

WITH THE WILD BEASTS, LEARNING FROM THE TREES:
ANIMALITY, VEGETALITY, AND (COLONIZED) ETHNICITY
IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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Abstract

Could we imagine a bestial messiah and a vegetal empire of God? Reading the Bible, including the Gospel of Mark, with nonhumans studies has been dismantling anthropocentric interpretations of Jesus and the Empire of God by blurring the Cartesian human-animal divide. Emulating ecological consciousness manifested by ecofeminists, ecowomanists, postcolonial ecocritics, and continental philosophers, this dissertation seeks to further disrupt anthropocentric reading of Mark by intersecting the optics of animality, vegetality, and animacy with the optics of (colonized) ethnicity. This intersectional reading of Mark highlights the importance of engaging nonhuman biblical interpretation while being sensitive to the issue of racism through animalization. By doing so, this dissertation re-imagines the Markan Jesus as the colonized messiah who struggles with the bestial logics of the empire – that is, its systems of subjugation through animalization. Mark narrates this struggle through Jesus' ambivalent relationships with nonhumans and other colonized people. On the one hand, nonhuman reading of Mark depicts Jesus overcoming the imperial bestial logic by preparing for his ministry under the gaze of the wild beasts (Mark 1:13). Jesus later points to the trees as teachers of the Empire of God and the harbingers of God's reign (Mk 4:26-32; 13:28-31). On the other hand, this bestial and vegetal messiah struggles in his solidarity with nonhumans as Jesus himself mimics the bestial logics of the Roman Empire. Jesus kills his vegetal teacher for not providing food at his beck and call (Mk 11:12-14, 20-21). The pigs and the Sea of Galilee are relegated to the level of dispensability just to prove Jesus' imperial prowess (Mk 5:1-20). Jesus even carnophallogocentrically re-colonizes the Syro-Phoenician

woman (Mk 7:24-30) with animalization just to prove his “carnivorous virility.” This ambivalence grounds the Markan Jesus in the material, micro-practices and experiences of the colonized people and their fellow bestialized nonhumans. Such “humanization” of the Markan Jesus participates in shifting the anthropocentric episteme of biblical interpretation by opening new vistas for a more ecological and racially sound biblical interpretation.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible Commentary
<i>ACME</i>	<i>AMCE: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies</i>
<i>ATI</i>	<i>American Theological Inquiry</i>
BAGD	Bauer, Walter, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i>
BBC	British Broadcasting Company
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BL	Bible and Liberation
BMW	The Bible in the Modern World
BP	The Bible and Postcolonialism
<i>BR</i>	<i>Biblical Research</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
C21	Center for 21 st Century Studies
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>The Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CNBC	Consumer News and Business Channel
CNN	Cable News Network
<i>Colloq</i>	<i>Colloquium</i>
<i>CR</i>	<i>CR: The New Centennial Review</i>
<i>Crit Inq</i>	<i>Critical Inquiry</i>
<i>EcR</i>	<i>Ecumenical Review</i>

EDNT	Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>The Expository Times</i>
<i>Fem Form</i>	<i>Feminist Formations</i>
Hermeneia	Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible
HeyM	Heythrop Monographs
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JFSR</i>	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>J. Philos. Educ.</i>	<i>Journal of Philosophy of Education</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement</i>
<i>Kunapipi</i>	<i>Kunapipi: Journal of Postcolonial Writing and Culture</i>
<i>Language</i>	<i>Language: Journal of the Linguistic Society of America</i>
LNTS	The Library of New Testament Studies
<i>MELUS</i>	<i>Multiethnic Literatures of the United States</i>
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NIB	New Interpreter's Bible
New lit. Hist.	<i>New Literary History</i>

NIBCNT	New International Bible Commentary on the New Testament
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>Phoenix: Journal of the Classical Association of Canada</i>
Pelican	The Pelican New Testament Commentaries
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of Modern Language Association</i>
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
Semeia	Semeia Studies
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>SocAnim</i>	<i>Society and Animals</i>
<i>SozW</i>	<i>Soziale Welt</i>
SP	Sacra Pagina
<i>Stud. World Christ.</i>	<i>Studies in World Christianity</i>
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
<i>TLZ</i>	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
TTC	Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia
<i>USQR</i>	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

INTRODUCTION:

Tracing the Marks of the Nonhumans

The nonhumans (animals, plants, and inanimate entities) are hissing in, crawling through, clawing, and pollinating the pages of the Gospel of Mark. This time, their paths intersect with the colonized *ethnē*,¹ the colonized peoples, of the Roman Empire. Ecological and nonhuman readings of the Bible have already planted the seeds that allow interpretations to give voice and value to nonhumans, even blurring ontological boundaries between humans and nonhumans. Following Stephen D. Moore in acknowledging the complexity of the presence of nonhumans in the Gospel of Mark far beyond being labeled as flat or dispensable characters,² this dissertation's nonhuman reading reflects the complexities of the interactions between humans and nonhumans in Mark. Moore's book, *Gospel Jesuses and Other Nonhumans*, paves the way in defamiliarizing anthropocentrically interpreted "overly familiar texts, excavations of their incessantly erased strangeness."³ With this in mind, this dissertation's nonhuman hermeneutics re-reads select narratives of Mark through animality, vegetality, and animacy theory. The nonhuman actors in these interpretations intersect with the humans,

¹ This dissertation defines *ethnē* as (human) people, groups, or community. See the ensuing pages of this introductory chapter for further elaboration. Interestingly though, Homer in *Iliad* used *ethnē* as a collective noun for nonhumans such as μελισσάων (tribes of thronging bees, 2.87), ὀρνίθων (tribes of winged foal, 2.459), and μυιάων (tribes of swarming flies, 2.469). Homer, *The Iliad: Volume 1, Books 1-12* (trans. A. T. Murray; rev. William F. Wyatt; Loeb Classical Library, vol. 170; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924).

² See Stephen D. Moore, "Why There Are No Humans or Animals in the Gospel of Mark," in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect* (ed. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner; Resources for Biblical Study 65. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2011), 71–93.

³ Stephen D. Moore, *Gospel Jesuses and Other Nonhumans: Biblical Criticism and Post-poststructuralism* (Semeia 89; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2017), 1.

especially women, differently-abled, poor Galilean peasants, and others who are colonized through animalization. This dissertation follows Neel Ahuja's definition of animalization: "[it] involves contextual comparisons between animals (as laborers, food, 'pests,' or 'wildlife') and the bodies or behaviors of racialized subjects."⁴ The ensuing interpretations then highlight the intersections of nonhumans and the colonized *ethnē* (people or group) by reconfiguring their relationality as assemblages of actants who affect each other.⁵ Thus, the Markan Jesus and the "Empire of God"⁶ are re-imagined as bestial messiah and vegetal Empire of God accordingly. These reconfigurations and re-imaginings, however, are not always positive. As colonization through animalization is deeply ingrained in the psyches, discourses, and systems even of the first century CE, Mark depicts his Jesus on a few occasions as mimicking the colonizers' animalization of the colonized *ethnē* and the nonhumans.

The ethico-political nature of this interpretation could be a hindrance for those who do not see its necessity. One of the misconceptions of nonhuman interpretation is the assumption that this reading strategy is about understanding how nonhumans think or feel. Nonhuman interpretation is not about reading as if humans know how nonhumans

⁴ Neel Ahuja, "Postcolonial Critique in a Multispecies World." *PMLA* 124.2 (2009): 557. Ahuja references in turn Harriet Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 121-27; and Mary Louis Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 208-13.

⁵ I define assemblage preliminarily with Jane Bennett's definition: "Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant matters of all sorts. Assemblages are emerging confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within... Assemblages are not governed by any central head... An assemblage thus not only has a distinctive history of formation but a finite life span." See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 24. Actant is explained below.

⁶ I am following Moore's preference to use "Empire" instead of "Kingdom or Kin-dom." As Moore argues, himself influenced by such scholars as Wes Howard-Brook: "I believe that *basileia* in Mark, as in other early Christian texts, is best rendered in English by the term 'empire' rather than by the more innocuous 'kingdom,' a term whose political edge has been all but rubbed smooth by centuries of theological usage." See Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (The Bible in the Modern World 12; Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 2006), 37, n.29.

would read the Bible. Rather, as will be discussed further in following chapters, nonhuman interpretation is about valuing the *responsivity* of nonhumans, to use Jacques Derrida's term.⁷ Nonhumans respond and not just react; they affect and influence other entities, including and especially humans. Aside from this philosophical reason, an ecological argument is more viscerally immediate in validating this hermeneutics. Since climate change, environmental degradation due to pollution of all kinds, factory farming, and other unethical profiteering at the expense of the nonhumans are increasing, biblical interpretation cannot and should not be limited to anthropocentric readings anymore. As a matter of fact, this dissertation's nonhuman reading of the Gospel of Mark not only takes ecological and nonhuman readings as valid ways of reading Mark, it takes one step further by intersecting nonhuman reading with the perspectives of colonized *ethnē*. To elaborate, it is about reading Mark from within the relationality between nonhumans and the colonized *ethnē*: on the one hand, taking seriously the need to care for nonhumans even to the point of philosophically blurring ontologies (in order to efface the Cartesian logic of human superiority over nonhumans), and, on the other hand, seriously engaging the affective histories of animalization of the colonized and/or the oppressed.

The Earth Bible Project

The foundation of human-nonhuman intersectionality in ecological biblical hermeneutics is the Earth Bible Project.⁸ The nonhuman reading of Mark that I am

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (ed. Marie-Louise Mallet and David Wills; NY: Fordham University Press, 2009), 33, 124-5.

⁸ Norman C. Habel, ed., *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Earth Bible 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), idem, *The Earth Story in Psalms and Prophets* (Earth Bible 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), Norman C. Habel and S. Wurst, eds., *The Earth Story in Genesis* (Earth Bible 2;

attempting in this dissertation would scarcely be imaginable without the path-breaking efforts of the Earth Bible team and related work such as *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*.⁹ The Earth Bible team has challenged anthropocentric readings of the Bible through ecojustice hermeneutics. This hermeneutics is guided by six ecojustice principles: intrinsic worth, interconnectedness, voice, purpose, mutual custodianship, and resistance. It is also buttressed by hermeneutics of suspicion, identification, and retrieval.¹⁰ Ecojustice hermeneutics engages the socio-cultural environments of the Bible while identifying “attitudes, beliefs, and factors in that time-and-place context that reflect living relationships with the natural world.”¹¹ The Earth Bible Project, however, does not arbitrarily attempt to retrieve solely positive relationships between the divine-human-nonhuman in biblical texts. Rather, many of the participants in the project are bold and critical in their readings, allowing conclusions that admit the irretrievable nature of certain biblical passages or their anthropocentricity.¹² This dissertation will extend those efforts into fresh theoretical and political terrain, as explained below.

Among the six ecojustice principles, the principles of purpose (the universe, earth and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic relationality within which each entity has a place) and voice (earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), idem, *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions* (Earth Bible 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), and Norman C. Habel and Vicky Balabanski, *The Earth Story in the New Testament* (Earth Bible 5; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

⁹ Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger, eds., *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2008).

¹⁰ See Norman C. Habel, “Introducing the Earth Bible,” in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (ed. Norman C. Habel; Earth Bible 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 24-37; and Earth Bible Team, “Guiding Ecojustice Principles,” in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (ed. Norman C. Habel; Earth Bible 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 38-53.

¹¹ The Earth Bible Team, “Ecojustice Hermeneutics: Reflections and Challenges,” in *The Earth Story in the New Testament* (ed. Norman C. Habel and Vicky Balabanski; The Earth Bible 5; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 2.

¹² The Earth Bible Team, “Ecojustice Hermeneutics: Reflections and Challenges,” 2.

against injustice) echo the theoretical trajectories of this dissertation. Ecojustice hermeneutics does not specifically work with posthumanist or nonhuman concepts; nevertheless, ecojustice hermeneutics embraces the philosophical disavowal of anthropocentric subjectivity by claiming all beings to be equal and active entities who respond to and affect one another. By doing so, ecojustice hermeneutics reflects its participation in the multidisciplinary ecological discourse that strives to recognize the earth's voice not as a mere metaphor but as a voiced subject who speaks in non-anthropocentric terms. Echoing the Earth Bible team's ecojustice hermeneutics, Charles Birch, a world-renowned geneticist and theologian, also finds intrinsic value in all living creatures: "in the ecological model of nature all molecules and cells are recognised as subjects."¹³ For Birch, no entity should be limited to the mechanical nor should any entity be pigeon-holed as a mere cog in a cosmic design that relegates certain entities as dispensable. Rather, Birch finds in all entities inherent tendencies for life and purpose.¹⁴

Interestingly, ecojustice hermeneutics manifested in recent papal encyclicals. Pope John Paul II's 1987 *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concerns) article 34 had already questioned the anthropocentric categorization of animals and inanimate entities in order to commodify them. Pope John Paul II writes that we must participate in

acquiring a *growing awareness* of the fact that one cannot use with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate – animals, plants, the natural elements – simply as one wishes, according to one's own economic needs. On the contrary, one must take into account *the nature as each being* and of its *mutual connection* in an ordered system, which is precisely the "cosmos."¹⁵

¹³ Charles Birch, *On Purpose* (Kensington, NSW: University of New South Wales Press, 1990), 27.

¹⁴ Birch, *On Purpose*, 67.

¹⁵ Gregory Baum and Robert Ellsberg, eds., *The Logic of Solidarity: Commentaries on Pope John Paul II's Encyclical on Social Concern* (New York: Orbis, 1989), 36, italics original.

Pope Francis' second encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (2015), participated in its own way in dismantling human-nonhuman hierarchy: "Yet it would also be mistaken to view other living beings as mere objects subjected to arbitrary human domination."¹⁶ Although this quotation above¹⁷ does not fully reflect a philosophical critique of agency, its ecojustice clarion call for the restoration of familial relationship with the earth resonates with activists and scholars who are seeking to establish the intrinsic worth of nonhumans.

Two examples from the Earth Bible Project that reflect this intersectional reconfiguration in relation to the Gospel of Mark are the essays written by Susan Miller and Elaine Wainwright in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*.¹⁸ In "The Descent of Darkness Over the Land: Listening to the Voice of Earth in Mark 15:33," Miller animates the Earth as a living entity who responds to the death of Jesus. After Jesus dies on the cross, Miller interprets the sudden darkening of the sky as the Earth's way of mourning for the injustice that has happened to Jesus and all those who are oppressed. The Earth is anthropomorphized to be "in mourning and empathizes with the suffering of Jesus. This portrayal of Earth retrieves both biblical traditions and Hellenistic texts, which present Earth as a subject who mourns the death of human beings."¹⁹ Although I do not follow

¹⁶ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2015), 57.

¹⁷ Paragraph 82.

¹⁸ *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* is a continuation of the Earth Bible Project's work in developing ecological hermeneutics: "This volume [*Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*] is a representative selection of papers on the emerging field of ecological hermeneutics [vii]... The current components of ecological hermeneutics explored at the recent SBL consultations are dependent on the ground-breaking work of the Earth Bible team and the writers in the Earth bible Project (1)." Norman C. Habel, "Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2008), vii and 1.

¹⁹ Susan Miller, "The Descent of Darkness Over the Land: Listening to the Voice of Earth in Mark 15:33," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2008), 129.

Miller's anthropomorphization of the Earth, I do follow Miller's emphasis on the "interrelationships of human beings and the natural world."²⁰

In "Healing Ointment/Healing Bodies: Gift and Identification in an Ecofeminist Reading of Mark 14:3-9," Wainwright uses the concept of *identification*, or the Earth Bible Project's version of intersectionality that "constantly expands to new areas of interdependence, creating a web of relationships that are multidimensional."²¹

Wainwright intersects or identifies ecofeminism with "other-than-human" perspectives in her reading of Mark 14:3-9, *The Pouring of Healing Ointment* narrative. After the woman with the alabaster jar poured the ointment on Jesus, some of those with Jesus complained about the woman's perceived wasteful act. Wainwright bases their complaint on a commodity-exchange mindset in which they could not see the gift-process mindset that the woman and the ointment offers Jesus.²² In other words, those persons who complained only saw the ointment as a commodity or an object wasted on Jesus. Those who complained thought that the woman's action was pointless because it undermined profitable results. But according to Wainwright, the woman's gift-process model demonstrated how women like her (or those who are considered unimportant) and other-than-human agents like the alabaster jar/ointment could become life-giving sources to others. This narrative then teaches about the importance of interdependence with other

²⁰ Miller, "The Descent of Darkness Over the Land," 129-30.

²¹ Elaine Wainwright, "Healing Ointment/Healing Bodies: Gift and Identification in an Ecofeminist Reading of Mark 14:3-9," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2008), 132. For further examples of feminist and minority eco-justice readings, see essays in *The Earth Story in the New Testament*: Anne Elvey, "Storing Up Death, Storing Up Life: An Earth Story in Luke 12:13-34," 95-107, Oyeronke Olajubu "Reconnecting with the Waters: John 9:1-11," 108-121, and Elmer Flor, "The Cosmic Christ and Ecojustice in the New Cosmos," 137-147.

²² Wainwright, "Healing Ointment/Healing Bodies," 138.

humans, other-than-humans, and even the divine. According to Wainwright, this invaluable teaching is the gift of life provided by the woman and the alabaster jar/ointment: “it is the recognition of and participation in the play of dependence and interdependence in the web of relationships in which the other-than-human, the human, and the divine live out the unfolding gift event.”²³

Thus, Miller’s and Wainwright’s essays create spaces for eco-critical and intersectional interpretations that, as Rosemary Radford Ruether argues in *Women Healing Earth*, provide “[a] less dogmatic and more creative” reading of the Bible.²⁴ In this sense, the dogmatic is the insistence on anthropocentric reading of the Bible. To read with the nonhumans does not assume that the author of Mark was explicitly “posthumanist” or had the explicit intention of ontologically blurring the boundaries between humans, nonhumans, and the divine. Rather, this dissertation invites readers of the Gospel of Mark to open themselves up to the hauntings of nonhumans in the text, to the unspoken but visceral bestial logics whipped into the skins of the colonized ones, and to the reconfiguration of Mark’s messiah and Empire of God with bestial and vegetal terms.

As this preliminary encapsulation of my project suggests, I wish to expand the intersectional models of ecological hermeneutics employed by Miller and Wainwright and other scholars associated with the Earth Bible Project. Wainwright’s attention to gender dynamics in addition to human-nonhuman interactions is commendable, but there are still further dimensions that a fully robust nonhuman hermeneutics requires.

²³ Wainwright, “Healing Ointment/Healing Bodies,” 138.

²⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed., *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion* (intro. Rosemary Radford Ruether; New York: Orbis; 1996), 7.

Specifically, I wish to bring race/ethnicity and imperialism/colonialism fully into the intersectional mix. I will attempt to explain in the next section why I believe this is important. I also wish to extend the Earth Bible model using such resources as animality studies, vegetality studies, animacy theory, and assemblage theory, as I explain later in this introductory chapter.

Becoming-Intersectional Assemblage

Instead of dogmatically limiting oneself with one criticism or hermeneutics, intersectional biblical interpretation focuses on the open-endedness of any interpretation and its necessary vulnerability to being challenged and reinterpreted constantly by another interpretation. As Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw argues, the value of intersectionality lies in its ability to highlight the complexity of relationships between gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, class, and other identifications.²⁵ Although she does not explicitly discuss posthumanist issues, Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality complicates subjectivity by critically re-examining how "the other" is constructed through various sites of oppressions and identifications. In other words, intersectionality seeks to illuminate the unintended blindside of looking at subjectivity and relations from just one identification point. Wo/men are not just oppressed by (hetero)sexism but are also oppressed by colonialism and classism. Moreover,

²⁵ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality. See Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 140 (1989):139-167; idem, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43:6 (1991):1241-1299.

intersectionality rejects dualistic tendencies such as all heterosexual men are oppressors and all minorities are victims. Rather, it cautions that male minorities could be victims in terms of racism but oppressors in terms of sexism/patriarchy.

Applying this to nonhuman studies, intersectionality illuminates that the existence of an oppressive discourse relies upon the existence of another oppressive discourse. Racism thrives because it transgresses and leaks into other oppressive discourses, such as speciesism. To fight racism/speciesism, one must identify and challenge the very complex matrix of dependency of various oppressive discourses on conceptions of the other. Carol J. Adams in *Neither Man nor Beast* also echoes the importance of intersectionality because oppressive systems manifest as an “interlocking system of domination.”²⁶ To fight such complex structures is to engage them with the same level of complexity in the form of intersectionality. Additive approaches, cursorily tackling another issue as if it is an afterthought, are not enough to confront the complexity of various oppressive systems in play because, as Crenshaw argues, “intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism...”²⁷ Thus, reading the Gospel of Mark with the nonhumans and the plight of the colonized/bestialized people illuminates the matrix of oppression(s) haunting Mark and his context. The consilience of theories/hermeneutics/perspectives delves into deeper questions and inquiries than one perspective of interrogation would reveal.

A critique against intersectionality is that a single system of oppression by itself is already sufficiently difficult to resolve, discuss, or “master.” To intersect various issues

²⁶ Carol J. Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast: Feminism and the Defense of Animals* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 79.

²⁷ Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” 58.

could result into haphazard or “amateur” understandings of all the issues, resulting in an endeavor that is useless or even detrimental to all sides. Claire Jean Kim’s response to this critique is her study of the tension between the Chinese “exotic” animal market vendors versus animal rights activists in San Francisco. In her book, *Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species, and Nature in a Multicultural Age*, Kim gathers stories, transcripts of judicial hearings, and news clippings on the tense struggle between the Chinese vendors who cried racism against the predominantly white animal rights protestors; simultaneously, the protestors also cried speciesism against the vendors who are selling “exotic” animals. Instead of providing “the solution” to this struggle, Kim suggests a multi-optic approach. Kim’s approach, which is a simile of intersectionality, sees each intersecting optic (racism and speciesism) from within, and from without, through the vantage point of the other, while holding the confluences of the optics simultaneously so as to perceive the interconnectedness of each optic.²⁸ Mutually avowing conflicting optics does not lead to paralysis of critique or unreflective atomization. In fact, the level of critique actually becomes more complex as the contours of critique unveil unforeseen issues hidden within single (or even double) optic interpretations.²⁹ The conclusions brought about by Kim’s multi-optic approach do not seek some form of resolution for each optic. Rather, her approach actually opens the doors for further intersectional possibilities. Applying Kim’s approach to this dissertation then translates to the absence of desire for the ultimate interpretation from a nonhuman perspective. Instead, the hope of this dissertation is to further open doors for a more

²⁸ Claire Jean Kim, *Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species, and Nature in a Multicultural Age* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 19.

²⁹ Kim, *Dangerous Crossings*, 198.

creative and critical reading of Mark (and the Bible) that is buttressed by ethico-political and ecological considerations.

Working with Kim's understanding of intersectionality as fluidly creating further possibilities, this dissertation defines intersectionality through the lens of Jasbir Puar. Frustrated with how intersectionality has become rigid and ironically essentializing in its definition and application, Puar argues that intersectionality has to be revisited and reinterpreted away from its current state. According to Puar, one has to re-read intersectionality as having the similitude of Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage. Puar even created a portmanteau for this equation, "becoming-intersectional assemblage."³⁰ This amalgamation is a response against how the categories being intersected (race, gender, class, and so on) in intersectionality have ironically reified the subjects they represent. If intersectionality is about pointing out the instability of identity and subjectivity, the epistemological trend to do "intersectionality" ironically became a signifier for certain bodies. Puar highlights Rey Chow's critique against this inadvertent return to the encapsulation of subjectivity by calling it as "poststructuralist signficatory incarceration."³¹ This encapsulation is formulated in the equation of difference equals identity. As this universalizing project highlight otherness, this repetition is creating a fatigue in which marginalized bodies are the new centers of self-referentiality. What this means is that racially minoritized bodies have inadvertently positioned their bodies constantly as the ultimate point of referentiality when it comes to racial issues. Queer

³⁰ Jasbir Puar, "I Would Rather be a Cyborg Than a Goddess: Intersectionality, Assemblage, and Affective Politics." *Europäisches Institut für Progressive Kulturpolitik*, (Jan 2011). <http://eipcp.net.transversal/o811/puar/en>.

³¹ Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 53. I am following Puar's quotation of Chow in "I Would Rather be a Cyborg Than a Goddess," n.p.

bodies are being forced to have gender and sexuality discourse as their primary and/or only point of identities. As Puar suggests, we need to re-learn Kimberlé Crenshaw's understanding of intersectionality as a process in which

[C]ategories – race, gender, sexuality – are considered events, actions, and encounters between bodies, rather than simply entities of subjects.... [I]dentification is a process; identity is an encounter, an event, an accident, in fact. Identities are multi-casual, multi-directional, liminal; traces aren't always self-evident.³²

Here, Puar finds in assemblage theory a channel to expound upon intersectionality's porous understanding of identity. Assemblage theory's attention to affect and de-privileging anthropocentric tendencies sustain the importance of "ontological irreducibility"³³ in understanding intersectionality. In her book, *Terrorist Assemblages*, Puar reminds her readers that

No matter how intersectional our models of subjectivity, no matter how attuned to locational politics of space, place, and scale, these formulations – these fine tunings of intersectionality, as it were, that continue to be demanded – may still limit us if they presume the automatic primacy and singularity of the disciplinary subject and its identitarian interpellation.³⁴

Thus, this dissertation will read select Markan texts with becoming-intersectional assemblage theory, or simply assemblage theory. Even though the nonhumans and the colonized *ethnē* mentioned in this dissertation are becoming reified subjects because the passages that encapsulate them are interpreted constantly, I seek to de-territorialize them from their anthropocentric interpellations by tracing their decolonizing, and counter-Cartesian, vestiges.

³² Puar, "I Would Rather be a Cyborg Than a Goddess," n.p.

³³ Puar, "I Would Rather be a Cyborg Than a Goddess," n.p.

³⁴ Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 206.

Ecofeminism and Ecowomanism

An integral impetus for reading biblical texts through the intersections of ecological (particularly animal-related) and human-related issues (such as racism, classism, gender and sexuality, ableism, and other issues) is the intersectional work of ecofeminists and ecowomanists. Before Jacques Derrida wrote his seminal essay, “The Animal that Therefore I Am,”³⁵ Susan Fraiman argues that ecofeminists, also known as “vegetarian ecofeminists,” since the 1960s have been concerned with the animal question.³⁶ Jane Goodall,³⁷ Carol J. Adams,³⁸ Vicki Hearne,³⁹ Harriet Ritvo,⁴⁰ Donna Haraway,⁴¹ and other ecofeminists⁴² had already begun the discussion in reconfiguring the relationality between humans and nonhumans. Like Fraiman, Greta Gaard expressed

³⁵ Derrida’s essay was published first in French in 1999, “L’animal que donc je suis (à suivre),” in *L’animal autobiographique* (ed. Marie-Louise Mallet; Paris: Galilée 1999): 251-303. Then the essay was translated into English in 2002 with the title, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28.2 (2002): 369-418. In 2008, this essay and three other essays were compiled and published as a book posthumously: *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (ed. Marie-Louise Mallet and David Wills; NY: Fordham University Press, 2009).

³⁶ Susan Fraiman, “Pussy Panic versus Liking Animals: Tracking Gender in Animal Studies,” *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn 2012): 89-115.

³⁷ Jane Goodall, *My Friends the Wild Chimpanzees* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1967).

³⁸ Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); Carol J. Adams and Lisa Kemmerer, *Sister Species: Women, Animals, and Social Justice* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen, *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

³⁹ Vicki Hearne, *Adam’s Task: Calling Animals by Name* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 1986).

⁴⁰ Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁴¹ Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1990); idem, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003); and idem, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

⁴² Lynda I. A. Birke, *Feminism, Animals and Science: The Naming of the Shrew* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994); idem, “Intimate familiarities? Feminism and Human-Animal Studies,” *Society and Animals* 10(4): 429-436; Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (Feminism for Today; London: Routledge, 1993), 155; Myra J. Hird and Celia Roberts, “Feminism Theorizes the Nonhuman,” *Feminist Theory* 12.2 (2011): 109-117.

her frustration on how ecofeminism's work on animals and animal studies, even on new materialism,⁴³ has been overlooked.⁴⁴ For more than fifty years, ecofeminists have engaged the difficulty of challenging sexism's animalization of women while leading the way on the ethico-political treatment of nonhumans. A trajectory, then, that this dissertation tries to follow, is the mandate of ecofeminism and ecowomanism to actually care for nonhumans.⁴⁵ This dissertation's form of caring of nonhumans is to tackle the thorny issue of the animalization of the oppressed, and not just in the plane of the theoretical but also of the affective-political.

As Adams and Donovan argued, the very disparagement or exclusion of affect compared to reason in animal discourses is one of the root causes for the justification of subordination of women and nonhumans.⁴⁶ Since women are stereotyped as "emotional," anthropocentric, androcentric, and misogynistic scholarships have disdained (eco)feminists' work as too affective, which translates as too "un-critical." The very centrality of the question of the nonhumans in many ecofeminist works is "precisely the reason why their scholarship is disregarded."⁴⁷ Phallogocentric (masculine, reason-based,

⁴³ Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, eds., *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008); Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁴⁴ Greta Gaard, "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism," *Feminist Formations* 23 (Summer 2011): 26–53; idem, *Ecofeminism: Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan, eds., *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995); idem, *Beyond Animal Rights: A Feminist Caring Ethic for the Treatment of Animals* (New York: Continuum; London: Cassell, 1996).

⁴⁵ This is a reaction against Cary Wolfe's statement: "The ethical and philosophical urgency of confronting the institution of speciesism and crafting a posthumanist theory of the subject *has nothing to do with whether you like animals.*" Cf. Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 7.

⁴⁶ Adams and Josephine Donovan, *Animals and Women*, 6.

⁴⁷ Jon Roffe and Hannah Stark, "Deleuze and the Nonhuman Turn: An Interview with Elizabeth Grosz," in *Deleuze and the Non/Human* (ed. Jon Roffe and Hannah Stark; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 19.

anthropocentric) scholars who dominate academia have excluded ecofeminists' work because ecofeminists champion the oppressed and neglected, the voiceless and those who do not speak human language. That is why this dissertation, particularly in chapter three and four, intersects affect-gender-ethnicity (and even ableism in chapter four) in an attempt to demonstrate the persuasiveness of affective-political arguments.

Another duality that needs to be challenged is the culture-nature paradigm in which women are aligned with "nature" or subordinated to men's so-called cultured ways. Instead of distancing from nature as a way to combat sexism, Stacy Alaimo embraces nature by contesting its phallogocentric definitions. Through literature, art, and activism, Alaimo in *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* redefined nature as undetermined, contested, and even filled with "multitude of conflicting, ever shifting meanings that are nonetheless potent ideological pivots."⁴⁸ Alaimo detaches nature from its gendered essentialism, racism, and heterosexist exploitations. By doing so, Alaimo opens possibilities for renewed alliances between feminism and environmentalism that are not chained to the dualism of the phallic.

Donna Haraway also recasts the culture-nature dualism by introducing her definition of nature through the figure of the cyborg. According to Haraway, the cyborg "is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction."⁴⁹ Her concept of cyborg offers a way to disentangle from the phallic past because to be a cyborg is to lack origin, to be where "nature and culture are reworked; one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the

⁴⁸ Stacy Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 19.

⁴⁹ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149.

other.”⁵⁰ Emphasizing the fractured identities of feminism, Haraway uplifts the imperfections and contradictions that cyborg politics and identity emulate. Such blurring of boundaries become “a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves.”⁵¹ In addition, Val Plumwood suggests that we must “reconceive of ourselves as more animal and embodied, more ‘nature,’ and... reconceive of nature as more mindlike than in Cartesian conceptions.”⁵² Plumwood’s suggestion reconfigures our relations with nature while being in nature.

Alongside ecofeminists, ecologically conscientious women of color also have voiced their concern for the nonhumans. Kwok Pui-lan has discussed the ambiguous intersections of third world women’s issues and nature. Some third world women were/are objectified as sexual objects only worthy of reproductive use. However, not all third world women were/are maligned as such. Some who are in the elite class cooperate with the colonizers and are treated with some form of respect.⁵³ Kwok also voiced the complexity of third world women’s fight against being animalized while caring for nature. The dire poverty and the difficulty of fighting various forms of oppression unfortunately sometimes force them to choose between their survival over care for nature.⁵⁴ Kwok proposes various responses to these ambiguities. Though she does not use the term actant, Kwok teaches us that the “universe responds and takes care of us.”⁵⁵ This

⁵⁰ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 151.

⁵¹ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 181.

⁵² Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 124. See also Greta Gaard, “Introduction: Critical Ecofeminism,” in *Critical Ecofeminism* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017), xxiv.

⁵³ Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 223-6.

⁵⁴ Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 227.

⁵⁵ Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 229.

response hinges on the belief that fighting for oppressed women and nature should go hand in hand because we humans are not the only ones who are responders in this world. As a matter of fact, we are just participating in the already ongoing work of the earth. Along somewhat similar lines, Jea Sophia Oh, a postcolonial ecotheologian Salimist (*Salim* means “enlivening” in Korean), intersects process theology and *DongHak* (Eastern learning) with the intention of recognizing “life” as a theological theme that re-centers the importance of the sustained existence of every creation.⁵⁶

Although she does not label her work as ecowomanist, Maneesha Deckha has highlighted the importance of highlighting race and culture in posthumanist feminist theory, and the intersectionality of gender and nonhuman issues.⁵⁷ Conjuring feminist and womanist literature⁵⁸ that insist on the importance of intersectionality (although some did not explicitly use the term), Deckha’s insistence on the intersectionality of posthumanism and feminism is based on “how the social forces that code and privilege whiteness inform questions related to the human/animal divide.”⁵⁹ Responding against Karen Warren’s “politics of alterity”⁶⁰ that begins with gender as its starting point, Deckha suggests that in order to avoid some form of essentialism that prioritizes human-related issues, various

⁵⁶ Jea Sophia Oh, *A Postcolonial Theology of Life: Planetarity East and West* (Upland, CA: Sopher, 2011), 12.

⁵⁷ Maneesha Deckha, "Toward A Postcolonial Posthumanist Feminist Theory: Centralizing Race and Culture in Feminist Work on Nonhuman Animals," *Hypatia: Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 27:3 (2012): 527-545.

⁵⁸ bell hooks, *From Margin to Center* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” In *Sister Outsider* (Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1984); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); and, Sherene Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race, and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

⁵⁹ Deckha, "Toward A Postcolonial Posthumanist Feminist Theory," 530.

⁶⁰ Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

issues should be approached co-axially.⁶¹ Melanie L. Harris also points to the paradoxical relationship between women of African descent (who are colonized and enslaved with animalizing rhetoric) and their care for the earth – the paradox of being derided or negatively associated with that which they love and care for. In this paradox, Harris’s approach is to engage in intersectionality especially between “race-class-gender and [the] environmental justice paradigm.”⁶² The comparability of oppression against Black women’s bodies and the earth have become the channel for ecowomanists to pursue this intersectional endeavor.⁶³

Postcolonial Ecocriticism

Another impetus for this dissertation is the intersectionality of ecological studies, postcolonialism, and race and ethnicity studies. Quoting Lawrence Buell’s historical mapping of ecocriticism studies in *The Future of Environmental Criticism*,⁶⁴ Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic echo Buell’s point that ecocriticism is already in its “third wave.”⁶⁵ Emerson, Thoreau, and Muir influenced the parameters of the first wave (conservation literature). Scholars associate the second wave with the seventeen

⁶¹ Deckha, "Toward A Postcolonial Posthumanist Feminist Theory," 534.

⁶² Melanie L. Harris, "Ecowomanism: An Introduction," *Worldviews* 20 (2016): 5. See also idem, *Gifts of Virtue, Alice Walker, and Womanist Ethics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); and, idem, *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2017).

⁶³ Harris, "Ecowomanism," 13. Michelle R. Lloyd-Paige also expounded on the value of intersectionality from a Black woman vegan perspective: Michelle R. Lloyd-Paige, "Thinking and Eating at the Same Time: Reflections of a Sistah Vegan," in *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society* (Brooklyn: Lantern Books, 2010).

⁶⁴ Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005).

⁶⁵ Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic, "The Shoulders We Stand On: An Introduction to Ethnicity and Ecocriticism," *MELUS: Multiethnic Literatures of the United States* 34.2 (Summer 2009): 5-24.

Principles of Environmental Justice.⁶⁶ Adamson and Slovic depict this intersectional second wave as a “yoking together of environmental issues and social justice issues.”⁶⁷ In particular, the second wave focuses on the intersection of ecological studies and various facets of human experience (particularly Native American experience).⁶⁸ The so-called “third wave” expounds upon the second wave by adding postcolonial lenses that critique antithetical binarization of nature/primitive/non-West versus culture/civilized/West.⁶⁹ Greta Gaard even adds her “fourth-stage/wave” or critical ecofeminism to this “wave” model. This fourth-stage/wave is grounded on the practice of attentive listening and the intersections of “Val Plumwood’s work, scholarly activist engagements, environmental justice, interspecies, queer climate justice, posthumanisms (i.e., plant studies), and sustainability efforts.”⁷⁰ This dissertation’s methodology embarks upon this “fourth stage/wave,” particularly on the intersections of posthumanism, environmental justice, and race and ethnicity issues.

⁶⁶ See Adamson and Slovic, “The Shoulders We Stand On: An Introduction to Ethnicity and Ecocriticism,” 6. Also <https://www.ewg.org/enviroblog/2007/10/17-principles-environmental-justice#.WohCSEUrKT8>. According to the website, “the delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held on October 24-27, 1991, in Washington DC, drafted and adopted these 17 principles of Environmental Justice. Since then, the Principles have served as a defining document for the growing grassroots movement for environmental justice.”

⁶⁷ Adamson and Slovic, “The Shoulders We Stand On,” 7.

⁶⁸ For more readings on intersections of ecocriticism and ethnicity, see Joni Adamson, *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2001); Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein, eds., *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2002); Donelle N. Dreese, *Ecocriticism: Creating Self and Place in Environmental and American Indian Literatures* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002); and Jeffrey Myers, *Converging Stories: Race, Ecology, and Environmental Justice in American Literature* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2005).

⁶⁹ Adamson and Slovic, “The Shoulders We Stand On,” 6-9. For other references, see Susie O’Brien, “The Garden and the World: Jamaic Kinkaid and the Cultural Borders of Ecocriticism,” *Mosaic* 35.2 (2002): 167-84; and, Cara Cilano and Elizabeth DeLoughrey, eds., Special Cluster on Postcolonial Ecocriticism. *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 14.1 (2007):71-159.

⁷⁰ Gaard, “Introduction: Critical Ecofeminism,” xvi.

Mentioning the “wave” model above, however, does not neglect Gaard’s critique against it. Gaard argues that this so-called “wave” model typically traces its intellectual history through “popular standpoints and Euro-Western intellectual developments.”⁷¹ It overlooks other emergences of ecocriticism, particularly from non-Western perspectives. These non-Western perspectives or texts may not explicitly label their own work as ecocriticism or ecofeminism; nevertheless, their contributions frustrate any attempts to identify a unifying intellectual lineage for ecocriticism. For now, I continue to utilize Buell’s “wave” model, not to endorse it as the master narrative, but rather, as a way to acknowledge and navigate the conversations that relied upon such terminology.

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin rode the “third wave” of ecocriticism by publishing *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*. Among various intersections tackled in this book, this dissertation’s trajectory resonates most with the book’s discussion of racialization/racism through animalization. Huggan and Tiffin also mention the difficulty of imparting importance to nonhuman issues and their intersections with the fight against the animalization of the oppressed humans because of the “first-things-first excuse” or the excuse of neglecting issues that are perceived as irrelevant by the powerful/oppressors.⁷² To counter this dismissal, Huggan and Tiffin argue that “human liberation will never be fully achieved without challenging the historical conditions under which human societies have constructed themselves in hierarchical relation to other societies, both human and nonhuman, and without imagining new ways in which these societies, understood as being ecologically connected, can be creatively transformed.”⁷³

⁷¹ Gaard, “Introduction: Critical Ecofeminism,” xiv.

⁷² Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2nd ed.; London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 135-8.

⁷³ Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, 22.

On the one hand, Huggan and Tiffin's response seems to fall under the circular argument fallacy because humanist solutions are still the key for humanist problems. On the other hand, Huggan and Tiffin's acknowledgment that we humans could only respond in "human ways" in disavowing the Cartesian logic and the ongoing devastation of the earth is actually a humbling reality check on our limitations. That is why as Cary Wolfe argues, one of the best ways humans could participate in healing the earth is placing nonhuman studies "at the heart" of our human concerns.⁷⁴

Continuing this theme of human limitation, and borrowing from Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?,"⁷⁵ postcolonialism reminds us that subjectivity is never (anthropocentrically) autonomous and transcendental. As Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests, humans are nothing but one "geophysical force" among the various geophysical forces that compose this earth: "a purposeful biological entity with the capacity to degrade natural environment."⁷⁶ Chakrabarty even questions the metaphysical insistence for anthropocentric ontology by arguing that humans have both human and nonhuman elements within us: "This nonhuman, force-like mode of existence of the human tells us that we are no longer simply a form of life that is endowed with a sense of ontology. Humans have a sense of ontic belonging."⁷⁷ In other words, postcolonial ecocriticism's third wave insists that humans are just part of the collective existence of various forces,

⁷⁴ Cary Wolfe, "Human, All Too Human: 'Animal Studies' and the Humanities," *PMLA* vol. 124.2 (Mar 2009): 572.

⁷⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-316.

⁷⁶ Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change," *New Literary History* 43.1 (2012): 11.

⁷⁷ Chakrabarty, "Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change," 11-13.

and that we humans need to stop insisting upon our essential superiority and ontological uniqueness.

From Posthuman to Nonhuman

Inspired by the intersectional work done by ecofeminists, ecowomanists, and postcolonial ecocritics, this dissertation intersects two main theoretical trajectories. First, it reads the nonhumans and humans of Mark as actants in their various assemblages throughout the gospel. Second, it highlights the reality of animalization of the colonized *ethnē* while being in assemblages with nonhumans.

Unpacking the concepts mentioned in the first trajectory beginning with “nonhuman,” followed by “actant” and “assemblage,” I prefer to call all entities that are not human beings as nonhumans in order to include and even focus on those that are called “inanimate objects.” Of course, the term “nonhuman” runs the risk of anthropocentrism again because it describes animals, plants, and “inanimate” others through negation of the human as if they could not stand on their own. Further, a definition-via-negation has an injurious historical legacy whereby certain minoritized groups have been defined as proximate or distant from the touted social ideal. In other words, certain bodies have been interpreted as either like or *not* like the perfect specimen. On such a scale, one is measured (and valued) depending on how much one lacks or strays from the pinnacle. In this vein, women have suffered substantially from men who insist upon reading women’s bodies as lacking superior “male elements.” Women have been interpreted as inferior men, with inverted male parts. Indeed, popular slang talks

about men and women as opposite sexes, as if unconsciously declaring woman as an upside-down man. Even when women are not conceived as not-men, women still often find themselves defined in narrow biological terms, thereby forgetting how historical ideas of woman have been biologized. In this example, I thus hope to convey how phony it is to define the majority of creation as a not-something. Yet, for reasons I will outline below, I will begrudgingly maintain this term as a tentative, temporary placeholder as it appears to communicate the most transparent definition I am trying to convey.

Some ecofeminists have posited alternative terms attempting to express the spirit of “nonhuman.” Such creative and generative options include “more-than-human” or “earthother.”⁷⁸ Earthother, employed by Val Plumwood, serves as an umbrella term for plants, animals, inanimate objects, and even humans.⁷⁹ These options seek to elevate the place of creatures who are not humans. This is accomplished when the relationality of all creatures, including humans, is bracketed under the scope of the earth.

“Posthuman” is not a viable option because it seems to imply that humans are still the center of progress or change. According to Grusin, “posthuman” seems to claim

a teleology or progress in which [humans] begin with the human and see a transformation from the human to the posthuman, after or beyond the human.... The very idea of the posthuman entails a historical development from human to something after the human, even as it evokes the imbrication of human and nonhuman in making up the posthuman turn.⁸⁰

For now, Richard Grusin’s definition and choice to work with “nonhumans” seems the most apt. Grusin argues that the term “nonhuman” expresses the condition of human-

⁷⁸ See Gaard, “Introduction: Critical Ecofeminism,” passim.

⁷⁹ Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis in Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁸⁰ Richard Grusin, “Introduction,” in *The Nonhuman Turn* (ed. Richard Grusin; Center for 21st Century Studies; Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2015), ix.

nonhuman relationality, as “we have never been human” or humans are not the center of the universe; rather, humans and nonhumans “coevolved, coexisted, or collaborated.”⁸¹ Another reason for working with Grusin’s choice is simply because the trajectory of this dissertation is bent towards continental philosophy and its proponents. Scholars in this field resonate with nonhumans over other terms, and they have worked with it for some time now. In this imperfect compromise, my usage of nonhumans is not mutually exclusive with the reasons behind the usage of more-than-human and earthother. Rather, my usage of nonhumans embodies their spirit for countering Cartesian hierarchy, and finding better ways to be in companionship with all creatures.

Moreover, the nonhumans of Mark will be reconfigured as actants. Following Bruno Latour’s definition, actants are “sources of affects and effects, actions and reactions, something that modifies another entity in a trial... [whose] competence is deduced from its performance and not from presumptions.”⁸² This is a reaction against anthropocentric correlation of humans as subjects and nonhumans as objects that demarcate arbitrarily the superiority and centrality of humans. To reconfigure nonhumans as actants is to recognize that humans and nonhumans actually are in a network of relations mutually affecting each other: “we [humans] retain what has always been most interesting about them [nonhumans]: their daring, their experimentation, their uncertainty, their warmth, their incongruous blend of hybrids, their crazy ability reconstitute the social bond.”⁸³ Latour clarifies that we humans do not grant subjectivity

⁸¹ For further explanations for preferring the term “nonhuman” over nonhuman animal, nature, or other such terms, see Grusin, “Introduction,” ix-x.

⁸² Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (trans. Catherine Porter; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 237. See also Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10-11.

⁸³ Bruno Latour, “The Parliament of Things,” in *We Have Never Been Modern* (trans. Catherine Porter;

(or the capacity to affect) to nonhumans.⁸⁴ Rather, we have never been the all-knowing subjects of this world. That is why Jane Bennett describes actants as “interveners” in the problematic paradigm of the subject-object dichotomy.⁸⁵ Bennett further explains and likens the concept of actants as interveners with the Deleuzian concept of “quasi-causal operator”: an operator “by virtue of its particular location in an assemblage and the fortuity of being in the right place at the right time, makes the difference, makes things happen, becomes the decisive force catalyzing an event.”⁸⁶ This shift in paradigm dismantles the anthropocentric causality in which humans enact and nonhumans react. Causality and response are deconstructed from a fixation with human causality and human form of response. To approach humans and nonhuman as actants, then, places all “operators” in a fluid space, affecting and being-affected by one another in their finite assemblages.

Assemblage Theory

Furthermore, reading the nonhumans of Mark as actants sees the various narratives of Mark as “uneven topographies” or assemblages that are not centered upon Jesus but on collective actants in the form of “emergent properties.” Each pericope/narrative that will be discussed in the chapters of this dissertation are taken as

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 142.

⁸⁴ Bruno Latour, “On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications,” *Soziale Welt* 47.4 (1996): 369-81.

⁸⁵ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 9. See also Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 75.

⁸⁶ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 9.

assemblages. This Deleuzoguattarian concept is actually a translation of the French term, *agencement*. According to Manuel DeLanda, *agencement* or assemblage refers “to the action of matching or fitting together a set of components (*agencer*), as well as to the result of such an action: an ensemble of parts that mesh together well.”⁸⁷ Moreover, the problem with the English translation – assemblage – is that it reflects only the second part of the definition, misconceiving the term as a product rather than a constant process of territorialization and deterritorialization or the constant homogenization of various parts/actants and their corresponding dissolution.⁸⁸ That is why after sifting various iterations of assemblages throughout Deleuze and Guattari’s corpus, DeLanda finds Deleuze’s statement in *Dialogue II* the most conceptually straightforward:

What is an assemblage? It is a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across sexes and reigns – different natures. Thus, the assemblage’s only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a “sympathy.” It is never filiations which are important, but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ See Manuel DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 1.

⁸⁸ DeLanda defines territorialization as referring “not only to the determination of the spatial boundaries of a whole – as in the territory of a community, city, or nation-state – but also to the degree to which an assemblage’s component parts are drawn from a homogenous repertoire, or the degree to which an assemblage homogenises its own components.” DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 22. Among the various enunciations Deleuze and Guattari espoused in regards to defining territorialization, this one caught my attention: “Territorialization is an act of rhythm that has become expressive, or of milieu components that have become qualitative.” See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (trans. Brian Massumi; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 315. For more references on territorialization and other Deleuzoguattarian concepts, see Eugene B. Young, Gary Genosko, and Janell Watson, *The Deleuze and Guattari Dictionary* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 306-12.

⁸⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 69. For other key references on assemblage, see Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 34, 38, 67, 73, 88, 90, 97-8, 323-4, 330, 356-7, 368, 503; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), 36; Félix Guattari, *The Machinic Unconscious: Essays in Schizoanalysis* (trans. Taylor Adkins; Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e); 2011), 47, 55, 147, 188; and, Félix Guattari, *The Guattari Reader* (ed. Gary Genosko; Oxford; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 154-5.

This definition captures the temporary emergences of assemblages “without investing the emergent structures of power with essentialist notions of being.”⁹⁰

The concept of emergence further explains the nature of assemblage as a process. DeLanda defines emergent properties, or emergence itself, as “the properties of a whole caused by the interactions between its parts... [while] the parts retain their autonomy.”⁹¹ Assemblages cannot be reduced to their parts, while no one part becomes transcendent over others. DeLanda argues further that if “the [emergent] properties are viewed as produced by the interactions between components, and their existence and endurance explained by the continuity of those interactions, then the properties are *contingent*: if the interactions cease to take place the emergent properties cease to exist.”⁹² Since, assemblages are immanent and not transcendent, they should be viewed as “peripheral or to exist alongside their parts.”⁹³ Thus, the trees, the Sea of Galilee, Jesus, the Syro-Phoenician woman, and other actants in the Gospel of Mark that we shall consider are all parts of various assemblages; no one actant transcends over others. The assemblages formed in each pericope, and across pericopae, exist only because of the interactions produced by the various parts that comprise each assemblage. They will be considered then as “open-ended groupings”⁹⁴ found throughout the Markan narrative as we shall see in far greater detail in due course.

DeLanda systematically organized Deleuze and Guattari’s scattered definitions of assemblage into four main points. First, assemblages have “a fully contingent historical

⁹⁰ Roffe and Stark, “Introduction: Deleuze and the Nonhuman Turn,” 11.

⁹¹ DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 9-10.

⁹² DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 12.

⁹³ DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 12.

⁹⁴ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 24.

identity, and each of them is therefore an individual entity...that does not exist in a hierarchical ontology.”⁹⁵ The individual in question does not signify number but its historical uniqueness.⁹⁶ Second, assemblages are “always composed of heterogeneous components”⁹⁷ that are not “uniform in nature or origin, and... the assemblage actively links these parts together by establishing relations between them.”⁹⁸ Jane Bennett’s definition of assemblage resonates with DeLanda’s second point: “assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant matters of all sorts. Assemblages are emerging confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within.”⁹⁹ Third, assemblages can become components of larger assemblages.¹⁰⁰ Fourth, assemblages “emerge from the interactions of their parts.”¹⁰¹ As mentioned above, assemblages are not ruled by a single component; rather, each emergent property is a vital force of the assemblage.¹⁰² As soon as an assemblage is formed, it immediately becomes its own source of limitations and deterritorialization because an assemblage cannot be reduced to its own parts or a part cannot transcend its own assemblage. Thus, assemblages are always in the process of dismantling and opening themselves for new formations because they have “finite life span.”¹⁰³

Since assemblages are finite and immanent, reading Mark’s narratives as assemblages is actually a practice of decoding. Decoding is a Deleuzoguattarian term for

⁹⁵ DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 19-20.

⁹⁶ DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 6 and 13.

⁹⁷ DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 20.

⁹⁸ DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 2.

⁹⁹ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 23.

¹⁰⁰ DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 20.

¹⁰¹ DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 21.

¹⁰² Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 24.

¹⁰³ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 24.

dismantling structures of transcendence. If coding is the process of fixing identities, behaviors, and rules of engagement,¹⁰⁴ then assemblage “is a stratum that has been decoded.”¹⁰⁵ Strata or layers “consist of giving form to matters, of imprisoning intensities or locking singularities into systems of resonance and redundancy [...] Strata are acts of capture [...] they proceed simultaneously by code and by territoriality.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, reading narratives of Mark as assemblages intends to decode, among other things, the assumed transcendental stranglehold of anthropocentric prejudices. It is not simply about forcefully retrieving or interpreting texts so as to engage with the neglected nonhumans. Rather, it is about interrogating tendencies that superimpose explicitly or implicitly anthropocentric codes on all relationalities. Reading Mark’s humans and nonhumans as actants in various assemblages opens the imaginative possibilities that were once curtailed due to limitations brought about by anthropocentrism.

From an ecological perspective, the concept of assemblage resonates with the Earth Bible team’s second ecojustice principle, the principle of interconnectedness: “Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival.”¹⁰⁷ Assemblage theory extends the spirit of the second ecojustice principle by continuing its ecojustice stance while drawing further its theoretical reach, as developed and provided by such thinkers as Deleuze and Guattari, DeLanda, and Bennett. Moreover, assemblage theory echoes Roman Catholic “geologian” Thomas Berry’s “communion of subjects.”¹⁰⁸ Berry sees all nonhumans as

¹⁰⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 322, 355.

¹⁰⁵ DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 22.

¹⁰⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 40, 45.

¹⁰⁷ Earth Bible Team, “Guiding Ecojustice Principles,” 38-53.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton, “Introduction,” in *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion*,

autonomous subjects with their own agencies. The nonhumans are in communion with the world as they are capable of affecting and being affected by others. Although Berry does not use posthumanist concepts explicitly, his care for the earth resonates with the philosophical maneuverings argued by many theorists and employed in this dissertation.

Following Berry's reconfiguration, the follow-up question then becomes: how are the actants within an assemblage in communion with each other? Among various possibilities, this dissertation highlights Stacy Alaimo's term, *trans-corporeality* or the way "in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world. . . . The substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment.'"¹⁰⁹ Trans-corporeality is Alaimo's way of recognizing the entanglements of all actants materially, socially, and even affectively. These entanglements produce relationality through the movements across various forms of bodies that are "unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors."¹¹⁰ Thus, the trans-corporeality of this dissertation is traced through transgressions of the actants in the select Markan narratives, with the guidance of animality, vegetality, and animacy perspectives.

Animality, Vegetality, Animacy

The constellation of these theories attempted in this dissertation is not unique to it. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's edited volume, *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*,

Science, and Ethics (ed. Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton; New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 11-14.

¹⁰⁹ Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 2.

¹¹⁰ Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 2.

for example, insists on the importance of intersecting animality studies with vegetality studies and new materialism: “the study of animals, plants, stones, tracks, stools, and other objects can lead us to important new insights about the past and present; and that they possess integrity, power, independence and vibrancy.... Human is not the world’s sole meaning-maker, and never has been.”¹¹¹

The constellation of animality, vegetality, and new materialism (in the form of animacy, as will be explained below) is more than just a heuristic selection in this dissertation. The assemblage of these three theories/hermeneutics is based on the hope of engaging as many nonhumans in the Gospel of Mark as possible. The eclectic variety of theories employed in this dissertation is not meant simply to chalk up points in an intellectual game. Rather, the variety signifies my desire to decolonize interpretive gatekeeping that compartmentalizes hermeneutics, criticisms, and theories. Intersecting various theories decolonizes and/or “reframes”¹¹² the arbitrary restrictions customarily imposed on biblical interpretation, a kind of (Foucauldian) epistemic stranglehold. It does not seek allegiance to a single criticism or hermeneutics because it does not want one perspective to restrict and control the possibilities for imaginative and critical interpretations. It goes without saying that if someone should re-read the Gospel of Mark with the three theories mentioned above, that person will come up with a mixture of conclusions both similar and different to this dissertation. The diversity of interpretations,

¹¹¹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Introduction: All Things,” in *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects* (ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen; DC: Oliphant Books, 2012), 7. This book is based on a conference at George Washington University in March 2011 entitled “Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects in the Early Modern and Medieval Periods.”

¹¹² Vincent L. Wimbush and Tat-siong Benny Liew, “Contact Zones and Zoning Contexts: From the Los Angeles ‘Riot’ to a New York Symposium,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 56.1-2 (2002): 36.

the infinity of interpretive assemblages and the endless blossoming of new ones, is the very intent of this decolonizing epistemology.

First, no unanimously decided definition of animality studies exists. Even with the disagreements on the name of the field, however (animal studies, human-animal studies, zoocriticism, critical animal studies, posthuman animality studies, and others), all animality philosophers and activists agree that one of the core arguments of animality studies is the eradication of the Cartesian human-animal hierarchy and divide. Animality studies is generally understood as a philosophical engagement with transdisciplinary roots that seeks to work through “the question of the animal.”¹¹³ It is indebted to ecofeminists, ecowomanists, and Jacques Derrida’s interrogation of that question, or the way animals have traditionally been reduced to anthropocentric essentialist taxonomies. Animality studies then seeks and invites nonhumans’ interruptions, hauntings, and affects.

As Stephen D. Moore argues, animality studies should never disregard the work of animal advocacy groups.¹¹⁴ Animality studies is inspired by the ecological drive to erase anthropocentric legacies. It participates in animal advocacy through philosophical and theoretical work by going against methods that delimit nonhumans to the literary realms of metaphors, tropes, and data. Nonhumans are rather viewed as material entities or living creatures who affect and influence other actants. Of course, animality studies does not claim to know animal thoughts or dare to represent nonhumans with

¹¹³ See Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 6.

¹¹⁴ Stephen D. Moore, “Introduction: From Animal Theory to Creaturely Theology,” in *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology* (Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquium; ed. Stephen D. Moore; New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 2.

constitutively shared characteristics based on humanist presumptions. In the end, we still assume and interpret from humanist perspectives. As Cary Wolfe argues, “it is a matter, then, of locating the animal of animal[ity] studies and its challenge to humanist modes of reading, interpretation, and critical thought not just ‘out there,’ among the birds and beasts, but ‘in here’ as well, at the heart of this thing we call human.”¹¹⁵

In several chapters of this dissertation – specifically, chapters one (Mk 1:13, Jesus and the wild beasts), three (5:1-20, the Sea of Galilee, the Gerasene demoniac, and the pigs), and four (7:24-30, the Syrophenician woman) - the primary animality studies interlocutor is Jacques Derrida, particularly his magisterial book, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Derrida’s other works such as *The Beast and The Sovereign I and II*¹¹⁶ and “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject”¹¹⁷ will also be consulted for further exposition of his thoughts on animality. The second interlocutors will be Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, especially on their concepts of becoming and assemblage.¹¹⁸ Further explanations of these concepts are distributed throughout the chapters of this dissertation. I will not, however, attempt to provide a history of the scholarship of animality studies because many introductory books have already masterfully summarized the historical trajectories of this interdisciplinary field.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Wolfe, “Human, All Too Human,” 572.

¹¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2 volumes; trans. Geoffrey Bennington; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009-2011).

¹¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject,” in *Points...: Interviews, 1974-1994* (ed. Elisabeth Weber; trans. Peggy Kamuf et al.; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

¹¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 232-309.

¹¹⁹ For a selection of introductory texts on animality studies, see Calarco, *Zoographies*; Margo DeMello, *Animals and Society: An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Haraway, *When Species Meet*; Kelly Oliver, *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to Be Human* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Cary Wolfe, *Before the Law: Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). For biblical and theological intersections with animality

A drawback of choosing Derrida is that, according to Donna Haraway, when he reflected on his encounter with his cat, he “failed a simple obligation of companion species; he did not become curious about what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available to him in looking back at him that morning.”¹²⁰ Moore points out that Derrida seems to have anticipated such a critique because Derrida re-engaged the importance of his cat’s gaze:

When I feel so naked in front of a cat, facing it, and when, meeting its gaze, I hear the car or God ask itself, ask *me*: Is he going to call me, is he going to address me? What name is he going to call me by, this naked man, before I give him woman....¹²¹

This re-engagement, according to Moore, reconfigured the cat’s ontology not just as the constitutive other but as the hyphenated human-nonhuman-divine, divinanimality.¹²²

Although Derrida did not engage the nonhumans along the line of Jane Goodall or Carol J. Adams, his engagement, in all its imperfections, contributed to dismantling Cartesian logic.

Inasmuch as Deleuze and Guattari’s various philosophical concepts are useful, Haraway is correct in her critique of their sweeping statement against the mundane, the sentimental. Haraway points out Deleuze and Guattari’s discombobulating statement:

“*Anyone who likes cats or dogs is a fool!*”¹²³ In their desire to critique Freud and promote

studies, see Jennifer L. Koosed, ed., *The Bible and Posthumanism* (Semeia 74. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2013); Moore, *Divinanimality*; Stephen D. Moore, “The Dog-Woman of Canaan, and Other Animal Tales in the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Soundings in Cultural Criticism: Perspectives and Methods in Culture, Power, and Identity in New Testament Interpretation* (ed. Francisco Lozada, Jr. and Greg Carey; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 57-71; Moore, “Why There Are No Humans or Animals in the Gospel of Mark;” Hannah M. Strømme, *Following the Biblical Archive: Jacques Derrida, the Bible, and the Question of the Animal* (Semeia; Atlanta: SBL Press, forthcoming); and, Ken Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

¹²⁰ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 20.

¹²¹ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 18. See Moore, “Introduction,” *Divinanimality*, 7-8.

¹²² Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 132.

¹²³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 240.

the importance of becoming-animal, Deleuze and Guattari qualified the relationality between humans and animals into three groups. They prefer the demonic, pack, or affect animals who are in their multiplicity of becoming are not tied down (third group) to the classifications accorded by the State's anthropocentric taxonomy (first group), or to the individuated, Oedipal regressions of those who own pets (second group). In regards to the second group, Deleuze and Guattari critiqued those who have animal companions for their "narcissistic contemplation" or resolving their daddy and mommy issues through animal companionship.¹²⁴ According to Deleuze and Guattari, nonhumans are freed from anthropocentrism when they are liberated from state apparatus and human sentimentality. Miffed by their short-sightedness, Haraway lambasted Deleuze and Guattari for their preoccupation with the sublime over the mundane and visceral, their "misogyny, fear of aging, incuriosity about animals, and horror at the ordinariness of flesh."¹²⁵ Deleuze and Guattari contradicted their own concept of becoming by limiting the possibilities of relationality between nonhumans and their human companions in the interests of countering Freud's Oedipal complex. Even though Haraway's work is not based on Deleuzoguattarian concepts, her work demonstrated a better understanding of multiplicity of becoming-animal than Deleuze and Guattari themselves. With this in mind, I am and seek to be haunted and guided by Haraway's mandate as I apply Deleuze and Guattari's concepts in interpreting various Markan passages.

Second, vegetality studies or critical plant studies argues that the vegetal entities are capable of "accessing, influencing, and being influenced by a world that does not

¹²⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 240-1.

¹²⁵ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 30.

overlap the human *Lebenswelt* but that corresponds to the vegetal modes of dwelling on and in the earth.”¹²⁶ Critical plant studies does not claim to know or speak for plants. Rather, it values the life of plants by letting plants be in their own obscurity, their otherness, and their ways of existence.¹²⁷ Chapter two of this dissertation re-reads the Empire of God and its temporality through Michael Marder’s ontophytology (vegetal ontology), which means understanding the nature of existence and temporality through plants. Jeffrey T. Nealon’s argument on plant biopolitics will also be utilized in the chapter. According to Nealon, life is “not a static or dynamic backdrop for the myriad (im)possibilities of individual lives but as the ecological territory that cuts across all strata of life... life as defined in rhizomatic territories.”¹²⁸

If animal(ity) studies is still struggling to be accepted by mainstream academia, vegetality studies is subjected to outright ridicule, or taken with a hint of skepticism at best. Its relative newness in the academic field with few academic resources does not help in challenging this hostility.¹²⁹ Nealon laments the indifference shown towards plant-life and the preferential orientation of biopolitics to fleshly organisms. To counter this neglect, Nealon propounds that vegetality invites a reconfiguration of biopolitics that is vegetal, concerned with life in the territory of the emerging: “life is an interlocking

¹²⁶ Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 8.

¹²⁷ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 8.

¹²⁸ Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Plant Theory: Biopower and Vegetable Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 107.

¹²⁹ Aside from Marder and Nealon’s books, here are select academic resources on critical plant studies: Richard Doyle, *Darwin’s Pharmacy: Plants, Sex, and the Noosphere* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003); Matthew Hall, *Plants as Persons* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010); Elaine Miller, *Vegetative Soul: From Philosophy of Nature to Subjectivity in the Feminine* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002); Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

assemblage of forms of processes, a series of doings, as Deleuze and Guattari insists; it is not hidden world possessed by an individual organism.”¹³⁰ Vegetality affects other actants in ways that are not organic (centered) and molarly linear (a fixed single trajectory of life), but rhizomatic¹³¹ (distributive) and molecularly cyclical (an endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth). Also, Marder in *The Philosopher’s Plant* argues that “*philo-sophia*, the love of wisdom, is brought to life with the help of *phyto-philia*, the love of plants.”¹³² Tracing the “intellectual herbarium” or various ways philosophers’ ideas are expressed through plants, Marder demonstrates that “philosophical dialogues, treatises, lectures, and meditations will grow, flourish, blossom in greater proximity to vegetable life.”¹³³ As Marder resuscitates various fragments of vegetality in thinkers ranging from Plato to Luce Irigaray, this dissertation will in turn use the vegetal engagements of Marder, and also those of Nealon, to read select passages in the Gospel of Mark.

Third, I follow Mel Y. Chen’s approach to new materialism: animacy theory. It considers how matter “that is considered insensate, immobile, deathly, or otherwise ‘wrong’ animates cultural life in important ways.”¹³⁴ Chen’s animacy theory intersects new materialism with gender and sexuality, race, ecojustice, and affect in order to “affectively disrupt and subvert the arbitrary hierarchy and ontological boundaries

¹³⁰ Nealon, *Plant Theory*, 114.

¹³¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21-23.

¹³² Michael Marder, *The Philosopher’s Plant: An Intellectual Herbarium* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), xiii.

¹³³ Marder, *The Philosopher’s Plant*, xv.

¹³⁴ Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2012), 2.

formed not just between humans and animals but also with those categorized as animate and as inanimate.”¹³⁵

The importance of this third approach, and what places it in the category of new materialism, is that it reconfigures the so-called “inanimate objects” (or as Jane Bennett describes them, “vibrant matter”) ¹³⁶ as actants who have affective and generative agencies toward themselves and others.¹³⁷ This dissertation finds new materialism to be an important conduit for discussing intersectional matters because new materialism energizes “materiality that materializes, evincing immanent modes of self-transformation that compel us to think of causation in far more complex terms.”¹³⁸ In other words, new materialism embraces the embodied particularities and finitude of humans and nonhumans. The subject-object distinction is removed not by distancing from materiality but by embracing the very underlying matters that brought about the dichotomy in the first place. New materialism then becomes key in further intersecting nonhumans with the experience of objectification of the colonized *ethnē* in the Gospel of Mark. It resuscitates the presence of inorganic matters as vital forces that affect human characters in Mark, even Jesus and the Empire of God.

¹³⁵ Chen, *Animacies*, 2, 104.

¹³⁶ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 36.

¹³⁷ This dissertation will not engage with speculative realism or object-oriented ontology, those other major manifestations of new materialism, even if they each have in their own ways undermined the human-subject, nonhuman-object hierarchy. On speculative realism and object-oriented ontology, see Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Hants: Zero, 2011); Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Surrey; Burlington: Ashgate, 2012); and, Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (trans. Ray Brassier; London; New York: Continuum, 2008).

¹³⁸ Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, “Introducing the New Materialisms,” in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost; Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 9. For Theological engagement with new materialism, see Catherine Keller and Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Religion, Science, and New Materialisms* (Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia; New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

And yet, claiming nonhuman studies' reconfiguration of ontologies as fluid, or as transgressing the boundaries between humans and nonhumans (in other words, as removing anthropocentric philosophical or essentialist differences between humans and nonhumans) needs more nuanced explanation. To claim this fluidity demands first and foremost acknowledgment of the histories of racism, sexism, colonization, ableism, and other oppressive structures that have used animalization as their tool of choice. Taking our lead from Cary Wolfe's argument in *What is Posthumanism?*,¹³⁹ a nonhuman reading of Mark should avoid the mistake of applying animality theory (or, by extension, vegetality theory and new materialism) too quickly to marginalized and colonized groups without at least recognizing their unresolved colonial-animalizing issues. In the US, for example, minorities have been animalized as a form of oppression and segregation. W.E.B. DuBois fought against the horrible treatment of African-Americans in schools as they were treated like meat, as creatures in-between humans and cattle.¹⁴⁰ Animalization is so prevalent in contexts of oppression that Frantz Fanon had to narrate the "discovery of humanity" by the colonized as a way to combat their animalization by the colonizers.¹⁴¹ Ngūgĩ Wa Thiongo abhorred the punishment his fellow students received in British schools in Nigeria for speaking Gikuyu. The punishment was wearing a sign that said "I am a Donkey."¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* 99.

¹⁴⁰ W.E.B. DuBois, "The Training of Black Men," in *The Souls of Black Folk* (ed. And intro by Brent Hayes Edwards; Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007), 75-83.

¹⁴¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (trans. Richard Philcox; NY: Grove, 2004), 7-8.

¹⁴² Ngūgĩ wa Thiongo, "The Language of African Literature," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman; New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 437.

Confessions and Questions

I myself experienced animalization in many ways. During my early years of graduate studies in one of the southern states of the US, I was subjected to racial slurs whereby strangers aimed animal sounds (hisses, dog barks, and monkey screams) against me. But what really opened my (Asian) eyes to the power of animalization was reflecting upon how this bestial logic operated in my childhood in the Philippines. Although a Korean, born in South Korea, I grew up around Manila. As fellow colonized *ethnē*, one might assume that our solidarity would protect us, Koreans and Filipin@s, from lashing out at each other. Particularly since both of our nations celebrate independence from harsh Japanese occupation, I had naïvely believed that our histories had taught us to avoid such animalizing colonial tactics. Yet, as a matter of confession, my Filipin@s brothers and sisters and I used animalization to demean each other. I did not target the powerful oppressor, but hurled verbal assaults at my Filipin@ friends. I had not taken into account that my “East-Asianness” socially separated me from “Southeast-Asianness.” As a Korean residing in the Philippines before the influx of Korean immigrants, I felt isolated and belittled for my difference. Meanwhile, my Filipin@ community read me as a young man of privilege. In the world of colorism, my paler skin – a virtue in a still overwhelmingly white culture – complemented, rather than challenged, dominant standards of a valued body. Unaware of these internalized standards within Asian groups, I participated in perpetuating these hierarchies by animalizing my Asian neighbors. Was this a residue of colonial neurosis that desired the

oppressors' methods? Was this a colonial mentality in which I chose to mimic the oppressors in order to escape my (former) colonized reality through demeaning others?

Such self-realization helped me recognize other manifestations of racism when I migrated to the West Coast of the US. A white seminary student commented that she felt as if she needed a passport to travel to California because UC Berkeley felt like Asia. In fact, in 2007, a New York Times writer communicated concerns of “over-representation” of Asians at prominent institutions of higher education, and specifically cited UC Berkeley as an example.¹⁴³ Admissions offices were accused of converting top ranked American universities into “Little Asias.”¹⁴⁴ When I arrived in California, I continued to hear about Asians as the “model minority,” but these comments conveyed the limitations of racial tolerance. And, indeed, I partook in fulfilling those expectations of being an “ethnic, but neutral” body – the virtue of “mainstream multiculturalism.”¹⁴⁵ Even in academia, scholars feigned interest in my perspectives, my gaze, my optics – an extension of the obsession with Asian eyes as the corporeal defining imprint of my Asianness. In fact, when I described myself once as Asian American, a Caucasian American corrected me saying that I was not a US citizen and therefore could not be American. “You are an Americanized Asian. Perhaps a Westernized Asian if you will.” In other words, as I transgressed national borders, I did not enter an empty stage. My body bumped into the ghosts of orientalism, through which and against I would be viewed. Although these racializations were not explicitly animalistic, these new layers pointed me towards my other interest – the environment. Not only are colonized *ethnē*

¹⁴³ Timothy Egan, “Little Asia On the Hill,” *New York Times*, Jan 7, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/07/education/edlife/07asian.html>.

¹⁴⁴ Egan, “Little Asian On the Hill.”

¹⁴⁵ Egan, “Little Asian On the Hill.”

understood in animalistic language, we are read in the context of our stage, our environment, that environment in turn being regularly conceived as “fit only for animals,” a step closer to the natural world than the habitat befitting proper humans. Thus, my other concern is the actancy of everything around the human as well.

These stories and questions are the impetus for my desire to intersect nonhuman studies and the experience of animalization by the colonized *ethnē* in reading the Gospel of Mark. I find animality, vegetality, and new materialism in the form of animacy theory liberating and invigorating; and yet, my other optic *squints* critically in order to always remember the hauntings of bestial logics that linger around nonhuman studies’ desire for ontological fluidity among all actants.

This haunting is nothing new. Rachel C. Lee in *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America* discussed the “zoe-ification” of Asian Americans.¹⁴⁶ *Zoe* comes from Giorgio Agamben’s concept of *zoe* versus *bios* in which the latter is a label for those who are politically worthy of life while the former reduces entities (mostly humans) to the level of the dispensable (like rodents, insects, or microbes).¹⁴⁷ Lee traces the bodily *zoe*-ification of Asian Americans in literature. Carlos Bulosan’s *America is in the Heart* expresses the pain of being labeled as monkeys by White Americans.¹⁴⁸ The outpouring of lament against the animalization of Asian Americans continued on in Maxine Hong Kingston’s

¹⁴⁶ Rachel C. Lee, *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America: Biopolitics, Biosociality, and Posthuman Ecologies* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 48.

¹⁴⁷ Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

¹⁴⁸ Carlos Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1943).

Woman Warrior,¹⁴⁹ Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*,¹⁵⁰ and R. Zamora Linmark's *Rolling the R's*.¹⁵¹

African Americans have struggled side-by-side with Asian Americans against racialized animalization. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson interrogates liberal humanism's tendency to sidestep racial and colonial perspectives in discussing what it means to be human.¹⁵² Seeking to transform from within posthumanism, Jackson seeks to further articulate posthumanism by bringing to the forefront "bestializing social logics," or expanding how race, gender, sexuality, and dis/ability have been used as tools to animalize and/or de-humanize of the oppressed.¹⁵³ Alexander G. Weheliye also exposes in *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* that certain key minority discourses against the "western man" have been relegated or forgotten by critical theorists.¹⁵⁴ Even before Derrida wrote *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Aimé Césaire in *Discourse on Colonialism*¹⁵⁵ had already questioned the ontological essentialism manifested by (western European) humanism. Cary Wolfe also accused the liberal philosophical tradition of theorizing and redefining "the human" too easily, resembling the privileged mobility of "those who are on top," those who do not

¹⁴⁹ Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (New York: Random House, 1976).

¹⁵⁰ Jessica Hagedorn, *Dogeaters* (New York: Penguin, 1990).

¹⁵¹ R. Zamora Linmark, *Rolling the R's* (New York: Kaya, 2006).

¹⁵² Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism* (Ann Arbor: MPublishing, University of Michigan Library, 2013), 671.

¹⁵³ Jackson, *Animal*, 674.

¹⁵⁴ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2014), 8.

¹⁵⁵ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (trans. Joan Pinkham; New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001; French original 1950).

have to deal with oppressive structures.¹⁵⁶ In other words, intersecting animality with race/ethnicity/gender had become an afterthought at best when it should have been a point of departure.

What if Agamben, Foucault, and Derrida took the Middle Passage as the starting point of their theories rather than the precincts of Europe? Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon,¹⁵⁷ Sylvia Wynter,¹⁵⁸ Hortense J. Spillers,¹⁵⁹ Sharon Patricia Holland,¹⁶⁰ and Lewis Gordon¹⁶¹ had already been disrupting the concept of “enlightenment man” before and alongside French theory. They did not need to be convinced about the blurring of the human-nonhuman divide because the ontologies of their racial/ethnic environments were forcefully blurred by animalization. Their starting point was already “posthuman,” if not “unhuman.” That is why nonhuman studies have to bring to the forefront the struggles of the colonized and animalized other.¹⁶²

Bringing such struggles to the forefront is not about following Marjorie Spiegel’s suggestion in which human suffering is simply equated with animal suffering.¹⁶³

Sweeping the history of denigration under the rug by arguing that such comparison is

¹⁵⁶ Cary Wolfe, “Introduction,” in *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal* (ed. Cary Wolfe; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), ix-xxiii.

¹⁵⁷ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (trans. Charles Larn Markmann; New York: Grove Press, 1967); idem, *The Wretched of the Earth* (trans. Constance Farrington; New York: Grove Press, 1963).

¹⁵⁸ Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Toward the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review*, no. 3 (2003): 257-337.

¹⁵⁹ Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); idem. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17 (1987): 64–81.

¹⁶⁰ Sharon Patricia Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

¹⁶¹ Lewis Gordon, “African-American Philosophy: Theory, Politics, and Pedagogy,” *Philosophy of Education 1998* (1998): 39-46.

¹⁶² Jackson, *Animal*, 674.

¹⁶³ Marjorie Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 30.

only offensive to speciesists does not resolve the issue. Reversing speciesism, in which humans are marginalized and animals are privileged, as Carrie Rohman¹⁶⁴ argues, only perpetuates marginalization as a tool of discourse because it does not question the systems of exclusion and sacrifice that enable it. Instead of these approaches, this dissertation's intersectional quest does not seek a foolproof way to include all who are oppressed, let alone "solve their animalization," in the name of nonhuman studies. Using Judith Butler's concept, this dissertation resorts to "embarrassed *et cetera*"¹⁶⁵ – the shorthand way of, in this case, expressing and hiding my failure to include all who are oppressed and the failure to completely resolve the issue of animalization. This failure is not avoidable, and yet should not be an ongoing reason to continue the exclusion of those who are not mentioned in this dissertation. On a personal note, I hope that they will be discussed in other works. Nevertheless, this dissertation's "*embarrassed et cetera*" is a humbling admittance to the difficulty of finding fully adequate ways to assert ontological fluidity between humans (particularly those who are animalized) and nonhumans.

Colonized *Ethnē*

Shifting gears, this dissertation prefers to use the expression *colonized ethnē* as a signifier for both Mark's human audience and for the human actants within the narratives who are colonized by the Roman Empire. This expression is inspired by Davina C. Lopez's monumental book, *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul's Mission*.

¹⁶⁴ Carrie Rohman, *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 100.

¹⁶⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 143.

According to Lopez, outside the religious construct dependent on differentiating Gentiles (*Ethnē*) from Jews (*Ioudaioi*), *ethnē* (or *gens* in Latin, which means people, groups, “ethnicities,” and other variations) signifies all “peoples conquered by the Romans and incorporated into (i.e., made to serve) their territorial empire.”¹⁶⁶ Lopez’s most convincing argument is materially evident through the inscriptions on the base of a relief on the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias in southwest Turkey. In the north portico of the Sebasteion, reliefs of approximately fifty personified female representations of various colonized *ethnē* stand side by side as a reminder of the penetration of the masculine and colonial prowess of the Roman Empire. They showcase the reach of the Roman Empire by listing the names and images of these colonized *ethnē*. These reliefs have bases with inscriptions and faces of their colonized *ethnē* with stereotypical markers such as hairstyles and facial features. One of the inscriptions reads: “ETHNOUS IOUDAION” (Image #1).



(Image #1: Photo taken by Rhian Jeong, 2015 at Aphrodisias, Turkey)

¹⁶⁶ Davina C. Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul’s Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 6. Please note that I translate *Ioudaioi* as Judeans in general. I translated it as “Jew” here in order to replicate how it has been translated when it is limited to religious discourses.

In other words, in the eyes of the Roman Empire, Jewish communities, and all other Others, are *ethnē*. If the Romans, or the Roman Empire, are the central and most important group, the rest are mere *ethnē*. I added “colonized” as the descriptive adjective to “*ethnē*” because it highlights the overreach of Roman imperial ambitions in various facets of life, extending to animalization of its colonies.¹⁶⁷

Moreover, as noted by Benjamin Isaac, ancient historians used *gens* to describe various groups of people. For example, Tacitus maligned Jewish communities by calling them *taeterrima gens* (most repulsive people).¹⁶⁸ Bruce Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey remark relatedly that ancient authors, such as Pliny the Elder, classified humans according to their ethnic groupings based on their place of origin.¹⁶⁹ Pliny was concerned for geography and ethnic divisions because he wanted to prove that the Romans were the most important *gens* in the world.¹⁷⁰ This skewed valuation of one’s group was apparently not unique to the Romans. According to Denise K. Buell, Christians used “ethnic reasoning” or “modes of persuasion...to legitimize various forms of Christianness as the universal, most authentic manifestation of humanity, and it offered Christians both a way to define themselves relative to ‘outsiders’ and to compete with other ‘insiders’ to

¹⁶⁷ For more discussions on mixing of ethnicities, Roman citizenship, and the issues thereof, see David L. Balch, *Contested Ethnicities and Images: Studies in Acts and Art* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), chapter one. See also Victor’s monograph on colonial education of the Hellenized children during the time of Jesus: Royce M. Victor, *Colonial Education and Class Formation in Early Judaism: A Postcolonial Reading* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2010).

¹⁶⁸ Tacitus, *Histories, Books IV-V, Annals Books I-III* (trans. Clifford H. Moore and John Jackson; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), v.8; See Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 448-9, 478.

¹⁶⁹ Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 114.

¹⁷⁰ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History: Bks. III-VII v. 2* (trans. H. Rackham; William Heinemann Ltd, 1942), 3.5.33; 7.40.

assert the superiority of their varying visions of Christianness.”¹⁷¹ Eric D. Barreto follows Buell’s argument in reading the Acts of the Apostles from race and ethnicity perspectives in which he defines ethnicity as a flexible term in its creative assemblage(s) of “geography, myths, history, appellation, cultural and religious commitments, and others.”¹⁷²

For this dissertation, I add the layer of animalization in defining ethnicity. This layer emphasizes the colonial tensions undergirding relationality between various groups (not just colonizer-colonized). The mutability of ethnicity does not have to stay exclusively within the anthropomorphic realm. Nonhumans also mutate ethnicities in ways that cause their allegiances and associations to branch out even to their assemblages with lands, waters, mountains, trees, and rocks. For example, the Sea of Galilee is an ethnic marker of both the Galileans and the communities of the Decapolis in the Gospel of Mark. The stones of the second temple in Jerusalem encode the history and identity of the Judeans. The purple dye and the cedar trees are markers of ethnicity for the Phoenicians. Camel-hair clothing, together with locusts and wild honey, is a metonym, for John the Baptist. The cross, for Christians through the ages, has been a metonym for Jesus.

The Roman Empire’s animalization of their colonial subjects, or the animalization of their opponents, was a common occurrence in the ancient Mediterranean world.

Aristotle apparently advised Alexander the Great to treat the colonized *ethnē/gens* like

¹⁷¹ Denise K. Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 2.

¹⁷² Eric D. Barreto, *Ethnic Negotiations: The Function of Race and Ethnicity in Acts 16* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 39. See Barreto’s work for informative groundwork on tracing the definitions of race and ethnicity, and their application not just in Acts but in reading the Bible in general.

“plants and animals” (ζῷοις ἢ φυτόις).¹⁷³ Caligula proclaimed himself divine while treating humans as below animals: “Having collected wild animals for one of his shows, he found butcher’s meat too expensive and decided to feed them with [human] criminals instead.”¹⁷⁴ Derrida mentions Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s interpretation of Caligula as someone who reputedly said: “kings were gods, peoples were beasts.”¹⁷⁵ And yet, this inclination to animalize others was not solely the prerogative of the Roman Empire. Colonized *ethnē* also animalized each other by mimicking the bestial logics of the Roman Empire (more on this in chapter one).

Of course, one could doubt or even question the possibility of knowing if many colonized persons experienced animalization or even worried about it. To assume that the characters in and the audience of the Gospel of Mark are all traumatized by colonization and animalization seems to be overreaching. Not all colonized persons hated the Roman Empire. For example, the Jewish local elites of Jerusalem in the first century CE benefited from the empire. The Roman Empire supported the Jerusalem temple not out of reverence for the sacred site but as a way to control its colony by colluding with the local oligarchs who controlled the temple.¹⁷⁶ It follows that not all colonized *ethnē* would express anger toward the colonial bestial logics of animalization of the colonized since they presumed that they were exempted from such logics. Nevertheless, this dissertation

¹⁷³ Plutarch, *Moralia, Volume IV, Roman Questions. Greek Questions. Greek and Roman Parallel Stories. On the Fortune of the Romans. On the Fortune or the ... in Wisdom?* (trans. Frank Cole Babbitt; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), 329.b.

¹⁷⁴ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars* (rev ed.; London; New York: Penguin Classics, 2007), Gaius (Caligula) 27.

¹⁷⁵ Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. I, 12-3. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 1954), 237.

¹⁷⁶ Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 BCE to 640 CE* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 11-14.

recognizes the psychological and physical toll that imperialism takes on both colonial and diasporic communities (wherever they may be), even if such suffering is unquantifiable.

This recognition is a response to the suffering of *both* humans and nonhumans in their finitude, vulnerability, and passivity. It continues Derrida's turn away from "asinanity or suspension of compassion and deprivation of (humans and) nonhumans from every power of manifestation."¹⁷⁷ Following Rosi Braidotti's "bio-egalitarian turn,"¹⁷⁸ this dissertation performs Mel Chen's plea for an "ethics of care and sensitivity"¹⁷⁹ that challenges the order of oppressive biopolitics by destabilizing human-nonhuman hierarchy and opening oneself (in this case, one's Asian-self, or minority-self) to unexpected assemblages and affections. In this sense, I am seeking to "re-territorialize the loci of political responsibilities"¹⁸⁰ or re-imagine agencies in human-nonhuman assemblages.

In a way, I am inviting Asian/American communities to re-imagine the fluidity of our identity with nonhumans. Inasmuch as the colonial discourse of animalization still haunts (Asian) minorities, this project participates in moving beyond the impasse by questioning "the discomfort zones that mark the edges of acceptable and normative practice in the guild by examining the system of exclusions"¹⁸¹ that regulate Asian/American biblical scholarship. I do not claim to have found *the* answer to this issue. Rather, in line with Kim's argument, I will approach this "irresolvability"¹⁸² not as

¹⁷⁷ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 37-8.

¹⁷⁸ Rosi Braidotti, "Animals, Anomalies, and Inorganic Others," *PMLA* 124.2 (Mar 2009): 526.

¹⁷⁹ Chen, *Animacies*, 16, 235.

¹⁸⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 88.

¹⁸¹ Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 130.

¹⁸² Kim, *Dangerous Crossings*, 19.

a hindrance but as an opportunity to find pockets of resolutions and justices in this endless flow of mutual avowal among multiplicities of optics.

This invitation for re-imagination in the form of reconfiguration of assemblages is a response to the “paradoxes of auto-immunitary logic” in many (Asian)/postcolonial interpretations. By “auto-immunitary,” Derrida means an act of self-defense or self-preservation of a thing that in fact leads to that very thing’s self-destruction.¹⁸³ There is a tendency for minority scholars to engage in auto-immunitary biblical interpretation in which the plight of the colonized/minority is thoroughly analyzed at the expense of (consciously or unconsciously) neglecting or sacrificing nonhumans. In this biopolitical fight for (Asian) life and identity, nonhumans are on some occasions turned into scapegoats as we minority scholars auto-immunize ourselves or unintentionally blind ourselves to the plight of the nonhumans by focusing too much on our subjectivity and/or sovereignty. Roberto Esposito’s response to this is that minority scholars should not enclose themselves and become so “removed from the movement that binds him [*sic*] to his [*sic*] own biological matrix.”¹⁸⁴ The search and fight for “Asian-ness” should not exclude animacy to nonhumans. Instead, the task of this dissertation is to propose the transformation of auto-immunitary biblical interpretations and their myopic search for (Asian/minority’s) sovereignty into community-relational and creaturely-intersectional interpretations that respond to the minorities’ ethico-political issue while fulfilling the obligation to be with and become as nonhumans.

¹⁸³ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 47. See also Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 35-36, 86.

¹⁸⁴ Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (trans and intro. Timothy Campbell; Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2008), 188.

Shuffling-Reading the Chapters

I would like to invite the readers of this dissertation to read it as Deleuze and Guattari suggest their readers to read *A Thousand Plateaus*. They compared reading *A Thousand Plateaus* with listening to a music record or album.¹⁸⁵ Depending on the day, certain songs speak to us while others are skipped. The same goes for the chapters of *A Thousand Plateaus* and, I would venture to say, this dissertation: readers might be in the mood to read a certain chapter(s), depending upon the day. As this dissertation does not intend to have the final word, hopefully the “randomness” of reading it will be like listening to music according to one’s mood or the ethico-political issues that haunt the day. In other words, it is up to the readers to decide if the finitude of each chapter ends at the last period of the chapter or continues to the next. Usually, dissertations have trajectories that climax in the last chapter or in the conclusion. If readers would like to have more structure in reading this dissertation, then they might begin with this introductory chapter and jump ahead to the chapter(s) of their choosing. Afterwards, they are invited to engage the concluding chapter as a way to wrap up the arguments with suggestions for further intersections.

Each chapter assembles various passages/texts/narratives with theories/hermeneutics/criticisms. These assemblages emerged and achieved flight in each chapter or plateau (in Deleuze and Guattari, “a plateau is reached when circumstances combine to bring an activity to a pitch of intensity that is not automatically dissipated in a

¹⁸⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, xiii-iv.

climax”).¹⁸⁶ The arguments of each chapter are in certain sense contained within that chapter. And yet, each chapter’s argumentative intensities also overflow to other chapters. The traces of arguments left behind/picked up by previous/following chapters transgress the boundaries of chapter markers. The reason for such overflow is to challenge readers to find further intersections and even gaps in this dissertation. Finding those new intersections (and gaps) hopefully will encourage readers to find more ways to be creative and subversive in their ethico-political readings of Mark and the Bible.

Here are the summative traces of the chapters of this dissertation. The chapters are arranged in the semi-chronological order of the Gospel of Mark. Chapter one engages the curt but bewildering Mark 1:13b: the narrative in which the Markan Jesus “was with the wild beasts.” This chapter works with an animality perspective that argues for (human) life-altering experience produced through the encounter with the beast(ly) or the nonhuman. Working with the ontologically penetrating gaze of Jacques Derrida’s cat, Carol J. Adam’s reflection on the death of her horse, Jimmy, and Aldo Leopold’s life-changing encounter when he saw the fierce green fiery eyes of a wolf he shot and killed, this chapter argues that the animal gaze/presence (or the absence thereof) affectively shapes, jolts, and even questions the supposed ontological uniqueness and superiority of humans.¹⁸⁷ The relationality that is formed by being with nonhumans, as Jesus is with the wild beasts, demands responsivity to the ways humans have neglected the plight of nonhumans. As read in this chapter, the Markan Jesus’ encounter with the wild beasts causes him to struggle in his responsivity to humans (colonized *ethnē*) and nonhumans

¹⁸⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, xiv.

¹⁸⁷ This chapter will expand and include other encounters found in a forthcoming editorial volume by Trevor Bechtel, Matthew Eaton, and Timothy Harvie, *Encountering Earth: Thinking Theologically with A More-Than-Human World*.

alike. The Markan Jesus is described as a bestial messiah because he tries to be in solidarity with nonhumans and those that are animalized while (un)consciously mimicking the bestial logics of his time.

Chapter two approaches the Empire of God with Michael Marder's work on vegetality. Instead of relegating plants to the realm of dispensability, this chapter finds in the Gospel of Mark several narratives/passages (4:1-20, 26-29, 30-32; 13:28-31) that depict plants as either teaching or demonstrating the Markan version of the Empire of God. The first vegetal lesson reconfigures the Empire of God as an atelic collective being that grows through multiple interactions with other actants. The second lesson reimagines an empire not led or primarily occupied by humans. Continuing the arguments of the second lesson, the third lesson teaches us that those who are deemed inanimate or irrelevant are those that give life and direction to the Markan Empire of God. Moreover, this chapter finds in Mark a vegetal way of understanding the temporality of the Empire of God. Lastly, through these stories, this chapter acknowledges and discusses the unfortunate colonial and anthropocentric desire manifested by the Markan Jesus in 11:12-14, 20-21 (the cursing of the fig tree). His desire to curse the fig tree reflects centuries of colonial conditioning in which the colonized *ethnē* are entangled to mimic the oppressors' disregard for those who are considered dispensable.

Chapter three re-reads Mk 5:1-20 from the plight of the Sea of Galilee filled with pig carcasses. Working with Mel Chen's animacies perspective and Sarah Ahmed's understanding of the affect of disgust, this chapter argues that those that are considered inanimate, insensate, and immobile have affective potentialities to move and even transform organic actants. The affect produced by the disgusting pig cadaver-infested Sea

of Galilee could have moved the Gerasenes to beg Jesus to move out of their region. The visual and olfactory disgust bring back for the colonized *ethnē* (particularly the poor and the oppressed) memories of colonial disdain and current anger against the Roman Empire for their sacrificial machine that systematically makes those who are oppressed as killable. Unfortunately, the Markan Jesus reflects or mimics the oppressors' carnophallogocentric treatment of the dispensable ones even as he himself struggles to not do so.

Chapter four tackles the contentious dialogue between the Syrophenician woman and the Markan Jesus (7:24-30) by providing another animality reading of this narrative through Neel Ahuja's trope of the animal mask. Jesus' animalizing response to the Syrophenician woman is a reflection of a collective assemblage of enunciation stemming from centuries of animosity between the Israelites and the Syrophenicians. The Syrophenician woman's response is a form of animal mask – that is, a performative discourse that temporarily dons the bestial logics in order to reflect back to Jesus his animalizing rhetoric. Her animal(izing) performance wakes the Markan Jesus to the need to unify with fellow colonized *ethnē* under the domination of the empire. Thus, he heals her daughter.

The last chapter reflects upon the trajectory this dissertation has taken. While this conclusive chapter revisits key concepts and issues that are highlighted in the dissertation, it will also address the limitations of this dissertation. By doing so, it invites readers to territorialize new assemblages with other actants, hoping that their new re-territorializations will flourish for a more intersectionally ethical biblical interpretations.

CHAPTER ONE:

Marked by the Beast: The Wild Beasts of Mark 1:13b

Could we imagine a Jesus who could be influenced or transformed by his encounter with the wild beasts or animals¹ (θηρία)? That is, could we imagine a Jesus who cedes power to, and is genuinely moved, by the nonhuman other? Christian piety has long nurtured an image of Jesus/Christ as one who moves but is never moved, who influences but is never influenced. His divinity is mightily uplifted at the expense of diminishing his humanity. Could the human Jesus have felt fear at the presence of wild beasts? Did the pitiful plight of animals move Jesus to care for those who are animalized? A far cry from the omnipotent Christ, a nonhuman reading of Mk 1:13b demands the resurgence of a more “humanized” Jesus due to the gaze of the wild beasts.

Postcolonial readings of the gospel of Mark have already reconfigured or “humanized” Jesus as someone who struggled with outside influences – that is, the oppressive regime of the Roman Empire moved and influenced Jesus. On the one hand, Tat-siong Benny Liew finds Mark’s portrayal of Jesus as mimicking colonial authority in which Jesus’s dystopian vision seeks to annihilate all opponents according to the colonial bestial logic of “serve-or-be-destroyed” by reigning in his new empire (see Mk 4:24; 8:38-9:1; 12:9-11, 36; 13:1-2, 26; 14:61-62).² The Markan Jesus also seems to buy into

¹ I prefer to translate θηρία as wild beasts over “animals” in order to emphasize the harsh context of the wilderness, and to distinguish θηρία from domesticated animals/nonhumans or animals in general (ζωή).

² Tat-siong Benny Liew, “Tyranny, Boundary, and Might: Colonial Mimicry in Mark’s Gospel.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 73 (1999): 23.

the bestial logic of the colonizers³ who assert that, as Liew states, “certain people have proven to be too barbaric, too evil or too underdeveloped to be given autonomy, or even the right to live.”⁴ Stephen D. Moore amplifies Liew’s point: Jesus appears to be the only figure in Mark who is “attributed with absolute, unassailable authority” even as Jesus himself commands his followers to shun authority (see 9:33-37; 10:17-31, 35-44; cf: 12:41-44).⁵ On the other hand, Jesus’ so-called unassailable authority did not translate into full realization of his empire. The Markan Jesus preached the coming of the Empire of God that would topple down and replace the Roman Empire. And yet, the Markan Jesus’ mimicry of the colonizers’ rhetoric backfired because he himself became a victim of his own colonial rhetoric through his death on the cross. The supposed messiah is bestialized by being hung on a cross like an animal or like someone who does not have the right to live. His death on the cross, combined with his disciples’ fear (Mk 16:8) left this supposed new empire unattained.⁶

Mark’s crucifixion narrative, especially when contrasted with those of Luke and John, has Jesus succumbing most fully to the animalizing ordeal of crucifixion: “My

³ This is my assertion, not Liew’s. I see it as a bestial logic because it dehumanizes the other, marking him or her for animalizing death.

⁴ Liew, “Tyranny, Boundary, and Might,” 23.

⁵ Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 36-7.

⁶ For other postcolonial readings of Mark, see Tat-siong Benny Liew, *Politics of Parousia: Reading Mark Inter(Con)Textually* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999); R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), passim; Simon Samuel, *A Postcolonial Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (London; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2007); David Joy, *Mark and Its Subalterns: A Hermeneutical Paradigm for a Postcolonial Context* (Oakville, CT: Equinox Pub, 2008); Hans Leander, *Discourses of Empire: The Gospel of Mark from a Postcolonial Perspective* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2013); and Jin Young Choi, *Postcolonial Discipleship of Embodiment: An Asian and Asian American Feminist Reading of the Gospel of Mark* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). He does not transcend the reduction of his flesh to butchered meat, as Luke’s and John’s Jesuses do. This begs the question, why did the author of the Gospel of Mark portray his Jesus with such a bestialized image? This dissertation suggests that Mark “bestialized” his messiah so that Mark’s bestialized audience would know that their messiah is “with them;” that is, Jesus is also a fellow colonized person who partook in their struggle against their animalization by the Roman Empire. Mark does this by not distancing Jesus from animals or wild beasts. Rather, Mark inaugurates this reconfiguration as early as possible; Mark places Jesus “with the wild beasts” during his preparation for ministry in the wilderness (Mk 1:13b).

Of course, Mark does not explicitly mention the details of the encounter between Jesus and the wild beasts. Could Jesus have subjugated the wild beasts? Does he have a peaceable relationship with them? The unstated details of this literary episode are, of course unknowable, as is the inner state of this literary character. My intention, nonetheless, is to imaginatively and meaningfully fill in these narrative blanks through recourse to certain ethical discourses on animality. This dissertation provides another interpretation of Mk 1:13b through the experience of Jacques Derrida’s encounter with his cat, Carol J. Adam’s life-changing reflection on the death of her horse named Jimmy, and Aldo Leopold’s life-changing encounter when he saw the fierce green fiery eyes of a wolf he shot and killed. These stories highlight how humans have transformative experiences because of the gaze and presence (or absence) of nonhumans. Nonhumans have the affective capacity to shape, jolt, and even make humans question their supposed ontological uniqueness. Nonhumans transgress the arbitrary anthropocentric borders of

relationality and responsivity created by humans, particularly the assumption that only humans can affect the other. Applying this line of thinking to Mk 1:13b, this dissertation interprets the deliberate creation of this encounter, which is absent from its synoptic parallels in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13, as a way to reconfigure Jesus' messiahship early on as bestial. The Markan Jesus' struggle, however, is not always positive or in solidarity with the oppressed humans and nonhumans. As the following chapters of this dissertation narrate, the Markan Jesus' struggle also includes his recidivism to colonial mimicry in which he uses the bestial logic of animalization on his fellow colonized *ethnē*.

Tracking the Interpretations of Mark 1:13b

Even though Mk 1:13b is enigmatically short, many interpreters have imaginatively tried to make sense of this passage. As a matter of fact, the very conciseness of the passage seems to bestow permission upon interpreters to come up with creative possibilities. What does the assemblage of Jesus and the wild beasts (τά θηρία) signify? What does it mean for Jesus *to be with* the wild beasts? Richard Bauckham's ecological reading of Mk 1:13b in *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* is instrumental in laying the foundation for a nonhuman reading of the passage. Bauckham interprets Mk 1:13b as an eschatological fulfillment of Jesus' Davidic messiahship that brings peaceable relationship with nonhumans. According to Bauckham, the passage resonates with Davidic messiahship because in Isaiah 11:1-9 Jesus is the very

“shoot that came out of the stump of Jesse” who reinstated the peaceable relationship with all creatures.⁷

This peaceable relationship for Bauckham is eschatological because, aside from overcoming Satan, it hopes for a world in which humans affirm nonhumans’ “independent value for themselves and for God.”⁸ This affirmation entails “eschatological salvation”⁹ by changing humans’ relationship with nonhumans from subjugation and domestication to peaceable companionship. This peaceable relationship is also immanent because Bauckham describes Mk 1:13b as Mark’s reconfiguration of his Jesus (or Christology) in which relationship with all of creation is a prerequisite for Jesus’ messiahship and his ministry.¹⁰ Jesus went to the wilderness because “He must establish his messianic relationship to these before he can preach and practise the kingdom of God in the human world.”¹¹

Bauckham also quotes Hosea 2:18 as an eschatological expectation, using Robert Murray’s term, the “cosmic covenant”¹² in which God renews the covenant not only with humans but with all creatures: “I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety (Hosea 2:18; NRSV).”¹³ Bauckham acknowledges, however, that this restoration of relationship between humans and nonhumans still has hints of human domination and forceful turning

⁷ Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 130.

⁸ Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 131.

⁹ Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 131.

¹⁰ Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 113.

¹¹ Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 117.

¹² Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant* (Heythrop Monographs 7; London: Sheed & Ward, 1992), 27-32.

¹³ Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 124.

of predatory animals into vegetarians.¹⁴ Gene M. Tucker similarly emphasizes that the covenant promises “a return to culture and fruitful nature, to the way humans have come to live in a positive relationship with the rest of creation.”¹⁵ The hope of this restoration (see also Job 5:22-3) then continues to be based on anthropocentric concerns since it desires “peace” according to human predilections.

In addition to Bauckham’s reading, some interpreters adhere to a New Adam typology for Mk 1:13b. The new Adam typology argues that Jesus is the new Adam who resisted the devil and restored the Edenic paradise in contrast to the Adam of Genesis who participated in disrupting this paradise. Thus, Jesus’ eschatological encounter and victory over both Satan and the wild beasts represents hope for Edenic restoration with all creatures.¹⁶ Joel Marcus even sees the new Adam motif manifested in the portrayal of John the Baptist’s garments and food, in addition to John the Baptist’s traditional comparison to Elijah due to his “hairy mantle.”¹⁷

And yet, the difficulty of applying this Jesus-as-the-new-Adam motif is that Mark does not feature any Garden of Eden-like paradise image elsewhere in his gospel. Robert H. Gundry rejects the paradisaical interpretation as well but simultaneously neglects the notion of a struggle with the animals. Gundry simply states that the scene serves “to bear

¹⁴ Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 126.

¹⁵ Gene M. Tucker, “The Peaceable Kingdom and a Covenant with the Wild Animals,” in *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner* (ed. William P. Brown and S. Dean McBride; Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2000), 223.

¹⁶ See John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Sacra Pagina vol. 2; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002), 38-39; Camille Focant, *L’Evangile Selon Marc* (Commentaire Biblique: Nouveau Testament 2; Paris: Cerf, 2004), 70-71; Jeffrey B. Gibson, *The Temptations of Jesus in Early Christianity* (Journal for the Study of New Testament Supplement 112; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 67; Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 27; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 168-71; Ulrich Mell, “Jesu Taufe durch Johannes (Markus 1,9-15) zur Narrative Christologie vom Neuen Adam,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 40 (1996): 161-78.

¹⁷ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 168-71. See further comparison with Elijah in Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 63.

witness to Jesus being Son of God, whom none can harm.”¹⁸ Walter Radl also argues that the μετὰ (“with”) of Mk 1:13b should just be read as Jesus being in the presence of/or associated with animals.¹⁹ Radl compared other uses of μετὰ in Mark: Mk 3:14 where Jesus appoints the twelve apostles that they might be “with” him; Mk 5:18 has the Gerasene Demoniac pleading to be “with” Jesus; and Mk 14:67 has Peter addressed as one who was “with” Jesus. By comparing the multiple uses of *meta*, Radl concludes that none of these are about domination or paradisaical relationality.

Another interpretive option for Mk 1:13b is to depict Jesus at odds with the wild beasts. This line of interpretation stems from the existence of ancient Jewish apocalyptic texts that represent animals and/or wild beasts as enemies, evil, and even demonic. These texts express fear of animals for their uncontrollability, power, and indecipherability. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, in particular, depict wild beasts as part of Satan’s threats to humanity. These texts promise the people of Israel that “the devil will flee from you; wild animals will be afraid of you, and the angels will stand by you” (*Testament of Naphtali* 8.4; *Testament of Issac* 7.7; *Testament of Benjamin* 5.2).²⁰

Some scholars prefer to see the wild beasts as part of the testing of Jesus in the menacing wilderness. According to John Paul Heil, Jesus’ testing corresponds to Israel’s

¹⁸ Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993),

58. For an overview of scholarships before 1961 and in German, see E. Fascher, “Jesus und die Tiere.” *Theologische Literaturzeitung* (1965): 561-70.

¹⁹ Walter Radl, “μετὰ,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider; trans. James W. Thompson and John W. Medendorp; 3 vols; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990-1993), 2. 413: “In the local sense, it means in the midst of, among the wild beasts.” See also Frederick William Danker, rev. and ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3rd Edition; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 636-38.

²⁰ See William Loader, “Good News – For the Earth? Reflections on Mark 1.1-15,” in *The Earth Story in the New Testament* (ed. Norman C. Habel and Vicky Balabanski; London; New York: Sheffield Academic Press; Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2002), 38.

trials in the wilderness which included hostility from wild beasts. This is also called the Jesus-Israel motif.²¹ Heil marshaled key biblical passages that depict the threatening presence of wild beasts against Israel. In Deuteronomy 8:15, God leads Israel “through that great and terrible wilderness with its biting serpents and scorpions.” In Deut 7:22 LXX, the wilderness is described as a place where the threat of numerous wild animals would be overwhelming for Israel: “lest the land become wilderness and the wild animals (θηρία) of the field become too numerous for you.” In Ezekiel 34:5, there is a promise to destroy evil “wild animals” (LXX, θηρία) from the land so that Israel may dwell securely in the wilderness. Heil also argued using the “*meta* + object” construction (with + the wild beasts) in which Jesus is in the object position in relations to the subject position of the wild beasts. Heil concludes that “for a peaceful subjection of the wild animals to Jesus in a restored paradise, we would expect to hear that the wild animals are *with Jesus*; but that Jesus is *with the wild animals* suggests that he is the object of their unfriendly threats just as he is the object of Satan’s unfriendly testing.”²² John Olley also sees through Psalm 91:11-13 in which wild beasts (lions, serpents, and the cobra in particular) are inimical to humanity as a proof text to the threatening nature of wild beasts for humans.²³ To summarize, Ernest Best interprets this passage as a “holy war” between Satan and wild beasts versus Jesus and the angels.²⁴

²¹ John Paul Heil, "Jesus with the Wild Animals in Mark 1:13," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (Jan 2006): 63. See also A.B. Caneday, "Mark's Provocative Use of Scripture in Narration: 'He was with the Wild Animals and Angels Ministered to Him,'" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 9 (1999): 33.

²² Heil, "Jesus with the Wild Animals in Mark 1:13," 65.

²³ John Olley, "Animals in Heaven and Earth: Attitudes in Ezekiel," *Colloquium* 33 (2001): 47-57.

²⁴ Ernest Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), 57; see also Erich Grässer, "KAI HN META TON ΘΗΡΙΩΝ (Mk 1,13b): Ansätze einer theologischen Tierschutzethik," in *Studien zum Text und zur Ethik des Neuen Testaments: Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Heinrich Greeren* (ed. Wolfgang Schrage; Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 1986), 144-157.

But when did nonhumans decide to become enemies of Jesus? Did they ever plan to test Jesus? Nonhumans or wild beasts were never inherently enemies of humans. Humans created the conditions for such enmity. Insatiable greed, lust for power, and unfathomable indifference caused such enmity between humans and nonhumans. Moreover, to interpret this encounter as a divinely mandated subjugation or mastery over the wild beasts, following in the vein of Greco-Roman stories of heroes,²⁵ perpetuates anthropocentric ventriloquism of the divine in order to manipulate the oppressed, voiceless nonhumans. These human-created conditions replicate the shackling of nonhumans into the literary where the nonhumans are sacrificed for the phallic quill pen to meet the skins of nonhumans in the form of papyrus (reed plant) or parchment (usually goat skin).²⁶ For example, wild beasts such as lions are turned into symbols of greatness, such as Revelation 5:5's depiction of Jesus as "the lion of Judah." Interestingly, the same lion or other wild beasts are used as metaphors for associates of Satan or demons, threats, and enemies of humans in general (Luke 10:19; 1 Peter 5:8; *Joseph and Aseneth* 12:9-10; Psalm 10:9; 17:12; 22:12-13, 16, 21; 58:4-6; 91:13; 118:12; 140:3, and too many more to list here). The unhindered anthropocentric manipulation of wild beasts by (re-)inscribing their natures for the sake of human ideological bias is one of the ways the general lack of concern for the wild beasts is expressed. Bauckham addresses this issue by challenging biblical interpreters to retrieve the lost and abused voices of the "real" wild beasts in this

²⁵ John Kloppenborg sees the similarity of Jesus' confrontation with wild animals with Greco-Roman heroes facing tests and trials before going off to adventures. Thus, the real struggle is with Satan, and the wild animals are just preparations for Jesus. Cf. John Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 258-62.

²⁶ See Stone's animality reading on goat skin and biblical scrolls in his *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies*, 14, 21, 44.

passage. Here, Jesus was with real, living and breathing wild beasts. These wild beasts (Θηρία) according to Bauckham usually are

wild animals in distinction from animals owned by humans, and usually to four-footed animals in distinction from bird, reptiles, and fish (Gen 6:20; 7:20; Ps 148:10; Hos 2:18; 4:3 LXX; 1 Enoch 7:5; *Ap. Mos.* 29:13; Jas 3:7; Barn. 6:18), though snakes can be called Θηρία (Gen 3:2 LXX; Acts 28:4-5; Hermas, *Sim.* 9:26:1, 7; Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 17.117). However, the word can also have the more limited sense of beasts of prey or animals dangerous to humans. Though sometimes given by the context or an adjective (cf: Gen 37:20, 32; Lev. 26:22; Job 5:22-3; Hos. 13:8 LXX; Tit. 1:12; Josephus, *Ant.* 17:120), this sense of dangerous beast of prey seems sometimes required by the word *therion* without further indication of it (e.g. Josephus, *Ant.* 2.35; Acts 11:6; Ignatius, *Eph.* 7:1; Rom. 4:1-2; 5:2; *Smyrn.* 4:2; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 4:38) ... The word does not prohibit well-informed readers from thinking also of other animals: hyenas, jackals, caracals (the desert lynx), desert foxes, Fennec foxes, wild boars, wild asses (the onager and the Syrian wild ass), antelopes (the desert oryx and the addax), gazelles, wild goats (the Nubian ibex), porcupines, hares, Syrian hyraxes, spiny-mice, gerbils, sand-rats, and jirds.²⁷

Instead of wondering which metaphor “best” appropriates the wild beasts’ relationality with Jesus, Bauckham suggests that they, the real wild beasts and Jesus, were simply together. Bauckham concludes this because he is calling for a more positive and hopeful co-habitation with the wild beasts without anthropocentric manipulations. He seeks to affirm the wild beasts (and all creatures in general) as “creatures who share the world with us in the community of God’s creation.”²⁸

What remains to be said about this matter? The concept of an *assemblage* of Jesus with the wild beasts as a way to re-imagine a more humanized and creaturely messiah is the jumping-off point of my own reading. From this point, I deviate from Bauckham by

²⁷ Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 118-9. Bauckham refers to these texts for the list of animals: Henry Baker Tristram, *The Natural History of the Bible* (London: SPCK; 1911); Friedrich Simon Bodenheimer, *Animal Life in Palestine* (Jerusalem: L. Mayer, 1935); George Cansdale, *Animals of Bible Lands* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970).

²⁸ Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 132.

focusing on the colonial animalization of the other. Instead of a peaceable relationship, the importance of this encounter is Jesus' transformation as a result of the wild beasts' gaze: the encounter with their pitiful plight caused Jesus to struggle with his own animalized past. My own reading has certain affinities with William Loader's interpretation of Mark 1:13b in which Jesus struggled at the presence of wild beasts, not as enemies (Satan is Jesus' arch nemesis), but as a voice that enhanced a sense of danger.²⁹ This struggle, as Loader further explains, reverberated throughout the wilderness or the place that "spoke, disturbed, evoked, whined, shouted, and wailed, giving voice to the pain of those who are struggling."³⁰ Although Josephus critiqued the assumption that the wilderness is a place of preparation for liberation,³¹ this interpretation finds the assemblage of wild beasts, Jesus, and the wilderness as a place of preparation for Jesus to be in tune with the reality of animalization of the colonized *ethnē*. If the image of this assemblage for Bauckham brings forth a peaceable image, for this dissertation, it brings forth an image of Jesus who chose to be with the wild beasts in his preparation, as part of the colonized *ethnē* who are derided with animalization. Jesus did not detach and distance himself from the wild beasts. Here, Jesus was with them. In re-imagining and reconfiguring this "preparation scene," this dissertation taps into "realistic" human reactions to wild beasts or animals in which humans are either fearful and/or jolted to anxiety due to the inability to control the other. Has the Jesus of Mark 1:13b experienced this jolt? Has his time with the wild beasts/animals reminded him of all the animalizing derision thrown at him and his fellow colonized *ethnē*? Was this

²⁹ Loader, "Good News – For the Earth? Reflections on Mark 1.1-15," 38.

³⁰ Loader, "Good News – For the Earth? Reflections on Mark 1.1-15," 40.

³¹ See Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War* (Book II; trans. H. St. J. Thackeray; London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1927), 423-5 (2.258-64).

passage the author of Mark's mechanism of reminding his audience to remember and be comforted that their messiah is also derided and bestialized?

The Animals and the Animalized in the Greco-Roman World

It is not far-fetched to focus on this animalization because the Roman Empire blurred the boundaries between humans and nonhumans through colonization-through-animalization. The colonized *ethnē* lived in a world in which the Roman Empire (sovereign state) – top-down power relations – decided who lives and who dies, who are “humans worthy of living” and who are “(non)humans unworthy of life.” Applying Giorgio Agamben’s concept of bio-power, Mark and his colonized *ethnē* are “in [some form of] a concentration camp or in politics of bare life... [that] legitimated and necessitated total domination.”³² Jesus and his fellow colonized *ethnē* had to fight against being labeled as bestial. From the time of Jesus (and even earlier) until today, to be labeled as wild beast or animal, *therion* (in Greek) or *belua/bestia* (in Latin) is an insult. According to Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, to be called an animal, or associated with one, was to be something the Greeks and Romans (or the colonizers in general) did not want to be: Barbarian, exile, or slave.³³ The Roman Empire, along with many other colonizers, as a matter of fact, used bestial logics or systemic animalization of others in order to subdue those who one considered to be inferior or deserving oppression. G.B. Riddehough provides an example of this animalization through his study of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*:

³² Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 120, 123.

³³ Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans: Changing Attitudes to Animals in Greek, Roman and Early Christian Thought* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 85.

“thought is what separates the human from the animal as it separates the Greek and Roman from the barbarian.”³⁴

Benjamin Isaac’s book, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, provides a comprehensive analysis and examples of animalizing rhetoric utilized by Greco-Roman authors. Ancient Greco-Roman authors were busy rhetorically and literally labeling foreigners, enemies, and oppressed others as beasts. Describing and/or associating certain groups of people with animals aided in controlling the bio-politics of superiority and the right to rule over others. According to Isaac, animalization happened at least in three ways.³⁵ First, certain groups of people were compared metaphorically with animals. Second, colonizers applied physiognomics or the arbitrary method of assigning similarities of physical and mental characteristics between certain persons and certain animals. Third, some persons were thought of as literally made like animals.

Expounding on the third way, Semonides of Amorgos, a seventh century BCE poet, wrote iambic poems that claimed physical and psychological resemblances of ten types of women with animals and some unknown entities.³⁶ Women were compared to a sow, a wicked vixen, a bitch, a stunted creature, a creature from the sea, an ash-gray ass, a ferret, an offspring of a proud mare with a long mane, a monkey, and a bee. Out of these ten types, only one, the bee, was a relatively positive portrayal of women. Nine out of ten, the description of women as created by gods through animals were overtly demeaning. For example, “In the beginning god made the female mind separately. One he made from a long-bristled sow. In her house everything lies in disorder, smeared with

³⁴ G.B. Riddehough, “Man-into-Beast Changes in Ovid,” *The Phoenix* 13.4 (1959): 201-9.

³⁵ Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, 213-5.

³⁶ Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *Females of the Species: Semonides on Women* (Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes, 1975), 29.

mud, and rolls about the floor; and she herself unwashed, in clothes unlaundered, sits by a dungheap and grows fat.”³⁷ Semonides’ literal bestialization of the other is nothing new. According to Lloyd-Jones, Semonides knew about the Aesopic fable tradition in which Prometheus created too many animals and not enough materials to create men. So, Prometheus created men who have human exteriors but animal interiors. Semonides could have continued this tradition and applied it to women.³⁸ Thus, this contemptuous bestialization of women reflects a culture in which women are commodified and maligned. Could these poems just be forms of light caricature or metaphorical humor and not a derisive animalization of women? To respond that these forms of comparison are just for humor is to have not understood or experienced that the line between metaphorical versus literal animalization of the other is often blurred. This blurring constantly happens because there is potency in animalizing the other. As Christopher Peterson argues, bestial logics or the animalization of the other has the capacity to oppress because of “its fungibility... unceasing and seemingly illimitable production of social and political beasts.”³⁹ Whether the target of animalization is colonized *ethnē* or a Roman political elite, the “fungibility” of animalization to traverse and affect all realms of lives is a resounding reminder that the Markan Jesus and his audience probably were not exempt from receiving or hearing this ubiquitous rhetoric.

Here are other select examples of animalization by Greco-Roman authors from Isaac’s comprehensive list. In 353 BCE, Demosthenes records Euctemon calling Timocrates and his three fellow Athenians τοῖς θηρίοις, “beasts of prey,” for embezzling

³⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *Females of the Species*, 36, 56 (lines 1-6).

³⁸ Lloyd-Jones, *Females of the Species*, 21.

³⁹ Christopher Peterson, *Bestial Traces: Race, Sexuality, Animality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 7-8.

the goods of a merchant vessel off the Egyptian port of Naucratis.⁴⁰ Demosthenes also records Deinarchus deriding Aristogeiton and Eunomus by calling them τριαῦτα θηρία, “these monsters,” for not paying huge sums of money to the state.⁴¹ Also, Epichares vituperated against Theocrines for indicting his father by calling Theocrines, ὄ μισητὸν σὸ θηρίον, “you abominable beast.”⁴² Isaac even reports that Cicero used the word *belua*, “beast,” sixty-five times in his orations.⁴³ In 70 BCE, Cicero spoke against Gaius Verres for persecuting Dexo of Tyndaris. Here, Cicero describes Verres’ cruelty as monstrous as the savagery of wild beasts: *cum homine [enim] crudele nobis res est an cum fera atque immani belua?*⁴⁴ Cicero in his philippic against Mark Antony even labels him as “*immani taetraque belua*, “monstrous and adominable beast.”⁴⁵ These examples demonstrate that animalization of one’s opponent happened prominently even in (or especially in) elite circles.

Obviously, the colonized *ethnē* are favorite targets for animalization. Strabo describes that the colonized *ethnē* of the Roman Empire who lived on the mountains, particularly Kyrnos (called Corsica by the Romans), “are wilder than animals.”⁴⁶ After the Roman Empire attacked and enslaved the people of Kyrnos, the Roman soldiers marveled at the supposed “savageness and bestiality” of the inhabitants as the soldiers

⁴⁰ Demosthenes, *Against Meidias, Androtion, Aristocrates, Timocrates, Aristogeiton* (trans. J. H. Vince; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1935), 465 (24:143).

⁴¹ Demosthenes, *Against Meidias, Androtion, Aristocrates, Timocrates, Aristogeiton*, 521 (5:8).

⁴² Demosthenes, *Private Orations L-LIX* (trans. A. T. Murray; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1939), 329 (58.49.8).

⁴³ Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, 202.

⁴⁴ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *The Verrine Orations* (trans. L. H. G. Greenwood; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1935), 587 (2.5.109).

⁴⁵ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Philippics* (trans. Walter C. A. Ker; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1963), 247 (4.5.12).

⁴⁶ Duane W. Roller, *The Geography of Strabo* (Cambridge: University Printing House, 2014), 229 (5.2.7 [224]).

had difficulty selling them as slaves.⁴⁷ In describing the Germanic and Sarmatian tribes (which includes Peucini, Venethi, and Fenni), Tacitus in the first century CE describes two groups, Hellusii and Oxionae, as having “the faces and visages of humans but the bodies and limbs of wild beasts.”⁴⁸ This bestialization of the Germanic tribes continued with Marcus Manilius. During the reign of Tiberius, Manilius in *Astronomica* animalizes Germanic tribes as *teque feris dignam tant*, “fit only to breed with wild beasts,” because he was frustrated with their traumatic defeat in which three Roman legions under Publius Quinctilius Varus lost against Arminius (leader of the Germanic tribes) at the battle of Teutoburg forest.⁴⁹

If the northern colonized *ethnē* were animalized, the southern colonized *ethnē* were not exempt. According to Isaac, nomads were deemed the most uncivilized and brutish because they were perceived to lack governance, domicile, and rule of law.⁵⁰ Sallust, a Roman aristocrat who lived in first century BCE, described in his *Bellum Iugurthinum* that North African people are brutish nomads: “In the beginning Africa was inhabited by the Gaetulians and Libyans, rude and uncivilized folk, who fed like beasts on the flesh of wild animals and the fruits of the earth. They were governed neither by institutions, law, nor were they subject to anyone’s rule.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ Roller, *The Geography of Strabo*, 229 (5.2.7 [224]).

⁴⁸ Publius Cornelius Tacitus, *Agricola, Germany, Dialogue on Orators* (trans, intro, and notes by Herbert W. Benario; Indianapolis, New York, Kansas: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1967), 65 (46.4).

⁴⁹ Manilius, *Astronomica* (trans. G. P. Goold; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1977), 287 (4.794).

⁵⁰ Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, 202.

⁵¹ Gaius Sallustius Crispus, *Catilina, Iugurtha, Fragment Ampliora* (ed. Alphons Kurfess; Lipsiae: B.G. Teubneri, 1957), 69 (18.1): “*Africam initio habuere Gaetuli et Libyae, asperi incultique, quis cibus erat caro ferina atque humi pabulum uti pecoribus. Il neque moribus neque lege aut imperio quoisquam regebantur: vagi palantes quas nox coegerat sedes habebant.*”

Aristotle describes in *Nicomachean Ethics* that there are two kinds of humans who are bestial: “people irrational by nature and living solely by sensation, like certain remote tribes of barbarians, belong to the bestial class; others who lose their reason because of disease or insanity, belong to the diseased.”⁵² Animalization is just a metaphor for a form of disease when it is used to describe Greeks. But when it is used against non-Greeks, the metaphorical turns into literal. Aristotle in *Politics* continues this us-versus-them mentality by deriding the so-called barbarians for not sharing in Greek polis system: “But anyone who lacks the capacity to share in community, or has not need to because of his self-sufficiency, is no part of the city and as a result is either a beast or a god.”⁵³ Thus, ancient Greeks treated foreigners like or as animals because of their perceived lack of civilization. Foreigners were uncivilized or bestial because they, unlike the Greeks, did not have democracy or were not (it was imagined) ruled by rationality: to be ruled by feelings/passions was bestial.⁵⁴ One may quickly infer that ancient Greek writers did not care about the accuracy of their assessment in describing groups of people as animals. For the Greeks, it was a political priority to place themselves as superior over others. The remedy for bestiality, according to these Greco-Roman authors, is to become civilized like them, to be sociable like a Roman citizen and not like the wild and irrational *ethnē*.⁵⁵

⁵² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (trans. H. Rackham; Loeb Classical Library, vol.19; London: Heinemann, 1968), 414-6 (7.5.6/1149a, 4-7): και τῶν ἀφρόνων οἱ μὲν ἐκ φύσεως ἀλόγιστοι καὶ μόνον τῇ αἰσθήσει ζῶντες θηριώδεις, ὥσπερ ἓνια γένη τῶν πόρρω Βαρβάρων, οἱ δὲ διὰ νόσους, οἷον τὰς ἐπιληπτικάς, ἢ μανίας νοσηματώδεις.

⁵³ Aristotle, *Politics* (trans. H. Rackham; Loeb Classical Library, vol. 264; London: Heinemann, 1967), 10 (1253a).

⁵⁴ See Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 113fn; and Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, 200.

⁵⁵ Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, 214.

Aside from describing other groups of people as animals, it goes without saying that slaves are among those treated like, or even assumed to be, animals by being called *andrapodon*, “man-footed creature.”⁵⁶ Keith Bradley argues that slaves and animals are not considered as equals but the masters of slaves were *inclined* to treat them as such.⁵⁷ Slaves are generally viewed then as subhumans.⁵⁸ Slaves and donkeys pulled yokes together. Greco-Roman agricultural authors reflect the prevalent association of slaves with animals. For example, Cato (234-149 BCE) advises to “sell worn-out oxen, blemished cattle, blemished sheep, wool, hides, an old wagon, old tools, an old slave, a sickly slave, and whatever else is superfluous. The master should have the selling habit, not the buying habit.”⁵⁹ Aside from cattle and mule, Varro (116-127 CE) discusses slaves as one of the necessary “instruments” for tilling land.⁶⁰ Aristotle also notes slaves’ animal-like utility: “the usefulness of slaves diverges little from that of animals; bodily service for the necessities of life is forthcoming from both slaves and from domestic animals alike.”⁶¹ Even Roman laws (*Lex Aquilia*) judicially designate slaves as animals in terms of financial value: “If anyone kills unlawfully a slave or a servant-girl belonging to someone else or a four-footed beast of the class of cattle, let him be condemned to pay the owner the highest value that the property had attained in the preceding year.”⁶²

⁵⁶ Keith Bradley, “Animalizing the Slave: The Truth of Fiction,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 90 (2000): 110.

⁵⁷ Bradley, “Animalizing the Slave,” 110.

⁵⁸ Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine*, 114.

⁵⁹ Cato and Varro, *On Agriculture* (trans. W.D. Hooper; Loeb Classical Library, vol. 283; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 9 (2.7).

⁶⁰ Cato and Varro, *On Agriculture*, 224 (1.17.1).

⁶¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, 22 (1254b). See also Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans*, 14.

⁶² Justinian, *The Digest of Justinian, vol. 1* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2011), 277 (The *Lex Aquilia* 9.2.2).

Of course, nonhumans were neither unanimously charged with negative attributes nor were they automatically at odds with humans. One may, of course, imagine benign human-nonhuman relationships. Quoting Fowler, nonhuman companions were often adored and even remembered through epitaphs because they represented “childhood and simplicity.”⁶³ Hellenist epigrammatists were hired to make epitaphs of pets (dolphins, cockerels, locusts, cicadas, and even ants) posing with children whereby the artifact not only suggests a high regard for nonhumans, but also seems to value the nonhuman as much as their human companions.⁶⁴ Moreover, Gilhus finds the inverting of human-nonhuman hierarchy within Egyptian worship of nonhumans. Many Egyptians recognized “a lack” in humans – a deficiency in humanity that was deemed less inspiring in occasional cases when compared to the uncanny nature of nonhumans. This rationale became one of the underlying logics for Egyptians to worship and attribute divinity to nonhumans.⁶⁵ Ancient Egyptians and various groups who were willing to use nonhumans (bulls, cats, falcons, ibises, crocodiles, and other nonhumans) as symbols of divinity believed that nonhumans were the “dwelling place, vehicle or living image of the god.”⁶⁶ Porphyry even remarks that “every one of the ancients who had the good fortune to be nurtured by animal boasts not so much of his ancestors as of those [nonhumans] who reared him.”⁶⁷ In addition, Terrance Callan’s article on 2nd Peter collected Jewish and Greco-Roman ancient literature that compares humans and nonhumans, and arranged the data into positive, negative, and neutral perspectives. Nonhumans were treated differently

⁶³ B. H. Fowler, *The Hellenistic Aesthetic* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

⁶⁴ Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans*, 13.

⁶⁵ Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans*, 97.

⁶⁶ Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans*, 99, 112.

⁶⁷ Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Killing Animals* (trans. Gillian Clark; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 89 (3.17.1).

according to the context and the unique personalities of the humans involved. Although his article is on 2nd Peter, Callan's conclusion that inter-species comparison is "nuanced and complex"⁶⁸ applies to Mark as well.

Markan Jesus in the Presence of the Wild Beasts

With all of these discourses of animalization, why then would Mark have Jesus associate with wild beasts? As discussed above, resorting to a metaphorical or allegorical reading of Mk 1:13b does not suffice, at least if one is reading for liberation, because it removes from the equation of animalization the oppressed bodies of both humans and nonhumans. Steve Baker even calls this intentional allegorical reading of "real" bodies of animals as the "denial of the animal."⁶⁹ Laura Hobgood-Oster finds relegating animals into the symbolic as "escapist and serves to reinforce human superiority and dominance."⁷⁰ Thus, the wild beasts who confront Jesus are "real, living" animals.

I argue that Mark has Jesus then in the presence of living wild beasts because Mark wanted to portray Jesus as a bestial messiah. Jesus' encounter with the wild beasts is a (partial) reversal or a breaking away/off from the despotic naming of what is bare life – animal(ization). The presence and/or the gaze of the wild beasts disrupts and reconfigures the nature of the messiah for Jesus and Mark's audience. Of course, Jesus is bestial not only because of his association with the wild beasts but also because of

⁶⁸ Terrance Callan, "Comparison of Humans to Animals in 2 Peter 2, 10b-22," *Biblica* 90.1 (2009): 113 (101-113).

⁶⁹ Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity, and Representation* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 2111.

⁷⁰ Laura Hobgood-Oster, *Holy Dogs and Asses: Animals in the Christian Tradition* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 15.

Mark's counter-intuitive narrative of Jesus. Mark did not begin his story of Jesus with a somewhat glorious royal genealogy (see Matthew 1:1-17), a priestly pedigree (Luke 1:5-25), or cosmic-creation overtones (John 1:1-18). Instead, Mark's Jesus begins his ministry in the wilderness. He will be baptized by a bestial prophet who roams the countryside clothed with camel's hair and a leather belt, eating locusts and wild honey (Mk 1:1-8). Itinerant and undomesticated, the Markan Jesus will meet with bestialized demon-possessed individuals (Mk 1:23-28, 32-34, 39; 3:11, 15; 4:15; 5:1-20; 6:7; 7:24-30; 9:14-29, 38-41). Jesus himself will die in a beastly way: hung up on a stake to die like an animal (Mk 15:21-37).

Further, Mark's counter-intuitive narrative of his messiah is extremely piquant in 1:12 ("And the Spirit [πνεῦμα] immediately drove him out [ἐκβάλλει] into the wilderness" [NRSV]). Here, the Markan Spirit apparently has the capacity to physically displace Jesus in an instant. This capacity could be interpreted as a result of the spectral agency or actancy of the Spirit. This interesting relationship between Jesus and the Spirit thus invites us to consider a bestial Christology in relationship to a bestial pneumatology. Although Moore focused similar reflections on the pneumatology of Luke-Acts, I apply Moore's definition of spirit or "ghost" for a Markan reading. Following Grace M. Cho's work⁷¹ and preferring to translate πνεῦμα as ghost, Moore defines it as

an assemblage composed of "disparate elements in an environment," not all of which are human. A ghost is "a spectral agency made up of different material and immaterial forces." Cho might well have had recourse to Deleuze's own definition of an assemblage as a heterogeneity whose only unity resides in a "cofunctioning," a "symbiosis," and which is never a matter of "filiations" but only of "alliances," not "lines of descent, but

⁷¹ Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2008).

contagions, epidemics, the wind.” Wind, breath, spirit, *pneuma*. The ghost, holy or not, is all of these.⁷²

The Markan spirit is indeed an assemblage of nonhuman divine material (the spirit comes down from the heavens) and nonhuman animal material (it takes the form of a dove). Although he focuses on Greco-Roman historical resonances and not on philosophical interpretations, Edward P. Dixon’s work lists examples of immaterial and material mixing of the divine and the nonhuman. Dixon argues that other spirit-bird rhetoric can also be found in Greco-Roman literature. Various Greco-Roman gods and goddesses were portrayed as descending (and even ascending) in bird-like form, as textually attested, for example, in Homer’s *Iliad* and Virgil’s *Aeneid*:

In *Aeneid* 9, Iris’ bird-like departure is accompanied by a tearing of the heavens. As she flies away, Turnus yells after her, “Iris, glory of the sky, who has brought thee down to me, wafted upon the clouds to earth? Whence this sudden brightness of the air? I see the heavens part asunder [*discedere*], and the stars that roam in the firmament. I follow the mighty omen, whoso thou art callest to arms!” (9.18-22).⁷³

Mark similarly likens the spirit to a bird, specifically a dove. This dove-like spirit is not just a metaphor or an image insulated in the spectral. Rather, the dove-like spirit is an agent that causes the other to move materially. Hence, there seems to be some pneumatological tradition at work here that understands the animacy and agency of spirits. Moore further describes the spirit/ghost in Luke-Acts as “a force, an intensity, that impacts bodies, that infiltrates bodies and circulates between them, impelling movement,

⁷² Stephen D. Moore, “The Inhuman Acts of the Holy Ghost,” in *Gospel Jesuses and Other Nonhumans: Biblical Criticism Post-poststructuralism* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 99.

⁷³ Edward P. Dixon, “Descending Spirit and Descending Gods: A ‘Greek’ Interpretation of the Spirit’s “Descent as a Dove” in Mark 1:10,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no.4 (2009): 759-780.

emotion, and cognition.”⁷⁴ In a certain sense, the Spirit in Mark also impacts bodies. That is, in 1:12, the Spirit materially drives Jesus out into the wilderness. The nonhuman Spirit infiltrates the human body of Jesus, impelling Jesus to be confronted by the gaze of still other nonhumans.

The Spirit’s penetration is so forceful that the agency of Jesus seems subsumed throughout the scene. Mark does not indicate whether or not Jesus complied with the Spirit or willingly participated in his being driven out into the wilderness. Nevertheless, Mark’s uses of the verb “(he/she/it) drives out” (ἐκβάλλω) in 1:12 “bestializes” the Markan Jesus by rendering him nonhuman. The other occasions in which Mark uses ἐκβάλλω undergird this bestial interpretation. Such casting is linguistically reserved for expelling nonhuman demons/unclean spirits (1:34, 39; 3:15, 22, 23; 6:13; 7:26; 9:18, 28, 38; 16:9, 17), or with exercising coercion over and against someone or something (5:40; 9:47; 11:15; 12:8). Was the Spirit driving Jesus out like an unclean spirit? Which spirit is actually casting Jesus out?⁷⁵ If the Holy Spirit casts Jesus out, then why would Mark use a verb that evokes the casting out of unclean spirits? This bewildering aggressive scenario seems to have motivated Matthew and Luke to tone down their versions of the temptation narrative by changing the verb to a softer “was led up” (ἀνήχθη) in Matthew 4:1 and “was led” (ἤγετο) in Luke 4:1. Scholars also mince words when it comes to this vividly forceful Markan verb. Loader, for example, paraphrases the event as: “the Spirit

⁷⁴ Moore, “The Inhuman Acts of the Holy Ghost,” 101.

⁷⁵ Mark mentions the spirit in three ways: “Holy Spirit” in 1:8; 3:29; 13:11; “Spirit” in 1:10, 12; 2:8; 8:12; 12:36; 14:38; and, “unclean spirits” in 1:23, 26, 27; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 13; 6:7; 7:25; 9:17; 9:20; 9:25.

is compelling. . . .”⁷⁶ Other scholars also tiptoe around the aggressiveness of the Spirit’s action with technical verb tense discussion and resonances with other passages.⁷⁷

Such circuitous approaches to the text reflect hesitancy to argue for the possibility that the Markan Jesus is not only the mover but also the one who is moved by the other. In other words, to understand the Markan Jesus as bestialized is to understand that Mark seeks to reconfigure his messiah in a way that voids any transcendental guarantee of being uninfluenced and physically unmoved by the other. One of the defining features of the messiah for Mark is the possibility that he may be moved, be thrown out, and even be nailed to a cross, in order to redefine relationality in the Empire of God. Could it be that the Markan Jesus’s ministry begins with a sort of God-Spirit forsakenness, a bookend to the experience and feeling of forsakenness at his death (15:34)? Could it be then that the persistent theme of secrecy in Mark, coupled with the systemic failure to understand, is ultimately about the difficulty of accepting Mark’s message that his messiah is bestial? Are the disciples and the crowds in Mark possessed by the phallic desire for the messiah to be the infiltrator of bodies, the one who impels, rather than the one who is penetrated?

As introduced earlier, the disruptive gaze of the wild beasts on the Markan Jesus finds its constellation of resonances with Jacques Derrida’s, Carol J. Adams,’ and Aldo Leopold’s encounter with nonhumans. Derrida’s encounter with his cat is now a famous tale that has reconfigured animality theory. After feeling ashamed of his nakedness in

⁷⁶ Loader, “Good News – for the Earth? Reflections on Mark 1.1-15,” 37.

⁷⁷ See Gundry, *Mark*, 54; Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 65; Bas M. F. van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary* (trans. W. H. Bisscheroux; Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 164; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 102; Ronald J. Kernaghan, *Mark* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2007), 39; Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 38. For Hebrew Bible resonances of being physically displaced by the “spirit,” see 2 Kings 2:16; 1 Kings 18:12; Ezekiel 8:3.

front of his cat, Derrida questioned his own reflex of shame: “Whence this malaise?”⁷⁸ Why do humans feel ashamed of being naked in front of nonhumans? Why do nonhumans not feel ashamed as well? Through this experience, Derrida felt the “gaze of a seer”⁷⁹ upon him: his cat’s challenge against the anthropocentric logic of the shamefulness of nakedness. According to Derrida, anthropocentrism created the border between human versus nonhuman in which what is proper for humans is to be clothed, and what is proper for nonhumans is not.⁸⁰ Derrida calls this impropriety of shame he felt from his cat *animalséance*: “the single, incomparable and original experience of the impropriety that would come from appearing in truth naked, in front of the insistent gaze of the animal, a benevolent and pitiless gaze, surprised or cognizant.”⁸¹ This *animalséance* made Derrida question his feeling of shame, his unjustifiable feeling of superiority over nonhumans. It also impelled him to *responsivity* toward animals. It is not asking whether animals can speak or not (logocentrism). But this response is of sharing in the finitude/mortality of all creations: “the possibility of sharing this nonpower, the possibility of this impossibility, the anguish of this vulnerability, and the vulnerability of this anguish.”⁸²

Carol J. Adams also had a life-changing encounter because of a nonhuman. After returning from Yale Divinity School in 1973, Adams heard from her distressed neighbor that someone had just shot one of Adams’ horses. Adams frantically ran through the pasture and found her beloved horse, Jimmy, lying dead. That night, Adams was utterly

⁷⁸ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 4.

⁷⁹ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 4.

⁸⁰ Contrary to the ubiquity of and comfort with nakedness in Greco-Roman milieu, one could even question if this shamefulness is a product of western Christianity’s introspective struggle with sin.

⁸¹ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 4.

⁸² Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 28.

distraught over the dead body of her beloved nonhuman companion. And yet, on her dinner table, she had a hamburger. Then and there, she realized that “the invisible became visible: I became aware of how I objectified others and what it means to make animals into meat.”⁸³ Her encounter with two corpses, one on her pasture, the other on her table, disrupted Adams in almost every possible way. She became conscientious in her actions and decisions. The traumatic experience of that night became an impetus for her to become a feminist vegetarian (although a year later), to dedicate her life to fighting against the objectification and animalization of the other, and to participate in decolonizing epistemologies in which the consumption of the weak is no longer institutionally sanctioned.

Aldo Leopold also had a life-altering experience when he killed a wolf in the wild. In “Thinking Like a Mountain,” Leopold recounts this traumatic event. While he was eating lunch with his friend on a high rimrock, they saw down below on the riverbank a half-dozen wolves wagging their tails and playfully mauling each other. Up to this point, Leopold never interrogated his involvement in hunting wolves. He had understood his actions as having a positive impact on other nonhumans (deer in particular). In effect, he thought that he was saving them from these predatory nonhumans. Without any hesitation, he and his friends killed the wolves. The distance from his target spared him from viscerally feeling the impact of his gun. But after descending upon the riverbank where the wolves were lying, drenched in their blood, Leopold saw the fierce green eyes of the wolves, slowly extinguishing. The dying gaze of the wolves changed Leopold. At that moment, he realized that “neither the wolf nor the

⁸³ Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast*, 163. Adams also relives this traumatic event in Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 11-12.

mountain agreed with such a view.”⁸⁴ Leopold realized that the death of the deer at the fangs of wolves might be gruesome to watch for humans; but for the trees and the deer themselves, it was a needed part of the circle of life. The decreased wolf population corresponded with the exponential increase in the number of deer. This phenomenon, in general, leads to extreme defoliation, which, in return, depletes deer of their food source. This lack of food leads to their own death. As Leopold noticed, “perhaps with better cause, for while a buck pulled down by wolves can be replaced in two or three years, a range pulled down by too many deer may fail of replacement in as many decades.”⁸⁵ The wolves’ gaze prompted Leopold to reexamine his own anthropocentric bio-political tendencies to determine which nonhumans deserve to live, and which ones deserve to die.

On a personal note, I myself struggle in the presence of nonhumans, not in the sense of fear and cowardice, but in the sense of awe at their indecipherable gaze. Growing up in the rural places of the Philippines, I was with nonhumans (dogs, cats, chickens, snakes, bats, spiders, frogs, and other nonhumans) most of my life. Constant proximity with various nonhumans would or should have made me feel comfortable with nonhumans. And yet, I am still uneasy around them. Perhaps because in the Philippines context, they are often marked as hosts of diseases. I am still amazed at humans who have no qualms about touching nonhumans (particularly dogs), petting them especially when they are “stray” or “wild,” so-called. No matter how adorable and friendly they are, I am still hesitant to the point that I wait for their permission to be petted. Mostly, I never do. The undecipherability of their gaze makes me question my desire to be with, domesticate,

⁸⁴ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (illus. Charles W. Schwartz; New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 129-30.

⁸⁵ Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, 132.

and even pet them in the first place. How do I know if the nonhuman wants my presence at all? What cues do I read as an invitation into a new relationality?

Instead of confining the wild beasts to the cages of metaphor and other literary devices, this kind of reading I am interested in releases them in their material selves. Could then the Markan Jesus of Mk 1:13b also experienced a life-changing moment because of his encounter with the wild beasts? Could the gaze of the wild beasts reconfigure the assemblage between Jesus, the other colonized *ethnē*, and the wild beasts? Instead of remaining in the stratum of oppressive animalizing discourse, Mark describes his Jesus to be with the wild beasts in order to associate Jesus with the finitude or the dispensability of wild beasts, and as such with the colonized *ethnē* who are subjected to the bestial logics of the Roman Empire. Mark did not have his Jesus prepare his ministry through recourse to prominent teachers and orators who constantly profess their (human) superiority over others. Mark did not distance his Jesus from the animalized other, treated like the wild beasts, in order to be more like the Greeks and Romans. Mark has his Jesus prepare by being exposed in the wilderness with the uncontrollable, yet ultimately vulnerable, animal gaze. In other words, Jesus was with the lowest of the low, those that are deemed not worthy of life.

Even in the face of bestial logics, Mark chose to depict his Jesus as with the wild beasts so as to let their gaze teach, disrupt, and remind Mark's audience of the struggles of all of those who are oppressed. Echoing Kelly Oliver's point, "to acknowledge the dependence of *man* [*sic*] and *humanity* on *animal* and *animality* is to undermine man's [*sic*] sense of himself as autonomous and self-sovereign."⁸⁶ It is not about arguing for

⁸⁶ Oliver, *Animal Lessons*, 21.

sameness but of relationality and responsivity.⁸⁷ It is a reminder that nonhumans are the firstborns, the first occupants of the planet, the master, and the subjects: “who was born first, before the names? Which one saw the other come to this place, so long ago? Who will have been the first occupant, and therefore the master? Who [is] the subject? Who has remained the despot, for so long now?”⁸⁸ It is also about disrupting the “Great Chain of Being” cosmology.⁸⁹ This cosmology believes that there is a divinely mandated hierarchy in this world. At the top is, of course gods and goddesses, followed by angels, demons, and demi-gods, then by humans, and at the bottom are nonhumans.

The wild beasts of Mark are “divinanimals”⁹⁰ because they are actants who transgress the borders of the divine, human, and animal. This transgression, according to Stephen D. Moore in “Why There Are No Humans or Animals in the Gospel of Mark,” suggests that nonhumans are “ontological threats” to the Markan Jesus or the “Son of Humanity.”⁹¹ The Cartesian inspired pristine division between humans and nonhumans which has infiltrated even the critical reading of the Gospel of Mark is being threatened so as to reconfigure Mark’s Son of Humanity to become not just divine but also human and an ontologically affected nonhuman (his destiny is to be butchered, after all), an interstitial being who overlaps in his animality, divinity, and humanity. Christopher Manes also remarks on such transhuman transgression, noting that many persons during the time of Jesus have thought that nonhumans were “in touch with the gods and could be

⁸⁷ Oliver, *Animal Lessons*, 21.

⁸⁸ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 18.

⁸⁹ Chen, *Animacies*, 233.

⁹⁰ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 132.

⁹¹ Moore, “Why There Are No Humans or Animals in the Gospel of Mark,” 88-89.

used to intervene on behalf of humans.”⁹² Greco-Roman gods and goddesses were known to be represented, associated with, and accompanied by animals. Gilhus argues that the connection between gods/goddesses and nonhumans has to do with the “prevalence of the agricultural societies, dependence on animals, and the belief that the animal contributed to the concept of the divine.”⁹³

This avowal of animality, however, does not completely eradicate the humanist tendency for anthropocentric disavowal of nonhumans. Peterson asks: “To what extent are both racist and antiracist discourses predicated on a shared repudiation of animality? How might we comprehend animality in non-pejorative terms?”⁹⁴ Peterson begrudgingly argues that there could be no “posthumanist triumph”⁹⁵ because of humans’ limitation to see ourselves and nonhumans beyond our humanist purview. Peggy Kamuf would reiterate Peterson’s argument as “disavowal of disavowal.”⁹⁶ We are haunted by the desire to relinquish all forms of exclusionary and hierarchical logics; and yet, we also realize our incapacity to fulfill such desires totally because we have conflicting perspectives in regards to the good and the parameters for differences. Peterson calls for a “weaker or lesser disavowal of difference” which resonates with Derrida’s “lesser violence.”⁹⁷ Since we are stuck in between valuing differences and policing discourses of exclusion, Peterson, working through Derrida, suggests that being in this ambivalence should be embraced: “given that the injunction to unconditional hospitality rests on an

⁹² Christopher Manes, *Other Creations: Rediscovering the Spirituality of Animals* (London; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 104-5.

⁹³ Gilhus, *Animals, Gods and Humans*, 112.

⁹⁴ Peterson, *Bestial Traces*, 2.

⁹⁵ Peterson, *Bestial Traces*, 9-10.

⁹⁶ Peggy Kamuf, *Book of Addresses* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 14.

⁹⁷ Peterson, *Bestial Traces*, 16. See also Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (trans. David Willis; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 71.

impossible ideal, perhaps we ought not be quite so ashamed of this failure of inclusivity. Or, if embarrassment is unavoidable, then maybe we should abide rather than evade it. Exclusion may not be excusable, but it is nonetheless inescapable.”⁹⁸

In all these matters, Jesus is still haunted by what Peterson would term “the *stain* or the unavoidable tendency for discrimination that marks all social relations.”⁹⁹ In the story of the Gerasenes and their pigs (Mk 5:1-20), the Syrophenician woman (Mk 7:24-30), and the trees (Mk 11:12-14, 20-21), Jesus seems to relapse into anthropocentrism, as we shall see in ensuing chapters. Following Derrida, we might say that Jesus was stained with the desire for beastly sovereignty. In *Bête et le Souverain (The Beast and the Sovereign)*, Derrida delves into the irony of the homophony of the French words *et* and *est* in which similar-sounding words produce quite dissimilar meanings. According to Derrida, the sovereigns or those who view themselves “above the law” look down upon beasts (*bêtes*) or those that are assumed to be ignorant of human laws.¹⁰⁰ And yet, the *betise* (stupidity) of the sovereigns is that they mimic the “lawlessness” of those they abhor: “my fault, my failing, evil, or illness, the defect from which I suffer well, it would first be necessary to take into account perhaps, a kind of contagion of *bêtise*, a mimeticism of *bêtise*...”¹⁰¹ Kings and emperors during the time of Jesus were the sovereigns who existed without, above, and outside the law like the very beasts they malign. Jesus on the one hand, fought against this sovereignty that animalizes the colonized ones. And yet, on the other, Jesus mimicked this sovereignty against the

⁹⁸ Peterson, *Bestial Traces*, 16.

⁹⁹ Peterson, *Bestial Traces*, 19. The concept of “stain” is derived from Roth’s work. Philip Roth, *The Human Stain* (New York: Vintage International, 2001).

¹⁰⁰ Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, I, 18.

¹⁰¹ Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, I, 158.

Gerasenes and their pigs (Mk 5:1-20), the Syrophoenician woman (Mk 7:24-30), and the trees (Mk 11:12-14, 20-21), as the following chapters will show.

This ambivalence reflects how ingrained bestial logics are in the psyche of those who are animalized. Derrida would call this the autoimmunitary nature of democracy,¹⁰² or, as Peterson puts it: “all aspirations to universal inclusivity necessarily fall short of achieving their ideals attests to the autoimmunitary response inherent in various forms of community, kinship, and belonging, which inevitably produce ‘beasts’ notwithstanding our apparent desire for nonviolence.”¹⁰³ According to Derrida, autoimmunity can be explained through the irony embedded in the concept of democracy. The irony is that democracy has to allow room for those who are against democracy even if such a compromise destabilizes its very intention. This inevitability reflects the impossibility of a perfect concept or idea; nevertheless, its vulnerability in its imperfection allows for relationality to open for change and non-idealization. The Markan Jesus fights for the dispossessed while inadvertently allowing for their (both human and nonhuman) destruction. His autoimmunization is his struggle as colonized *ethnē* to care for all. Jesus’ promise for “liberation to come” in the Derridean sense aims at bringing the Empire of God into this world through “a despairing messianicity or a messianicity in despair”¹⁰⁴ manifested on the cross and in the empty tomb. The Markan Jesus’ messiahship seems to be an act of despair from the perspective of anthropocentrism, but, as hopeful liberating ambivalence for those who see this Jesus, as bestial, “with the wild beasts,” or for those who are animalized.

¹⁰² Derrida, *Rogues*, 35-36, 86.

¹⁰³ Peterson, *Bestial Traces*, 19.

¹⁰⁴ Derrida, *Rogues*, 86.

CHAPTER TWO:

Vegetal Lessons: How Mark's Plants Teach Us about God's Empire

“They tried to bury us but they did not know we were seeds.”
- A Mexican Proverb

The title of this chapter is inspired by Kelly Oliver's book, *Animal Lessons: How They Teach us to be Human*.¹ Oliver's seminal work challenges not only anthropocentric philosophical discourses but also those with posthumanist bent to show more concern for actual, “real and living” nonhumans by avowing human dependency on animal pedagogy or on how nonhumans teach us to be humans.² Oliver asserts that human-nonhuman kinship should be based on a sustainable ethics that learns the indebtedness of humans to nonhumans even if this learning process constantly demands further negotiations.³ Oliver's sustainable ethics is based on two premises. First, Oliver extends the list of teachers to whom humans should learn from to the earth, that is, Oliver seeks an earth pedagogy.⁴ Second, Oliver finds Derrida's hyperbolic ethics to be a

¹ Kelly Oliver, *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to be Human* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). I am indebted to Stephen D. Moore for cultivating vegetal reading of biblical texts. See Stephen D. Moore, “What a (Sometimes Inanimate) Divine Animal and Plant Has to Teach Us about Being Human,” in *Gospel Jesuses and Other Nonhumans: Biblical Criticism Post-poststructuralism* (Semeia 89; Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2017), 107-126.

² Oliver, *Animal Lessons*, 5.

³ Oliver, *Animal Lessons*, 305-6.

⁴ Oliver, *Animal Lessons*, 305-6.

paradigm for her sustainable ethics because it constantly challenges the limits of ethical considerations.⁵ Derrida's hyperbolic ethics (i.e.: hospitality, gift, and forgiveness) is a form of ethics that constantly engages the borders that fix laws, mores, norms, customs, and others regulating forces, even if this engagement seems to be difficult and out of reach.⁶ For example, this demand for constant vigilance transgresses the laws of hospitality: for a host to be truly hospitable, the rules that divide host and guest should be blurred, the fluidity of subjectivity in which the eater or the provider also becomes the eaten or the provided, and vice versa. However, Derrida does not claim that hyperbolic ethics is pure and absolute. As Oliver points out, it is more like "a virus invading a host."⁷ In other words, this ethics is paradoxical in its hyperbole or unconditional nature. It needs the conditional to articulate its absoluteness: "Only an unconditional hospitality can give meaning and practical rationality to a concept of hospitality. Unconditional hospitality exceeds juridical, political, or economic calculation. But no thing and no one happens or arrives without it."⁸

Heeding Oliver's call to learn from the earth, this chapter expands and reconfigures this kinship and sustainable ethics to plants. If hyperbolic ethics seeks to push the limits of acceptability and the figures who establish the bounds, this chapter pushes the limits of ethical consideration to plants as teachers who reconfigure the boundaries of (sustainable) ethics. Instead of depicting the Empire of God and its

⁵ Oliver, *Animal Lessons*, 305-6.

⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond* (trans. Rachel Bowlby; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 25, 75; idem, "On Forgiveness," in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (trans. M. Dooley and M. Hughes; London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 25-60; idem, *Rogues*, 148-9.

⁷ Oliver, *Animal Lessons*, 116.

⁸ Derrida, *Rogues*, 149.

temporality only through human figures or human temporality, the author of Mark invites the possibility that humans could learn from plants. These select vegetal lessons are narrated in Mk 4:1-20 (parable of the sower and the seed),⁹ 4:26-29 (parable of the growing seed),¹⁰ 4:30-32 (parable of the mustard seed),¹¹ and 13:28-31 (lesson of the fig tree).¹² And yet, this kinship is not always rosy. Mk 11:12-14, 20-21 (Jesus curses the fig tree)¹³ reflects anthropocentric biopolitics rooted in Mark's (or Jesus') struggle to break free from relegating plants to the non-living, expendable commodities.

⁹ Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: "listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.'" And he said to them, "do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." (NRSV)

¹⁰ He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come." (NRSV)

¹¹ He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." (NRSV)

¹² From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. (NRSV)

¹³ Verses 12-14: On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it. Verses 20-21: In the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree

Mark models the Empire of God on plants and/or the expendable ones who are at the bottom of the “Great Chain of Being.” Why would Mark who is busy depicting his messiah and empire as authority-driven¹⁴ link them with the weak? This chapter argues that Mark’s decision to use plants and their vegetal lessons in illustrating the Empire of God could be due to the fact that they reflect the quotidian needs and struggles of the colonized people. The vegetal discourse resonates with William R. Herzog II’s understanding of parable within the agrarian milieu. Inspired by Paulo Freire,¹⁵ Herzog argues that parables are “not earthly stories with heavenly meanings but earthly stories with heavy meanings, weighted down by an awareness of the workings of exploitation in the world of their hearers.”¹⁶ Parables speak not only about the role of the divine in the daily lives of the people; they “decode”¹⁷ or problematize the givens. Herzog echoes C.H. Dodd’s definition of parables as realistic narratives and not just allegories that reflect the “inward affinity” of the people who are hearing the parables.¹⁸ The parables interrogate the shackles of socio-economic oppression and political exploitation by the dominant, “...whether the political form of that society was the client kingdom of Herod Antipas, the province of Judaea under the hegemony of the Temple and the Jerusalem elites, or the colonial administration of an imperial province.”¹⁹

withered away to its roots. Then Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.” (NRSV)

¹⁴ See chapter one’s exposition on Liew’s “might is right” argument.

¹⁵ See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (trans. Myra Bergman Ramos; 9th ed.; New York: Seabury: 1973).

¹⁶ William R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 3.

¹⁷ Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech*, 21.

¹⁸ C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (rev. ed.; Glasgow: Fontana [Collins], 1961), 20. Further work on the realism of the parables, see Charles W. Hedrick, *Parables as Poetic Fictions: The Creative Voice of Jesus* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1994), ch.3.

¹⁹ Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech*, 73. See pages 53-73 for Herzog’s analysis of the agrarian systems and their corresponding oppressive structures against the peasants.

But what is vegetality?

Defining Vegetality

On the one side, when the word “vegetal(ity)” is employed in English-speaking modern contexts, it unfortunately connotes passivity, inactivity, and sedentariness. This interpretation stems ultimately from many ancient Greco-Roman philosophical and literary works that relegate plants into lifeless matter. With the ancients’ preoccupation with soul and flourishing, the finitude and inevitable recurring decay of plants did not correspond to their search for the transcendental. In *Phaedrus*, Socrates confesses to his conversation partner (Phaedrus): “I am fond of learning. Now the country places and the trees won’t teach me anything, and the people in the city do.”²⁰ In *De Anima*, Aristotle unleashed his violence against plants by dismissing their actancy due to their lack of movement: “plants seem to live without sharing in locomotion or in perception.”²¹ Aristotle also describes plants as apparently “deprived of eyes” – a metaphor for insufficiency in general.²² (Pseudo)-Aristotle or Nicolaus of Damascus in *De Plantis* intensifies Aristotle’s trajectory in describing plants as incomplete (*ateles pragma*)²³ and lifeless: “But the plant does not belong to the class which has no soul, because there is

²⁰ “φιλομαθῆς γάρ εἰμι τὰ μὲν χωρία καὶ τὰ δένδρα οὐδὲν μ’ ἐθέλει διδάσκειν, οἱ δ’ ἐν τῷ ἄστει ἄνθρωποι.” Plato, *Euthyphro; Apology; Crito; Phaedo; Phaedrus* (trans. Christopher Emlyn-Jones; Loeb Classical Library, vol. 36; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 423 (230d).

²¹ Aristotle, *On the Soul; Parva Naturalia; On Breath* (trans. W.S. Hett; Loeb Classical Library, vol. 288; rev. ed.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 59-60 (410b. 23-24).

²² Aristotle, *Metaphysics, Books 10-14* (trans. Hugh Tredenic and G. Cyril Armstrong; Loeb Classical Library, vol. 287; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 1022 b24.

²³ (Pseudo)-Aristotle, “De Plantis,” in *Minor Works* (trans. W.S. Hett; Loeb Classical Library, vol. 307; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 150 (816b. 5-10).

some part of the soul (*meros psukhes*) in it, but the plant is not a living (*zoon*) creature because there is no feeling in it.”²⁴

On the other side, the etymology of vegetal(ity), *vegetabilis*, actually means “growing or flourishing.” The verb form, *vegetare*, is defined as to animate or to enliven.” Tapping into this etymology, Marder reveals the hypocrisy of these ancient philosophers who relegated the vegetal to the lowest rank of relevancy when as a matter of fact plant life nourished them physically and philosophically.²⁵ Nevertheless, Marder highlights a philosopher and botanist who swam against the current, Theophrastus. Born in 370 BCE at Eresos in Lesbos, Theophrastus was one of Plato’s students who after Plato’s death led the Lyceum and managed Plato’s library. During his tenure, the Lyceum had amazing gardens with flowers and plants from all over the known world. This access to local and foreign plants enabled Theophrastus to systematically observe and classify various plants.²⁶ In *Enquiry into Plants*, he contradicted Aristotle for arguing in *Historia Animalium* that plants are inferior to animals. Theophrastus asserts that plants actually are not the same or even superior to animals because they “have the power of growth in all its parts, inasmuch as it has life in all its parts.”²⁷ In other words, if animal’s life begins and ends with their heartbeat, plant’s life is decentralized and multiple. Plants could have parts that are dead but could also have parts that are growing simultaneously. The multiplicities of life sources in plants make them incomparable to animals. Thus,

²⁴ (Pseudo)-Aristotle, “De Plantis,” 148 (816a 35-40).

²⁵ Michael Marder, *The Philosopher’s Plant*, xvi.

²⁶ William A. Locy, *The Growth of Biology: Zoology from Aristotle to Cuvier, Botany from Theophrastus to Hofmeister, Physiology from Harvey to Claude Bernard* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1925), 35.

²⁷ Theophrastus, *Enquiry into Plants: And Minor Works on Odours and Weather Signs* (2 volumes; Loeb Classical Library, vol. 70; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), vol.1, 7 (I.3-4).

following and building upon Theophrastus' perspective on vegetality, this chapter expounds upon the vegetal hermeneutics that plants are actants who have the capacity to affect others as they grow, reproduce, and even decay.

To argue with and for plants is an uphill climb since it stands on speculative grounds. A preliminary approach to a nuanced nonhuman reading of the Gospel of Mark through vegetality is to follow Anna Tsing's definition of landscape. For Tsing, landscape is a "configuration of humans and nonhumans in their material... as well as 'social' (created within human projects) and 'natural' (outside of human control; populated by nonhuman species) [aspect]." ²⁸ Tsing's concept of landscape resonates with the Deleuzoguattarian concept of assemblage. Tsing adds a layer to it with her concept of "gaps." Gaps are "conceptual spaces and real places into which powerful demarcations do not travel well." ²⁹ When the Meratus mountain residents of Indonesia were forcefully ejected out of their forest so that they could be more "social" and less "natural," Tsing critiqued this hegemonic definition of the corporate profiteers who only saw the Meratus residents in need of being educated into their version of "social," and the forest into their version of "natural," or something that needs to be restored to its original "nature" state. ³⁰ When wild forests are defined and demarcated (over against farm lands as "social") by anthropocentrism based on human desire for productivity, finding the gaps that blur hegemonic demarcations of what is social and natural produces subversive spaces and places. ³¹ The forests and the people of Meratus did not need to be naturalized

²⁸ Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 173-4.

²⁹ Tsing, *Friction*, 175.

³⁰ Tsing, *Friction*, 202.

³¹ Tsing, *Friction*, 176.

or re-socialized. Humans and nonhumans could be in a relationality that defied hegemonic, anthropocentric dictates. The Meratus residents were social and natural with the forests; the forests were fellow actants who brought liveliness to the human residents of Meratus.

Marderian Vegetality

Building upon these gaps of possibilities for actancy or liveliness for animalized humans and nonhumans, this chapter will work primarily with Marder's eco-justice, philosophical exposition on vegetality.³² The vegetal lessons found in Mark teach his audience that plants are actants who are capable of influencing and challenging the colonized *ethnē* in re-imagining the Empire of God and its temporality. As they are unpacked below, Mark's vegetal lessons teach that the Empire of God is first an atelic (or open-ended, incomplete, and infinitely changing) "collective being" that grows through the multiplicities of interactions with various actants (sun, water, air, bees, and others). Second, the vegetal Empire of God is not based on human interference. This empire invites an abandoning of the familiar human terrain of encroachment and colonization of nonhumans. Third, it teaches that those who are deemed irrelevant are ironically those who give life. Fourth, vegetal temporality reconfigures imperial time.

³² Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013). For other resources somewhat similar to Marder, see Francis Halle, *In Praise of Plants* (trans. David Lee; Portland: Timber Press, 2002); Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World* (New York: Random House, 2002); Daniel Chamovitz, *What a Plant Knows: A Field Guide to the Senses* (New York: OneWorld, 2013); Randy Laist, ed., *Plants and Literature: Essays in Critical Plant Studies* (Amsterdam; New York: Rodolpi, 2013); Patricia Vieira, Monica Gagliano, and John Ryan, eds., *The Green Thread: Dialogues with the Vegetal World* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington, 2016); and, Luce Irigaray and Michael Marder, *Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

The novelty of applying vegetality in reading the Gospel of Mark requires several caveats. First, encountering plants should not entail fetishizing their otherness.³³ Vegetality is not about saying that plants have feelings, rationality, personhood, or any other human attributes.³⁴ I myself am not claiming to know the esoteric knowledge and discourse of plants. Botanists and other scientists might have better knowledge of the workings of plants; but vegetality insists that inasmuch as knowing plants is important, the form of this process of knowing should fall under the auspices of respect. Thus, in this chapter, Marderian³⁵ vegetality is inspired by the findings of botanists while keeping a healthy sense of alterity regarding the things unknown about plants. As Marder suggests: “All we can hope for is to brush upon the edges of their being... and in so doing to grow past the fictitious shells of *our* identity and *our* existential ontology.”³⁶

In addition, this chapter pays homage to applied scientists such as Janine Benyus for promulgating biomimicry (the science that studies nature as models and inspirations for human problems and designs), i.e.: leaves inspiring solar cells, whale fins inspiring wind turbine blades, spider silk inspiring thread materials, prairies teaching how to grow food, finding cures like the chimpanzee, conducting business like a redwood forest, and other mimicries. Biomimicry is not about exploiting nature but about learning from nature’s 3.8 billion years of expertise.³⁷ It questions centuries of anthropocentric science that prevented nature from becoming our mentors or teachers. The neglect of our

³³ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 3.

³⁴ Cf. Hall, *Plants as Persons*.

³⁵ An adjective justified by the fact that Marder’s work on vegetality has been seminal for the emerging field of critical plant studies/plant theory.

³⁶ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 13. Emphasis in the original.

³⁷ Janine M. Benyus, *Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1997), 2-3.

nonhuman teacher has created inventions detrimental to humans and nonhumans alike, even depleting ecological resources to the point of extinction. Benyus invites people from all fields to walk into the forest again in order to learn from nonhumans. This willingness to learn from nonhumans, as Benyus states, and with which I agree, requires a certain combination of “brains, humility, and spirituality.”³⁸ Thus, this chapter seeks to mimic Benyus’s spirit in approaching the vegetal in the Gospel of Mark.

Second, vegetality requires the emancipation of plants from the greenhouses of Linnaean taxonomy and the anthropocentric limitation of plants to the stratum of literary devices such as metaphors, analogies, and other such figures. Expounding upon Luce Irigaray’s work, Marder critiques the unhindered and unabashed reduction of plants into the literary: “To reduce them [plants] to mere symbols or even metaphors, no matter how thoroughly reimagined, is by the same stroke to re-appropriate them for *logos*, which has been for millennia sanctioning their exploitation – and that of women, as well.”³⁹ Deleuze and Guattari might have championed rhizomes, subterranean plants who shoots their roots through their nodes in multiple ways, as the ultimate image of thought for the multiplicities of all actants and assemblages. And yet, Deleuze and Guattari ironically re-appropriated trees in the form of a straw man (or strawplant) fallacy. They chose the image of trees as the symbol for the hierarchical, genealogical, centralized, phallic, and even transcendental.⁴⁰ Although Deleuze and Guattari admits that rhizomes also have their own rigidity, despotism, and hierarchy in their immanence,⁴¹ they categorize trees as

³⁸ Benyus, *Biomimicry*, 9.

³⁹ Michael Marder, *The Philosopher’s Plant*, 220.

⁴⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 19-20.

⁴¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 20.

as the phallic objects of reproduction who are stuck in their endless growth and filiation: “external reproduction as image-tree and internal reproduction as tree-structure.”⁴² Trees are apparently to be shunned because they do not fit the poststructuralist philosophical mold of multiplicities and finitude. This categorization superimposes phallogocentrism to trees in which a plant is once again sacrificed for human linguistic consumption. Thus, it begs the question: do we really have to signify the tree to be the phallic?

Invoking Steven Shaviro, David Wood, and Michael Marder,⁴³ Jeffrey Nealon argues against Deleuze and Guattari’s dismissive rhizome/tree binary distinction. Nealon questions the “singular emergence,”⁴⁴ the unquestioned logic that equates Cartesian logic to trees. In certain sense, one could wonder if Deleuze and Guattari’s works have reached or have been placed on such a pedestal (by persons like me) that the negative appropriation of trees or any plants has reached the “too-big-to-fail” or untouchability in terms of Derridean autoaffection. In *On Touching*, Derrida expounds upon his critique of autoaffection or the act of convincing oneself to only listen and talk to oneself – a self-explaining of some sort at the expense of excluding the other. Derrida problematizes autoaffection or “self-touching” because “a vicarious surplus of masturbatory pleasure does in no way reduce the alterity of the other who comes to inhabit the self-touching, or at least to haunt it, at least as much as it spectralizes any experience of ‘touching the other.’”⁴⁵ It seem that popular reception of Deleuze and Guattari’s works created an aura

⁴² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21, 25.

⁴³ When it comes to references, Nealon mentions Shaviro’s blog, but does not provide a reference for Wood. For Marder, Nealon points to *Plant-Thinking*. See Nealon, *Plant Theory*, 137, chapter 4, fn13. See also Hannah Stark, “Deleuze and Critical Plant Studies,” in *Deleuze and the Non/Human* (eds. Jon Roffe and Hannah Stark; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁴⁴ Nealon, *Plant Theory*, 88-ff.

⁴⁵ Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* (trans. Christine Irizarry; Stanford; Stanford University Press, 2005), 274.

of autoaffection to the point that their presumptive equation of trees with phallic has become a phallogocentric premise.

Instead of trying to detach trees with the phallic by creating an unintentional binary division, Marder channels Derrida's deconstruction and finds a solution to the issue by unravelling from within. Marder adds the prefix "phyto" to phallogocentrism: phytophallogocentrism. Phallogocentrism prefers and privileges masculine or patriarchal speech, logos, and/or manifestations. Marder adds the vegetal (phyto) to this erectile structure in order to collapse the structures of metaphysics or the transcendental signified/phallic. If Deleuze and Guattari have already signified trees with the phallic, then pushing for more reflection on the vegetality of trees would collapse the phallic designation from within: "the flower deflowers (dehiscence) itself at the peak of blossoming, and *logos* interrupts its own monologue in the middle of addressing itself to itself. Internally decentered, phytophallogocentrism falls apart into multiple outgrowths."⁴⁶

Third, the limitation of Marderian vegetality is that it primarily intersects with western ontology and ethics. Marder explains that his decision to limit his work to western ontology is due to the need to repair the damage caused by it and "in order to ensure that neither slide into a highly speculative meta-discourse on biology nor culminate in a set of normative and, in the last instance, vacuous prescriptions."⁴⁷ Marder only briefly leaves western ontology when he explores the potentialities of vegetal thinking through Jain philosophy.⁴⁸ This chapter's primary engagement with

⁴⁶ Michael Marder, *The Philosopher's Plant*, 208.

⁴⁷ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 2.

⁴⁸ "Jain philosophy ascribed great significance to plants, so much so that it understood them to be the fifth

western philosophy is due relatedly to the fact that many biblical interpretations have been too enmeshed in or rely solely on western philosophy. Nevertheless, it is my hope that future vegetal interpretations of Mark will engage non-western philosophies.

The Vegetal Empire of God

“Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.”

- Lao Tzu

First vegetal lesson: the Empire of God may have been initiated by humans scattering seed on the ground, but it did not grow by their hands. In Mk 4:1-20, the parable of the sower and the seeds, the four different seeds sown represent the gospel, and the different grounds/soils represent how various humans received the call to discipleship. A vegetal reading of this passage reveals that although a sower might have scattered seeds in various areas, the human actant (the sower) did not control the seeds’ growth and/or their corresponding demise. The nonhuman actants that surrounded the seeds determined their fate. The vegetal atelic collective dependency of plants and seeds teaches a lesson in reconfiguring the nature of discipleship and the Empire of God.

Reading Mk 4:1-20 from an anthropocentric perspective tends to focus on deciphering the categorization of the four grounds that received the seeds with certain characters or groups of people in the Gospel of Mark.⁴⁹ The ensuing issue that arises from

element comprising the universe, alongside the other classical elements: earth, water, fire, and air.” Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 6. See Sibajiban Bhattacharya, *The Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies* (vol. 10; Jain Philosophy; New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies, 1970), 165. Also see Brianne Donaldson’s work on Jainism and plants in *Creaturely Cosmologies: Why Metaphysics Matters for Animal and Planetary Liberation* (Lanham; Boulder; New York; London: Lexington Books, 2015).

⁴⁹ Mary Ann Tolbert relates the four grounds to four groups: ground along the path with the scribes, the Pharisees, the Herodians, and the Jerusalem Jews; rocky ground with the disciples and those who are healed; thorny ground with the rich man (Mk 10:17-22); and the good earth with those who are healed as a

from such categorization is its arbitrariness in determining those who could listen and those who could not. Verses 11-12 seem to relay a divine mandate to reject certain people so that they will not understand and not be forgiven. The same goes with the four grounds: some are just bound to not receive the seed. In this regard, I follow Mary Ann Tolbert's interpretation of this conundrum. Tolbert argues that this parable does not "force people outside or pull people inside; [it] simply reveal[s] the type of ground already present."⁵⁰ The parable is not prescriptive; instead, it is descriptive of the on-going circumstances happening with the reception of the word.

Instead of having four groups of persons for four different grounds, a vegetal reading of this parable hints at the "gaps" or, according to Joel Marcus, "deliberate ambiguity in the narrative.... [T]he author may intentionally leave a gap open to various interpretations, although this openness operates within an overarching structure of narrative or ideological coherence that would be clear to the original readers."⁵¹ One of the glaring gaps⁵² for this parable is the method of sowing. Joachim Jeremias tried to explain this gap by focusing on the possibility that the audience of Mark could have sowed before plowing the field.⁵³ In other words, farmers could have sowed the seeds knowing that they would come back to plow the land where the seeds fell. The loss, then, would be minimal, making the parable financially and agriculturally sensible. Countering

result of their faith (e.g., the woman with the excessive blood flow, 5:25-34). See Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 153-75.

⁵⁰ Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 160-1.

⁵¹ Joel Marcus, "Blanks and Gaps in the Markan Parable of the Sower," *Biblical Interpretation* 5.3 (1997): 247-248.

⁵² Other gaps are the identities of the seed and the sower. See Marcus's discussion of these gaps in "Blanks and Gaps in the Markan Parable of the Sower," 251-6.

⁵³ Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (trans. H. S. Hooke; 2nd ed; New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1972), 11-12.

this optimistic reading of the parable, Marcus argues that the parable is not just simply about the *falling* of the seeds but their eventual growth (or the lack thereof).⁵⁴ The parable narrates four times that the sower did not come back to plow the seeds. Thus, the parable emphasizes the tendency for the seeds to be lost more than the fruitfulness of a few. Barbara Reid further complicates the situation by providing two possible scenarios. If the sower is a peasant farmer, then the parable reflects a “sloppy and wasteful manner of sowing.”⁵⁵ But if the sower is a tenant farmer or a day laborer, “their reaction would be sympathetic. They would know all too well the amount of seed and effort that is expended that never bears fruit because of the difficult conditions.”⁵⁶ In a certain sense, Reid’s work resonates with William Herzog’s reading of the parable as a “hidden transcript” or “a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant and that is typically expressed openly – albeit in disguised form.”⁵⁷ Working with the *campesinos* in Solentiname, Herzog finds in the parable hidden transcripts or “the struggle to appropriate symbols (a bountiful harvest), identify causes, and assess blame (birds, thorns, and rocks are more than they seem).”⁵⁸

A vegetal reading of Mk 4:1-20 finds a hidden transcript in the “method of sowing” gap. That is, nonhumans are the actants that moved the seeds to various grounds.

⁵⁴ Joel Marcus, “Blanks and Gaps in the Markan Parable of the Sower,” 258.

⁵⁵ Barbara E. Reid, *Parables for Preachers: The Gospel of Mark Year B* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 94. Like Marcus, Reid in her footnote mentions the debate on the timing of plowing and sowing: “there is some debate whether the custom was to plow after sowing, as this parable envisions. Some ancient texts refer to plowing before sowing: Isa 28:24-26; Jer 4:3; Ezek 36:9; Gospel of Thomas 20; Pliny, Nat History 18.176; Others speak of plowing after sowing: Jub 11.11; Sabb 7.2; b. Sabb. 73 a-b.” See Reid, *Parables for Preachers*, 94, fn.9.

⁵⁶ Reid, *Parables for Preachers*, 94.

⁵⁷ William R. Herzog II, “Sowing Discord: The Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-9), *Review and Expositor* 109 (Spring 2012): 197. Herzog quotes James C. Scott’s definition of hidden transcripts in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), x-xiii.

⁵⁸ Herzog, “Sowing Discord,” 196.

After the sower broadcasted the seeds and before the seeds were taken by birds or somewhat grew, a close vegetal reading of this parable probes and acknowledges the possibility for the actancy of nonhumans with these seeds. Although he does not designate his work as vegetal or ecological, George Nnaemeka Oranekwu's interpretive retelling of the parable from the perspective of traditional Igbo culture highlights the importance of the actancy of nonhumans particularly in-between the timing of the seeds being sown and their growth:

Listen! Imagine, a certain Sower who after due preparations, went to his large farm and sowed many seeds. Later after he had finished sowing, there was a heavy storm and his farm was over-flooded with water. The flood carried many seeds away and they died. Some seeds were left on the surface of the earth and they were eaten up by the birds and so were gone too. Some, which survived the great flood and the birds of the air, germinated and grew up. But due to extreme heat of the sun after the flood, they died off without bearing any fruit. But the rest that survived all bore fruits: some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundredfold.⁵⁹

Oranekwu acknowledges the inevitable vicissitudes of the farmer: "He experiences flood, he sees the birds of the air every day, the excruciating heat of the sun forms part of his daily life experiences."⁶⁰ While recognizing the role of the Roman Empire and the actancy of humans in the reception of the word and the formation of the Empire of God, a vegetal reading of Mark 4:1-20 reveals the hidden transcripts of the nonhumans in seed transmission and plant formation. Aside from the birds, rocks, and thorns explicitly mentioned in the parable, wind, water (in the form of flood or rain), animals, insects, and other nonhumans could have moved those seeds from wherever they were first thrown by

⁵⁹ George Nnaemeka Oranekwu, "...Indeed, he would never speak to them except in Parables" (Mark 4:34): *A Hermeneutical Correlation of Parables in Mark 4 to the Traditional Igbo Culture* (Frankfurt; London: IKO, 2006), 247-8.

⁶⁰ Oranekwu, "...Indeed, he would never speak to them except in Parables" (Mark 4:34)," 248.

the sower. The parable does not say that the sower plowed the seeds or worked on the land after sowing the seeds. Connecting this parable with the other vegetal parables that follow it (4:26-29 [parable of the growing seed] and 4:30-32 [parable of the mustard seed]), I suggest that the absence of human interference and the primacy of nonhuman actancy is the key in understanding 4:1-20.⁶¹

This vegetal reading of the parable of the sower and the seeds takes a pause from immediately equating a ground with a type of person and/or group of persons. Instead, it complicates and exposes the reality that the reception of the word is more difficult than the audience of Mark expects it to be. Mark portrays the ignorance or the inability of the disciples to follow Jesus⁶² not just because of their personal incapacities but because of various entities, both human and nonhuman, that interfere with their discipleship. Moreover, such interference creates the possibility for anyone to be in any ground, even in multiple grounds at once. As Tolbert argues that “the seed and the good earth... must combine to bring the kingdom in power,” thereby yielding “a *typology of disclosure and interaction* rather than conversion and dominance,”⁶³ every person and community who seeks and follows the word of Jesus will be in one of the four seed-ground interactions in one moment and in another seed-ground interaction on a different occasion, depending upon their circumstances. One way or another, a vegetal lesson teaches that the reception of the word and the Empire of God is unpredictable, unbounded by human expectations, and even interrupted by the unforeseen actancies and intensities of nonhumans.

⁶¹ The other two parables will be explained below.

⁶² Mark portrays the disciples as failing to understand Jesus and his mission. See Mk 4:13, 35-41; 6:45-52; 8:17-21; 10:35-41.

⁶³ Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 163.

Such a reading also helps in mitigating anti-Semitic reading of Mk 4:1-20. The ease of equating Jewish leaders with the seeds fallen on the path and eaten by Satan (4:4, 15) could unfortunately expand the scope of this categorization into all Jewish people.⁶⁴ A vegetal reading allows for an interpretation in which the seed-ground interaction territorializes with signification but is always open for de-territorialization and re-territorialization with any person or group. If anthropocentrism molarized or tried to fix the signification of these four seed-ground interactions, a vegetal reading takes a step back and admonishes the audience of Mark that no one is always the good soil or the thorny ground. The fluidity and precariously humbling nature of their place as followers of Jesus testify to and teach the unpredictability of the reception of the word and the nature of the Empire of God.

In the same vein, Mk 4:26-29 narrates a parable in which Jesus equated the Empire of God with the growth of seeds into fully ripe plants without human interference. The soil produced grain: first the stalk, then the head, and then the full kernel. Only after the grain ripens, do humans enter the process of harvesting. A nonhuman reading of this text perceives the earth as the actant who cultivated the seeds. In Genesis 1:11-12, the earth brought forth vegetation – it was a co-creator with the divine:

Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God said that it was good. (RSV)

⁶⁴ Terence J. Keegan emphasizes that even within “Jewish leadership,” there is much complexity and varied responses to Jesus’s words and actions. See “The Parable of the Sower and Mark’s Jewish Leaders,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56 (1994): 501-18.

Mark did not explicitly mention or elaborate upon the composition of the earth, but one could surmise that the earth was comprised of an assemblage of interactions and exposures of the seed with sun, soil, air, water (through rain or other ways), microbes, worms, and other nonhuman actants. Thus, a Marderian reading of Mk 4:26-29 would argue that the vegetal Empire of God was not produced by one (human) “cause.” Rather, the causalities of the growth of the seeds are dispersed throughout the internalities and externalities that surround the seed and the potential within the seed body itself. To be vegetal is to be heteronomous or spatially and temporally dependent upon others for growth.⁶⁵ Thus, Mk 4:26-29 teaches that the vegetal Empire of God does not grow solely by human hands. Humans might receive the benefits of the work of nonhumans, but this empire grows and produces because of the other.

The vegetal Empire of God’s heteronomy (Marder’s term for spatial and temporal dependence upon others) implies that it is a “collective being or a body of non-totalizing assemblage of multiplicities, an inherently political space of conviviality.”⁶⁶ No part or organ of a plant dominates or is dominated by the whole. A plant grows due to the collective exposure of each organ to its surrounding elements. The growth of plants is based upon their “infinite loosening, weakening of their boundaries”;⁶⁷ the more they are oriented towards the other (in particular, the sun), the more they become alive. This act of reaching out reflects a space of political conviviality. In *The Philosopher’s Plant*, Marder reformulates this space as “vegetal fidelity” or a plant’s faithfulness to its milieu.⁶⁸ A

⁶⁵ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 67.

⁶⁶ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 85.

⁶⁷ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 150.

⁶⁸ Marder, *The Philosopher’s Plant*, 222.

plant's growth is loyal or honest to its environment: the kind of water, the amount of sunshine, the nutrients found in the soil, and other such factors. Mark's Empire of God requires this political conviviality or alliance with fellow colonized *ethnē*. Colonized *ethnē* are fellow actants who are also fellows in milieu with one another. They feed and help each other grow (see esp. Mk 10:42-45). That is why as plants "[monitor] the world's fluctuations, seasonal rotations, comings and goings,"⁶⁹ the growth of a group or community of colonized depends upon its faithfulness to its neighboring milieu or fellow colonized *ethnē* as they monitor the schemes of the Roman Empire. It is about being attentive to others in this alliance to co-survive and co-fight the Roman Empire's sly divide and conquer scheme. As Richard A. Horsley puts it, the Gospel of Mark is a story of the submerged and subjected agrarian village communities who are in alliance through their Israelite traditions and fight against Rome-designated rulers who oppress the daily lives of their communities.⁷⁰ And yet, as the following chapters will show, sometimes this reaching out to the other turns into a devouring of the other.

I partially agree with Marder's understanding of plants as atelic: open-ended, incomplete, and infinitely changing since they are not "sovereignly self-determined [for their own ends] and that [they] do not assert themselves over and against their environment."⁷¹ Inasmuch as this statement tries to depict plants as maintaining a constant state of magnanimity, ecologically speaking, this is overstated. Strangler figs cover the host tree and kill it eventually. Kudzu plants also kill its host, which it needs for support. Venus Flytrap and Sundew gain nutrients by imbibing other nonhumans. Vines

⁶⁹ Marder, *The Philosopher's Plant*, 222.

⁷⁰ Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 27-51.

⁷¹ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 68.

encroach upon their environment. In other words, vegetality does not imply passivity, unmitigated generosity, or co-dependency. Rather, vegetality re-imagines the Empire of God organically growing in its responsiveness to the other. This organic growth means openness to decay and even death (see esp. Mk 8:34-35). Contra colonial-capitalist desire for the perfect fruit without blemish or discoloration, the organic Empire of God is faithful to its unavoidable bumps and bruises, bite marks from nonhumans, and eventual rotting. Mark's Empire of God might be harvested in the end by humans, but the grains organically grow without initial human interference. For the colonized *ethnē*, their empire is not exempt from the blemishes and bruises, decay and rot (see esp. Mk 13:9-13). This empire, unlike the Roman Empire, accepts the inevitability of their vulnerability – to depend on, grow, and decay with the other.

Where would God fit in all of these green blue-prints? A vegetal reading does not negate the presence of God. In fact, God is one of the actants who affect the growth, the decay, and the rebirth of plants. God's immanent presence co-creates with the earth and all creatures, since we are animated through God's breath, or through the *adamah*, the humus, the soil. Vegetality is a way to see the divine in all entities (pantheism), especially in the vegetal, while it finds and emphasizes in the ontology of plants a way to learn also about the divine.

A contemporary Jewish celebration called *Tu B'Shevat* (fifteenth of the month of Shevat) or the Jewish New Year for Trees balances the privileged place of the divine in human affairs by seeing in trees a way to be in harmony with the world and with one's religiosity. *Tu B'Shevat* commemorates the "Torah of Trees,"⁷² which includes *Orlah* and

⁷² John J. Parsons, "Tu B'Shevat - Rosh Hashanah for Trees." Accessed September 17, 2016. http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Holidays/Winter_Holidays/Tu_B_shevat/tu_b_shevat.html.

and *Neta Reva'i* (letting plants and the lands lay fallow for three years and tithed on the fourth: Lev 19:23-25; 26:3-4) and *Maaser Ani* (third tithing in which the produce is given to the poor: Deut 14:28) and *Maaser Sheni* (second tithing in which the produce is brought to Jerusalem and eaten there in the presence of God: Deut 22:22-27). Instituted by the Kabbalists of Safed in the 16th century CE, many contemporary Jewish communities observe *Tu b'Shevat* seder in which various fruits and nuts are eaten with four cups of wine. This seder comes from the belief that trees symbolize the “Tree of life, which carries divine goodness and blessings into the world.”⁷³ Responsible and respectful consumption of the gifts provided by the trees through the ritual of seder is to participate in liberating the divine energy out of their shells, renewing life into the world.⁷⁴ Here, humans participate in the flow of positive, life-giving energy between the divine and the vegetal. In the same vein, could one see in Mk 4:26-29 a harmonic eco-divine play at work in growing this empire?

Second vegetal lesson: the Empire of God invites a relinquishing of assuming to know the nature of the Empire of God. The irony of Mk 4:26-29 is that the audience of Mark, the Galilean farmers in Mark, and many of the colonized *ethnē* in general probably knew how plants organically grow. They presumably understood the seasons, farming techniques, and the stages of plant growth. And yet, Mk 4:26-29 does not invite them to till the land. PHEME PERKINS alludes this secretive growth of the seeds to “a warning about the suddenness of the coming Judgment.”⁷⁵ Expounding upon PERKINS’ interpretation with

⁷³ Ronald L. Eisenberg, “Tu b’Shevat,” in *JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 252-254. See also Paul Steinberg, *Celebrating the Jewish Year: The Winter Holidays* (v.2: Hanukkah, Tu b’Shevat, Purim; ed. Janet Greenstein Potter; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2007).

⁷⁴ Eisenberg, “Tu b’Shevat,” 252.

⁷⁵ PHEME PERKINS, “Gospel of Mark,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (vol. 8; Nashville: Abingdon Press,

with the intersection of a nonhuman and colonized *ethnē* perspective, the suddenness seems to be less that of the coming judgment (or end of the world) as the sudden detachment from controlling the growth of the Empire of God. For the colonized *ethnē* who barely have any control over their lives due to the dictates of the Roman Empire, imaginatively controlling the future of the Empire of God probably signified hope and some form of dominion over something. And yet, Mk 4:26-29 takes away even the keys to the formation of this messianic revolution in the form of the Empire of God. The growers and tillers of this empire are none other than the nonhumans.

Marder asserts that vegetality invites an approach to plants from a standpoint of “obscurity”⁷⁶ and/or alterity (according to Jeffrey Nealon’s definition) “not as *an effect* of an originary loss or plenitude, but rather that identity and difference, though they certainly are located in specific chains of effects, likewise *produce effects*.”⁷⁷ Nealon’s alterity affirms the difference of the other, but not due to inability to understand or totalize the other. Alterity refuses to associate with plants on the basis of the (im)possibility of finding similarities or sameness. Rather, Nealon invites an approach to alterity that views plants as producers of effects and affects on various matters. Vegetal alterity in Mark then teaches us to abandon anthropocentric assumptions that humans are the only ones who affect others.

This standpoint is needed more than ever as humans have been trying to control and manipulate nonhumans for human ends (pesticides, mono-cropping, genetic manipulation, industrial food production, eco-system destruction and clearing, and so on).

1994), 577.

⁷⁶ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 9.

⁷⁷ Jeffrey Nealon, *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 11.

Vegetality is about watching and learning from the flourishing, decaying, and regeneration of plants according to their world, time, and space. By describing the manner of growth with the adjective in adverbial form “by itself” (αὐτομάτη) in Mk 4:28a, the narrative harkens back to Leviticus 25:5 and 11 (Septuagint version) in which “growing by itself” depicts the untilled growth that happens during the Sabbatical and Jubilee years.⁷⁸ Leviticus 25:6-7 commands that humans should receive whatever the earth produces for them on that year: there is to be no human interference or anthropocentric tilling of the land. The sabbatical year seems to be a period in which the current assemblages based on human consumption of the land are dismantled in order to make space for new nonhuman assemblages to emerge. This emergence or letting the land go fallow teaches a vegetal reminder on how suffocating humans’ involvement has become for nonhumans. Before it is too late, the cyclical reminder that occurs every seven years teaches humans again and again how to co-exist with nonhumans in “obscurity” or respectful alterity. It is about learning about how nonhumans cultivate the land and grow seeds in their own terms.

Alterity does not mean complete avoidance of eating plants literally and symbolically. Rather, as Marder argues, it asks the question: how am I to eat ethically?⁷⁹ To eat ethically resonates with Derrida’s call “to eat well [*bien manger*]”⁸⁰ or to unhinge plants from the sacrificial structure of the killable. To eat ethically is to form rhizomatic relations with plants even as we eat them. Rhizomatic relations with plants consider them not as static entities or dispensable ones but as actants with multiplicities of becomings or

⁷⁸ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 151.

⁷⁹ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 185.

⁸⁰ Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject,” 278-280.

possibilities to affect the other. It reflects plants' iterability and heterogeneity in life, death, and regeneration. Simply put, respectful alterity means deploring commodification of plants into "storehouses of calories."⁸¹ This commodification limits the *telos* or the end (goal or purpose) of plants to human consumption. Such limitation drives plants "to ontological exhaustion"⁸² when vegetality is supposed to be atelic or open-ended, incomplete, and infinitely changing.

An example of eating plants well is at the last supper (or Eucharist) event in Mk 14:22-25. Here, Jesus mimics the generosity or unconditional hospitality of plants toward the other. As plants (grains and grapes) are processed into bread and wine to be consumed for nourishing of the other, the actancy of these nonhumans enabled Jesus to commemorate his body and blood to be symbols of rhizomatic connections for all who consume him. Interestingly, Marder critiqued the Eucharist because it "appropriated the bodies of plants, processed them into food, and then ventriloquized them as something they are not (voice of Reason and that of Revelation), thereby ceasing their existence as plants."⁸³ Marder's argument seems too harsh in the sense that making bread and wine for ecologically justifiable and sustainable means and ends can find a place in the realm of "eating well." In any case, the assemblage of Jesus with the processed nonhumans created a positive transformative emergence that continues to be felt and repeated even today. Again, it is a matter of not relegating nonhumans as the dispensable ones, but as the remembered ones who are raised up before the communal meal for all to see, who are commemorated for their gifts of life to all who partake.

⁸¹ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 185.

⁸² Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 184.

⁸³ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 33.

But before this exemplary event, Mark narrates Jesus in Mk 11:12-14, 20-21 as someone who was influenced by the colonial and anthropocentric desire to interfere, manipulate, and commodify plants. After Jesus left Bethany, he became hungry. Seeing a fig tree from a distance, Jesus went to it and found no fruit because it was not the season for figs. Nevertheless, Jesus cursed the fig tree to never bear fruit ever again. This narrative has become the quintessential story of banishing vegetality into the category of expendable commodities. The frustration of Jesus in this narrative (as he cursed the fig tree) is not an isolated, accidental emotion. His anger reflects the centuries of abuse suffered by the colonized *ethnē* and their fig trees. Figs are one of the staple foods of the colonized *ethnē* and animals in Judean and Galilean regions. It is also a tree that produces fruit precariously. Newly planted fig trees will not produce fruit until the fourth or fifth year. Even healthy, mature fig trees will not bear fruit if the environment is excessively hot or cold, or if they are over-plucked or over-pruned.⁸⁴ Luke 13:6-9 narrates the difficulties of growing fig trees. And yet figs were important because they were the food of the masses. According to Mishnah Ketuvot 5:8, Jewish husbands were required to provide their wives with (among many other things) a measure of dried or pressed figs for her sustenance. Moreover, figs symbolically represented Israel's relationship with God (Jeremiah 8:13; Hosea 9:10; Micah 7:1). Furthermore, fig trees were associated with peace and safety for the Israelites (Micah 4:4; Zechariah 3:10; 1 Maccabees 14:12).⁸⁵

The interference of the Roman Empire and their colluding local elites, according to Douglas E. Oakman, forcefully deprioritized figs in order to concentrate on plants such

⁸⁴ G. D. Palmer, "When Does a Fig Tree Bear Fruit?" Accessed September 5, 2016. <http://homeguides.sfgate.com/fig-tree-bear-fruit-49324.html>.

⁸⁵ Claus-Hunno Hunzinger, "συκῆ, ktī," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich; trans. G.W. Bromley; vol. 7; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 751-759.

as olives, grapes, and wheat which were more profitable for the Roman Empire: “whether through neglect or through loss to specialized production, Judaeans, and perhaps also Galileans, peasants were deprived of one of their staple crops.”⁸⁶ This is, in modern parlance, mono-cropping. Moreover, Oakman evinces that the reason for the absence of figs in Mk 11:12-14 is because “the Jerusalem elite took all figs to the storehouse or to the local market, their policies resulted in an ‘artificial famine’ of such staples. Consequently, nothing was left for the peasant family or hungry passerby.”⁸⁷ This colonial food hoarding (an early form of oppressive agro-capitalism) withered the customs of colonized *ethnē* and the vivacity of figs as actants. Wendy Cotter mentions Pliny the Elder’s observation: “The fig tree is also the only tree whose leaf forms later than its fruit.”⁸⁸ Following Pliny’s observation and assuming that the fig tree of Mk 11:12-14 is in its fruit bearing years (even though 11:13d says that it was not the season yet), then the lack of fruit could signify either Jesus’ unfortunate late arrival because others have already harvested the fruit or a reflection of the dire situation of the colonized *ethnē* where they had to fight for scraps such as the fruit of a random fig tree. Thus, the difficulty of pinpointing the timeframe of Mk 11:12-14, 20-21⁸⁹ is due to the recurring

⁸⁶ Douglas E. Oakman, “Cursing Fig Trees and Robbers’ Dens: Pronouncement Stories Within Social-Systemic Perspective: Mark 11:12-25 and Parallels,” *Semeia* 64 (1993): 261.

⁸⁷ Oakman, “Cursing Fig Trees and Robbers’ Dens,” 261-2.

⁸⁸ Wendy J. Cotter, “For It was Not the Season for Figs,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48.1 (1986): 64 [62-66]; see Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* (vol. 4; trans. H. Rackham; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1945), 461-3 (16.49).

⁸⁹ “Because of the imagined botanical difficulties, the dating of the ‘cursing’ episode has long been discussed. Is this event to be associated with Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall [Dennis Nineham, *St. Mark* (The Pelican New Testament Commentaries 2; New York: Penguin Books, 1963), 293]? In this case, Jesus would be seeking fruit roughly in the period September to October, before the leaves drop off for the winter (November). The fruit on the new wood, representing the major part of the fig harvest for the year, would be available at this time. Jewish peasants did not pick all of the fruit at once, since it was not all ripe at once [Gildas Hamel, *Poverty and Charity in Roman Palestine, First three Centuries CE* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1990), 10]. The other dating option is to place the Cursing episode in the spring before Passover. Here the leaves would be just on the tree (appearing at

oppressive interventions of the Roman Empire and their local collaborators with the lives of the colonized *ethnē* and their (fig) trees. The unfortunate repercussion to these malevolent entanglements with the oppressors is that Jesus became one of those who mimicked the oppressive imperial temporality that demanded un-vegetal ripeness or the commodification of plant time. Instead of respecting the alterity of plant life and reproduction, Jesus was bewildered at the incongruence of a fig tree that was not at his beck and call.

Could the cursing of Jesus be directed not against the fig tree but against the Jerusalem Temple⁹⁰ or the Roman Empire?⁹¹ Is it possible that the affect of Jesus' frustration is directed toward and limited only to the Jerusalem temple and the Roman Empire? This containment is impossible because the curse that came out of Jesus withered the fig tree. The curse may have portended or looked back at the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. But the curse did not destroy the temple, much less the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire still stood mighty and even flourished during the time of

the end of March). The early fruit, ready by late May, would hardly be ripe, although some fruit from the previous season might be on the tree. Mark's comment has often been taken to imply such a date, if *καίρος* ("the season") means the late-summer fig harvest. Otherwise, Mark's comment can be referred to the June harvest of the early figs (on old wood)." See Oakman, "Cursing Fig Trees and Robbers' Dens," 258. See also C. W. Smith, "No Time for Figs," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 79 (1960): 315-27.

⁹⁰ William R. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree: A Redaction-Critical Analysis of the Cursing of the Fig-Tree Pericope in Mark's Gospel and its Relation to the Cleansing of the Temple Tradition* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1980); idem, "More Fruit from the Withered Tree: Temple and Fig-Tree in Mark from Greco-Roman Perspective," in *Templum Amicitiae: Essays on the Second Temple presented to Ernst Bammel* (ed. William Horbury; Journal for the Study of Old Testament Supplement 48; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991); Fernando Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark* (trans. Matthew J. O'Connell; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981), 180; Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 299; Watty W. William, "Jesus and the Temple: Cleansing or Cursing?" *The Expository Times* 93.8 (May 1982): 235-239.

⁹¹ Annette Weissenrieder, "Cultural Translation: The Fig Tree and Politics of Representation under Nero in Rome (Mark 11:13-15, 19-20; Matthew 21:18-19; Luke 13:1-19)," in *Miracles Revisited: New Testament Miracle Stories and their Concepts of Reality* (eds. Stefan Alkier and Annette Weissenrieder; Göttingen: de Gruyter, 2013); idem, "The Didactics of Image: the Fig Tree in Mark 11:12-14 and 20-21," in *The Interface of Orality and the Written Text* (eds. A. Weissenrieder and R. Coote; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

Mark. Here, one has to question again the very intent to trivialize the plight of the fig tree under the aegis of the literary and the symbolic. To argue that it is not “really” about the fig tree undermines the penetrating reach of human *logos* into the material bodies of nonhumans. As discussed in the previous chapter, nonhuman reading of the Bible is wary of excusing the use and abuse of nonhumans through metaphors, allegories, and other literary devices. Metaphors penetrate borders and boundaries. They leak and contaminate their contents to “real, living” nonhumans. When contamination happens, it is hard to wash away the derogatory cursing remarks that have already seeped into the tissue of the nonhumans.

The cursing of the fig tree incident implicitly demonstrates human interference through a biopolitics that designates plants as bare life: “a form of life that can be reduced, ignored, or killed by a dominant sovereign mode of power (wielded solely by humans).”⁹² Did Mk 4:26-29 seek to illustrate the Empire of God void of human interference because humans have been imagining and implementing the growth of this empire in ways detrimental to nonhumans (and humans), as in Mk 11:12-14, 20-21? One can only surmise. Nonetheless, a way to not interfere is to follow Jeffrey Nealon’s vegetal biopolitics, which preliminarily admonishes us to pay “close attention to the power effects rendered by the myriad practices by which we do in fact differentiate ourselves from other forms of life, and what forms of violence those practices inevitably inflict.”⁹³ One of the most significant violence incurred against vegetality is to exhaust it of life. That is why Nealon’s vegetal biopolitics challenges the definition of life which

⁹² Nealon, *Plant Theory*, 26.

⁹³ Nealon, *Plant Theory*, 13.

has been based so far on “living” organisms. Life belongs to all “kingdoms,” to begrudgingly use Linnaean taxonomy. Vegetality sees all actants to be in the plane of “ecological territory that cuts across all strata of life as we have known it, life as primarily defined rhizomatic territories, which is to say by the practices of emergence and transformation.”⁹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari call this “interkingdoms.”⁹⁵ As a matter of fact, life or living “is an interlocking assemblage of forms and processes, a series of doings.”⁹⁶ This is a response to Cary Wolfe’s call in which “race and species must...give way to their own deconstruction in favor of a more highly differentiated thinking of life in relation to biopower.”⁹⁷ That differentiated thinking of life de-territorializes life from the stratum that resembles humans or animals, and re-territorialize life into the plane of emergences or actancies. If life is to cause actancy, then plants are living or with life. Hence Mark’s vegetal Empire of God admonishes to see (and not interfere with) the life-producing capacity of the vegetal in co-creating the Empire of God.

Of course, if vegetal biopolitics is about understanding life as affective emergences, then the question remains on the parameters of which life is extended or designated. In other words, if life as defined by having the capacity to affect others, does that definition have ethical limits? Do anthrax, cancer cells, and other harmful toxins and carcinogens deserve to have or be called life? Roberto Esposito argues in *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy* that “as the human body lives in an infinite series of relations with the bodies of others, so the internal regulation will be subject to continuous

⁹⁴ Nealon, *Plant Theory*, 107.

⁹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 242.

⁹⁶ Nealon, *Plant Theory*, 114.

⁹⁷ Wolfe, *Before the Law*, 56.

variations.”⁹⁸ The regulations or parameters do not have to follow the extreme logic of all-or-nothing. Esposito proposes that attributing the value of life to a certain entity is never a one-time event. It is an ongoing process, deconstructed continuously, in order to prevent stagnation and fascist outlooks on life. The challenge then, according to Nealon,

is to account as fully as possible for various forms of violence, not to renounce the violence of choice or life altogether (as if that were even possible). Thinking robustly about life isn’t to say that all life is the same, nor is it a ploy to make you feel bad about your cancer treatment. It is rather to suggest the opposite – that an untainted moral high ground is impossible when it comes to thinking about meshes in life. Undecidability complicates decision; it doesn’t make decision impossible.⁹⁹

Anthrax does not belong to the realm of life or life-giving for now; but future technologies might come to a different conclusion and find life in this toxin.

This life is expressed, according to Marder, in “the non-synchronicity, the asymmetry, and the non-contemporaneity of human and vegetal temporalities and that release the time of plants back to the contingency of the other.”¹⁰⁰ This non-synchronicity, asymmetry, and non-contemporaneity could also be called vegetal play. Derived from post-Kantian aesthetic philosophy, vegetal play liberates plants from the anthropocentric formula for cost-profit efficiency (that business model based on the least possible cost in order to make the highest profit possible). Marder invokes Friedrich Schiller’s example of play: “The tree puts forth innumerable buds which perish without developing, and stretches out for nourishment many more roots, branches, and leaves than are used for the maintenance of itself and its species. What the tree returns from its

⁹⁸ Esposito, *Bios*, 188.

⁹⁹ Nealon, *Plant Theory*, 117.

¹⁰⁰ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 102.

lavish profusion unused and un-enjoyed to the kingdom of the elements, the living creature may squander in joyous moments.”¹⁰¹ Mk 4:26-29 exemplifies vegetal play because the land grows not at the pace, space, and time of humans. The plants and their surrounding milieu create the production through their play and/or interactions. As plants grow toward the sun (light) and in reverse sinks deeper into the soil (darkness),¹⁰² the vegetal Empire of God is ubiquitous but hidden, knowable but obscure, void of human manipulation but invites humans back as its ripeness comes into fruition. Vegetality plays to resist what has always been. Vegetality teaches that difficulties and uncontrollability are the hallmarks of both the Empire of God and life as colonized *ethnē*. Their messianic revolution is and will be excessive, transgressive, unexpected, and even death-bound.

Third vegetal lesson: those who are deemed irrelevant are those who give life. Mk 4:30-32 narrates the Empire of God with two hyperbolic claims. The first claim assumes that the mustard seed is the smallest (μικρότερον) seed on the ground. For those who are farmers among the audience of Mark, this would be a baffling claim because they would be aware of other seeds which are similar in size to the mustard seed.¹⁰³ The second claim describes and imputes greatness (μεῖζον) to the size of the mustard shrub when it only grows up to six feet¹⁰⁴ or ten feet.¹⁰⁵ Rather than just dismissing the author of Mark as ignorant of plant and seed sizes, a nonhuman reading of Mk 4:30-32 sees these ironic and

¹⁰¹ Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (trans. Reginald Snell; NY: Dover, 2004), 133. See Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 144.

¹⁰² Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 177.

¹⁰³ There are other seeds that were known to exist in the Levant and have a somewhat similar size to the mustard seed during the time in which Mark was written: bramble, mint, mulberry, and others. See Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 67.

¹⁰⁴ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 151.

¹⁰⁵ Robert W. Funk, "Looking-Glass Tree is for the Birds: Ezekiel 17:22-24; Mark 4:30-32," *Interpretation* 27.1 (1973): 5.

hyperbolic claims as evidence of affective aftermath experienced through receiving and learning vegetal generosity. The vegetal Empire of God teaches us that those who are deemed most insignificant are the very ones who are the most generous and the defining image of this empire. This argument stems from Stephen D. Moore's book, *Empire and Apocalypse*, which highlights how Mark uplifts liminal, counter-cultural, "insignificant" figures, such as the child (παῖδιον), servant (δῆακονοϋ), and slave (δοῦλοϋ), as models for emulation (see Mk 9:35-37; 10:13-16, 42-45; cf: 13:34).¹⁰⁶

Some commentators have already mentioned the comic irony¹⁰⁷ or the "light-hearted burlesque"¹⁰⁸ of Mk 4:30-32 in describing the Empire of God with a small mustard shrub. They have argued that great trees are used to describe empires, including in the Hebrew Scriptures. Ezekiel 17:22-23 prophesies using the cedar tree to describe the fruition of the empire of Israel:

Thus says the Lord God: I will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar; I will set it out. I will break off a tender one from the topmost of its young twigs; I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar. Under it every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind. (NRSV)

Ezekiel 31:1-9 compares the empire of Assyria with the cedar tree of Lebanon as well.

Daniel 4:20-22 depicts Nebuchadnezzar and his empire with a great tree. These passages, like Mk 4:30-32, illustrate how animals come under the trees' shade and dwell in their branches. The irony is that the mustard shrub is not as great as the trees mentioned above.

¹⁰⁶ Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 36ff.

¹⁰⁷ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 152.

¹⁰⁸ Funk, "Looking-Glass Tree is for the Birds," 7.

Matthew 13:31-32 and Luke 13:18-19 probably knew about the tradition of comparing empires with great trees because they revised Mark's shrub (*λαχάνων*) into a tree (*δένδρον*). Moreover, the burlesque or absurd quality of this passage is only accentuated by the fact that it neglects to mention that mustard trees do not have leaves all year around because they are only in bloom during summer. Funk contends that this change of description is a theological move because it tries to conform to the "prophetic and apocalyptic tradition" that tends to magnify the actual size of a mature mustard plant.¹⁰⁹ Other commentators justify the use of the mustard shrub in order to emphasize divine providence.¹¹⁰

A vegetal interpretation of Mk 4:30-32 might begin with following Donahue and Harrington's interpretation that the "message was one of hope for Jesus' discouraged followers and for the persecuted Markan community."¹¹¹ Instead of imagining the Empire of God as a great tree with all the nations under its shade or rule, Mark presents an empire that hyperbolically lives for the other. As the mustard shrub is incapable of providing leaves for shade and nesting for the birds and animals all throughout the year, the lesson of the mustard shrub in Mark is that the colonized *ethnē* should not expect the Empire of God to follow the prescribed image of a towering cedar-like empire: the biggest, most powerful, most self-serving colonial mechanism. Mark chose the mustard shrub as an image for the Empire of God in order to accustom the colonized *ethnē* to a different way of becoming in this Empire of God. The customary prerogative of an empire, which is to conquer all, is reversed. This Empire of God gives to all

¹⁰⁹ Funk, "Looking Glass Tree is for the Birds," 5.

¹¹⁰ Perkins, "Gospel of Mark," 578.

¹¹¹ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 154.

hyperbolically. In other words, Mk 4:32's "so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade" exemplifies vegetal generosity.

Vegetal generosity translates into plants' orientation for the other in their embodied finitude. To argue that "plants are oriented for the other" does not claim to know the intentions and purposes of plants. But it does not go to the other side in asserting that plants do not have "a self to which [they] could return nor a fixed, determinate goal or purpose that [they] should fulfill."¹¹² Living in that liminal obscurity, if the vegetal could dictate its own so-called "self" or its self-imposed "purpose" (assuming that we, humans, could actually figure it out, let alone overlook the imposition of anthropocentric prerogatives), and if its dictations are something that could be learned by humans like me, then I learn generosity from plants. This generosity is not just the act of giving; it is an act of teaching or coaching others to do the same. The content of its teaching is on the unconditional and democratic nature of generosity: "the non-economic generosity of plant-soul, giving itself without reserve to everything and everyone that lives."¹¹³ Plants' growth, reproduction, decay, and regeneration are contingent upon their fluid, immanent, and dispersed relationality with the other.¹¹⁴ In every year and season, plants expose their vegetal bodies for the other. Even in their death, their potentialities are never exhausted. Their dehiscence and decay become the seeds and nutrients for new life. Just like animals, plants blur the demarcations of life and death.¹¹⁵ Even if living trees are turned into snags by forest fungi, these wildlife trees are the specters of liminal existence

¹¹² Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 153.

¹¹³ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 52.

¹¹⁴ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 12-13, 152.

¹¹⁵ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 53.

as they become living homes of animals and other new sprouts. If vegetal life and generosity is not about naïve vitalism, then the Empire of God should not be imagined by the colonized *ethnē* as naïvely self-serving. Rather, the vegetal Empire of God is with and for others, with all of their corresponding decay and regeneration.

Vegetal generosity's orientation for the other does not condone abuse, especially of plant life. The gift of vegetal generosity might be inexhaustible, but a way vegetality counters abuse is by demonstrating how nonhumans interact with each other. Mk 4:26-29 has already shown the reason why nonhumans can show a better image of the Empire of God than humans. Mk 4:30-32 shows how birds can nest and eat the fruit of the tree every year and every season without killing or exhausting the whole tree. As Marder argues: "no one entity/actant can accept all of the generosity of the plants as a whole."¹¹⁶ Mk 4:30-32 teaches us the importance of restraint, as no one nonhuman dominates the shades and the branches of the shrubs. The only way vegetal generosity is abused is when humans intervene abusively: over-plucking, deforestation, and forceful commodification of vegetal production and time.

Hence, the vegetal Empire of God is atelic or open-ended in its being-for-the-other. Like plants, the vegetal Empire of God is "inappropriable, both in us and outside of us, just as the life it bestows upon 'all living creatures' cannot belong to any one of them once and for all."¹¹⁷ This argument follows Deleuze and Guattari who argued that plants, even with their roots, always have "an outside where they form a rhizome with something else – with the wind, an animal, human beings."¹¹⁸ The mustard shrub forms rhizomes

¹¹⁶ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 46.

¹¹⁷ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 46.

¹¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 11.

and assemblages with birds, wind, twigs, and other actants. The wisdom in this vegetal assemblage teaches the colonized *ethnē* that they cannot belong unto themselves only. The vegetal Empire of God is for all. In effect, vegetality, celebrated in the Markan Son of Humanity's mustard seed parable and his other vegetal teachings, constitutes a model for the Son of Humanity himself whose destiny it is "not to be served but to serve and to give his life...for many" (10:45).

Vegetal Temporality

Fourth vegetal lesson: vegetal temporality reconfigures imperial time by re-attaching temporality to the material bodies of the nonhumans and the colonized *ethnē*, and by detaching these very same bodies from anthropocentric linearity based on human obsession with efficiency and control. These de-territorializations and re-territorializations are based on Marder's understanding of vegetal temporality or ontophytology (the ontology of plants).¹¹⁹ If vegetal temporality finds this reconfigured time in the being and spatiality of plants, then Mk 13:28's parable of the fig tree manifests the reconfigured temporality of the Empire of God as the branches becoming tender and putting forth leaves.

For the colonized *ethnē*, wars, famines, persecutions, and other forms of suffering listed in Mk 13 are not events waiting for them in the future; rather, they are experiencing or have experienced one or more of these sufferings in their lifetime because of the Roman Empire and other oppressors (such as the local elites). Mk 13:32-37 then cannot

¹¹⁹ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 94.

be read just as metaphor or futuristic forecast but as a description of present and past reality that resonates with the colonized *ethnē*, the majority of Mark's audience, and the tenant farmers and slaves who work in the fields. Mk 13 would have been an affirmation of their suffering. It also affirms the nature of their vindication. They suspect that their vindication will not happen in one event or by one self-professed savior. Years have gone by. Several self-proclaimed saviors (Mk 13:21-22) have arrived but the expected messianic revolution did not come to fruition. Waves of rebellions arose but they all subsided as fast as they emerged. In this context, Mk 13:28 affirms the expectations and struggles of the hearers by offering a vegetal temporality: an embodied time oriented toward others, heterogeneous in its finitude for growth and decay, and regenerating season after season as a promise for a future based on the traces of the past's decay.

Arguing for a reading of Mk 13 as a concurrent apocalyptic discourse for the hearers of Mark, I follow Donahue and Harrington's definition of apocalyptic discourse as "the literature of the dispossessed."¹²⁰ The "this generation" in Mk 13:30 could be interpreted as a metaphorical generation that covers a multitude of lifetimes or a cipher reference for modern day apocalyptists. However, for the audience of Mark, for those who are suffering or dispossessed here and now, the invocation of "this generation" is probably felt viscerally in the present. Working with the Earth Bible principles, Keith D. Dyer cautions against associating Mk 13's eschatological images with 21st century apocalyptic imaginations promulgated by biblicist doomsayers and those who use this narrative as an excuse to not care for the earth by blaming the divine necessity clause in which God apparently wills the destruction to happen (δεῖ γενέσθαι, "this must take

¹²⁰ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 379.

place”; see 13:7).¹²¹ From a vegetal temporality perspective, this divine necessity clause is a retelling of the painful past by the 1st century CE colonized *ethnē* in which they are trying to make sense of why God has not intervened and/or why their plight has not yet improved.

Even with years of disappointment, Mark still promises the coming of this vindication through the growth pattern of fig trees (13:28). Mark is not alone in his fascination with the image, seasonality, growth, and even the decay of fig trees. Many Jewish prophets used the image of the fig tree for various reasons.¹²² Some prophets used the barrenness of the fig tree as a symbol for prophetic judgment against Israel (Hosea 2:12; Joel 1:7,12; Haggai 2:19; Jeremiah 3:13). Fig trees in full bloom have also been used as a symbol for the promise of reconciliation between God and Israel (Joel 2:22; Zechariah 3:10). As J. Lyle Story argues, the fig tree is chosen not just because of its connection with the Jerusalem Temple and the messianic age but also of its dramatic life cycle in which “it casts its leaves, so that the bare spiky twigs which give it an appearance of being utterly dead, make it possible to watch the return of the rising sap with special clearness.”¹²³

¹²¹ Dyer is working primarily with the first principle (the universe, Earth, and all its components have intrinsic worth/value), second principle (Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival), and fourth principle (the universe, Earth and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design). Keith D. Dyer, “When is the End Not the End? The Fate of Earth in Biblical Eschatology (Mark 13),” in *The Earth Story in the New Testament* (ed. Norman C. Habel and Vicky Balabanski; London; New York: Sheffield Academic Press; Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2002), 44; Earth Bible Team, “Guiding Ecojustice Principles,” 38-53.

¹²² Allan J. McNicol, “The Lesson of the Fig Tree in Mark 13:28-32: A Comparison Between Two Exegetical Methodologies,” *Restoration Quarterly* 27.4 (1984): 200.

¹²³ J. Lyle Story, “The Parable of the Budding Fig Tree (Mark 13:28-31),” *American Theological Inquiry (Online)* 4.1 (Jan 15, 2011): 89, 92.

Story's point on the dramatic life cycle of fig trees is fertile ground for a vegetal reading of Mk 13. As fig trees tender their branches and bring forth leaves almost every summer, the temporality of the fig tree reflects the timing of the vindication: seasonally expected but precariously actualized. Expounding upon the nature of the fig trees through the lens of Marder's ontophytology, fig trees or plants in general are precarious because they do not follow the singular linearity of time dictated by human vitality, since death ends all potentialities for humans. Vegetal temporality, however, begins with death or negative futurity. As seeds germinate through their burial in the earth, as flowers blossom by withering away their buds, and as seeds are produced through dehiscence, these negative vegetal phenomena open the ground for actualization of latent vegetal potentialities. These moments of "non-fruiting and non-accomplishment"¹²⁴ are the initial manifestations of vegetal temporality. Plants are temporally heterogeneous in their infinite lives and deaths because the various parts of plants seasonally totalize (like a tree that is in season for fruit bearing). The withering of leaves does not portend to the demise of the whole plant. The leaves' finitude is premised by the hope of regeneration in due time. The same goes for the time of vindication for the colonized *ethnē*. This vindication, the coming of the Empire of God, will happen irregularly and imperfectly. Sufferings will still haunt this generation and the next. The Roman Empire's regime will not immediately dissipate. But the hope is that as branches will grow tender and bring forth leaves, the vindication for the colonized *ethnē* will regenerate season after season. Even in its death or failure, the demise of a vindication will become the seed for the next.

¹²⁴ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 98.

Another complexity illustrated by the fig tree of Mk 13:28 is that its growth, its potentialities, are not self-dependent. The maturation or potentiality of the branches to become tender and bring forth leaves are contingent upon the other: sun, rain, minerals, and other nonhumans.¹²⁵ As mentioned before, this dependency reflects plant's non-synchronicity with itself. That is, a plant has "loose alliance of multiple temporalities" within itself.¹²⁶ Depending upon the exposure (or the lack thereof) to externalities, various parts of plants grow differently. Even on the same tree, some branches become tender, and some do not. Some leaves grow better than others. This non-synchronicity is not due to lack or excess like humans experience when they get sick. The heterogeneity of temporality within each plant allows for multiplicities of growth and decay simultaneously. In other words, each part or organ of the plants has potentially infinite growth patterns (and infinite potentialities for decay as well) because they grow based on their exposure to various externalities. This potentiality is expressed well through the iterability¹²⁷ of leaves: "an ephemeral register for the inscription of vegetal time as the time of repetition, a register not archived but periodically lost and renewed, such that these losses and renewals themselves make up the temporal, temporalizing trace imprinted on it."¹²⁸ Leaves teach us a lesson on the ephemeral nature of the Empire of God. Branches might be intact but leaves fall and spring back to life in their alterity.

¹²⁵ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 100-1.

¹²⁶ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 104-5, 107.

¹²⁷ According to Derrida, iterability "does not signify simply... repeatability of the same, but rather alterability of this same idealized in the singularity of the event... There is no idealization without (identificatory) iterability; but for the same reason, for the reasons of (altering) iterability there is no idealization that keeps itself pure safe from all contamination." Jacques Derrida, *Limited, Inc.* (trans. Samuel Weber; Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 119.

¹²⁸ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 114.

Applying this lesson to the colonized *ethnē*, the vindication they awaited is not self-dependent. Rather, this vindication depends upon the gathering, the assemblage of various *ethnē*, angels, nonhumans, and other actants (see Mk 13:27). To say that summer is near does not always equate with branches becoming tender and leaves sprouting. In reality, some fig trees' branches will not become tender and bring forth leaves again. The colonized *ethnē* know this because they have experienced firsthand the unpredictability of vegetal growth and also how the colonizers destroy or commodify vegetal temporality for their own imperial purposes. Mark further expresses this irregularity and unpredictability with 13:24-25's¹²⁹ celestial interruptions. Dyer interprets this passage with a pre-Copernican lens and argues that the heavenly bodies represent human leadership: "they would be understood as the realignment of temporal powers in the East after the fall of Jerusalem and the establishment of the House of Flavian in Rome."¹³⁰ Other interpreters point to the demise of the elemental spirits (στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου) who are also known to rule the world (see Galatians 4:3; Colossians 2:8, 20; 2 Peter 3:10, 12).¹³¹ These cosmic portents also resonate with Hebrew Scripture's theophanic narratives (Isaiah 13:10; 34:4; Ezekiel 32:7-8; Joel 2:10-11, 31; 3:4,15; Amos 8:9; Haggai 2:6, 21). Instead of limiting interpretive possibilities to anthropocentric concerns, a vegetal reading of Mk 13:24-25 argues that these celestial interruptions are common nonhuman phenomena. The sun darkens (solar eclipse; Mk 13:24b). The moon loses its light once in a while (new moon; 13:24c). The stars do fall (shooting stars; Mk 13:25a).

¹²⁹ "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken." (NRSV)

¹³⁰ Dyer, "When is the End Not the End?", 52.

¹³¹ Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 374.

Storms do shake the heavens (13:25b). All of these “heavenly powers” disrupt the supposed regularity of human cosmology.

These interruptions echo the interruptions of plants. In explaining the interruptions of plants in their growth and decay (expansions and contractions), Marder finds Goethe’s theory of the metamorphosis of plants helpful: “the organ that expanded on the stem as a leaf, assuming a variety of forms, is the same organ that now contracts in the calyx, expands again in the petal, contracts in the reproductive apparatus, only to expand finally as the fruit.”¹³² These interruptions reflect the traces of finitude in the ostensibly infinite lives of plants. The same applies to the vindication of the colonized *ethnē*. The vegetal Empire of God expands and contracts like plants. These movements are what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the “wisdom of plants.... Follow the plants: you start by delimiting a first line consisting of circles of convergence around successive singularities; then you see whether inside that line new circles of convergence establish themselves, with new points located outside the limits and in other directions.”¹³³ Vegetal temporality maps an oscillating matrix of relationality (expansions and contractions) that interrupts the supposed obvious and predictable human timeline of the coming of the Empire of God. By following the time of the plants, the vegetal teaches that death and decay are integral parts of this coming because through them new offshoots of hope spring forth. As Joel Marcus says, “God’s kingdom must manifest itself in the world as a mixture of death and life. The opposition that the Markan community is experiencing is

¹³² Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Metamorphosis of Plants* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 100. See Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 110.

¹³³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 12.

thus actually a sign of the kingdom's advent, and its sufferings are a way in which it participates in the kingdom's mystery."¹³⁴

Branches becoming tender and putting forth leaves then is a statement of hope for a precarious future. "To be awake" (Mk 13:37) is not about waiting for that one moment that will bring the world to its end. As Dyer argues, it is to be in "existential alertness and faithful action."¹³⁵ In vegetal terms, it is to know that this vindication will come in multiplicity, in various iterations, and in the expectation of its finitude while waiting for the other to germinate it again into fruition. New regenerations will sprout with the traces of the past cycles of life. Marder finds hope in the *ex-scription* (using Jean Luc-Nancy's word) of time in the accretion of vegetal "rings" on the bodies of plants.¹³⁶ When tree trunks are cut diagonally, one can see the age of trees by counting the concentric rings that manifest the number of seasons and the kinds of climate the trees have endured. These rings, the plants' *ex-scriptions*, are bodily reminder for the colonized *ethnē* that their vindication is already happening within them. Year after year, their struggle to survive as manifested through the wearing and scarring of their skins, the withering of their hair, and the decay of their bodily organs promise that their future will bud with new life this coming summer or the next.

In conclusion, I find Grace Butcher's poem, "Learning from Trees," to be more than apropos in summarizing the vegetal lessons of this chapter. Inspired by her Native American roots, her poem expresses a longing for the possibility of mimicking plants in

¹³⁴ Joel Marcus, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 224.

¹³⁵ Dyer, "When is the End Not the End?", 54.

¹³⁶ Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, 112.

their cyclical, death, and in letting go. Butcher finds in the negative futurity of trees a way to be and belong in this vegetal world.

“Learning from Trees”

If we could,
like the trees,
practice dying,
do it every year
just as something we do—
like going on vacation
or celebrating birthdays,
it would become
as easy a part of us
as our hair or clothing.

Someone would show us how
to lie down and fade away
as if in deepest meditation,
and we would learn
about the fine dark emptiness,
both knowing it and not knowing it,
and coming back would be irrelevant.

Whatever it is the trees know
when they stand undone,
surprisingly intricate,
we need to know also
so we can allow
that last thing
to happen to us
as if it were only
any ordinary thing,

leaves and lives
falling away,
the spirit, complex,
waiting in the fine darkness
to learn which way
it will go.

- Grace Butcher¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Grace Butcher, *Child, House, World* (Hiram Poetry Review Supplement no.12; Ohio: Hiram College, 1991), 79.

CHAPTER THREE:

And Say the Sea of Galilee Responded?

In March 2013, 16,000 dead pigs were found floating and decomposing in the tributaries of the *Huangpu* river in Shanghai. A 48-year old fisherwoman described the tributary adjacent to her home, the *Jiapingtang* river, as “inky black, covered in a slick of lime green algae, and it smells like a blocked drain... At [her] feet a dead piglet bobs on the river’s surface, bouncing against the shore.”¹ The rivers, once for fishing, swimming, and drinking, became the dumping ground for contaminated carcasses. This incident caused national and international public and media scrutiny: negligence and greed through lack of environmental concerns compounded by the illegal market meat trade. A sudden high demand for pork in the 1980s converted *Jiaxing*, formerly a fishing village, into one of the biggest producers of pork. The current infrastructure, however, could not support the surge of demand for pork. Inadequate production channels caused some farmers to resort to illegal market meat trading: selling diseased meat usually unbeknownst to the buyers. When law enforcement cracked down on this illegality, some farmers resorted to discarding their dead pigs in the river.

Images of this catastrophe caught national attention through China Central Television (CCTV) and Weibo (China’s social media program). Internationally, news outlets reported these violations as well. BBC (British Broadcasting Company) coverage posted an image in which sanitation workers in orange vests and blue protective suits

¹ Nicola Davidson, “Rivers of Blood: The Dead Pigs Rotting in China’s Water Supply,” <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/29/dead-pigs-china-water-supply>, (March 29, 2013).

used wooden sticks to pick up dead pigs.² CNN reported that the Shanghai residents, drinkers of the water flowing from the *Huangpu* river, had already been skeptical of the quality of the water.³ For these locals who were immediately impacted by this catastrophe, the effect of visual evidence confirming their fears induced utter disbelief. Their water came from the same source as where pig carcasses floated! The Shanghai residents were further infuriated when the government leaders told them that the water from the tributaries were safe to drink. This led many of the residents to voice their complaints to social media: “Since apparently, the water has not been contaminated, big leaders, please go ahead and have the first drink,” one local quipped.⁴

Mark 5:1-20, particularly verses 13 and 16-17 (“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. . . . Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood” [NRSV]), reeks of similar disgust and resonates with the affect produced by the tragedy of *Huangpu* river. Imagine the stench of thousands of large animals decomposing, the stench of their bobbing and bouncing carcasses hitting against the shore, contaminating the relatively small, enclosed Sea of Galilee that was supposed to provide drinking water and food for its adjacent towns. The Roman Empire’s imposition on the city of Gerasa to produce pork⁵ mirrors the sudden influx of pork factories into the town of Jiaying. The collusion of the local elites with the

² John Sudworth, “China Pulls Nearly 6,000 Dead Pigs from Shanghai River,” <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-21766377>, (March 13, 2013).

³ Madison Park and Dayu Zhang, “Chinese Farm Says It Dumped Dead Pigs in River,” <http://www.cnn.com/2013/03/13/world/asia/pigs-china-river/index.html>, (March 14, 2013).

⁴ Park and Zhang, “Chinese Farm Says It Dumped Dead Pigs in River.”

⁵ This will be expounded below.

Roman Empire anticipates the lack of infrastructural concern for the people of Jiaxing and Shanghai by the local Chinese government. The anger of the pig herders (βόσκοντες) and the Gerasenes against Jesus, and their plea for him to leave their town, mirror the fury and disgust of the fisherpersons and the residents of Shanghai.

Mk 5:16-17 has the Gerasenes exhort (παρακαλεῖν) Jesus to leave their region. Why do they do so? Is it the loss and the potential further loss to their business (death of pigs) due to the presence of Jesus? Are they afraid of possible imperial reprisals against them because the food supply of the Roman legion was eliminated? The text does not explicitly say. Taking our cue from the fury of the fisherperson and other residents of Shanghai, should we surmise that the anger of the pig herders (βόσκοντες) and Gerasenes against Jesus, and their plea for him to leave town, is occasioned particularly by the grotesque pollution of their primary water source? The affect of disgust created by seeing the gruesome spectacle of thousands of pigs in the Sea of Galilee, and the realization that their water and food (fish) from the Sea of Galilee will always be affected by the hauntings of these pigs' cadavers likely traumatize the Gerasenes. This disgust becomes the impetus for the Gerasenes to implore Jesus to leave.

Although I invoke the affect of disgust to compare Mk 5:1-20 and the plight of Jiaxing and its tributaries, Mk 5:1-20 does not literally say that the Gerasenes, or Jesus for that matter, were disgusted. Following Stephen D. Moore's application of affect theory in re-reading the Gospel of John,⁶ this chapter follows the method of affective

⁶ Stephen D. Moore, "Why the Johannine Jesus Weeps at the Tomb of Lazarus," in *Mixed Feelings and Vexed Passions: Exploring Emotions in Biblical Literature* (ed. F. Scott Spencer; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2017), 287-310, citing Eugenie Brinkema, *Forms of the Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), xiv, 37-39. Moore's essay is reprinted as "Why the Risen Body Weeps," in *Gospel Jesuses and Other Nonhumans*, 15-39.

close reading as a way to read Mark affectively. This form of close reading requires an imaginative leap in which contemporary affective encounters guide the possibilities for reading texts that could be channels for affective resonances. As Eugenie Brinkema, following Peter Greenaway, argues: “disgust brings the form of the text – its colors, spaces, rhythms, textures – into being.”⁷ I am not crudely implying that sniffing the pages of your New Testament book will detect repulsive odors similar to rotting pig cadavers. Rather, as Moore would point out, the disgust of Mk 5:1-20 fumes out from the “absences, elisions, ruptures, gaps, and points of contradiction”⁸ that have characterized previous scholarly interpretations of the pericope, interpretations oddly oblivious to the 2,000 pig carcasses dumped in the Sea of Galilee at the pericope’s end and left to rot there as Jesus and his disciples leave the scene. If Mk 5:1-20 is understood as an affective encounter by living actants, both human and nonhuman, then this chapter invites a re-reading of Mk 5:1-20 that smells and sees the “what ifs” of the gaps hidden between verses and words, fuming out affective and visceral possibilities of interpretation.

This affective and visceral nonhuman reading of the Bible actually resonates with eco-justice hermeneutics. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, eco-justice hermeneutics gives voice to the voiceless, agency (or actancy) to those who are deemed inanimate. The earth is imaginatively portrayed to have an enduring voice that witnesses to the vicissitudes of time. There is no literary evidence to support the explicit “voice” of the earth. And yet, eco-justice hermeneutics affectively find through the materiality of “real world” issues (such as factory farming, genetic modification, mountaintop mining,

⁷ Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects*, 171.

⁸ Moore, “Why the Johannine Jesus Weeps at the Tomb of Lazarus,” 297.

and other environmentally harmful activities) the hidden gaps through which the voice of the earth can be retrieved. Following this line of approach, this chapter builds upon eco-justice hermeneutics by intersecting the affect of disgust with Mel Chen's animacies theory in a nonhuman reading of Mk 5:1-20. Chen's animacies reconfigure the Sea of Galilee as an actant who exercises its affective potentialities even if it is assumed to be "insensate, immobile, deathly, or otherwise 'wrong.'"⁹ The Sea of Galilee, now saturated with rotting pig flesh, animates disgust, potentially moves human actants into decisive actions, even if it is considered inanimately toxic.

This chapter, finally, borrows its title from Derrida's essay, "And Say the Animal Responded?," a rebuttal of Jacques Lacan's "The Subversion of the Subject" in which animals are singularized through the Cartesian logic of relegating nonhumans as creatures capable not of response but only of reaction: "the animal has neither unconscious nor language, nor the other, except as an effect of the human order, that is by contagion, appropriation, domestication."¹⁰ Derrida argued that Lacan characterizes the nonhuman as incapable of "pretending or *erasing its traces*, unable to become a subject or subject of the signifier."¹¹ Derrida did not argue, however, in favor of attributing certain human capacities (speech, reason, mourning, and others) to nonhumans. Rather, his argument questions the supposed "*pure, rigorous, indivisible*" nature of humans.¹² Derrida complicates the distinction and/or instills the *différance* between response and reaction, acknowledging the multiplicity of human and nonhuman responses. This chapter's

⁹ Chen, *Animacies*, 2.

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, "And Say the Animal Responded?," in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (ed. Marie-Louise Mallet and David Wills; NY: Fordham University Press, 2009), 121-2.

¹¹ Derrida, "And Say the Animal Responded?," 120.

¹² Derrida, "And Say the Animal Responded?," 135.

reading of the nonhumans of Mark sees them as actants who respond but not according to anthropocentric expectations of expression. How they respond, among many ways, is through affect. The Sea of Galilee tells *their* story, their response to Jesus and other humans, through disgust.

A Legion of Scholars on Mark 5:1-20

Eco-justice interpreters already called out the *schadenfreude* or the anthropocentric readings of Mk 5:1-20 in which sacrificing the pigs is a non-issue or simply a joyous symbolic victory over the Roman Empire. Annika Spalde and Pelle Strindlund have traced various trends of interpretations of Mk 5:1-20 throughout (Christian) history that either see Jesus as a callous person towards the pigs, use the narrative as a justification for abusing nonhumans, or highlight the imperial backdrop of the narrative.¹³ Finding these works insufficient because nonhumans are still relegated as property, Spalde and Strindlund re-read Mk 5:1-20 with an eco-justice lens. They concluded that nonhumans should be recognized to have “theos-rights” (borrowing from Andrew Linzey)¹⁴ to live in harmony with others in their God-given purpose. Humans are then called to serve and “expand a dominion of love to all creatures.”¹⁵

R. S. Sugirtharajah’s summation of the three mainstream interpretations of Mk 5:1-20 in *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* also demonstrate that

¹³ Annika Spalde and Pelle Strindlund, “Doesn’t Jesus Treat Animals as Property?” in *A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for Animals* (eds. Tripp York and Andy Alexis-Baker; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012).

¹⁴ See Andrew Linzey, *Animal Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 40.

¹⁵ Spalde and Pelle Strindlund, “Doesn’t Jesus Treat Animals as Property?” 113.

interpretations throughout the years have been anthropocentric (intentionally or not) and void even of imperial presence.¹⁶ First is interpreting the passage from a colonial-mission perspective in which placing the narrative outside of Jewish territory (Gerasa) supposedly indicates the proto-spreading of the gospel to gentile/pagan territories, which, by extension, includes Asian, African, and south American nations.¹⁷ Second is the use of social-scientific methods and “western” psychological theories to analyze the human demon-possession and the healing thereof.¹⁸ Third is the vernacularization of the passage especially by African biblical interpreters in which the focus of the passage is primarily on its correlation with African belief systems regarding supernatural powers.¹⁹

As early as 1920, Mary Beard was one of the first scholars to associate the “legion” of Mk 5:1-20 with imperial, military connotations. Beard referenced the tenth Roman legion that was garrisoned in Palestine during the time of Jesus. Beard was unequivocal in her argument that “there is no example in Hellenistic Greek of this word [legion] being used with other than a definite *military* connotation.... Therefore it would

¹⁶ R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 91-2. See the following for mainstream interpretations of Mk 5:1-20: Roger David Aus, *My Name is “Legion:” Palestinian Judaic Traditions in Mark 5, 1-20 and other Gospel Texts* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America; Oxford: Publicity Partnership, 2003); John F. Craghan, “Gerasene Demoniac,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30.4 (October 1, 1968): 528-9; J. Duncan M. Derrett, “Contributions to the Study of the Gerasene Demoniac,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 2.3 (May 1, 1979): 3; and, Gundry, *Mark*, 260-1.

¹⁷ See Jeffrey L. Staley, “‘Clothed and in Her Right Mind’: Mark 5:1-20 and Postcolonial Discourse,” in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah; 3rd ed.; Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 2006).

¹⁸ See Paul W. Hollenbach, “Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities: A Socio-Historical Study,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 49.4 (December 1, 1981): 572; Diarmuid McGann, *The Journeying Self: The Gospel of Mark Through A Jungian Perspective* (New York: Paulist, 1985), 71-80; Michael Willett Newheart, *My Name Is Legion: The Story and Soul of the Gerasene Demoniac* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2004); Wayne G. Robbins, *Soul and Psyche: The Bible in Psychological Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).

¹⁹ Solomon K. Avotri, “The Vernacularization of Scripture and African Beliefs: The Story of the Gerasene Demoniac among the Ewe of West Africa,” in *Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends* (eds. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube; Leiden: Brill, 2000).

appear in the N.T. contexts the word should be interpreted *literally*.²⁰ Almost a century has passed, and yet there is still a legion of scholars of Mk 5:1-20 that prefers to live within the confines of theological (meaning Christian dogmatic) and non-imperial perspectives. Mk 5:1-20 is apparently one of the *crux interpreta* of Mark because it does not conform to the usual glorified view of Jesus.²¹ That is why Sugirtharajah called for more imperial, liberation, and postcolonial readings of the narrative. Interestingly, there was no shortage of responses to Sugirtharajah's call.²²

Recently, postcolonial interpretations of Mk 5:1-20 have gained traction. For example, Stephen D. Moore refrained from reducing the Markan narrative simply as a matter of "Jesus bumping Caesar off the throne."²³ Moore posits an ambivalent stance entailed in the Markan Jesus' mimicry of the Roman Empire's colonial methods. The Markan Jesus may have allegorically overthrown a legion of the Roman Empire by drowning the pigs with the demons called legion in the Sea of Galilee. Nevertheless, the Markan Jesus mimics the imperial model of colonization when he commands the

²⁰ Mary Beard, "The Gerasene Demoniac," *Expository Times* 31.4 (1920): 189. Italics in original.

²¹ See E. Haenchen, *Der Weg Jesu* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968), 190. Donahue and Harrington also consider the narrative to be by far the "most elaborate and enigmatic gospel miracle story" because of its theological conundrum. Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 169.

²² Richard Dormandy, "The Expulsion of Legion: A Political Reading of Mark 5.1-20," *The Expository Times* 111 (2000): 335; Joshua Garroway, "The Invasion of a Mustard Seed: A Reading of Mark 5.1-20," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32.1 (September 1, 2009): 60; Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 194; and Teresa Calpino, "The Gerasene Demoniac (Mark 5:1-20): The Pre-Markan Function of the Pericope." *Biblical Research* 53 (January 1, 2008): 15–23. Calpino offers four symbolic correlations: "first, the demons beg Jesus not to send them out of the country (v. 10). Instead of implying resignation to imminent defeat on the part of the demons, the request also has another possible meaning. Suetonius reports that one of the main reasons that the legions were persuaded to support Vespasian was the threat that Vitellius planned to re-station the Syrian legions to Germany, a decidedly less hospitable location. Therefore, the plea of the demons would echo the legion's desire to stay in the region. Second, Roman soldiers were well-known for their love of eating pork and sacrificing pigs to their deities, and the reference to the pigs is an apt and witty connection. Third, these pigs behaved in a decidedly 'un-pig like' manner by moving in unison more like a military troop than the non-herding animals that they are. Finally, the legion of demons that enters the pigs may also be the spirits of dead Roman soldiers who continue to threaten the living as the close proximity to the tombs implies."

²³ Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 31.

Gerasene who was possessed previously to spread Jesus' imperial victory to the colonies. This command entails a reiteration of a colonial takeover story in which a region (Gerasa) is cleansed of vestiges (here symbolized by pigs) of the old regime. This postcolonial reading questions the supposed liberating reading of Mk 5:1-20. Is it liberating when the process of liberation mimics the oppressive methods of the colonizers (the expendability and re-colonization of the weak and oppressed)?

Hans Leander added an interesting twist to postcolonial readings of Mk 5:1-20 by highlighting nineteenth century biblical commentators' colonial tendencies represented by Protestant missions and biological determinism. Leander conjures up George Alexander Chadwick's interpretation of Mk 5:1-20 in the *Expositor's Bible* published in 1887. Here, Leander expounds upon Chadwick's description of ancient Gerasa as a "mixed race, place where the shadow of sin has fallen, and direst wretchedness."²⁴ As these kinds of descriptions of non-European lands reverberate in much Protestant missionary literature, Leander traces the so-called colonial burden of European countries and their mission groups to preach the gospel in the name of the "Divine ambassador" who will cleanse the heathens of their sins.²⁵ When it comes to biological determinism, scholars and scientists (such as Georges Cuvier) buttressed their racist argument that certain people (women in general and non-Europeans) are more susceptible to demon possession because their nervous systems are inherently weak. We are apparently in need of rescue from European missionaries due to our biological inferiority that leads to exaggerated sensualism and "other sinfulness."²⁶ In explaining this history of racist

²⁴ Hans Leander, *Discourses of Empire*, 96.

²⁵ Hans Leander, *Discourses of Empire*, 97.

²⁶ Hans Leander, *Discourses of Empire*, 103-7.

knowledge production, Leander also noticed that biblical commentators saw the oppressive impact of Roman rule in Mk 5:1-20; nevertheless, they neither interpreted Mark as anti-imperial nor let the oppressive regime of the Roman Empire influence their conscience. Turning to animality and Mk 5:1-20, Leander gave a promising remark in his opening page for the chapter on this passage: “the matter of demonic possession of an animal brought forth a discussion regarding the borderline between humans and animals that seems to connect to colonial discourse.”²⁷ Unfortunately, the analysis fell short as Leander only critiqued Volkmar’s play on words of swine/swinish in reference to the “heathens” in this commentary.²⁸

Turning to the intersection of postcolonialism and masculinity studies, Warren Carter’s 2015 article revisited the term “legion” in its military connotation and the demon’s unusual request to enter the pigs. Carter employed empire-critical and hegemonic masculinity perspectives in reading Mk 5:1-20. Carter’s definition of the hegemonic masculinity perspective comes from Robert W. Connell who defines it as: “a ‘pattern of masculinity’ comprising ‘configurations of practice generated in particular situations and in a changing structure of relationships’ that guarantee ‘the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.’”²⁹

Carter, on the one hand, depicts Jesus as a hyper-masculine figure who tames the “out-of-control, demonic, militaristic, effeminate Roman Empire.”³⁰ Jesus subdues or penetrates into submission the legion or the premier army that symbolically represent the

²⁷ Hans Leander, *Discourses of Empire*, 95.

²⁸ Hans Leander, *Discourses of Empire*, 99.

²⁹ Warren Carter, “Cross-Gendered Romans and Mark’s Jesus: Legion Enters the Pigs (Mark 5:1-20),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133.1 (2014): 142. (139-155); see Robert W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 76-81.

³⁰ Carter, “Cross-Gendered Romans and Mark’s Jesus,” 145.

Roman Empire by commanding the demon to penetrate “the pigs” (or boar, the symbol of the tenth legion of the Roman Empire). According to Carter, this sexual language of penetration has a long pedigree. Aristophanes, in particular, pejoratively called female genitalia pigs or piglets.³¹ Since the Roman legion is like or symbolized by a pig/boar, then Mk 5:1-20 demonstrates the victory of Jesus over the Roman Empire/legion by the penetration of the phallic demons into the Roman Empire’s (female) genitalia.

On the other hand, Carter ambivalently complicates the hyper-masculinity of Jesus. Following Colleen Conway, Carter argues that any celebration would be precipitous because ten chapters later Jesus became the “emasculated victim” at the cross.³² Jesus’ hyper-masculinity in Mk 5:1-20 imitated the *venationes* or the mass killing or subjugation of animals in front of an audience. This spectacle of subjugated animals contributed to the “normative Roman identity” as conquerors of the world, the triumph of the civilized over the barbaric other.³³ The request of legion to be “sent into the pigs” in Mk 5:1-20 similarly re-enacts this imperial control over the animals and the land that sustains them. And yet, ironically the Markan Jesus himself became the spectacle, a subjugated colonized *ethnē*, who was crucified, subjected to an animalizing death, because he tried to disrupt the imperial normativity. If Mk 5:1-20 poses Jesus as a symbolic hyper-masculine penetrator of the Roman Empire and its legion, the Roman

³¹ Carter found these references that describe female genitalia as pigs or piglets: Jeffrey Henderson, *Aristophanes: Acharnians, Knights* (LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 153-55; Jeffrey Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975); Alan H. Sommerstein, *Acharnians* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1980), 194-5; Michael Ewans, *Aristophanes: Archarians, Knights, and Peace* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012); Kenneth James Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 63-5; James N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 82.

³² Carter, “Cross-Gendered Romans and Mark’s Jesus,” 155; see Colleen Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 100-6.

³³ Carter, “Cross-Gendered Romans and Mark’s Jesus,” 149.

Empire returned the favor by penetrating Jesus as well with nails in his hands and feet (see Mk 15:24).

This chapter's affective animacy reading of Mk 5:1-20 intersects with postcolonial hermeneutics because this intersectionality manifests the lived colonial realities of the colonized *ethnē*. Moore argues that Mk 5:1-20 should be read as a "national allegory," a colonized person (the demoniac) standing allegorically for the history of an entire group or nation.³⁴ Expounding upon Moore's argument, the disgust felt by the Gerasenes with the affect produced by the Sea of Galilee and the dead pigs in Mk 5:1-20 represents the history of bestial logics or the objectification of the other experienced by the colonized *ethnē* and the nonhumans under the colonizers' gaze. It is one thing to say that the Sea of Galilee is disgusting because it is filled with pig cadavers; it is another to say that the colonized *ethnē* feel the disgust viscerally as the dead pigs mirrored the dispensability of their lives, their livelihood, and of their hope for a new Empire of God. The death of the pigs is not a joyous symbolic destruction of the Roman Empire. Rather, their death becomes the necro-actant that reminds the colonized humans and nonhumans of their shared emasculation under the Roman Empire.

For this reason, a nonhuman reading of Mk 5:1-20, which is based on eco-justice hermeneutics, is more than apropos for the escalating ecological crisis happening in almost every corner of the planet today. The gloomy tone of interpretation of the present chapter echoes various eco-justice interpretations of Mk 5:1-20 where scholars are at a

³⁴ Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 27. For more detailed explanation of national allegories, see Frederic Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65-88; Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" *Social Text* 17 (1987): 3-25; and Stephen Simon, "Monuments of Empire: Allegory/Counter-Discourse/Post-Colonial Writing," *Kunapipi* 9 (1987): 1-16.

loss on how to retrieve this narrative in a more upbeat tone. Responding to the need to care for the earth, Richard Bauckham's ecological or "green" reading of Mk 5:1-20 begrudgingly resorted to the "grey" area or the lesser evil argument to explain Jesus' action to let demons kill the pigs.³⁵ This argument reflects the "first-things-first approach" - better to save one human over thousands of pigs – in which none of the choices are redeemable. Bauckham interpreted Mk 5:1-20 this way because he acknowledges that the "peaceable kingdom of God" does not come into fruition in perfect form.³⁶ Bauckham hopes but cannot fully commit to Michael Northcott's image of Jesus as "one who lives in supreme harmony with the natural order."³⁷ David Rhoads also acknowledges that the list of "egregious examples of disparaging attitudes toward nature in the New Testament include the drowning of the 2,000 pigs in the Sea of Galilee."³⁸ William Loader designates this passage as one of the irretrievable passages that blatantly espouse destruction of the earth. For Loader, Mk 5:1-20 treats the pigs as "collateral damage" in the war against the Roman Empire and the evil powers.³⁹

In 2017, Kendra Haloviak Valentine's essay, "Liberating Legion: An Ecocritical, Postcolonial Reading of Mark 5:1-20," revisited the pericope by focusing on the violence done to the fields of Gerasa and its corresponding neglect of the plight of the poor. Using Mary Douglas' groundbreaking work, *Purity and Danger*,⁴⁰ Valentine re-defined the

³⁵ Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 98.

³⁶ Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 77.

³⁷ Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 224.

³⁸ David M. Rhoads, "Who will Speak for the Sparrow? Eco-Justice Criticism of the New Testament," in *Literary Encounters with the Reign of God* (eds. Sharon H. Ringe and H. C. Paul Kim; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 67.

³⁹ Loader, "Good News – for the Earth? Reflections on Mark 1.1-15," 41.

⁴⁰ See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1966).

concept of “unclean” for Mk 5:1-20 as the “hazardous and dangerous use of the fields for ecologically unsustainable purposes.”⁴¹ Valentine re-imagined this violence or unsustainable use of the lands/fields (χώρα) in Mk 5:1-20 by emphasizing how the Roman Empire transformed the fields meant for cultivation of plant crops (“allocation” economy) into grazing lands for the pigs which were consumed by the Roman legion (“extraction” economy).⁴² This cooptation of land catered directly to and benefited solely the Roman Empire and their rich local collaborators because first century CE pig husbandry required vast amount of land, time, and resources (grain and water) before any form of benefit could be garnered. This luxury husbandry is not geared toward providing sustenance for the poor since pig husbandry negatively correlates to the food provision of the poor: the more pigs are fed with grain (and other basic sustenance), the less the poor have food left for themselves. The field should have been cultivated for crops because such utilization could provide food more easily for the masses. Instead, the fields that should be producing basic food source have been coopted into lands for the rich and their pigs. That is why, according to Valentine, Mk 5:1-20 is a narrative of protest against this displacement. It protests against the “unclean” oppression of the poor and the land.⁴³ Jesus’ healing of the demoniac then became a symbol of threat to the Roman Empire’s power structure and its rich local collaborators because it signified the expulsion of the pig husbandry and its corresponding violence against the land and the people.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Kendra Haloviak Valentine, “Liberating Legion: An Ecocritical, Postcolonial Reading of Mark 5:1-20,” in *Ecotheology and Nonhuman Ethics in Society: A Community of Compassion* (ed. Melissa J. Brotton; Lanham, Maryland: Lexington, 2017), 209.

⁴² Valentine quotes Roland Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2015), passim. See also Marvin Harris, “Pig Lovers and Pig Haters,” in *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches: The Riddles of Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), passim.

⁴³ Valentine, “Liberating Legion,” 201.

⁴⁴ Valentine, “Liberating Legion,” 200, 208.

Affected by the Sea of Galilee

If Valentine ecocritically and postcolonially re-imagined the fields and its relations with the poor, local elites, and the Roman Empire, this chapter finds solace in the affective actancy of the Sea of Galilee in influencing Markan interpretations. Many Markan scholars would not say that the Sea of Galilee affected them to interpret in certain ways. But they would agree that the author of Mark's frequent use of the Sea of Galilee affected their perception in understanding the metanarrative of the Gospel of Mark. For example, most Markan scholars would agree that the Sea of Galilee is the geographical focal point for the first half of the Gospel of Mark.⁴⁵ By the sea, Jesus called his disciples (1:16,19, 20) and taught and healed the crowds (2:13; 3:7; 4:1; 8:13-21). Jesus also traversed the Sea of Galilee, both floating and walking on the water's surface (6:45-56), in order to meet with various colonized *ethnē* (4:35; 5:1, 21; 6:45, 53; 8:10, 13). Moreover, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon asserts that the topography of the Sea of Galilee intertwines with Markan theology. For Malbon, the Sea of Galilee "makes known the Jesus of Mark as both Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee (1:9) and Jesus Christ the Son of God (1:1; 1:11; 3:11; 9:7; 15:39)."⁴⁶

The relatively small size of the Sea of Galilee seems to not hinder its affective potentialities and narrative role in Mark's gospel. It has a total length of thirteen miles (21 km) and is seven miles (11 km) wide in its farthest points. It is about 130-148 feet

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "The Jesus of Mark and the Sea of Galilee." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103.3 (1984): 363. See also Malbon's book, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

⁴⁶ Malbon, "The Jesus of Mark and the Sea of Galilee," 377.

deep depending upon the season.⁴⁷ From a hill, one can see the entire lake. From the slopes above Tel Hum (Capernaum), and almost anywhere from the eastern shore, it is totally visible and arguably underwhelming.

However, the importance of the Sea of Galilee in Mk 5:1-20 for the author of Mark is further evinced as the author used it as a focal space for the narrative, even if the author seems to be geographically challenged when it comes to determining the distances of towns in relations to it. Mark claims that Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee to Gerasa. This is impossible because Gerasa (Jerash) is about 42 miles or 67.6 kilometers from the Sea of Galilee. According to the description of the environment in the pericope, the only possible place that Mk 5:1-20 could have happened is in Kersa or Kursi because of its steep slopes and proximity to the Sea of Galilee. Eric Francis Fox Bishop even narrates a story about the steep slopes of Kersa as it resonates with the way the pigs drowned: "The steep place at Kersa slopes down at once to a depth of 49 feet and a short distance further out gives the sounding of 102 feet. A motor boat bound for the Jewish colony of ain Geb on the eastern side and somewhat overloaded turned right over and most of the passengers who could not swim, were drowned."⁴⁸ No wonder its moniker is *al Ghuweir* or "the little sunken dip."⁴⁹

Bishop's story is one of many encounters with the Sea of Galilee that go all the way back to the pre-monarchic period of the Israelite people. Various encounters with the Sea of Galilee produced various names according to various groups of people (or colonized *ethnē*): lake/sea of Kinneret (Number 34:11; Joshua 12:3; 13:27; contemporary

⁴⁷ Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Sea of Galilee | Lake, Israel | Britannica.com," <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sea-of-Galilee>.

⁴⁸ Eric Francis Fox Bishop, "Jesus and the Lake," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 13.4 (Oct 1951): 399.

⁴⁹ Bishop, "Jesus and the Lake," 399.

Jewish Israeli citizens would call the lake by this name), Gennesaret (Luke 5:1), Tiberias (John 6:1; 21:1), or Bahr Tabariyeh (the name used by modern Arab-speaking persons). In addition, R. Steven Notley further emphasizes the importance of the Sea of Galilee for Mark by tracing the development of its toponym to Isaiah 9:1's prophecy. From various possibilities of names for this body of water, Notley argues that Mark used *θάλασσαν τῆς Γαλιλαίας*, "the Sea of Galilee" (even if it is inaccurate; cf: the Gospel of Luke calls it lake or *λίμνη* [5:1, 2; 8:22, 23, 33]) because it alludes to the places (land of Zebulun and Naphtali, by the way of the sea, and beyond the Jordan) that will be honored and will see the light according to Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 9:1; see also Matthew 4:12b-16).⁵⁰ Instead of Gennesar or Tiberius, Mark chose Galilee since it symbolically stands as a "place-name," as Notley puts it, that ascribes prophetic significance and affective resonance to the lake and its region for the Markan Jesus and his Empire of God.

Another Story of Tehomicide?

Still, the enduring approach in dealing with nonhuman actants, such as the Sea of Galilee, is to consider them as background objects for anthropocentric ends. For many biblical interpretations, the cumulative anthropocentric perspective on the Sea of Galilee is that it is apparently a "place of chaos and destruction."⁵¹ Following Wendy Cotter, the stilling of storms is a common motif in narratives on Greco-Roman Olympian pantheon deities (Poseidon and Aphrodite), regional deities (Dioscuri, Samothrace deities, Isis, Serapis, the Jewish diety), and even humans/heroes (Orpheus, Pythagoreans, Apollonius

⁵⁰ R. Steven Notley, "The Sea of Galilee: Development of an Early Christian Toponym," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128.1 (2009): 187.

⁵¹ Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 70.

of Tyana, and Julius Caesar).⁵² Many of these narratives impose agency on bodies of water as capable of reacting to the chants, prayers, and/or commands of these divine and human entities. The motif is also found in biblical literature. Psalm 148:7 imbues the cosmic sea creatures and ocean depths with the capacity to speak so that they can praise God (see also Ps 104:7). Job 38:8-11 anthropomorphizes the sea as a newly-born baby who is wrapped in garments and obedient to God's imposed limitations. These traditions of anthropomorphizing place the sea in the service of divine and human desires. In Mk 4:35-41, the Sea of Galilee is implicitly imbued with the linguistic capacity to understand human language because the narrative depicts Jesus commanding the Sea of Galilee into submission through human words. The narrative never questioned the "natural" recurring pattern of shallow lakes having huge waves during storms.⁵³ The narrative does not respect the alterity of the Sea of Galilee. Instead, the Sea of Galilee is anthropomorphized as an untamed beast meant to be subdued in order to elevate the human protagonist. This chaotic rendering of the sea can be traced to the Hebrew Scriptures in which large bodies of water are targets of abuse or objectification in demonstrating divine power and preference for (certain) humans. In Nahum 1:4, the prophet describes that God's rebuke and anger have the power to dry the seas and rivers. The prophet does not say which specific bodies of water; nevertheless, the point is that Nahum chose to describe God as

⁵² Wendy Cotter, *Miracles in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 131-163.

⁵³ According to Shelley Wachsmann, "There is a daily order to the winds during the summer and fall around the Sea of Galilee. In the winter months, the weather system is more chaotic, and the winds have a tendency to shift, blowing first from one direction and then the other. It is also during the winter that the *sharkia* [strong winter easterly wind in the region of Israel; from p.397 of Wachsmann] comes howling down the Golan Heights to stir up the Kinneret, raising waves that pound the western side of the lake. *Sharkias* come at a frequency of about once every two weeks and generally last for about three days." Shelley Wachsmann, *The Sea of Galilee Boat: An Extraordinary 2000 Year Old Discovery* (New York: Plenum Press, 1995), 121.

someone who is willing to destroy bodies of water just to teach or reprimand humans. Similar examples could be multiplied from the Hebrew Bible, and also from early Christian literature. Particularly notable in the latter category is Revelation 8:8-11, in which “something like a great mountain, burning with fire,” is “thrown into the sea”; subsequently, “a third of the sea [becomes] blood” and “a third of the living creatures in the sea [die],” and “a third of the rivers and...springs of water” become “wormwood,” all at God’s behest. In Revelation 16: 3-4 and 12, God finishes the job, causing the entire sea to become “like the blood of a corpse” so that “every living thing in [it dies],” and the rivers and springs of water also to become blood, and the waters of “the great river Euphrates” to be “dried up.” Not surprisingly in Revelation’s “new creation,” then, “the sea [is] no more” (21:1). These passages describe a divinity who subjugates or destroys inanimate objects to prove a point.⁵⁴ From another angle, one could argue that human authors ventriloquize the mouth of the divine in order to project their intent in a more authoritative way. One could argue that these passages are all just metaphors, and should be taken with a grain of salt. And yet, in Mk 4:35-41, the calming of the Sea of Galilee by Jesus is not a metaphor. It was not written as a parable or an analogy in a teaching event. The taming of the Sea of Galilee is in line with healing narratives that are arguably presented as historical. In similar vein, Psalm 107:23-29 asserts that God controls the sea literally. Job 38:8 and 11 even depict God as setting the boundaries of various “real” bodies of water.

Moreover, for Mark, bodies of water are apparently dumping sites for various other bodies. Mk 5:1-20 already demonstrated this destructive practice of disposing of

⁵⁴ See Robert L. Faricy, *Wind and Sea Obey Him: Approaches to a Theology of Nature* (Foreword by Mary Evelyn Jegen; London: SCM, 1982), 42-8.

abject bodies in the Sea of Galilee. Mk 9:42 turns an unspecified sea into a death zone for those who cause “the children” to stumble. They are to be thrown into it with a large millstone around their neck, sentenced to the sea of death. Further, Mk 11:23 tells the followers of Jesus that they could destroy natural ocean habitat (throw a mountain into the sea) if they choose or have faith to do so. The ease with which the Sea (of Galilee) is disposed of or destroyed is due to anthropocentric tradition of labeling/connoting sea(s) as chaos, threat, and danger in opposition to land that symbolizes order, promise, and security.⁵⁵ This ecocidal tradition is reflected in Mark’s decision to use *thalassa* (“sea”) instead of *limnē* (“lake”) even if *limnē* is the more accurate descriptor for the Sea/lake of Galilee. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon argues that Mark chose *thalassa* (sea) because it has a richer connotation that flows from the Hebrew Scriptures.⁵⁶ The so-called “richness” though, as shown above, is concerned with depicting the threatening nature of the sea, representing it as being at enmity with both God and human beings.

Catherine Keller responds to this negative signification of the sea, this tehomophobia or fear of the abyss of the primordial waters of creation, by questioning the orthodox Christian belief of *creatio ex nihilo*. Keller prefers tehomophilia, an alternative or third space, that sees the sea/tehom as “the topos of the Deep... as primal chaos [that] precedes and gives rise to the generative tensions of order and disorder, form and formlessness...in which the strange inter-fluences of creatures – in ecology, predation, genetic, cultures – crisscross the abyss of differences....”⁵⁷ Keller poetically expresses

⁵⁵ Malbon, “The Jesus of Mark and the Sea of Galilee,” 376.

⁵⁶ Malbon, “The Jesus of mark and the Sea of Galilee,” 364.

⁵⁷ Catherine Keller, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 12.

that in *creatio ex profundis*, in the matrix of possibilities,⁵⁸ there could be “radical interrelation” between humans and nonhumans. In its chaotic and complex potentialities, the sea displays “nonlinearity and unpredictability because it is part of the dynamic web of ecology that keeps on becoming and emerging.”⁵⁹ Keller’s reading of Mk 4:35-41 sees Jesus’ annoyance not with the sea but with the tehomophobic disciples who do not have the courage to “activate” or do the gospel themselves.⁶⁰

Is Mk 5:1-20 then a story of tehomicide? The Sea of Galilee is interpellated (forcefully given an identity) as a living monster that needs to be tamed. More usually, however, in ancient Israel and the ancient Mediterranean world, the watery body that was demonized was the Mediterranean Sea. Communities throughout history gave the Mediterranean Sea various *noms de guerre* due to its relative vastness and consequent perils. In the Hebrew Scriptures, for example, it is both “the Great Sea” (הַיָּם הַגָּדוֹל); see Numbers 34:6-7; Joshua 1:4, 9:1; 15:47; Ezekiel 47:10, 15, 20) and “the Sea of the Philistines” (Exodus 23:31). Compared to the Great Sea, the Sea of Galilee – actually a mere lake – does not exude threat on a cosmic scale.

And yet, the Sea of Galilee of Mk 4:35-41 and 5:1-20 is not exempt from being interpellated as a threatening monster that, on the one hand, needs taming, and on the other hand, is capable of dissolving into oblivion the bodies of all that are dumped in it. No matter its size, this interpellation proves that the Sea of Galilee was definitely conceived by Mark and his tradition as a force that needed to be suppressed. Hence,

⁵⁸ Keller, *The Face of the Deep*, 160-1.

⁵⁹ Catherine Keller, “No More Sea: The Lost Chaos of the Eschaton,” in *Christianity and Ecology* (eds. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 193-194.

⁶⁰ Keller, *The Face of the Deep*, 214.

following the Earth Bible Project's principle of voice (Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice), the voice that needs to be *retrieved* in Mk 5:1-20 is the voice of the Sea of Galilee.

Animating the Aqueous Voice

Norman C. Habel, reflecting on Genesis 1:26-28, created an imaginary voice of the Earth in the first person in order to convey his ecological reading through the principle of voice:

I am Earth. I was first revealed when God summoned the primal waters to part. I came forth from these waters as a living domain with potential to give birth. I count this a great honor and grounds for celebration. I am valued part of the cosmos....⁶¹

Following Habel, I read the Sea of Galilee not as a threatening monster but as an affective actant who has the capacity to, as Chen would say, "revise biopolitical spheres"⁶² or reconfigure the assemblage hierarchy in Mk 5:1-20. That is, the disgust felt viscerally through the dead pig carcasses in the Sea of Galilee becomes the animating, powerful actant that drives Jesus away from the region of Gerasa, staging a reversal and placing Jesus at the bottom of animacy hierarchy.

Chen explains that animacy theory challenges the confinement of animacy with humans. It sees that those who are "considered insensate, immobile, deathly, or otherwise 'wrong' animate cultural life in important ways."⁶³ This reconfiguration of animacies is not a new phenomenon. Before theorists expounded the actancy of the inanimate, one

⁶¹ Habel, "Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics," 8.

⁶² Chen, *Animacies*, 3.

⁶³ Chen, *Animacies*, 2.

could already glean the wisdom of (critical) novelists who wrote on the affective actancy of all entities. For example, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's analysis in their *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*⁶⁴ of Amitav Ghosh's novel, *The Hungry Tide*,⁶⁵ bespeaks of the agency of water and/or storm as actants who redefine relationalities. The protagonist of the novel is Piya (a female metropolitan scientist who wanted to research the dolphins) and Fokir (an illiterate fisherman) whom Piya hired because he is knowledgeable about the rivers that engulf the islands. Their relationship represented the clash of two worlds: the conservation of nonhumans versus the preservation of human lives by killing tigers. *The Hungry Tide* is based on the bloody tension of the 1970s between the West Bengal government and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), on the one hand, and the refugees of the Marichjhapi islands (Sundarbans), on the other. The former wanted to protect the wildlife animals in the islands of Marichjhapi, particularly the Bengal tigers, from extinction. The latter were refugees who were displaced due to the break-up of east and west Pakistan, and took residence in the islands. The former wanted to remove the refugees in order to "conserve" the islands for the nonhumans. The latter were trying to establish a space to live to the point that they had encroached upon the spaces of the nonhumans. The government officials and WWF enforced harsh and even deadly measures to expel the refugees who stood their ground. The refugees, however, resorted to killing the Bengal tigers because of the constant confrontation. The story reached its climax when a storm caused havoc on the islands, killing Fokir as he protected Piya. Through this storm, Ghosh's philosophical narrative unfolded. Here, Ghosh signifies the

⁶⁴ Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010).

⁶⁵ Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* (Boston; New York: A Mariner Book, 2005).

storm, the waters, and the wind as the agents who displaced the binaries, the divisions, and the tensions brewing in the islands. Huggan and Tiffin conclude that agency (or, for the present chapter, actancy) does not reside with those who have “essentialist, anthropocentric capacities to effect change. Rather, agents [or actants] are those who effect change itself.”⁶⁶ The storm blew away the impasse between the two groups. When houses were blown away into the rivers, animals were stranded by debris, government officials’ boats were torn into pieces, and Fokir sacrificed himself for Piya, the storm’s actancy dispelled the two groups’ contempt for each other.

To draw further wisdom from recent headlines, in the historic standoff against the Dakota Access Pipeline (2016-17), water has also become the bearer of memory, teacher of invaluable lessons.⁶⁷ Many Native American tribes, most notably the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, gathered at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota to protest against the construction of a massive crude oil pipeline that would lay along the Missouri river and the Cannon river and its tributaries, as well as through sacred Indian lands. One of the protestors or protectors was grandmother Faith Spotted Eagle. As she was narrating the miraculous birth of a baby girl named Mni Wiconi or Water is Life in Oceti Sakowin camp, which is located north of the Cannon river, she also talked about the animacy of water. For grandmother, “water... also has memory. When people speak or sing to it during a ceremony, it is believed that the water holds on to what it hears and can later share what it learns. So, when a group of women gathers on the river bank next to the

⁶⁶ Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, 191.

⁶⁷ Greta Gaard provides another recounting of this historic standoff in her “Epilogue,” in *Critical Ecofeminism* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017), 183-6.

crowded main camp and they hold up tobacco offerings while singing prayers, the water is listening.”⁶⁸

The No Dakota Access Pipeline protest (NoDAPL) is a fight for the preservation of sacred space because – among many reasons – water and land are the ancestors, the spirits, the guiding actants who listen, speak, and teach all who traverse, drink, and live in them. Water and land are brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers. What seem to be inanimate from the perspective of unquenchable corporate greed are the very actants who animate the indigenous spirits, affecting people from around the world to come to the protest line, catching the fire of environmental awareness in social media, and rekindling the disgust against the degradation of nature.

On December 5, 2017, I was able to participate in the clergy call to protest with Standing Rock Sioux tribe against the Dakota access pipeline. Thousands of clergy from around the U.S. (and even from other countries) gathered by heeding the call to protect the sacred waters and lands. December 5th was the last day before we were supposed to be removed from the campsite. We stood together, side by side, chanting for a miracle from 10 am until 2pm. Around 2:30pm, Chief Archibald arrived at the camp and brought the good news that the Corps of Engineers would not enforce evacuation of the campsite. We were extremely jubilant that day. Together, we were an affective assemblage who rejoiced for our temporary victory over unhinged corporate greed. That day, the call of

⁶⁸ Jessica Ravitz, “The Sacred Land at the center of the Dakota pipeline dispute,” *CNN*, Nov. 1, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/11/01/us/standing-rock-sioux-sacred-land-dakotapipeline/index.html?sr=fbCNN110116standing-rock-sioux-sacred-land-dakotapipeline0800PMVideoVideo&linkId=30584489>.

the sacred waters and lands moved the hearts and minds of many people around the world to respect the sacredness of nonhumans, no matter how short lived it was.⁶⁹

The Disgust that Moved the Markan Jesus

Mk 5:1-20 also describes an affective assemblage in which nonhumans affected the other. In particular, the necro-actants, or actants that are categorized as dead or deadly such as the Sea of Galilee choked with pig cadavers, penetrated various bodies to the point that they animated the Gerasenes to drive Jesus out of their region. The inanimate necro-actant forcefully animated human actants who, according to anthropocentrism, were supposed to be the only source of animacy. In the overall narrative of Mark, no inanimate object determines Jesus' movements quite as decisively as the Sea of Galilee replete with pig cadavers. In other words, an affective nonhuman reading of Mk 5:1-20 demonstrates how the anthropocentric animacy hierarchy is challenged by none other than the dead or deadly ones. The goal though is not simply that of reversing the hierarchy of animacy. Rather, applying Stacy Alaimo's thoughts in *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*, the goal is to expose affective assemblages into the realm of "insurgent vulnerability," which entails "a recognition of our material interconnection with the wider environment that impels

⁶⁹ The work of Native American scholars on the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and nonhuman concerns deserves much more engagement than I have given it here. See Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed, 2013); Lauret E. Savoy, *Trace: Memory, History, Race, and the American Landscape* (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2015); Joni Adamson, *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place* (Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 2001); Howard L. Harrod, *The Animals Came Dancing: Native American Sacred Ecology, and Animal Kinship* (Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 2000); and too many more to mention here.

ethical and political responses.”⁷⁰ The intent of this chapter is to expose readers/listeners of the Gospel of Mark to our permeability to the toxins of anthropocentrism, environmental neglect, and neo-colonial tendencies. By realizing our exposure to these toxins, the hope is to see that inanimate necro-actants are fellow sites of and sources for ethico-political engagements. Their actancies, no matter how delegitimized by anthropocentrism, arouse and impel us to action. What are seemingly inanimate objects animate, affect, and move the supposedly animating subjects (Jesus and his disciples) into action. Could we also imagine that the listeners of Mark, both ancient and contemporary, are affectively impelled to action by listening to the plight of the Sea of Galilee?

This animacy reading of Mark is documented in another narrative in Mark. In Mk 4:35-41, verse 39 in particular, Jesus rebuked and commanded the wind and the sea to be quiet (σιώπα) and silent (πεφίμωσο). This passage already manifested the liveliness, the actancy, and even the capacity of the wind and the sea to “understand” Jesus’ human words. The wind and the sea’s (or the wave’s) obedience animated the disciples to question their lack of courage to “do” their faith in Christ. If the Sea of Galilee is already depicted as “understanding” not only human language but also its actancy, then one could surmise that the affect of disgust brought about by the rotting pig carcasses floating in the Sea of Galilee became the actant who affected change for Jesus and the Gerasenes. For Mk 5:1-20, human language was not needed to affect the Gerasenes. The intensities of the disgust, the nonverbal communication entailed in the decomposing pig carcasses, rewrote the conditions of relationality between Jesus, the demoniac, the Gerasenes, the pigs, and the Sea of Galilee.

⁷⁰ Stacy Alaimo, *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 94.

If Moore traced the vestiges of putrefaction of Jesus and Lazarus' bodies through the Gospel of John,⁷¹ finding the affect of disgust in Mk 5:1-20 requires a step back to the beginning stages of decay and is haunted by the ensuing putrefaction, becoming-rot, to be ingested by humans and nonhumans alike. This disgust could also be expressed through Chen's queering of toxicity. Chen troubles the subject-object binary by narrating the unfettered transgressions of toxicity, particularly how it is ingested by humans through mouth, skin, nose, and other means. This is due to the animacy of toxicity in which it "fails over and over again to privilege rationality's favorite partner, the *human* subject, rather defaulting to chairs, couches, and other sexual orientations...."⁷² The sovereign and/or those who are disgusted with the other are already contaminated as the disgusting Sea of Galilee has already slipped and leaked into their bodies. The assumed rationality of the Gerasenes has failed them as they were willing to challenge the sovereignty of Jesus (by asking him to leave), even though he is the one who has the unquestionable power over demons and probably even over Gerasenes. The sovereign Jesus himself could not overcome the animacy of toxicity, and so is obliged to leave even after he demonstrated his prowess. The promise of putrefaction of the pig cadavers in the Sea of Galilee, the promise of its unnerving animacy through disgust, rattles the nerves of those who self-designated as being above the inanimate.

If disgust, according to Sara Ahmed, is a "contact zone in which it clings to that which is near,"⁷³ the disgust of pig carcasses floating in the Sea of Galilee clung to the skin of Jesus. He reeked with an imperial stench. It reminded the Gerasenes of the Roman

⁷¹ Moore, "Why the Johannine Jesus Weeps at the Tomb of Lazarus," passim.

⁷² Chen, *Animacies*, 209, 221.

⁷³ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2nd ed; New York: Routledge, 2014), 87.

Empire's disgusting colonialism in which they were forced to produce pork for the Roman army. And yet, the Gerasenes are pulled into the ambivalent feeling, the other side of disgust, in which they are also disgusted by their loss of income, their profitable collusion with the Roman Empire. Ahmed described disgust as ambivalent because it involves "desire for, or an attraction towards, the very objects that are felt to be repellent."⁷⁴ As Ahmed suggests, we push away objects that disgust us while being simultaneously pulled us toward these very objects, making us do "double-takes" on what is disgusting.⁷⁵

Elaborating on this ambivalence, on the one hand, the Gerasenes probably abhorred the *Legio Decima Fretensis*, the tenth Roman legion (with the emblem of a boar), which was stationed in Galilee during the Jewish revolt. Paul Winter focused on how legion, a Latin word, is used in Mk 5:9 instead of Greek or Aramaic words for troops or a great horde: "The use of the Latin word constitutes a direct verbal thrust against the occupation-forces in Jewish lands."⁷⁶ Herman Waetjen also focuses on legion as a representative of the Roman Empire, particularly its "economic exploitation, political suppression, social disruption, and systematic denial of all attributes of humanity to its subjugated people."⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 84.

⁷⁵ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 84.

⁷⁶ Paul Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus* (Studia Judaica: Forschungen zur Wissenschaft des Judentums; 2nd ed.; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974), 181. See also Christopher Burdon, "'To the Other Side:?' Construction of Evil and Fear of Liberation in Mark 5:1-20," *Journal for the Study of New Testament* 27.2 (2004), 149-167; John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 314-8; Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 100-108; Richard A. Horsley, "Submerged Biblical Histories and Imperial Biblical Studies," in *The Postcolonial Bible* (ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); D. Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Reinterpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 341-53.

⁷⁷ Herman C. Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 115.

On the other hand, there were those who benefited. The local elites and the merchants in particular benefited due to their privileged positions to negotiate with the occupying Roman legion. Waetjen mentions the value of having the legion army stationed in or near Gerasa because they protected the “lucrative trade routes to both southern Arabia and India.”⁷⁸ In view of the Parthian threat, it would seem that a Roman presence would have to be stationed in Gerasa in order to guard both the frontier and the trade routes from the east and the south. Perhaps the *strategos*, the military general placed over the “free” cities of what had once been Coele-Syria by the Romans under Pompey (as Josephus indicates in *Antiquities* XIV.74-76), may have resided in Gerasa.⁷⁹

These contradictory impulses do not resolve themselves. They linger and impose upon our memories. As William Ian Miller argues: “even as the disgusting repels, it does so without also capturing our attention.”⁸⁰ Killing off the pigs was a counter-imperial move because it disrupted the food supply of the imperial army. Nevertheless, it caused massive financial loss, instigating the ire of the Roman Empire, and significant destruction to the supply of water and fish for the Gerasanes.

The disgust-in-ambivalence toward the Roman Empire is also manifested through the bestial and vegetal messiah, the Markan Jesus. Simon Samuel pictures the Markan Jesus subduing the legion or the Roman Empire surreptitiously. And yet, Jesus also became the “new Caesar who can cross the stormy sea and conquer the enemy.”⁸¹ As mentioned above, Moore finds the Gospel of Mark to be a ripe location for postcolonial

⁷⁸ Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power*, 116. Cf. A.H.M. Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* (2d ed; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 289-90; and, Carl H. Kraeling, ed., *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis* (New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research 1938), 35-45.

⁷⁹ Kraeling, *Gerasa*, 34.

⁸⁰ W. I. Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), x.

⁸¹ Samuel, *A Postcolonial Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, 127.

reading because it deals with land, occupation, liberation, and destruction.⁸² The Markan Jesus might have allegorically overthrown a legion of the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, the Markan Jesus also began his colonial gospel by commanding the Gerasene demoniac to spread his victory.⁸³

This is the quagmire of the Markan messiah: he is on the one hand proclaiming a different way of being and becoming; and yet on the other hand he mimics the colonial logic of totalitarian method. Adding to Moore's Markan Jesus who is a hyphen between the divine and the animal,⁸⁴ Jesus is also a hyphen between the colonized and the neo-colonizer. As Jesus was trying to help his fellow colonized *ethnē* (epitomized by the Gerasene demoniac), he also succumbed to the lure of manifesting his carnivorous virility by killing thousands of pigs and subduing the Sea of Galilee by dumping the pig carcasses in it. According to Derrida, carnivorous virility is the pursuit of a subject to be installed as the virile figure by sacrificing others.⁸⁵ Jesus inadvertently sought absolute sovereignty by sacrificing the flesh of others. This schema of subjugation or sacrificial structure privileges the adult male over women, children, and nonhumans. Moreover, this sacrificial system, as Yvonne Sherwood asserts, is based on the clear cut "division between god, human, animal, and inorganic matter."⁸⁶ Hence, a virile man, the *chef d'Etat* or head of state, is described as potent and carnivorous: he devours women through his phallocentrism, and eats the flesh of nonhumans as signs of his prowess and

⁸² Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 26.

⁸³ See Hugh Anderson, "A Restored Demoniac Becomes an Enlisted Missionary," in *The Gospel of Mark* (New Century Bible Commentary 27; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 1976, 146-51.

⁸⁴ Moore, "Why There Are No Humans or Animals in the Gospel of Mark," 90-1.

⁸⁵ Derrida, "Eating Well," 280.

⁸⁶ Yvonne Sherwood, "Cutting Up Life: Sacrifice as a Device for Clarifying – and Tormenting – Fundamental Distinctions between Human, Animal, and Divine," in *The Bible and Posthumanism* (ed. Jennifer L. Koosed; Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 251.

sovereignty.⁸⁷ The Markan Jesus seems to be imitating this carnivorous virility in Mk 5:1-20. He tried to showcase his virility by commanding demons, destroying pigs in the thousands, and sending his new subject to spread his gospel. The Markan Jesus imitated emperors who treated the colonized *ethnē* and nonhumans as killable.

And yet, the Markan Jesus' virility was thwarted by something that is more affectively intense even than his exorcism. In verse 17, the colonized *ethnē* of Gerasa came and saw what Jesus did: healed the Gerasene Demoniac and killed thousands of pigs, driving them into the Sea of Galilee. The Gerasenes begged Jesus to leave because the death of the pigs in the Sea of Galilee created a new assemblage that "delimited and re-zoned the areas of proximity that are discomfiting versus acceptable."⁸⁸ Seeing the massacre of these pigs, seeing the closeness of mass-death, a specter that had been kept at bay due to their collusion with the empire, caused visceral repulsion at the decay and the ensuing stench emanating both from the pig carcasses and the subservience of Gerasa and many other colonized *ethnē*. What were once considered forsaken, forgotten, and outside were now too close and inside. The death of the pigs and the massive contamination of their source of water and food caused the Gerasenes to gag upon the disgusting thought that the empire was once a thing of allure to them while being simultaneously revolted for allowing themselves to be enslaved.

Rachel Carson, in her updated preface to her book *The Sea Around Us*, discusses how the dumping of radioactive waste in the sea will be catastrophic because the toxins are widely distributed not only by water but also through the movements of living

⁸⁷ Derrida, "Eating Well," 281.

⁸⁸ Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects*, 131.

creatures.⁸⁹ The same goes with the pigs' parts floating and drowning in the Sea of Galilee. No matter how energetically the Gerasenes might have immediately removed the pig cadavers from the Sea of Galilee, some parts of those pigs would have transcorporeally been transmitted and digested into the bodies of fish, stones, and other nonhumans. Fish who are supposedly benign have now incorporated the particles of decay and disgust into their bodies. Disgust, as Brinkema argues, is "an affect bound up with bodies, to implant itself without meditation on a skin or a consciousness, to have a direct target in the repulsed sensorium of its victim."⁹⁰ Like how the Shanghai residents were repulsed with the idea that their waters was contaminated by rotting pink blobs, the thought of imbibing contaminated pig-water and eating fish that ate dead carcasses would likely have churned the stomachs of the Galileans, the Judeans, the Gerasenes, Roman soldiers, and everyone else who would have enjoyed the bounties of the Sea of Galilee.

The rotting Sea of Galilee is not just "pure negation,"⁹¹ however, because it affects humans by inserting them in a different relational ontology in which no one is essentially uncontaminated, superior, or "clean." If to feel disgusted with something or someone translates to a feeling of revulsion over the inferiority or "belowness" of the other, Ahmed argues that "given the fact that the one who is disgusted is the one who feels disgust, then the position of 'aboveness' is maintained only at the cost of a certain vulnerability."⁹² For Mark, then, the Roman Empire, the one that views itself as "above" and the one that is disgusted with the other, expressing that disgust through bestialization,

⁸⁹ Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us* (intro. Ann H. Zwinger; afterword Jeffrey S. Levinton; special ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), xiii.

⁹⁰ Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects*, 134.

⁹¹ Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects*, 171.

⁹² Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 88.

itself feels disgusted by the other at the expense of being contaminated by its porosity, at its fluid borders, by feeling disgusted with itself for feeling the disgust.

Feeling disgusted and simultaneously feeling numb over environmental destruction still goes on today. The Sea of Galilee is still being polluted today by industrial waste and illegal fishing.⁹³ Flint, Michigan's water crisis of 2014, after years of struggle, has not yet been resolved. The disgust of political inefficacy has continuously caused severe health risks to humans and nonhumans in Flint, including the possibility of being affected by legionnaire's disease.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, the (contaminated) waters animated or instigated ethico-political measures through their affective production of disgust. The revulsion of these waters might have been distant for those who do not live in the Sea of Galilee or in Flint, Michigan. Yet, the trans-corporeality of water, or the thought that my water could also be contaminated one way or another, probably made the listeners of Mark (in my imagination of them, anyway) and the viewers of the daily news feel the disgust viscerally and more proximately because disgust bends spatiality as it affects even those who are not contiguous to the disgusted.

⁹³ Eli Ashkenazi, "Seven Sea of Galilee Beaches Closed Due to Pollution, Lifeguard Dearth," *Haaretz*, Jan, 8, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/seven-sea-of-galilee-beaches-close-due-to-pollution-lifeguard-dearth-1.226288>. See also Joshua Basofin, "Water Pollution in Israel Threatens People, Animals, Plants," *Green Prophet*, Jan. 8, 2012, <http://www.greenprophet.com/2012/01/water-pollution-in-israel-threatens-people-animals-plants>.

⁹⁴ Siddharta Roy, "Legionnaire's Disease Possibly Associated with Flint River Water Supply," *Flint Water Study*, Jan. 15, 2016, <http://flintwaterstudy.org/?s=legionnaire>.

CHAPTER FOUR:

The Animal Masks of the Syrophoenician Woman and the Markan Jesus: Reading Mark 7:24-30 through a Postcolonial Animality Lens

The contentious and yet temporally short-lived assemblage composed of Jesus and an unnamed Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30) reeks of colonial angst. As will be expounded below, Syrophoenicians and Galileans/Judeans had tense relations throughout their long colonial history. If Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman stand as “national allegories” for their respective groups,¹ Jesus’ derisive remark in Mk 7:27 in which he called the Syrophoenician woman a dog (κυνάριος) echoed the tense infighting among the colonized ethnoi. Mk 7:24-30 stoked further bewilderment by having the Syrophoenician woman respond to Jesus’ animalizing jab with a groveling response. All she wanted was for Jesus to heal her daughter. Instead, the dialogue tapped into the deeply-rooted animosity that spawned children-dog, us-versus-them, “fight for scraps” colonial insider dialogue that the author of Mark assumed the listeners of his gospel would understand. This internecine feud was stirred up by the long history of colonial meddling in the economic, social, and even psychological lives of the colonized *ethnē*. Jesus’ unfounded fear that his healing power is insufficient to be shared with the Syrophoenician’s daughter stems from decades (or even centuries) of deprivation or the idea thereof instilled in the oppressed.

Taking a step back in order to trace the history of interpretation of this narrative, we see that various interpreters have already expressed their frustration with Jesus’ “un-

¹ See Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 27.

Jesus-like” response to the Syrophenician woman. Scholars have variously interpreted the scandalous words of Jesus as: peirastic irony (a form of verbal challenge in order to test the opponent’s response);² as a way to test the gentile woman and demonstrate her faith as paradigmatic;³ and as a symbolic struggle and desire for gentile mission.⁴ This chapter is wary and cognizant of the possibility of falling into the trap of inadvertently labeling the side of Jesus or (ancient) Jewishness as patriarchal colonizers, in line with Amy-Jill Levine’s caution about such ways of reading.⁵ Whether the Syrophenician woman is a rich well-educated and urban (well-integrated) Greek/Hellenist⁶ or a poor widowed/divorced woman,⁷ this chapter will attempt to not essentialize her as the ultimate symbol of victimhood versus Jesus as the patriarchal colonizer who represents the Jewish people. A postcolonially ambivalent stance, which this chapter follows,

² Jerry Camery-Hoggatt, *Irony in Mark’s Gospel: Text and Subtext* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Studies 72; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 149-51; Kelly Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark: ‘Even the Dogs under the Table Eat the Children’s Crumbs’* (Library of New Testament Studies 339; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 51-2.

³ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 468; Frederick D. Aquino and A. Brian McLemore, “Markan Characterization of Women,” in *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity* (ed. Carroll D. Osburn; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1993), 412.

⁴ Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26* (Word Biblical Commentary 34A; ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Baker; Waco, TX: Word, 1989), 386-9. Theissen summarized the various interpretations on Mark 7:24-30 in three groups: biographical, paradigmatic, and salvation-historical. See Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. L. M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 62-3.

⁵ See Levine’s warning against postcolonialism’s inadvertent anti-Judaism as it tries to resist colonialism: Amy-Jill Levine, “The Disease of Postcolonial New Testament Studies and the Hermeneutics of Healing,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 20.1 (2004): 91-99. See these references to further reflect upon Levine’s point: Poling Sun, “Naming the Dog: Another Asian Reading of Mark 7:24-30,” *Review and Expositor* 107 (Summer 2010): (384) 381-394; R. S. Sugirtharajah, “The Syrophenician Woman,” *Expository Times* 98 (1986): 13-15; and Leander, *Discourses of Empire*, 109-115.

⁶ Sharon H. Ringe, “A Gentile Woman’s Story Revisited: Re-reading Mark 7:23-31,” in *A Feminist Companion to Mark* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 86, 89; Theissen, *The Gospels in Context*, 70-71; Mary Ann Beavis, “Women as Models of Faith in Mark,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 18 (1988): 6 [3-9]; Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark* (New International Bible Commentary on the New Testament 2; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1983), 115; David Rhoads, “Jesus and the Syrophenician Woman in Mark: A Narrative-Critical Study,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62 (1994):343-75.

⁷ Sharon H. Ringe, “A Gentile Woman’s Story,” in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Letty M. Russell; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 70; Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, 212-5.

acknowledges the critical interpretations of Mk 7:4-30 expressed by (Asian) feminist and postcolonial interpreters while being sensitive to Levine's concern of (un)intentionally stereotyping negatively the Jewish community as a whole.⁸

In other words, neither Jesus nor the Syrophenician woman were untainted by the influences of their colonial circumstances. The only difference is that the Syrophenician woman was able to rise to the occasion first by mirroring or animal-masking⁹ Jesus' bestial logics against her, designed to animalize her as inferior. Only then was Jesus himself able to snap out of his conditioned colonial mimicry and heal her daughter. Instead of dichotomization, this chapter traces Jesus' and the Syrophenician woman's co-painful, liminal, colonial past in order to understand their bewildering utterances.

Jesus' utterance in Mk 7:27, "let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs," is not just his direct statement. Following

⁸ For more postcolonial and/or feminist reading of this narrative or of Matthew, see HyunJu Bae, "Dancing around Life: An Asian Woman's Perspective," *Ecumenical Review* 56.4 (2004): 390-403; Laura Donaldson, "Gospel Hauntings: The Postcolonial Demons of New Testament Criticism," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections* (ed. Stephen D. Moore and Fernando Segovia; The Bible and Postcolonialism 8; New York: T&T Clark, 2005); Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Saint Louis: Chalice, 2000); Aruna Gnanadason, "Jesus and the Asian Woman: A Post-Colonial Look at the Syro-Phoenician Woman/Canaanite Woman from an Indian Perspective," *Studies in World Christianity* 7 (2001): 162-77; Leticia Guardiola-Sáenz, "Borderless Women and Borderless Texts: A Cultural Reading of Matthew 15:21-28," *Semeia* 78 (1997):69-81; Hisako Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese Feminist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994); idem, "De-Colonizing Ourselves as Readers: the Story of the Syro-Phoenician Woman as a Text," in *Distant Voices Drawing Near: Essays in Honor of Antoinette Clark Wire* (ed. Holly E. Hearon; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004); Kwok Pui-lan, "Woman, Dogs and Crumbs," in *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (The Bible and Liberation; Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995); Surekha Nelavala, *Liberation Beyond Borders: Dalit Hermeneutics and Four Gospel Women* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic, 2009); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Mary Ann Tolbert, "Mark," in *Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; expanded edition; London: SPCK, 1992); Elaine M. Wainwright, "Not Without My Daughter: Gender and Demon Possession in Matthew 15:21-28," in *A Feminist Companion to Matthew* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001); and Jin Young Choi, "The Consumed Body," in *Postcolonial Discipleship of Embodiment: An Asian and Asian American Feminist Reading of the Gospel of Mark* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 85-108.

⁹ This term will be explained below.

Deleuze and Guattari, it is an expression of a collective assemblage of enunciation. If an assemblage, as discussed previously, is composed of actants, then one way these actants link and become a community or organization is through “the enforceable social commitments created by the enunciation of speech acts.”¹⁰ A collective assemblage of enunciation is “based on particular space and time and in relation to a machinic assemblage”¹¹ or automated way of processing our surroundings. These expressions or enunciations, however, do not reside in an individual. In their utterance, “there is no subject, but always collective agents; and in what the utterance speaks of, there are no objects, but machinic states.”¹² Jesus’ verbal jab at the Syrophenician woman cannot be reduced to one individual’s scathing remark against another. Rather, Jesus’ statement, following Eugene W. Holland’s understanding of collective assemblage of enunciation, is derived from a collective “unconscious... composed of very diverse kinds of elements, including libidinal, social, and technical machines.”¹³

For Mk 7:24-30, the machinic states, operating independently of the volition of any given individual, are the colonial histories of pain and infighting between the colonized *ethnē*. Their enmity is expressed through machinic formulations such as applying bestial logics to one another. These machinic formulations in many cases are blurted out automatically or without compunction. In other words, stereotyping or labeling the other are unreasonable and yet easily uttered because they are automated in the psyches of those whose communities have been enunciating them for generations.

¹⁰ Delanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 55. See also Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 88.

¹¹ Eugene W. Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaus* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 78.

¹² Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 71.

¹³ Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaus*, 96.

The questionable utterances in Mk 7:24-30 are mechanical releases of frustration that spring from visceral, libidinal, social, and even colonial trauma that haunt the actants. One's expression is never an isolated incident. Statements such as Mk 7:27 are "derivatives"¹⁴ of the collective or the deterritorialized expressions that haunt the present by going "beyond the individual, on the side of the *socius*, as before the person, on the side of pre-verbal intensities, indicating a logic of affects rather than a logic of delimited sets."¹⁵ Thus, the formation of a collective assemblage of enunciation is not on its "various individuated statements or an interlocking of different subjects of enunciation... [rather, it is] the redundant complex of the act and the statement that necessarily accomplishes it."¹⁶ That is why a statement is "order-words," because it does not only relay information, it commands and seeks obedience in its redundancy. The point is to see that a collective assemblage of enunciation emerges from "group phenomena, social assemblages, and technological apparatuses."¹⁷ In other words, expressions even by an individual are already expressions that have been repeated before by others in their unconscious derivations. It is less about who said it, but more about the performativity of the statement.

To say that the speaker is not fully responsible for the originality of a statement does not negate the affect and effect of the said statement. The bodies of the actants may not have changed immediately, but the speaker or the spoken undergoes an "incorporeal transformation"¹⁸ because of the utterance. Deleuze and Guattari use the example of a

¹⁴ Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaus*, 78.

¹⁵ Félix Guattari, *Chaomosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 8-9.

¹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 80.

¹⁷ Young, Genosko, and Watson, *The Deleuze and Guattari Dictionary*, 70.

¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 80-1.

judge pronouncing a sentence. The person who receives the verdict goes through an incorporeal transformation. The body of the person does not change; but how this person is now expressed or enunciated – he or she is a “criminal” - changes due to the sentencing. However, the signification of a “criminal” relies upon its repetitive expressions within its particular collective assemblage of enunciation. For a more affective example, Donald Trump’s slogan, “Make America Great Again,” changed the persona of Trump from a real estate mogul and reality show entertainer to the leader of the “silent majority.” Trump’s corporeality was not changed by the statement, or the statement did not change Trump’s body literally. Nevertheless, Trump’s political ingenuity is in the “non-totalizable intensive multiplicity”¹⁹ of his statement, its capacity to resonate with many of his supporters according to their context.

The unconscious that gave rise to the libidinal, social, and colonial-technical machines of the Markan Jesus and his statement in 7:24-30 is the history of and the concurrent animosity between two colonized peoples. In discussing the importance of the geographical boundaries of the Markan narrative, Jeffrey W. Aernie traced and argued that “the abusive distinction developed between the children and the dogs with respect to the appropriate distribution of bread in Jesus’ statement in Mk 7:27 may stem at least in part from the inherent socioeconomic and political situation that plagued the region.”²⁰ The ensuing effect of this tension between the colonized peoples is to desire or mimic the imperial animalization of the other. Following Simon Samuel’s reading of Mk 7:24-30, Jesus stands in a liminal space of “double vision, i.e., with the vision of the colonized and

¹⁹ Guattari, *The Machinic Unconscious*, 55.

²⁰ Jeffrey W. Aernie, “Borderless Discipleship: The Syrophenician Woman as a Christ-Follower in Mark 7:24-30,” in *Bible, Borders, Belonging(s): Engaging Readings from Oceania* (ed. Jione Havea, David J. Neville, and Elaine M. Wainwright; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 193.

colonists, and speak with a forked tongue, speaking as the dominant and the dominated.”²¹ My reading also sees Jesus as the product of “the dynamics of transcultural (consensual and conflictual) hybridity.”²² As Samuel diagnoses Jesus’ harsh statement as “the problem of approximation (Jesus approximating a colonist posture),”²³ this chapter sees it as his colonial mimicry of carnophallogocentrism (this will be explained below). As Samuel suggests the Syrophoenician woman’s response as an expression of “liberative dynamics of reiteration (woman repeating the words of Jesus),”²⁴ this chapter argues that her response re-expresses this liberative stance through an animal mask (again this will be explained below).

Ambivalent Animosity between the Colonized Ethnē

Before delving into defining the philosophical terms mentioned above, a history on the ambivalent relationship between the Israelites and the Syrians and/or Phoenicians is necessary here. Some scholars propound that these groups are enmeshed even at their (etymological) origins. This etymological entanglement is suggested by the fact that the Greek word *phoenicia* or φοινίξ is derived from the Akkadian word, *kinahhu*, or “purple.” This Akkadian word, according to those scholars, is apparently the basis also for the Hebrew root letters for Canaanite, *k-n-n*.²⁵ Gerhard Herm supports this argument

²¹ Samuel, *A Postcolonial Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus*, 85.

²² Samuel, *A Postcolonial Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus*, 85.

²³ Samuel, *A Postcolonial Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus*, 85.

²⁴ Samuel, *A Postcolonial Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus*, 85.

²⁵ See Gerhard Herm, *The Phoenicians: The Purple Empire of the Ancient World* (New York: Morrow, 1975); Sabatino Moscati, *The World of the Phoenicians* (New York: Praeger, 1968); Trevor Bryce, *Ancient Syria: A Three Thousand Year History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 112-3; and, Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 338.

by stating that the Phoenicians usually referred to themselves as Canaanites, even at the time of Alexander the Great's conquering of Tyre.²⁶ Furthermore, the Septuagint translated Canaan in a few places as Φοινίσης (see Exodus 6:15; 16:35; Joshua 5:1,12). However, some scholars find this etymological connection accidental. Sabatino Moscati argues that the term Canaan included, but was not solely, the name for the Phoenicians.²⁷ Genesis 10:15 mentions that Canaan was the father of the Sidonians as well. Any claim for Canaan-Phoenician connection is suspect due to the "complete loss of Phoenician literature and the difficulties of archaeological research, due to the fact that the most important ancient sites are covered by modern buildings."²⁸ Thus, most information about Phoenicia, Syria, and its regions are at the mercy of other groups or writers' written accounts about them. For example, Homer describes in the *Odyssey* the Phoenicians as rogues and deceivers.²⁹ And yet, Homer sings a different tune in the *Iliad* where he describes the Phoenicians as great merchants.³⁰ In any case, scholars today would agree that the Phoenicians, and their neighbors, were among the best seafaring peoples and merchants of their time.

Another historical claim unanimously agreed upon by scholars is that the Phoenicians and/or the Syrians were influential in the region of Levant as early as the tenth century BCE.³¹ Their influence endured through the period of Israelite monarchy.

²⁶ Herm, *The Phoenicians*, 25.

²⁷ Sabatino Moscati, *The Phoenicians* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989), 24; and, E.A. Speiser, "The Name Phoinikes," *Language*, XII (1936): 121-6.

²⁸ Moscati, *The Phoenicians*, 38.

²⁹ Homer, *Odyssey* (trans. Edward McCrorie; Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 205 (14.287-91).

³⁰ Herm, *The Phoenicians*, 162, 167.

³¹ Brian Peckham, "Phoenicia, History of," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. David Noel Freedman; 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:349-57.

Of course, some scholars would argue that one could push back further to Genesis (Gen 10:19a – “and the borders of Canaan reached from Sidon toward Gerar as far as Gaza”). According to the Hebrew Scriptures, Israel and Phoenicia were in trade relations, albeit skewed trade relations, according to E. Knauf.³² 1 Kings 5 demonstrates that there was an on-going treaty between Solomon and Hiram, king of Tyre. Solomon’s decision to build the Jerusalem Temple led him to seal a deal with Hiram. Due to Israel’s lack of skilled labor and valuable goods to build the temple, Solomon depended upon the Phoenicians.³³ The Phoenicians supplied Solomon with cedar and juniper logs (1 Kgs 5:8), gold (9:11,14), and skilled labor 7:13-14). Solomon paid Hiram an annual tribute of wheat and olive oil (5:11-12), and even territories, although Hiram did not find them useful (9:10-14). Whether or not the details of these exchanges and the names of those who were conscripted to forced labor in 1 Kgs 5 and 9 are questionable, for Knauf, this kind of trade reminds one of the unfair trade between first world and third world countries today, Israel in this instance being the third world.³⁴ The Phoenicians were portrayed to be the rich, technologically advanced gateway region for world trade. If the Israelites were primarily farmers and shepherds, the Phoenicians were depicted as at the center of commerce and a highly skilled nation. Although it is a prophecy against Tyre, Ezekiel 26-27 sums up well the mercantile success and grandeur of Tyre (and probably several other

³² E. Knauf, “King Solomon’s Copper Supply,” in *Phoenicia and the Bible: Proceedings of the Conference held at the University of Leuven on the 15th and 16th of March 1990* (ed. Edward Lipinski; Leuven: Departement Oriëntalistiek: Peeters, 1991), 168.

³³ For Solomon’s dependency on Phoenicia, H. Donner, “The Interdependence of Internal Affairs and Foreign Policy during the Davidic-Solomonic Period,” in T. Ishida, ed., *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays: Papers read at the International Symposium for Biblical Studies, Tokyo 5-7 December, 1979* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982).

³⁴ Knauf, “King Solomon’s Copper Supply,” 168. As Knauf has argued, Solomon gave Hiram territory which had always been Phoenician.

Phoenician cities) until the sixth century BCE (see also Zechariah 9:3). According to Ezekiel 27:17, Judah and Israel were also part of the nations who were desperate to trade with Tyrians/Phoenicians in exchange for wheat, honey, olive oil, and balm.

The skewed relationship between the two groups escalated into a tense one when Solomon introduced or followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians due to his Sidonian wife (1 Kgs 11:5, 33; 2 Kgs 23:13). Solomon's descendant, Rehoboam, also assimilated to the Phoenician religiosity by building asherah poles on "every high hill and under every spreading tree" (1 Kgs 14:22-23). Abijah, the successor of Rehoboam and king of Judah, also followed his father's assimilation of Sidonian or Phoenician deities (1 Kgs 15:3). The northern kingdom of Israel was no exception. As a matter of fact, the incursion of Phoenician religiosity was at its height through the marriage/alliance between Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal (the king of the Sidonians), and Ahab, the son of Omri (the king of Israel). Ahab not only married Jezebel, he also built an altar/temple for Baal in Samaria and an asherah pole as well (1 Kgs 16:32-33).

The key story of contention between these nations is, in fact, the story of Jezebel. Since there is no historical account from Jezebel's perspective, the authors of the books of Kings have to be taken with a grain of salt in their negative assessments of her. First, she apparently plotted the murder of Naboth in order to usurp his vineyard for Ahab (1 Kgs 21:1-17). After hearing about this conspiracy, Elijah cursed Jezebel to be devoured by dogs at the wall of Jezreel (1 Kgs 21:23). Second, Jezebel was apparently the cause for Ahab's "going after idols" (1 Kgs 21:25-26). Third, Jehu describes Jezebel as a harlot who is also into witchcraft (2 Kgs 9:22). Last, Jezebel is portrayed as deserving a gruesome death: thrown down from a window, her blood is spattered on the wall, her

body trampled by horses, and her cadaver eaten by dogs (2 Kgs 9:32-37). Athalya Brenner-Idan argues that Jezebel is demonized in 1st and 2nd Kings because the authors of these texts were proponents of Jehu and repulsed by Israel's tendency to assimilate with foreign deities (2 Kings 10:18-ff).³⁵ The attack on Jezebel reflects the religio-political tension between the ruling parties in Israel: Jezebel versus Elijah and Jehu. That is why the authors of 1st and 2nd Kings or those who side with Jehu consistently denigrated and even suppress Jezebel's roles in their narratives.

1st and 2nd Kings have other narratives that portray disapproval of assimilation with Phoenician deities. Asa expelled male shrine prostitutes and removed all idols. He even deposed his grandmother, Maakah, from her position as queen mother because she made an image of Asherah for worship (1 Kgs 15:12-14). Jehu massacred Ahab's seventy sons and all of the priests, prophets, and servants of Baal (2 Kgs 10:1-27). Furthermore, Jehu even eliminated worship of Baal (2 Kgs 10:28), a ruling which led him to be described as one of the kings of Israel who had done "right in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Kgs 10:30). All of these narratives further stoked the strife between these colonized peoples.

And yet, the Israelites, Judeans, Tyrians, and Sidonians were bonded by the same experience of colonialism under Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. According to Jeremiah 27:3, Jeremiah's prophecy was not just against Judah; it included Tyre and Sidon. Alongside their enemies, Jeremiah prophesied that the Israelites and Judeans would carry the yoke of subjugation with the Tyrians and Sidonians together (Jer 27:1-7). They would be taken to Babylon together until the day the Lord decides to bring them

³⁵ Athalya Brenner-Idan, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1985), 28. The second edition of this book was published in 2015.

back (27:22). Jeremiah does not spell out a literal list of nations that will return to their homelands. Nevertheless, one could surmise that when the people of Zion/Jerusalem sang a jeremiad by the rivers of Babylon (Psalm 137), the Tyrians and Sidonians, with their “head rubbed bare and shoulder made raw” (Ezekiel 29:18), were also lamenting over their cities alongside the Israelites and Judeans.

It was not until the defeat of the Neo-Babylonian Empire by the Persian Empire under Cyrus II or Cyrus the Great that the exiled ones were given the chance to repatriate to their homelands. Those who returned in batches were not just the Judeans and Israelites; it also included Tyrians and Sidonians. When the Judean returnees decided to rebuild the Jerusalem temple, once again they sought the assistance of the Tyrians and Sidonians: “Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and gave food and drink and olive oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre, so that they would bring cedar logs by sea from Lebanon to Joppa, as authorized by Cyrus king of Persia” (Ezra 3:7).

However, this alliance was short-lived. Nehemiah began an exclusivist politics in Judah. He started to impose regulations that created borders, dividing the Judeans from their neighboring nations. For example, Nehemiah disapproved of the actions of the Tyrians who lived in Jerusalem of selling fish and all kinds of merchandise during Sabbath (Nehemiah 13:16). Alongside the Tyrians, Nehemiah reproached the Jewish nobles of Judah for not keeping the Sabbath (Neh 13:17-18). Nehemiah even physically reprimanded certain persons by pulling their hair and beating them because they married foreigners (Neh 13:23-27; see also: Ezra 9-10). Their marriages were considered so egregious because they recall Solomon’s marriage with foreign women which was assumed to be the sinful reason for his downfall. It also goes without saying that Jezebel

and Ahab's marriage still lingered on the minds of those who had seen the results of unhindered assimilation with the Phoenicians and Syrians.

And then came the Romans. Mark 7:24-30 attests that Jesus met a Greek (Ἑλληνίς) woman from Syria-Phoenicia. During the time Mark was written, Syria³⁶ and/or Phoenicia were also under the Roman Empire (see Pliny, *Natural History*. 5.17-19).³⁷ Syria had become a province of Rome in 64 BCE with Antioch as the political center of the province. The cities of Syria barely put up a fight with Pompey's annexation of the region. According to Appian of Alexandria, "the Romans, without fighting, came into possession of Cilicia, inland Syria and Coele Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine, and all the other countries bearing the Syrian name from the Euphrates to Egypt and the sea."³⁸ The primary reason for the lack of opposition was trade. Syria became the primary hub for global trading. The Orontes river functioned as a conduit for trans-imperial commerce coming from the East (China, India, and other nations) into the Mediterranean nations. Juvenal the satirist laments the so-called pollution of Rome with exotic goods: "The dregs of Orontes have (now) been flushed into Father Tiber."³⁹

Delineating the exact boundaries of Syria is difficult because "ancient sources themselves fail to provide any clear guidelines to follow."⁴⁰ The composition of "Syria"

³⁶ According to Trevor Bryce, the etymology of Syria probably comes from a "variant of 'Assyria,' the bronze and iron age kingdom based in northern Mesopotamia. In its ancient context, 'Syria' is used by many scholars in a broad geographical sense to cover a conglomerate of lands extending southwards from south-eastern Anatolia to Arabia, through the Amuq plain of modern Turkey, the modern country of Syria west of the Euphrates, and the territories of Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan, and eastwards from the Mediterranean littoral to the western fringes of Mesopotamia." Trevor Bryce, *Ancient Syria*, 5.

³⁷ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 279-283 (5.17-19).

³⁸ Appian of Alexandria, *Roman History* (Book XI: *The Syrian Wars*; Trans. Horace White; London: William Heinemann; New York: The Macmillan, 1912), 199 (50).

³⁹ Juvenal, *The Satires* (trans. Niall Rudd; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 16-17 (3.62-3).

⁴⁰ Kevin Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum: Getty Publications, 2003), 10.

or the constant expansion/changing of the name of a certain region as “Syrian (or Syro-)” during the Roman Empire signifies that the term “Syrian” for the Romans was less of cultural or ethnic designation; rather, it was a “shorthand for things and people inhabiting the Syrian region.”⁴¹ Whether or not there was a political identity called “Syrian” before the Romans came to the region is not a concern for the empire. What was more pressing for the Roman Empire was the functionality of using the term “Syrian” as a way to effectively rule a region for taxation, governance under a governor, and adherence to the imperial cult.⁴²

The Syrophenicians’ allegiance with the Roman Empire was economically sound strategy. As the great merchants of the known world, the Syrians and/or Phoenicians benefitted from the Roman Empire’s controversial *Pax Romana*. Pompey’s annihilation of sea piracy in the Mediterranean Sea favored the Phoenicians’ trade deals.⁴³ However, misfortunes also beset the Phoenicians as they did not politically fall in line correctly. In the struggle between Anthony and Octavian (Augustus), the Phoenicians’ allegiance to Anthony cost them dearly since history shows that Octavian prevailed. According to Dio Cassius, Augustus revoked the privileges the cities of Phoenicia once enjoyed.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, this punishment did not last forever. According to Rawlinson, Sidon and Tyre (and Tripolis) rebounded to the status of “free cities.”⁴⁵

For the zealous liberationists of the Palestinian area, the Judean and Galilean leaders’ assimilationist stance with the Syrophenicians was an abomination. Acts 12:19-

⁴¹ Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East*, 10.

⁴² Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East*, 79.

⁴³ George Rawlinson, *Phoenicia: History of Civilization* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 540.

⁴⁴ Dio Cassius, *Roman History* (trans. Earnest Cary; London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1917), 286-308 (xlvi, 33-41).

⁴⁵ Rawlinson, *Phoenicia*, 542-3.

20 narrates Herod Agrippa I's (41-44 CE) collusion with the Tyrians and Sidonians. At first, Agrippa was reluctant to grant the request of the leaders of Tyre and Sidon to support them with food. But after Blastus mediated or lobbied for the Phoenicians, Agrippa agreed to assist. On an appointed time, the Tyrians and Sidonians planned to worship Agrippa for his generosity by saying that Agrippa's voice is of god, and not man. But an angel of the Lord struck Agrippa down and worms ate him immediately. Acts 12:19-20 seems to be a story of admonition not to collude with the Tyrians and Sidonians, let alone consider oneself a god and not give God what is due. Matthew 11:21-24 further expresses this disdain against Tyre and Sidon by associating them with Sodom.

The sour relationship between Syrophenicia and the Galileans and Judeans worsened as the Syrians apparently did not have any qualms about the Roman plan to use Syria (and Phoenicia) as one of the bulwarks of its empire in the east, especially as a buffer region against the Parthians. The Roman Empire pitted the colonized peoples against one another. In *Against Apion*, Josephus scathingly describes Tyrians as “notoriously our bitterest enemies.”⁴⁶ Moreover, the presence of the emperor-appointed Syrian governor and his legion (*Legio Decima Fretensis*) in northern Syria caused more tensions. One of the controversial enactments that enraged the colonized *ethnē* of Judea was the taxation census created by the Syrian governor, Publius Sulpicius Quirinius, in 6 CE (see Luke 2:1-3). Moreover in 66 CE, when the first Jewish war began, the Syrian governor with his legions and soldiers from client rulers (other colonized *ethnē*) came down to quell the revolt.⁴⁷ By 70-74 CE, the Jewish rebels had lost to the Roman army

⁴⁶ Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, (trans. H. St. J. Thackeray; London: William Heineman; New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1926), 191 (1.70-1).

⁴⁷ Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 509 (2.478). Josephus in *Jewish Antiquities* even demanded remunerations from the Tyrians for seizing Jewish lands by force and other unjust activities. See *Jewish Antiquities* (book

commanded by Vespasian and then by Titus. As a result of this loss, a permanent legionary garrison (the *Legio Decima Fretensis*) was stationed in Judea. The rebels fought once more against the Roman Empire during the *Bar Kokhba* revolt (132-136 CE). The failure of this revolt led to the renaming of the entire region as Syria Palestina in 139 CE. This was a response to the need to ultimately destroy any possibility for future revolt, and strengthen the presence of the Roman army in the lower regions.⁴⁸

The Animal Mask of the Syrophoenician Woman

Writing the Gospel of Mark within the context of a destroyed homeland (even a homeland now experienced only in diaspora), where one's sacred temple, lands, and waters are desecrated, must be considered as an influential event that affected the work. In particular, the angst that accompanies trauma as well as political, cultural, and personal insecurity, could be inferred in Mk 7:24-30. From the Judean perspective, the Syrophoenicians seemed to be complicit in the demise of Jerusalem. Calling them dogs (κυνάρια) through the mouthpiece that is the Markan Jesus might have been a knee-jerk reaction expected for that time. Jesus' animalizing association of the Syrophoenician woman with a dog is hardly surprising because dogs were powerful symbols in Canaanite religion. Jennifer Koosed argues that "dogs are associated with the goddesses Anat and Astarte and the dog Baal... [Harkening back to Jezebel, her sudden demise in which]

VII; trans. Ralph Marcus; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1943), 617 (14.313-322). See also: Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East*, 41; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 462; Theissen, *The Gospels in Context*, 77-8; Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus' Attitudes to Women and Their Roles as Reflected in His Early Life* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 51; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 168.

⁴⁸ Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East*, 84.

only her palms, feet, and skull remain (2 Kings 9:35) [alludes to a] Canaanite mythology in which Anat wore a necklace of human skulls and hands.”⁴⁹ Also, Jezebel, the quintessential “Canaanite” woman, herself *becomes* canine, to the extent that her fate is to be devoured by dogs, incorporated into their flesh. Associating the Syrophenician woman with Jezebel, the derogatory animalizing comment made by Jesus against the Syrophenician woman stems from centuries of colonial tensions between the two colonized *ethnē*. Jezebel’s horrible death is a threat of annihilation to anyone who tries to disrupt the “proper religiosity” of the Israelites.⁵⁰ Jesus’ knee-jerk reaction reflects this colonized mindset in which the other (even if they are fellow colonized *ethnē*) has to be eliminated in order to enable one’s own survival and prevent imposition of foreign elements on an already “fragile” state.

Even as colonized *ethnos*, Jesus is not exempt from this colonized mindset. He cannot simply be categorized as a constant victim or labeled as exclusively subjugated. Jesus is both a victim and perpetrator of, using Jacques Derrida’s neologism, carnophallogocentrism. In unpacking the “scheme of the dominant,”⁵¹ Derrida explains that the subjectivity of those who view themselves as the dominant or *chef d’Etat* (Head of State) operate under carnophallogocentrism. It is a term for a system that perpetually measures how much certain persons lack in their subjectivity compared to the free adult male who is considered as the ultimate signifier of subjectivity.⁵² Adult male, father, husband, or brother are the usual subjects who subscribe to carnophallogocentrism

⁴⁹ Jennifer Koosed, “Death of Jezebel,” *Bibleodyssey.org*, June 6, 2017, <http://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/people/related-articles/death-of-jezebel>.

⁵⁰ Koosed, “Death of Jezebel.”

⁵¹ Derrida, “Eating Well,” 281.

⁵² Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law,” in *Acts of Religion* (ed. and intro. Gil Anidjar; New York; London: Routledge, 2002), 951.

because they find power in “carnivorous virility.”⁵³ To be dominant is to be virile (contra the “feminine condition”) or to penetrate others with one’s will or so-called “rights” to impose.⁵⁴ Those who subscribe to carnophallogocentrism “install the virile figure at the determinative center of the subject.”⁵⁵ To complete the definition of the term, the machination of this installation occurs through carnivorous sacrifice or the sacrifice of others, specifically those who are weaker (women, children, nonhumans, and the rest of those who are viewed inferior) by “eating” or sacrificing them for one’s benefit. Carnophallogocentrism’s sacrificial machine dictates those who are killable or subjected to bare life, and the subjugation of the other becomes the fodder for this carnivorous machinery.

In the Markan episode we have been considering. Jesus mimics the hyper-masculine subjectivity of the free elite male Romans by denigrating the subjectivity of the Syrophenician woman. Jesus’ statement against the Syrophenician woman in Mk 7:27 reflects his mimicry of the imperial animalization of the other through carnophallogocentrism. A carnophallogocentric reading of the Markan Jesus’ utterance in 7:27 resonates with Tat-siong Benny Liew’s cautionary tale of the Markan Jesus’ unhindered colonial mimicry in his unquestionable tyranny, rebuilding of exclusionary boundary formations, and the imitation of “might-is-right” ideology.⁵⁶ Moreover, according to Musa Dube, one could also equate 7:24, “he set out and entered the region of Tyre,” the unhindered entry to the Syrophenician woman’s land, with the gendered

⁵³ Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject,” 280.

⁵⁴ Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject,” 280.

⁵⁵ Derrida, “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject,” 280.

⁵⁶ Liew, “Tyranny, Boundary, and Might: Colonial Mimicry in Mark’s Gospel,” 7-31.

colonial discourse in which foreign lands are feminized for the purpose of being penetrated by the colonizers.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, the Markan Jesus is not a pure specimen of carnophallogocentric, colonial manhood. His subjectivity may be presumed to be impure or flawed, as colonial subjectivity dictates that Jesus' ontology is the negation necessary to the subjectivity of the colonizers, applying Frantz Fanon's definition of colonial neurosis in *Black Skin, White Masks*.⁵⁸ The colonizers' gaze "overdetermines"⁵⁹ the identity of Jesus from the outside. The colonizers effectively demand that Jesus fit into their mold of carnophallogocentrism. The colonizers do not simply create a feeling of inferiority; they create a feeling of non-existence.⁶⁰ Seeking to break free from this feeling of non-existence, Fanon expresses the irony of what colonized persons could say: "The colonized... roar with laughter every time they hear themselves called an animal by the other. For they know they are not animals."⁶¹ But "the colonizer's laughter," as Moore points out, "is even louder when the colonized attempts to turn the animalizing barbs back on him, so confident that is he that he is the absolute antithesis of the animal."⁶²

The Markan Jesus' denigration of the Syrophenician woman as a dog, a beast, is a symptom of this overdetermination. He tried to overcome it by unfortunately mimicking the hierarchical binary between himself (as human) versus the Syrophenician woman (as nonhuman). And yet, the colonizers laugh because this denigration through

⁵⁷ Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 129.

⁵⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 89-90.

⁵⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 95.

⁶⁰ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 118.

⁶¹ I am indebted to Moore's work for directing me to this quotation. See Stephen D. Moore, "The Dog-Woman of Canaan and Other Animal Tales," in *Gospel Jesuses and Other Nonhumans: Biblical Criticism Post-poststructuralism* (Semeia Studies 89; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017), 82.

⁶² Moore, "The Dog-Woman of Canaan and Other Animal Tales," 83.

mimicry unconsciously seeks approval from the colonizers, trying to fit into their mold of sacrificial machine that promulgates antithetical relationality with the (animalized) other.

The Markan Jesus' struggle against overdetermination also resonates with W. E. B. Du Bois's double consciousness, an ambivalence in which it is "at once a deprivation (an inability to see oneself except 'through the eyes of others') and a gift (an endowment of 'second-sight', that seems to allow a deeper or redoubled comprehension of the complexities of 'this American world')." ⁶³ W. E. B. Du Bois struggled with the construct of his identity as both Black and (white) American. ⁶⁴ In a fashion similar to Du Bois' struggle, the Markan Jesus seems to be in an ambivalent position in which he strives to be true to his colonized identity and people, while at the same time seeking to overcome the imperial carnophallogocentrism by ironically mimicking the colonial image of an overdetermining subject. Like Du Bois, the Markan Jesus seeks to overcome animalization, to garner opportunity to be part of the "civilized" world. And yet, he seems unable to do so without transgressing against fellow animalized subjects.

⁶³ Brent Hayes Edwards, "Introduction," in W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (ed. Brent Hayes Edwards; Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007), 12. This passage expounds upon Du Bois's double consciousness: "After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 34).

⁶⁴ "The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would be bleached his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face" (ibid.).

The response of the Syrophenician woman in Mk 7:28b, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs,” is her refusal to be locked in the “tower of the past,” her strategy of “disalienation or her refusal to consider her reality as definitive.”⁶⁵ Her response is *her* version of double consciousness. Her response demonstrates the strength of double (or even multiple) identity, an identity that manipulates colonial spaces and utterances. Instead of identities warring against each other, they become fluid partners that respond to the needs for various (re/de)-territorializations. Her reality is to be continually herded into the fold of those who are animalized, and sacrificed to be devoured by carnivorous colonizers. And yet, this reality does not prevent her from finding healing for her daughter even at the expense of being animalized by her fellow colonized *ethnē*. In the face of humiliation, the Syrophenician woman reassembles the carnophallogocentric assemblage that is the Markan Jesus by reconfiguring their encounter as one of Jesus’ turning points in the Gospel of Mark. When carnophallogocentrism threatens to divest her of responsivity, making her into τα αλογα, one of the bestial “the irrational ones,”⁶⁶ she responds in a way that was not expected from those who were deemed lacking in logos.

The oppressors, even the Galilean miracle-worker and his entourage, tried to silence her. And yet, the Syrophenician woman persisted. The Syrophenician woman’s response in Mk 7:28b is her form of animal mask. According to Neel Ahuja, a performer puts on an animal mask or dons on animal guise in order to unveil “a historical logic of animalization inherent in processes of racial subjection. The performance of the animal

⁶⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 201.

⁶⁶ According to Gilhus, the Stoics developed a philosophy on animals as the irrational ones in contrast to humans who are the rational animals: “animals acted according to nature (από φύσεως) and not according to reason.” See Gilhus, *Animals, Gods, and Human*, 39.

mask does not necessarily entail identification with nonhuman species, but it always points to the historical conjunctions of social difference and species discourse. It may also, on occasion, envision alternative multispecies relationships.”⁶⁷ This ironic performance that provisionally embraces animality “is actually a common strategy for disentangling race and species.”⁶⁸ The animal mask is Ahuja’s response to the clash between racism and speciesism, in the struggle to adhere to animality and yet be sensitive to the history of animalization of the minoritized.

Instead of running away from Jesus’ animalization of her, the Syrophoenician woman provisionally embraces the animal mask, specifically the dog mask. Quoting Kwok Pui-lan, the colonized *ethnē* (which includes the Syrophoenician woman) were expected to be “as subservient, obedient, and loyal as a ‘devoted dog.’”⁶⁹ Going against the grain, the Syrophoenician woman performs or wears this mask in order to show Jesus, face to face, the (unintended?) carnophallogocentric violence to which he has subjected her. It is her way of unmasking Jesus’ neocolonial tendencies in his mimicry of the colonizers. She reminds Jesus of his mission to reveal the Empire of God, and the nature of his messiahship.

More importantly, she reminds Jesus of the animalization of his fellow colonized *ethnē*. It is as though she asks, “Have you already forgotten that you and I are both colonized *ethnē* who are animalized by the colonizers?” The Syrophoenician woman’s animal mask places a mirror in front of Jesus’ face in order to remind him that he too is a member of a colonized *ethnē*, and as such also animalized. Building upon Leander’s

⁶⁷ Ahuja, “Postcolonial Critique in a Multispecies World,” 558.

⁶⁸ Ahuja, “Postcolonial Critique in a Multispecies World,” 558.

⁶⁹ Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 78.

understanding that Ἑλληνις indicated a colonized hybrid identity,⁷⁰ we may say that the Syrophoenician woman reminds Jesus that she is also τῷ γένει or one of the (colonized) *ethnē* who had to face enforced colonial assimilation to Greek/imperial customs and language. Jin Young Choi argues that the Syrophoenician woman understood or perceived “the brokenness and movement of Jesus’ body and utilizes embodied tactics in order to allow her daughter to share his body.”⁷¹ Choi interprets that the Syrophoenician woman’s *phronesis* or embodied wisdom enabled her to understand Jesus. Resonating with Choi’s interpretation, my reading argues that the Syrophoenician woman performed an affectively embodied assemblage with Jesus (as Choi also argues, this is in contrast to rational knowledge). Her remedy is to remind Jesus of their shared experience of oppression as Syrians and Asiatic Greeks (including Jews), who according to Livy, are considered to be “the most worthless of peoples among mankind and born for slavery.”⁷²

The Syrophoenician woman gathered up the messy collective assemblage of enunciation that the Phoenicians and the Galileans/Judeans threw at each other daily. Her short statement subversively reminisced a long history of tension between Jesus’s *ethnē* and hers. Following Jim Perkinson, the Syrophoenician woman can be said to have reiterated the “discourse of power” thrown at her by Jesus, thereby affectively jolting Jesus with his own statement: “Her word opens a gap in his word: the past catches up to the present. Suddenly there are discontinuous times contentiously present in one discursive space.”⁷³ The Syrophoenician woman did not spare Jesus from his very own

⁷⁰ Leander, *Discourses of Empire*, 229.

⁷¹ Choi, *Postcolonial Discipleship of Embodiment*, 85.

⁷² Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* (trans. Evan T. Sage; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 209 (36.17.5).

⁷³ Perkinson, “A Canaanite Word,” 74.

tainted colonial body and mind. As Perkinson argues, her plea for Jesus to heal her daughter was expressed in both a sly and bold way: “she does (covertly) shame him into honoring her appeal by re-presenting it as the concrete implication of his own reason for refusal.”⁷⁴ In the end, her plea became the enunciation that healed her own daughter. In Mark 7:29, Jesus did not perform or say anything that would heal her daughter. Instead Jesus points out that her statement (Διὰ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον), this bold performance of the animal mask, was the actancy that enabled the healing process. If the Gospel of Matthew’s Canaanite Woman narrative has Jesus performing in the imperative in which he healed her daughter through his words (γενηθήτω σοι ὡς θέλεις – Mt 21:28), Mark does not.⁷⁵ Her words became the trans-corporeal actant that affected not only the colonized mind of the Markan Jesus but also healed the material body of her daughter.

Here, one might wonder if the author of Mark deliberately placed the passage on the Syrophenician woman right after Jesus’ rhetoric on what defiles a person (Mk 7:14-23) in order to highlight the actancy of enunciations. In verse 15, Jesus says: “there is nothing outside of a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.” He continues in verses 21-22 by listing the things that are defiling: “adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, and folly.” So, it begs the question: did the Markan author place the story of Jesus’ encounter with the Syrophenician woman immediately after the defilement discourse in order to accentuate the trans-corporeal capacity of enunciations to affect the other, being an actant in itself?⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Perkinson, “A Canaanite Word,” 76.

⁷⁵ I would like to thank Dr. George Aichele for pointing this crucial difference between Matthew and Mark.

⁷⁶ The Gospel of Matthew also has this story preceded by “the things that defile” narrative. See Mt 15:10-28.

Moreover, the animal mask interpretation moves us away from the patronizing interpretation of τὰ κυνάρια as endearing “little pet dogs.”⁷⁷ To interpret the dogs of Mk 7:24-30 as domesticated pets tries to justify that the Syrophenician woman was not harassed with derogatory words but actually was a recipient of a light banter that used an endearing pet-name. Whether it is a wild dog or a cute schanauzer,⁷⁸ animalization cannot be brushed off or explained away just because a lesser form of offensive remark is used. To belittle the issue of animalization in Mk 7:24-30 is to show that one has not oneself experienced the painful reality of animalization. Dismissing or trivializing the historical reality of animalization does not stop the perennial utilization of nonhumans in animalizing the other.

Actancy of the Dogs and Bread Crumbs

The animal mask interpretation discussed above has not dealt with the material bodies of dogs and bread crumbs of 7:24-30. So far, the animal mask interpretation seems to relegate the nonhumans (again) as flat characters in the clash between two round human characters, Jesus and the Syrophenician woman. In certain sense, one might resort to the Asklepian healing cult in which dogs (and serpents) are present in the healing rituals and even considered part of the healing process.⁷⁹ Still, the healing cult

⁷⁷ For the latter, see Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 234. See also 1 Sam 17:43; Isa 56:10-11; 2 Kgs 8:13; Prov 26:11; Matt 7:6; Phil 3:2; 2 Pet 2:22; Rev 22:15.

⁷⁸ According to Miller, there are passages in the Hebrew Scriptures that portray dogs in positive light: Job 30:1; Tobit 6:2, and 11:4. See David Miller, “Attitudes Toward Dogs in Ancient Israel: A Reassessment,” *JSOT* 32.4 (2008): 487-500. For a more ambivalent stance, see: Joshua Schwartz, “Dogs in Jewish Society in the Second Temple Period and in the Time of the Mishnah and Talmud,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 55.2 (2004): 246-77.

⁷⁹ According to Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, “In the temple of Asclepius in Epidaurus, where people came to be healed by the god, serpents and dogs were present and sometimes contributed to effecting a cure... Not only snakes worked as the god’s assistants in Epidaurus; dogs are also mentioned: the blind boy, Lyson of

still ingests dogs for human necessity. Hence, could we ever read Mk 7:24-30 without symbolically consuming nonhumans in order to establish the arguments? The immediate answer is no. And yet, in this impasse, Derrida relays a sense of inevitability when it comes to eating nonhumans literally or marginalizing/using nonhumans symbolically for various human purposes. Derrida's resolution is "to eat well" (*bien manger*).⁸⁰ If humans cannot avoid eating the other, then Derrida suggests that we should eat the other in the most respectful way. By eating, Derrida signifies the physical ingestion of the other, and/or metonymically interiorizing the other through symbols, language, and other expressions.⁸¹ In this eating, "one must begin to identify with the other, who is to be assimilated, interiorized, understood ideally (something one can never do absolutely *without addressing oneself to the other* [italics in the original] and without absolutely limiting understanding itself, the identifying appropriation), speak to him or her in words that also pass through the mouth, the ear, the sight, and respect the law that is at once a voice and a court."⁸²

Stephen D. Moore's queer temporality and animality reading of the Matthean version (Mt 15:21-28) of Mk 7:24-30 is a form of "eating" the dogs and the bread crumbs well.⁸³ Building upon his previous work in which Jesus' title as the Son of Man, adapted from Daniel 7, is a "flickering interstitial hyphenated entity between animal-angelic-

Hermione, had his eyes treated 'by one of the dogs about the sanctuary' (A20, *The Epidaurian Miracle Inscriptions* [texts, trans, and commentary L. R. LiDonnici; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995], 98-99). Another boy, from Aigina, was cured of the growth on his neck when 'a dog from the sanctuary took care of him with its tongue while he was awake, and made him well' (B6, *The Epidaurian Miracle Inscriptions*, 104-5)." See Gilhus, *Animals, Gods, and Humans*, 109.

⁸⁰ Derrida, "Eating Well," 282.

⁸¹ Derrida, "Eating Well," 282-3.

⁸² Derrida, "Eating Well," 283.

⁸³ Moore, "The Dog-Woman of Canaan and Other Animal Tales from the Gospel of Matthew."

divine,”⁸⁴ Moore turns the disgust from labeling the Canaanite woman as a dog to the anthropophagic resonances of the eating of the crumbs falling off from the table with the consumption of the body and blood of Jesus at the Last Supper. If the crumbs of the bread allude to the body of Jesus, as some scholars have argued, then the Canaanite woman not only became the proto-disciple but also the portending figure who began the “inhuman” consumption of Jesus. That is, the “Canaanite,” a member of an ethnic group that should evoke revulsion, became the model of discipleship not just for her care of her daughter but also as the one who first consumed and acknowledged the nourishing grace of the “body” of Jesus.⁸⁵

Moreover, Hans Leander also wrote about the identification of Mk 7:24-30’s bread crumbs with the body of Jesus or the bread of the Eucharist.⁸⁶ For Leander, the bread’s “predisposition of falling to pieces, its inability to stick together as a unified whole... makes possible the healing of the woman’s daughter.”⁸⁷ Following Leander, the actancy of the bread crumbs in Mk 7:24-30 is in their predisposition to be broken and eaten because they reflect the instability of Jesus’ subjectivity as messiah and the nature of his empire. That is, the bread crumbs remind the Markan Jesus that he is also subject for consumption at the cross. The crumbs that fell on the floor satisfied, but they did not

⁸⁴ Moore, “Why There Are No Humans or Animals in the Gospel of Mark,” 71-94.

⁸⁵ Building upon Moore’s work, this chapter finds Ahuja’s animal mask to be a viable response to an animality reading of Mk 7:24-30 or any other animality interpretations of the Bible. In addition, for readings on the history of relationality between humans and dogs throughout Christianity, Laura Hobgood-Oster’s very informative book, *Holy Dogs and Asses*, should be consulted. The chapter on dogs in particular is quite interesting. See Laura Hobgood-Oster, “The Granted Image,” in *Holy Dogs and Asses: Animals in the Christian Tradition* (Urbana; Chicago; University of Illinois Press, 2008).

⁸⁶ On this identification, see Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 367. Cf. Best, *Disciples and Discipleship*, 189, 192-3.

⁸⁷ Leander, *Discourses of Empire*, 237.

suffice. Much more is needed from the body of Jesus. As a matter of fact, his whole body barely satisfied the hunger of the sacrificial machine of the empire.

Animality, Disability, and The Cross

When I shared an earlier version of the current chapter in a summer institute led by Asian theologians and scholars, Boyung Lee, a leading feminist Korean professor in pastoral theology,⁸⁸ reminded me to be vigilant that (gendered) animalization goes both ways. As Heidi J. Nast argues that oppressed communities also use bestial language against their oppressors,⁸⁹ Lee admonished that the oppressed or the minoritized cannot be condoned for using bestial logics no matter their circumstances. The collective assemblage of enunciation that derogatorily identifies the other with nonhuman actants has to be countered not just from one trajectory (oppressor to oppressed), but also vice versa.

Here, I propose another way to “eat well” in which the assemblage of humans-nonhumans is reterritorialized. This new emerging milieu is to follow Sunaura Taylor’s approach in dealing with the intersections of ableism, sexism, racism, and speciesism. Taylor is an artist and a scholar who is physically disabled (she has arthrogyriposis, a medical condition that causes congenital joint contractures in multiple areas of her body). Using her life as a canvas, her paintings and scholarship intersect disability studies and nonhuman issues, focusing on the oppressive systems that animalize, demean, and abuse

⁸⁸ Boyung Lee is the new senior vice president of academic affairs and dean of the faculty at Iliff School of Theology.

⁸⁹ Heidi J. Nast, “Loving... Whatever: Alienation, Neoliberalism and Pet-Love in the Twenty-First Century,” *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 5.2 (2006): 300-327.

disabled persons and nonhumans. As a disabled person, to be compared to an animal is downright offensive. And yet, as an animal activist, Taylor tried to find ways to fight for the disabled while not distancing oneself from nonhumans. Her answer was similar to Ahuja's recommendation of an animal mask.

Taylor narrated her early childhood in which she was compared with animals. She writes: "I have been told I walk like a monkey, eat like a dog, have hands like a lobster, and generally resemble a chicken or penguin.... They meant it to hurt my feelings, which of course it did. However, I wasn't exactly sure why it should hurt my feelings...."⁹⁰

Taylor is more than aware of animalization, or strategies of using animals as tools for denigration. And yet, she seeks to reconfigure this discourse of comparison in a way "that doesn't have to be negative."⁹¹ For her, awareness of oppression is the key to resolving this dilemma: "As a freak, as a patient, I do not deny that I'm like an animal. Instead, I want to be aware of the mistreatment that those labeled 'animal' (human and nonhuman) experience. I am an animal."⁹² Following Claire Jean Kim's "ethics of avowal," Taylor further elaborated her assertion for an awareness of oppression by "examin[ing] the system that degrades and devalues both animals and disabled people – systems which are built upon, among, other things, ableist paradigms of language and cognitive capacity."⁹³

⁹⁰ Sunaura Taylor, "Beasts of Burden: Disability Studies and Animal Rights." *Qui Parle* vol. 19.2 (Spring/Summer 2011): 191-2.

⁹¹ Taylor, "Beasts of Burden," 192.

⁹² Taylor, "Beasts of Burden," 194.

⁹³ Sunaura Taylor, *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation* (New York: The New Press, 2017), 52.



(Image #2: *Animals with Arthrogryposis* by Sunaura Taylor. Downloaded from <http://www.sunaurataylor.org/portfolio/animal/painting> on June 6, 2017.)

Taylor's desire for awareness of these issues in the form of art is her way of wearing the animal mask. Her painting entitled *Animals with Arthrogryposis* (Image #2), represented Taylor herself nude beside two factory farm pigs and a curly calf. The letters A, B, C, D are written beside each of them respectively. The image was meant to invoke a medical photo figuring the condition of arthrogryposis.⁹⁴ Taylor posed herself in this vulnerable way – like the Syrophoenician woman – in order to show how far

⁹⁴ For the image/figure, see Taylor, "Beasts of Burden," 204. For Taylor's description of this image, see Taylor, "Beasts of Burden," 218-9; the image per se is in between pages 204-5.

carnophallogocentrism has infiltrated and denigrated women, the disabled, and nonhumans.

Through her paintings, Taylor is visually force-feeding her audience to “eat well” or be disrupted viscerally by seeing the very animalization of those who are othered. Instead of hiding her disability, Taylor donned the ironic mask of nudity in order to confront ableism, speciesism, sexism, and even racism. The Syrophenician woman also dons the collective assemblage of animalization enunciated among colonized *ethnē*. Instead of running away from Jesus, the Syrophenician woman shows the negative affect of his colonial utterance. Her self-denuding enunciation disrupts Jesus. It wakes him to the realization that his body-turned-into-meat is also mangled and animalized by the bestial logics of the Roman Empire. He might have covered himself momentarily with robes of carnophallogocentrism. But as Mark’s narrative unfolds, several chapters later, the Markan Jesus is also laid bare on a wood-framed canvas side by side with two other “rebels,” (ληστᾶς) one on his right, another on his left (Mk 15:27). And yet, these mutilated carcasses, as Moore enunciates, are the “sacred place in which the human encounters the divine in Mark, in which the human shudders before the divine, is affected by the divine....”⁹⁵ The self-revelation or the unmasking of the Markan Jesus in the assemblage formed at the cross (“cross-torture victim assemblage”),⁹⁶ as gruesome as it is, becomes Mark’s contact zone for the colonized community. As in Taylor’s painting, this visceral encounter disrupts because the sensation of the unwanted, the abhorred crucifixion, is chosen by Mark to be the symbol in which the animalized community is to

⁹⁵ Stephen D. Moore, “The Messiah Who Screamed,” in *Gospel Jesuses and Other Nonhumans*, 59.

⁹⁶ Moore, “The Messiah Who Screamed,” 55.

re-assemble. The abject pieces of meat in the eyes of the colonizers has reterritorialized as the rallying cry for the oppressed communities to not be afraid even if the first witnesses were (Mk 16:8). In turn, they are to see their very own animalized selves, be emboldened by the butchered bodies, because their messiah and comrades has first done so.

CONCLUSION:

(Re-)Animating the Biblical Epistemic Ground

This dissertation sought to read the Gospel of Mark from nonhuman perspectives with sensitivity to racialization through animalization. Nonhuman perspective or studies is an umbrella term that represents animality, vegetality, and animacies studies/theories. Highlighting the need for sensitivity through intersectionality arose from the recognition that even hermeneutics that are ethico-political, or those that are geared toward uplifting the oppressed and giving voice to those who are suppressed, can still inadvertently conclude with statements that are discriminatory and borderline offensive. Reading Mark through the lens of animality in which the ontological borders that separate humans versus animals are blurred is, on the one hand, liberating from the perspective of anti-speciesists; on the other, anti-racist proponents would find this reading wanting if it did not fully recognize the histories of animalization of the oppressed/minority. A preliminary way through this impasse is through intersectionality that mutually avows each perspective, as Claire Jean Kim would argue.¹ Building upon Kim's work, as discussed in the Introduction chapter, this dissertation follows Jasbir Puar's suggestion to re-read intersectionality as assemblage, even giving it a new amalgamated name, becoming-intersectional assemblage theory. In this dissertation, I simply called it assemblage theory.

This intersection of various hermeneutics, theories, and/or perspectives is a road less taken because it is unscientific, unrepeatable, and highly ethico-political. The

¹ Kim, *Dangerous Crossings*, 192-7.

chapters in this dissertation do not mimic repeatable “scientific” methods of biblical interpretation. And yet, the perceived lack of repeatable methodology in this dissertation is actually my way of trying to effect an “epistemic break” with the cut-and-dried historical and/or “scientific” biblical interpretation. Michel Foucault defines episteme as

the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems... [I]t is the totality of relations that can be discovered for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities.²

Anna Runesson in *Exegesis in the Making* unpacks Foucault’s understanding of episteme as “what constitutes the web in which knowledge is possible... [E]pisteme is composed of the components that determine what knowledge is during a certain historical period.”³ Rupture occurs when those who participate in an episteme do not neatly carry it over to the next period or web of understanding. This failure to transmit meaning is called an epistemic break or rupture. Applying Foucault’s understanding of episteme, Moore and Sherwood argue that the very “history of biblical interpretation [itself]... arguably offers a... compelling illustration of the epistemic break.”⁴ Moore and Sherwood locate a colossal epistemic break in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment in which the authority of biblical interpretation shifted from the church (focusing on theological and doctrinal matters) to an emerging culture of critique that analyzed the Bible with a range of scholarly tools (philology, archaeology, history, and so on). The introduction of

² Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1989), 191.

³ Anna Runesson, *Exegesis in the Making: Postcolonialism and New Testament Studies* (Boston: Brill, 2010), 35.

⁴ Moore and Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar*, 47.

“postmodernism” to biblical interpretation in the late twentieth-century should have signaled the dawn of a new epistemic break. Moore and Sherwood argue, however, that the Enlightenment episteme still has a stranglehold on this supposedly new episteme of biblical interpretation.⁵

Here and there, I begrudgingly conformed to the socio-politically constructed expectations of “acceptable” biblical-scholarly interpretation. This dissertation checked itself to the invisible hand that biblical scholars call “historicity” (for example, the meticulous measurement of the distance between Gerasa and the Sea of Galilee in Chapter Three). It also succumbed to the formulaic requirement to proof-text one’s work with Greco-Roman and/or ancient Jewish sources (In Chapter One, for example, I adduced ancient texts that narrate the animalization of the other). As Moore and Sherwood rightly point out, such reticence stems from “fear of breaking with the unwritten regulations that determine our professional style as biblical scholars.”⁶ In its own way, this dissertation acquiesces to the idea that “no fundamental rupture of the biblical-scholarly episteme has yet occurred remotely comparable to that which brought the discipline into being in the first place.”⁷ Still, this dissertation also tries in its own ways, as Moore and Sherwood advocate, to

pick the locks of the disciplinary mechanism itself and expose its inner operations; to probe the discomfort zones that mark the edges of acceptable and normative practice in our guild; to examine the system of exclusions that constitute our professional identities as biblical scholars; and to reflect on how precisely this system relates to that order of knowledge we call “modern.”⁸

⁵ Moore and Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar*, 48.

⁶ Moore and Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar*, 112.

⁷ Moore and Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar*, 48.

⁸ Moore and Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar*, 130.

To rephrase the issue with which I am grappling, can we have molecularly revolutionary⁹ interpretations that are rigorous and yet not trapped in the anthropocentrically phallic way of interpreting the Bible? Here, Ivone Gebara's words come into mind. She asserts that epistemologies are supposed to lead to ethical issues because good scholarship should force us to interrogate the limits and biases of our ways of knowing.¹⁰ In a certain sense, this dissertation responds to Gebara's mandate by intersecting continental philosophers with the voices of eco-justice scholars and activists. This intersectional endeavor asserts the necessity for philosophical, nonhuman-attuned reading of the Gospel of Mark (or the entire Bible) to be responsive to the socio-ethical demands promulgated by eco-justice scholars and activists. Such responsivity is my contribution to the in-breaking of this new episteme.

To be more specific, as Cary Wolfe, too, has invited scholarship to break out from "safe ontological distance,"¹¹ I have reconfigured the "characters" in the Markan narrative as actants. This reconfiguration revived the affective interventions of the nonhumans and especially "inanimate objects" in a way that does not commodify their presence but actually engages their emergences in assemblages. Moreover, the narratives analyzed in the dissertation are themselves interchangeably called assemblage(s) in order

⁹ Molecular 'r'evolution is a Guattarian term for decentered, originary, and subversive activities that occur in random moments. The small letter 'r' represents Guattari's preference for the molecular or decentered micro-political nature of social transformations and revolutions against the idea that revolution has to be transcendental or that it requires totalitarian machinations. Félix Guattari and Suely Rolnik, *Molecular Revolution in Brazil* (trans. Karel Clapshow and Brian Holmes; Los Angeles; Cambridge: Semiotext, 2007), 261.

¹⁰ Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 25.

¹¹ Wolfe, "Human, All Too Human," 569.

to expose the fragility of any narrative in terms of the presumed centrality of human actants. This fragility also contaminates the efficacy of any criticism, hermeneutics, or theory in providing the ultimate interpretation. The invitation to view any biblical interpretation as always open for further intersectionality due to its unforeseen limitations opens the doors for self-reflexivity in one's interpretations.

Another possible counterargument against this dissertation is to accuse it of being a heuristic exercise. If heuristic is defined as finding solutions that are not guaranteed optimal or perfect but sufficient for this time, then yes, my reading of the Markan narrative is indeed heuristic. As a matter of fact, this reading is never meant to be "optimal" or to be *the* interpretation of the text. This reading is heuristic because it relies on dormant possibilities, provisional plausibility, and creative endeavors. Reading the Gospel of Mark with assemblage theory demands repeatability without iterability (or the ability to mimic exactly). Of course, this does not mean that any interpretation of the Bible is acceptable. Instead of arguing that a biblical interpretation is "legitimate or acceptable," however, this way of reading the Gospel of Mark asks if the interpretation is first of all reflecting the agency, context, and ideology of the interpreter. Second, it values the rigor of applying specific strategies of reading or theoretical practices to the biblical narratives toward certain ethico-political ends. Third, here you, as biblical interpreters, should add your own criterion/a. Afterwards, the community is invited to engage your addition.

When I presented a chapter of this dissertation at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, someone from the audience questioned the absurd "lowness" of the christology I assign to Mark. That person was worried about how my reading of the

Markan Jesus as both bestial and vegetal implied a christology so “low” as to border on blasphemy. I empathize with that person’s concern since many Christians feel like they already stand on thin ice when it comes to defending the validity of their faith tradition in the modern world. And yet, one of the reasons why the Christian God tends to recede as a distant “unapproachable” figure for many is because of a high christology, an appropriation of Jesus as the Son of God who is detached from the “lowliness” of humans and especially of nonhumans. In many ways, the suffering messiah of Mark has disappeared in many of church pulpits even as the crucifix continues to reign as a popular fixture behind those pulpits. Of course, I am generalizing here; there are many ordained ministers who embody the bestial messiah and participate in the vegetal Empire of God. They are the reasons why I still value my own ordination. For the purpose of this dissertation, I mention church life to ground the bestial and vegetal theories of this work.

Could we emphasize then a (Markan) Jesus who is, or a Markan christology that is, “grounded in the materially embedded sense of responsibility and ethical accountability?”¹² Borrowing further from Rosi Braidotti, I would argue that this dissertation has tried to demonstrate that the author of Mark constructed (even while failing many times) a Jesus who “practice[s] a humble kind of hope, rooted in the ordinary micro-practices of everyday life...”¹³ Moreover, this Jesus’ empire is sustained by the vicissitudes of the bestial, the vegetal, and the “inanimate.” Stephen Moore already laid the groundwork for this materially embedded (Markan) Jesus who is ontologically reconfigured in status as the Son of Humanity only through the nonhumans.¹⁴ Turning to

¹² Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2006), 137.

¹³ Braidotti, *Transpositions*, 278.

¹⁴ See especially Moore, “Why There Are No Humans or Animals in the Gospel of Mark,” 89.

Matthew, Moore doubled down his animality reading of the Son of Humanity by closely re-reading narratives on the Matthean Jesus' death and its portents. According to Moore, Jesus' humanity is consumed by his (impending) gruesome death through slaughter on the cross. Jesus's dehumanization is also portended by the anthropophagic consumption of his body and blood (Mt 26:26-29) and his animalizing interment: "For just as Jonah was for three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Humanity will be in the heart of the earth" (Mt 12:40).¹⁵

Moore's reflections on the crucifixion, as well as my own earlier chapters, might be further extended. For example, Anne Joh's politicized appropriation of the Korean concepts *jeong* and *han*¹⁶ intersected with Julia Kristeva's notions of abjection and love,¹⁷ in reconceptualizing christology from the perspective(s) of an Asian American feminist theologian opens doors for further materially embedding (or embodying) conversations on the cross and christology. Although Joh did not specifically work with nonhumans, her argument that the cross "performs a double gesture as it simultaneously signifies abjection and love, *han* and *jeong*" provides ways to reconfigure animality and the animalization of Jesus on the cross.¹⁸ For example, reconfiguring a statement from Joh's work with the lens of a nonhuman perspective, the parenthetical insertions are the

¹⁵ See Moore, "The Dog-Woman of Canaan, and Other Animal Tales in the Gospel of Matthew," 64.

¹⁶ Joh defines *jeong* as "a Korean way of conceiving an often complex constellation of relationality of the self with the other that is deeply associated with compassion, love, vulnerability, and acceptance of heterogeneity as essential to life.... *Jeong* is the power embodied in redemptive relationships." Wonhee Anne Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), xxi. Following Joh's citation, "*han* is a sense of unresolved resentment against injustices suffered, a sense of helplessness because of the overwhelming odds against one's feeling of total abandonment, a feeling of acute pain and sorrow in one's guts and bowels." See Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 120, quoted in Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, xxi.

¹⁷ See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

¹⁸ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, xxii.

nonhuman additions to Joh's postcolonial christology: "From a postcolonial perspective of *jeong*, the cross pays homage to the power of horror/abjection(/animalization) while at the same time using mimicry (and/or nonhuman perspectives) to make present the transgressive and transforming power of love (and responsiveness toward all actants, both human and nonhuman)."¹⁹ Moreover, Joh's work inspires intersectionalities of *jeong* and *han* with nonhuman biblical interpretations. What does it mean for us humans to have *jeong* and *han* with the nonhumans under the auspices of ecocritical relationality? How do we approach the gruesomeness of the cross and yet still find some form of redemption for those who are animalized, human and nonhuman? If the Markan Jesus is ambivalently striding in the third space of *jeong* and *han*, abjection and love, then how do we translate these concepts to the Markan Jesus' struggle with colonial mentality/mimicry in the form of carnophallogocentrism?

Like Braidotti, Stacy Alaimo also finds the concept of sustainability a viable tool supporting an epistemic break. In *Exposed*, Alaimo argues that sustainability in a new materialist environmentalism would

formulate more complex epistemological, ontological, ethical, and political perspectives in which the human can no longer retreat to an asylum of separation and denial, or to proceed as if it were possible to secure an inert, discrete, externalized this or that.²⁰

Following Karen Barad's "ethics of mattering" or responsiveness to relationalities of becoming that considers all actants to be part of webs of relations,²¹ Alaimo's concept of sustainability invites us, as biblical interpreters, to break free from technologies that fix

¹⁹ Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, xxvi.

²⁰ Alaimo, *Exposed*, 178.

²¹ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 393.

our parameters for biblical engagement. This “unfixing” does not seek finality. Like the vegetal, sustainable biblical interpretation grows and dies, blossoms and withers for a negative futurity in which all of our interpretations provide for and respond to our current ethico-political issues without being imprisoned in the factory farms of academia. This sustainable biblical interpretation organically encourages “situated knowledge” that participates in dismantling the default (pesticide-ridden) categories of biblical interpretation. By following this recipe, I hope that my dissertation can become a cookbook for organic, free-range, and locally-sourced biblical interpretation that provides an alternative to anthropocentrically and carnophallogocentrically modified biblical interpretation.

Other Nonhuman Imprints in the Gospel of Mark

Of course, there are more passages in the Gospel of Mark that are ripe for nonhuman readings than those which the dissertation has engaged. The texts chosen and interpreted in this dissertation neither represent the “perfect fit” for nonhuman readings nor are they the only texts that espouse the possibility of retrieving nonhuman “voices” in Mark. I am seeking to both retrieve and be suspicious (in the postcolonially ambivalent sense) of how Mark has been written and interpreted from anthropocentric angles. By placing animality, vegetality, and animacies into conversation with sensitivities to the animalization of the ethnic other, I have sought to reconfigure the parameters of the so-called “acceptable” biblical interpretation. In expanding the lenses of interpretation that includes not just (human) bodies but also the actancy of all entities, the texts chosen in

this dissertation are just gateway texts for further engagements from animality, vegetality, and animacies hermeneutics. I hope that these chapters may become seeds that will germinate other nonhuman interpretations of the Bible.

Here is a non-exhaustive list of possible narratives open for further nonhuman interpretations of Mark. When it comes to animality, Mk 1:16-20 has Jesus promising his soon-to-be disciples (Simon and Andrew) that they will become fishers of people (ἀλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων). In Mk 6:34, the crowd (ὄχλος) who seem to be lost are described as sheep (πρόβατα). Both instances describe people in general as nonhumans. Of course, the usual interpretation would argue that these are just metaphors. And yet, as mentioned in previous chapters, metaphors are contagious. They transgress into bodies, particularly vulnerable and animalized bodies. Animalization begins, thrives, and even ends with metaphors. To metaphorically call a human actant a monkey brings with it loads of animalizing baggage even if the speaker of such a metaphorical comparison did not intend to do so. With that in mind, it would be interesting to know the historical baggage and contemporary resonances of fish and sheep. Is calling the colonized *ethnē* fish and sheep demeaning, benign, or ambivalently both?

Mk 16:17-18, sidelined by scholars as a secondary addition but devoutly read by countless Christians as scriptural, pictures an apocalyptic expectation in which signs will accompany those who are baptized. They will cast out demons, speak in new tongues, pick up snakes with their hands, and drink poison but will not die. Here, a nonhuman perspective would question this apocalyptic Eden-like restoration in which predatory animals (here, snakes [ὄφεις]) are once again defanged. Moreover, the actancy of poison is quite interesting here. The overcoming of the inanimate poison seems to be one of the

markers of those who are baptized. The juxtaposition of water and poison, two liquids with supposedly different human purposes (one for sustenance, the other for harm), are now both significations for membership in this baptized community.

From a vegetality perspective, Mk 8:22-25 narrates Jesus' encounter with a blind man in Bethsaida. In the healing process, Jesus puts his saliva on the blind man's eyes. As soon as his saliva was applied, the blind man said: "I can see people, but they look like trees [δένδρα], walking" (verse 24). Was the blind man able to see at least partially before? Or was this the first time he was able to see? It seems that the blind man was able to see before since he was able to determine the difference between a tree and a human physique. And yet, why would he describe what he saw as looking like walking trees if humans are supposedly mobile and trees are not? Was the blind man describing liminal entities that blur the ontological and material boundaries between humans and trees?

There are several Markan texts ripe for new materialist/animacies reading. Sandwiched between Jesus' encounter with Jairus, Mk 5:25-34 retells the bravery of a woman who had flow of blood for twelve years. She endured many physicians and spent all she had just to be healed, but to no avail. Hearing that Jesus was coming to her town, she decided to ask Jesus for help. The large crowd prevented her frail body from approaching Jesus. And yet, she persisted. She was not able to ask Jesus for healing but she believed that she could be healed just by touching his cloak. Here, the issue of the agency of healing becomes an issue. Jesus did not release the healing mechanism because he did not knowingly sanction the healing, but neither did the woman with the flow of blood deploy the healing power through her own agency. The cloak seems to possess the

healing power because it encapsulated the actancy to heal for any who touched it. The apparent inanimacy of the healing actant in this pericope compels reflection.

Food products in Mark also invite animated readings. First, Jesus cautions his disciples against the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod (Mk 8:14-21). After crossing the Sea of Galilee, the disciples are hungry and have forgotten to bring enough bread. Hearing this, Jesus responds in a way that baffles the disciples: “Watch out – beware of the yeast (ζύμης) of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod (8:15).” The enigmatic role of yeast, its actancy to puff a small amount of dough into a large fluffy bread probably is the imagery Jesus uses in describing the puff spewed by the Pharisees and Herod. And yet, for the listeners of Mark, yeast would resonate more with the affect of oral, olfactory, and visual satisfaction through the yeast-puffed bread. The previous actancy, the memory of the whiff and taste of fresh bread, counteracts Jesus’ vitriol against the Pharisees and Herod.

Another food product that animates is salt. In Mk 9:49-50, the Markan Jesus presents salt ambivalently in at least three ways.²² The first way (“everyone will be salted with fire”) seems to allude to the testing and purification required before the parousia of Jesus. The second way (on the possibility of salt losing its flavor) shifts the discussion on salt to the importance of faithfulness in discipleship for the followers of Jesus. The third way (“have salt among yourselves, and live in peace with one another”) alludes to the use of salt in offerings during sacrifices (see Lev 2:13a) in order to qualify the nature of discipleship. In all three instances, the sayings highlight salt’s affective capacity to confer

²² This paragraph is inspired by Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 288-9.

both life and death. What seems inanimate, immobile, and insensate has animated, moved, and sensationalized the nature of discipleship.

Materializing Biblical Interpretation

As I am writing this concluding chapter, Donald Trump has announced that he will withdraw the US from the Paris climate accord.²³ Adopted in December 2015, the Paris climate accord is an agreement among 195 countries with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to curtail polluting mechanisms that contribute to climate change.²⁴ Each country determines its own systems, dates, and goals in mitigating various forms of pollution in their respective countries. On June 1st 2017, Trump attempted to justify this historically baffling withdrawal, but not by resorting to scientific or religious arguments. Instead Trump's angle is economic: the US is paying more than its fair share to the United Nations Green Climate Fund. He wants to renegotiate so that the US will have a better deal in this international agreement. The condemnation of this decision, aside from the usual suspects (ecologically-oriented groups), came also from CEOs of powerful international companies. Goldman Sachs,

²³ Jill Colvin, "Trump Pulls US from Global Warming Accord, to Allies' Dismay," *MSN*, Jun 1, 2017, <http://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/trump-says-us-will-withdraw-from-climate-accord-renegotiate-a-deal/ar-BBBLeti?OCID=ansmsnnews11>.

²⁴ Anon., "Chapter XXVII: Environment," *United Nations Treaty Collection*, Mar 6, 2017, https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XXVII-7-d&chapter=27&clang=_en.

Disney, Tesla, IBM, and even energy companies such as Shell²⁵ did not approve of Trump's decision because, among other (environmental) reasons, it was bad for business.

Trump's decision and the CEOs' reactions reminded me of Laurel Kearns's argument that economics and/or the capitalist market – or what makes economic sense – is the underlying force that manipulates climate change talks and decisions, and not just religion and/or science.²⁶ Although we might never fully know the reasons why energy companies condemned Trump's decision, those of us who seek to be protectors of the environment must take heed of Kearns's assertion that “[c]hanges must come from deliberately linking a changed worldview with ethical economic practice that challenges the current belief in, and workings of, the market and that promotes a more equitable and just cohabitation of the planet in order to ensure a future for all of creation.”²⁷

This dissertation has focused on and even tried to reconfigure the parameters of identity politics. Not only are the plights of the minoritized/animalized highlighted, their ontological relationalities with nonhumans were central in interpreting various Markan narratives. Beyond such considerations, following Kearns, changes for a more environmentally conscientious biblical interpretation should, among many possibilities, also engage material and economic issues. For those of us who dwell and thrive in the realm of identity politics, Kwok Pui-lan invites us to reach out to those who do not see themselves as “minority or animalized” by intersecting our identity politics with macro-

²⁵ Javier E. David, “Big Businesses – even energy companies – disapprove of Trump's decision to walk away from climate deal,” *CNBC*, June 1, 2017, <http://www.cnbc.com/2017/06/01/big-businesses-disapprove-of-trumps-decision-to-walk-away-from-paris-accord.html>.

²⁶ Laurel Kearns, “Cooking the Truth: Faith, Science, the Market, and Global Warming,” in *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth* (eds. Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller; New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2007), 107.

²⁷ Kearns, “Cooking the Truth: Faith, Science, the Market, and Global Warming,” 124.

level issues: “[W]e have to avoid the tendency of focusing too narrowly on identity issues in the US, without paying attention to larger social, economic, and political forces shaping the world at the macro-level.”²⁸ By being the first to reach out and cross the border, we should strive to tear down the walls of disbelief on climate change, and of hatred through animalization of the other with unconditional hospitality, even within biblical interpretation.

²⁸ Kwok Pui-lan, “Trump, Democracy, and Empire,” *Wabash Center*, May 11, 2017, http://wabashcenter.typepad.com/teaching_religion_politic/2017/05/trump-democracy-and-empire.html.

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