others.

#### 4.7. Postcolonial Jesus Liberating an African Person

Being an African person, we could not end this research without looking at how the consideration of a postcolonial Jesus might liberate the African person in their historical, social and economic context. It is of paramount importance to understand the African context. Today, all African countries enjoy political independence. However, we need to realize that neocolonialism brings about new chains and shackles that bind African nations in another form of imperialism. Discovering Jesus today cannot “separate the African Christian from the scramble for land, struggle for economic justice, and struggle for cultural survival.”<sup>18</sup> Just like in the time of Jesus, the followers of Jesus today need to find inspiration in Jesus, who lived connected with the people’s daily struggles. Mark’s Jesus in the pericope we studied exorcized the possessed man. From the analysis above, it was a struggle against the forces that subdued people of the time, the empire’s forces. The example taken from Mark 5:1-20 is that following Jesus was not a spiritual journey devoid of the time’s concerns; it was a journey deeply rooted in politics, economics, and cultural identity.

This postcolonial discussion falls within the debate initiated by some African scholars. Musa Dube’s interpretive lens called “Rahab’s Hermeneutic” invites African biblical scholars to engage a dialogue with womanist biblical reading.<sup>19</sup> Here is the African woman’s liberation and situating the biblical text at the center of such

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<sup>18</sup> Musa W. Dube Shomanah, Andrew Mūtūa Mbuvi, and Dora R. Mbuwayesango, *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations*, vol. no. 13, global perspectives on biblical scholarship (Atlanta, GA.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 4.

<sup>19</sup> Musa W. Dube Shomanah, *Other Ways of Reading*, Global perspectives on Biblical scholarship; no. 2 (Atlanta, GA.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001).



freedom. Another instance concerns Equiano's *Sankofa*, "a decolonizing reading that sets out to dispute the colonial discourse by claiming divinity and history from both his Igbo and biblical traditions." This study was critical as orientaling discourses portray African people as ahistorical and godless. Moreover, some scholars investigated and exposed the colonial biblical translations and their ideologies. In the same vein, David Adamo offers a critique of Eurocentric engagement with the psalms.

So then, how can postcolonial Jesus liberate the African person? The colonial/imperialism discourse propagates a lie.<sup>20</sup> That lie dehumanizes the African person, just like the Roman imperialism did it to the people of that time. It devalues the African person's humanity, worth, intellect, culture, morals, values, sexuality, hair, skin, and physical features. And the biggest problem is that the lie does not remain external to the African mind; it becomes internalized. Once internalized, it creates an inferiority complex - to use the categories of Fanon. Such inferiority complex clouds every thought, belief, self-confidence, expectation, and action. In this situation, a new breed of African scholars needs to present to Africa a God, Jesus who looks like them, who cares about them, who love them above and beyond everything. Such work will replace the black inferiority and need of a white savior by black humanity.<sup>21</sup> The restoration of African humanity, though a continuing campaign, requires a certain impetus today through postcolonial studies. We, African scholars,

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<sup>20</sup> What we call a lie in this part denotes the binary approach of divisive and oppressive discourses.

<sup>21</sup> Martin L. King would say that emancipation is about recovering our identity and a firm sense of self-esteem. In other words, it could mean a freedom from any and all toxic ideas about the inferiority of Black culture. Finally, it could point at the freedom to see beyond the negative stereotypes that have burdened and limited the black person for centuries.

must tell our reading of the Bible, colonial experience, resilience, trials, and values. I will end with this African proverb, “until a lion has a historian, the hunter will always be the hero.”

## General Conclusion

This thesis reads Mark 5:1-20 from a postcolonial perspective. It starts from the assumption that Mark depicted Jesus as a postcolonial character who lived negotiating His identity in the wider context of Roman empire. Using the postcolonial perspective on Mark's text aimed at retrieving this text's aspects left out by a reading disconnected from the 1<sup>st</sup> century political context. The aspects left out by such a reading constitute the often-neglected influence of the empire and the politics of the imperialism. Reading postcolonially reveals how Jesus's identity emerged out of a context shaped by subjugation and resistance. These two elements unveil how Jesus, growing-up, had to negotiate his identity, his social status and his place with the larger cosmos of the empire. Hence, in this research, I strove to answer to the question: "How was Jesus depicted in Mark 5:1-20?"

In order to answer to that question, this research comprises four chapters. The first chapter concerned the theoretical framework of this research. In this chapter, I introduced the concept of postcolonialism as a field of study. Scholars, such as Edward Said, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Leela Gandhi or Robert, J.C. Young, argued that Postcolonialism is a critical school that focuses on the political, economic, cultural and discursive practices of the colonial powers in light of the nascent (postcolonial) writings and insights from formerly colonized nations. It owes much from a variety of Western theoretical landscapes. First, Marxism enables it to discuss the role and place of dominant ideologies and discourses. And, in such a way, Postcolonialism analyzes social relations through the lenses of race, ethnicity and colonialism. Second, Poststructuralism helped postcolonial scholars to discuss racial,

discursive, cultural and psychological implications of colonialism. Hence, Postcolonial criticism requires a critical reading of all colonial discursive materials to unveil power relation disparities.

Postcolonialism, being a recent critical field of study, expanded its application to biblical criticism. I argued that, considering the context of Palestine's successive occupation, Postcolonialism fits rightly in the discussion of Mark 5:1-20. According to Brett, postcolonial biblical criticism endeavors to uncover the political and economic relationship as well as the cultural subjectivities and hybridities in ancient Palestine. In exploring Mark's text, I followed in the footsteps of the scholars who used postcolonial perspective to read the Bible. Some of these scholars include Laura Donaldson, R.S. Sugirtharajah, Fernando Segovia, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Justin Ukpong and others. Moreover, reading Mark postcolonially put me on the track of Richard Horsley, Sugirtharajah, Mary Ann Tolbert, Benny Liew and others. Concluding the first chapter, I explored three concepts, namely hybridity, lactification, and disgust.

In the second chapter, I situated Jesus in His historical context. 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine was under the Roman rule. This rule, extending from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE to the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, coincided with the time of Gospel redaction, including Mark's Gospel. I began by exploring how the Romans got in contact with Palestine. At first, the Roman empire appeared as "a well-disposed power toward all allied with her" (Macc. 8:1ff). However, the Romans used a policy that privileged the powerful and empowered the privileged. Life became so difficult for the many outside the power center. Taxes weighed heavily on the peasants' shoulders. Discontent and tensions

became the lot of many in Palestine. Following internal dissensions and revolts against the Roman rule, the grip became brutal and violent up until the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. At the time of Jesus' birth, Palestine was a land endemic of protests and violence. Mark redacted the Gospel in such a situation marked by imperialism, exploitation of the peasants, privileging of the powerful, religious corruption and a propensity to revolt. Mark's Gospel as a text of its own time reveals the empire's history as seen by the first followers of Jesus Christ.

The postcolonial exegesis of Mark 5:1-20 constitutes the crux of the third chapter. I began by situating its setting within the whole Gospel. It falls within the four miracles stories found in Mark 4:35-5:43. In its concentric form, Mark 5:1-20 has as its center the possessed man's healing. Reading the text through a postcolonial lens, I pointed out the relationship between the resistance-prone 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine and the setting of this text. First, the demons possessing the man bear the name "*legio*". Legion was a name referring to the Roman unit of 6000 soldiers. Second, the various militaristic terms used in the text confirmed the reference to the Roman occupation. Third, the self-destructive behavior displayed by the demoniac was symbolic of the ill-effects of the Roman exploitation and occupation. These inferences to the imperial presence and its impact recalls the dire situation faced by the people in Palestine and in the surrounding kingdoms or cities.

Imagining the dire situation faced by local people, one has to view imperialism under three headings. The first heading consisted of imperialism as a context. Mark 5:1-20, I argued, had for its historical context the Vespasian's military campaign in Gadara. Mark creatively turned this historical event upside down by showing the

defeat of legion by Jesus. This creative subversiveness served as an alternative story to the imperial discourse. Second, imperialism as a subtext pointed to the role of culture and the cycle of socialization. Through the cycle of socialization, the subjugated people were taught to remain in line and embraced the imperial ideology. However, I argue how this socialization cycle could end in dissonance, stress, hate or self-destructive behavior. Finally, by considering empire as a pretext, I contend that Roman empire established and maintained peace through the threat or exercise of violence. And this potential or real threat of violence kept people in line; however, it was a source of health issues for the people living under constant stress.

Through the lenses of Critical Race Theory (CRT), the communal aspect of the demoniac oppression reflected the relationship between mental health and racism (or any other oppressive system). I argued that madness seen in the demoniac manifested as a result of accumulated stresses caused by prejudice, systemic discrimination, microaggressions, and physical acts of violence suffered by the subjugated people. In other words, communities under occupation display signs of chronic stress, heightened stress response, and poor mental and physical health. This negative effects of imperialism or racism corroborates the diagnosis given by Frantz Fanon. Fanon argued that people who had been subjected to state repression, brutality and torture revealed signs of mental illnesses. Hence, in tackling the demoniac's situation using the lenses of CRT, I revealed the collective anxiety suffered by the people under Roman imperialism.

In such a context of collective anxiety, Jesus' act of exorcising the possession becomes a symbolic act of resistance. In the discussion above, I referred to this kind

of resistance as the healing's violence. "In hegemonic societies, the violence that maintains and characterizes the ruling structure cultivates and necessitates violence among its citizens."<sup>1</sup> This resistance unfolds in two distinctive ways. The first form of resistance occurred at the taxonomic and epistemic level. I called this subjugated people's capacity of negotiating their place and role in the imperial cosmos. Secondly, rejection of the imperial *Weltbildung* anticipated God's victory over Roman empire's powers. The metaphor of the Roman army drowning made sense for the people under oppressed as they recalled of God's triumphant deliverance of His people from the Egyptian grip. Hence, in the third chapter, I contend that – though the ill-effects of the Roman imperialism – Mark 5:1-20 unveils signs of hope that the imperialism would not have the last say.

The final chapter focuses more on the person of Jesus. Through postcolonial lenses, Jesus' character displayed the characteristics of hybridity, desire and disgust. In the same way, I argued in the previous chapter that the people mentioned in Mark 5:1-20 reflected their social and historical environment, so did Jesus. Jesus was historically embedded and culturally responsive to His time. In this text, He endeavored to disrupt the social apartheid imposed by the empire's violence and the privileging of the powerful. In order to substantiate this claim, I elaborate how Mark's description of Jesus followed the taxonomic values of the time. Mark's Jesus was more powerful than the Roman empire. Son of God, a title falsely given to the emperors, portrayed better Jesus. To use this title to designate a rural Galilean, Mark destabilized the title's profound meaning, associated with power, attitude and social practice of the time.

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<sup>1</sup> Hens-Piazza, "Forms of Violence and the Violence of Forms," 99.

Jesus, being the man of his time, appears to be a hybrid character in the Markan narrative. Mark in depicting Jesus lactified Him in imperial values. He made Jesus look like a doppelganger of Vespasian. The masculinity of the time dictated that Jesus to be a leader of the nascent movement ought to have Greco-Roman male feature. The will to action and self-assertion had to characterize a Greco-Roman male body and distinguished such a man to the passive conquered bodies. Despite this mimicry of the imperial male figure, Jesus at the same time manifested the feature of disgust. In other words, I argue that Jesus did not accommodate the empire. His mission put him on a course against the empire.

Such a mission required a person whose identity is far from just assimilating or resisting. Mark's Jesus hybrid identity allowed him to challenge the boundaries of imperial discourses and opened up new possibilities for the oppressed people. These people were emasculated lacking in autonomy, collective agency and epistemic coordination. The exorcising act enabled the people to hear an alternative discourse based on God's mercy. From a representative of collective anxiety, the healed man is sent on a mission to preach God's victory over the Roman oppression. It is in such a way that Mark's Jesus became a transformative resistant.



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## Index

- A**
- Aharon Oppenheimer: Oppenheimer 32  
Alexander .....28  
ambivalence .....4  
anthropology .....4  
Antonio Gramsci .....9, 10  
aristocracy .....30, 33, 38  
Augustus.....31
- B**
- binary .....4, 11, 19, 90, 95  
Burkart Holzner: Holzner.....33, 34, 35
- C**
- Caesar..... 84, 85, 89; Divi  
Filius.....84, 85, 89  
Ched Myers .....34  
chief priests .....8, 81  
colonial mimetic discourse.....2  
colonialism .....4  
colonization .....18, 20, 73  
colonized ....1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 18,  
19, 20, 21, 23, 28, 68, 69, 86, 89, 92,  
98  
colonizer...6, 11, 12, 19, 20, 22, 23, 86,  
88, 89  
colonizers .....10, 11, 18, 22  
critical race theories .....4  
Critical Race theory .....72  
cultural domination .....4  
cultural hybridity.....11, 19  
cultural identity .....8, 18, 82, 95
- D**
- Dead Sea .....37, 62  
Decapolis.....6, 39, 40, 42, 55, 58  
dehumanization .....71, 73, 100  
desire .....3, 4  
Digust: Moral disgust.....25  
discrimination.....43, 71, 72, 101  
disgust 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 17, 24, 25, 26, 78,  
82, 90, 92, 99, 102, 103
- Disgust**.....7, 24, 25, 26, 91;  
rejection ...24, 25, 75, 79, 81, 85, 91,  
102; revulsion .....24, 25  
DISGUST.....82, 90  
dominant social stratification.....6  
dynamics of identity construction.....4
- E**
- Edward Said .....8, 10, 98;  
Orientalism.....8, 9, 12  
epidermalization of racial condition .23  
*erlebnis*.....22  
Essenes.....34  
*évolués* .....22  
Exorcism .....73, 74
- F**
- Fernando Belo: Belo .....31  
Fernando Segovia .....13, 99;  
Segovia.....3, 13, 17  
Frantz Fanon ..3, 5, 20, 23, 71, 75, 101;  
Fanon5, 7, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 71, 73,  
75, 89, 96, 100, 101; lactification ..3,  
7, 17, 21, 22, 89, 99; psychoanalytic  
categories .....4
- G**
- Gadara.....36, 42, 55, 62, 91  
Gayatri Spivak .....11  
Gentile.....41, 43, 47, 69  
George Adam Smith .....55  
Gerard West .....14  
Gerasene demoniac .....6, 40  
Gerasene-possessed man.....2  
Gerd Theissen: Theissen .....68, 69
- H**
- Herod .....8, 31, 34, 38, 55  
High Priests: Hyrcanus .....29  
Homi Bhabha .....1, 11, 18, 86;  
Bhabha ...1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 11, 18, 19, 20,  
87, 88  
hybrid identity .....8  
Hybrid identity .....20  
hybridity .....1, 3, 4

Hybridity .....5;  
 desire ..3, 5, 7, 11, 21, 22, 34, 57, 69,  
 70, 71, 78, 82, 89, 90, 102;  
 hybridized person. 6; imperial binary  
 relationship.....4;  
 mimic .....6, 20, 89;  
 mimicry .....5;  
 Mimicry..... 6; transformative and  
 liberating identity .....6

**I**

Ideological discourses .....6  
 imperial construct.....8  
 Imperial culture: Romanization .....30  
 imperialism.....1, 4

**J**

Jacques Lacan: Lacan.....22, 23, 88  
 Jesus ...1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 17, 27, 35,  
 36, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 47, 48, 49, 51,  
 53, 54, 55, 57, 58, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72,  
 73, 74, 77, 78, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85,  
 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 94, 95, 98, 99,  
 101, 102; hybrid character 4; Mark's  
 Jesus ... 3, 4, 6, 7, 70, 83, 102; Son of  
 God.....7  
 Jews.....4  
 Josephus .....6, 29, 35, 36, 37, 62, 85  
 Judas Maccabeus.....29  
 Justin Ukpong .....14, 99

**L**

lactification.....5  
 Laura Chrisman.....9, 98  
 Laura Donaldson .....13, 99  
 Leela Gandhi .....9, 98  
 Louis Althusser .....6, 9, 10; ideological  
 state apparatuses.6; Ideological State  
 Apparatuses ..... 10; Repressive State  
 Apparatuses .....10

**M**

Macaulay .....20  
 madness .....43, 71, 72, 74, 90, 101  
 Madness .....71  
 Marcus J. Borg .....68  
 margin .....13, 35, 76, 86, 87, 90  
 Mark 5: 1-20.....2;  
 1-20 .....2

Mark G. Brett.....12  
 Mark's Gospel..1, 2, 14, 15, 17, 27, 32,  
 36, 37, 38, 73, 84, 88, 99  
 Mary Ann Tolbert .....16, 17, 99;  
 Tolbert.....16  
 masculinity: Manhood ..83, 84, 89, 102  
 Mercy A. Oduyoye .....14  
 mimicry .....3  
 miracle .....39, 100  
 miracles .....39  
 mockery .....3

**N**

NEGOTIATION .....74, 75  
 New Testament 1, 2, 13, 14, 37, 47, 68,  
 74, 76, 79, 80  
 Norman Petersen.....40

**O**

oppression ....17, 29, 71, 72, 73, 90, 92,  
 101

**P**

Palestine .12, 15, 19, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31,  
 33, 36, 38, 43, 55, 68, 69, 71, 99,  
 100  
 pathological.....4  
 Patrick Williams .....9, 98  
 Paul Hollenbach .....71, 100  
 Pharisees .....34, 81  
 Pompey .....29  
 postcolonial criticism .....3  
 Poststructuralism.....10  
 Ptolemies.....28

**R**

R.S. Sugirtharajah .....13, 99;  
 Sugirtharajah .....1, 13, 15, 16, 99  
 racialized space .....21  
 resistance.....6  
 Richard Horsley .....2, 15, 32, 99  
 Robert J.C. Young .....9  
 Roman empire..... 4, 6; Roman  
 Imperium.....27  
 Roman Empire ..... 1, 3  
 Roman imperialism..27, 29, 30, 33, 36,  
 38, 73, 78, 82, 95, 101, 102  
 Roman legions .....30, 35, 49, 51, 76  
 Rudyard Kipling .....19



rural peasant .....32

### S

Sara Ahmed.....25, 26

Seleucids .....28, 29

Simon Samuel .....2

Social science criticism.....4

sociology .....4

Stuart Hall .....17

subaltern .....5

### T

Tat-Siong Benny Liew ..... 2; Benny  
Liew .....2, 17, 99

Third Space ..... 18; third  
space.....1, 4, 18, 70, 82, 87, 88

Thomas F. Carney: Carney .....32, 37

transformative resistance .....5

transformative resistant.....2

### V

Vespasian .....36, 62, 84, 85, 87, 89, 91,  
102

vicarious trauma.....73

violence..31, 42, 44, 49, 70, 71, 72, 74,  
75, 79, 81, 82, 84, 92, 100, 101, 102

Violence: empire's violence .....42, 82

### W

*weltbildung*.....27

*Weltbildung* .....30, 79, 102