

**MUTUALITY AND MARK**  
*READING BIBLICAL TEXTS WITH PERSONS  
WITH POOR MENTAL HEALTH*

BY

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All things are twofold, one opposite the other,  
and He has made nothing incomplete.  
One confirms the good things of the other,  
and who can have enough of beholding His glory?

*Sirach 42.24-25*

## ABSTRACT

This doctoral work examines the thesis that mutuality is an effective form of resistive and transformative postcolonial praxis. This thesis is explored through the interpretation of six texts from the Gospel of Mark, read in dialogue with groups of people who have variously experienced poor mental health. When juxtaposed next to biblical scholarship, these reading group interpretations offer emphases and expansions on the roles of identity, agency, and dialogue within the relational dynamics of the Markan characters. Mutuality was found to operate in these texts as a praxis that works within hegemonic power dynamics, that enables other praxes of resistance, and that is transformational of relational dynamics in supplemental ways. Within the milieu of postcolonial criticism, whilst it is not concluded that mutuality leads to the end of hegemonic power, this work finds it to be a biblically informed heuristic for the re-imagining of that power with regards to mental health in 21<sup>st</sup> century societal contexts.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wife, Monica, for all of the hours, early, late, and in between, that she listened, encouraged, debated, and looked after our family for the both of us.

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## CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1-18</b>
<b>Chapter One</b>	<b>19-56</b>
<b>Relational dynamics of poor mental health</b> <i>Assessing existing paradigms</i>	
<b>1.1 Relational dynamics &amp; mental health</b> <i>Tracing the contours of context</i>	19-27
<b>1.2 Liberation hermeneutics and poor mental health</b> <i>Resistive theologies at the margins</i>	27-42
<b>1.3 Foucault</b> <i>Power and poor mental health</i>	42-55
<b>1.4 Conclusion</b>	55-56
<b>Chapter Two</b>	<b>57-83</b>
<b>Mutuality</b> <i>A heuristic for the relational dynamics of poor mental health</i>	
<b>2.1 Beyond mutuality as an aspiration</b> <i>Mutuality as a praxis</i>	57-69
<b>2.2 Postcolonial praxes</b> <i>Co-creating Third Space</i>	69-79
<b>2.3 Conclusion</b>	79-83
<b>Chapter Three</b>	<b>84-119</b>
<b>Dialogue and difference</b> <i>Mutuality and biblical hermeneutics</i>	
<b>3.1 Postcolonial biblical criticism</b> <i>Strands of hermeneutical interest</i>	84-89
<b>3.2 Difference in colonial relational dynamics</b> <i>Renegotiating the Jesus encounter in Mark</i>	89-95
<b>3.3 Reading with difference</b> <i>Dialogical biblical criticism</i>	95-105
<b>3.4 Mutuality and Mark</b> <i>A method for reading with persons with poor mental health</i>	105-117
<b>3.5 Conclusion</b>	117-119

**Chapter Four** **120-168**  
**Identity, labels, and resistance**  
*Mark 3:1-6 & 3:19b-35*

**4.11 Introduction: Jesus and the man with the withered/divine hand** 121  
*Mark 3:1-6*

**4.12 Reading Mark in 2-D: Stereotype and the interpretation of relational dynamics** 122-126  
*Scholars' Perspectives*

**4.13 Power, voice, and the signification of difference** 127-134  
*Group Readers' Perspectives*

**4.14 'Come forward'** 134-143  
*Invitations to the middle and the man with the withered/divine hand*

**4.21 Introduction: Labels, binarism, and ambiguity** 144-145  
*Mark 3:19b-35*

**4.22 Jesus, labels, and binaristic resistance** 145-150  
*Scholars' Perspectives*

**4.23 External and internal struggles** 150-155  
*Group Readers' Perspectives*

**4.24 Re-articulating identity in ambiguity** 155-166  
*A viable strategy?*

**4.3 Conclusion** 166-168

**Chapter Five** **169-215**  
**Negotiating marginal agency**  
*Mark 5:21-43 & 7:24-30*

**5.11 Introduction: Agency and power** 170-172  
*Mark 5:21-43*

**5.12 Beyond modelling faith: Gender and power** 172-178  
*Scholars' Perspectives*

**5.13 Gendered alterity: Agency on an unlevel playing field** 178-185  
*Group Readers' Perspectives*

**5.14 From exclusion to participation** 185-193  
*Subaltern agent, liminal agency*

**5.21 Introduction: Agency and rhetoric** 194  
*Mark 7:24-30*

**5.22 Unblotting Jesus' copybook: Saving Jesus from throwing food and insults** 195-201  
*Scholars' Perspectives*



<b>5.23 Power, difference, and the fracture of mutuality</b>	201-205
<i>Group Readers' Perspectives</i>	
<b>5.24 Mutual transformation?</b>	205-212
<i>The cost of negotiation</i>	
<b>5.3 Conclusion</b>	212-215
<b>Chapter Six</b>	<b>216-259</b>
<b>Dialogue and mutuality</b>	
<i>Mark 5:1-20 &amp; 15:1-5</i>	
<b>6.11 Introduction: Radical alterity and the possibility of dialogue</b>	217-218
<i>Mark 5:1-20</i>	
<b>6.12 Deciphering the man among the tombs</b>	218-224
<i>Scholars' Perspectives</i>	
<b>6.13 'It's so painful this story': 'Thick' hermeneutics?</b>	225-230
<i>Group Readers' Perspectives</i>	
<b>6.14 'They were resting together'</b>	231-238
<i>Dialogue as an emancipatory tool</i>	
<b>6.21 Introduction: Where is the good news?</b>	239
<i>Power, identity and the failure of dialogue</i>	
<b>6.22 The significance of dialogue in the interpretation of 15:1-5</b>	239-247
<i>Scholars' Perspectives</i>	
<b>6.23 'It has to do with people wanting power...'</b>	247-251
<i>Group Readers' Perspectives</i>	
<b>6.24 Silent agency</b>	251-258
<i>The choice for silence and mutuality</i>	
<b>6.3 Conclusion</b>	258-259
<b>Chapter Seven</b>	<b>260-285</b>
<b>Mutuality and Mark</b>	
<i>Reflections: Textual and contextual</i>	
<b>7.1 Mutuality as a postcolonial praxis</b>	260-273
<i>Qualities and efficacies within textual relational dynamics</i>	
<b>7.2 Mutuality and Mark</b>	273-285
<i>Hermeneutical achievements and limitations</i>	

<b>Appendix</b>	<b>1-71</b>
<i>Reading Group Transcripts</i>	
<b>8.1 Reading Group Transcripts: <i>Mark 3:1-6</i></b>	1-17
<b>8.2 Reading Group Transcripts: <i>Mark 3:19b-35</i></b>	18-26
<b>8.3 Reading Group Transcripts: <i>Mark 5:21-43</i></b>	27-41
<b>8.4 Reading Group Transcripts: <i>Mark 7:24-30</i></b>	42-51
<b>8.5 Reading Group Transcripts: <i>Mark 5:1-20</i></b>	52-63
<b>8.6 Reading Group Transcripts: <i>Mark 15:1-5</i></b>	64-71
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>1-20</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Conversations matter. Connections matter. How people relate to one another matters. Acts of relating are significant because they embody how other persons' identities are represented in language, in thought, and in the exercise of power. They are significant because they embody how other persons' agencies are perceived in terms of value, effectiveness, and moral standing. And they are significant because they embody possibilities for change and transformation by attending to the relational dynamics in such encounters and by seeking to resist and transform those dynamics which are life-denying and are a block to the realisation of the fuller potentiality of human persons.

The dynamics of relating have not only been significant for me in general, they have been significant in particular to mental health. Thus, more personally, relating matters because it has been via conversations in peoples' homes, in parish ministry, in healthcare settings, and sometimes just through everyday encounters - on the street, on a bus, in casual conversation - that I have found both a passion and an intellectual interest emerge for how people relate with persons with poor mental health<sup>1</sup>. I am interested in the societal contexts of poor mental health, and in particular the **relational dynamics** of those

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<sup>1</sup> I have chosen to use the term 'poor mental health' rather than 'mental illness' in respect for the many readers with whom I have worked through the course of this dissertation. That is, in sharing texts with readers who experience poor mental health of differing forms I have noticed a common resistance to labelling such as 'mad', 'crazy' or 'lunatic', which to some of the readers has suggested a radical and perhaps even insurmountable alterity. By contrast, the term 'poor mental health', whilst still being a label of sorts, is at least an attempt to describe a lived reality rather than an attempt to categorise persons as essentially different. In using this term, I have also chosen not to use certain alternatives such as 'mental distress' (a term favoured for instance by a National Health Service (UK) report, Gilbert, P. *et al* (2003) *Inspiring hope: Recognising the importance of spirituality in a whole person approach to mental health*, London: The National Institute for Mental Health in England) because a certain dichotomy is still implicit that suggests that a person either is 'mentally distressed' or not. 'Poor mental health', on the other hand, is an attempt to describe the temporal reality of psychological and sometimes physical experiences (note, for instance, a study by Rosenham, which concluded that psychiatric patients 'were sane for long periods of time - that the bizarre behaviours upon which their diagnosis were allegedly predicated constituted only a small fraction of their total behaviour' (Rosenham, D. L. (1975) 'On being sane in insane places' in Heller, T. *et al* (eds.) *Mental Health Matters: A Reader* New York, NY: Palgrave in association with Open University Press p.78).

contexts. That is, I am interested in how identity, agency, and dialogue are negotiated in personal encounters as those encounters relate to poor mental health. It is my contention, as this dissertation will argue, that in North-Atlantic<sup>1</sup> societies - even in this age of inclusion, of anti-discrimination legislation<sup>2</sup>, and of altered nomenclature<sup>3</sup> - fear and stereotypical representation of poor mental health and the denigration of persons with poor mental health are still commonplace.

I make this case, in the work that follows, about the societal location of the relational dynamics of poor mental health, via an assessment of perceptions of identity, of representations of agency, and of dialogical exchange. Given this, what I wish to propose through the course of this work is a biblically mediated response to these relational dynamics in the form of a particular postcolonial praxis as it is read to operate in biblical texts. Specifically, this praxis is couched in the terms of this thesis: **mutuality is an effective form of resistive and transformative postcolonial praxis**. Mutuality will be given a detailed examination through the course of this interdisciplinary work as I consider its various intersections with psychology, disability and feminist theologies, and postcolonial criticism. In brief, though, mutuality as a praxis might be understood as the

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<sup>1</sup> I have chosen to utilize 'North-Atlantic', referring to North American and European societies, rather than alternatives such as 'more developed', 'First World', or 'Western' societies. I have done so mindful of critiques both of the notion of development as an acceptable delineation of nations in an era of globalisation that has problematised such delineations, and of the notion of what constitutes 'the West'. Given this dissertation's interest in postcolonial studies, avoiding the use of 'Western' is particularly significant. For instance, Benny Liew has offered a critique of the notion of 'Western' as a kind of 'cultural territorialism that 'fossilizes' different cultures in distinctly separate and definable spaces'; an endeavour proven 'untenable in the light of history' (Liew, B. (1999) *Politics of parousia: Reading Mark Inter(con)textually* Leiden: Brill p.24). Similarly, within the field of biblical studies, it is recognized that the boundary between 'Western' and 'non-Western' readings of biblical texts represents a blurred and somewhat false dichotomy. It is argued that 'non-Western' situations, persons, and perspectives abound in the West and at the same time many of the reading assumptions of biblical interpretations that originate outside of 'the West' are thoroughly Western in their appreciation of history and their Enlightenment derived notion of progress (see de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) (2004) 'Through the eyes of another: Objectives and backgrounds' in *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.12).

<sup>2</sup> See for instance the Disability Discrimination Acts (1995, 2005) and the Mental Health Act (1983) in the U.K. and Mental Health Parity Act (1996) and Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) in the U.S.

<sup>3</sup> For instance 'differently abled' rather than 'disabled' and 'developmentally challenged' and 'mental distress' rather than mentally retarded and mental illness.

strategic attempt to re-imagine and renegotiate the terms of relational dynamics. The strategic edge that I argue for in the praxis of mutuality is contained in its presentation in this dissertation as a compound of resistive and aspirational agency. It is resistive in as much as persons are seen through the lens of this praxis to resist hegemonic relational dynamics that deny them a voice in encounters through perceptions of identity, representations of agency, and the exercise of dialogue. Yet, these reassertions of identity, agency, and dialogical participation are also aspirational to the point that this praxis of mutuality also seeks the transformation of hegemonic relational dynamics into more postcolonial relational encounters that are more just and that have more room for difference.

Within the framework of this work as a piece of contextual biblical studies, text relates to context to the extent that mutuality is presented as a praxis that might serve the re-imagining of the relational dynamics of poor mental health through the reading of biblical texts. To be clear, whilst I am not proposing the praxis of mutuality as a model for relating, nor mutuality as some sort of prescription for behaviour with regards to persons with poor mental health, I do wish to explore the potential of the praxis of mutuality as a **heuristic** for the realities of contexts. That is, the trajectory of this dissertation is such that through the lens of textual study, the praxis of mutuality might serve as an aide to discovering how hegemonic relational dynamics might be re-imagined and how in a Foucauldian sense, the rules of formation that govern discourses of mental health might be re-inscribed and re-articulated.

This dissertation, then, is an exercise in contextual analysis and textually mediated response. Given its interest in context, the work that follows is broad in its range of interdisciplinary interests; a fact that will become clear as I describe the shape of the dissertation below. **Chapter One** begins by laying out the background for this contextual

biblical study by offering a description of what I argue to be the societal location of the relational dynamics of persons with poor mental health in contemporary North-Atlantic societies. Following that fundamental contextual premise, and wishing to locate my own contextual biblical work within biblical and theological paradigms that have considered the societal location of poor mental health, I present an analysis of liberation hermeneutics.<sup>1</sup> Whilst offering much to biblical hermeneutics and praxis in its wider appreciation of structural power and its call to prophetic pastoral praxis, I argue that liberation hermeneutics' fundamental flaws of textual selectivity, theological pre-determinedness, and a limited analysis of power relations, severely constrict it as a paradigm for this dissertation's appreciation of context and for its textual analysis of relational dynamics. Indeed, the most central critique of liberation hermeneutics is that inherent in the paradigm is the notion of progress from bondage to freedom in the motif of liberation from the margins. Such a motif is offered in the end, both to the reading of texts and to the praxes of contexts, as an aspiration or teleology without any significant suggestion as to how such a struggle for freedom might occur other than it should.

Thus, taking on liberation hermeneutics' interest in relational power yet also recognising the deficit that I argue to exist in this paradigm with regards to its ability to articulate how power structures might be resisted, I then turn to a paradigm outside of biblical criticism: the work of Michel Foucault and his analysis of discourse on 'madness/unreason'. Making clear that he sees power not only as oppressive but also productive, I argue that Foucault's work offers some of the conceptual tools that might enable an analysis of how struggles for power might be had not beyond 'the margins',

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this dissertation I refer to liberation hermeneutics as one whole collection of different forms of biblical criticism. Whilst I do assess in Chapter One the various ways in which this form of biblical criticism and theology has evolved since its Latin American inception, I assess its use as a way of thinking about the relational dynamics of poor mental health as reasonably unified. Thus the singular grammatical form being used here is not to suggest that liberation hermeneutics in all of its complexities and variations is homogenous, rather it is to suggest that its use by theologians who have been interested in poor mental health has been most closely tied to its earliest form focusing on the motif of 'liberation from the margins'.

but within them as struggles for power in relationship. That is, the focus that Foucault's work offers is how struggles are had within oppressive power dynamics, thus resisting the move away from oppression that liberation hermeneutics tends to focus on. Thus, I argue that despite some significant critiques that have been made of Foucault's understanding of agency inherent in his concepts of discourse and power, his work points to the possibility of power in relation and counter-discourse. Thus, the core benefit of a Foucauldian analysis of the relational dynamics of poor mental health is the incitement to re-imagine such hegemonic relational dynamics.

Building on the insights of both liberation hermeneutics and Foucault, in **Chapter Two** I introduce mutuality as the concept that I have chosen as the central heuristic of this dissertation. I argue that it is the Foucauldian analysis of relational dynamics operating within hegemonic societal power structures that prompts the exploration of mutuality as a way of conceiving of power within relational encounters. I also maintain that the analysis of this dissertation will be based primarily on the study of textual relational encounters rather than theological concepts or textual motifs. That is, unlike liberation hermeneutics, my own approach to reading biblical texts as a way of thinking about the real life relational dynamics of poor mental health will not explore texts for overarching themes, or theological frameworks, rather it will closely read encounters in texts as they occur between individual characters to see how the praxis of mutuality operates in those encounters.

In setting up this textual study, I assess the uses of mutuality as it has emerged in three paradigms that pertain to the interests of this dissertation: mental health literature, feminist theologies, and theologies of disability. Within mental health literature the use of mutuality is diverse and I argue that as a consequence the concept retains a nebulous quality and holds very little explanatory power in terms of how the aspiration for

mutuality might be attained or negotiated within relational dynamics. In this regard, theologies of disability are seen to be more descriptive of the tensions that the praxis of mutuality inhabits within relational dynamics, such as Nancy Eiesland's work, which stresses the ambiguity of embodiment, such that relational dynamics are seen as the negotiation of a single space of difference and sameness. Thus Eiesland's work, despite utilising the liberation paradigm, largely evades the binaristic oppressor/oppressed nature of that conceptual frame and invites a consideration of mutuality as the ambiguous exchange of relational dynamics. A similar appreciation of ambiguity is explored in the feminist theology of Carter Heyward and her use of mutuality as a core component of right relating that is inherent as a potential in encounters between persons. Heyward argues that the power to transform hegemonic power structures is not a power that needs to be given to persons, rather it is a power already present.

Whilst Eiesland and Heyward's notions of mutuality as ambiguous, and the inherent power in relating, are significant conceptual developments, what I argue to be absent from these explorations is the strategic element that a praxis-oriented approach to mutuality requires. In the end, the work of these thinkers still leaves the explanatory power of the concept of mutuality at a loss, and is still more aspirational than it is descriptive of how power is re-imagined. In search of a more strategically inclined understanding of mutuality, I then seek to locate the concept within the paradigm of postcolonial criticism in the work of Homi Bhabha in particular. What I take from Bhabha's work for the exploration of mutuality as a postcolonial praxis is twofold. Firstly, with his own strategic elements of postcolonial praxes in mind - hybridity, mimicry, sly civility, and so on - mutuality can be situated as one strategy amongst several. That is, when textual relational dynamics are explored in this dissertation, mutuality should not be considered as a praxis that operates in isolation, but as one that interacts with other praxes influencing their effectiveness and vice versa, as well as



merging with them to form a composite postcolonial praxis. Secondly, and responding to the critique of Bhabha's work that it seems to limit the notion of resistive agency to struggles for survival within hegemonic discourse, I argue that what Bhabha's *Third Space* agency offers this dissertation's exploration of mutuality is the notion of postcolonial praxis operating more at a liminal level, or in appreciation of James C. Scott's work, at a hidden level of relational encounter. Thus, via Bhabha, mutuality might be conceived of as a postcolonial praxis that exercises incremental and supplemental agency within the structures of power.

I also argue, somewhat as an extension of Bhabha's work, that as a postcolonial praxis, mutuality might be seen to push at the boundaries of postcolonial thought as a strategy not only for reactive survival within power structures but also for the transformation of those structures. Thus, whilst wishing to explore mutuality as a strategic praxis, I also seek to retain its aspirational qualities as held to be significant by the theologies of Eiesland and Heyward. Pulling these various strands together, then, I conclude Chapter Two by presenting my own understanding of mutuality as a strategic praxis of resistance and transformation that will be considered as a praxis for contemporary contexts through the reading of ancient biblical texts.

It is to this act of reading that I then turn in **Chapter Three**. The texts used in this contextual biblical study are all taken from the Gospel of Mark. Mark was selected for this dissertation due to its potential as a text rich in points of tension between the different characters in the stories narrated. The six pericopae selected within Mark all narrate encounters had by Jesus and other characters and were chosen for their interest in the relational dynamics between Jesus and those characters: Jesus, 'the Pharisees', and the man with the withered hand in the synagogue (3:1-6); Jesus, his family, and 'the scribes' (3:19b-35); Jesus and the demon possessed man among the tombs (5:1-20); Jesus, Jairus,

and the woman with haemorrhages (5:21-43); Jesus and the Syrophenician woman (7:24-30); and Jesus before Pilate (15:1-5). The hermeneutic utilised in reading these texts draws on the impetus of mutuality as the core concept of this dissertation and postcolonial criticism as the core paradigm for its exploration. I explore the potential of postcolonial biblical criticism as a hermeneutic for reading via an outline of the broad clusters of this hermeneutic in general, and then an assessment of how postcolonial criticism has been applied to Mark in particular. The potential of postcolonial biblical criticism in general is that it stands as a hermeneutic spacious enough for multiple questions and multiple answers to be offered of texts, generating multiple interpretative perspectives. This has been seen in a number of different ways with some forms of postcolonial biblical criticism interrogating ancient texts for their colonial contexts, others attempting to uncover the so-called hidden or at least submerged voices within texts, and still others exploring the potential interlocution offered by extra-biblical literature. As well as these, there is the strand that most interests this dissertation, that seeks to utilise the insights of postcolonial criticism as offering heuristics for the reading of texts. The potential of this particular hermeneutical strand applied to Mark has been used to question the notion of agency in the reading of that gospel. I analyse Benny Liew's questioning of the predominance of an over-romanticized interpretation of Jesus and his argument that suggests that Jesus mimics rather than contests colonial power structures. As a contrast, I consider Simon Samuel's suggestion that the postcolonial lens renders a more fluid and ambiguous Jesus whose agency is not always easy to place. Arguing along the lines of Samuel's stress on the fluidity and ambiguity of agency in Mark, I propose my own model for how the characters in Mark might be seen to engage in a contested space of agency, wherein power is negotiated between characters and is not the sole reserve of some at the exclusion of others.

With this conceptual alignment within postcolonial biblical studies in place, the fundamental gap in this milieu that I argue this dissertation wishes to fill is the one that I take to be present in Spivak's paradigmatic shaping question: 'can the subaltern speak?'<sup>1</sup> Spivak wishes to problematise the notion that the oppressed, if given the chance, 'know and can speak of their conditions'.<sup>2</sup> She argues that in this searching out of previously unheard voices, the 'rendering of the individual' is lost to a rendering of the structures that the individual finds herself in and has been hidden by.<sup>3</sup> That is, Spivak's critique is that the search for particular histories and voices of oppressed persons is subsumed in the analysis of the structure of power and knowledge which has led to the oppression of the oppressed in the first place. What Spivak's argument brings to the fore is a crucial distinction between the consciousness of the intellectual who encounters 'the subaltern' in textual analysis and the subaltern herself/himself. That is, the insurgent voice is, according to Spivak, uttered from an 'irretrievable consciousness'<sup>4</sup>. For, as the voice of the 'other' is heard it is transcribed into a *grammar* which is not its own. And so the voice of the oppressed in the dialect of the academy is not one which ever speaks of itself.

However, one of the searing ironies of postcolonial criticism's concern for the voice of the 'other' is the absence of the subaltern's voice in postcolonial academic writing.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Spivak, G. (1995) 'Can the Subaltern speak?' in Ashcroft, B. *et al* (eds.) *The Postcolonial studies reader* London & New York: Routledge pp.24-28 (original work 1988)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.25

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.28

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.28

<sup>5</sup> A similar argument has been put forward by Rieger with regards to liberation theology's interest with 'the margins' as a paradigmatic marker of theological enquiry. Rieger argues for 'creating broader alliances with people at the margins' and the need for a 'connection to the margins' with theology articulated 'from the perspective of the subaltern' (see Rieger, J. (2004) 'Liberating God-talk: Postcolonialism and the challenge of the margins' in Keller, C. *et al* (eds.) *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press pp.211-215). However, whilst Rieger argues that 'we' should give up our conventional assumptions, his own exploration of the possibility of 'creating broader alliances' still looks to fall within the dichotomous paradigm of classic liberation theology, utilising statements such as, 'truth thus conceived can only be perceived from the margins'. Left unanswered by such a stance are questions as to how different 'truths' might interrelate, and in his own essentialising of 'the margins' as a site of hermeneutical privilege there is no sense that there might be struggles within marginal spaces for discursive voice; multiple levels of

Furthermore, the vocabulary of the postcolonial genre is oftentimes so dense and jargonised that it is hard to imagine many who are not in 'the know' of the postcolonial *lingua franca* being able to engage in a dialogue with postcolonial critique without first having to learn another grammar. It is here that the irony lies. Not just that postcolonial criticism is at times an inaccessible and over-intellectualised form of academic parlance, but that it inhabits a practice of exclusion.

In response to Spivak's assertion that the subaltern cannot speak in the textual expressions of the academy, this dissertation seeks to directly address the absence of subaltern voices within postcolonial biblical criticism by inviting them to the table of textual interpretation. This is not at all to dismiss the profound challenge that both assessing the social location of and engaging with so-called subalterns in the reading of texts poses. What it is aimed at doing, though, is to open the somewhat closed-off system of postcolonial criticism to other voices, keeping in mind that this endeavour will be an imperfect expansion of this hermeneutical frame, yet an expansion all the same.

With this aim in mind, the second strand of concern in developing the reading strategy for this dissertation is how the core concept of mutuality and the paradigm of postcolonial biblical criticism might be applied to the field of dialogical hermeneutics. Tracing the development of the field, particularly with the work of Gerald West, I explore how the dialogical approach to contextually interested biblical studies offers much in its engagement with the so-called ordinary reader, thus breaking the isolation of biblical studies from the interlocution of those who are often socially disconnected from the contexts of such ordinary readers. What dialogical hermeneutics contain, then, is the potential to have room for difference.

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power, and voice, and 'truth'. Indeed, it is exactly this multiplicity of struggle that this dissertation seeks to explore.

That said, whilst this potential for having room for difference is there in dialogical hermeneutics, I argue that the reality has proved harder to achieve. Central to this has been the role of the reading facilitator as an ‘interested reader’ and the way in which this facilitator retains the right to arbitrate difference when interpreting texts with others. I argue that this distinction between so-called ordinary and trained reader proves to be unhelpful and propose instead a more flat model for reading wherein no arbitration of difference is offered. Laying out my own reading strategy, then, I describe how the relational dynamics of textual narratives in this dissertation are explored in a succession of prepared and spontaneous questions. True to the affinity that dialogical biblical criticism shares with reader-response criticism<sup>1</sup>, the questions posed of Mark in this dissertation treat the pericopae being studied as stories. Therefore, fundamentally, an in-front-of-the-text approach is taken towards this gospel with questions framed so as to probe the relational dynamics between characters in the texts via questions that ask group readers to explore both the actions and the imagined thoughts and feelings of those characters. Within such questions, the relation of texts to both the contexts of readers and their experiences of poor mental health in society is explored.

Drawing on this reading strategy, the middle chapters of the dissertation turn directly to the text. Via an analysis of six encounters with Jesus and focusing on the relational dynamics of these encounters, I focus on the major themes of identity, agency, and dialogue, the three aspects of relational dynamics that I argued in Chapter One to bear the marks of hegemonic forms of relating. This analysis is designed such that the insights

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<sup>1</sup> The sort of dialogical reading that my own work represents can be seen to directly respond to Hans Robert Jauss’ critique of this form of biblical criticism as stated by Aichele: ‘as long as biblical reader-response critics concentrate on the implied reader and narratee in the biblical texts, they will continue to neglect the reception of biblical texts by flesh-and-blood readers’ (see Aichele, G. A. (1995) *The Postmodern Bible: The Bible and Culture Collective* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press p.36). A similar critique is levelled against ideology criticism, which, similar to my own work, is interested in the dynamics of power that texts inhabit; yet ideology criticism remains at the level of theory and ‘rarely listens to ordinary readers’ (see de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) (2004) ‘Through the eyes of another: Objectives and backgrounds’ in *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.31).

of biblical scholars are placed alongside the insights of reading groups. Building upon the emphases that group readers provide, and placing those emphases in relation to scholars' insights, I then work through each pericope assessing the core thesis that mutuality is an effective postcolonial praxis of resistance and transformation.

Thus, there are three sets of voices in this dissertation's dialogical method. The first set of voices are those of biblical scholars, samples of whose interpretations are touched on across a diverse range of biblical criticisms inasmuch as they focus on the relational dynamics of the texts in question. This sampling approach is followed in order to look for interpretative tendencies and patterns across a range of scholarship, rather than go into depth in any one form of biblical scholarship. Furthermore, what is pursued is not a dialectical model with differing interpretations analysed in such a way as to sublimate the difference other interpretations present, leading to some sort of synthesis for reading. Rather, a dialogical approach is pursued which views competing interpretative voices as creative of openings for reading pushing at the limits of stated framings of the text.<sup>1</sup>

The second set of voices is made up of those with whom I shared interactive Bible studies in four settings in the Metropolitan Boston area of Massachusetts, USA. The readership of these studies was rich and varied. What I shall call Reading Group One was based at a day treatment centre for seniors with poor mental health. Reading Group Two formed at a drop-in centre for working-age adults with poor mental health. Reading Group Three

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<sup>1</sup> What my approach to the competing scholarly and group reader interpretations offers is a response in part to de Wit's challenge that given the voluminous quantity of 'popular readings of the Bible' collected to date, especially in the Southern hemisphere, and the relative scarcity of systematic research done on it, there is a need to produce some sort of 'theoretical framework' or 'coding system' for those readings (see de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) (2004) 'Through the eyes of another: Objectives and backgrounds' in *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.16). de Wit's response is to propose a new form of 'empirical hermeneutics' (see *Ibid.* p.41) wherein his project's products are placed side by side and analysed almost as scientific data. My own approach is also to place reading products side by side but in a way that does not only seek to describe the patterns that emerge, but also to question them, probe the points of emphasis and tension and then consider avenues that such a contrapuntal association suggests.

was based at a residence where persons who experience various forms of poor mental health live in community whilst holding down professional jobs and courses of study during the day. Reading Group Four was based at a residential project that offered its residents help with substance abuse along with problems with poor mental health.<sup>1</sup>

In each of these settings, the populations of the reading groups were varied across ethnic, socio-economic, and gender lines, and it was rare that one week's group members were the same as the next. Difference was also present in terms of the readers varied faith perspectives: from those who forefronted a Christian faith, to those who explicitly viewed the Markan texts strictly as stories. The multiple subject locations of the group readers rendered a rich array of interpretations which I placed in 'dialogue' with the interpretations of the first set of conversation partners, from the academy, in such a way as to expand views of text and context retaining difference within the tensive openings readings offered.

It is here, at these points of tensive opening that I chose to add the third voice: my own. There is no attempt in this dissertation for me to present the interpretations which follow as the work of a somehow neutral and objective arbitrator of interpretative difference. Not only does the dialogical hermeneutic I have employed preclude such notions of arbitration and objectivity, it sees them as profoundly limiting. My own interpretative voice, then, is a subjective and socially located part of this dialogical exchange. Particularly, this includes my 'subject location' of being an English man, educated in the academy of biblical scholarship, ordained in the Anglican Church, with little direct personal experience of marginalisation along lines of socio-economic disadvantage,

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<sup>1</sup> The exact identity of these locations and groups is not given in this dissertation in a desire to protect the confidentiality of group participants.

ethnic background, sexual orientation, gender, or seasons of poor mental health.<sup>1</sup> At another level, there is my experience more indirectly via relationships with persons in my own life, and indeed via transitory relationships with readers, of the hegemonic societal reality (as well as the psychological and spiritual reality) of being designated as other in the discourses of mental health.

With this reading strategy in place, the six pericopae under consideration were divided into three pairs, each taking up a chapter of the dissertation. In **Chapter Four** the first pair considers the question of identity and how acts of labelling and exclusion pose threats to the abilities of characters to self-identify in the narrative of the texts. In the first pericope (Mark 3:1-6) I consider the strategies of relating that are employed by Jesus and a man with a withered hand to re-imagine notions of identity and agency. On one hand, I argue that the agency narrated in 3:1-6 is an instance of mutuality and hybridity acting as praxes both of resistive survival and of relational as well as physical transformation. On the other hand, the consequences that readers imagined there might be for such spectacular acts of resistance are severe, suggested by the plot to 'destroy' Jesus (3:6) narrated at the end of the pericope.

By contrast, the strategy of ambiguity that I argue to be at the heart of Jesus' response to charges in 3:19b-35 that he has lost his mind and his theological credentials (3:21-22), whilst an act of resistive survival on the part of Jesus, appears to be less able to bring about any sort of transformation either to that relational dynamic or to ones that follow it in the text. What emerges from these two pericopae that focus on identity, then, is a conclusion that the praxis of mutuality is one that operates transiently within relational dynamics. That is, what I argue to be the transformative impact of the praxis of

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<sup>1</sup> Although it is not insignificant that I have experienced on several occasions shorter periods of poor mental health, which although never leading to hospitalisation, medication, or the complete debilitation of functioning, have been times of depression which make me able to empathise a little with those who have experienced more acute episodes or seasons.



mutuality, in its operation with other postcolonial praxes, is that it occurs as a momentary re-imagining of power structures, not as their overcoming.

In **Chapter Five** the second pair of pericopae consider how gender and ethnicity further complicate the dynamics of power in the exercise of agency in colonial relational dynamics. The first pericope considers the contrasting strategies of agency practised by Jairus, a prominent synagogue leader, and a woman who has been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years (5:21-43). Both of these individuals seek healing and go about it in different ways: one exercising agency in the open, publicly attempting to negotiate a healing for his daughter; the other exercising a surreptitious agency, reaching out for the corner of Jesus' clothing, attempting to take healing unnoticed. What I argue female agency in this pericope reveals is the necessarily supplemental and incremental struggle for power that the power differential between genders within colonial relational dynamics demands. Thus, the praxis of mutuality in this pericope between male and female is limited within the thin space of colonial discourses on gender and agency. Contrary to some feminist re-readings of this pericope, then, I argue that reciprocity is not in the end gained for the females in this encounter, rather it is because of reciprocity's denial that the necessarily supplemental agency of the woman with haemorrhages is exercised in the way that it is.

In the second pericope of the pair (7:24-30) the gradations of power and gender are further complicated by the impact of ethnicity. That is, within an ethically charged exchange of words between Jesus and a Syrophenician woman, where Jesus appears to throw insults as well as metaphorical food, the agency of a doubly othered woman emerges along the Bhabhian lines of mimicry. Thus, arguing again differently to certain feminist re-readings of this text, I suggest that that there is not mutual transformation in this story, rather, what is seen is mimetic agency that renegotiates the terms of the

relational dynamics of power present between Jesus and the woman. Furthermore, I argue that there is no textual sense in postulating that Jesus has been transformed in this pericope anymore than the woman has; rather, what emerges from 7:24-30 is the ambivalent agency of Jesus whose indeterminacy precludes definitive conclusions being reached about the nature of transformation in the story.

In **Chapter Six** the final pair considers the question of dialogue and its potential as an emancipatory tool which is seen both to lead to the opening up of new possibilities for life and to its closing down. The first pericope, 5:1-20, explores the potential of dialogue as an emancipatory tool in the encounter between Jesus and a man who lives among the tombs. In exploring the thicker description of the alterity of the man that group readers offer, I argue that the engagement between the man and Jesus is a central element of the story. The significance of this engagement, though, is not seen as the healing that the man receives at the hand of Jesus, rather it is the potential it opens up for the man to articulate his own talent for survival and his own way to healing. Furthermore, the significance of the commission of the man to go back to those who had chained him in the first place is argued to be paramount to an understanding of the postcolonial re-imagining of these colonial relational dynamics, with 5:1-20 presented less as an act of miraculous healing and more as a recovery story enabled by dialogical engagement.

By contrast, the efficacy of dialogue in the final pericope of the dissertation, Jesus so-called trial before Pilate in 15:1-5, appears to be at a loss from the outset, with Jesus' silence in that exchange taken by several interpreters as a sign of a passive acceptance of victimhood. Arguing along a different trajectory via the emphases of group readers, I suggest that Jesus does not passively acquiesce to his fate, but rather chooses to dialogically engage Pilate, rather paradoxically, through the employment of a strategy of silence. I explore the potential of this composite praxis of silence and mutuality as a way

of opening up the thin space of the relational dynamics Jesus is faced with for others to enter into mutual relating. Whilst in the end I argue that as a praxis that seeks to resist external hegemonic power this strategy fails, its significance lies as a strategy of internal resistance that allows for a mutuality with the self to emerge when all other hopes for mutual relation are seemingly lost.

**Chapter Seven** brings this dissertation back to its stated contextual concerns by assessing how well the core thesis of the dissertation – **that mutuality is an effective form of resistive and transformative postcolonial praxis** – has been true in the textual interpretations that the previous chapters have practised. Specifically, I assess the efficacy of the praxis of mutuality as it operates within the structures of hegemonic relational dynamics. I also explore mutuality's operation delineated by gender, by open and hidden agency, as well as its operation complimentary to other postcolonial praxes and as supplemental to hegemonic power. Along with this, reflections are offered on the place that the textually mediated insights of the dissertation have in relation to contextual developments. The dissertation then closes with an exploration of some of the perceived benefits and limitations of the hermeneutical model pursued.

It is hoped that readers of this work might include those who live with, relate to, care for, advocate for, or take an interest in persons with poor mental health and discourses on mental health. Similarly, it is hoped that this dissertation might be of interest to those whose work is to offer criticism of ancient texts and the reading of such texts, and in particular it is hoped that those whose own work leads them to dialogue with others might find the hermeneutic and insights of this particular attempt at dialogical biblical interpretation a source of interest. Yet, it is hoped more than anything else that this dissertation is able to engage those who struggle for transformed relating in the everyday encounters of persons with poor mental health and so might offer some encouragement

not only to continue in that struggle but to engage critically with the issues such struggles raise. Indeed, if there is one ethical imperative that the political act of reading calls for, it is that conversation continues to go on, and that participants continue to be found, engaged, and hopefully, even changed.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**RELATIONAL DYNAMICS OF POOR MENTAL HEALTH**  
*ASSESSING EXISTING PARADIGMS*

*In this first chapter I offer an analysis of three things. First, I analyse the relational dynamics of poor mental health in 21<sup>st</sup> century North-Atlantic societies in terms of perceptions of identity, representations of agency, and dialogical encounters. Second, I analyse how contextual biblical criticism has attempted to respond to these relational dynamics. Specifically, I explore how liberation hermeneutics is used to talk about poor mental health in particular, and how in general as a form of contextual biblical criticism it is both fruitful yet limited. Third, and with this critique of liberation hermeneutics in mind, I turn to the work of Michel Foucault, considering how through a Foucauldian analysis of context an alternative conceptual frame for the relational dynamics of poor mental health might emerge that is more subtly power-aware and more centrally relational. Aligning with a Foucauldian analysis of relational dynamics as operating within hegemonic societal power structures, I then conclude the chapter by suggesting the benefits of exploring an alternative concept to liberation hermeneutics' 'liberation from the margins', which leads the discussion on to Chapter Two.*

**1.1 Relational dynamics & mental health**

*Tracing the contours of context*

I begin this chapter's exploration of the societal location of poor mental health with an anecdote from the reading group Bible studies that form the heart of this doctoral work. The anecdote touches on questions of identity, agency, and dialogue, the three fundamental concerns of this dissertation with regards to how people with poor mental health are related to in contemporary societies:

*'C: I think very often, more a feeling or knowing and a willingness and desire to take responsibility of judging. In my own view mental health professionals as a group can be judgemental to greater extents than some others.*

*B: Because they have some knowledge that they didn't give up. People who go into the field want to help with 'diagnosis'. I think that when a person decides to devote their life to that kind of thing...*

*C: They have issues...(laughs)*

*B: I think they'll encounter some arguing, some hostility even and also the nature of the idea of a psychological illness is a very significant collection of beliefs. Persons with issues have different labels, reasons why their judgment might be this way, they might feel like they are not being reasonable or normal.*

*C: It's hard not to feel patronised and its tough not to feel stymied.*

*A: And not to blame individuals who go into the field because its part of how it is taught.*

*B: It's a problem of great complexity. People read too much into things.*

*C: You think misdiagnosis – label – say schizophrenic and you really aren't one.*

*A: I think it is a name of something. It is useful when someone like us walks into an office. There may be a whole lot of reasons why our judgment might be off.*

*C: And we might feel inferior to the person.*

*B: You can feel invalidated.*

*C: It's difficult, you always know it is a professional argument. It's really tough, learning how to live with it and in the midst of it. I can be paranoid.*

*B: It's almost like a caste system of your brain. Technically I can't judge my teachers.*

*C: They take us back.*

*A: That can be one really positive aspect, you can be forgiven because they understand you're dealing with a lot.*

*B: I don't want you to say that I can't judge them, it's just you don't have the same education as they do.*

*A: I think there's healthy judgements.*

*C: Sometimes judgments are off. Sometimes they see things you are not seeing'.<sup>1</sup>*

What should be made of instances of relating as the opening encounter of this chapter describes? That is, are feelings of being 'patronised', 'stymied', and being made to feel inferior and invalidated peculiar to this particular group of individuals or do their

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from Reading Group Three April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.13, commenting on Mark 3:1-6. Letters denote the different participants, and relate in no way to true names or identities.

experiences reflect a wider societal picture? Furthermore, if such a picture of relating is found to be more than anecdotal, how might such relating be resisted and begin to be transformed?

It is my contention in this chapter that the anecdote above does indeed reflect to a significant degree North-Atlantic societal relational dynamics as they pertain to poor mental health. That is, despite the supposed progress of the past 30 or so years in the area of 'mental health reform', relational dynamics between persons with poor mental health and others are still had in spaces wherein the voices of persons with poor mental health are oftentimes reduced to the sounds of their illness<sup>1</sup>. I will substantiate this assertion by considering three main facets of relational context that influence the formation of acts of relating: representations of identity, perceptions of agency, and acts of dialogue.

In terms of the representations of identity, one of the most significant contributors to shaping the relational dynamics in encounters with persons with poor mental health is stigma. Two kinds of stigma are identified in research: public stigma as the general population's reaction and attitude to persons with poor mental health, and self-stigma as the prejudice which such persons turn on themselves.<sup>2</sup> Both types of stigma are understood to have three components: stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination.<sup>3</sup> For instance, whilst people who hold certain stereotypes might not agree on whether they are valid or not, prejudice acts both to endorse negative stereotypes (e.g. 'persons with mental illness are violent') and to generate negative emotional reactions (e.g. 'they all scare me') as a result.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Foucault, M. (2001) *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (Routledge Classics Edition) London & New York: Routledge (original work 1961) pp.237-8, 250-1

<sup>2</sup> Corrigan, P. W. & Watson, A. C. (2002) 'Understanding the impact of stigma on people with mental illness' *World Psychiatry* 1 (1) (February) p.16

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.16

<sup>4</sup> See Hilton, J. von Hippel W. (1996) 'Stereotypes' *Annual Review of Psychology* 47 pp.237-271

A stigma about mental health is found in a number of studies from North-Atlantic societies to be widely endorsed by the general public.<sup>1</sup> One of the most effective vehicles for public stigma is the media. One study finds that Americans identified mass media as the source from which they get most of their knowledge about 'mental illness' such that persons with poor mental health were depicted as objects of ridicule, as people fundamentally different from others, as violent, criminal and dangerous, and were often referred to via slang or other disrespectful words.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, such media representation of persons with poor mental health, both in films and in print, tends to emphasise three major themes: persons with poor mental health are homicidal and should be feared; they have childlike perceptions of the world and should be marvelled at; they are responsible for their illness and therefore have weak characters.<sup>3</sup> Via the representation of mental health in the media it is found that often regardless of the specific symptoms or behaviours observed, people tend to respond to those with psychiatric labels on the basis of the label by recalling images and stereotypes the particular label in question conjures up.<sup>4</sup> This is even found to operate in healthcare settings.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the U.S.: Link, B. G. (1987) 'Understanding labeling effects in the area of mental disorders: an assessment of the effects of expectations of rejection' *American Sociological Review* 52 pp.96-112; Phelan, J. *et al* (2000) 'Public conceptions of mental illness in 1950 and 1996: what is mental illness and is it to be feared?' *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 41 pp.188-207; Rabkin, J. G. (1974) 'Public attitudes toward mental illness: a review of the literature' *Psychology Bulletin* 10 pp.9-33; Roman P. M. *et al* (1981) 'Social acceptance of psychiatric illness and psychiatric treatment' *Social Psychiatry* 16 pp.16-21. In Europe: Bhugra D. (1989) 'Attitudes toward mental illness: a review of the literature' *Acta Psychiatr Scand.* 80 pp.1-12; Brockington I. *et al* (1993) 'The community's tolerance of the mentally ill' *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 162 pp.93-99; Hamre P. *et al* (1994) 'Public attitudes to the quality of psychiatric treatment, psychiatric patients, and prevalence of mental disorders' *Norwegian Journal of Psychiatry* 4 pp.275-281; Madianos M. G. *et al* (1987) 'Attitudes toward mental illness in the Athens area. Implications for community mental health intervention' *Acta Psychiatry Scand.* 75 pp.158-165

<sup>2</sup> Wahi, O. F. (ed.) (2003) *Media Madness: Public images of mental illness* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press p.3

<sup>3</sup> See Hyler, S. E. *et al* (1991) 'Homicidal maniacs and narcissistic parasites. Stigmatization of mentally ill persons in the movies' *Hospital Community Psychiatry* 42 pp.1044-1048

<sup>4</sup> Wahi, O. F. (ed.) (2003) *Media Madness: Public images of mental illness* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press p.xiv

<sup>5</sup> For instance, in an experiment where eight pseudo-patients (who were considered to be in good mental health at the time) self-admitted into different hospitals and were subsequently given a psychiatric label, it was found that there was nothing 'normal' that the pseudo-patients could do to overcome the label designated to them. Rather, all behaviour was interpreted to confirm the label, including the notes the pseudo-patients made recording the behaviour of staff toward other patients and themselves. Perhaps most



Representation, then, is seen to influence how dialogical exchanges are formed. Such a limiting of dialogue is also seen in the representation of mental health in everyday dialogical exchanges via perceptions of language and agency. Gilman suggests that the designation of language as *bizarre* is a means of demarcating the normal and the pathological: 'Thus we use the stereotype of the bizarre language of the schizophrenic as a means of defining our own sanity'.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, she argues that it is the realisation of the 'banality of madness' that is most formative in the representation of poor mental health. The line between the well and unwell, the sane and insane begins to shift when the picture of the 'mad-dog killer' is replaced by persons 'just like us' and so 'the mentally ill' have to be different in order to reassert the demarcation.<sup>2</sup> Gilman's thesis is that there is a need in society to represent mental health absolutely and that this totalising tendency therefore precludes those designated as stigmatised from entering the conversation: 'one does not even have to wait for the insane to speak. The mentally ill are instantly recognisable'.<sup>3</sup>

The power of public stigma, labels, and the resultant limiting of dialogue with persons with poor mental health is significant. It is not surprising, then, given such findings, that when interviewed such persons speak of the self-stigma and of the debilitation of agency - the 'embarrassment, shame, and discouragement' - experienced in reaction to the real and perceived responses of the public toward them.<sup>4</sup> Such self-stigma might even be seen

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interestingly no questions were ever asked of the pseudo-patients as to what they were writing and the consequent medical notes revealed that their writing was interpreted almost universally across the experiment as evidence of their symptomatic behaviour (see Rosenham, D. L. (1996) *On being sane in insane places* in Heller, T. et al (eds.) *Mental Health Matters: A Reader* New York, NY: Palgrave in association with Open University Press pp.70-75).

<sup>1</sup> Gilman, S. L. (1988) *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press p.243

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.243

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.48

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.xiv

to develop into acts of stigmatising, labelling, and relating between persons with poor mental health.<sup>1</sup>

The impact of such public stigmas and the media's propagation of such stigmas' influence is postulated to act not only on an individual level in terms of self-stigma, it is also seen to operate at a more structural level where the agency of persons with poor mental health is presumed to be limited. In the U.K., discrimination against persons with poor mental health is reported in a number of areas. The British newspaper *The Guardian*, reported on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2005 that, 'People with mental health problems face discrimination from financial providers and retailers.' The report went on to quote the UK-based advocacy and advice charity *Citizens Advice*, which reported that 85% of its clients' claims against payment protection insurance policies fail in cases of 'mental illness'. In U.S. studies such perceptions of agency find discrimination to take a number of forms: withholding help, avoidance, coercive treatment, and segregated institutionalisation.<sup>2</sup> When surveyed, more than half of respondents in a U.S. survey said they would be unwilling to spend an evening socialising with, work next to, or have a family member marry a person 'with mental illness'.<sup>3</sup>

Even within healthcare systems prejudice may lead to the withholding of help or the replacement of healthcare provisions with services provided by the criminal justice

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<sup>1</sup> For instance take this reflection of an individual user of a mental health drop-in in the U.K.: *'It's a funny sub-culture...There's a certain amount of mockery in it as if they say, 'Come on, take your tablets!' That kind of thing...There's a strange sort of sub-culture where they say, 'You haven't got a job have you? How did you get a job? You're a mental patient'* ('Jeffrey' in Barham, P. & Hayward, R. (1996) 'The lives of users' in Heller, T. *et al* (eds.) *Mental Health Matters: A Reader* New York, NY: Palgrave in association with Open University Press p.234).

<sup>2</sup> Socall, D. W. *et al* (1992) 'Attitudes toward the mentally ill: the effects of label and beliefs' *Sociology Quarterly* 33 pp.435-445

<sup>3</sup> Martin, J. K. *et al* (2000) 'Of fear and loathing: the role of 'disturbing behavior', labels, and attributions in shaping public attitudes toward people with mental illness' *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 41 pp.208-223

system.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, within healthcare systems which provide for people with special needs, it is argued that health services continue to grow as scientists define more and more 'defects'. Consequently, as more and more people view themselves as increasingly 'defective' the demand for treatment and therapy also increases.<sup>2</sup>

The significant aspect to appreciate about the potency of stigma, labelling, and language's impact on persons with poor mental health, and the ways in which these factors help to construct the praxis of relating with such persons, is that these factors do not operate in isolation: certain other socio-economic, cultural, political, and gendered issues among others come into play. For instance, in a study which focuses specifically on schizophrenia, it is found that individuals from lower socio-economic groups have an earlier age of first presentation and longer periods of untreated illness. Furthermore, individuals 'with schizophrenia' are over-represented in the homeless population, among migrants, those in prison (indeed other research has found that 66% of the remand population in the U.K. is thought to have some sort of mental health problem, compared to 39% of the sentenced population<sup>3</sup>), and people who generally find it difficult to generate social capital.<sup>4</sup> It may be argued that these factors combined with the societal reality of public stigma and its hegemonic impact on some individuals constitute a 'structural violence' which not only impairs access to psychiatric and social services but also amplifies the impact of individuals' symptoms.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it is asserted in another study that the structural impact of stigma and labelling alone might be the single biggest

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<sup>1</sup> Corrigan, P. W. (2000) 'Mental health stigma as social attribution: implications for research methods and attitude change' *Clinical Psychology Scientific Practice* 54 pp.48-67

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.431

<sup>3</sup> Bird, L. (1998) 'The prevalence of mental health problems in the prison setting' in *Updates* 1 (3) London: Mental Health Foundation p.1

<sup>4</sup> Kelly, B. D. (2005) 'Structural violence and schizophrenia' *Social Science & Medicine* 61 (3) pp.721-730

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.721

cause of an episode of poor mental health leading to a 'career' as a 'mentally ill person', such that the label outlives the internal reality of the condition.<sup>1</sup>

Sadly, such structural and systemic existential violence has also been attested to at the more immediate societal level of family and friends. In a study commissioned by the UK's *Mental Health Foundation* it is found that the most common sources of discrimination cited by respondents were from those closest to them, such as family and friends. People interviewed stated that the stigma and discrimination experienced in relation to mental health made acceptance by others a vital element of their survival and frequently proved to be a means of self-acceptance.<sup>2</sup> One respondent described the pervasive subtlety of discrimination that limited opportunities for real dialogue: 'Always being asked if the way I'm feeling is due to my mental health problems. Not allowed to express emotions good or bad like 'normal people''.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the endless potential for counter-anecdotes and statistical analyses, and indeed, despite the significant advances in community care, public awareness<sup>4</sup>, and positive if rather idiosyncratic media representations of poor mental health (e.g. *A Beautiful Mind*<sup>5</sup>), this brief sketch of the North-Atlantic relational dynamics of persons with poor mental health is one within which such persons are at a considerable disadvantage. This is not to say, however, that positive and life-giving relationships and acts of relating do not exist

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<sup>1</sup> Scheff, T. J. (1996) 'Labelling mental illness' in Heller, T. *et al* (eds.) *Mental Health Matters: A Reader* New York, NY: Palgrave in association with Open University Press pp.67-68

<sup>2</sup> De Ponte, P. *et al* (2000) 'Pull yourself together! A survey of the stigma and discrimination faced by people who experience mental distress' *Updates 2* (4) London: Mental Health Foundation p.1

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.2

<sup>4</sup> That there has been 'progress' within society is testified to by the rise of the social model of disability and the concomitant disability rights movement. This movement has led to (among other precipitating factors) deinstitutionalisation, various landmark pieces of legislation (The Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 in the U.S. for example), retrofitting of public spaces and access, as well as a growing recognition that persons who experience a variety of 'disabilities' suffer from marginalisation in society; that is, they are more than the products of private pathological conditions (see Tremain, S. (2005) (ed.) 'Foucault, Governmentality, and critical disability theory' in *Foucault and the Government of Disability* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press p.2).

<sup>5</sup> *A Beautiful Mind* © 2001 Universal Studios and DreamWorks LLC.

in North-Atlantic societies. Of course, such relating is present and it would be remiss of me to suggest otherwise.

The point I am making is not that right relating does not exist at all in North-Atlantic societies regards to mental health, it is that there exists a way of perceiving and representing poor mental health that is still dominant enough to draw the conclusion that for many, the state of the relational dynamics of encounters with persons with poor mental health has the potential to leave such individuals at a considerable social and specifically relational disadvantage. Furthermore, and as I shall argue later on in this chapter, it is not that persons in society in their interactions with persons with poor mental health are unable to resist such perceptions and representations, rather it is that the impact of such relational dynamics needs to be recognised if it is going to be resisted.

With this analysis of the relational dynamics of poor mental health in place, the next step for this dissertation as a piece of contextual biblical studies is to consider the sort of responses that have been made to this contextual reality in order to assess which aspects of these responses might be useful for this work. The predominant paradigm within biblical studies that has been used in this regard is liberation hermeneutics. Specifically, I will focus on pastoral theology and biblical hermeneutics, and how both draw from the insights of Liberation Theology; this is an endeavour that will prove to be both fruitful yet limiting.

## **1.2 Liberation hermeneutics and poor mental health**

### *Resistive theologies at the margins*

Liberation came to the fore of theological concern in the 1970's following the publication of Gustavo Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation*<sup>1</sup> which defined liberation as the release

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<sup>1</sup> Gutierrez, G. (1988) *A theology of liberation* (15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition) Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books

from 'all that limits and keeps human beings from self-fulfilment, and from all impediments to the exercise of freedom.'<sup>1</sup> From this starting point, Gutierrez and his successors argued for three levels of liberation: personal, socio-political, and spiritual.<sup>2</sup> Within the context of global Christian theology, it represented a counter-discourse to the individual-focused theologies which predominated at the time. That is, it was a hermeneutic which took societal contexts seriously and chose to resist their oppressive forms by opting to speak out of a more structurally power-aware theological imagination.

This seemingly holistic approach has attracted a number of pastoral theologians who argue for the theological paradigm-shift that liberation hermeneutics represents.<sup>3</sup> For instance, Pattison asserts that pastoral care and theology in North-Atlantic societies have largely been too myopic in scope, too narrowly focused on the individual aetiology of poor mental health, and too little focused on wider social and political aspects.<sup>4</sup> It follows, states Pattison, that from this limited paradigm, theology is unable to offer a fully critical reflection and 'liberating praxis' to the lived societal reality of persons with poor mental health.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gutierrez, G. (1988) *A theology of liberation* (15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition) Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.18

<sup>2</sup> Gutierrez, G. (1999) 'The task and content of liberation theology' in C. Rowland (ed.) *Cambridge companion to Liberation Theology* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.26

<sup>3</sup> See Pattison, S. (1994) *Pastoral Care and Liberation Theology* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Swinton, J. (1999) 'The Politics of Caring: Pastoral Theology in an age of conflict and change' *Scottish Journal of Healthcare Chaplaincy* 2 pp.25-30; and on related topics Morris, W. (2006) 'Does the Church need the Bible? Reflecting on the experiences of disabled people' in Bates, B. *et al* (eds.) *Education, Religion and Society: Essays in honour of John M. Hull* London & New York: Routledge pp.162-172; Eiesland, N. L. (1994) *The Disabled God: Toward a liberatory theology of disability* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press

<sup>4</sup> Pattison, S. (1994) *Pastoral Care and Liberation Theology* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.5

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.6

Liberation hermeneutics made an impact similar to the conceptual shifts made in the areas of ecclesiology and biblical interpretation<sup>1</sup> when applied to mental health. Liberation hermeneutics views the person from a broader perspective: that is, not only as a psychological and intellectual individual being, but also as a political and societally embedded one. Also, the paradigm shift calls for a form of pastoral care that looks beyond the counselling room and individual, private encounter, out to the public encounter of mental health in the world, characterising such a theology as committed, prophetic, and praxis-led. For instance, one of the praxis-led responses made by pastoral theologians is to embrace an ethic of friendship that seeks to re-centre the marginal displacement of persons with poor mental health, perceiving this praxis as a core ministry of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

With the broader area of disability studies in mind, the adoption of the liberation paradigm by theologians and practitioners interested in mental health represents an alignment with the move away from the so-called medical model of disability wherein disability is fundamentally perceived as a loss of function or ability and is thus seen

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<sup>1</sup> The impact of liberation theologies has moved far beyond its initial scope as a protest and challenge to so-called North-Atlantic based theologies contra to theology that it considered to be 'no longer relevant' in the face of widespread oppression (see for example Torres, S. & Fabella, V. (1978) *The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Underside* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.269: 'We reject as irrelevant an academic type of theology that is divorced from action'). Not only did liberation theology inspire and unite the various theological responses of people in Latin America in terms of praxis, including many such as Oscar Romero who were martyred for their outspoken commitment to such praxis, it also inspired similar and further developed theological movements in thought and praxis globally, often biblically based and thus significantly re-orienting biblical studies towards politically situated reader-response strategies, making impact in much of Africa and south and east Asia (see for example Mosala, I.J. (1989) *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) (1995) *Voices from the margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (New Edition) Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books). Moreover, the impact of liberation theologies has been felt beyond the developing world, influencing the emergence of various contextual theologies and their concomitant methodologies (see for example Green, L. (1987) *Power to the powerless: Theology brought to life* London: Marshall Pickering).

<sup>2</sup> See Swinton, J. (2005) *Healing Presence* Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University (<http://www.baylor.edu/christianethics/SufferingarticleSwinton.pdf>) p.72

primarily as a medical or biological condition.<sup>1</sup> The adoption of liberation hermeneutics, then, reflects the move in disability studies to the minority or social group model, which argues that the notion of disability is not primarily bodily or biological but is socially constructed via physical and attitudinal barriers created within society which serve to 'marginalise, segregate, devalue, and discriminate against persons with disabilities'.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of mental health specifically, liberation hermeneutics raises a central question: does pastoral theology and praxis with persons with poor mental health recognise the situation of the oppression of such people and attempt to 'set the captive free', or does it tend to be blind to, or even collude with the forces of oppression? For Pattison, pastoral theology and praxis stand accused of complicity in a systemic and epistemic 'violence' against some of the most vulnerable in society including those with poor mental health. In his words, such 'theological praxis needs liberating' in order to commit itself adequately to the cause of the oppressed.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See McCloughry, R. & Morris, W. (2002) *Making a world of difference: Christian reflections on disability* London: SPCK; Mitchell, D. T. & Snyder, S. L. (eds.) (1997) *The body and physical difference: Discourses of disability* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press

<sup>2</sup> Toensing, H. J. (2007) 'Living among the tombs: Society, mental illness, and self-destruction in Mark 5:1-20' in Avalos, H. *et al* (eds.) *This abled body: Rethinking disabilities in biblical studies* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature p.134. The social model of disability is identified as a part of the social constructionist approach which has closely aligned its struggle within society as the struggle for civil rights for persons with disabilities (see Reinders, H. (2008) *Receiving the gift of friendship: Profound disability, theological anthropology, and ethics* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company p.59). However, one critique of the social model of disability in its promotion of the struggle for rights is that it perpetuates a hierarchy of disability wherein those who are less able to exercise political agency of this sort in society are lower down the order than those that can. Attention in this regard is drawn to those who experience intellectual disabilities and poor mental health (see Gordon, P. *et al* (2004) 'Attitudes regarding interpersonal relationships with persons with mental illness and mental retardation' *Journal of Rehabilitation* 70 (Jan-Mar)).

Beyond the social model of disability there have been a number of other developments. One has been the emergence of 'disability identity' wherein persons with disabilities are encouraged to claim their disability as a part of their integral identity (see Creamer, D. (1995) 'Finding God in our bodies: Theology from the perspective of people with disabilities' *Journal of Religion in Disability and Rehabilitation* 2 p.80). Another approach has been one that makes the distinction between disability and impairment, wherein disability is taken to be the social construct that is associated with physical and/or mental impairment (see Reinders, H. (2008) *Receiving the gift of friendship: Profound disability, theological anthropology, and ethics* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company p.70).

<sup>3</sup> 'The suspicion was formulated that pastoral care might have social and political implications of which it is ignorant, and which lead it to unwittingly side with the powerful over against the oppressed' (Pattison, S.



What such an approach recognises is that the societal location of those in need of pastoral care, such as persons with poor mental health, is embedded beyond the pathology of an individual alone. It argues that public pastoral ministry has to be committed to struggling with the social pathology of societies, recognising that the individualisation of mental health denies the societal causality of socio-economic displacement in many incidences of individual poor mental health. Pastoral care that recognises the causality of social pathology aligns with Pattison's argument that: 'Factors affecting the diagnosis, care and situation of mentally ill people...are profoundly shaped by the socio-economic practices, values, and assumptions associated with the present capitalist social order.'<sup>1</sup> Put even more strongly is Graham's position that the network of care for persons with poor mental health at the microcosmic, individual level is rendered necessary and organises itself largely in response to a massive network of oppression and violence at the macrocosmic level.<sup>2</sup> The classic pastoral care tasks of healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling are thus to be expanded, argues Graham, to include 'prophetic efforts toward emancipatory liberation, justice-seeking, public advocacy, and ecological partnership'.<sup>3</sup>

Described in what have become recognisable paradigmatic terms – preferential struggle, capitalist social order, emancipatory liberation – liberation hermeneutics encourages biblical criticism to be aware of the 'hidden dynamics of power'<sup>4</sup> that interpersonal encounters inhabit. In terms of mental health in its societally embedded relational

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(1994) *Pastoral Care and Liberation Theology* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.261). One such instance of a 'liberated theological praxis' comes from the work of Martín-Baró, writing from both a Latin American perspective and as a psychologist and theologian, noteworthy not only for his public commitment to the cause of the mental health of the people, which in the end cost him his life, but also for his emphasis on a psychology of the oppressed rather than for the oppressed (see Martín-Baró, I. (1994) 'Toward a Liberation Psychology' in Aron, A. & Corne, S. (eds.) *Writings for a Liberation Psychology* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

<sup>1</sup> Pattison, S. (1997) *Pastoral care and liberation theology* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.94

<sup>2</sup> Graham, E. (2000) 'Practical Theology as Transforming Practice' in Woodward, J. & Pattison, S. (eds.) *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.16

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.20

<sup>4</sup> Swinton, J. (1999) 'The Politics of Caring: Pastoral Theology in an age of conflict and change' *Scottish Journal of Healthcare Chaplaincy* 2 p.25

context, this structurally power-aware imagination tends toward a conception of societies in the spatial terms of centres and margins such that persons with poor mental health are considered silenced, hidden, and displaced as people at the margins. Indeed, they are persons who are spoken of and for. The margin for much of liberation hermeneutics is considered as an exclusionary site – a place for persons which is other to the power which creates it: a place outside, at the outskirts of dwelling, beyond the city wall. Indeed, these are the images of theological and pastoral imagination that have inspired the heroic work of many who have ministered amongst the world’s most desperate, and from these notions numerous biblical readings have been generated from places of exclusion.<sup>1</sup> The fundamental movement inherent in much of liberation hermeneutics with regards to marginal relational dynamics, then, is one from oppression to liberation. The margins have become the mission grounds, onto which it is not the colonising North-Atlantic theologian who brings the Bible to the natives, but rather the liberation theologian who speaks of the God of that very Bible coming to ‘set the captives free’. God is the liberator from oppression; Jesus is his revolutionary.

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<sup>1</sup> See Ateek, N. S. (1995) ‘A Palestinian perspective: Biblical perspectives on the land’ in Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) *Voices from the margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (New Edition) Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; Green, L. (1987) *Power to the powerless: Theology brought to life* London: Marshall Pickering; McGovern, R. (1993) ‘The Bible in Latin American Liberation Theology’ in Gottwald, N. & Horsley, R. (eds.) *The Bible and Liberation* (Revised Edition) Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; Morris, W. (2006) ‘Does the Church need the Bible? Reflecting on the experiences of disabled people’ in Bates, B. et al (eds.) *Education, Religion and Society: Essays in honour of John M. Hull* London & New York: Routledge pp.162-172; Mosala, I. J. (1989) *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Rowland, C. & Vincent, J. (eds.) (2001) *Bible and Practice: British Liberation Theology* 4 Sheffield: Urban Theology Unit; Masoga, A. (2002) ‘Redefining power: Reading the Bible in Africa from the peripheral and central positions’ in Ukpong, J. S. (ed.) *Reading the Bible in the Global Village* 3 (Cape Town) Atlanta, GA: SBL pp.95-109; Plaatjie, G. K. (2001) ‘Toward a post-apartheid Black Feminist reading of the Bible: A case of Luke 2:36-38’ in Dube, M. W. (ed.) *Other ways of reading: African women and the Bible* Geneva: WCC Publications pp.114-142; Schussler Fiorenza, E. (1989) *Rhetoric and Ethic: The politics of biblical studies*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press; Sibeko, M. et al (1997) ‘Reading the Bible ‘with’ women in poor and marginalized communities in South Africa’ *Semeia* 78 pp.83-92; Tolbert, M. A. (1995) ‘Reading for liberation’ in Segovia, F. F. & Tolbert, M. A. (1995) *Reading from this place: Social location and biblical interpretation in the United States Volume One* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press; Weems, R. J. (1993) ‘Reading her way through the struggle’ in Gottwald, N. & Horsley, R. (eds.) *The Bible and Liberation* (Revised Edition) Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; West, G. (1994) ‘Difference and Dialogue: Reading the Joseph story with poor and marginalized communities in South Africa’ *Biblical Interpretation* 2 (3) pp.152-170; West, G. (1999) ‘The Bible, the poor: A new way of doing theology’ in Rowland, C. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; West, G. (1999) *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press

The significance of such a paradigmatic framing for theological articulation and biblical interpretation with regards to mental health is great indeed. In the reading of biblical narratives this paradigm has re-configured the interpretative landscape such that individual relational encounters of persons in those narratives are no longer only seen in individualised terms (e.g. of Saviour and saved), or in limited historical critical groupings (e.g. Galilean charismatic and Jewish/Gentile representative). Rather, via the expansive horizons of liberation hermeneutics, relational encounters are framed in their imagined societal contexts along socio-economic, cultural, and political trajectories, both, in terms of how biblical critics assert texts to have been produced and in terms of how they have been received.

This move towards a societally-aware biblical imagination offers much to contextual hermeneutics. However, as well as offering much, this particular form of liberation hermeneutics as it has been applied to mental health also limits interpretative possibilities particularly in relation to its framing of context within a centre-margin paradigm. Firstly, the very nomenclature of liberation hermeneutics contains a certain binaristic character, even in the titles of books on the subject<sup>1</sup>, which leaves it rife with opposites: liberation as opposed to oppression, the preferential option for the poor (and so not for the rich), God on the side of the poor, the hermeneutical advantage of the poor, opting for the margins and so on. To conceive of margins via such binaristic nomenclature might highlight the plight of those who have been subjugated in the history of mental health, but it also limits the scope of the hermeneutic to speak incisively about the nature and quality of such power differentials. Poor, oppressed, and marginalised become sloganistic typologies: generalised metaphors without the necessary and particular descriptive power that might allow the paradigm to be able to

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Green, L. (1987) *Power to the powerless: Theology brought to life* London: Marshall Pickering; Rieger J. (2001) *God and the excluded: Visions and blindspots in contemporary theology* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press; West, G. (1999) *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

assess the dynamic flow of power relations other than in terms of oppressor and oppressed.<sup>1</sup>

This binaristic notion of the margins in liberation hermeneutics also has consequences for how it makes use of biblical texts - a significant feature for this dissertation as a work of contextual biblical criticism. Take for instance the use of the biblical motif of the exodus. As a biblical motif the exodus is commonly utilised in the Hebrew Bible as a way of introducing the theme of liberation (as well as the theme of punishment) in biblical texts (e.g. Amos 2:10; Hosea 11:1; Ezekiel 20:6; Jeremiah 7:25). Because of this, liberation hermeneutics utilises the exodus motif in attempts to theologically justify a commitment to the liberation of the oppressed in society. For example, in a study of the exodus motif in the Hebrew Bible, Pixley and Boff conclude that the exodus account clearly shows that 'justice means taking sides with the oppressed...the Yahweh of the exodus takes the part of the oppressed'.<sup>2</sup>

However, the use of the exodus motif within liberation hermeneutics is often too selective. This point is well illustrated by Warrior's analysis of the exodus motif from the perspective of Native American history.<sup>3</sup> Whereas for much liberationist biblical interpretation use of the exodus motif has begun with Exodus 3:7-10 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt...' and ended with the liberation from that bondage in Egypt, a Native American reading focuses on the plight of the Canaanites, the people who already lived in the land. Within the Hebrew Bible, these are the people who

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Althaus-Reid has argued that any theology concerned with issues of wealth and poverty 'needs to consider more the incoherence of oppression and its multiple dimensions rather than its commonalities' (see Althaus-Reid, M. M. (2000) *Indecent Theology: Theological perversions in sex, gender and politics* London & New York: Routledge p.168).

<sup>2</sup> Pixley, G. & Boff, C. (1995) 'A Latin American perspective: The option for the poor in the Old Testament' in Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) *Voices from the margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (New Edition) Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.218

<sup>3</sup> Warrior, R. A. (1995) 'A Native American perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys and Indians' in Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) *Voices from the margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (New Edition) Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books

are to be destroyed (e.g. Exodus 23:31b-33; Deuteronomy 7:1-2). Warrior's concern is that this reading is too selective: that while the leading into the land was a redemptive moment for some, for others it was 'a violation of innocent people's rights to land and self-determination'.<sup>1</sup> The problem with reading for liberation in these texts is that it rests on a binary interpretation wherein only those texts and parts of texts that can support the notion of liberation as a movement from bondage to freedom are attended to.

It is not hard to see how such selectivity in the utilising of biblical texts to generate a theology of liberation might be equally limiting with regards to mental health. For instance, Pailin offers a critique of liberation hermeneutics within the broader field of disability studies when applied to intellectual disabilities in particular. One critique is that the 'claim to self-representation as the necessary condition of liberating action' cannot be applied to persons who have intellectual disabilities who largely need to be represented by others.<sup>2</sup> Presenting the societal location of mental health in the dichotomous terms of oppressor-oppressed does not allow for a proper consideration of the complexity of that societal location. What of the families of those with poor mental health? What of the myriad of healthcare workers and other professionals? What of other patients, pastors, and society at large? Surely resistance to levels of repression might take on a multiplicity of different forms, perhaps even operational at the same time. There may be open 'siding with the oppressed' by certain healthcare workers, family members, and of course patients themselves. At other times, though, there may be more submerged resistance.<sup>3</sup> If all of these complexly intertwined agents are to be placed onto either one or

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<sup>1</sup> Warrior, R. A. (1995) 'A Native American perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys and Indians' in Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) *Voices from the margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (New Edition) Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.285

<sup>2</sup> See Pailin, D. A. (1992) *A gentle touch: From a theology of handicap to a theology of human being* London: SPCK pp.20-22). Pailin offers two further critiques. One is that a liberation theology of disability is in danger of further segregating persons with disabilities by promoting a sub-culture within society (*Ibid.* pp.24-25). The other is that disabled persons cannot be liberated from their disabilities (*Ibid.* p.27).

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, more broadly, it has been a critique of liberation hermeneutics that it has not managed to reflect the more nuanced and 'differentiated character of liberatory practice' (Taylor, M. L. (2004) 'Spirit and

the other side of a binaristic power framework then several opportunities for a more nuanced analysis of relational dynamics are lost.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the fundamental caveat in the oppressor-oppressed paradigm is that not all relational dynamics that involve mental health are oppressive.

Another significant feature of liberation hermeneutics' conception of the margins is in how the assumed movement from the margins to the centre has generated somewhat predetermined theological reflections. Textually, it is an implied assumption that ultimately texts from the Bible are texts that speak of liberation *because* they are biblical texts, and this is in the end a theological assumption. For instance, Mesters argues that: 'it is as if the word of God were hidden within history, within their struggles. When they discover it, it is big news'.<sup>2</sup> And what 'bigger news' than to discover that the struggles of the 'common people' are also the struggles of the God who brought his people out of Egypt? The exodus of the Israelites becomes the exodus of the Brazilian 'common people'

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Liberation: Achieving postcolonial theology in the United States' in Keller, C. *et al* (eds.) *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press pp.45-46).

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that Pattison's dialogue between mental health and liberation theology does to an extent recognise the gradations of power at work in societal and institutional structures. For instance, whilst Pattison recognises that patients with poor mental health are 'the most impotent group' within hospital services, he also argues that junior nurses are 'also relatively powerless', whilst doctors are 'relatively powerful' (see Pattison, S. (1997) *Pastoral Care and Liberation Theology* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.226). Similarly, he recognises that within such groupings (as essentialised as they are) there are also gradations of power, citing elderly patients as victims of abuse and neglect 'in the back wards of the old psychiatric hospitals' (*Ibid.* pp.261-262). However, the drawback with Pattison's application of liberation theology is that he is unable to offer his own societal analysis adequately nuanced tools for a study of such power differentials, both politically and theologically, due to it being tied to a binaristic and theologically limiting paradigm. Indeed, his own proposal that persons committed to pastoral care should utilise an 'unfinished' model for social and political action (a model that advocates both short-term reform and long-term change 'in the totality of the order' without opting for one at the expense of the other) and should make a 'concrete option for the oppressed in the mental health sector', highlights the ambiguity of pastoral praxis when faced with decisions about aligning with or against hospital care, care in the community, or a hybrid of both (*Ibid.* p.229-238). It is clear that Pattison's desire for a more discerning and nuanced pastoral praxis, where there are 'no cut and dried answers to these complex questions' (*Ibid.* p.238), is not adequately supported by the theological paradigm he has chosen to utilise.

<sup>2</sup> Mesters, Carlos (1993) 'The use of the Bible in Christian communities of the common people' in Gottwald, N. & Horsley, R. (eds.) *The Bible and Liberation* (Revised Edition) Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.11

because this God is a God who struggles with the oppressed.<sup>1</sup> Taken alongside the challenge Weems<sup>2</sup> articulates, in an essay concerned with re-reading the struggle of women in biblical texts, that the marginalised reader must use ‘whatever means necessary’ to recover the voice of the oppressed within biblical texts, liberation can be said to be a hermeneutical given because it is taken as a theological given.

The problem here is that the more that God is read necessarily to side with the poor and oppressed, the less any inherent ambiguity in the text is uncovered. The textual reality is that the Bible does not present liberation in isolation but in tension with oppression, endorsing both freedom and slavery: God does not always side with the poor; sometimes he commands their annihilation (e.g. those already in the land although presented biblically as ‘mightier’ than the Hebrews (Deuteronomy 7:1) can hardly all be presumed to be rich). Thus the very concept of ‘the poor’ is not only to an extent reified in the hermeneutical and theological privilege liberation hermeneutics gives them, it is also a homogenised and essentialised category which is not sensitive to gradations of poverty either in texts or in contexts.<sup>3</sup> As Althaus-Reid argues liberation hermeneutics and its conception of the margins is a paradigm that continues to obey ‘certain masters’ which

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<sup>1</sup> Such pre-determinedness is not restricted to the Exodus narrative. For instance, a study that reads the Bible with members of a north Brazilian community’s women’s association contains this theological prolegomenon in the form of the instruction of the facilitator of the study: ‘In the beginning of our meeting, I made a short introduction to the anointing story in the Gospels, helping the women to remember what they knew well: that Jesus had lived persecuted because of his option of the poor...’ (see Ottermann, M. (2007) “‘How could he ever do that to her?’ Or, how the woman who anointed Jesus became a victim of Luke’s redactional and theological principles’ in West, G. (ed.) *Reading other-wise: Socially engaged biblical scholars reading with their local communities* Atlanta, GA: SBL p.104).

<sup>2</sup> Weems, R. J. (1993) ‘Reading her way through the struggle’ in Gottwald, N. & Horsley, R. (eds.) *The Bible and Liberation* (Revised Edition) Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books

<sup>3</sup> For instance, ‘the poor’ as an essentialised concept presents such persons as having an essential nature, and thus neglects the gradations of poverty, as well as the differential components of it along lines of gender, ethnicity, and religion.

regulated available strategies for freedom, and even 'pre-empted the notion of freedom itself'.<sup>1</sup>

Overall there are some considerable problems with liberation hermeneutics as it is applied to the relational dynamics of mental health. As I argue above, it practices a binaristic approach to the public and structural societal reality of mental health: of oppressor and oppressed. Such an approach is thus limited to generating essentialised and predetermined theological interpretations of biblical texts whereby theological reflection is limited to a paradigm which remains somewhat tied to its own archetype. Biblical texts are thus read too selectively and the contextual gradations of power and resistance are not able to be appreciated.

Along with these particular limitations, two broader issues are also problematic: one, the inherent notion of progress in the liberation paradigm; and two, its inability to capture the relational aspects of so-called marginal struggles. In terms of the first issue of progress, then, what the liberation paradigm calls for is a movement from the periphery to the centre; from the slavery of Egypt to the liberation of the entry into the land of promise. Applied to the relational dynamics of mental health in North-Atlantic societies sketched out in the previous section, progress as liberation might look like the breaking of stigma and stereotype, and the re-aligning of representations and perceptions of others concerning mental health from societally marginalising forms of relational exchange to societally centring ones.

On one level, in terms of seeking to align biblical studies to the world around it, this inherent notion of progress in liberation hermeneutics is consonant with other theological

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<sup>1</sup> Althaus-Reid, M. M. (1998) 'The Hermeneutics of transgression' in de Schrijver, G. (ed.) *Liberation theologies on shifting grounds: A clash of socio-economic cultural paradigms* Leuven: Leuven University Press p.268



approaches to context that seek not to individualise or apoliticize biblical interpretation. Indeed, it is argued that if theological conviction and pastoral care are to move beyond an 'ambulance ministry' and its accompanying theology, then the political and the spiritual must retain their inseparability.<sup>1</sup> Political and spiritual liberation, then, must remain a goal of theological enterprise. My own work in this dissertation is not intended in any way to suggest that striving for social change is somehow to be avoided in the relational dynamics of mental health. However, the problem that I wish to highlight with the liberation hermeneutics paradigm and its inherent momentum towards progress, is its lack of explanatory power. That is, it is unable to say much about *how* such a movement from the periphery to the centre might take place other than that it *should* take place.<sup>2</sup>

I do not make this criticism of liberation hermeneutics expecting biblical hermeneutics to mandate social transformation. The shortcoming of liberation hermeneutics is that this notion of progress from the margins to the centre is poorly resourced to articulate the intricate structures of power which pervade acts of relating. This very issue of power leads directly into the second major shortcoming of liberation hermeneutics: that there is little appreciation of the relational within the paradigm. The inherent binarism of liberation hermeneutics renders its analysis incapable of moving beyond dichotomous conceptions of power and so the negotiation of power differentials is similarly constrained. Power is confined in analysis, then, to a coercive and binaristic influence that is thus read into and out of biblical texts. Thus, the focus on relational dynamics that I pursue in this dissertation is not able to be adequately addressed within such a framework.

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<sup>1</sup> See Leech, K. (1999) *The eye of the storm: Spiritual resources for the pursuit of justice* London: DL&T p. 94

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that more recent work within liberation hermeneutics has recognised some of these criticisms and has seen the need to analyse agency in a more nuanced way 'in the counterpressures that are formed when we get in touch with the repressions of life' and in 'day-to-day forms of resistance' (Rieger, J. (2004) 'Liberating God-talk: Postcolonialism and the challenge of the margins' in Keller, C. *et al* (eds.) *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press pp.217-218).

Before moving on from the 'classic' form of early liberation theology that various pastoral theologians utilise in offering theological reflections on the contexts of mental health, it is worth noting that the various forms of liberation hermeneutics have not remained static, and the pastoral theological insights above do not in fact reflect the considerable evolution of what is now a global paradigm. For as well as having migrated from its Latin American roots to inform black theologies of liberation<sup>1</sup>, feminist theologies<sup>2</sup> and then 'Third World' feminist critiques of the same<sup>3</sup>, and other identity-specific theologies spanning Africa<sup>4</sup> and Asia<sup>5</sup>, the original paradigm has also evolved, offering a more nuanced critique of certain aspects of its earlier forms. For instance, one significant development has been the emergence of the exile over the exodus as a biblical motif for liberationist theological reflection, where God might be seen as one who does not provide reconciliation for victims of oppression but remains hidden in the exilic experience of poverty.<sup>6</sup>

However, whilst it is the case that the more recent work on liberation theology<sup>7</sup> attempts to address some of the critiques of binaristic conceptions of identity and power, somewhat predetermined biblical theologies, and an inherent tie to the notion of

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<sup>1</sup> See Edward Antonio, E. (2007) 'Black theology' in Rowland, C. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Second Edition) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp.79-104

<sup>2</sup> See Grey, M. (2007) 'Feminist theology: a critical theology of liberation' in Rowland, C. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Second Edition) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp.105-122

<sup>3</sup> See Vuola, E. (2002) *Limits of Liberation: Feminist Theology and the ethics of poverty and reproduction* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press

<sup>4</sup> See for example Walshe, P. (1987) 'The Evolution of Liberation Theology in South Africa' *Journal of Law and Religion* 5 (2) pp.299-311

<sup>5</sup> See Wielenga, B. (2007) 'Liberation theology in Asia' in Rowland, C. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Second Edition) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.55-78

<sup>6</sup> See Yoder's article on the necessity for the incorporation of the exile into liberation hermeneutics' use of biblical motifs (Yoder, J. (1990) 'The Wider Setting of "Liberation Theology' *The Review of Politics* 52 (2) pp.287-288).

<sup>7</sup> Of the most significant events in recent liberation theology on a global scale have been the World Forums on Liberation and Theology held first in Brazil in 2005 and then in Kenya in 2007, with over 300 participants predominantly from Africa reflecting the still vibrant and now global scale of the liberation theology movement interested in issues such as global north and south economic divides, 'ecological debt', poverty and slavery, fundamentalism and modernity, and globalisation (see Althaus-Reid, M *et al* (eds.) (2007) *Another possible world* (Liberation Theology Series) London: SCM Press).

progress, it has not been possible for the global paradigm to wrestle free from its fundamentally dichotomous nature. For instance, whilst Petrella's recent collection of Latin American liberation theologies reveals more nuanced appreciations of such key concepts as 'the poor'<sup>1</sup>, 'the margins'<sup>2</sup>, and the 'overestimation' of the exodus motif 'to enact liberation in history' offering instead the crucified God as a paradoxical 'defeated-liberator',<sup>3</sup> the strong association with God's preferential option for the poor remains. Thus, even if this notion of 'the poor' has been more thoroughly contextualised than its earlier theological manifestations, it is this theological teleology that means that for this dissertation's explorations of power and relating via the reading of biblical texts I will seek alternative hermeneutical paradigms.<sup>4</sup>

Overall, then, whilst liberation hermeneutics proves to be fruitful in its foregrounding of structural power for the description of contextual relational dynamics of poor mental health via textual interpretation, it is the binaristic and progress-led descriptions of contexts and interpretations of texts that leave it limited. In its assessment of existing paradigms, this dissertation will turn now to a conceptual framework from outside of biblical studies, namely the work of Michel Foucault. With the emphasis on the centrality

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<sup>1</sup> Recognising that it is not a homogenous category but must be complicated by issues of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality (see Nelson Maldonado-Torres, N. (2005) 'Liberation theology and the search for the lost paradigm: from radical orthodoxy to radical diversity' in Petrella, I. (ed.) *Latin American Liberation Theology: The Next Generation* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.55).

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Silvia Regina de Lima Silva has argued that 'Afrodescendant' women challenge liberation theology 'questioning and deconstructing the patriarchal theology that in Latin America and the Caribbean has assumed a male, white, and elitest face, fostering an ethnocentric, class-based, macho theology', (see de Lima Silva, S. R. (2005) 'From within ourselves : Afrodescendant women on paths on theological reflection in Latin America and the Caribbean' in Petrella, I. (ed.) *Latin American Liberation Theology: The Next Generation* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.68) thus 'the lives and experiences of black women are a new theological locus, from the margins of the margins' (*Ibid.* p.70).

<sup>3</sup> Sung, J. M. (2005) 'The human Being as Subject: Defending the Victims' in Petrella, I. (ed.) *Latin American Liberation Theology: The Next Generation* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.11

<sup>4</sup> The determination of liberation theologies to remain grounded in this preferential option for the poor is clearly understandable given the clear global disparities that such a theology has articulated. Thus, for the liberation theologian, it is crucial to recognise that binarisms do exist and poverty is real (see the first chapter ('The Global Material Context of the Liberation Theologian: The Poverty of the Majority') of Petrella, I. (2008) *Reclaiming liberation theology: Beyond liberation theology A polemic* London: SCM Press pp.5-44).

of power that liberation hermeneutics offers, I explore through Foucault's work in the section below how the relational dynamics described in the first section of this chapter need not be viewed in binaristic terms but as experiences that congregate around a struggle for power in relationship. Furthermore, I argue that it is with an appreciation of these power differentials that contextual biblical studies is more able to speak meaningfully and incisively to the relational dynamics of mental health.

### 1.3 Foucault

#### *Power and poor mental health*

Foucault frames the struggle for power within the notion of discourse. That is, the notion that when knowing is exercised over a state of affairs, or over persons, this act of describing reality is also somewhat a production of that reality. At the core of Foucault's arguments concerning mental health is that discourse emerges on the social landscape, not as the emergence of truth - and particularly not as the emergence of the truth about persons with poor mental health - but as the emergence of power. What Foucault means by this can be elucidated by turning to two key concepts of his work: *genealogy* and *archaeology*.

Foucault's understanding of *genealogy*, based partly on Nietzsche's use of the term, is a rejection of linear history: that is, in contradistinction to the search for origins and universal structures of knowledge,<sup>1</sup> there is no unity or teleology to events; no 'timeless and essential secret' behind history at the origin of things but a discontinuity.<sup>2</sup> That is, he seeks to point to the ways in which North-Atlantic societies have organised what counts and what does not count as knowledge of mental health, and within this organisation of knowledge what counts as reason-able and as unreason-able in society.

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault, M. (1998) 'Nietzsche, Genealogy and History' in Faubion, J. (ed.) *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology, The Essential works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984, Volume Two* The New Press NY pp.369-392 (original work 1971) p.371-2

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.371-2

To demonstrate this it is worth briefly sketching Foucault's genealogy of mental health in *Madness and Civilisation* and how it relates to his other central concept: archaeology. Essentially what Foucault argues is that there is a set of rules of formation that determine what can be stated at a particular time about a particular category, such as poor mental health, which also dictate how such a statement of knowledge is related to other statements of knowledge. He calls these the rules of discursive formation and describes these rules as the archaeology of knowledge<sup>1</sup>. Archaeology is not an attempt to define thoughts, or representations, or images concealed or revealed in discourses, rather it is an attempt to describe 'those discourses themselves, as practices, obeying certain rules'<sup>2</sup>.

The first traces of such a formation of discourse on mental health which Foucault outlines are in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, which saw the 'great confinement' of persons with poor mental health. Not only did this signal a hiding of poor mental health, this new world of confinement argues Foucault also created a neutralising space wherein autonomy was forsaken in a predetermined social milieu. Firstly, autonomy was lost in a predetermined exchange of the provision of food and water for the physical constraint of confinement.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, autonomy was lost in an even more profound way, as Foucault argues in his earlier work *Mental illness and Psychology*: 'Madness which for so long had been overt and unrestricted, which had for so long been present on the horizon disappeared. It entered a phase of silence from which it was not to emerge for a long time; it was deprived of its language; and although one continued to speak of it, it became impossible for it to speak of itself'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Foucault, M. (2002) *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Routledge Classics Edition) London & New York: Routledge (original work 1969) p.155

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.138

<sup>3</sup> Foucault, M. (2001) *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (Routledge Classics Edition) London & New York: Routledge (original work 1961) p. 45

<sup>4</sup> Foucault, M. (1962) *Mental Illness and Psychology* (Revised Edition) Berkley, CA: University of California Press (original work 1954) p.68

Foucault also argues that this loss of autonomy in being confined was often combined with an inability to work in an age when the failure to produce labour was akin to moral laxity. Thus developed, asserts Foucault, the notion of poor mental health as a problem, as a social and moral deficit.<sup>1</sup> Aligning with Foucault's analysis, Porter, in his historical survey of the social location of poor mental health, demonstrates how in the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the emergence of the specialist public asylum saw certain anti-social behaviours - traditionally labelled as sins, vice, and crime - being labelled as 'madness' by magistrates who began to fill asylums with political opponents and criminals.<sup>2</sup> Foucault argues in *Mental illness and Psychology* that this signalled a new relationship between persons with poor mental health and the criminal: 'Madness forged a relationship with moral and social guilt that it is still perhaps not ready to break.'<sup>3</sup>

As well as being confined, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century persons with poor mental health were beginning to be associated with hegemonic stereotypes. The emergence and power of the stereotype was further and profoundly compounded by the 19<sup>th</sup> century rise of science and the concomitant emergence of psychiatry. Porter has argued that among other things, this led to the wider classification of poor mental health, the positing of neurological aetiologies of symptoms and the general development of phrenology and its assertion that the seat of 'the mind' is the brain, and therefore that there is a physical substrate to insanity.<sup>4</sup> Foucault's argument goes on to state that these developments led to a focus on the designation of 'madness' as a disease and on persons with poor mental health as objects of scientific study - knowable, able to be captured by the knowing subject, the scientist, and literally, bodies of evidence proving the veracity of scientific diagnosis, prognosis, and regimes of treatment. From this separating out of 'madness' as

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault, M. (1962) *Mental Illness and Psychology* (Revised Edition) Berkley, CA: University of California Press (original work 1954) p.59

<sup>2</sup> Porter R. (2002) *Madness: A brief history* Oxford: Oxford University Press p.122

<sup>3</sup> Foucault, M. (1962) *Mental Illness and Psychology* (Revised Edition) Berkley, CA: University of California Press (original work 1954) p.68

<sup>4</sup> Porter R. (2002) *Madness: A brief history* Oxford: Oxford University Press p.147

an object of science, 'mental illness' was born, and as Foucault argues, nascent psychiatry was able to posit that the only truth available to 'madness' was the one that sought to reduce it, thus psychiatry's domain of diagnosis and cure was born.<sup>1</sup> The diagnosis-cure paradigm, emerging with the advent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century's asylum system thus broke from the practice of physical restraint of persons with poor mental health, seeing mental reform as the only way to a cure for 'mental illness'.<sup>2</sup>

Foucault's point, therefore, is that this paradigm shift of 'mental reform' meant that even though the asylum saw the end of chaining up persons with poor mental health, the loss of autonomy witnessed in the confinement of the 18<sup>th</sup> century only deepened in the 19<sup>th</sup> century extending into the modern period. Indeed, he argues that a process of objectification was deepened as the restored visibility of 'mental illness' to the eyes of reason led not to the renewal of the 'stammered' dialogue of reason with persons with poor mental health but to the seemingly totalising occupation of communicative space by the voice of reason, making persons with poor mental health even more deeply known objects: 'All the rest is reduced to silence...the silence of mental disease, as it would develop in the asylum, would always only be of the order of observation and classification. It would not be dialogue.'<sup>3</sup>... 'Delivered from his chains, he is now chained by silence.'<sup>4</sup>

Foucault argues that this objectification along a diagnosis-cure axis most emerged via the advent of the medical expert, not because that person truly knew 'mental illness', but because within the social world of the asylum, he could isolate and master it. The doctor's power, argues Foucault, enabled him to produce the reality of 'mental illness'

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<sup>1</sup> Porter R. (2002) *Madness: A brief history* Oxford: Oxford University Press p.188

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.104ff.

<sup>3</sup> Foucault, M. (2001) *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (Routledge Classics Edition) London & New York: Routledge (original work 1961) p.59

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.248

characterised by the ability to reproduce behavioural phenomena completely accessible to scientific study.<sup>1</sup> Foucault sums up this colonising of persons with poor mental health in his description of the encounter between the asylum patient of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the doctor: 'Now the combat was always decided beforehand, madness' defeat inscribed in advance in the concrete situation where madman and the man of reason meet. The absence of constraint in the nineteenth-century asylum is not madness liberated, but madness long since mastered'.<sup>2</sup>

Where then does Foucault's genealogy of the discourses of 'madness' lead? It can be argued that Foucault presents a picture of power relations which have emerged as expressions of various rules of discursive formation – rules about what constituted 'madness' and rules about the societal location of persons with poor mental health. Such rules led to confinement and concomitant losses of autonomy and associations with criminality. Stereotyping of mental health became another feature which marked out persons for difference. The rise of science and its paradigm of diagnosis and cure further compounded this objectification, as the designation of medical labels led to an attenuation of power and ability for persons with poor mental health to speak for themselves. Furthermore, what Foucault demonstrates is that as these rules of formation of discourses on mental health interacted with other discourses' rules of formation (e.g. the rise of science, penal codes, the rise of the individual), the result was a deepening of this marginal condition rather than a movement toward some sort of Enlightenment notion of progress or 'humane' representations and encounters with persons with poor mental health.

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault, M. (1997) 'Psychiatric Power' in Rabinow, P. (ed.) *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth, The Essential works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984, Volume One* New York, NY: The New Press (original work 1974) p.44

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.239



Whilst Foucault's work offers much to this dissertation's contextual concern with mental health in general, and its focus on relational power in particular, there are three fundamental critiques of Foucault that must be addressed before his insights can be taken up as paradigmatic markers for this doctoral work. The first critique relates to the accuracy of his historical analysis. Foucault's presentation of the societal location of persons with poor mental health as liminal and somewhat predetermined may not truly reflect the societal forces shaping that location during the periods in question. That is, Foucault's work may lack what is normatively considered to be historical accuracy. For instance, it is argued that Foucault's work in *Madness and Civilisation* relies too heavily on the French context and that his analysis is over-generalised.<sup>1</sup> For example, it is argued that with the exception of France, the 17<sup>th</sup> century did not witness a surge of institutionalisation. It was different in different countries. In Russia, state-organised institutions for the insane did not appear until the 1850's, and if people were confined it was mostly in monasteries.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, it is asserted that the asylum developed in England during a period when the emergence of capitalism and the processes of urbanisation saw an associated decreased tolerance of bizarre or inappropriate behaviour.<sup>3</sup> The argument follows that the growth of the asylum had more to do with the drive to construct a productive society rather than to mark out 'others' for difference.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Porter R. (2002) *Madness: A brief history* Oxford: Oxford University Press p.93

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.93

<sup>3</sup> Scull, A. S. (1989) *The most solitary afflictions: Madness and society in Britain* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press p.217

<sup>4</sup> Other arguments, though, have aligned more with Foucault's stress on the normalising dynamic which he argues to have been at the heart of the growth of the asylum, with such institutions providing a symbolic as well as a practical means of securing and isolating parts of ourselves which are 'wild, dangerous and out of control'. See Shoenberg, E. (1990) 'Therapeutic communities: the ideal, the real and the possible' in Jensen, E. (ed.) *The Therapeutic Community* London: Croom-Helm.

A related critique of Foucault's work in terms of its historiographical standing has been that his genealogical work relies too heavily on 'minor texts' and 'obscure artefacts' (see Fendler, L. (2004) 'Praxis and Agency in Foucault's Historiography' in *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 23 p. 450, for a framing of the limits of this kind of critique. However, the same feature of selectivity has been highlighted from a different vantage point, with Foucault being celebrated for practising such a form of historiography because in doing so he has called attention to hitherto marginalised voices and narratives. See Golstein, J. (ed.) (1994) *Foucault and the writing of history* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, for an overview).

However, the historical accuracy critique misses the point of Foucault's work in his genealogy. Rather than offering a description of historical progression, Foucault's point is to offer analyses of the power dynamics embodied in encounters with persons with poor mental health that speak as much to the present as they do to the past. As Bernstein points out, representation of historical facts or events is not the goal of genealogy; it is not an example of didactics, rather, it is a 'rhetoric of disruption'<sup>1</sup> that as Fendler argues models a kind of thinking that questions received wisdom and aims to incite attention to the present.<sup>2</sup> The targets of genealogical critique, according to Fendler, are those assumptions in the present which serve to 'sort people unjustly', undermining the supposed naturalness of such assumptions.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, he argues, the effectiveness of Foucault's work is not found in the accuracy of his presentation of knowledge as such, but in the effectiveness of his argument to incite a questioning of how we perceive knowledge<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, as Hoy argues, 'Foucault paints a picture of a totally normalised society, not because he believes our present society is one, but because he hopes that we will find the picture frightening.'<sup>5</sup>

As a study of the past which attempts to incite a questioning of the present, then, Foucault's work offers a potential reframing of the societally structured relational dynamics present in encountering persons with poor mental health: perceptions of identity via stigma and stereotype; representations of agency via the media, language and labelling; and limits set on dialogical exchanges with persons with poor mental health as legitimate and capable partners in relational exchange. Furthermore, in terms of contextual biblical hermeneutics, whilst liberation hermeneutics offers a paradigm which

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<sup>1</sup> Bernstein, R. (1994) 'Foucault: Critique as philosophical ethos' in Kelly, M. (ed.) *Critique and power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas debate* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press pp.211-241

<sup>2</sup> Fendler, L. (2004) 'Praxis and Agency in Foucault's Historiography' *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 23 p.450

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.451

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.450

<sup>5</sup> Hoy, D. C. (1986) 'Introduction' in Hoy, D. C. (ed.) *Foucault: A critical reader* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.14

depicts power as dichotomous and its resistance characterised as the progression out of slavery and into freedom, Foucault's work brings the question of power to the forefront in quite a different way.

For Foucault, power in the relational dynamics of mental health is not the power of knowing subjects over known objects. Or put within the paradigmatic nomenclature of liberation hermeneutics, it is not that power is somehow held by the oppressors over the oppressed, such that challenging power will be a process of progressing away from states of oppression, or moving out of the margins and into the centre of power. For Foucault the working of power in society is within discourse, and so power is more diffuse and relational than binaristic and only oppositional.

However, the potential for Foucault's work to open up a more relationally subtle appreciation of power has to be set in relief to the second key critique of Foucault that I wish to address: he underestimates the potential of individual agency. This critique has often been based on Foucault's perceived over-stating of the dominance of discourse over individuals. For instance, Foucault questions 'whether the subjects responsible for scientific discourses are not determined in their situation, their function, their perspective capacity, and their practical possibilities by conditions that dominate and even overwhelm them.'<sup>1</sup> That is, Foucault may be read to suggest that power relations between human subjects are less to do with the agency of the individual who has the appearance of having power, and more to do with the structures of power which form discourses on poor mental health.

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<sup>1</sup> What Foucault is levelling against here is the high view of the human subject that gives an absolute priority to the observing subject as being able to somehow reflect upon an essential human phenomenology. Foucault cannot accept the notion of the knowing subject placing, 'its own point of view at the origin of all historicity – which in short leads to a transcendental consciousness...Historical analysis of scientific discourse should in the last resort be subject, not to a theory of the knowing subject, but rather to a theory of discursive practice' (Foucault, M. (1970) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the human sciences* New York, NY: Random House (original work 1966) p.xiii).

However, if Foucault is read this way, a significant problem arises: if all subjects are 'overwhelmed' by the pervasiveness of discourse, Foucault's notion of power appears to leave the question of the resistance and the transformation of hegemonic relational dynamics – a possibility which liberation hermeneutics argues strongly for – at a loss. Indeed, Foucault's genealogy of confining, estranging, objectifying, and silencing, all might lead one into thinking that those who were being marked out for otherness complied with such designating without any resistance or protest. Therefore, the pervasiveness of power within the dynamics of relational encounters could be interpreted to mean, argues Dews, that persons are viewed as passive agents, simply formed by the power structures of discourse.<sup>1</sup> It is argued that Foucault would thus be read as being too reductionistic and one-dimensional in his appreciation of power to allow for a critical appreciation of human agency<sup>2</sup> and would present a view of agency wherein the structures of power actively oppress while persons are subjected to the operation of that power in a silent form of acquiescence. This question of agency and resistance has been a critique of Foucault, most famously proposed by Jurgen Habermas who maintains that there is an inherent functionalism to Foucault's work such that everything, including individual identity and agency, is a function of power.<sup>3</sup>

There is, however, a central problem with this sort of critique of Foucault. If one is to read Foucault in such a way, then power remains only an imposing force operating as a limit on human agency. The crucial element that this misses is that for Foucault, as Butin points out, power is to be understood not as a force per se, but as a relation<sup>4</sup> and it is not conceived of only in negative terms; not solely a force of oppression or restriction. As

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<sup>1</sup> Dews, P. (1987) *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and Claims of Critical Theory* London: Verso p.161

<sup>2</sup> McCarthy, T. (1994) 'The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School' in Kelly, M. (ed.) *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate* Cambridge: MIT Press p.272

<sup>3</sup> Habermas, J. (1990) *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press p.253

<sup>4</sup> See Butin, D. W. (2003) 'If this is Resistance I would hate to see Domination: Retrieving Foucault's Notion of Resistance within Educational Research' *Educational Studies* 32 (2) pp.157-176

Foucault states in *Discipline and Punish*: 'We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.'<sup>1</sup> Functionalism is avoided in Foucault's work by the simple fact that he conceives of power dynamics as acted out in a space that is always open to re-negotiation: 'These power relations are thus mobile, reversible, and unstable. It should also be noted that power relations are possible insofar as the subjects are free'.<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to critiques of Foucault that he reduces the potential for agency in discourse, I believe that Foucault's notion of power in discourse can be read to open up the potential for agency *within* hegemonic relational dynamics; resistance is inherent within the relations of power, not absented by them. For Foucault such resistance belongs to those who are capable of seizing 'the rules' of discourse and struggle to dominate chance events.<sup>3</sup> That is, the ideological functioning of a science should be tackled as a discursive formation at the locus of the generative power of those discourses – the discursive rules of formation - and should be challenged point by point.<sup>4</sup> So, for persons with poor mental health, Foucault does not advocate a program for the dismantling of institutional psychiatry, but rather suggests a way of viewing the communicative space between patient and doctor, between 'mad' and 'sane', between any two people in such a way that allows that space to be freed, to be re-imagined, not according to a new set of parameters but on a continually *ad hoc* basis in an agonistic relationship 'which is at once the same

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault, M. (1991) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* London: Penguin Books (original work 1977) p.194

<sup>2</sup> Foucault, M. (1997) in Rabinow, P. (ed.) *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth* New York: The New Press p.292

<sup>3</sup> Foucault, M. (1997) 'Psychiatric Power' in Rabinow, P. (ed.) *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth, The Essential works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984, Volume One* New York, NY: The New Press (original work 1974) p.47. Indeed he argues for the destruction of the 'asylum space' in our contemporary asylum society, by transferring power to the patient to produce his/her own truth of his/her poor mental health.

<sup>4</sup> Foucault, M. (2002) *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Routledge Classics Edition) London & New York: Routledge (original work 1969) p.205

time reciprocal, invitation and struggle'.<sup>1</sup> Such a view of renegotiating relational context stresses the strategic aspect of the encounter, moving from the seeming sense of pre-determinedness of Foucault's discursive rules of formation, to encounters continuously configured and reconfigured.

Centrally, then, Foucault's work suggests that resistive and transformative struggles with hegemonic relational dynamics inherently involve acts of re-imagination. It is this incitement to re-imagine societal landscapes which is so crucial to appreciate in Foucault's contribution to this dissertation's presentation of the relational dynamics of persons with poor mental health. Power does not belong to one group or individual. Rather, as Isenberg argues, power is always in the midst of relational dynamics; always situational.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, as Foucault himself states, power is productive of relational dynamics and so is always up for grabs: '...a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements that are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that 'the other' (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts'.<sup>3</sup>

However, if one emphasis that might be taken from Foucault is that persons can be seen as those who act within power dynamics - wherein power might be produced in acts of re-imagining discourse - the final critique of Foucault that will have to be addressed is offered by Fendler. He contends that Foucault's work is too apolitical to sustain such acts of re-imagination in its failure to take stances on issues or offer frameworks for political engagement<sup>4</sup> or as Isenberg put it in Habermas's terms, for 'communicative action'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault, M. (1982) 'The Subject and Power' in Dreyfus, H. & Rabinow, P. (eds.) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press p.221

<sup>2</sup> See Isenberg, B. (1991) 'Habermas on Foucault: Critical remarks' *Acta Sociologica* 34 p.301

<sup>3</sup> Foucault, M. (1982) 'The Subject and Power' in Dreyfus, H. & Rabinow, P. (eds.) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press p.220

<sup>4</sup> See Fendler, L. (2004) 'Praxis and Agency in Foucault's Historiography' *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 23 p.450

Hence, it can be argued that little scope is provided in his work for the heuristic of re-imagining to be drawn forth.

Whilst this looks like a valid critique of Foucault, where it falls down is in its misreading of what genealogy is. That is, as Owen argues, genealogy cannot be expected to legislate agency and autonomy 'for us'; it can only exemplify its commitment to it.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it is here that Foucault's work provides both a new notion of political engagement with those who have been 'disempowered' in society, and a damning critique of liberation hermeneutics' treatment of poor mental health. For, whilst in the liberation paradigm the so-called 'marginalisation of the oppressed' presupposes the need to empower those whose voices are obscured at the margins, it can be argued that Foucault's work reveals that the liberation paradigm will ultimately reinforce an essential and asymmetric relationship between those who are regarded as autonomous and those who are regarded as dependent.<sup>3</sup> Genealogy, on the other hand, seeks to re-think the notion of political agency, arguing that all subject agents can exercise autonomy in the re-imagining of discourse.

Whilst I would argue that it is not the case that Foucault's work lacks political engagement, it can be argued that it is still left unclear in Foucault's treatment of human agency and resistance *how* relational dynamics might be re-imagined when in Foucault's genealogy, despite the presentation of the productivity of power, the agency of the human subject is set within discourses that are too 'overwhelming' and within power networks which are too complex and pervasive. The central problem, then, is that whilst

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<sup>1</sup> See Isenberg, B. (1991) 'Habermas on Foucault: Critical remarks' *Acta Sociologica* 34 p.305

<sup>2</sup> Owen, D. (1995) 'Genealogy as exemplary critique: Reflections on Foucault and the imagination of the political' *Economy and Society* 24 (4) p.492

<sup>3</sup> See Cruikshank, B. (1999) *The will to empower: Democratic citizens and other subjects* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press

Foucault can be read as offering incitement to re-imagine relational dynamics, the praxis of resistive agency may still look elusive.<sup>1</sup>

The fundamental problem that remains with Foucault's work, as Said asserts, is that what is missing is the presence of counter-discourses.<sup>2</sup> That is, there is an absence in Foucault's work of the 'different claims' on discourse that are already being articulated in the societal relational dynamics of persons with poor mental health.<sup>3</sup> It is argued that Foucault's genealogy leaves little room for listening to such voices or for facilitating such a process of communication with such voices.<sup>4</sup> In terms of my own interests in this

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<sup>1</sup> Part of the problem in trying to understand how Foucault conceives of the human subject is that his thoughts do not remain the same throughout his writing. It has been argued that a gradual emergence of the significance of the subject for Foucault can be seen through the course of his work (see Shumway, D. R. (1989) *Michel Foucault* London: University Press of Virginia p.153ff). In *The Order of Things* the subject can be argued to be presented as an epistemic fiction – one of man's doubles (see Foucault, M. (1970) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the human sciences* New York, NY: Random House (original work 1966) p.310); that is, the subject is a non-essential being, continuously created within uniquely different occurrences of social relations. In *Discipline and Punish* the subject is understood as the product of a relation of dominance either to a sovereign or to the disciplinary regime. To be subject then is to be subjected. In this work Foucault still limits the role of the subject in the power relation he seeks to describe: 'It is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge useful or resistant to power, but power/knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determine the forms of possible domains of knowledge,' (see Foucault, M. (1991) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* London: Penguin Books (original work 1977) p.28). This is more a role for the subject akin to that described in *Archaeology* as more determined by the rules of discursive formation than determining them.

In the later volumes of *History of Sexuality* a role for the subject is developed beyond previous descriptions to such a degree that the subject is presented with power to make choices and set goals. In returning to the Greco-Roman notions of the cultivation of the self, Foucault explores the methods, techniques, and exercises directed at forming the self within the nexus of relationships (see Rabinow, P. (ed.) (1997) *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth, The Essential works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984, Volume One* New York, NY: The New Press p.xxvii).

This emergence of the role of the 'self' in Foucault at first might look bewildering given his previous work. However, there is no argument here that these practices of the 'cultivation of the self' lead to a rediscovery of a deep hidden truth within oneself, an essence or origin. Rather, Foucault argues that through the absorption of a truth imparted by a teaching, a reading, or a piece of advice as with the process of *askesis* advocated by Plutarch and Seneca, Foucault argues that it is possible to become more attentive to the present moment (see Foucault, M. (1997) 'The Hermeneutics of the Subject' in Rabinow, P. (ed.) *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth, The Essential works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984, Volume One* New York, NY: The New Press p.100).

<sup>2</sup> 'There is, I believe, a salutary virtue in testimonials by members of those groups asserting their right of self-representation within the total economy of discourses,' (see Said, E. (1986) 'Foucault and the imagination of power' in Hoy, D. C. *Foucault: A critical reader* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.153).

<sup>3</sup> See Connolly, W. E. (1985 August) 'Taylor, Foucault, and otherness' *Political theory* 13 (3) p.368

<sup>4</sup> See Bauman, R. (1987) *Legislators and interpreters: On modernity, post-modernity and intellectuals* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press p.5



dissertation, Foucault does not offer attentiveness to the ways in which persons with poor mental health already do struggle to produce power in the re-imagining of their relational dynamics. So, whilst Foucault is interested in the local manifestation of political struggle, he is not interested in its person-by-person manifestation. Put another way, there is no engaging with the political subjects of discourse, and with this limitation to his work, there is no possibility for the re-imagining of discourse to be explored as such; there is only the implicit suggestion that it should be.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

For the purposes of this dissertation, the two key paradigms of thought analysed above have been assessed for how they offer a conceptual framework for biblical criticism to offer a textually mediated response to the relational dynamics of poor mental health. In this regard, I take from liberation hermeneutics the emphasis on the central importance of power and the central notion that individuals with poor mental health (and for that matter individual characters in textual encounters in the Gospel of Mark) are to be understood not as isolated individual units of study, but as individuals who act within a social structure that in ways can be oppressive to those individuals. Thus, the core emphasis of liberation hermeneutics is the biblical mandate to resist oppressive social structures, moving towards liberation from that which bonds.

That said, as I discussed above, it was the limiting nature of liberation hermeneutics treatment of power – both contextual and textual – that prompted me to analyse the work of Michel Foucault and thus move past the essentialising and binaristic tendencies of liberation hermeneutics, and instead embrace a more nuanced appreciation of the gradations of power as a relation. That is, I argued in agreement with Foucault, for a view of power as both a repressive and productive reality such that this awareness might enable hegemonic acts of relating to be resisted and perhaps even be transformed.

Indeed, I suggested that it is this relational core to Foucault's argument that power might not be seen as purely coercive but also productive of resistance, that is a key element for this dissertation and its exploration of the relational dynamics of texts. For as I stated at the end of this chapter, it is the potential of subjects to exercise an agency of re-imagining relational dynamics that I take to be the central point of Foucault's work in terms of my own interest in the relational dynamics of poor mental health.

In the end, then, it is Foucault's social philosophy and not liberation paradigm's biblical theology that I have settled upon as offering the more helpful paradigmatic framework responding to the relational dynamics of mental health. What I am interested in now doing is to explore the potential of an alternative concept to liberation from the margins as a way of offering a response to the relational dynamics described in this chapter via the reading of biblical texts. This exploration will be carried out in Chapter Two.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MUTUALITY

#### *A POSTCOLONIAL PRAXIS FOR THE RELATIONAL DYNAMICS OF POOR MENTAL HEALTH*

*In the course of this chapter I explore the use of mutuality within various conceptual frameworks as a preparation for understanding mutuality specifically as a postcolonial praxis. In doing so, I will draw on mutuality's presence both in the worlds of mental health literature and in theology, particularly Nancy Eiesland's theology of disability and Carter Heyward's theology of mutual relation. Seeking a more strategic understanding of mutuality as a praxis, I turn to the work of postcolonial thinker Homi Bhabha and from a critique and analysis of the same I conclude the chapter by offering my own development of the concept of mutuality as it applies to the textual analysis of relational dynamics.*

#### **2.1 Beyond mutuality as an aspiration**

##### *Mutuality as a praxis*

The centrality of societal power in liberation hermeneutics, and in Foucault's work, the concept of power as relational, and the incitement in his work to re-imagine hegemonic power dynamics, are the core features of the previous chapter that I carry into this one. Moreover, in parsing the significance of these two paradigms, one of the key insights that I argue Foucault offers over liberation hermeneutics is the assertion that individuals can exercise agency in the re-imagination of discourse. In other words, the 'disempowered' of the liberation paradigm do not, in fact, need to be empowered by some source external to them; they already have the potential for counter-discourse.

That said, the fundamental drawback that has been pointed to in Foucault's work is a lack of attention to the practice of actual counter-discourses. Thus, whilst retaining the power and relationally-aware imagination of these two paradigms, and this notion of agency as the power to re-imagine discourse, I propose in this chapter a way of analysing

relational dynamics that directly addresses this perceived deficiency in Foucault's work and that focuses on counter-discourses. I wish to focus the analysis of the relational dynamics on the level of individual encounters as a way of speaking about the possibility of counter-discourse. Moreover, I am interested in how individual encounters are negotiated within the structures of hegemonic power without having to look towards a necessary teleology of liberation from that hegemony. Therefore, I wish to explore the moment-by-moment instances of resistive agency and thus move this dissertation from the theoretical analysis of relational dynamics to the praxes of relating and ask what these praxes might say of the nature of resistive agency.

The specific praxis of resistive agency that I am interested in exploring is **mutuality**. Exactly what mutuality is understood to be varies somewhat according to the discipline making use of it. Understanding mutuality as a praxis rather than as a theoretical concept, or a philosophical ideal, I will study how it emerges within relational dynamics. There is a Foucauldian premise to viewing mutuality as a praxis that speaks to a confidence that the re-imagination of hegemonic discourse does in fact exist in the form of counter-discourses.

This praxis-led approach to this dissertation's core concept means that defining what is meant by mutuality will be difficult to specify as mutuality emerges in encounters between persons in multiple forms. For instance, some explorations of mutuality in action focus on it as a praxis centring on the importance of relationship, such as analyses of classroom dynamics or methodologies of pedagogy that emphasise mutuality as the shared process of knowledge assimilation within dialogue<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, the missiology of the World Council of Churches emphasises the role of the local church in enabling 'mutuality in mission' to emerge that is aware of the intercultural nature of mutual

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<sup>1</sup> See Wallace, D. & Rothschild Ewald, H. (2000) *Mutuality in the rhetoric and composition classroom* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press

relationship and agency<sup>1</sup>. Other explorations of mutuality focus on its appreciation of difference, such as in ecclesiologies where a Trinitarian model of church is proposed as one which therefore has room for differences within church membership and identity<sup>2</sup>, and in the ecumenical movement where 'mutual accountability' is promoted in the pursuit of consensus over majority rule, seeking to emphasise interdependence as a way of remodelling ecumenism.<sup>3</sup>

With such a broad appeal, as a concept mutuality has retained a nebulous quality, loosely related to a wide-range of attempts to take 'the other' into account. It has served both as an aspiration, as well as a methodology. It is also clear that mutuality as a concept used within multiple areas of concern has fallen foul of being used in conjunction with various catch-phrases such as 'intercultural mutuality'<sup>4</sup> and 'mutual accountability'<sup>5</sup>. The danger is that mutuality might be taken as an idea and a praxis whose impact is lost to a combination of ubiquity and vagueness. Given this wide variety of its usage, I will focus how mutuality has been understood in three paradigms that relate directly to this dissertation: the study of poor mental health in society, Nancy Eiesland's theology of disability, and Carter Heyward's theology of mutual relation.

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<sup>1</sup> Ionita, V. (1997) 'One gospel and diverse cultures: towards an intercultural mutuality' *International Review of Mission* 86 pp.53-56

<sup>2</sup> Jinkins, M. (2003) 'Mutuality and difference: Trinity, creation and the theological ground of the church's unity' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2) pp.148-171

<sup>3</sup> Apostola, N. K. (1998) 'Mutual accountability and the quest for unity' *The Ecumenical Review* 50 (3) (July) pp.301-306. It is interesting that one common thread in the application of mutuality to relational dynamics, whether pedagogical or ecclesiological, is that room should be made for difference as persons are encountered in society. Such a feature makes mutuality as applied in these varied milieus markedly different to its application in economic theory where a homogeneity of interests is argued to be a prerequisite for economic success (see Deakin, S. *et al* (2008) *The governance of mutuality* (Centre for Business Research, University of Cambridge).

<sup>4</sup> Ionita, V. (1997) 'One gospel and diverse cultures: towards an intercultural mutuality' *International Review of Mission* 86 pp.53-56

<sup>5</sup> Apostola, N. K. (1998) 'Mutual accountability and the quest for unity' *The Ecumenical Review* 50 (3) (July) pp.301-306

In mental health literature, when mutuality is considered from the lived perspective of persons who have experienced poor mental health, the concept is understood as 'the experience of real or symbolic shared commonalities of visions, goals, sentiments, or characteristics, including shared acceptance of difference'.<sup>1</sup> It is understood fundamentally as an experience between persons where there is room for difference, and so by nature this understanding retains a degree of idiosyncrasy. Similarly, it is argued that 'shaping' mutuality between nurses and family caregivers of mental health patients focuses care on mutual partnership and understanding which is able to allow all involved to accept different perspectives and changing attitudes.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, such mutual partnerships as models of care-giving push at the limits of what is normatively perceived as the demarcation between care-giver and care-receiver wherein mutuality in praxis is seen as a blurring of certain client-caregiver boundaries such that identities and boundaries are set in a process of continual negotiation.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it is stated that 'at the right moments' what is most therapeutic in psychotherapy is a real relationship between two people characterized by 'mutuality, reciprocity, and intersubjectivity'.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it is argued that this state of 'mutual surrender' is one wherein the other is truly recognised, wherein a tension is maintained between recognition of the other and self-assertion, such that the tendency to collapse the relational space shared or perhaps even constructed in this act of mutual recognition is resisted.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hagerty, B. M. K. *et al* (1993) 'An emerging theory of human relatedness' *IMAGE: Journal of nursing scholarship* 25 p.294

<sup>2</sup> Jeon, Y. (2004) 'Shaping mutuality: Nurse-family caregiver interactions in caring for older people with depression' *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* 13 pp.130-132

<sup>3</sup> McAllister, N. (2004) 'Different voices: Reviewing and revising the politics of working with consumers in mental health' *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* 13 p.28

<sup>4</sup> Watson, R. A. (2007) 'Ready or not, here I come: surrender, recognition and mutuality in psychotherapy' *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 35 (1) p.67

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.67. Watson goes on to note how the struggle for intersubjective mutual recognition is reflected in the life of God in the Trinity: a pattern of relationship without the motive of power over the other (*Ibid.* p.72).

Similarly, mutuality is explored as a theme in recovery from seasons of poor mental health in terms of the relational encounters between persons. For instance, it is found that by sharing experiences of survival and recovery women have been able to give-up shame, self-blame, and isolation as well as enter into reciprocal relationships that can have a prolonged power to heal.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, mutuality is described as the 'background music' in women's experience of mental health such that its relative presence or absence is found to be a significant contributor to well-being, affecting how women perceive their lives and relationships.<sup>2</sup> Also, within the area of recovery literature, mutuality is considered in Aristotelian terms as the recognition of the healing potential of 'noble friendship'.<sup>3</sup> Mutuality occurs for Aristotle in the moral moment of taking up the good of the other as our own,<sup>4</sup> and it is in such a praxis that the 'profound healing' potential of mutuality is experienced.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, it is argued that 'nonmutuality' is 'the source from which oppression springs'.<sup>6</sup>

What emerges from this assessment of some of the uses of mutuality in mental health literature is a series of aspirations: that mutuality should mean having room for difference, being open to crossing interpersonal boundaries, valuing reciprocation, interdependence, shared experience, and accountability. Thus, with the contextual picture of relating that Chapter One describes in mind, mutuality as it has been variously defined above is an aspirational praxis that seeks the transformation of such hegemonic

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<sup>1</sup> Fearday, F. L. *et al* (2004) 'A voice for traumatized women: Inclusion and mutual support' *Psychiatric rehabilitation journal* 27 (3) (Winter) p. 262

<sup>2</sup> Hedelin, B. *et al* (2003) 'Mutuality as background music in women's lived experience of mental health and depression' *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health nursing* 10 pp. 317-332. Indeed the significance of mutuality in the lives of women in particular has been widely studied and postulated to be a core indicator of mental health (for example see the survey in Sperberg, E. D. *et al* (1998) 'Depression in women as related to anger and mutuality in relationships' *Psychology of women quarterly* 22 pp.224-225).

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* trans. Ostwald, M. (1962) New York, NY: Macmillan p.33

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.224

<sup>5</sup> Stocker, S. S. (2001) 'Disability and Identity: Overcoming Perfectionism' *Frontiers: A Journal of Woman Studies* 22 (2) p.166

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.168

relational dynamics. However, for such aspirations to become practical realities an awareness of power and its complexities is called for.

For instance, whilst in the case of the care of disabled babies it is argued that 'narrowly conceived interpretations of normality' can be challenged by 'embracing alternative narratives' of the care of those babies, what exactly does it take to embrace an alternative narrative?<sup>1</sup> Is it a question of merely listening to, or is it more taking account of those narratives and allowing them to re-shape medical care? Or is it even a question of having those alternative narratives provide a redefinition of medically modelled diagnosis? Certainly, from a Foucauldian point of view, without an incisive grasp of how the discourses of medical power and societal behaviours towards disabled babies and children might work across various social settings, the efficacy of 'embracing alternative narratives' stands little chance of re-imagining the power it seeks to alternate.

With its highly aspirational focus, one of the aspects of relational dynamics that mutuality in mental health literature fails to consider fully is the inherent ambiguity that relational encounters inhabit. It is in this regard that the second paradigm, Nancy Eiesland's theology of disability, offers more insight into the workings of mutuality as an embodied praxis. Within the discipline of theologies of disability, Nancy Eiesland's work seeks to explore the potential of mutual relation along the axis of the inherent ambiguity that such relating embodies when encountering disability. She argues that mutuality evades the binaristic oppressor/oppressed paradigm and invites theological reflection and with it, praxis, beyond the categorising and essentialising of the disabled body as if it were an ontological category of its own, and into an ambiguous space.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, she argues that the disabled person is not to be viewed as a person enslaved to a picture of

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<sup>1</sup> See Fisher, P (2007) 'Experiential knowledge challenges 'normality' and individualized citizenship: towards 'another way of being'' *Disability and society* 22 (3) pp.283-298

<sup>2</sup> Eiesland, N. L. (1994) *The Disabled God: Toward a liberatory theology of disability* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press p.116



normalcy for which they should strive, but is already fully human, highly ambiguous, and imbued with the endless potential for relational mutuality.<sup>1</sup> Hence, and rather ironically, given Eiesland's stated interest in liberation hermeneutics, such an emphasis on the ambiguity of the embodied encounter with disability resists the teleological temptation to move beyond difference and towards, somehow, its liberation.

This is so because for Eiesland the encounter with disability is not the recognition of 'the other' - not the recognition of an essentially different being - but the recognition of difference and sameness at the same time. Embodiment, as Eiesland argues, is a profoundly ambiguous reality.<sup>2</sup> The self and the other are faced with a somewhat messier relational reality than the dichotomous liberation paradigm suggests; with this emphasis on the ambiguity of mutuality, relational dynamics look less and less like two sides of a dichotomous exclusion and more and more like the negotiation of shared relational dynamics. Thus, within such a paradigmatic understanding of relating, a desire is contained to remain in dialogue even in the absence of agreement.

This emphasis to remain in dialogue with difference is exactly where I believe mutuality differs most significantly from the notion of liberation from the margins. At the margins, there is no space for the difference of marginalised persons to be renegotiated with the centre. Within classic liberation hermeneutics there is only the exodus movement out of the peripheral location (the margins) to the imagined centre. Mutuality on the other hand is a relational dynamic which does not suggest a place where the other is excluded but rather the struggle wherein difference is renegotiated within shared relational spaces. There is no movement from-to, or put another way, there is no sublation of difference; there is an attempt to work with difference rather than try to progress past it.

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<sup>1</sup> Eiesland, N. L. (1994) *The Disabled God: Toward a liberatory theology of disability* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press p. 48

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 95

What can be taken in framing an understanding of the praxis of mutuality from Eiesland's theology of disability is an appreciation that this praxis is one that pauses within the relational encounter to perceive and be perceived by the ambiguous difference of embodiment. This picture of sharing relational space is not one to be moved over lightly, rather it is a significant development in this dissertation's exploration of a praxis that might offer a counter-discourse to hegemonic power dynamics. Indeed, there is a sense in which Eiesland's theology of ambiguity suggests a greater spaciousness for difference to be encountered and negotiated.

It might also be said that this is as far as this framing of the praxis of mutuality goes: it is suggestive but not explanatory. That is, exactly how sameness and difference are negotiated within relational dynamics remains something of an enigma in Eiesland's theology. It is hard to see a strategic appreciation of mutuality here; it remains largely aspirational. Given this critique, the third paradigm that I consider in framing this dissertation's understanding of mutuality as a praxis - feminist theologies - offers the concept of mutuality a more robust description of its potential to be a power-aware praxis. There are multiple applications of the notion of mutuality within feminist theologies, from those that explore the role of mutuality and violence<sup>1</sup>, to those that explore feminist ethical considerations of economics<sup>2</sup>, and to those that explore the role of mutuality in sexual ethics<sup>3</sup>, including theological analyses of prostitution<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See Fortune, M. M. (1995) *Love does no harm: Sexual ethics for the rest of us* New York, NY: Continuum Press

<sup>2</sup> See Robb, C. S. (1995) *Ethical Value: An ethical approach to economics and sex* Boston, MA: Beacon Press pp.156-159

<sup>3</sup> See Ellison, M. M. (1996) *Erotic justice: A liberating ethic of sexuality* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press pp.30-58; Harrison, B. W. (1983) *Our right to choose: Toward a new ethic of abortion* Boston, MA: Beacon Press; Gudorf, C. E. (1994) *Body, sex and pleasure: Reconstructing Christian sexual ethics* Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press pp.24-50; Jordan, M. (2002) *The ethics of sex* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing pp.163-168

<sup>4</sup> Peterson-Iyer has argued that the feminist moral norm of 'right relationship' as mutuality/reciprocity, which requires relationships to be characterized by nonsubjection and equal regard, should be applied to the institutional practice of prostitution. See Peterson-Iyer, K. (1998) 'Prostitution: a feminist ethical analysis' *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 14 (2) (Fall) pp.19-44.

What feminist theologies offer to the consideration of power dynamics in relational encounters is an appreciation of how as a relational concept mutuality is oftentimes subordinated to other ethical norms. For instance, feminist theologians critique the notion of sacrifice for the mutual good of all as a praxis that only perpetuates a hierarchical framework wherein some persons end up being more mutual than others. Marchal argues, when mutuality is paired with sacrifice this tends to result in an uneven distribution of sacrifice such that women in particular suffer a disproportionate deficit in true mutuality in the cause of the mutual good of all.<sup>1</sup> What feminist theologians attempt to do is to deconstruct models of mutuality that have been subjugating in effect even though liberating in their rhetoric.

One of the most significant feminist thinkers in this regard has been Carter Heyward whose work brings contextual acts of relating into an incisive theological dialogue with the notion of mutuality. For Heyward, mutuality involves being in right relations with the other, respecting that other's integrity and moving beyond sexist, racist, and heterosexist modes of relating.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Heyward sees relation as a term with significant theological overtones: 'the radical connectedness of all reality, in which all parts of the whole are mutually interactive'.<sup>3</sup> This notion of connectedness has profound implications for Heyward's doctrine of God such that 'God' is 'the movement that connects us all'<sup>4</sup>; God is not only in the 'relationality' between us, God is our power in mutual relation, 'the Spirit celebrating mutuality'.<sup>5</sup> From this theological standpoint, Heyward wishes to stress the move beyond a mere interpersonal understanding or even a communal understanding of mutuality, to a cosmic one that sees mutuality as the

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<sup>1</sup> Marchal, J. A. (2005) 'Mutuality rhetorics and feminist interpretation: Examining Philippians and arguing for our lives' *The Bible and Critical Theory* 1 (3) p.17-6

<sup>2</sup> Heyward, C. (1989) *Coming out and relational empowerment: A lesbian feminist theological perspective* (Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies 38) Wellesley MA: Stone Center Press

<sup>3</sup> Heyward, C. (1999) *Saving Jesus from those who are right: Rethinking what it means to be Christian* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.61

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.61

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.65

‘creative basis’ of all life and all parts of reality. Mutuality, then, becomes both the enlivening Spirit of relation and the moral work of all creatures.<sup>1</sup>

The notion of ‘beginning in relation’ is not only the fundamental unit of Heyward’s work, it is also where mutuality is most significant in terms of its existential depth. Specifically, the notion that, ‘the experience of relation is fundamental and constitutive of human being’<sup>2</sup>, points to a radical understanding of agency, power, and ambiguity. In terms of agency, she argues that, ‘simply because we are human, we are able to be co-creative agents of redemption’<sup>3</sup>. Power in relation is a power, Heyward argues, that ‘we choose to claim or not.’<sup>4</sup> Mutuality, for Heyward, is the presupposition of our existential state. We are to have confidence not only in its possibility but in the reality of its power.<sup>5</sup>

Heyward’s conception of mutuality as a praxis is Foucauldian in its notion of individual agency having the potential to re-imagine hegemonic discourse. In terms of the biblical motifs of liberation hermeneutics it is a move away from the notion of persons with poor mental health as disenfranchised and disempowered subalterns of society. Heyward’s is a picture of power presupposed already to exist. To speak of mutuality is to speak of power that is inherent, power that should be taken for granted.

Picking up the theme of ambiguity again, Heyward’s concept of power is not only a fundamental of human existence and being, it is also highly unpredictable. This unpredictability is suggested in Heyward’s emphasis of the Markan use of δύναμις (e.g. 6:2b καὶ αἱ δυνάμεις τοιαῦται διὰ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτοῦ γινόμεναι (What deeds of power

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<sup>1</sup> Heyward, C. (1999) *Saving Jesus from those who are right: Rethinking what it means to be Christian* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.62

<sup>2</sup> Heyward, C. (1982) *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* New York, NY: University Press of America p.1

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.2

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.3

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.44

are being done by his hands<sup>1</sup>) to refer to instances of Jesus' use of power in the gospel. Heyward argues that δύναμις is not power which is held or possessed by one individual or another in a binarism of oppressor-oppressed. Rather, it is a power that is always 'a dynamic exchange between and among persons',<sup>2</sup> and a power that may be experienced by others as 'raw power, spontaneous, uncontrollable, and often fearful'.<sup>3</sup> This differs from ἐξουσία (e.g. Mark 11:28 ἐν ποίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ ταῦτα ποιεῖς ἢ τίς σοι ἔδωκεν τὴν ἐξουσίαν ταύτην ἵνα ταῦτα ποιῆς (By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?<sup>4</sup>) which, Heyward argues, is hierarchical and socially licensed.<sup>5</sup> For Heyward δύναμις is a power underneath the authoritative order of external power; a power of sometimes hidden resistance, yet at other times it is a highly provocative and explicit demonstration of power. Indeed, from a Foucauldian perspective, Heyward sees Jesus as a figure who seeks to 're-image' power, 'giving *exousia* to relational *dunamis*'.<sup>6</sup>

Such a power- in-relation is not only unpredictable and in ways subversive to received expressions and recognitions of power, it is also ambiguous to the point where persons in relational encounters share a permeable space of potential transformation. Persons are not only 'immersed in [the] ambiguity, tension, [and] shifting foci'<sup>7</sup> of the other, they are open also to the possibility of ambiguity in the self. Encounters of relational power are truly mutual encounters, where each person is affected by the relational power of the other. For Heyward, this is as true of God as it is for us: 'with us, by us, through us, God

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<sup>1</sup> NRSV translation

<sup>2</sup> Heyward, C. (1982) *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* New York, NY: University Press of America p.47

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.41

<sup>4</sup> NRSV translation

<sup>5</sup> Heyward, C. (1982) *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* New York, NY: University Press of America p.41

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.42

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p.159

lives, God becomes, God changes...'<sup>1</sup> What Heyward is saying here about power relations is that mutuality requires persons to be always open to change<sup>2</sup>: 'a dynamic relational dance in which each nurtures and is nurtured by the other in her time of need.'<sup>3</sup>

Overall, then, with Heyward's descriptions of the praxis of mutuality as δύναμις, the reciprocal negotiation of power in between persons, and with the fluid and ambiguous impacts of such relational dynamics, this particular framing of the praxis of mutuality offers much to the theological imagination for reading biblical texts and re-thinking relational contexts. To see power as inherent in relational dynamics is to see it in the Foucauldian sense: always up for grabs. Furthermore, Heyward's notion of power as relation adds to the consideration of the relational encounters of biblical characters and subsequently to how these textual encounters might speak to contextual relational dynamics of persons with poor mental health. It offers an expanded view of such individuals whose agency in texts and contexts should not be easily dismissed. Indeed, what Heyward's theology of relating points to is the potentially transformative aspect of the praxis of mutuality.

Moreover, in terms of the fundamental deficit of explanatory power as to how resistive agency might operate within networks of relational dynamics that I have noted in both liberation hermeneutics and in Eiesland's theology of disability, Heyward's work offers some movement forward with her notion of the praxis of mutuality as sometimes hidden

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<sup>1</sup> Heyward, C. (1982) *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* New York, NY: University Press of America p.9

<sup>2</sup> For Heyward, one of the most well-known instances of this is in her exploration of the relationship and boundaries between her therapist and herself. See for instance, Heyward, C. (1994) 'Boundaries or barriers?' *Christian Century* 111 (18) (June 1-8) p.579. This notion of a mutual transformation which lies at the heart of the relational encounters informed by mutuality is one which is seen in numerous other arenas where such boundary blurring is perceived as more permissible. See for example, Crain and Seymour's study of ethnography and ministry where the notion of transformation being a mutual experience for minister and ministered-to is seen as crucial to a healthy and life-giving congregational culture, Crain, M. A. & Seymour, J. L. (1996) 'The ethnographer as minister: Ethnographic research in ministry' *Religious Education* 91 (3) (Summer) p.300.

<sup>3</sup> Heyward, C. (1979) 'Coming Out: Journey Without Maps' *Christianity and Crisis* 39 (June) p.156

and sometimes public and highly provocative. That said, due to Heyward's description of δύναμις as an uncontrollable and spontaneous power the hope of being able to describe how such an agency of resistance might operate is somewhat mitigated by its unpredictability. Thus, even with the notions taken from Eiesland and Heyward's work that have understood mutuality as a praxis as centring on the ambiguity of embodiment, the appreciation of difference, the spontaneity of sometimes hidden and sometimes open shows of power, in the end, what remains fundamentally lacking is a fuller appreciation of the strategic element to relational encounters. I would argue that such a strategic focus is necessary for this dissertation's stated hope of utilising mutuality as a heuristic for real life relational dynamics of poor mental health. In other words, unless the textual analysis of relational dynamics is robust in its power awareness, any reflections that might be offered from text to context will be limited in value.

Therefore, in order to explore mutuality more robustly as a praxis, I now turn to a final and more strategic paradigm: postcolonial criticism. Whilst in many ways postcolonial criticism reflects much of the sort of boundary-defying mutuality described above, it also enables a more incisive analysis of the strategies of agency and resistance of the praxis of mutuality, which I believe opens the way for both an aspirational and a strategic conception of mutuality.

## **2.2 Postcolonial praxes**

### *Co-creating Third Space*

Broadly there have been two approaches toward defining postcolonial criticism. One approach has retained the hyphen, with post-colonial used to refer to a temporal and a socio-psychological reality.<sup>1</sup> Such a term refers to struggles set within geopolitical

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<sup>1</sup> See Segovia, F. F. (2000) 'Interpreting beyond borders: Postcolonial studies and diasporic studies in biblical criticism' in Segovia, F. F. (ed.) *Interpreting beyond borders: The Bible and Postcolonialism* 3 Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.12

contexts of colonial rule such as the French in Algeria or the British in India. Within such contexts, post-colonial struggles might be defined as struggles for liberation after the achievement of political independence.<sup>1</sup> The other approach uses the term postcolonial (without the hyphen) and signifies a discourse of reactive resistance articulated by the 'colonised' who critically interrogate dominant knowledge systems.<sup>2</sup> That is, its concern is, argues Segovia, to trace the relations between centre and periphery, and to re-articulate conceptions of those relations.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as Young states, postcolonial criticism attempts to undo the ideological heritage of colonised forms of knowledge via a 'decentring of intellectual sovereignty' hitherto held by one group over another.<sup>4</sup> In this second paradigm, relational dynamics are traced in struggles for power in contexts which are 'colonising' as they result in the subjugation of knowledge and persons.<sup>5</sup>

It is this non-territorial conception of postcolonial criticism that I utilise in this dissertation's exploration of the re-imagination of the relational dynamics of poor mental health in contemporary North-Atlantic societies through the reading of biblical texts. Within this postcolonial paradigm, whilst 'diasporic or intercultural' postcolonial thinkers such as Segovia<sup>6</sup>, and 'transcultural' ones such as Spivak and Bhabha<sup>7</sup>, speak of border-crossing in global, colonised, and/or transcultural terms, I am interested in the transgressive boundary crossings of shared relational encounters. That is, I am interested in exploring in this dissertation the ways in which the re-articulation of identity, the

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<sup>1</sup> See Young, R. J. (2001) *Postcolonialism: An historical introduction* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.11

<sup>2</sup> See Sugirtharajah, R. S. (2002) *Postcolonial criticism and Biblical Interpretation* Oxford: Oxford University Press p.23

<sup>3</sup> See Segovia, F. F. (1999) 'Notes towards refining the postcolonial optic' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 73 p.103

<sup>4</sup> Young, R. J. (2001) *Postcolonialism: An historical introduction* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.65

<sup>5</sup> Moore has listed a number of 'interrelated relia' that fall within the 'orbit' of the second form of postcolonial thought, including imperialism, Orientalism, universalism, resistance, assimilation, creolization, colonial mimicry, hybridity, and the subaltern marginalization among others, all 'intersected by the ubiquitous determinants of language, gender, race, ethnicity, and class' (see Moore, S. D. (2006) *Postcolonialism and the New Testament* Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press p.9).

<sup>6</sup> See Samuel, S. (2007) *A postcolonial reading of Mark's story of Jesus* London & New York: T&T Clark International pp.21-22 for the designation of Segovia's work as such.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p.26 for the same designation.



exercise of agency, and the practice of dialogue might push at the boundaries of relational dynamics constructed under hegemonic discourse. Thus, the postcolonial nature of praxis that I am interested in exploring is the praxis that renegotiates relational dynamics in the Foucauldian attempt to re-inscribe the rules of the formation of hegemonic discourse. And so, with particular reference to the praxis of mutuality, what I am now interested in exploring is how this second form of postcolonial criticism might offer a strategically robust paradigm to complement the aspirational conceptions of mutuality explored earlier in this chapter.

To frame the praxis of mutuality, I have chosen the work of Homi Bhabha because of its strategic edge. At first sight, Bhabha's conception of relational encounters is similar to Heyward's notion of power as relation, in that Bhabha views relational dynamics as occurring in spaces within which and upon which agents act, as well as spaces which act upon them in the occurrence of the operation of what Bhabha calls a *Third Space*.<sup>1</sup> This *Third Space* is not neutral; it is a space wherein identity and agency are malleable such that human subjects in relational encounters are open to self-change. However, Bhabha's work speaks from a different place than Heyward's work: the experience and agency of the colonised person, which he characterises as resistive survival,<sup>2</sup> a praxis of 'dealing with or living with and through contradiction and then using that process for social agency'.<sup>3</sup> It is not, then, the commonality of the encounter that Bhabha emphasises, it is the difference.

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<sup>1</sup> Bhabha, H. (1994) 'The commitment to theory' in *The Location of Culture* London & New York: Routledge p.37

<sup>2</sup> Moore-Gilbert, B. (2000) 'Spivak and Bhabha' in Schwarz, H. & Ray, S. (eds.) *A companion to Postcolonial Studies* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.452

<sup>3</sup> Bhabha, H. (1995) 'Translator translated, W. J. T. Mitchell talks to Homi Bhabha' *Artform* (March) p.80. Elsewhere, Bhabha describes this agency of survival as 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' wherein individuals learn how to translate between and across cultures in order to survive. See Bhabha, H. & Comaroff, J. (2002) 'Speaking of Postcoloniality, in the continuous present: A Conversation' in Goldberg, D. C. & Quayson, A. (eds.) *Relocating Postcolonialism* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.24

For Bhabha, relational encounters occur at a site of a negotiation between persons termed a 'space of translation.' This space exists at the boundary between persons, and 'from [it] something begins its presencing'.<sup>1</sup> That something, for Bhabha is repetition. As with Heyward's description of relational power as an existential constitutive element of power in relation, Bhabha wishes to foreground the issue of power and authority and explore the dynamics of its operation within relational dynamics in a different subversive way. In this regard, the notion of repetition demonstrates how the colonial or subjugating presence of the so-called knowing subject is not authoritative, but undermined in the very act of its enunciation: 'The colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference.'<sup>2</sup>

What Bhabha is describing here is that this relational *Third Space*, wherein power is negotiated, is a space that does not leave the subjecthood of persons engaging in the relational encounter the same from beginning to end. The voice of one is echoed; the gaze of the other is returned. And what is returned to the other person is both the same, a repetition, and different. It is this very repetition that makes the relational encounter in the shared between space one which prevents the so-called knowing subject from having the power, 'to signify, to negate, to initiate historical desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse'.<sup>3</sup> What is present in this space is the struggle with what is known in postcolonial parlance as *hybridity*<sup>4</sup> wherein encounters occur and

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<sup>1</sup> Bhabha, H. (1994) 'Introduction' in *The Location of Culture* London & New York: Routledge p.5

<sup>2</sup> Bhabha, H. (1994) 'Signs taken for wonders' in *The Location of Culture* London & New York: Routledge p.107-8

<sup>3</sup> Bhabha, H. (1994) 'The commitment to theory' in *The Location of Culture* London & New York: Routledge p.31

<sup>4</sup> Hybridity is a central concept in postcolonial thought, understood as the 'interdependence of persons in the dialogical relational encounter and the mutual construction of their subjectivities' (Ashcroft, B. *et al* (2000) *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* London & New York: Routledge p. 118).

leave a 'resistant trace', a 'stain' of the subject being encountered as a sign of resistance.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, encounters in *Third Space* hybridise those who encounter within it.<sup>2</sup>

To clarify this, it might be helpful to consider a specific example from Bhabha's work. In his essay entitled 'Signs taken for wonders', Bhabha describes a missionary's attempt to convert a group of villagers outside Delhi, subverted in the renegotiation of the terms of conversion by the villagers. Facing the 'authoritative gaze' of the missionary, the villagers resisted conversion on the grounds that the word of God came to them from the mouth of a meat-eater and not a vegetarian.<sup>3</sup> The villagers, in their demand for a 'vegetarian Bible', re-imagined the rules of colonial discourse thus estranging the basis of its authority, and in this act of resistance, 'the dominated' effectually 'contaminated' the dominant discourse with their own suppressed knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

For Bhabha, it is this 'splitting', this space that opens up within and between one and the other, that leads to the possibility of resistance. Bhabha sees this form of resistance as a form of subversion which is incremental and often liminal, wherein the 'small differences', and 'slight alterations and displacements' become 'often the most significant elements in a process of subversion and transformation'.<sup>5</sup> They are significant because these slight alterations produce 'supplemental positions' which highlight the

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<sup>1</sup> Bhabha, H. (1994) 'The commitment to theory' in *The Location of Culture* London & New York: Routledge p.49

<sup>2</sup> Bhabha's notion of sharing space and resistance within it is very different then to the form of resistance which at the conceptual level at least, liberation hermeneutics argues for. That is, the hybridity of the *Third Space* is not a generalised, global category which de-historicizes and de-localises encounters. To the contrary, it is a notion which seeks to emphasise the local and particular nature of power relations and resistance. Bhabha's rendering of relational 'space' is similar then to the discourse analysis of Foucault who argues that it is, 'only the historical contents [which] allow us to rediscover the ruptural effects of conflict and struggle that the order imposed by functionalist or systematising thought is designed to mask' (see Foucault, M. (1976) 'Two Lectures' in Gordon, C. (ed.) *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977* New York, NY: Pantheon Books pp.78-108 (original work 1971) p.82).

<sup>3</sup> Bhabha, H. (1994) 'Signs taken for wonders' in *The Location of Culture* London & New York: Routledge p.118

<sup>4</sup> Kapoor, I. (2003) 'Acting in a tight spot: Homi Bhabha's Postcolonial politics' *New Political Science* 25 (4) (December) p.564

<sup>5</sup> Bhabha, H. (1995) 'Translator translated, W. J. T. Mitchell talks to Homi Bhabha' *Artform* (March) p.82

incommensurability of the colonial project of knowing 'the colonised'.<sup>1</sup> Such supplemental agencies described through Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* include praxes such as hybridity, mimicry, ambiguity, and sly civility.<sup>2</sup>

The question remains as to whether 'slight alterations' are enough of a strategic edge for such postcolonial praxes to be effective. One of the most significant critiques of Bhabha's work is that it lacks political efficacy. In other words, his insights are somewhat disconnected from lived reality. Some critics focus on political realities, and the weakness of *Third Space* resistive praxes in their relation to the 'material exclusions, repressions, and subjugations' of lived contexts<sup>3</sup>, questioning whether whilst hybridity might be a 'critical aspect of subversion', it might not be a 'sufficient agent of colonial failure'.<sup>4</sup> Along a related line of critique, it is argued that Bhabha's notion of hybridity conflates the psychic identities of the 'coloniser and the colonised' while discounting the 'crucial material differences' between them.<sup>5</sup> The same sort of critique is made in relation to how gender<sup>6</sup> and class<sup>7</sup> might complicate Bhabha's models of identity and cultural interaction. Indeed, for Bhabha, apart from some anecdotal reflections in *The Location of Culture*, most notably in the essay 'Signs taken for wonders', there is little evidence of how effective hybridity is as a resistive product of colonial milieus.<sup>8</sup> These critiques are significant, and they focus on the challenge that much postcolonial criticism is susceptible to: namely that

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<sup>1</sup> See Kapoor, I. (2003) 'Acting in a tight spot: Homi Bhabha's Postcolonial politics' *New Political Science* 25 (4) (December) p.564

<sup>2</sup> See Bhabha, H. (1994) *The Location of Culture* London & New York: Routledge

<sup>3</sup> Goldberg, D. T. (2000) 'Heterogeneity and Hybridity: Colonial legacy, postcolonial heresy' in Schwarz, H. & Ray, S. (eds.) *A companion to Postcolonial Studies* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.82

<sup>4</sup> McClintock, A. (1995) *Imperial Leather: Race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest* New York, NY: Falmer Press pp.66-7

<sup>5</sup> See JanMohamed, A. (1985) 'The economy of Manichean Allegory: The function of racial difference in colonist literature' in Gates, H. L. Jr. (ed.) *Race, Writing, and Difference* London & Chicago: Chicago University Press pp.78-106

<sup>6</sup> See Holmlund, C. (1991) 'Displacing the limits of difference: Gender and Colonialism in Edward Said and Homi Bhabha's theoretical models in Marguerite Duras's Experimental Films' *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 1 (3) pp.1-22

<sup>7</sup> Moore-Gilbert, B. (2000) 'Spivak and Bhabha' in Schwarz, H. and Ray, S. (ed.) *A companion to Postcolonial Studies* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.460

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p.459

its rhetorical engagement with colonialism is in danger of not being able to relate to the lived experiences of colonialism as material, political, and embodied.

To dismiss Bhabha's work here for its lack of political efficacy would be not to recognise the strategic element of his work. For, whilst it might be argued that Bhabha's work does not address the embodied political realities of power, differentials of class, gender, and economic disparity, it can equally be retorted that it is the strategic nature of repetition and mimicry, hybridity, and sly civility, what might be termed *Third Space* praxes, that is most suited to these embodied realities. The strategic nature of these praxes is that they are not praxes of open defiance but strategies employed under the guise of colonial rule. James Scott's work on hidden transcripts of resistance is informative here. It argues that in the interests of safety and success, the dominated have tended to prefer to disguise resistance within the 'public transcripts' of domination.<sup>1</sup> The possibility of knowing how effective such hidden resistance might be, therefore, is limited by the nature of the public transcript of the dominant and the need of the dominated not to call attention to any signs of resistance.<sup>2</sup> Thus, as Scott points out, 'unless one can penetrate the official transcript of both subordinates and elites, a reading of the social evidence will almost always represent a confirmation of the status quo in hegemonic terms'.<sup>3</sup> That said, there are a number of studies that explore the use of 'hidden' forms of resistance in a diverse range of settings that might offer some corroboration of the sort of agency Bhabha's work describes.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Scott, J. C. (1995) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press p.86. The specific proposition that Scott wishes to put forward is that subordinate groups have 'learned to clothe their resistance and defiance in ritualisms of subordination that serve both to disguise their purposes and to provide them with a ready route of retreat that may soften the consequences of a possible failure' (p.96).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.89

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.90

<sup>4</sup> See for example: Rahman, A. (2001) *Women and microcredit in rural Bangladesh: An anthropological study of Grameen bank lending* Boulder, CO: Westview Press pp. 42-44; Loew, P. (1997) 'Hidden Transcripts in the Chippewa Treaty Rights Struggle: a Twice Told Story Race, Resistance, and the Politics of Power' *American Indian Quarterly* 21 (4) pp.713-728; Misago C. (1997) 'Women's hidden transcripts

Bhabha's *Third Space* strategies of resistance might in truth be highly effective even if they do not appear to be evident. Indeed, if the 'hidden transcript' is 'a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant'<sup>1</sup> then one would not expect such strategies to be easily recognisable as having political efficacy. It is at this more submerged and even hidden level of resistive praxis that Bhabha's *Third Space* postcolonial imagination operates.

However, an even more serious critique for Bhabha's thought, is that it appears only to conceive of agency within the premise of hegemony and subjection. It has been argued that there is no question in Bhabha's paradigm of challenging authority 'from outside' colonial discourse, or as Benita Parry has put it: 'no alternative texts are supposed to have been written'.<sup>2</sup> That is, with Heyward's notion of power as relation in mind, there is no innate or pre-existent δύναμις from which agency might be expressed. This seeming limiting of agency within the premise of hegemony not only limits the role of the 'colonised' to that of a reactive counter to prevailing discourse and never producers of discourse in their own right, it also seems to limit the imaginative scope of *Third Space* praxes in re-imagining postcolonial space into being.

Bhabha's notion of agency can be seen as merely a reduction of the voices counter to the dominant discourse to the level of 'sly civility'.<sup>3</sup> If such a limit is extrapolated to the

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about abortion in Brazil' *Social Science and Medicine* 44 (12) pp.1833-1845; Levi, J. (1999) 'Hidden Transcripts among the Rarámuri: Culture, Resistance, and Interethnic Relations in Northern Mexico' *American Ethnologist* February 1999, 26 (1) pp.90-113.

<sup>1</sup> Scott, J. C. (1995) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press p.xii

<sup>2</sup> Parry, B. (1995) 'Problems in current theories of colonial discourse' in Ashcroft, B. (ed) *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* London & New York: Routledge p. 43. Quoting Frantz Fanon, Parry argues that postcolonial discourse has not taken up the challenge of taking up an oppositional discourse: 'I am not a prisoner of history; it is only by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle of my freedom'. See Fanon, F. (1967) *Black skin, White masks* Weidenfeld, NY: Grove Press (original work 1952) p. 231

<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, widening the scope of this critique beyond Bhabha alone and to postcolonial thinkers in general, it has been argued that postcolonial critique neglects the significance of pre-colonial thought and

relational dynamics of poor mental health there is a sense that Bhabha's work encourages an archetype of 'colonialism': discourses of mental health that minimise the identity, agency, and dialogical voice of persons with poor mental health. The problem with such a limiting view of relational dynamics is that whilst indeed they are embedded in hegemony, if the agency practised within them is only to be viewed as a reactive survival, then the potential operation of mutuality as a more positive and even transformative praxis, as suggested by the work of Eiesland and Heyward, is seemingly precluded.

Yet the question that is being begged here is whether Bhabha's notion of liminal postcolonial praxis does in fact preclude a more hopeful notion of praxis. For, whilst Bhabha leaves it unclear whether resistive agency can be consciously programmatic or purposive,<sup>1</sup> I would argue that his work still has something of an invitational element to it. Persons, albeit perceived only to operate within hegemonic discourse, are invited by virtue of their colonial hybridity to a postcolonial praxis of resistance that is open to the possibility of self-change and structural transformation, if at an incremental rate.

Indeed, specific to those who consider the potential impact of Bhabha's work within the field of psychiatry, this invitational element is described as an opportunity for 'psychiatric others' to 'sing their world into existence',<sup>2</sup> to become 'ontological architects' who 'create, shape and 'hold' space for healing'.<sup>3</sup> Identity, agency, and dialogue are in a

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agency (see Vaughan, M. (1994) 'Colonial Discourse Theory and African History, or has Postmodernism Passed Us By' *Social Dynamics: A Journal of the Centre for African Studies University of Cape Town* 20 (2) p.5). In terms of postcolonial biblical criticism, R.S. Sugirtharajah is one of the few thinkers who is alert to this caveat and attempts to draw attention in the postcolonial paradigm to texts, interpretations, and praxes which pre-date colonialism. See for example, Sugirtharajah, R. S. (2001) *The Bible and the Third world: Pre-Colonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial encounters* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

<sup>1</sup> Moore-Gilbert, B. (1997) *Postcolonial Theory* London: Verso p.38

<sup>2</sup> Fox, N. J. (1999) *Beyond Health: Postmodernism and Embodiment* London: Free Association Books p.130

<sup>3</sup> Watson, J. (1999) *Postmodern Nursing and beyond* Toronto, ON: Churchill Livingstone p.257

sense always in a process of becoming,<sup>1</sup> and in this becoming, looking for 'new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking'.<sup>2</sup> Bhabha's *Third Space*, then, is interpreted as a space of becoming, of transformation,<sup>3</sup> a mode of articulation in a productive space capable of 'engendering new possibility'.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, once persons in relational encounters enter into such a *Third Space*, Bhabha himself has argued that, 'we're in a different space, we're making different presumptions and mobilizing emergent, unanticipated forms of historical agency'.<sup>5</sup>

Referencing Bhabha's more recent work on migration that speaks of 'postcolonial contramodernity'<sup>6</sup> as a description of the colonised migrant within dominant culture both interrogating and hybridising that culture's current narratives of self-representation and self-legitimation,<sup>7</sup> I would like to highlight his work of agency beyond only a resistive survival in the face of hegemony. In this more recent work, whilst retaining his predilection for the incommensurability of migrant and dominant cultures<sup>8</sup>, Bhabha does stress that the relationship between the two is not entirely antagonistic. That is, within the ambivalence of the meeting of cultures in the migrant experience there is some measure of desire, such that migrant and native 'both are in some ways mutually in need of each other'.<sup>9</sup> This notion of mutual need is also discernible in how Bhabha describes his own notion of hybridity in *Third Space*, not as an identity as such, but as an

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<sup>1</sup> Wilkin, P. E. (2001) 'From medicalization to hybridization: a postcolonial discourse for psychiatric nurses' *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* 8 p.119

<sup>2</sup> Rorty, R. (1980) *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.360

<sup>3</sup> Goldberg, D. T. (2000) 'Heterogeneity and Hybridity: Colonial legacy, postcolonial heresy' in Schwarz, H. & Ray, S. (eds.) *A companion to Postcolonial Studies* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.83

<sup>4</sup> Meredith, P. (1998) 'Hybridity in the Third Space: Re-thinking Bi-cultural politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand', paper presented to Te Oru Rangahau Maori Research and Development Conference 7-9 July 1998, Massey University, Aotearoa/New Zealand (<http://lianz.waikato.ac.nz/PAPERS/paul/hybridity.pdf>) p.3

<sup>5</sup> Bhabha, H. (1995) 'Translator translated, W. J. T. Mitchell talks to Homi Bhabha' *Artform* (March) p.83

<sup>6</sup> See Bhabha, H. (1997) 'Front lines/border posts' *Critical Inquiry* 23 pp.431-459

<sup>7</sup> Moore-Gilbert, B. (2000) 'Spivak and Bhabha' in Schwarz, H. & Ray, S. (eds.) *A companion to Postcolonial Studies* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.460

<sup>8</sup> One of the defining features of Bhabha's collection of essays *The Location of Culture* (see Bhabha, H. (1994) *The Location of Culture* London & New York: Routledge).

<sup>9</sup> Moore-Gilbert, B. (2000) 'Spivak and Bhabha' in Schwarz, H. and Ray, S. (ed.) *A companion to Postcolonial Studies* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.461



identification. That is, hybridity is a 'process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness', in such a way that each bears the feelings and practices of the other.<sup>1</sup>

Summarizing the points of Bhabha's work this way: the *Third Space* is a space of becoming and of transformation which engenders new possibility and unanticipated forms of historical agency wherein each is in mutual need of the other, bearing the feelings and practices of the other, Bhabha's own notions of resistive agency are hybrid. On one hand, Bhabha's work seems to limit the notion of resistive agency to relate to struggles for survival within the power interstices of hegemonic discourse. On the other hand, Bhabha invites more than being tied to this archetype. It is this invitation to more that contributes to my own conception of mutuality as a postcolonial praxis, utilised throughout the rest of this dissertation, as both resistive and potentially transformational.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

Mutuality is a concept that to an extent evades definition. In the several paradigms considered, it emerges variously as a praxis focused on relationship, having room for difference, valuing interdependence, transgressive of interpersonal boundaries, valuing the potential of reciprocity, ambiguity, connectedness, and relational power between persons that is open to change in the self and in the other. My own definition of mutuality is as a postcolonial praxis that is resistive and potentially transformative of hegemonic relational dynamics via the renegotiation of perceptions of identity, representations of agency, and instances of dialogical exchange. This praxis serves as a

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<sup>1</sup> Bhabha, H. (1990) in Rutherford, J. (ed.) 'The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha' *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* London: Lawrence & Wishart p.211

reminder that those whom Spivak has called the othered<sup>1</sup> agents of colonial power are also persons who have legitimate identity, agency, and dialogical potential.

As a praxis, in this chapter I explored the need for a strategic edge to mutuality's operation in hegemonic relational dynamics. I argued that such an edge could be found in the work of Homi Bhabha and his conception of *Third Space* praxes. There are two key strategic elements that I take from Bhabha's presentation of such praxes for the analysis of mutuality. The first key strategic element is that mutuality is somewhat submerged or supplemental to colonial power. That is, as I argued in relation to James C. Scott's work, the exercise of mutuality as a postcolonial praxis might reasonably be assumed to be more hidden within the hegemonic structuring of relational dynamics rather than in outright opposition to them. That said, the theological imagination of Carter Heyward, specifically her conception of the praxis of mutuality as sometimes hidden yet sometimes openly provocative, should also be kept in mind. The aspirational element to mutuality needs to be retained within its composite nature as a postcolonial praxis of resistance and transformation. Within relational encounters I posit here there are occasions when open and defiant agency is risked in the renegotiation of relational space by the othered person.

The second strategic element of Bhabha's work is that it can be assumed that through the lens of postcolonial criticism mutuality will emerge as one praxis in operation among several. That is, I expect that postcolonial praxes of hybridity, mimicry, ambiguity, sly civility, and other such incremental and supplemental forms of agency will be present and interact with the praxis of mutuality. It is here that the crucial distinction between the core concept of this dissertation and other postcolonial praxes described herein is made clear. The critical expansion that mutuality as a praxis offers to postcolonial

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<sup>1</sup> Spivak, G. (1995) 'Can the Subaltern speak?' in Ashcroft, B. *et al* (eds.) *The Postcolonial studies reader* London & New York: Routledge p.24 (original work 1988)

criticism is to move it from the conception of agency within colonial spaces as only reactive survival operating under the assumption of hegemonic relational dynamics toward a more positive and hopeful praxis.

Mutuality as a postcolonial praxis is presented in this dissertation as a way of not only viewing relational exchanges as struggles for survival, but also as a way of re-imagining them as aspirational encounters of potential transformation. Viewing the role of agency through such a praxis is to see persons entering these relational encounters resistively imagining as if a different 'set of rules' for discursive formation existed. Therefore, the struggle for relational dynamics is no longer seen as only the struggle over colonial spaces, but also in the Foucauldian sense as the re-imagining of those spaces as postcolonial ones. Reading postcolonial agency as both an agency of resistive survival *and* as an aspirational transformation is to radically re-imagine relational dynamics *within* the reality of discourse and power. Indeed, returning to how mutuality might be seen to interact with other postcolonial praxes, I posit that it is this aspirational element to mutuality that might make other postcolonial praxes more effective as resistive praxes. This is not to suggest that the praxis of mutuality will somehow enable the postcolonial agent to move past hegemonic power struggles, rather I postulate that the fundamental benefit of the praxis of mutuality is its ability to enable the renegotiation of the terms of hegemonic discourse as they occur.

Whilst a person might be understood to practice mutuality unilaterally by reasserting their rights to identification, agency, and dialogue, the full form of the praxis of mutuality is multilateral in nature with an inherent reach towards and inclusion of the other. That is both the self and the other are recognised as mutual partners in the relational encounter, in a form of relating wherein each has room for the difference that the other embodies.

The praxis of mutuality understood as a renegotiation of power may not suddenly transform relations between persons; rather, in the Bhabhian sense, the praxis of mutuality may be an incremental one that enables the transformation of relational dynamics only gradually. Thus, in reading the relational dynamics of encounters within biblical texts, I am not approaching the texts with a teleological hope that this praxis will be seen to be an agent of colonial collapse or even of relational reconciliation. Rather, I am approaching the textual presence of the praxis of mutuality with an open mind as to how effective such a praxis will prove to be in each case.

In presenting the significance of mutuality as a praxis of resistance and transformation it is worth noting that basing this presentation on an appreciation of the aspirational potential of Bhabha's work, Bhabha himself is wary of placing an ethics and agency of survival within the 'uplifting, tall stories' of progress and liberalism's celebration of cultural diversity. Bhabha's concern is that this celebratory move is in danger of losing agencies of survival within a discourse which reifies the teleology of the normative principles of such a liberalised society.<sup>1</sup> Whilst wishing to take heed of that warning, and recognising this critique's similarity to critiques I offered of liberation hermeneutics in Chapter One, I also wish to contend with Bhabha that only speaking of agency as survival runs the risk of losing sight of the potential for an aspirational agency of transformation. I believe that in seeking to emphasise the possibility of a *Third Space* agency of both resistive survival and aspirational transformation I take up something of Bhabha's own hopefulness, as stated in one of his most recent interviews, that our own 21<sup>st</sup> century transmigrational milieu is one of 'emergent peoples entering that transitional movement that might lead them to a difficult, yet necessary, freedom'.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bhabha, H. & Comaroff, J. (2002) 'Speaking of Postcoloniality, in the continuous present: A Conversation' in Goldberg, D. C. & Quayson, A. (eds.) *Relocating Postcolonialism* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.31

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 46

It is in being hopeful in my view of hegemonic relational dynamics that I wish to approach the last and most significant feature of this dissertation's exploration of mutuality as a postcolonial praxis of resistance and transformation: the group readers who have known what it is to experience hegemonic relational encounters in their own lives. The final stage, then, in setting the stage for this work of contextual biblical criticism is to establish a reading method that will most suitably enable a close reading of relational dynamics as I have described them in this chapter. Thus, the reading strategies of this dissertation ideally will reflect room for difference, ambiguity, and agonisms of power in the analyses of the relational dynamics between characters in the texts. With this in mind, I explore in the next chapter the possibility of mutuality as a heuristic for this dissertation's reading method. I will argue that mutuality can be used to influence not only how the text might be approached theoretically, but that it may also be used to influence who might count as readers and interlocutors of the text. With the notion of mutuality at the forefront of a discussion of biblical hermeneutics, Chapter Three presents the possibility of reading biblical texts with others as a way of listening to, for, and with the voices of persons with poor mental health whose readership I seek in this work both to learn from and to question.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**DIALOGUE AND DIFFERENCE**  
*MUTUALITY AND BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS*

*This chapter seeks to explore the hermeneutical approach of this dissertation located within two specific foci of biblical criticism and to relate these foci to this dissertation's core concept of mutuality. First, I locate this dissertation's hermeneutic within postcolonial biblical criticism, and explore how the application of the more theory-driven strand of this form of biblical criticism relates to my approach to the Gospel of Mark and to the concept of mutuality. Second, I locate this dissertation within dialogical biblical criticism, and in particular consider how the power dynamics inherent in the relationship between facilitator and readers correspond to the concept of mutuality. At the end of the chapter, in light of a critical analysis of both postcolonial and dialogical biblical hermeneutics, I present the particularities of my own hermeneutic for this dissertation.*

**3.1 Postcolonial biblical criticism**

*Strands of hermeneutical interest*

Chapter Two explored this dissertation's core concept of mutuality as a postcolonial praxis within the paradigm of postcolonial criticism, and defined mutuality as the praxis of resisting and potentially transforming hegemonic relational dynamics via the renegotiation of perceptions of identity, representations of agency, and instances of dialogical exchange. Taking this core concept of mutuality into this chapter's exploration of reading method I first consider how mutuality's location within the broad milieu of postcolonial criticism relates to this dissertation's use of postcolonial biblical criticism as a way of preparing to apply mutuality to the relational dynamics of texts.

A number of predominant strands of postcolonial biblical criticism have been identified in biblical studies. The first is described by Sugirtharajah as being interested in the colonial contexts of the production of biblical texts, with postcolonial critiques of those

texts leading to a reevaluation of colonial ideology, stigmatisation, and negative portrayals embedded in content, plot, and characterisation. This form of postcolonial biblical criticism also attempts to 'resurrect lost voices' which have been distorted or silenced in the canonised text.<sup>1</sup> Moore has suggested that this strand might better be labelled 'empire studies' with its sustained focus on empire in the interpretations such scholars offer of texts.<sup>2</sup>

A second strand has an interest in 'the once-colonised to produce knowledge of their own'.<sup>3</sup> In other words, as well as having a deconstructionist tendency, postcolonial biblical criticism emphasises the reconstruction or re-reading of texts, attempting to remain sensitive to various subaltern elements hitherto submerged in those texts. Moore argues that this strand of postcolonial hermeneutical interest emanates to an extent from more recent liberation hermeneutics which might be grouped together as contextual or vernacular hermeneutics, focusing on 'recovering, reasserting, and reinscribing identities, cultures and traditions'<sup>4</sup> such as the Korean biblical hermeneutics emanating from what is called *Minjung Theology*<sup>5</sup>. Also related to these approaches is a strand which Samuel has labelled as a 'diasporic intercultural model' which recognises the plurality of readers and readings of texts.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sugirtharajah, R. S. (1999) 'A brief memorandum on Postcolonialism and biblical studies' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 73 p.4

<sup>2</sup> Moore argues Richard Horsley to be the leading figure in this particular cluster (see Moore, S. D. (2006) *Postcolonialism and the New Testament* Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press pp.17-19).

<sup>3</sup> Sugirtharajah, R. S. (1999) 'A brief memorandum on Postcolonialism and biblical studies' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 73 p.4

<sup>4</sup> Moore, S. D. (2006) *Postcolonialism and the New Testament* Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press pp.14-15

<sup>5</sup> Minjung is made up of two Chinese characters that mean 'the common people' or the masses who are subjugated or ruled. Often subsumed in historical discourse, Minjung Theology reclaims the minjung as protagonists of their own history. For example Suh Nam Dong's reading reverses the primacy of Jesus in the biblical text: 'The subject matter of Minjung Theology is not Jesus but the minjung... Jesus is the means for understanding the minjung correctly, rather than the concept of minjung being the instrument for understanding Jesus' (Suh Nam Dong (1995) 'Historical references for a theology of Minjung' in *Minjung Theology: People as the subjects of history* London: Zed Press p.160 cited in Kwok, Pui-Lan (1995) *Discovering the Bible in the non-biblical world* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.15).

<sup>6</sup> Samuel identifies Fernando Segovia as the leading figure in such work (see Samuel, S. (2007) *A postcolonial reading of Mark's story of Jesus* London & New York: T&T Clark International pp.21-26).

A third strand, interested in the reception of colonial texts, has been pioneered largely by the evolving work of R. S. Sugirtharajah. As one of the protagonists of the evolution of postcolonial biblical criticism, Sugirtharajah has been something of a moving target in biblical studies – with Moore’s clustering of postcolonial biblical criticism identifying him as a leading proponent of contextual or identity-specific interpretation,<sup>1</sup> and Samuel identifying him as a leading proponent of the ‘resistance/recuperative’ model<sup>2</sup> - it can certainly also be argued that Sugirtharajah has been more interested in recent years in probing the reception history of colonial texts during colonial times, both from a biblical and an extra-biblical perspective.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, he has encouraged an expansion of postcolonial biblical criticism to include studies of the canonisation and translation of biblical texts.<sup>4</sup>

A fourth strand has an interest in extra-biblical postcolonial studies. For some, this has meant pushing at the boundaries of what does and what does not constitute ‘biblical’ studies. For instance, Kwok Pui Lan argues that to read the Bible in Asia requires a dialectical reading between two worlds – the ‘biblical’ and the ‘non-biblical’.<sup>5</sup> This dialectical model of interpretation attempts to shift the emphasis from one scripture to

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<sup>1</sup> Moore, S. D. (2006) *Postcolonialism and the New Testament* Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press pp.14-17

<sup>2</sup> Samuel cites the evolution of the work of Sugirtharajah as exemplary of this approach in its interest in ‘oppositional reading practices’ and Said’s contrapuntal mode of reading (see Samuel, S. (2007) *A postcolonial reading of Mark’s story of Jesus* London & New York: T&T Clark International pp.17-21). See also Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) (2008) *Still at the margins: Biblical scholarship fifteen years after Voices from the Margin* London: T&T Clark.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Sugirtharajah R. S. (2003) *Postcolonial reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible & Doing Theology* London: SCM Press; Sugirtharajah, R. S. (2008) *Troublesome Texts: The Bible in Colonial and Contemporary Culture* Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press; Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) (2009) *Caught Reading Again: Scholars and Their Books* London: SCM Press

<sup>4</sup> See for example the chapters in Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) (2006) *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing pp.255-290; Sugirtharajah, R. S. (2005) *The Bible and Empire: Postcolonial Explorations* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>5</sup> This approach, she argues, means that certain boundaries within biblical studies are transgressed. First, sacrality: the Bible is not sacred alone, but one text among others. Second, canonicity: the Bible is not to be conceived of as a closed system, but is both inclusive and repressive of truth, and subject to expansion via cultural re-reading (cited by Segovia, F. F. (ed.) (2000) ‘Reading-across: Intercultural criticism and textual posture’ in *Interpreting beyond borders: The Bible and Postcolonialism* 3 Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press pp.76-78).



many scriptures, and from one religious narrative to many possible narratives. Whilst this does open up hermeneutical space for reading within biblical texts, space is also opened up exterior to the biblical text in a set of tensions between biblical and other texts. Put another way, it would seem that this sort of creation of hermeneutical space in biblical studies makes it possible and permissible for almost any questions to be asked of and subsequently almost any answers to be given in the interpretation of the Bible, and indeed beyond the Bible. It is a reading strategy that does not seek to privilege participatory space such that only those who fall within certain confessional or ideological boundaries might be 'allowed' to interrogate texts and their readings. Rather, the potential that postcolonial criticism promises is one of a highly participatory, mutual space of textual engagement.<sup>1</sup>

A fifth strand is also interested in extra-biblical sources, this time from within the more theoretical milieu of postcolonial criticism, drawing on the insights of thinkers such as Bhabha, Spivak, and Said. Moore has described this as an 'intensely interdisciplinary' and 'theory-fluent' mode of postcolonial biblical criticism, citing the work of Ronald Boer and Benny Liew to name a couple of its proponents.<sup>2</sup> Such an approach to biblical texts does not begin with a set of epistemological starting points, such as with liberation hermeneutics' commitment to the poor and the oppressed and their liberation through the liberator-God.<sup>3</sup> Rather, it wishes to open up biblical reading freed from the trajectories

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<sup>1</sup> The question of how far this has happened in practice will be addressed later in the chapter.

<sup>2</sup> See Moore, S. D. (2006) *Postcolonialism and the New Testament* Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press p.21

<sup>3</sup> See Torres, S. & Fabella, V. (1978) *The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Underside* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.269. That said, it has been argued that the engagement of postcolonial criticism in theological reflection is 'incoherent outside the effects of liberation theology'. Keller argues that this is so because it was liberation theology which made theologians conscious that the church is political by default not by intention (see Keller, C. *et al* (eds.) *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press p.5). Similarly, Sugirtharajah's critique of postmodernism states that its 'lack of a theory of resistance' and failure to take into account 'liberation as an emancipatory metastory', points to the fact that postcolonial criticism must maintain its link to liberation theology (see Sugirtharajah, R. S. (1999) *Asian Biblical hermeneutics and postcolonialism* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.15).

of orthodoxy and theological givens.<sup>1</sup> The starting point for such postcolonial readings is not epistemological but enunciative. That is, reading biblical texts is not to begin under the guidance of a set of pedagogical principles, rather reading is performative, an event in the present moment. There is a certain Foucauldian aspect to this approach to reading which recognises the need for critiques of power inscribed in the text, as well as in the dominant history of its interpretation, to problematise and interrogate dominant discourses of texts. It is a reading which is open to the irreducibly infinite possibilities of multiple readings and readers.

Whilst each of these five strands of postcolonial biblical criticism have their merits, it is the first two and the last that I draw on in this dissertation. The first two strands are significant in their emphases on both the attempt to 'resurrect lost voices' and on 'the once-colonised producing knowledge of their own'<sup>2</sup>. My interest in drawing from these strands does not lie in the behind the text concerns that have occupied much postcolonial biblical criticism in terms of the colonial contexts of the production of texts. Rather, I am interested in the reading of texts as stories set within colonial contexts. This dissertation's exploration of the Gospel of Mark, therefore, seeks out so-called 'lost voices' in texts in terms of characters in the stories narrated. Later on in this chapter I will argue ways in which postcolonial biblical criticism, in as far as it has been applied to Mark, has been limited in its analysis of the relational dynamics of individual-to-individual encounters, the key interest of this dissertation.

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Moore has argued that a defining feature of postcolonial biblical criticism 'as distinct from (although by no means in opposition to) 'liberationist' biblical exegesis, is a willingness to press a biblical text at precisely those points at which its ideology falls prey to ambivalence, incoherence, and self-subversion – not least where its message of emancipation subtly mutates into oppression' (see Moore, S. D. (2006) 'Mark and Empire: "Zealot" and "Postcolonial" readings' in Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.197).

<sup>2</sup> Sugirtharajah, R. S. (1999) 'A brief memorandum on Postcolonialism and biblical studies' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 73 p.4

Beyond this, I am also interested in expanding the frame of postcolonial biblical criticism in terms of gathering readers with poor mental health not normally counted as interlocutors of such texts within this paradigm. To make this move to expand the scope of postcolonial biblical criticism, I explore later on in this chapter how the insights of dialogical biblical criticism might apply to this interest to read with such persons.

My interest in postcolonial biblical criticism also lies in the final strand outlined above that focuses both on its interdisciplinary and theoretical tendencies. In the next section, I will critique the treatment of relational dynamics that I assess to be present in Markan postcolonial biblical scholarship, and then state how I seek to utilize the conceptual paradigm of postcolonial thinkers such as Homi Bhabha as a way of paying closer attention to the struggles for power the pericopae narrate.

### **3.2 Difference in colonial relational dynamics**

#### *Renegotiating the Jesus encounter in Mark*

My fundamental interest in Mark is to explore individual textual encounters in spatial terms, that is, in the relational dynamics between characters as a site of narrative struggle for voice and power. In focusing interpretation on the space between Jesus and other characters, I seek to foreground the role of the so-called minor characters in Mark, by exploring six relational encounters: Jesus, 'the Pharisees', and the man with the withered hand in the synagogue (3:1-6); Jesus, his family, and 'the scribes' (3:19b-35); Jesus and the demon possessed man among the tombs (5:1-20); Jesus, Jairus, and the woman with haemorrhages (5:21-43); Jesus and the Syrophenician woman (7:24-30); and Jesus before Pilate (15:1-5). In analysing these pericopae through a postcolonial lens I recognise the significance of the colonial context of Roman rule of these stories as the socio-cultural backdrop of the various characters involved. In doing so, I am interested in what Liew

has called the 'construction of colonial subjects' in Mark.<sup>1</sup> That is, I am interested in studying how subjects acting within hegemonic relational dynamics in the gospel exercise agency as colonial subjects; as persons subject to colonial discourse. That said, a brief sketch of postcolonial readings of Mark will reveal how I wish to analyse colonial subjecthood rather differently to much postcolonial scholarship to date.

Much postcolonial and similarly inclined interpretation of Mark has tended to emphasise the ideological underpinnings of the text's supposed production. For instance, Myers argues that Mark rejects the imperial hegemony of Rome and the Temple's exploitative alignment with it, advocating an egalitarianism by way of binding the strong colonial man (Caesar) via an ethic of non-violence.<sup>2</sup> Similar arguments - that Mark advocates an anti-colonial ideology - can be found in the work of a number of scholars: Waetjen, via a Marxist analysis of the text, argues that Mark calls for a partisan questioning of the socio-political structures of the society of the day in Roman occupied Syria for a community of Gentile peasants;<sup>3</sup> Horsley proposes that Mark is providing an alternative reading of history to the Rome-centred historiography of the day<sup>4</sup> (although other postcolonial scholars have questioned the extent of Mark's anti-colonial ideology)<sup>5</sup>; and Hamerton-Kelly argues that Mark challenges violent ideology and praxis via the text's narration of

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<sup>1</sup> Liew, B. (1999) *Politics of parousia: Reading Mark Inter(con)textually* Leiden: Brill p.33

<sup>2</sup> See Myers, C. (1988) *Binding the strong man* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books

<sup>3</sup> See Waetjen, H. C. (1989) *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press

<sup>4</sup> See Horsley, R. (1998) 'Submerged biblical histories and imperial biblical studies' in Sugirtharajah R. S. (ed.) *The Postcolonial Bible* Sheffield p.158.

<sup>5</sup> Moore has suggested that in comparison to 'Mark's near-contemporary cousin', the Book of Revelation, the gospel lacks the 'snarling, fang-baring hostility toward the Roman state' (see Moore, S. D. (2006) 'Mark and Empire: "Zealot" and "Postcolonial" readings' in Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.197). Indeed, Moore argues that 'Mark's anti-imperial invective really only extends to the local elites' (*Ibid.* p.199). Liew has also problematised the notion of Mark as an anti-colonial authority text with particular attention paid to Jesus' authoritative role in the parousia (13:24-27) portrayed in the gospel with Jesus' 'ultimate show of authority that will right all wrongs with the annihilation of the wicked' (see Liew, B. (1999) *Politics of parousia: Reading Mark Inter(con)textually* Leiden: Brill p.107).

the resurrection, which signifies that despite his violent death, Jesus' way offers the possibility of a new community characterised by love and inclusion<sup>1</sup>.

However, these largely anti-colonial readings of Mark are susceptible to criticism. For instance, Samuel has highlighted how such interpretations tend to romanticise and homogenise 'the subaltern subject Jesus'.<sup>2</sup> The fundamental problem for such readings of Mark is that Jesus tends to be essentialised, one way or another. Indeed, such is the theological significance of Jesus in the history of interpretation that as a character it is almost impossible not to see more of Jesus than the text alone presents.

For instance, arguing not for Jesus as a 'subaltern subject' but for Jesus as an authority figure, Liew posits that Jesus in Mark - as a character inscribed with an absolute authority as God's son and heir - replaces one colonial authority with another, ultimate authority.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, rather than being a liberatory move, Liew maintains that this represents a sharp binarism between insiders and outsiders, based on those who look favourably on Jesus' authority, teaching, and actions - in short, those who accept him - and those who do not. Arguing, then, for a Markan 'politics of parousia', Liew presents Jesus in rather stark terms where his reappearance in power and judgement (8:38-9:1; 12:9-11, 36; 13:1-2, 26; 14:61-2) in the parousia will bring about a realignment of socio-political power and the full establishment of God's reign.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Hamerton-Kelly, R. (1994) *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press

<sup>2</sup> Samuel, S. (2007) *A postcolonial reading of Mark's story of Jesus* London & New York: T&T Clark International p.82

<sup>3</sup> Liew, T. B. (2006) 'Tyranny, boundary, and might: Colonial mimicry in Mark's Gospel' in Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing (original work 1999) p.209. Liew has argued that Mark is an ambivalent text. That is, it includes both critiques of the existing colonial order, and also contains 'traces of colonial mimicry that reinscribe colonial domination', or in other words, a pro-colonial ideology (see *Ibid.* p.215).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 213

At the heart of Liew's argument is the issue of power. He argues that Mark makes Jesus' teachings inseparable from his miracles, with his power to perform miracles resident in Jesus' authority, and Jesus' authority resident in his status as God's beloved and heir (1:9-11; 9:2-8; 12:6; 15:39).<sup>1</sup> This authority demands the submission of everything and also the annihilation, ultimately in the parousia, of all those who do not submit. Mark then, argues Liew, defeats power with more power and so offers an ideology (and with it a theology), which is no different to the ideology of the hegemony of colonial rule.<sup>2</sup>

However, from a Foucauldian perspective, the significant problem with Liew's argument is that he only appears to conceive of power in oppressive terms. That is, Liew's Markan Jesus is the absolute authoritative knowing subject of the Gospel. Therefore, in the force of his own rhetoric, Liew almost leaves no room for resistance in the face of such power. What is missing, then, is the notion Foucault's analysis of power foregrounds: power is both repressive and productive, and furthermore, power is expressed in relationship with the 'other'. It is the irreducible difference of the other which Liew's reading of Mark oversteps, and so, whilst he argues that it is Jesus who reduces the role of minor characters to that of 'sidekicks', and in the case of the disciples in particular, to 'gophers' and 'loyal satellites'<sup>3</sup>, I would argue that Liew himself is somewhat complicit in that act of reduction. Indeed, Liew asserts that with Mark's 'grim view of human agency'<sup>4</sup>, where 'human beings remain objects instead of subjects of agency'<sup>5</sup>, in the gospel 'human agency for change is futile'<sup>6</sup>. Such a reading underestimates the potential of colonial subjects for resistance, particularly, as Samuel highlights, in critiquing Liew's notion of

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<sup>1</sup> Liew, T. B. (2006) 'Tyranny, boundary, and might: Colonial mimicry in Mark's Gospel' in Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing (original work 1999) p.214

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 215

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.212

<sup>4</sup> Liew, B. (1999) *Politics of parousia: Reading Mark Inter(con)textually* Leiden: Brill p.115

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.123

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.119. Liew goes on to argue that as constructed colonial subjects in Mark, such characters are limited both in their choices as well as in their abilities to bring about change (*Ibid.* p.132).

colonial mimicry in Mark. Colonial power is not only duplicated in the praxis of mimicry, it also disrupted.<sup>1</sup>

My own approach to the Gospel of Mark seeks to resist excessive readings of Jesus, and probe the text for agency exercised in shared relational encounters. In doing so, I align with Samuel's problematising of the tendency to present Jesus in a monolithic way – in postcolonial criticism for instance Jesus is presented largely either as pro- or anti-colonial<sup>2</sup> – preferring instead with Samuel to see him, and other characters around him, as a hybrid blend of both antagonism against and affiliation with colonial discourse.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Samuel sees Mark as a whole as a postcolonial discourse that reflects the longings of a subjugated community for a 'strategic space between Roman colonial and the relatively dominant Jewish...discourses of power'<sup>4</sup>, and that this longing is presented through an 'indeterminate and fluid picture' of Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

My own interest is in analysing the characters in Mark as they encounter one another in a story set in the colonial times of Jesus' own day. This analysis probes the complex relational dynamics between Jesus and others, and moves beyond the interpretation of the characters Jesus encounters as necessarily subordinated to his supposed superlative status as the one who ushers in the reign of God<sup>6</sup>, or as an absolute authority<sup>1</sup>. Rather,

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel, S. (2007) *A postcolonial reading of Mark's story of Jesus* London & New York: T&T Clark International p.84

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Samuel has argued that 'the very fact that one can construct such contrasting portraits out of Mark suggests that the portrait of Jesus in Mark is much more complex, i.e., the Markan portrait of Jesus is both pro- and anti-colonial in nature' (Samuel, S. (2007) *A postcolonial reading of Mark's story of Jesus* London & New York: T&T Clark International p.156).

<sup>3</sup> Samuel describes this as a combination of 'strategic essentialism and transcultural hybridity' (Samuel, S. (2007) *A postcolonial reading of Mark's story of Jesus* London & New York: T&T Clark International p.86, 128).

<sup>4</sup> Samuel, S. (2007) *A postcolonial reading of Mark's story of Jesus* London & New York: T&T Clark International p.153

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.153

<sup>6</sup> See for example Mann, C. S. (1986) *The Anchor Bible: Mark* Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc. p.242

such so-called minor characters are examined as potential co-creators of the narrative outcomes being analysed; and, with the praxis of mutuality as presented in Chapter Two in mind, such characters are considered again as agents of the renegotiation of the complex of relational dynamics found in hegemonic social orders. In the pericopae that I explore in this dissertation, therefore, being made well (3:5), being made clean (5:1-20; 7:29), being healed (5:34) and being brought back from the dead (5:41-2) are not events set within a framework where the transformation that takes place in those encounters is only passively received, rather it occurs in sharing a common relational space.

To see relational dynamics as taking place in a common relational space does not mean that my interpretations of Mark begin with an expectation that the praxis of mutuality will be somehow present in the text *a priori*. That is, unlike the pre-occupation of liberation hermeneutics with the textual movement from contexts of oppression to contexts of liberation, I seek to probe acts of relating as they are; in other words, the praxis of mutuality might be abundantly present in a particular text or it might be almost completely absent.

Thus, in alignment with Samuel in seeing 'the postcolonial' as a spatial category – as a 'cultural discursive space in between'<sup>2</sup> - I analyse the relating that takes place between characters in biblical texts and move beyond stereotyped, or typecast interpretations of identity and agency, and ask what might emerge if reading remains attentive to the power dynamics of relating. Thus from the colonial landscape of Jesus' encounters with others I assess if postcolonial strategies of relating are present. Specifically, as I stated in Chapter Two, I want to place the praxis of mutuality alongside other postcolonial praxes - such as hybridity, ambiguity, mimicry, sly civility and so on - as agencies of hegemonic

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<sup>1</sup> Liew, T. B. (2006) 'Tyranny, boundary, and might: Colonial mimicry in Mark's Gospel' in Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing (original work 1999) p.212

<sup>2</sup> Samuel, S. (2007) *A postcolonial reading of Mark's story of Jesus* London & New York: T&T Clark International p.158



disruption and to ask whether mutuality how might operate as both a resistive and a transformational praxis.

With this relationship to postcolonial biblical criticism in place, the second foci that I wish to explore within biblical criticism as it relates to mutuality is the milieu of dialogical biblical criticism. Here I ask how the praxis of mutuality might serve as a heuristic to the construction of a reading space with those who have experienced poor mental health. In utilising mutuality in such a way, I am extending the relevance of this concept beyond the confines of the theoretical, and into the practical mechanics of how reading with others might be carried out. Furthermore, in engaging the interlocution of group readers who have first-hand experience of the societal location of poor mental health, I am grounding this dissertation's exploration of biblical texts within that societal reality.

### **3.3 Reading with difference**

#### *Dialogical biblical criticism*

The notion of biblical criticism as a dialogue within groups of readers located outside of the academy still remains a peripheral form of biblical interpretation facilitated by scholars in the academies of the northern and western hemispheres.<sup>1</sup> However, this is less the case elsewhere. In Latin America, a key forerunner to the present forms of reading in dialogue is Cardenal's Nicaraguan study of reading the gospels in Solentiname with local villagers.<sup>2</sup> Also key are the multiple *comunidad eclesial de base* (CEB) which consisted of local gatherings of Catholics engaging in Bible studies, led by lay and ordained 'pastoral agents', inspired by the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops in

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<sup>1</sup> Note that 'biblical criticism as dialogue' is distinct from but not unlike Kwok Pui Lan's notion of the 'dialogical imagination' which seeks to open up the biblical world and its interpretation to new dialogue partners outside of the normative circle of hermeneutic concern such as other cultural and religious voices. See Kwok, Pui Lan (1995) *Discovering the Bible in the non-biblical world* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books pp.12-13.

<sup>2</sup> See the various volumes of Cardenal, E. (1977) *Love in Practice: The Gospel in Solentiname* London: Search Press

Medellin in 1968 (itself inspired by the spirit of Vatican II (1962-5)) which accorded the 'Christian base community' formal ecclesial status.<sup>1</sup> The significant dialogical feature of both the Solentiname and the CEB models is that texts are read aloud and then those gathered reflect on the text and how the text speaks to and from the contexts of daily life, thus leading to an engagement in key community issues within the classic liberation paradigm's praxis-led hermeneutical circle.<sup>2</sup> Although having faced some considerable challenges from the Vatican since its height in the 1980's, when over 100,000 CEB's existed in Brazil<sup>3</sup>, the work begun four decades ago is still vibrant today with organisations such as the Brazilian *Centro de Estudos Biblicos* galvanizing local dialogical projects.<sup>4</sup>

In Africa, where much of the most prominent dialogical reading work is done today (although there is similar work being done in other contexts too<sup>5</sup>) a key proponent of this method is Gerald West, who argues that at the heart of reading together is a relationship between the 'trained/socially engaged biblical scholar' and the 'ordinary individual

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<sup>1</sup> Dawson, A. (1999) 'The origins and character of the base ecclesial community: A Brazilian perspective' in Rowland, C. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.115

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.117. West argues that the fundamental praxis-led model of See-Judge-Act present in current South African dialogical reading also has its roots in the work of Joseph Cardijn who worked amongst factory workers in 1930's Belgium (see West, G. (2006) 'Contextual Bible reading: A South African case study' *Analecta Bruxellensia* 11 p.138).

<sup>3</sup> Dawson, A. (1999) 'The origins and character of the base ecclesial community: A Brazilian perspective' in Rowland, C. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.122

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.cebi.org.br>. West argues that CEB dialogical readings have tended to rely on scholarly socio-historical reconstructions of biblical texts, although latterly reading methods have apparently diversified. It was a move away from this model which West felt was overly reliant on the trained biblical reader that characterised the work of the Ujamaa Centre (see West, G. (2006) 'Contextual Bible reading: A South African case study' *Analecta Bruxellensia* 11 pp.139-140).

<sup>5</sup> For instance in the U.S. see Ekblad, B. (2003) 'Preaching outside the lines: A just paradigm for preaching that empowers just action' in Resner A. (ed.) *Just Preaching* St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press pp.195-206; in the UK see Lees, J. (2007) 'Remembering the Bible as a critical 'pedagogy of the oppressed'' in West, G. (ed.) *Reading other-wise: Socially engaged biblical scholars reading with their local communities* Atlanta, GA: SBL; in the U.S. Vincent Wimbush leads work in Los Angeles looking at the role of scriptures in the cultural contexts of Los Angeles (see The Institute for Signifying Scriptures web site at <http://iss.cgu.edu/about/index.htm>); and, globally see de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) (2004) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies. See also the recent publication by West G. & de Wit, H. (2008) *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue In Quest Of a Shared Meaning* Leiden: Brill

reader'<sup>1</sup>. West sought to explore this relationship following his frustration that the actual voices of 'the poor' are rarely heard despite their apparent hermeneutical privilege in liberation theologies,<sup>2</sup> a mark of distinction that West claims delineates the earlier Latin American liberation theologies and their African counterparts.<sup>3</sup> In developing this relationship, West uses a 'participatory research' or 'action research' methodology.<sup>4</sup> This sort of methodology is committed to begin the act of reading from the needs and experiences of communities of 'poor and oppressed' people, using the interpretative categories of such participants to shape interpretation.<sup>5</sup> Within this framework three further commitments of contextual Bible study are argued for. First, a commitment to read the Bible in community, equally valuing the contributions of so-called trained and untrained readers. Second, a commitment to read the Bible critically. And third, a commitment to individual and social transformation through Bible study.<sup>6</sup>

West's stated desire is to read with others. However, he argues that as soon as the biblical scholar speaks of the readings, strategies, and resources of the so-called ordinary reader, the vernacular hermeneutics which he advocates and practises cease to be vernacular. What he argues for, therefore, is a reading with and not a reading for. The dialogical hermeneutic West proposes, then, is highly relational and is about the sharing of reading

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<sup>1</sup> West, G. (1999) 'Local is Lekker, but Ubuntu is best: Indigenous reading resources from a South African Perspective' in Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) *Vernacular Hermeneutics: The Bible and Postcolonialism 2* Sheffield Academic Press p.37.

<sup>2</sup> West, G. (2004) 'Explicating domination and resistance: A dialogue between James C. Scott and biblical scholars' in Horsley, R. (ed.) *Hidden transcripts and the arts of resistance: Applying the work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* Semeia Studies Atlanta, GA: SBL p.173. This frustration led to the establishment of the Institute for the Study of the Bible, South Africa, in 1990 (later formed into the Ujamaa Centre for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research, <http://www.sorat.ukzn.ac.za/ujamaa/default.htm>) modelled to an extent on the Brazilian Centro de Estudos Biblicos (see <http://www.cebi.org.br>).

<sup>3</sup> See West, G. (2006) 'Contextual Bible reading: A South African case study' *Analecta Bruxellensia* 11 p.137

<sup>4</sup> West, G. (1991) 'The Relationship between different modes of reading (the Bible) and the ordinary reader' *Scriptura* S 9 p. 91

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.92

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 94-5

spaces with those who previously have so often been the objects of academic production now acting as subjects and co-producers of biblical interpretation.

This 'Contextual Bible Study'<sup>1</sup> paradigm has a number of advantages. Firstly, with the unpredictability of the interlocution that multiple readers bring, overly selective interrogations of texts are less likely. Furthermore, it has often been found that multiple readers bring multiple confessional and other ideologically positioned perspectives to texts, thus decentring the tendency for academically produced interpretations to remain only at an imagined objective distance from socially located interpretative positions. Secondly, dialogical biblical criticism naturally and necessarily draws on an individual level of analysis and thus in the sharing of interpretive space particular voices are given the option to be heard. Thirdly, for West the practice of being embedded in the action-reflection cycle of the liberation paradigm allows reading to be oriented towards praxis in the communities of readers<sup>2</sup>.

In terms of the contextual concerns specific to this work, dialogical biblical criticism has the advantage of opening up the way for persons with poor mental health to be directly engaged in acts of interpretation of texts and contexts. This allows biblical studies to enter a conversation with context as it truly is, as it is experienced. Whatever the nature of such experience is, the lived reality of poor mental health in contemporary society is

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<sup>1</sup> This is the term most recently used by West to describe the dialogical hermeneutic he has been developing over the past decade or more (see West, G. *et al* (2007) *Doing Contextual Bible Study: A resource manual* produced by The Ujamaa Centre for biblical and theological community development and research (<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/sorat/ujamaa/ujam123.pdf>))

<sup>2</sup> West, G. (2007) 'Reading other-wise: Socially engaged biblical scholars reading with their local communities: An Introduction' in West, G. (ed.) *Reading other-wise: Socially engaged biblical scholars reading with their local communities* Atlanta, GA: SBL p.1. A further advantage has been argued for by Janet Lees with regard to her work with communities in the UK where biblical texts in worship are remembered by congregants of churches rather than read. This remembering of texts in the form of dialogue was found by Lees to have significant advantages for participants who struggle with various communication impairments (see Lees, J. (2007) 'Remembering the Bible as a critical 'pedagogy of the oppressed' in West, G. (ed.) *Reading other-wise: Socially engaged biblical scholars reading with their local communities* Atlanta, GA: SBL p.74).

not assumed to be known by the biblical scholar, rather in a dialogical space there is openness for lived experiences to be offered as interpretative lenses for the reading of texts and the analyses of contexts.<sup>1</sup>

On the face of it then, dialogical biblical criticism has the potential to retain difference within the act of reading. That is, when different readers offer varied and perhaps contradictory interpretations of texts interpretative space is opened up for those different interpretations to be placed side by side in an agonistic tension. Indeed, such a practice might be seen as a critical pedagogy, which, as Kramer-Dahl argues, opens up space for the marginalized 'to give voice to their experience and to develop a critical analysis of oppressive social systems in order to transform them'.<sup>2</sup>

However, the drawback of much dialogical biblical criticism practised to date is that in the face of such interpretative tension, difference has often not been retained but resolved by the arbitration of the so-called trained biblical scholar. This is discernible in West's

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the transient nature of the relationship that was formed in the course of this dissertation's work with readers meant that the See-Judge-Act framework (see West, G. *et al* (2007) *Doing Contextual Bible Study: A resource manual* produced by The Ujamaa Centre for biblical and theological community development and research (<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/sorat/ujamaa/ujam123.pdf> p.3) that West's work utilises is not one that this dissertation manages to fully emulate. The significant missing part of the process is the Act component. As a praxis-led approach to biblical studies this is seen by West to be central, and it is a fair criticism of the level of social engagement of this dissertation's work that it has not been possible to engage with the communities encountered at this level. That said, one of the primary hopes of this dissertation's efforts within contextual biblical studies is that through the encounters with texts practised with readers there might have been at least the potential for an incitement for readers to re-imagine the lived contexts of poor mental health through the dialogical study of biblical texts. From a Foucauldian perspective, the significance of re-imagining discursive power is fundamental to the potential transformation of context.

Another fundamental difference between this dissertation and the work of West and his colleagues at the Ujamaa Centre is that in the case of the latter, group readers approached the biblical scholars to participate in Bible study, whilst in my own case not only did I make the approach to engage in dialogical reading, it was also a considerable undertaking for me to gather groups to participate each week from within the various settings that I had been granted access to. Significantly, reading groups were hardly ever the same from week to week, varying in constituents and total numbers. Interestingly, the responses to the invitations to read the Bible within these settings revealed that the Bible itself was of marginal interest.

<sup>2</sup> See Kramer-Dahl, A. (1995) 'Reconsidering the notions of voice and experience in critical pedagogy' in Luke, C. (ed.) *Feminisms and pedagogies of everyday life* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press p.242 cited in Lees, J. (2007) 'Remembering the Bible as a critical 'pedagogy of the oppressed' in West, G. (ed.) *Reading other-wise: Socially engaged biblical scholars reading with their local communities* Atlanta, GA: SBL p.85

own work when the terms of the reading relationship are examined more closely. West's use of 'scholar' and 'ordinary'<sup>1</sup>, a differentiation he also delineates as critical and pre-critical, already betray that there is a certain pre-determinedness about the reading relationship he is describing. Before readings can begin, expertise has already been located and normalised in the form of the trained biblical theologian. The local and particular expertise of the readers who will read with the biblical theologian are denied the mantle of expert, or scholar.<sup>2</sup> This is so even in the most careful dialogical reading, simply because the 'ordinary reader' is denied the voice of arbitration. Indeed, West states that 'ordinary readers have little choice in how they read the Bible', not having been trained in the critical modes of reading that characterise biblical scholarship.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that West's recent work recognises the problematical nature of the term 'ordinary reader' with his acknowledgment of a comment made by Gerald Sheppard in Toronto in 2002 that 'all ordinary readers are actually 'extraordinary' readers' (see West, G. (ed.) (2007) 'Reading other-wise: Socially engaged biblical scholars reading with their local communities: An Introduction' in *Reading other-wise: Socially engaged biblical scholars reading with their local communities* Atlanta, GA: SBL p.4). A simple alternative is proposed by Sakenfeld, who suggests that academic and non-academic might be a more suitable delineation, recognising that even with such labels there is a continuum between the two (see Sakenfeld, K. D. (2008) 'Whose text is it?' *Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 127 no.1 p.5). The notion of a continuum would suit West's own work with facilitators through the Contextual Bible Studies with The Ujamaa Centre, where there is a diversity of embeddedness in the academy amongst the facilitators (see West, G. et al (2007) *Doing Contextual Bible Study: A resource manual* produced by The Ujamaa Centre for biblical and theological community development and research (<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/sorat/ujamaa/ujam123.pdf>).

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it is argued that the characterisation of the 'poor' and 'oppressed' as 'ordinary readers' and scholars as 'critical readers' implies that material poverty necessarily implies intellectual poverty (see Hinga, T. M. (1996) "Reading with": An exploration of the interface between 'critical' and 'ordinary' readings of the Bible: A response' *Semeia* 73 p.284). John Riches also challenges the sharp distinction between ordinary and critical readers, arguing that those who are not academically trained should not necessarily be assumed to be entirely lacking in techniques of biblical interpretation (see Riches, J. (1996) 'Interpreting the Bible in African contexts: Glasgow consultation' *Semeia* 73 p.186). On another front, Stephen Jennings offers the critique that the term 'ordinary reader' is problematical because 'it tends to elide various categories of persons who are not necessarily the same' (see Jennings, S. C. A. (2007) "Ordinary reading in 'extraordinary' times: A Jamaican love story' in West, G. (ed.) *Reading other-wise: Socially engaged biblical scholars reading with their local communities* Atlanta, GA: SBL p.49).

<sup>3</sup> West, G. (1991) 'The Relationship between different modes of reading (the Bible) and the ordinary reader' in *Scriptura* S 9 p.90. It is also argued that the formulation of the untrained-versus-trained distinction is based on an uncritical acceptance of the 'ideologies, choices and commitments inherent in the 'training' of the so-called trained' (see Platjje, G. K. (2001) 'Toward a post-apartheid Black Feminist reading of the Bible: A case of Luke 2:36-38' in Dube, M. W. (ed.) *Other ways of reading: African women and the Bible* Geneva: WCC Publications p.119).

West's response to the problem of difference has left a tension at the heart of his project as it has developed through the years. Whilst West argues that the contribution of the trained reader to the reading process should be limited to 'constantly encouraging and facilitating ordinary readers to read the text carefully and closely',<sup>1</sup> managing conflict, and keeping the Bible study 'moving toward the conclusion',<sup>2</sup> the facilitator, described as 'just one voice' in the study, is a voice that is loaded with a certain amount of pre-determined knowledge and power that ultimately still shapes the reading process. West is aware that this tension exists in his work between a 'colonised consciousness' and a 'critical consciousness'.<sup>3</sup> On one hand, he argues that it should be recognised what centuries of colonisation have done to the consciousness of the 'poor' and 'oppressed' (yet, the same attention is not given to what centuries of colonising have done to the consciousness of the colonisers). On the other hand, West maintains that it must be recognised that even with this history of subjugated knowledge, the 'poor' and 'oppressed' do offer a critical consciousness, albeit 'different from those with which we are familiar'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, even though West, inspired by the work of James C. Scott, states that dialogical biblical study should attempt to mine the hidden transcripts of resistance<sup>5</sup> his own methodology appears to limit such an ambition.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, although the evolution of West's work has attempted to address this tension by refining and flattening

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<sup>1</sup> West, G. (1994) 'Difference and Dialogue: Reading the Joseph story with poor and marginalized communities in South Africa' in *Biblical Interpretation* 2 (3) p.161

<sup>2</sup> See West, G. *et al* (2007) *Doing Contextual Bible Study: A resource manual* produced by The Ujamaa Centre for biblical and theological community development and research (<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/sorat/ujamaa/ujam123.pdf>) pp.12-13

<sup>3</sup> West, G. (1991) 'The Relationship between different modes of reading (the Bible) and the ordinary reader' in *Scriptura* S 9 p.100

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* p.100

<sup>5</sup> West, G. (2004) 'Explicating domination and resistance: A dialogue between James C. Scott and biblical scholars' in Horsley, R. (ed.) *Hidden transcripts and the arts of resistance: Applying the work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* Semeia Studies Atlanta, GA: SBL p.182

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that some of West's recent work, studying antecedents of present day African hermeneutics, offers an appreciation of the 'infrapolitical' exchanges of the colonised with the coloniser in interpreting the Bible, wherein the praxis of mimicry was utilised as a way of problematising the dominant interpretive discourse of biblical texts that the colonised offered (see West, G. (2007) '(Ac)claiming the (Extra)ordinary African 'reader' of the Bible' in West, G. (ed.) *Reading other-wise: Socially engaged biblical scholars reading with their local communities* Atlanta, GA: SBL p.35).

the relationship between facilitator and readers, focusing on questions rather than answers<sup>1</sup>, the teleological presence of liberation as a marker of biblical interpretation continues to draw this process back to reserving the facilitator's role as the ultimate arbitrator of theological exploration and the provider of answers.

Beyond West's paradigm-shaping contribution to dialogical biblical criticism, one method that has emerged more recently has been pioneered by Hans de Wit and the Free University of Amsterdam project, reading John 4. This project paired over 120 partner groups across the globe in 22 different countries seeking to address whether intercultural reading of biblical texts might result in 'a new method of reading the Bible and communicating faith that is a catalyst for new, trans-border dialogue and identity formation'.<sup>2</sup> The reading method consists of groups reading texts communally and then sending the reports of their readings to their partners somewhere else in the world in exchange for that group's reading report, thus enabling both groups to see the text through the eyes of another group's interpretation. A third phase consists of each group responding to the reading report of the partner group.<sup>3</sup>

One of the fundamental methodological premises and stated values of the project was that the 'ordinary Bible readers' were the owners of the project: 'the group had the power'.<sup>4</sup> However, as with West's work, one of the key critiques of the project in terms of how it shapes reading with others is how interpretative differences are dealt with. One of the key aspects of de Wit's project is that the reading groups should 'strive for

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<sup>1</sup> See West, G. *et al* (2007) *Doing Contextual Bible Study: A resource manual* produced by The Ujamaa Centre for biblical and theological community development and research (<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/sorat/ujamaa/ujam123.pdf>) p.25

<sup>2</sup> de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) (2004) 'Through the eyes of another: Objectives and backgrounds' in *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.4

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.5

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.5



consensus'<sup>1</sup>; yet it is never made entirely clear why such a goal should exist. Indeed, whilst de Wit states that 'all possible and impossible connotations of texts have a vote in spontaneous understanding',<sup>2</sup> he also makes clear that as 'an interpretive community we need to come to grips with the differences; we have to resolve the tensions that arise'<sup>3</sup>. This stated need for a resolution of tensions reveals a basic assumption governing the project - that 'God's liberating action is also especially directed toward' the 'poor and sacrificed ones'<sup>4</sup> - thus leading to a theological teleology that lies at the heart of the conversation between trained and 'ordinary' readers.

What is missing from the forms of dialogical biblical criticism that have been explored above is what is central to this dissertation's presentation of mutuality as a postcolonial praxis of renegotiation. For, if the terms of this renegotiation and the scope of so-called ordinary readers are limited in advance of acts of reading together, then the fuller potential of dialogue is lost. Moreover, this critique of the trained biblical scholar acting as an arbitrator of reading difference within the act of reading is particularly ironic for readers who have experienced the societal location of poor mental health where being spoken for and having their interpretations of reality judged by others is commonplace, as I argued to be the case in Chapter One.

The question remains, then, how dialogical biblical criticism still might be able to engage with voices different from those with which academic production is familiar without subsuming that difference in that very act of engagement. In other words, the hope here is for a methodology, as Jonker argues for, that can embrace the 'communality' of having interpretative room for multiple and contradictory voices (both of texts and interpreters),

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<sup>1</sup> de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) (2004) 'Through the eyes of another: Objectives and backgrounds' in *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.14

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.14

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.30

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.18

and that can thus resist the potential for dialogical hermeneutics to collapse into self-reflection.<sup>1</sup>

One way forward is to consider what it means for the untrained readers who articulate difference into the interlocution of texts to produce their own knowledge of those texts. In this vein, another South African voice, Alpheus Masoga, argues that it is time for the 'periphery' (those 'marginalised' and 'oppressed' in the South African context) 'to occupy its own space without the interference of the centre'.<sup>2</sup> Although maintaining a highly binaristic perspective, Masoga's challenge that the 'periphery' might occupy its own space might require biblical scholars to withdraw the voice of arbitration or validation and enter into a genuine dialogue. This is not the same as biblical scholars having nothing to say about texts and contexts and thus becoming merely mediums for others' thoughts to be communicated in academic forums they might not otherwise have access to, rather it is to think of a starting point<sup>3</sup> for acts of reading that foregrounds 'cognitive dissonance'<sup>4</sup> as a potentially rich resource for reading rather than a problem for it.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Jonker, L. (2007) 'On becoming a family: Multiculturality and Interculturality in South Africa' *Expository Times* 118 (10) p.484

<sup>2</sup> Masoga, A. (2002) 'Redefining power: Reading the Bible in Africa from the peripheral and central positions' in *Reading the Bible in the Global Village* Cape Town No 3 Atlanta, GA: SBL p.101

<sup>3</sup> This would not be, however, Masoga's pedagogical sort of starting point: his dialogical Bible study begins with an introductory session which demonstrates how 'Jesus was interested in the renewal of the complete person and community', (see Masoga, A. (2002) 'Redefining power: Reading the Bible in Africa from the peripheral and central positions' in *Reading the Bible in the Global Village* Cape Town 3 Atlanta, GA: SBL p.106).

<sup>4</sup> Sibeko, M. & Haddad, B. (1997) 'Reading the Bible 'with' women in poor and marginalized communities in South Africa' *Semeia* 78 p.91. Such dissonance might involve a confrontation with the dominant theology of a group or of an individual on the part of the facilitator (see Ekblad, B. (2004) 'Jesus's surprising offer of living cocaine: Contextual encounters at the well with Latino inmates in U.S. jails' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.139).

<sup>5</sup> Such an approach seeks to value difference. See, for example the appreciation of Edgar Lopez working with a reading group in Bogotá: 'differing interpretations should be appreciated insofar as they contribute to the dialogic and supportive self-understanding of communities' (Lopez, E. A. (2004) 'Intercultural Bible reading by Catholic groups in Bogotá' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.142).

The reading method that I wish to pursue in this dissertation, therefore, is a blend of postcolonial and dialogical biblical criticism. I wish to open up a postcolonial-type reading space in dialogue with other readers so that the method might generate a reading whose interpretations are unpredictable and free, as much as possible, from the prevailing corrective discourse of the biblical scholar in the role of facilitator. In other words, in reading with others there is the potential to begin reading from the assumption of difference<sup>1</sup>.

### **3.4 Mutuality and Mark**

#### *A method for reading with persons with poor mental health*

The fundamental shift, therefore, that I am proposing with this dissertation with regards to normative forms of postcolonial biblical criticism is to focus not only on the interpretation of texts, but also on the act of reading itself and the space wherein that reading takes place. The hermeneutic that I wish to propose for this dissertation is a dialogical form of postcolonial biblical criticism that is informed in numerous ways by this dissertation's core concept of mutuality. The postcolonial aspect of this reading

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<sup>1</sup> As Berg argues, 'neither the reader nor the text has a single, stable center; both the reader and the text may be endlessly exchanged...Post-structuralism asserts that we may never attain mastery of a text, we may never come to the end of our reading experience...' See Berg, T. F. (1989) 'Reading in/to Mark' *Semeia* 48 p.203. Indeed, difference is presumed from the outset of a dialogical reading project such as this because in terms of the contextual realities under question, there is no knowing subject location from which to be expert or trained; no universal or essential subject position to 'read from'. Persons with poor mental health elide the categories placed on them simply because of the infinite particularity of their subjecthood. As Wilhelm argues regarding the related context of disability: 'I own all information about me, and no one is allowed to take definition-power over my life or appropriate me, or make me a thing. Without a reciprocal coming together, we will remain invisible to each other. Your images of normalcy or of me actually cloud your vision. What you see when you meet me are your fears, your hurts. We are all broken in some fashion. Let us mediate our brokenness...' (see Wilhelm, D. (1999) 'Roundtable discussion: Women with disabilities – A Challenge to Feminist Theology' in Bach, A. (ed.) *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* London & New York: Routledge p.436). Although writing from the perspective of being 'differently abled' Wilhelm's argument holds true for all those who have been marked out for difference and then identified according to their deviation from normalcy.

Contextually, then, this subject location of unknowing for the biblical scholar is very different from West's epistemological starting point as 'trained' or expert reader, and from critics of West's 'reading with' approach who argue for a 'reading from' the place of black African women ('I have no choice but to count myself with the non-academic black women readers'). See Plaatjie, G. K. (2001) 'Toward a post-apartheid Black Feminist reading of the Bible: A case of Luke 2:36-38' in Dube, M. W. (ed.) *Other ways of reading: African women and the Bible* Geneva: WCC Publications p.121.

method, then, is not only in its focus on the colonial contexts of texts, it is also in its construction of the reading space for group reading such that it might have room for mutuality as the negotiation of interpretative difference.

That is, mutuality informed this dissertation's method of dialogical postcolonial biblical criticism in creating a dialogical space for reading wherein each reader is influenced by the voice of the other in a movement that has the potential to displace the other protagonist to some degree, yet does not disavow their presence or their voice. Rather than encouraging coming to definitive conclusions about right or wrong interpretations of texts, the difference of multiple interpretations was retained in the practice of group reading in the hope of opening up space for more to be said about texts.<sup>1</sup> This was enabled through a non-corrective facilitation of reading in what Riches has called a 'community of readers'<sup>2</sup>, accepting that the formation of such a 'community' (as transient as it would be) is fraught with the difficulties that a reading process inhabits.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the concept of mutuality acted as a heuristic for the formation of the method of this dissertation in so far as each participant's interpretations of text and context were

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<sup>1</sup> Retaining such difference is what has been called the 'hermeneutical spiral'. Different to the hermeneutical circle, the notion of a spiral is intended to convey a process of reading with others that detects previously overlooked 'aspects of meaning' or 'blind spots', thus allowing for 'new discoveries to be made' (see Kahl, W. (2007) 'Growing together: Challenges and changes in the encounter of critical and intuitive interpreters of the Bible' in West, G. (ed.) *Reading other-wise: Socially engaged biblical scholars reading with their local communities* Atlanta, GA: SBL pp.149-150).

<sup>2</sup> See Riches, J. (1996) 'Interpreting the Bible in African contexts: Glasgow consultation' *Semeia* 73 p.180

<sup>3</sup> Lategan argues that it cannot be assumed that the relationship between facilitator and readers can simply be formed given that a series of 'other contrasts' inhabit the reading space such as 'theoretical/empirical', 'dominated/dominant', 'male/female', and so on. However, it should be noted how Lategan's problematising of the reading relationship is based upon what could be characterised as a set of binaristic and false dichotomies, even though this does not entirely take away his point about the challenge of forming a reading community and the potential for such a community's insights to be reified from the perspective of the facilitator (see Lategan, B. (1996) 'Scholar and Ordinary reader – more than a simple interface' *Semeia* 73 p.244). The significance of power in the reading relationship has also been emphasised by a number of practitioners. For instance, Dube talks of the suspicion of readers in her study with Botswana women in Botswana who voiced what she read as subtle protests when they felt she was leading the interpretation of the text in a direction they disagreed with (see Dube, M. W. (1996) 'Readings of *Semoya*: Botswana women's interpretations of Matthew 15:21-28' *Semeia* 73 p.124).

received without qualification or validation of veracity. People were encouraged to speak of their experiences of texts and contexts which remained peculiar to them, yet at the same time these experiences entered into a mutual space of interpretative negotiation in the shared act of reading. In recognising the agency of each individual reader I attempted to provoke multiple interpretations of texts via a continual interplay of questions and listening to answers. No arbitration of reading differences was offered<sup>1</sup>; likewise, no introductory sessions, or pedagogical pointers were given. All that was presented was a set of questions, which sought to facilitate the opening up of the texts under scrutiny and the contexts under consideration.

This approach represents a different reading stance to the Contextual Bible Study methodologies described earlier in this chapter where through an interplay between contextual and textual questions the facilitator offers certain behind-the-text aspects of the potential historical locations of texts.<sup>2</sup> Within this dissertation's work with group

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<sup>1</sup> To practice a facilitation style where no arbitration of reading differences is offered is to attempt to retain agonistic tensions within the reading process rather than attenuate them in any way. A corollary of this approach is that it places my methodology more within what has been described as a weak view of 'ideological hegemony', wherein it is assumed that 'marginalised' readers are 'already aware of their agency' and unlike the assumption of the position of 'strong ideological hegemony', they do not need assistance by 'the organic intellectual' to 'recognise the contradictions inherent in the hegemony of the dominant sectors' (see West, G. (2004) 'Artful facilitation and creating a safe interpretive site: An analysis of aspects of a Bible study' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.216). However, whilst my decision not to arbitrate reading differences might place this work in the weak ideological hegemony 'camp', it does not necessarily follow that I subscribe to the notion that the readers I encountered were always aware of inherent contradictions in the way West describes them. That said, I do believe that the group readings did reveal a freedom to interpret texts both in ways that collude with dominant interpretations, sustaining the interests of the powerful or dominant in the stories, and in ways that subvert such interpretative tendencies.

<sup>2</sup> See West, G. *et al* (2007) *Doing Contextual Bible Study: A resource manual* produced by The Ujamaa Centre for biblical and theological community development and research (<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/sorat/ujamaa/ujam123.pdf>) p.9. With the critique of Gerald West's working theological assumptions that I have offered above in mind, it is interesting that apart from the presence of his own behind-the-text insights, there is a significant similarity between his facilitation style and my own. He describes his style as 'reluctant to be directive' of the reading process, 'enabling participation', 'promoting turn-taking', 'focusing on the questions', and rather practically (particularly in my own settings where groups often met just before community lunch) 'keeping the time'. Fundamentally, West's approach as he describes it is to allow the questions to do the work; although as I have argued above, in truth his role as a facilitator is probably likely to do more 'of the work' than my own (see West, G. (2004) 'Artful facilitation and creating a safe interpretive site: An analysis of aspects of a Bible study' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.)

readers, there was a conscious decision not to engage in such a practice in an effort to avoid a greater reading distance being formed between facilitator and readers.

The formation of the questions for the Bible studies is also a key component of how mutuality acts as a heuristic for this dissertation's reading method. Whilst like the Contextual Bible Study paradigm, the questions for the Bible studies are mostly formulated beforehand<sup>1</sup>, in this dissertation's work new questions also emerged as the readings occur, a product, I would suggest, of the attempt to create a more flat reading relationship between facilitator and group readers that this dissertation seeks to pursue.<sup>2</sup> My first concern, then, was to ask questions and to remain open to have further questions asked, both of the text and of myself as a reader of the text.<sup>3</sup> These questions attempted to probe textual relational dynamics via an exploration of the potential thoughts, feelings, and motivations of characters in those texts; the outcomes of those dynamics; and significantly, pointers to readers' lived contexts of poor mental health that might be found in the text. All of these hermeneutical features constituted a reading process akin

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*Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.216).

<sup>1</sup> West, G. *et al* (2007) *Doing Contextual Bible Study: A resource manual* produced by The Ujamaa Centre for biblical and theological community development and research (<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/sorat/ujamaa/ujam123.pdf>) pp.8-9

<sup>2</sup> The attempt to strike a balance between a facilitation style that has no real leadership and one where leading questions can potentially stifle the process is a familiar challenge for those who practice dialogical reading (see Anum, E. (2004) 'Unresolved tensions and the way forward' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.176).

<sup>3</sup> West describes this facilitation style in relation to Bob Ekblad's work as a dialogical form of facilitation that he sees to be distinctive within the larger field of reading with groups (see West, G. (2004) 'Artful facilitation and creating a safe interpretive site: An analysis of aspects of a Bible study' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.217). This openness to the generation of new questions is what Riches sees as the paradigm shift that dialogical reading has the potential to open up, with so-called 'ordinary readers' opening up the possibility of new avenues of thought in a dialogue with the academy (see Riches, J. (1996) 'Interpreting the Bible in African contexts: Glasgow consultation' *Semeia* 73 p.186). Reading in dialogue has also been termed as 'conversational biblical hermeneutics' such that in this spirit of openness both facilitators and readers are faced with their 'truths' being 'continually challenged and changed' by the conversation (see Masoga, M. A. (2000) *Weeping city, shanty town Jesus: Introduction to conversational theology* Cape Town: Salty Print p.i).

to what is described as a 'deep hermeneutical discourse'<sup>1</sup>. That is, in seeking to explore with readers the structure of the relational dynamics within particular pericopae, questions were posed that probed both the external dynamics of power and the internal thoughts and feelings of characters, along with some self-reflective questions for the group readers. There is, then, a considerable empathetic component to the hermeneutic pursued in this dissertation that takes the introspective tradition of reader-response criticism<sup>2</sup> and applies it to actual readers. An example of such a series of questions is given below for the reading of Jesus' encounter with a man who had a 'withered hand' in Mark 3:1-6:

- V1 Who was this man 'with a withered hand'?
  - What might it feel like to be him?
  - Where is he to be found and how is he to be recognised?
  - What do we learn about this man?
  - Where are his friends?
  - What do you think he is doing in the synagogue?
  
- V2 Who are 'they'?
  - What do they know about Jesus?
  - What does Jesus know about them?
  - Why do you think 'they' are watching Jesus?
  
- V3 'Come forward'
  - What does this sound like to you? A command? A request?

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<sup>1</sup> See Masoga, M. A. (2007) "'Dear God! Give us our daily leftovers and we will be able to forgive those who trouble our souls": Some perspectives on conversational biblical hermeneutics and theologies' in West, G. (ed.) *Reading other-wise: Socially engaged biblical scholars reading with their local communities* Atlanta, GA: SBL p.24

<sup>2</sup> See Fowler, R. M. (1991) *Let the reader understand: Reader-Response criticism and the Gospel of Mark* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. Indeed, it has been a critique of reader-response criticism that the reader in this particular hermeneutic has remained only at the level of abstraction or within the imagination of the biblical scholar. What I am advocating is a move beyond this shortfall to shift biblical interpretation from what is characterised as a bipolar relationship between text and biblical scholar to a multipolar one incorporating multiple readers where not only is the relationship between readers and texts probed, but the interpretative relationship between readers is probed too (see Kessler, R. (2004) 'From bipolar to multipolar understanding: Hermeneutical consequences of intercultural Bible reading' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies pp.453-456).

- Has anyone asked for help?
- What is the 'man with the withered hand' come forward for?
- Where was he? Can you picture where he might have been? Was he hidden?
- Have you ever been asked to 'come forward'?
- Who asked you?
- What did it feel like?

Questions were posed of readers, then, in a continually expansive manner, always seeking to probe the dynamics of power and relating discernible in the narrative. There were some practical reasons why such a flow of questions is pursued as a reading strategy mostly to do with keeping readers engaged, staying focused on the task at hand, and in some cases keeping them awake.<sup>1</sup> With regards to the reading populations that this dissertation engaged with, if I had settled on a methodology that had presented the text before the readers and simply asked them to 'say what they saw' I believe that responses would have been severely attenuated. Not only was it very difficult to find organisations and settings that would accommodate the 90 minute sessions I planned for the reading groups, the populations of readers varied enormously from session to session and also within the duration of sessions (a feature common to de Wit's intercultural reading project<sup>2</sup>). Because I wished to create a reading environment that remained open, I

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<sup>1</sup> West notes that in the attempt to read the text carefully and closely most 'ordinary readers' found the task very difficult (see West, G. (1991) 'The Relationship between different modes of reading (the Bible) and the ordinary reader' in *Scriptura* 9 p. 97).

<sup>2</sup> See de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) (2004) 'Through the eyes of another: Objectives and backgrounds' in *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.48.

The reality of attempting to practice a dialogical Bible study with persons with poor mental health is that participation is always under negotiation. Yet, it could be no other way. Deviations into detailed explications of the rosary by one participant, questions about whether 'Our Lord' travelled space in a UFO, and long diatribes concerning the everyday life of the particular residential home, day centre or meeting place Bible studies took place in, where not just attempts to keep the dialogical space 'indeterminate' and 'unpredictable', they were part of listening and keeping silent without attempting to arbitrate. When I was asked to comment on others' opinions, though, I did not remain silent, but stated that 'this was one way of looking at it'. Likewise, when participants were curious about what I thought personally, I would offer my own view but would also point to a number of opinions often drawing reflectively on interpretations already offered by other group participants. No reading strategy and no facilitator can claim to be without caveats and shortfalls and whilst attempting to keep the dialogue as open as possible (and not remain totally silent when asked an opinion such that participants might have begun to wonder about my 'hidden agenda') I am sure that my own view of texts and questions about texts had an effect on the other readers. Hopefully though, without the practising of introductory sessions, or the intermittent offering of historical details, or



made it clear from the outset that people would be free to stay or leave or come back again as they chose. All readers came voluntarily. Along with this dynamic, the ability of groups to stay focused on the text in question, on the task of reading in general, or even on the processing and production of language altogether, varied greatly. Some individuals and some sessions flowed beautifully. Others deviated, hesitated, and in some cases participants drifted in and out of consciousness through the proceedings! Maintaining a flow of questions though was a part of the reading strategy not only for practical reasons, it was also part of an attempt to engage readers in as incisive and interrogative a manner as possible. In other words, I was interested in probing what readers think about texts and why they think in the ways that they do.

This element of probing what readers think about texts and why is one of the most significant ways in which the concept of mutuality shapes this dissertation's reading method regarding the problem of the trained biblical scholar as the sole arbitrator of interpretive difference. In the reading method employed in this dissertation, I sought to avoid both the tendency to have the final say about reading differences, and the alternative of having nothing to say about them. Rather, I placed my role as reading facilitator somewhere between the interpretative positions of group readers in the attempt to encourage group readers to dialogue with one another with regards to their interpretative differences.

Take for example the reading of one of the pericope I chose for this work (Mark 5:21-6:1). In contrast to my own reading strategy, Malika Sibeko's methodology for reading dialogically is very minimalist in terms of questions. She includes only two: 'Can we say this text is about women and why?' and 'How does this text apply to you as women in

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the interjection of corrective judgments, it is hoped that my own effect on others was not so overwhelming to be significantly more influential than the other readers' influences.

your context?’<sup>1</sup> By contrast my own session on the same pericope contained around 60 prepared questions, many of which were used in the different reading sessions that were carried out for that pericope, along with questions that emerged on a more *ad hoc* basis from myself and from others. Sibeko’s readers focused almost exclusively on the issue of menstruation, leaving behind the story of Jairus and his daughter almost altogether, not to mention other features of the two stories. My readers ranged all over the text.

The point here is not that all the aspects of texts which have interested biblical scholars or that interest me should be asked, almost on a canonical basis. Rather, it is that the act of reading dialogically not only includes the dynamic inputs of the reading group members, but also includes the inputs of the facilitator as an interrogator of those questions and answers. That is, in order to open texts up to the multiplicity of readings that texts are capable of entertaining, not only must a reading ethos be created and nurtured which values and listens to each participant’s particularly located questioning and responding to a text, it must also have room for the dynamics of questions which seek to trace along the wider textual edges of biblical narratives. What this facilitation style represents, then, is a blend of what van der Velde describes as the task-oriented style (which closely follows the prepared questions and steers the reading process, giving the facilitator a central role) and the relationship-oriented style (which creates space for individual members to ‘put a meaning to the text’).<sup>2</sup> Such a blended approach enables participants to experience a diversity of meanings.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sibeko, M. & Haddad, B. (1997) ‘Reading the Bible ‘with’ women in poor and marginalized communities in South Africa’ *Semeia* 78 p.86

<sup>2</sup> van der Velde, A. L. (2004) ‘Making things in common: The group dynamics dimension of the hermeneutic process’ in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.300

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.300

In order to proceed with a facilitation style that sought to probe the answers given by readers<sup>1</sup> it was necessary to create what West describes as a 'safe interpretive site' for reading.<sup>2</sup> Such a site is characterised by the continued practice of the affirmation of inputs of readers<sup>3</sup>, an acceptance of shifting the focus of reading when readers seek to do so, then dovetailing back to the questions or the text at hand more directly<sup>4</sup>, and prior to all of this, embedding to some extent in the life of the reading group outside the reading experience.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps most fundamental of all in creating a safe space for reading was that it was made clear before every reading group session that there were no wrong answers as such.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A key component of Ekblad's reading with prison groups (see West, G. (2004) 'Artful facilitation and creating a safe interpretive site: An analysis of aspects of a Bible study' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.220).

<sup>2</sup> See West, G. (2004) 'Artful facilitation and creating a safe interpretive site: An analysis of aspects of a Bible study' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies. Indeed, as West quotes, James C. Scott has argued that 'a fundamental requirement for marginalised sectors to speak in their own voices, rather than strategically mimicking the discourse of the dominant culture, is a safe site' (see West, G. (2004) 'Artful facilitation and creating a safe interpretive site: An analysis of aspects of a Bible study' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.227 and Scott, J. C. (1995) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press pp.113-115).

<sup>3</sup> A key component of my own style and that of Ekblad (see West, G. (2004) 'Artful facilitation and creating a safe interpretive site: An analysis of aspects of a Bible study' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.217).

<sup>4</sup> West, G. (2004) 'Artful facilitation and creating a safe interpretive site: An analysis of aspects of a Bible study' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.216

<sup>5</sup> This was central to my own experience as a facilitator in the various reading sites I worked at in this dissertation. At one I attended worship, at another I ate lunch and socialised with members, some of whom joined reading groups and some of whom did not, and, at another I forged a link with the community through a common friend.

<sup>6</sup> West takes this to be one of the key components of Ekblad's facilitation style (see West, G. (2004) 'Artful facilitation and creating a safe interpretive site: An analysis of aspects of a Bible study' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.228), yet a closer look at Ekblad's methodology reveals that he too presents a non-coincidental corrective facilitation style. For instance, it is clear at various points in the Bible study that West uses to assess Ekblad's facilitation style that Ekblad promotes a particular theological lens: finding a liberating God in the text. One example is the closing question Ekblad offers to the Bible study: 'How could we find God in a way similar to the way the Samaritan woman found God?' (*Ibid.* p.223). Following this loaded question and some answers from group readers, West states that Ekblad 'wraps up the discussion by affirming the progress they have made' (*Ibid.* p.223). The quality of what might constitute progress for Ekblad is highlighted later on as West describes where 'As before, he draws on his deep conviction that Jesus is good news for the marginalised and applies this theological orientation to the case' (of the Samaritan woman) (*Ibid.* p.225). The question that arises from this sort of open and directive theological orientation is whether a facilitator can promote his or her theology and remain a dialogical facilitator and still remain the case that

Another issue in attempting to create and nurture a dialogical reading space is the subject location of readers. It was clear that each reader brought into their own particular participation in the act of reading a set of paradigmatic and ideological assumptions not only about the texts, but also about themselves, other readers, and society around them. Questions were needed then that would continually upset and unhinge any particular dominance of voices or knowledge. Indeed, it is asserted that there is a danger that so-called subjugated, colonised, and unheard voices are assumed, by virtue simply of being the voices of the 'periphery', to be able to articulate interpretations infused with subversive counter-discourses of hegemony.<sup>1</sup>

This aspect of the reading relationship that seeks to have each reading perspective enlarge the scope of the other generates a central question in dialogical hermeneutics of how untrained and trained readers' perspectives might relate. Snoek asks whether a fruitful discussion between 'intuitive' and 'schooled' readings is really possible. That is, because the role of the facilitator is not always clear he questions how 'naïve readings' can make a contribution to biblical scholarship.<sup>2</sup> Answering his own question, Snoek suggests that it is the tension between scholars and group readers' perspectives that might offer 'points of contact for a fruitful dialogue'.<sup>3</sup>

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there are no wrong answers? I think that this sort of tension is difficult to retain, and whilst West argues of Ekblad that he does not 'insist the group follow his direction' and 'remains committed to engaging in dialogue with each member, no matter where they go or what they say' (*Ibid.* p.226) I think that this is tempered by the promotion (whether explicit or implied) of Ekblad's own theological agenda. Indeed, in his response to West's paper, Ekblad states that 'I have seen my own role as a facilitator to include overtly countering the official transcript in ways that create a space for the emergence of an unexpectedly good world' (*Ibid.* p.235). Such a teleological tendency to his facilitation style can only start to impact the interpretations of readers, and indeed this apparently would be one of Ekblad's goals.

It is clear, then, that where my own postcolonial hermeneutic differs from the liberation hermeneutic of facilitators such as West and Ekblad is that there is no expectation that any particular insight might be attained by readers.

<sup>1</sup> See Gandhi, L. (1998) *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* New York, NY: Columbia University Press p.154.

<sup>2</sup> Snoek, H. (2004) 'Biblical scholars and ordinary readers dialoguing about living water' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.305

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.308

It is exactly this sort of approach that I have pursued in the middle chapters of this work following the distinctive format that I have chosen for this dissertation. That is, I have been intentional in juxtaposing three strands of interpretation: biblical scholarship, group readers, and my own interpretations. Thus, informed by this dissertation's core concept of mutuality as a postcolonial praxis of the negotiation of difference, I have chosen to organise my analysis in such a way that the insights of biblical scholars and the group readers are placed side by side in separate sections to allow for the distinctiveness of each to be seen, and then in a third section I ask where the new emphases of group readers<sup>1</sup> might push at the boundaries of how particular texts are interpreted. In assessing the reading products of scholarly and group readers I have sought to retain and probe the agonistic tensions between readings rather than to resolve differences.

I approach biblical scholarship sampling a range of interpretations of the particular pericopae in question in this dissertation, with a specific focus on the ways in which scholars interpret the relational dynamics of the encounters narrated. I have not chosen to concentrate on one form of biblical criticism alone or to confine this sampling only to postcolonial biblical criticism. Rather, I have decided to assess a range of scholarship in order to highlight various patterns and tendencies in these interpretations of the relational dynamics of identity, agency, and dialogue in six Markan texts. That said, due to the inherent interests of certain forms of biblical criticism, there is a particular range of scholarship that tends to be referred to in the chapters that follow, namely: reader-response criticism<sup>2</sup>, socio-rhetorical criticism<sup>1</sup>, socio-political criticism<sup>2</sup>, postcolonial

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<sup>1</sup> Probing the emphases of 'ordinary readers' is also advocated by Miguez who suggests that in working such interpretations might enable the biblical scholar to 'construct new meanings' of texts and as well as the contexts of those readers (see Miguez, N. (2004) 'Reading John 4 in the interface between ordinary and scholarly interpretation' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.347).

<sup>2</sup>For example: Fowler, R. M. (1991) *Let the reader understand: Reader-Response criticism and the Gospel of Mark* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press; Heil, J. P. (1992) *The Gospel of Mark as a model for action: A reader-response commentary* New York, NY: Paulist Press; van Iersel, M. F. (1998) *Mark: A reader-response commentary* JSNT Supplement Series 164 Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press; Yee, G. A. (1995)

biblical criticism<sup>3</sup>, feminist biblical criticism<sup>4</sup>, and dialogical biblical criticism<sup>5</sup>, alongside a range of commentaries on Mark<sup>6</sup>.

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‘The Author/Text/Reader and power’ in Segovia, F. F. & Tolbert, M. A. (1995) *Reading from this place: Social location and biblical interpretation in the United States* Volume One Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press pp.109-120

<sup>1</sup> For example: Camery-Hoggart, J. (1992) *Irony in Mark’s Gospel: Text and subtext* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Witherington, B. (2001) *The Gospel of Mark: A socio-rhetorical commentary* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company

<sup>2</sup> For example: Belo, F. (1981) *A materialist reading of the Gospel of Mark* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; Horsley, R. (2001) *Hearing the whole story: The politics of plot in Mark’s Gospel*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press; Myers, C. (1988) *Binding the strong man: A political reading of Mark’s story of Jesus*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; Oakman, D. (1988) ‘Rulers’ Houses, Thieves, and Usurpers: The Beelzebul Pericope’ *Foundations and Facets Forum* 4 (3) (September) pp.109-123; Pallares, J. C. (1986) *A poor man called Jesus: Reflections on the Gospel of Mark* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; Theissen, G. (1991) *The gospels in context: Social and political history in the synoptic tradition* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press; Waetjen, H. C. (1989) *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark’s Gospel* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press

<sup>3</sup> For example: Liew, T. B. (2006) ‘Tyranny, boundary, and might: Colonial mimicry in Mark’s Gospel’ in Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing (original work 1999) pp.206-223; Moore, S. D. (2006) ‘Mark and Empire: “Zealot” and “Postcolonial” readings’ in Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing pp.193-205; Perkinson, J. (1996) ‘A Canaanitic word in the Logos of Christ; or the difference the Syrophoenician woman makes to Jesus’ *Semeia* 75 pp.61-85; Samuel, S. (2007) *A postcolonial reading of Mark’s story of Jesus* London & New York: T&T Clark International; Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) (2006) *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing; Sugirtharajah, R. S. (1999) ‘A brief memorandum on Postcolonialism and biblical studies’ *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 73 pp.3-5

<sup>4</sup> For example: Cotter, W. (2001) ‘Mark’s hero of the twelfth-year miracles: the healing of the woman with haemorrhages and the raising of Jairus’s daughter (Mark 5:21-43)’ in Levine, A. J. & Blickenstaff, M. (eds.) *A feminist companion to Mark* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press pp.54-78; Haber, S. (2003) ‘A woman’s touch: Feminist encounters with the haemorrhaging woman in Mark 5:24-34’ *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (2) pp.171-192; Kinukawa, H. (2004) ‘Mark’ in Patte, D. (ed.) *Global Bible Commentary* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press pp.367-378; Plaatjie, G. K. (2001) ‘Toward a post-apartheid Black Feminist reading of the Bible: A case of Luke 2:36-38’ in Dube, M. W. (ed.) *Other ways of reading: African women and the Bible* Geneva: WCC Publications pp.114-142; Ringe, S. H. (2001) ‘A Gentile woman’s story, revisited: Rereading Mark 7:24-30’ in Levine, A. J. & Blickenstaff, M. (eds.) *A feminist companion to Mark* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press pp.79-100

<sup>5</sup> For example: Avoti, S. K. (2000) ‘The venacularisation of scripture and African beliefs: The story of the Gerasene demoniac among the Ewe of West Africa’ in West, G. O. & Dube, M. W. *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, trajectories, and trends* Leiden: Brill pp.311-325; Cardenal, E. (1977) *Love in Practice: The Gospel in Solentiname* London: Search Press

<sup>6</sup> For example: Anderson, H. (1976) *The Gospel of Mark* (New Century Bible) London: Oliphants; Broadhead, E. K. (2001) *Mark* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press; Brooks, J. A. (1991) *Mark* The New American Commentary 23 Nashville, TN: Broadman Press; Deibert, R. I. (1999) *Mark* Interpretation Bible Studies Louisville, KY: Geneva Press; Gundry, R. H. (1993) *Mark: A commentary on his apology for the cross* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Hare, D. R. A. (1996) *Mark* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press; Hiebert, D. E. (1994) *The Gospel of Mark: An Expository Commentary* Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press; Hooker, M. D. (1991) *The Gospel according to St. Mark* London: A & C Black; Juel, D. H. (1999) *The Gospel of Mark* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press; Mann, C. S. (1986) *The Anchor Bible: Mark* Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc.; Marcus, J. (2000) *The Anchor Bible: Mark 1-8* Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co. Inc.; Painter, J. (1997) *Mark’s Gospel: Worlds in conflict* London & New York: Routledge; Williamson, L. (1983) *Mark* Interpretation Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press

In terms of group readers' interpretations I seek to remain true to the dialogical method of this dissertation. That is, as I have stated in this chapter, in the practice of dialogical biblical hermeneutics I offer no correctives to what may be deemed to be wayward interpretations, nor do I offer arbitrations of competing or contradictory interpretations between different readers. Another way of looking at this is to say that I do not offer critiques of group readers' contributions in the course of the Bible studies. This is so due to the premise fundamental to this work that if critique were ongoing then not only would the mutuality of the reading experience be under threat, so too would it be more likely that readers might end up limiting their answers to what they think the facilitator would want to hear.

In the same vein, I do not offer critiques of the interpretations of group readers after the fact. I do not do so, not only because there would be a dishonesty to maintaining the absence of critiques in the midst of dialogical Bible study only to offer critique later on, but also because I wish to explore the reading group interpretations for what they are: not the work of biblical trained scholars, but insights that offer fresh emphases and contextually informed ways into reading ancient texts. Thus, in the chapters that follow, I explore these emphases, which are sometimes contradictory, as far as they pertain to questions of identity, agency, and dialogue, and this dissertation's core concept of the praxis of mutuality.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, I argue that there are two postcolonial tendencies in the approach to the text that I propose for this dissertation which are influenced by the concept of mutuality. The first tendency, which focuses on the text itself, seeks to see the relational dynamics narrated in texts as a mutual space of participation, wherein characters share a struggle for discursive voice and power. Furthermore, this hermeneutic seeks to conceptualise 'the

postcolonial' spatially, focusing reading on mutuality as a praxis of resistance and transformation that may or may not be exercised in textual relational encounters. That is, alongside other postcolonial praxes, mutuality will be explored within relational dynamics of texts that might resist and seek to transform and thus be antagonistic to a colonial ordering of power, as well as those dynamics that might collude with such hegemonic power.

The second postcolonial tendency also seeks to dialogue with difference, this time in terms of the act of reading itself. In this chapter I explored various forms of dialogical hermeneutics, and critiqued the influence of the liberation paradigm on such hermeneutics. I argued that this tendency led to the retention of a theological teleology that results in facilitators unduly guiding reading towards liberative interpretive conclusions, thus collapsing the potential for actual interpretive differences within reading groups to be explored. Following this, then, I proposed that a postcolonial dialogical reading space, informed on multiple levels by this dissertation's core concept of mutuality, might have room to read with difference, arguing that this represented an attempt to nurture a more 'flat' reading relationship between readers and facilitator.

It is argued that biblical studies needs 'a clamour of diverse voices' to allow 'whispered voices' to be heard as well as 'loud confident ones'.<sup>1</sup> It is hoped, therefore, that this dissertation's hermeneutic offers a fundamentally practical response to Spivak's challenge to postcolonial studies<sup>2</sup> in its attempt to engage in dialogical acts with so-called subalterns of contemporary societal landscapes. In some ways then, the act of reading itself is a postcolonial response to the contextual hegemonic landscape of poor mental health I described in Chapter One. I hope the elided theological voices of readers with

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<sup>1</sup> Campbell, J. M. (2003) *Being biblical: How can we use the Bible in constructing ethics today* London: United Reformed Church Press p.43

<sup>2</sup> Spivak, G. (1988) 'Can the Subaltern speak?' in Ashcroft, B. *et al* (eds.) *The Postcolonial studies reader* London & New York: Routledge pp.24-28 (original work 1988) p.28



poor mental health might read Mark in the light of their own experiences of power and knowing. The extent to which they do will be considered in the chapters that follow.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**IDENTITY, LABELS, AND RESISTANCE**

*MARK 3:1-6 & 3:19B-35*

*The first pair of encounters - Jesus in a synagogue with a man who has a withered hand (3:1-6), and Jesus with his family and some scribes (3:19b-35) - examines the question of identity and how both 'the man with a withered hand' in the first pericope and Jesus in the second face radical challenges to their ability to self-identify. In the first pericope, identity is recovered and with it, the relational dynamics which had previously designated the 'other' for difference, are transformed. In the case of the man in 3:1-6, difference as a mark of hegemonic identity - withered - is resisted and indeed transformed in its repetition. That is, in the action of choosing to come into the middle and stretch out his hand the man re-imagines hybridity into the mark of hegemonic identity previously inscribed as dis-abled. The praxis of mutuality is thus exercised in the opting for the hybrid emphasis of the difference the withered hand symbolises.*

*In the second pericope, Jesus faces an attack on his identity, this time with acts of labelling – mad and/or bad - which attempt to mark him out for difference. Here I am interested in how Jesus resists the two acts of labelling which seek to impose identities upon him. I suggest that rather than successfully re-inscribing his identity along binaristic and, therefore, supposedly clearly delineated lines, as many scholars argue, Jesus responds with reactive discourse couched in ambiguous terms that evade the praxis of mutuality in its full form of resistive and transformative agency.*

#### 4.11 Introduction: Jesus and the man with the withered/divine hand

Mark 3:1-6

1Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. 2They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3And he said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Come forward.' 4Then he said to them, 'Is it lawful to do good or do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. 5He looked at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.<sup>1</sup>

*I argue below that there is a tendency for biblical scholarship to rely too heavily on stereotype in the reading of identity and relating in Mark 3:1-6 which then leads to a limited analysis of the relational dynamics discernible in the text. I wish to reconsider the relational dynamics of 3:1-6 via the suggestions and emphases that group readers offer in their interpretations of this text. Specifically, their interpretations suggest that this pericope narrates not only the story of an argument between Jesus and some Pharisees, and not only the story of a man whose hand was restored to normal function following the invitation of Jesus to stretch that hand out, but also the story of an invitation to choose to step out of a life-denying relational dynamic and into the praxis of mutuality. It is this emphasis on the potential of mutuality as a praxis of renegotiating relational dynamics that offers much to the interpretation of this pericope in its expansion of the frame of the text. It is not only Jesus and some Pharisees who bring forth questions of identity and agency in the pericope, it is also the unnamed man who says nothing, yet whose choice to act reconfigures the relational dynamics he experiences in the synagogue and perhaps beyond.*

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<sup>1</sup> All of the pericopae studied in this dissertation are taken from the *The New Revised Standard Version (Anglicized Edition)* of the Bible, copyright 1989. This particular translation was chosen due to its use as the standard text in British academic biblical studies.

#### 4.12 Reading Mark in 2-D: Stereotype and the interpretation of relational dynamics

##### *Scholars' Perspectives*

Much biblical scholarship considers a question posed by Jesus in 3:4 to lie at the heart of Mark 3:1-6: 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?' Furthermore, a great deal of attention is paid to what emanates from this question about Jesus and about the mysterious 'they' who are watching him (3:2). For instance, some argue that Jesus implicitly contrasts his own act of healing – doing good, saving life – to the supposed hostile activity of his opponents who are 'doing evil' by trying to find a way to destroy him.<sup>1</sup> Others argue that the question in 3:4 and the pericope overall express a general principle that the failure of the Pharisees, and with them the Herodians, to do good on the Sabbath is tantamount to doing evil hence resulting in the pericope having a polemical function.<sup>2</sup> My core critique of such interpretations of this text is that they tend to interpret the text's relational dynamics more upon a binary construction of difference which has relied on the operation of stereotypical views of the identities of those involved in the story rather than on a close reading of the text alone.

The operation of stereotype can be seen in interpretations of the three primary agents in the text: the Pharisees, Jesus, and the man with a withered hand. The Pharisees are commonly held to be the 'they' of 'they watched him' (3:2)<sup>3</sup> although that is not named

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<sup>1</sup> See Rawlinson, A. E. J. (1949) *The Gospel according to St Mark* London: Westminster Commentaries

<sup>2</sup> Taylor, V. (1966) *The Gospel according to St Mark* London: Macmillan p.222.

<sup>3</sup> For example: Hare, D. R. A. (1996) *Mark* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press p.43; Budesheim, T. L. (1971) 'Jesus and the disciples in conflict with Judaism' *ZNW (Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und Kunde der Älteren Kirche)* 62 p.203; Sabourin, L. (1975) 'The miracles of Jesus (III) Healings, Resuscitations, Nature Miracles' *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 5 (2) p.150; Hultgren, A. J. (1979) *Jesus and his adversaries: The Form and Function of the conflict stories in the synoptic tradition* Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House p.83; Dewey, J. (1980) *Markan public debate: Literary techniques, concentric structure and theology in Mark 2:1-3:6* SBL Dissertation Series 48 Chico, CA: Scholars Press p.101; Mann, C. S. (1986) *The Anchor Bible: Mark* Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc. p.242; Doughty, D. (1983) 'The authority of the Son of Man (Mark 2:1-3:6)' *ZNW (Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und Kunde der Älteren Kirche)* 74 p.170; Williamson, L. (1983) *Mark: Interpretation* Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press p.74; Hooker, M. D. (1991) *The Gospel according to St. Mark* London: A & C Black p. 107; Kuthirakkattel, S. (1990) *The beginning of Jesus' ministry according to Mark's Gospel (1:14-3:6) A Redaction critical study* Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico p.230; Hiebert, D. E. (1994) *The Gospel of Mark: An Expository Commentary* Greenville, SC: Bob Jones

explicitly until v.6. The language of some scholarship immediately betrays an ideological edge to its reading of the text's relational dynamics. For instance, Williamson states that the language in 3:2, 'conjures up the image of figures lurking at a discreet distance', and later compounds this negative and oppositional image with his comment on 3:4: 'their silence is poisonous'.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Van Iersel characterises the Pharisees in his reading of 3:1-6 as 'criminals and murderers', with Jesus' actions serving to 'expose the stubbornness of their criminal mentality'.<sup>2</sup> A similar use of stereotype can be seen in the interpretations of readers in Solentiname, where commenting on Luke's version of the story (Luke 6:6-11), one reader states: 'To keep people in sickness and misery is like destroying their lives, because it's a life that's not a life. Besides, they were already thinking about destroying his life. They were criminals'.<sup>3</sup>

However, textually, the insertion of malice in the watching of Jesus can only be justified by interpreters anachronistically: by reading back from v.6 where the Pharisees join the Herodians in conspiring to destroy Jesus.<sup>4</sup> The leap of reasoning that any malice towards Jesus precedes his actions in 3:3-5 cannot be supported by the text which only suggests that the concern of those watching Jesus was a legal or technical one, and not one which was necessarily attached to a motivation to do Jesus harm.<sup>5</sup> Readings that argue for

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University Press p.84; Van Iersel, M. F. (1998) *Mark: A reader-response commentary* JSNT Supplement Series 164 Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.160; Marcus, J. (2000) *The Anchor Bible: Mark 1-8* Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co. Inc. p.24

<sup>1</sup> Williamson, L. (1983) *Mark: Interpretation* Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press p.74-5

<sup>2</sup> Van Iersel, M. F. (1998) *Mark: A reader-response commentary* JSNT Supplement Series 164 Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.161. Similarly, he reads the whole episode to have been a 'set-up' with the role of the man with the withered hand to have been no more than a ruse to trap Jesus (*Ibid.* p.160).

<sup>3</sup> See 'Alejandro' in Cardenal, E. (1977) *Love in Practice: The Gospel in Solentiname* London: Search Press p.106

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it has been argued that 3:6 is an insertion either by the evangelist or via redaction of the text serving to conclude the larger section 2:1-3:5 as an indication that 'Jewish hostility has reached its zenith', (see Anderson, H. (1976) *The Gospel of Mark* (New Century Bible) London: Oliphants p.112).

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, within the milieu of the synagogue and its traditions of disputation, it would have to be argued by the logic followed of many scholars, that each synagogue disputation was motivated by 'underlying' and 'unspoken' motivations to destroy one's opponent, unless it can be argued that there is evidence to support the notion that disputations involving Jesus were somehow different. Horsley claims that the synagogue was central to the whole life of a village. Its religious identity was inseparable from its socio-political function.

malice between the Pharisees and Jesus in the relational dynamics of 3:1-6 demonstrate less a textually justified interpretation of identity and agency and more the operation of stereotypes.

If the operational stereotype for 'the Pharisees' is one centred on malevolence, often the interpretation of Jesus' identity in this text focuses on his supposed benevolence. Jesus' designation as Son of Man<sup>1</sup> and Messiah<sup>2</sup> is almost by definition a superlative and benevolent identity. For instance, Doughty, sees the establishment of the authority of Jesus as the Son of Man - as the one who is 'now clearly portrayed as one who stands in the place of God and acts with the authority of God'<sup>3</sup> to be the overall purpose of this pericope.

What is often in operation in such readings of Jesus' part in the acts of 3:1-6 is a theological agenda submerged within other stated hermeneutical interests. For instance, Hultgren's form critical reading focuses on the significance of Jesus' question to the Pharisees in 3:4, arguing that Jesus is persuasive in the pericope most significantly because putting forth an argument and then acting on it in healing the man with the withered hand focuses attention not just on Jesus' status and authority as a healer, but

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He argues for a much wider role for the Pharisees - whom he says were unlikely to have been in Galilee during Jesus' lifetime as Jerusalem no longer held direct political jurisdiction over the area. Their concerns, Horsley argues, were beyond a desire to see Torah narrowly defined and defended as such, but were concerned with life and death issues such as the provision of adequate food (interpreted by Horsley as the issue behind 2:23-28) and the disintegration of marriage and the family (10:2-9). Hence disputation was not only likely to have been common in and around synagogues, but would have been vital for the political and religious well being of the community. See Horsley, R. (2001) *Hearing the whole story: The politics of plot in Mark's Gospel*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press p.162ff.

<sup>1</sup> Doughty, D. (1983) 'The authority of the Son of Man (Mark 2:1-3:6)' *ZNW (Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und Kunde der Älteren Kirch)* 74 p.178

<sup>2</sup> Hultgren, A. J. (1979) *Jesus and his adversaries: The Form and Function of the conflict stories in the synoptic tradition* Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House p.152

<sup>3</sup> Doughty, D. (1983) 'The authority of the Son of Man (Mark 2:1-3:6)' *ZNW (Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und Kunde der Älteren Kirch)* 74 p.178

christologically on Jesus as 'Messiah'.<sup>1</sup> Mann's reading of 3:1-6 is another example of a theologically driven reading under the hermeneutical category of form criticism. He argues, 'that the dawning of the Reign of God carried with it implications of a new creation and what more appropriate day to herald the new act of God than the Sabbath'.<sup>2</sup>

The consequence of such stereotypical readings of identity markers is that the dominant concern of much scholarship on the relational dynamics of 3:1-6 is focused on the disputation the pericope narrates between Jesus and the Pharisees. What is placed into submission by this is the other piece of relating the story describes: between Jesus and the man with a withered hand. In interpretations that do focus on 'the man with a withered hand', a key assumption is that when Jesus encounters the silent compliance of the man this reflects the reality of the identities of both characters: Jesus as active agent and the man as passive recipient. 'The man with the withered hand', therefore, falls victim to another stereotypical frame common in biblical narration, as Elshout argues: the disabled are understood as little more than 'marvellous plot-devices that show off the power of God or the Anointed One,' part of the 'group of God's special interests'.<sup>3</sup> In scholarship the man is often read as the no-man of the pericope: a character who 'requests no cure and exhibits no faith'<sup>4</sup>, and the one whom Jesus intends to use 'to give a public demonstration of His attitude toward the perverted Sabbath rules of the scribes and Pharisees'.<sup>5</sup> He is at best, then, a man who exhibits no active agency in his healing, and at

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<sup>1</sup> Hultgren, A. J. (1979) *Jesus and his adversaries: The Form and Function of the conflict stories in the synoptic tradition* Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House p.152

<sup>2</sup> Mann, C. S. (1986) *The Anchor Bible: Mark* Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc. p.242.

<sup>3</sup> Elshout, E. (1999) in 'Roundtable discussion: Women with disabilities – A Challenge to Feminist Theology' in Bach, A. (ed.) *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* London & New York: Routledge p.439

<sup>4</sup> Sabourin, L. (1975) 'The miracles of Jesus (III) Healings, Resuscitations, Nature Miracles' *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 5 (2) p.151

<sup>5</sup> Hiebert, D. E. (1994) *The Gospel of Mark: An Expository Commentary* Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press p.84

worst, asserts Guelich, merely a dramatic tool playing a supporting role in somebody else's act<sup>1</sup>; a cipher for Jesus to contest his point with his opponents.<sup>2</sup>

What might be seen to be in operation in these readings of Jesus and the man with the withered hand in 3:1-6 is 'normate hermeneutics', which is argued to dominate modern biblical thought.<sup>3</sup> The idea of a normate, a term coined by Rosemarie Garland Thomson, is the notion that there exists a socially constructed ideal image of personhood 'through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings'.<sup>4</sup> With reference to the 'disability' of the man in 3:1-6, it is argued that interpretations of this pericope adhere to the normate ideal person embodied in Jesus; the unnamed man's identity and agency, by contrast, is imposed by disability's perceived deviation from that normate ideal.<sup>5</sup>

This sample of scholarship suggests a pattern in interpretations of this text across a range of hermeneutical interests that overly utilises stereotype and underemphasises a closer reading of the actual relational dynamics within the story. In contrast, what the interpretations of the group readers – with their alternative emphases and perceptions of relational dynamics in this pericope – might do to problematise or extend the scholarship described above will be explored in the next section.

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<sup>1</sup> See Guelich, R. A. (1989) *Mark 1-8:26* (World Biblical Commentary) (34A) Dallas TX: Word Books p.133

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Derrett argues that Jesus uses the man as an example in an 'obviously high-grade legal debate' and pointed to him as 'an example of the state of Israel'. See Derrett, J. D. M. (1985) *The making of Mark: The scriptural basis for the earliest gospel* Volume One Warwickshire, England: P. Drinkwater p.79

<sup>3</sup> Wynn, K. (2007) 'The normate hermeneutic and interpretations of disability within Yahwistic narratives' in Avalos, H. *et al* (eds.) *This abled body: Rethinking disabilities in biblical studies* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature p.92

<sup>4</sup> Thomson, R. S. (1997) *Extraordinary bodies: Figuring physical disability in American Culture and Literature* New York, NY: Columbia University Press p.8

<sup>5</sup> See Wynn, K. (2007) 'The normate hermeneutic and interpretations of disability within Yahwistic narratives' in Avalos, H. *et al* (eds.) *This abled body: Rethinking disabilities in biblical studies* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature p.92, for a similar argument about biblical criticism in general.



#### 4.13 Power, voice, and the signification of difference

##### *Group Readers' Perspectives*

The most immediate feature that can be noticed in the reading groups' interpretations is that readers also utilised stereotypes in their interpretations of identity in this pericope. Significantly, there was a marked similarity between how they perceived the Pharisees and Jesus when compared to trained scholars. For instance, whilst there was a wider range of interpretations offered of the Pharisees – as potentially 'ill',<sup>1</sup> feeling 'foolish',<sup>2</sup> 'stuck' without an answer to offer back to Jesus,<sup>3</sup> hard-hearted,<sup>4</sup> 'angry',<sup>5</sup> 'jealous' of Jesus and wanting his power,<sup>6</sup> and even languishing without an answer from the God they had turned to<sup>7</sup> - the interpretations offered largely reflected the trend found in the above sample of academic scholarship towards a malevolent depiction of the Pharisees in the story. Furthermore, none of the interpretations really marked out this group as having identities that were significantly hegemonic, rather they were understood in general as being in some way inferior to and less praiseworthy than Jesus. For instance, answering a question about why 'they' remained silent in response to Jesus' question in 3:4 ('Is it lawful to do good or harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?') one reader said: '*Because Jesus is Jesus and Jesus is superior*'.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, perceptions of Jesus' character in the reading groups, whilst varied - interpreted by group readers as a character set apart by his divine

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<sup>1</sup> '*They thought they were better. Personally, I think they looked down on Jesus. You wonder whether they are ill. There are a lot of people like that, unfortunately,*' 'E' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.9

<sup>2</sup> '*Maybe they were silent because they realised that what they were doing was just as bad as harm - by this set up, they felt foolish. When he asked them a question, he just saw through them,*' 'C' from Reading Group Four April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.16

<sup>3</sup> '*Nothing in the rules spelled out an answer. In the moment they were stuck,*' 'B' from Reading Group Three, April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.14

<sup>4</sup> '*Jesus brings radical love to a people whose hardness of heart is against him, telling people to love people who hate you. I am sure there were people who demonstrated what love really is, and mercy...I don't have mercy on myself more than anybody else. Even people who don't like me probably would be more merciful to me,*' 'C' from Reading Group Three, April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.12

<sup>5</sup> '*They were very angry, always getting angry with Jesus,*' 'A' from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.6

<sup>6</sup> '*C: They were jealous of him; A: He had power, they wanted that power,*' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.10

<sup>7</sup> '*Sometimes the Pharisees turned to God and didn't get a response,*' 'D' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.9

<sup>8</sup> 'D' from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.5

power,<sup>1</sup> as a 'good guy',<sup>2</sup> wanting to help people,<sup>3</sup> offering 'radical love',<sup>4</sup> and as one having authority,<sup>5</sup> yet also as one short on patience,<sup>6</sup> and rejected by the crowds<sup>7</sup> - were largely interpreted as being generally positive and superior to the other characters.

By contrast, the interpretations of the man with the withered hand were much more pronounced and divergent from those of the academic community focusing on the unworthiness and diminished agency of the man. For instance:

*D: He knew he was going to be used of Jesus. He did so understanding that he would be the one.*

*B: Just a spectacle. He didn't understand, he was just grieved.*

*C: Maybe he felt Jesus had such authority, he felt like a child, he just obeyed him.*

*B: Unworthy, right.*

*A: Unworthy.*

*D: It was a fight against good and evil'.<sup>8</sup>*

The fundamental point of note about these interpretations of the man was that more than the other characters in the text, a consistent interpretative pattern emerged across the reading groups where the identity of the 'man with the withered hand' was explicitly and often spontaneously linked to multiple perceptions of the lived experience of poor mental health by many group readers. For instance, one reader drew out the theme of the

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<sup>1</sup> 'Because he was the Son of God. He already knew the facts about it,' 'A' from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.4

<sup>2</sup> 'Jesus was a good guy,' 'A' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.7

<sup>3</sup> 'He wanted to help them but they didn't allow it,' 'E' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.10

<sup>4</sup> 'Jesus brings radical love to a people whose hardness of heart is against him, telling people to love people who hate you.' 'C' from Reading Group Three, April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.12.

<sup>5</sup> 'These people were seeking to accuse the Father himself. That was the true fight – it was a fight to accuse the Father. The authority that Jesus had was so unbelievable, he could feel God's grace as well as the pain,' 'D' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.16

<sup>6</sup> 'B: He ran out of patience; C: Oh sure, why not? He was only human. Once in a while we can see his human side,' from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.6

<sup>7</sup> 'The crowd rejects him the same reason they reject Jesus. They don't want to identify with Jesus,' 'C' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.15

<sup>8</sup> From Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts pp.16-17

unworthiness of the man in relation to a personal experience of poor mental health stating (in response to the question of how it feels to be the man with the withered hand): *“I desire mercy not sacrifice’. Makes me think of my own life and how God does want to heal me even if I don’t deserve it. Maybe even makes me think I should pray to God. I forget about God and that he wants me to have healing...I struggle with God’s prestige so my mind doesn’t work, but is it spiritual blindness or physical blindness?... It is said in the Bible, Jesus said go and sin no more. That part always scares me. Somehow sin is attached to affliction. I struggle with that sin leads to punishment. There are different schools of thought that mental illness is possession or spiritual warfare’<sup>1</sup>.*

Some readers emphasised how the man was marked out by difference. Whilst it was the case that *‘everybody else in the place had a good hand’<sup>2</sup>*, the man whose hand was not ‘good’ stood out:

*‘B: Something different always stands out in the crowd.*

*A: That’s true.*

*E: He was very different.*

*B: Yes’.<sup>3</sup>*

Indeed, echoing Gillman’s argument for the role of fear in the representation and perception of persons with poor mental health<sup>4</sup>, being marked out for difference was read in the text to lead to, and perhaps also to flow out of, a certain predeterminedness generated from various prejudices which left the character segregated.

*‘B: Yes, I feel that when you are different you stand out. Everybody watches him and is seeing what you are going to do about him...*

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<sup>1</sup> ‘C’ from Reading Group Three, April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts pp.11-12

<sup>2</sup> ‘C’ from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.3

<sup>3</sup> From Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.5

<sup>4</sup> Gilman, S. L. (1988) *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press p.243

*A: Yeah. It's called prejudice. They don't understand, they hate them automatically. They make up stories. Our Lord never had prejudice. He tried to help as many people as possible.*

*B: They were probably afraid that sometimes they might find it, might call it an illness in the hand. People are afraid of the mentally ill.*

*D: You think so?*

*B: Yeah.*

*D: Some people, not all.*

**Why?**

*B: They don't know how to behave toward them.*

*E: They think we're crazy. We're not sick. This is not our home, we don't live here'.<sup>1</sup>*

Other readers emphasised the role of stigma: *'Some of the crowd would call him names, making fun of it, because that's the way things are in the world.'*<sup>2</sup> Similarly, when asked where the man's friends are in this passage another group responded:

*'C: None. He was handicapped.*

*B: Sometimes when people are handicapped, people shun them, like the mentally ill, some people shun you. They think that you're crazy.*

*C: Some people don't understand.*

*A: Some do.*

*E: They shouldn't do that. Wouldn't wish it on anyone.*

*B: They call you names – loony, crazy'.<sup>3</sup>*

The impact of identities built upon stigma and stereotype was read by some group members to result in the silencing of those set apart for difference: *'Maybe he's been*

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<sup>1</sup> From Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts pp.3-4

<sup>2</sup> 'B' from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.3

<sup>3</sup> From Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p. 8

*praying for a cure. Nobody really hears him. But Jesus hears him and Jesus repairs his hand*.<sup>1</sup>

Taken together, group readers' interpretations present a radically diminished view of the identity of the man as *'different'*<sup>2</sup>, *hidden*<sup>3</sup>, *'cursed'*<sup>4</sup>, *'alienated'*<sup>5</sup>, *'an experiment'*<sup>6</sup>, *rejected*<sup>7</sup>, and even *'guilty'*<sup>8</sup>. These render the 'man with a withered hand' in the interpretations of group readers as profoundly marked out for difference. The significance of this emphasis offered by group readers is seen in the imagined consequences such a diminished view of identity might have for the perceived potential for agency the man has in comparison to other characters.

For instance, the identity of the Pharisees was not read by group readers significantly to compromise their potential for agency in the text. Indeed, they continued to be characterised as people *'wanting to argue'*<sup>9</sup>. Even when the agency of the Pharisees was seen to be diminished in their being silenced by Jesus – *'temporarily defeated'*,<sup>10</sup> couldn't give a good answer,<sup>11</sup> jealously wanting Jesus' power<sup>12</sup> - this could be argued to be less a product of their identity and more, as I will argue below, a consequence of their own

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<sup>1</sup> 'D' from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.4

<sup>2</sup> *'Yes, I feel that when you are different you stand out. Everybody watches him and is seeing what you are going to do about him.'* B from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.3

<sup>3</sup> *'He hid out. He wasn't accepted, he was different.'* 'B' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.10

<sup>4</sup> *'Maybe he had a family but when he got disabled, they said, 'you got yourself cursed, get out of here',* 'C' from Reading Group Three, April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.12

<sup>5</sup> *'When Jesus was going about teaching and preaching these people were so obsessed with the law. When you were struck with leprosy at that time there was no cure. They were alienated from normal people',* 'B' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.15

<sup>6</sup> *'He became a project - he was used, like an experiment',* 'B' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.15

<sup>7</sup> *'The crowd rejects him the same reason they reject Jesus. They don't want to identify with Jesus',* 'C' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.15

<sup>8</sup> *'I think he was probably ambivalent. He wanted to be healed but he felt guilty. We know how that is. Guilty that he didn't go to Jesus of his own will',* 'C' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.16

<sup>9</sup> *'Maybe they thought he was a fake. They wanted to argue with him',* 'B' from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.4

<sup>10</sup> *'The Pharisees were temporarily defeated. That's why they are so quiet',* 'D' from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.5

<sup>11</sup> *'C: Couldn't give him a good answer; D: If they answer one way, there can be no answer. They would look bad either way,'* from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.5

<sup>12</sup> *'C: They were jealous of him; A: He had power, they wanted that power,'* from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.10

choosing. In terms of Jesus, group readers largely interpreted his identity only to be further augmented by his agency in the pericope. For instance, Jesus was interpreted as one who is in control of the situation,<sup>1</sup> the 'centre of attention',<sup>2</sup> already knowing what the man needed,<sup>3</sup> having an effect on people as the 'Son of God',<sup>4</sup> with the 'efficient' ministry of a sovereign<sup>5</sup>.

In terms of how identity impacted agency for the man with the withered hand, the interpretations of group readers were split. Some argued that the man's profoundly diminished identity rendered his potential for agency severely attenuated. For instance, it was argued that the man was left feeling 'nervous' and 'in the spotlight',<sup>6</sup> hiding and 'cowering in a corner',<sup>7</sup> 'afraid',<sup>8</sup> 'forced to go' to the synagogue that day,<sup>9</sup> 'used of God',<sup>10</sup> feeling 'guilty that he didn't go to Jesus of his own will',<sup>11</sup> and left there an 'unworthy', 'grieved' 'spectacle'<sup>12</sup>. Thus these readers suggested that beyond even the view some

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<sup>1</sup> 'It sounds like to me that Jesus is in command of the whole situation. He always knows how to defeat plans with a good saying,' 'A' from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.5

<sup>2</sup> 'Jesus is the centre of attention. Helping this man he got more followers,' 'A' from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.7

<sup>3</sup> 'Reminds me of the woman at the well. She was confronted with what Jesus already knew about her,' 'C' from Reading Group Three, April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.14

<sup>4</sup> 'Well if he was Son of God it has an effect on people. Did he have doubts and then he believed? Jesus has an effect on him,' 'C' from Reading Group Three, April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.14

<sup>5</sup> 'In his sovereignty everything is efficient. It doesn't become a matter of what is most important. This one act will heal and demonstrate how wicked they are, right?' 'D' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.16

<sup>6</sup> 'He might be nervous or afraid, in the spotlight. Before he was not in the spotlight, now everybody can see him,' 'D' from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.6

<sup>7</sup> 'He's hiding, cowering in the corner. They wouldn't have wanted him to get help just because it was that day,' 'D' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.11

<sup>8</sup> 'Could be afraid to for societal reasons. The fact that they wanted to destroy the man who healed him – I can see he would be afraid they were going to destroy him too, he would be petrified,' 'B' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.12

<sup>9</sup> 'Forced to go there,' 'A' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.15

<sup>10</sup> '**What is the 'man with the withered hand' come forward for?... 'Because this being is used of God, he probably wanted to be healed of his deformity. He couldn't even offer things to God because of his deformity,'** 'D' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.16

<sup>11</sup> 'I think he was probably ambivalent. He wanted to be healed but he felt guilty. We know how that is. Guilty that he didn't go to Jesus of his own will,' 'C' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.16

<sup>12</sup> 'D: He knew he was going to be used of Jesus. He did so understanding that he would be the one; B: Just a spectacle. He didn't understand, he was just grieved; C: Maybe he felt Jesus had such authority, he felt like

scholars offered of the man as one who 'requests no cure and exhibits no faith'<sup>1</sup>, this is a man who is profoundly stigmatised such that his mark of difference – withered – renders his agency as decided in advance to be at a dead end. Via such interpretations of agency, this is a man for whom, in Benita Parry's terms, 'no alternative texts are supposed to have been written'<sup>2</sup>. He is the subaltern who not only does not, but cannot speak.

Other group readers, though, saw that despite his diminished identity, the man with the withered hand did act as an agent of change and healing in the pericope, an interpretation which is largely absent from the scholarship reviewed earlier. For instance, some argued that the man had been praying for help '*for a long time*',<sup>3</sup> that he played a big part in his healing,<sup>4</sup> that he went to the synagogue that day in order '*to understand how he feels*', '*to try to cope*',<sup>5</sup> that he wanted to be cured so that '*he wouldn't be victimised anymore*',<sup>6</sup> that he '*tried to hold onto hope and he got better*',<sup>7</sup> that '*he wanted to be whole again*',<sup>8</sup> and that '*he showed he believed*'<sup>9</sup>.

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*a child, he just obeyed him; B: Unworthy, right; A: Unworthy*', from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts pp.16-17

<sup>1</sup> Sabourin, L. (1975) 'The miracles of Jesus (III) Healings, Resuscitations, Nature Miracles' *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 5 (2) p.151

<sup>2</sup> Parry, B. (1995) 'Problems in current theories of colonial discourse' in Ashcroft, B. (ed.) *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* London & New York: Routledge p.43

<sup>3</sup> '*He was praying for it for a long time*,' 'D' from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.4

<sup>4</sup> '*He played a big part. He had to believe*,' 'C' Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.6

<sup>5</sup> '*Maybe he wants to understand how he feels. He's going to the synagogue to help him understand, to try to cope*,' 'E' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.8

<sup>6</sup> '*He wanted to be cured, so he wouldn't be victimised anymore. He believed Jesus could cure him*,' 'B' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.9

<sup>7</sup> '*He accepted what had happened to him and he did not try to deny them because he went and accepted them. He tried to hold on to hope and he got better*,' 'E' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.9

<sup>8</sup> '*The man's healing. Because he wanted to be whole again*,' 'D' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.9

<sup>9</sup> '*He played a very important part. He showed he believed. As tiny as a mustard seed, just a small amount*,' 'E' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.10

It is this twin emphasis of diminished identity yet active agency that I examine in an expansion of the frame of this text in the section that follows. To explore such a possibility is to take up the invitation such group readers' interpretations suggest: to probe the thin spaces of often submerged interest in the text. To read the man with the withered hand as an active agent in the text, particularly given the strong emphasis on his diminished and debilitated identity offered by group readers, might be seen to undermine such an important re-emphasis on diminished identity for this pericope, particularly given the multiple associations made by group readers between the man's relational predicament and those who experience poor mental health. Indeed, given the arguments I made in Chapter Three critiquing the role of the biblical scholar as the sole arbitrator of interpretive difference, to take up one emphasis (that the man's identity did not preclude his potential for agency) over another (that, to a large extent, it did) might look like I am seeking to sublimate the difference in between the different group readers' interpretations. However, the crucial delineation I wish to draw here is that in seeking to probe one of the emphases above, rather than another, I wish simply to explore one possible interpretative response to this text; I am not stating that this is how the text must be read. Furthermore, in pushing at the points of tension between readings of this text, I explore how the argument – namely, that diminished identity might lead to the conclusion that possibilities for agency are precluded - might rely on a view of postcolonial agency limited to the confines of hegemonic power structures, and that the postcolonial praxis of mutuality might suggest an expansion of that limited framing of agency.

#### **4.14 'Come forward'**

*Invitations to the middle and the man with the withered/divine hand*

The re-framing I offer of this pericope is essentially one which seeks to re-imagine power. On one hand, it can be argued that 'the man with the withered hand' has been imagined



as one who is subject to others' power in the text: to Jesus' power, who commands him to come forward, stretch out his hand, and then who performs a healing on him (3:3,5) and, to the Pharisees' power, who have often been assumed to have relegated this man to a place of exclusion in the synagogue and perhaps in the wider community<sup>1</sup>. With this, it can be asserted that this man is the product of these powers of assumption which render his identity as 'different'<sup>2</sup>, hidden<sup>3</sup>, 'cursed'<sup>4</sup>, 'alienated'<sup>5</sup>, 'an experiment'<sup>6</sup>, rejected<sup>7</sup>, and even 'guilty'<sup>8</sup>.

An alternative view of the man is that he is more than merely the object of others' power, and that he exercises power for himself. It is this second strand of group readers' interpretations, which contend that in spite of his profoundly diminished identity, the man does exercise agency and in doing so push at the limits of how this pericope has typically been framed.

Fundamentally, the shift that I am proposing is one which has been argued for in biblical studies more widely with regards to 'disability', urging a shift in the perception of disability 'from pathology to identity', wherein physical difference is not something to be

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<sup>1</sup> See Derrett, J. D. M. (1984) 'Christ and the power of choice in Mark 3:1-6' *Biblica* 65 p.178

<sup>2</sup> 'Yes, I feel that when you are different you stand out. Everybody watches him and is seeing what you are going to do about him.' B from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.3

<sup>3</sup> 'He hid out. He wasn't accepted, he was different,' 'B' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.8

<sup>4</sup> 'Maybe he had a family but when he got disabled, they said, 'you got yourself cursed, get out of here', 'C' from Reading Group Three, April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.12

<sup>5</sup> 'When Jesus was going about teaching and preaching these people were so obsessed with the law. When you were struck with leprosy at that time there was no cure. They were alienated from normal people', 'B' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.15

<sup>6</sup> 'He became a project - he was used, like an experiment', 'B' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.15

<sup>7</sup> 'The crowd rejects him the same reason they reject Jesus. They don't want to identify with Jesus', 'C' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.15

<sup>8</sup> 'I think he was probably ambivalent. He wanted to be healed but he felt guilty. We know how that is. Guilty that he didn't go to Jesus of his own will', 'C' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.16

compensated for but seen as a legitimate part of relational power.<sup>1</sup> Thus, along with the group readers who suggested that in spite of the man's diminished identity, he was able to exercise agency in the story, I wish to extend the frame of this possibility, in exploring how such agency might operate utilising this dissertation's core concept of mutuality as a postcolonial praxis.

The praxis of mutuality can be discerned in this pericope in the way agency is invited in the relational encounter narrated. In this regard, Jesus can be seen to offer a twofold invitation in 3:1-6. First, viewed through the lens of the praxis of mutuality, Jesus offers the invitation to share a space of dialogue to those who were watching him, even if that dialogue takes on a disputational form.<sup>2</sup> To see Jesus' question in 3:4 ('is it lawful to do good or do harm on the sabbath?') as an invitation to share dialogue is not a common view. Jesus' question to those who were watching him is sometimes interpreted as an act that reduces those being asked to silence.<sup>3</sup> However, from the text alone it is hard to see how the Pharisees as composite characters in Mark would be so easily reduced to silent compliance in this exchange. Indeed, according to the gospel as a whole, 'the Pharisees' are not a group that are often shy to offer an opinion (e.g. 2:15-17; 2:18-20; 2:23-27). Moreover, the indication at the end of the pericope (3:6) in the 'plot' of the Pharisees with the Herodians, is that the Pharisees were far from feeling marginalised by Jesus. Rather, if

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<sup>1</sup> See Wynn, K. (2007) 'The normate hermeneutic and interpretations of disability within Yahwistic narratives' in Avalos, H. *et al* (eds.) *This abled body: Rethinking disabilities in biblical studies* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature p.92, who cites Thomson's work on the normate principle (see Thomson, R. S. (1997) *Extraordinary bodies: Figuring physical disability in American Culture and Literature* New York, NY: Columbia University Press p.24).

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Pallares argues that Jesus invites 'his adversaries' to question themselves and answer whether God is on the side of oppression and tyranny or on that of succour and life (see Pallares, J. C. (1986) *A poor man called Jesus: Reflections on the Gospel of Mark* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.24).

<sup>3</sup> For instance, Painter argues that Jesus' question neutralises any objection that might be raised (Painter, J. (1997) *Mark's Gospel: Worlds in conflict* London & New York: Routledge p.63; Anderson argues that the Pharisees choice to remain silent is an attempt to indicate their disagreement to any principle that would undermine the sovereignty of the Law (Anderson, H. (1976) *The Gospel of Mark* (New Century Bible) London: Oliphants p.114); and Heil assumes that the Pharisees remain silent either because Jesus' question is to be read as a rhetorical one or because of the 'stubbornness' of those who were watching Jesus (Heil, J. P. (1992) *The Gospel of Mark as a model for action: A reader-response commentary* New York, NY: Paulist Press p.75).

the text is to be taken at face-value, they were choosing to respond to Jesus' invitation to dialogue and to his actions following it in a definitive way: 'plotting to destroy him' (3:6). Whichever way the silence is interpreted, such arguments suggest it was not out of an inability to answer Jesus' clever rhetoric that those who were watching him did not reply. The Pharisees made a choice not to take up the invitation to the praxis of mutuality in dialogue.

The second invitation to a praxis of mutuality Jesus offers is to the man. Apart from the more conventional interpretations of Jesus' 'sovereign' status<sup>1</sup> as the 'Son of God'<sup>2</sup> in relation to this man in the pericope, whereby Jesus' 'invitation' is read as a command, certain group readers focused on the quality of the encounter between Jesus and the man as invitational: *'I can see how he was trying to help this man. Not just physically if we consider he was outcast, shunned. He encountered him, calling him publicly. Basically through the people, Pharisees, and the crowd he's healing him right in front of them and defends that action. In fact that may not be the most important thing he's doing. The most important thing might be the way he is doing it. Healing is the operative thing. If he was using the guy to make a point then I think that would be going in the direction of the people he is saying this to and I think one of the huge points is that he is completely different in important ways. There's no way he's embodying objectifying. To the Pharisees their relation to the law was more important than whether this guy is suffering. The most obvious thing in this passage: Jesus feels different'.<sup>3</sup>*

I would argue along with this reader that the difference Jesus 'feels' is that he acts in this story as one who seeks out the agency of both the Pharisees and the man. That is, Jesus seeks to cultivate the praxis of mutuality and exercises it himself as a resistive and

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<sup>1</sup> *'In his sovereignty everything is efficient. It doesn't become a matter of what is most important. This one act will heal and demonstrate how wicked they are, right?'* 'D' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.16

<sup>2</sup> *'He saw the Son of God and knew he could help him'* 'A' from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.6

<sup>3</sup> 'B' from Reading Group Three, April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.14

transformative praxis: in dialogue with those who were watching him, and in action with the man. What I am arguing for here, then, is that the praxis of mutuality is utilised by Jesus as a way of re-imagining discursive power. In response to Jesus, the Pharisees choose to deviate the potential for a praxis of mutuality in that moment of the encounter to a discussion 'outside' the presence of Jesus and his invitation. Also in response to Jesus, the man chooses to take up that invitation to a praxis of mutuality within which identity might be re-imagined. Within postcolonial criticism, such acts of re-imagining, as Keller argues, thus challenge the notion of identity as fixed, re-presenting identity as something that 'evolves through a continuing process of interrelation, identification, and differentiation'<sup>1</sup>. That is, the man himself exercises a praxis of mutuality and thus acts to forge a new wholeness not by negating difference but by choosing to act within the very reality of the conflict difference presents.<sup>2</sup> What I am suggesting here is that in Carter Heyward's terms, the man and Jesus choose to exercise δύναμις, a power underneath the authoritative order of external power.<sup>3</sup>

Yet it is the specifically strategic nature of this exercise of δύναμις that I wish to emphasise here. For, the praxis of mutuality, seen in the invitational agency of Jesus, and in the man's response, operates in tandem with another postcolonial praxis: hybridity. Specifically, the man's agency of choosing to respond to Jesus' praxis of mutuality re-imagines a symbol previously interpreted as a mark of difference in the text – the

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<sup>1</sup> Keller, C. *et al* (eds.) *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press pp.11-12

<sup>2</sup> See Elshout, E. (1999) in 'Roundtable discussion: Women with disabilities – A Challenge to Feminist Theology' in Bach, A. (ed.) *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* London & New York: Routledge p.432, who argues that the disabled body represents the reality of differences and conflicts. Consequently, new relationships and new wholeness can only be forged in difference and conflict. Indeed, as Elshout argues in relation to the role of the 'dis-abled' body and transcendence, 'overcoming barriers and locating freedom in physical restrictions constitute my idea of transcendence. In other words, it is the body which provides the location and possibility for transcendence' (*Ibid.* p. 451).

<sup>3</sup> Heyward, C. (1982) *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* New York, NY: University Press of America p.44. Furthermore, the role that Jesus plays in encounters such as this 'confronts the traditional beliefs about disability' which associate 'disability' with sin and punishment from God, and establish a new relationship based on forgiveness and healing (see Hentrich, T. (2007) 'Masculinity and Disability in the Bible' in Avalos, H. *et al* (eds.) *This abled body: Rethinking disabilities in biblical studies* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature p.86).

withered hand – as a symbol of divine activity. In responding to the invitation of Jesus to ‘come forward’ (3:3) the man produces a fuller and hybrid knowledge of his identity symbolised in the man’s stretching out of his hand in 3:5.

That the outstretched hand of the man in 3:1-6 might be viewed as a praxis of hybridity can be seen by placing the symbolism of such an action within Judaic tradition. For instance, Derrett argues that the symbolic resonance of such an action cannot be missed: the man, in stretching out his hand, produces/performs ‘divine knowledge’.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the textual allusions of stretching out one’s hand are abundant (e.g. Exodus 6:6; 14:21,27; Deuteronomy 4:34; 5:15; 1Kings 8:42; 2 Kings 17:36; 2 Chronicles 6:32; Isaiah 50:2; Ezekiel 20:33-34). Whilst Derrett goes on to interpret the act as potentially having political overtones,<sup>2</sup> I would like to focus on the relational overtones of the encounter. That is, this encounter takes place in a space wherein the dynamism of the encounter is contained not in the issuing forth of ‘divine power’ from one character to another, but is expressed in the praxis of mutuality between characters who actively choose to exercise agency. Thus, through the lens of the postcolonial praxis of mutuality, the colonial space of this pericope may be seen as not only fertile for the resistance of stigmatising, stereotyping, and the negation of agency, it is also a space for a strategic transformation of hegemonic relational dynamics via the renegotiation of identity as hybrid.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in taking up Jesus’ invitation to stretch forth his hand the man imbues the encounter with hybridity: he is at one and the same time the man with the withered and the man with the divine hand. He symbolises both stigma and a debilitation of relational power and the divine in-breaking

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<sup>1</sup> See Derrett, J. D. M. (1984) ‘Christ and the power of choice in Mark 3:1-6’ *Biblica* 65 p.183. A similar point is argued by Smith, S. H. (1994) ‘Mark 3:1-6: Form, Redaction and Community Function’ *Biblica* 75 pp.153-74

<sup>2</sup> Arguing that the reaction of the Pharisees and Herodians in 3:6 might not have focused only on Jesus but on the now divinely strengthened hand of the ‘mighty army’ Jesus was equipping (see Derrett, J. D. M. (1984) ‘Christ and the power of choice in Mark 3:1-6’ *Biblica* 65 p.183).

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, more broadly, Keller argues that postcolonial criticism rightly recognises that hybridity contains ‘great potential for resistance’, turning hybridity to ‘transformative use’, (Keller, C. *et al* (eds.) *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press pp.13-14).

of transformative and saving/healing power in the midst of the relational encounter with Jesus. At Jesus' invitational praxis of mutuality, the man stretches forth his withered/divine hand and tears at the fabric of binaristic patterns of power.

In Bhabha's terms, the man with the withered/divine hand repeats the act of divine stretching forth, yet his ambiguous presence means that this repetition is not quite the same as the biblical imagination normatively conceives of it.<sup>1</sup> It might even be argued that it is in this 'hybrid moment of political change',<sup>2</sup> made possible by Jesus' invitational praxis of mutuality, that the hybridity of the man with the withered/divine hand offers him the room to manoeuvre in the space between Jesus and the Pharisees (if it can be assumed from the text that the 'they' who were watching him were the Pharisees named in v. 6) and so to resist not only the debilitation of his physical condition, but also the marginalising of his societal location.

As one of the readers argues in response to a question which asks what 'they' care about concerning the man, *'I think it's psychologically normal for people at times to do things outrageous or provocative'*.<sup>3</sup> It might be that this biblical instance of re-imagining difference not as dis-abled but as divinely-abled models hybridity as a form of resistance and transformation, which might offer ways for those who have been subjugated by the imposition of identity to estrange the basis of that hegemonic power. This interpretation of the actions of the man with a withered/divine hand, then, stands in tension with the earlier readings which submerged the significance of the sharing of space between Jesus and the man, and relegated the role of the 'no-man' of the encounter to little more than,

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<sup>1</sup> Bhabha, H. (1994) 'Introduction' in *The Location of Culture* London & New York: Routledge p.5

<sup>2</sup> Bhabha, H. (1994) 'The commitment to theory' in *The Location of Culture* London & New York: Routledge p.28

<sup>3</sup> 'B' from Reading Group Three, April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.12

in Liew's terms, a 'sidekick', or 'gopher'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this reading also stands in tension with theological interpretations of the significance of an outstretched and withered hand which do not designate such an act as being symbolic of the divine. Yet, the theological postcolonial lens is one which is open to boundary crossing in the interpretation of biblical texts, both in terms of culture and theology; a possibility that is open not only to Jesus<sup>2</sup> but to other characters too.

In this regard, there is, then, an invitational element to the praxis of mutuality in the man's action too. For, in his choosing to enter into the tenuous middle space of the synagogue, the man models the risky living of exercising a praxis of mutuality in the face of excluding and imposing power. There is a sense in which his action serves as an invitation to others present, and perhaps by extension to the reader, to take up the resistive praxis of hybridising narrow relational 'spaces' by reworking symbols of assured theological or ideological value and resonance. Such a hybridising praxis presents the man's 'disabled' identity in this pericope not primarily as a sign of a loss of status, but as the means through which he re-imagines power in relational dynamics. For, if not withered, his hand is not imbued with the hybridity that makes it such a subversive symbol of resistance. Indeed, his status might be reconfigured as augmented, not diminished, by his hybrid praxis.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Liew, T. B. (2006) 'Tyranny, boundary, and might: Colonial mimicry in Mark's Gospel' in Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing (original work 1999) p.212

<sup>2</sup> Postcolonial interpretations of Jesus as a boundary crosser are numerous. See for instance, Nausner, M. (2004) 'Homeland as borderland: Territories of Christian Subjectivity' in Keller, C. *et al* (eds.) *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press pp.118-133; and, Joh, W. A. (2004) 'The transgressive power of Jeong: A postcolonial hybridization of Christology' in Keller, C. *et al* (eds.) *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press pp.149-163.

<sup>3</sup> See Wynn, K. (2007) 'The normate hermeneutic and interpretations of disability within Yahwistic narratives' in Avalos, H. *et al* (eds.) *This abled body: Rethinking disabilities in biblical studies* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature p.101, who argues that disability might be conceived of not as a loss of status but as a mark of it.

However, before the potential of hybrid identity and 'disabled' agency is celebrated via the invitational praxis of mutuality, two caveats need exploring. The first is the simple textual fact of the matter that 'disability' is not retained in 3:1-6; to the contrary it is transformed in an act of healing (3:5). The principle that disability is something to be overcome, even metaphorically, by a divine restorative power is dominant in biblical texts.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, such healing power is read to indicate God's salvific action towards his people.<sup>2</sup> And so, with particular reference to Jesus' healing acts in general and in 3:1-6 in particular, it can be argued that Jesus treats the disabled body as something to be healed so that a barrier to full participation in society might be overcome.<sup>3</sup> Such a critique is significant for this dissertation's reading of 3:1-6, as implicit in my interpretation of this text is an assumption that the 'withered hand' is something to be overcome. That such an assumption might be problematic for those readers who experience chronically poor mental health is clear.

The second potential caveat is whether hybridity exercised via the invitational praxis of mutuality – in this case openly transgressive of hegemonic relational dynamics – is effective as a form of re-imagining identity. Some of the readers argued, following this symbolic and transformative act, that:

*D: He may be a little afraid of the Herodians.*

*A: They might cut off his head<sup>4</sup>.*

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Isaiah 6:10; Jeremiah 31:8; Zephaniah 3:19.

<sup>2</sup> See Melcher, S. J. (2007) 'With whom do the disabled associate?' in Avalos, H. *et al* (eds.) *This abled body: Rethinking disabilities in biblical studies* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature p.123, who emphasises the problematic nature of this sort of interpretation when considering biblical texts as sources of liberative rhetoric in relation to disability, resulting in a devaluing of persons with disabilities.

<sup>3</sup> 'Not only does the New Testament cultivate social contexts that expect the eradication of disability as a resolution to human-made exclusion, it does so by depicting disabled people as the agents of their own curative ambition' (Mitchell, D. *et al* (2007) "'Jesus throws everything off balance'" Disability and redemption in biblical literature' in Avalos, H. *et al* (eds.) *This abled body: Rethinking disabilities in biblical studies* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature p.179).

<sup>4</sup> From Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.10



The applied efficacy of these postcolonial praxes remains an open question, for it is not to a safe or liberated place that this story makes it end, but one which is fraught with danger and foreboding (3:6). What is clear, though, from re-reading this pericope, is that when stereotype is allowed to predominate in the interpretation of this text, the full extent of the agency exercised in 3:1-6 is missed. Furthermore, the emphasis group readers offered this re-reading of a man who is profoundly diminished and reduced, accentuated the significance of the man's choice to accept what I have argued to be Jesus' invitational praxis of mutuality to exercise agency, thus significantly altering the view of the 'man with a withered hand' as an agent in this story. Not only is the interpretation of this man as a passive character in the text challenged by this re-reading, so also is the interpretation of what is transforming. That is, I argue that transformation occurs in this pericope both because of Jesus' exercise of an invitational praxis of mutuality and because of the healing that came forth following the man's choice to respond positively to that invitation.

In this pericope I have argued that the praxis of mutuality is more than an interesting motif in the interpretation of this text; the praxis of mutuality is central to the text's narrative development. I have argued that the praxis of mutuality opens the way in this pericope for the exercising of agencies of resistive survival and transformation. In the second of this pair of pericopae this chapter considers, by contrast, is the absence of the full form of the praxis mutuality that opens up quite different possibilities, as the shadow of the cross is cast from Golgotha all the way to Capernaum.

#### **4.21 Introduction: Labels, binarism, and ambiguity**

*Mark 3:19b-35*

Then *Jesus* went home; 20and the crowd came together again, so they could not even eat. 21When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind'. 22And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.' 23And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, 'How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 27No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man: then indeed the house can be plundered.

28Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin' – 30for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit'.

31Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.' 33And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' 34And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! 35Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother'.

*In the interpretation of 3:19b-35 I ask how relational dynamics are negotiated in the unfolding of this narrative. Central to this question is the assertion that in 3:19b-35 Jesus is faced with a radical challenge, not only to his authority, but to his very person, by labels which seek to point to an inner, spiritual/theological and psychological depravity. My interest is in Jesus' response to these labels, and whether the binarism that he employs is an attempt to offer a resistance of clarity or one of ambiguity. Whilst both possibilities are explored by group readers, it is their emphasis on ambiguity which prompts my interpretation of Jesus' resistance in this encounter as one that*

*employs ambiguity as a postcolonial strategy. Furthermore, I explore how the relative absence of a praxis of mutuality in its full form ultimately shapes the encounter as it is narrated.*

#### **4.22 Jesus, labels, and binaristic resistance**

##### *Scholars' Perspectives*

In assessing Jesus' response to the questioning of his identity narrated in 3:19b-35, scholars who have an interest in the relational dynamics of the text tend to argue that Jesus resists the acts of labelling he is subjected to by utilising a similarly binaristic type of argument, turning it to his own advantage. Furthermore, it is often asserted that Jesus not only uses binarisms in contending with his accusers, he does so with clarity of expression. For instance, Dowd argues that unlike later passages in the Gospel, here in this pericope the contrast between insiders and outsiders is clear-cut.<sup>1</sup> That is, whilst in the first pericope examined in this chapter (3:1-6), Jesus' invitational praxis of mutuality with those around him sought to open up a space between the persons involved, on the face of it, Jesus' response to his own experience of 'othering' in this second pericope (3:19b-35) does the very opposite. He appears to allow no shared space within the relational dynamics between himself and those who accuse him. Instead he creates a binary distinction between insiders and outsiders; between himself and those who accuse him of being 'out of his mind' (3:21); and between himself and those who accuse him of 'having Beelzebul' (3:22), to whom Jesus offers a series of parables about devils,

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<sup>1</sup> See Dowd, S. (2000) *Reading Mark: A literary and theological commentary on the second gospel* Macon, GA: Smyth & Helyws p.37). For interpretations that see Jesus' argumentation in 3:19b-35 similarly based on clear binaristic distinctions see: Heil, J. P. (1992) *The Gospel of Mark as a model for action: A reader-response commentary* New York, NY: Paulist Press p.88; Hare, D. R. A. (1996) *Mark* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press p.50; Broadhead, E. K. (2001) *Mark* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.42; Bowman, J. (1965) *The Gospel of Mark: The new Christian Jewish Passover Haggadah* Leiden: Brill p.131; Guelich, R. A. (1989) *Mark 1-8:26* (World Biblical Commentary) (34A) Dallas TX: Word Books pp.175-6; Painter, J. (1997) *Mark's Gospel: Worlds in conflict* London & New York: Routledge p.72. Moreover, Liew argues that Jesus' use of binarism in 3:19b-35 duplicates an insider-outsider model that spells violent destruction for those 'outside', and serves the purpose of assisting in establishing Jesus' absolute authority upon the colonial landscape of the gospel (Liew, B. (1999) *Politics of parousia: Reading Mark Inter(con)textually* Leiden: Brill p.103).

kingdoms, and houses (3:23-25) couched in a binaristic form, the implication being that he stands on one side and cannot therefore stand on the other.

The argument that Jesus negotiates the relational dynamics he is faced with in this pericope with binaristic clarity has focused on what a number of biblical scholars have interpreted to be at the heart of the entire passage: the charge that Jesus 'has Beelzebul' (3:22).<sup>1</sup> The postulation of the central importance of 3:22 is often based on the supposed predominance of a theological dualism between 'powers of good and evil' contemporary in the story's historical location. That is, Jesus' binaristic response to the charges before him typifies a dominant discourse of 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst it is argued that Jesus responded to the acts of labelling he faced utilising a clear binaristic strategy of resistance, scholars often wish to retain the critical distance Jesus creates in relation to others in this text, at the same time arguing that he does not lack compassion for them. Take, for instance, the first act of labelling, that Jesus is 'out of his mind' (3:21). This troubles scholars who presume that Jesus' family are responsible for saying this, when they wish also to argue that a good relationship is maintained in this pericope between Jesus and his family. For example, Marcus sees the presence of an antagonism between Jesus and his family as necessary, wherein 'somehow such strange antagonisms must serve God's purpose'.<sup>3</sup> In this vein, some scholars want to abdicate the

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<sup>1</sup> See E.g. Hiebert, D. E. (1994) *The Gospel of Mark: An Expository Commentary* Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press pp.97-102; Best, E. (1990) *The Temptation and the passion: The Markan Soteriology* (Second Edition) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp.12-15; Mann, C. S. (1986) *The Anchor Bible: Mark* Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc. p.254; MacLaurin, E. C. B. (1978) 'Beelzeboul' *Novum Testamentum* Vol XX (2) (April) pp.157-159; Hiers, R. H. (1974) 'Satan, demons, and the Kingdom of God' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 27 (1) (February) pp.35-47

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Mann has argued that Zoroastrianism was a contemporary influence on Jewish thinking through both the earlier Persian period and later Hellenistic one. For instance Essene theology, one of a dualism between 'good' and 'evil' may have depended on Zoroastrianism in some form. Mann, C. S. (1986) *The Anchor Bible: Mark* Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc. p.254

<sup>3</sup> Marcus, J. (2000) *The Anchor Bible: Mark 1-8* Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co. Inc. p.280. See also Hiebert's argument that the attempt by the family of Jesus to restrain him represented nothing more sinister

family's role in the act of labelling altogether. Painter argues that the textual context of the appointment of the twelve by Jesus to do his work in 3:13-19 is evidence enough that the intended referent in the phrase in 3:21 is Jesus' disciples, and not his family.<sup>1</sup> Others argue that the role of the family should be interpreted in positive terms even if they demonstrate a 'lack of sympathy'.<sup>2</sup> Of course, scholars who take such a position mostly argue the opposite lack of personal regard for Jesus on behalf of the scribes, described by Hierbert as 'deliberately malicious'.<sup>3</sup>

Alternatively, those who wish to accentuate the critical distance between Jesus and his family argue that Jesus' family should be implicated in the accusation made against him, and Jesus' resistance should be read within a wider contemporary framework which challenges the ancient notion of traditional family ties with an alternative 'strategy for good living' centred on the 'Kingdom of God'.<sup>4</sup> This alternative strategy, argues Ahearne-Kroll, demands that when those ties interfere with the 'way of the Kingdom', then doing the will of God must come first, even if it means severing family relations.<sup>5</sup> Thus, according to Ahearne-Kroll, Jesus redefines family by its relation to God as its creator and binding force,<sup>6</sup> with conventional family relations no longer completely conditioning one's life choices.<sup>7</sup>

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than a misplaced, well-meaning desire to protect. Hiebert, D. E. (1994) *The Gospel of Mark: An Expository Commentary* Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press p.97.

<sup>1</sup> Painter, J. (1997) *Mark's Gospel: Worlds in conflict* London & New York: Routledge p.70. This argument is refuted by those who privilege the 'Markan sandwich' form which 3:19b-34 (with 3:19b-21 and 3:31-34 around 3:22-30) is taken to be an example of (see for example Guelich, R. A. (1989) *Mark 1-8:26* (World Biblical Commentary) (34A) Dallas TX: Word Books p.172).

<sup>2</sup> Hiebert, D. E. (1994) *The Gospel of Mark: An Expository Commentary* Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press p.97

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.99

<sup>4</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, S. P. (2001) "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Family relations and family language in the Gospel of Mark', *The Journal of Religion* 81 pp.1-25

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.19

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.22

<sup>7</sup> A similar argument about the need to break conventional family ties for the sake of the cause being struggled for is emphasised by readers in Cardenal's *Gospel in Solentiname*. For instance, Laureano argues 'Jesus has a revolutionary attitude here I believe, because every revolutionary has to break loose from his family' (Cardenal, E. (1977) *Love in Practice: The Gospel in Solentiname* London: Search Press p.160).

Other scholars' interpretations imply that a clearly defined binarism must lie at the heart of Jesus' responses to under gird his telling of parables. For instance, interpreters of the enigmatic parable of the strong man, suggest that it means that Jesus has already 'bound' or defeated Satan<sup>1</sup>, perhaps in the temptation in the wilderness (1:12-13). Contrary to this assertion is the position that argues that the parable of the 'binding of the strong man' refers not to Satan but to demons.<sup>2</sup> This sort of argument wishes to further the analysis of Jesus being in the process of 'binding the strong man' by associating it with a theology of Jesus as eschatological agent.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, rather than seeing Jesus' exorcisms as signs of the 'Kingdom of God' about to break in, they are interpreted as signs of the present action of that Kingdom through Jesus. Whichever interpretation is favoured, the implication is clear: Jesus cannot be on the side of those he is binding.

Alternatively, Jesus' seemingly binaristic use of parables to resist the labelling of the scribes has been argued to have political resonances. For instance, Myers, argues that Jesus has to be the 'strong man', whose role is less to bind the cosmic powers of evil and more related to the socio-economic powers under whose bondage the people languished.<sup>4</sup> He asserts that the notion of 'plundering a strong man's house' resonated

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<sup>1</sup> Waetjen has linked the overpowering of Satan in this parable to the work Jesus is now doing in the liberation of 'the possessed and dispossessed', (see Waetjen, H. C. (1989) *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.99)

<sup>2</sup> According to Hiers, the binding of demons is attested to in other scriptural literature e.g. Tobit 8:3; Jubilees 10:7ff (see Hiers, R. H. (1974) 'Satan, demons, and the Kingdom of God' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 27 (1) (February) p.43).

<sup>3</sup> See Hiers, R. H. (1974) 'Satan, demons, and the Kingdom of God' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 27 (1) (February) p.43; Marcus, J. (2000) *The Anchor Bible: Mark 1-8* Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co. Inc.p.270-287

<sup>4</sup> Myers, C. (1988) *Binding the strong man* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. Myers' reading of the prevalence of oppression at the hands of Roman rule and their Jewish client rulers is supported by other readers. For instance, Horsley argues that 'The Gospel of Mark...is about people subjected by an ancient empire' wherein the effects of imperial exploitation led to a breakdown the traditional socio-economic infrastructure. Exorbitant taxes and tributes led to a rising indebtedness and loss of the land for a people whose subsistence relied upon it. Horsley goes on to propose that the reign of Herod Antipas intensified this economic exploitation. Horsley, R. (2001) *Hearing the whole story: The politics of plot in Mark's Gospel*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press p. 30; Horsley, R. (1993) 'The imperial situation of Palestinian Jewish society' in Gottwald, N. & Horsley, R. (eds.) *The Bible and Liberation* (Revised Edition) Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.401

politically in 1<sup>st</sup> century Galilee, citing accounts in Josephus where both Judas in Sepphoris and Simon in Jericho broke into, and in Simon's case burnt down, royal palaces and then plundered 'the things that had been seized there'.<sup>1</sup>

From a slightly different angle, Oakman argues that the entire set of parables and indeed the whole pericope should be read more allegorically than has previously been done, with the unifying focus found in the word 'basileia' (reign).<sup>2</sup> For Oakman, the conflict with Beelzebul underscores not spiritual/cosmic concerns but economic and political ones. He further asserts that the parables of strong men, houses, and kingdoms in 3:19b-35 were crafted with the reign of Herod Antipas in sight, and operates as a hidden transcript of resistance<sup>3</sup> against such political and economic realities due to the dire consequences which could follow candid speech<sup>4</sup>. Thus, he argues, the conflict between Jesus and the scribes concerning Beelzebul underscores the political and economic dimensions of underprivilege, malnutrition, endemic violence, and the destruction of rural families.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the diversity, all of these interpretations of Jesus' responses to the labels he is given in this pericope, sampled above, share a common feature: the responses Jesus makes are intended to communicate a clear polar opposition between himself and his detractors. Yet it is this very issue of clarity that is questioned in relation to the nature of Jesus' resistive rhetoric in 3:19b-35 when the insights of group readers are brought into the hermeneutical circle of this text's interpretation. What group readers offer the

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<sup>1</sup> Josephus (Ant.17.271); see Horsley, R. (2001) *Hearing the whole story: The politics of plot in Mark's Gospel*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press p.274

<sup>2</sup> Oakman, D. (1988) 'Rulers' Houses, Thieves, and Usurpers: The Beelzebul Pericope' *Foundations and Facets Forum* 4 (3) (September) p.114

<sup>3</sup> See Scott, J. C. (1995) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press

<sup>4</sup> Oakman, D. (1988) 'Rulers' Houses, Thieves, and Usurpers: The Beelzebul Pericope' *Foundations and Facets Forum* 4 (3) (September) p.112

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.115

interpretation of this pericope are the particular vantage points from personal experiences of being labelled, and insights via this experience into both the impact of labelling on Jesus and the agency he exercises resisting the same.

#### **4.23 External and internal struggles**

##### *Group Readers' Perspectives*

In a story punctuated by labelling and resistance, one of the most prominent features group readers reflected on in their interpretations of this pericope was the struggle for power. On one hand, the scribes from Jerusalem were read as wanting to '*maintain power*'<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, the power the scribes represented, and its influence over the people, was perceived to have been somehow threatened by Jesus' own power, such that it was interpreted by one reader that the scribes' accusations against Jesus were an indication that they wanted '*the criticism to go away*'<sup>2</sup>. In the interpretations group readers offered of this text, power is seen in a Foucauldian sense as a complex web of power struggles present both between characters and as conflicts within them. For instance, interpretations of Jesus were offered which portrayed him as a character who, in a sense, inhabits internally the power struggle that he faces externally. That is, among certain group readers, Jesus' identity is considered to be ambiguous<sup>3</sup>, his home is not only a place of rest but is also a place of entrapment<sup>4</sup>, and he is identified as a person whom others often fail to understand<sup>5</sup>. Group readers strongly associated this sense of Jesus' internal and external struggle with their own experiences of poor mental health. For instance, with regards to the labelling of Jesus as being in league with Beelzebul and

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<sup>1</sup> '*They might have been concerned that they were losing popularity. They wanted to maintain power,*' 'B' from Reading Group Three, April 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.23

<sup>2</sup> '*I think they might want the criticism to go away,*' 'A' from Reading Group Three, April 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.23

<sup>3</sup> '*What was Jesus? Couldn't have been human. What was he? A superhuman? Batman or Hercules?*' 'C' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.20

<sup>4</sup> '*He's home but the crowd are eager to seize him. He's tired, couldn't get any rest,*' 'B' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.20

<sup>5</sup> '*They didn't understand what he was trying to do. They wouldn't believe what he had done. He keeps doing these strange things, they couldn't understand him so they told him that he was out of his mind,*' 'A' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.20



Jesus' parabolic response to that charge, some readers interpreted this to correspond to the notion of a divided self, expressed as an *'inner conflict'*<sup>1</sup>. One of the same readers, later in the session, went on to expand on the quality of that conflict, stating: *'sometimes I don't see reality'*.<sup>2</sup>

The striking commentary that these group readers offered of Jesus' sense of self in this pericope, then, is of a man in profound distress as a result of the labelling that he is subjected to. The emphasis here is not so much on a postulation that Jesus as a character is something of a divided self, rather it is an emphasis on the divisive and hegemonic impact of labelling, of power exercised upon Jesus. Whilst there were divergent views of which label might have been worse for Jesus to have received - for some being labelled as *'having Beelzebul'* was worse<sup>3</sup>, for others being labelled as being *'out of his mind'* was the more damaging identifier<sup>4</sup> - the impact of acts of labelling and their associations with mental health for group readers was strong in their interpretations. Group readers spoke of the experience of being labelled by others as one which encouraged them to act *'as if we are a separate category of people'*<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *'B: I think it's something about yourself. A soul divided into pieces cannot function properly. It's hard to believe it's a real house; D: A soul divided against itself, given over to sin and personal pressures. Before you know it is all messed up; C: Everyday I'm called that. They said it was an inner conflict,'* from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.21

<sup>2</sup> *'Sometimes people suffer for real. Sometimes I suffer so much I don't see reality and I don't realise what people are doing. When I finally get through I find that people are just living. It's all a racket. You've got to even pay to die. It's not worth it. If you really think about being in the world today you go nuts. You go off the deep end. When a person has faith, these people don't think about these things. It is the small things that put you over. You can't think over and over about the same thing,'* 'C' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.22

<sup>3</sup> *'B: They were saying he is of Satan, that is more damaging because Satan is Satan, he wants to destroy everything he's teaching; A: Satan existed in those days; B: The devil is the antithesis of what he is trying to teach. 'Out of his mind' is a physical model. Satan, that's spiritual not physical,'* from Reading Group Four, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.25

<sup>4</sup> *'It's worse being called crazy. It's unfair,'* 'C' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.22

<sup>5</sup> *'C: We have to live and act like we are a separate category of people; D: Oh no we shouldn't; C: It's just the way of life that's all,'* from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.22. That said, it should be noted that for two readers the impact of labels was perceived more positively: *'B: I guess for me it's not as much about the label than how well I'm doing. Am I safe? Am I in touch with reality? Are my moods stable or not? I don't know that people respect me or consider me mentally ill; A: I have no problem with labels; B: Labels can be useful, giving people an idea of what history might be there, what*

For group readers, labelling was not only seen as a threat to a person's ability to express identity for themselves, it was also seen as a threat to the sense of integrity a person has within themselves. For instance, one reader emphasised how labels can lead to an estrangement from the self<sup>1</sup>, and another reader stated how it becomes hard not to believe the things people say and then *'lose yourself for a while'*<sup>2</sup>. The impact of such threats that labelling presents, both externally and internally, was interpreted by some group readers to lead to *'surrender'*<sup>3</sup>, and to resolving to *'shut up'*<sup>4</sup>. From this perspective, then, in making an association between their own experiences and the imagined experience of Jesus in this pericope, power as it operates in 3:19b-35 seems to render Jesus' identity other in a coercive and objectifying way: Jesus is designated as spiritually and psychologically other.

However, being objectified by acts of labelling was not all that group readers emphasised. The other feature of power that group readers highlighted was the necessity of having something to say back to those who label<sup>5</sup>. Fundamentally, certain group readers argued that people facing labels need to defend themselves somehow<sup>6</sup>, even

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*symptoms to look for with family and friends. Really getting a sense of the problems I've been facing,'* from Reading Group Three, , April 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.24

<sup>1</sup> *'C: People like to label, it's convenient; A: And especially when a person is troubling you but you don't want to argue with them. It's easy to say 'he is an idiot'. Then deep down I need to be in conflict with myself about those things he is saying,'* from Reading Group Three, April 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.24

<sup>2</sup> *'You have to defend yourself somehow. Have to say something. They will walk all over you and you believe all these stupid things about yourself and you lose yourself for a while. It's very difficult for you,'* B' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.21

<sup>3</sup> *'It's tough, words are worse than the sword emotionally. I faced a family member head on, straight to the matter, who said I was crazy, 'you've been smoking too much crack'. I had to surrender right there. But for Jesus it was different he knew exactly what was going on,'* 'C' from Reading Group Four, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.26

<sup>4</sup> *'Even so-called regular people, if you say the truth, people let you have it. Even regular people have to shut up. Jesus had to keep his mouth shut sometimes. That's the way of society,'* 'A' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.22

<sup>5</sup> *'It depends on the person. He does a good job of thinking of something to say,'* 'B' from Reading Group Three, April 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.23

<sup>6</sup> *'You have to defend yourself somehow. Have to say something. They will walk all over you and you believe all these stupid things about yourself and you lose yourself for a while. It's very difficult for you,'* B' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.21

though it is *'never easy to defend yourself'*<sup>1</sup>. It is against this backdrop of the profound debilitating effect of labels on a person's sense of identity and agency and the utter necessity of saying something back, that Jesus' acts of resistance in this pericope should be read.

What group readers' interpretations offer the interpretation of this pericope, then, is a sketch of the human quality of the encounters narrated. Furthermore, the person of Jesus who emerges from these interpretations is not simply the monochrome master of rhetoric and parable who remains altogether unfazed by the labelling he faces. Rather, he is presented as a figure who is imagined to face external and internal conflicts and ambiguities. It is this thicker description of Jesus' character and identity that offers a fuller perspective from which to view his resistance.

Where group readers offer the depth of insight into this particular option for reading this pericope is in their descriptions of the lived experiences of poor mental health which they associated with the struggles of Jesus as narrated in 3:19b-35. For instance, one reader recounted the experience of a friend who, when faced with the exclusionary act of another person, responded in such a way that reflects the agonistic tension that people who experience poor mental health can oftentimes face when attempting to assert their resistance to pejorative remarks:

*'There's a woman I know with bipolar. She has a guy friend who tells her that she is a manic depressive. She left, sat in the car and cried. Then she went back and said, 'go to hell'. Then she left, she didn't want to give him more fuel. I think she wanted to represent herself and all people with bipolar in a positive light. If she had stayed to argue she might*

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<sup>1</sup> *'It's never easy to defend yourself against the Pharisees and the Scribes. Always trying to trap you,' 'A' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.22*

*have got angry in the heat of the moment and wouldn't have helped this guy to see mental illness in a positive light.*<sup>1</sup>

This episode reflects the tension of the relational dynamics that persons who experience poor mental health can often face, between the desire to defend oneself and the contrary presence of *'self-defeating thoughts'*<sup>2</sup>; and similarly, the tension between the pejorative representations of the identity of mental health others present (such as the man in the episode narrated above) and the difficulty of responding to such labelling without being reduced by the other person to the *'sound of their illness'*<sup>3</sup>. With this contextual reality in mind I wish to explore the possibility that being labelled as one who is out of his mind and as having Beelzebul/Satan has a more debilitating effect on his ability to exercise resistance than has hitherto been acknowledged.

What then of Jesus' resistance? As argued earlier, sampled scholars emphasise or imply the binaristic nature of Jesus' response to the labelling he faces in this pericope. A similar view was offered by some group readers, such as one who highlighted how Jesus manages to flip the power relations in the story<sup>4</sup>, thus assuming the teaching authority previously held by the scribes. Yet as well as these emphases, group readers offered insights on the inherent ambiguity in the relational dynamics of the passage. Jesus' home

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<sup>1</sup> 'B' from Reading Group Three, April 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.23

<sup>2</sup> 'I'm a firm believer that Jesus will not give up on me. I've seen work in my life I really believe is of God. Only be taught as a child. When you are subject, then there is freedom to rationalise it and continue to do something wrong. I knew that I was enslaved to my disease. When I used to get high I was a devil. The walking dead. Trying to use self-defeating thoughts to be my excuses,' 'B' from Reading Group Four, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.26

<sup>3</sup> 'Madness which for so long had been overt and unrestricted, which had for so long been present on the horizon disappeared. It entered a phase of silence from which it was not to emerge for a long time; it was deprived of its language; and although one continued to speak of it, it became impossible for it to speak of itself' (Foucault, M. (1962) *Mental Illness and Psychology* (Revised Edition) Berkley, CA: University of California Press (original work 1954) p.68).

<sup>4</sup> 'Well, I mean it is no longer the religious authorities who are deciding. He has flipped the power relation and he is teaching to students,' 'A' from Reading Group Three, April 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.24

is an ambiguous symbol of security yet entrapment<sup>1</sup>; his identity is an ambiguous expression of teaching with authority<sup>2</sup> whilst having that authority undermined by both scribes from Jerusalem and his own family by whom he is partly identified in the gospel (6:3); and his ministry remains ambiguous to those who fail to understand him<sup>3</sup>.

It might be argued prompted by these emphases of group readers', that Jesus' resistive responses in 3:19b-35 actually reflect this strain of ambiguity. Rather than employing a binaristic strategy of clarity in answering the labels which question his spiritual and psychological integrity, Jesus, in exercising resistance, that might actually utilise a binaristic strategy of ambiguity. It is this very possibility that I now explore in the next section.

#### **4.24 Re-articulating identity in ambiguity**

*A viable strategy?*

At first it may seem that the possibility that Jesus' rhetorical resistance in 3:19b-35 intentionally employs a strategy of ambiguity is to push a little too far out both from what group readers interpretations have suggested and also from the text itself. It is, after all, a thin slither of the interpretations offered by the group readers that I have decided to take as a lead in considering ambiguity as a praxis of resistance in this encounter. Yet, I do not believe that to push at the received boundaries of how this text has been

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<sup>1</sup> 'He's home but the crowd are eager to seize him. He's tired, couldn't get any rest,' 'B' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.20

<sup>2</sup> 'Anybody could be not trusted. God could make a spectacle. He [Jesus] could be drunk on beer or wine and go crazy that way too,' 'C' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.20. See also 'Yeah, depending on what it means. I feel like it's a strong psychological temptation to be megalomaniac, where you consider yourself to be really great. I imagine Jesus to be a really good teacher. It's plausible that hearing the crowd this could go to his head. He could consume himself that he could do more than he really could, more than just an ordinary man', 'A' from Reading Group Three, April 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.23

<sup>3</sup> 'They didn't understand what he was trying to do. They wouldn't believe what he had done. He keeps doing these strange things, they couldn't understand him so they told him that he was out of his mind,' 'A' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.20

understood in its interpretation by other scholars is a move too far. I state this for two reasons.

First, if the assumption that Jesus in his argumentation in this pericope is by default coherent and even masterful<sup>1</sup> is suspended momentarily, then it is possible to view this encounter as between a man under considerable and immediate public scrutiny and his detractors. This is where the significance of some of the diversity of interpretations offered by group readers comes in. Jesus' responses viewed in light of group readers' emphases on the debilitating impact of labelling offer an alternative to the assumption that Jesus must have been altogether composed in this pericope in order to have re-asserted his identity. Second, if the text is considered again not with the expectation that the terms of Jesus' argumentation are necessarily clear, but open to the possibility that a lack of clarity is also a possible finding, then the examination of ambiguity as a strategy of engagement by Jesus is more possible.

If it is to be established that Jesus achieved a clear delineation in his use of binarisms in his resistance to the labelling he faced, two things need to be identified. First, it would need to be clear to whom Jesus is referring in his argumentation for the delineation of insiders and outsiders to be beyond doubt. Looking at the pericope more closely, it is not clear at all from the text alone whom Jesus is referring to when he talks of his 'true family' (3:35) who have assembled in his home (3:33). Whilst it is clear that it cannot be his mother and brothers who are standing outside (3:31), it is not so clear who it is. Could it be his disciples? The neighbours who earlier wanted to restrain him? The scribes whom he has just called to him for a parabolic teaching?

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Liew's portrayal of Jesus' superlative rhetorical agency (Liew, B. (1999) *Politics of parousia: Reading Mark Inter(contextually)* Leiden: Brill p.103) and the group reader who describes Jesus' agency thus: 'He is God; just God,' 'A' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.20.

More widely, from the beginning to the end of the pericope questions abound. Who cannot even eat because of the crowd (3:20)? Jesus and his disciples? Jesus and his family? Jesus and the scribes? Who thinks that Jesus has gone out of his mind (3:21)?<sup>1</sup> Is it his family?<sup>2</sup> Is it the crowd or the mob<sup>3</sup>? Could it be the disciples? Or the scribes? Or perhaps just some neighbours who have had enough of all the commotion? And why was this charge being made against Jesus in the first place?<sup>4</sup> Was it because it reflected the reality of the situation or was it a more politically or theologically motivated attack? Then, after the charge by the scribes that Jesus ‘has Beelzebul’, whom does Jesus call to him? The scribes? Or is it a teaching episode for his disciples?<sup>5</sup>

The second feature necessary for the binaristic strategy to have been used with clarity is that the terms of reference would need to be clear. With regards to the second accusation for instance - ‘he has Beelzebul’ (3:22) – the search for clarity regarding the terms of reference in Jesus’ response to this charge has inspired a wide range of interpretative manoeuvres. One approach has been to focus on Jesus’ response in 3:28-30 wherein he rebuffs the charge of having an unclean spirit, the charge of being in league with

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<sup>1</sup> In addressing this quandary some scholars choose to spread their bets: “‘Those with Jesus’ likely refers to family or friends or followers. Believing Jesus to be beside himself, they come to take him away (3:20)’ (Broadhead, E. K. (2001) *Mark* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.42).

<sup>2</sup> See for example Taylor, V. (1953) *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* London: Macmillan pp.235-6; Johnson, S. E. (1960) *A commentary on the Gospel According to St Mark* London: A & C Black p.80; Waetjen, H. C. (1989) *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark’s Gospel* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.98; Dowd, S. (2000) *Reading Mark: A literary and theological commentary on the second gospel* Macon, GA: Smyth & Helyws p.34; Gundry, R. H. (1993) *Mark: A commentary on his apology for the cross* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company p.171; Crossan, J. D. (1999) ‘Mark and the relatives of Jesus’ in Orton, D. E. *The Composition of Mark’s Gospel* London, Boston, Koln: Brill p.55; Lambrecht, J. (1999) ‘The relatives of Jesus in Mark’ in Orton, D. E. *The Composition of Mark’s Gospel* London, Boston, Koln: Brill p.94

<sup>3</sup> See Hamerton-Kelly, R. (1994) *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.82

<sup>4</sup> See Gundry, R. H. (1993) *Mark: A commentary on his apology for the cross* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company p.171

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Aichele argues that Jesus summons the scribes as though they were his disciples. See Aichele, G. (1999) ‘Jesus’ uncanny ‘family scene’ *The Journal of for the study of the New Testament* 21 (74) p.41

Beelzebul (which in the narrative Jesus conflates with Satan)<sup>1</sup>. Some argue that Jesus resists the charge with the implication that the scribes had blasphemed against the clean Spirit, the Holy Spirit, with whom by his comment Jesus implies he is associated, or even identifiable.<sup>2</sup> However, is Hiers right in assuming that it is the scribes who are never to be forgiven for blaspheming against the Holy Spirit? Could it also be Jesus' family, or those others who labelled him as being 'out of his mind' who have blasphemed? Aichele argues that it could be both that each seeks to control Jesus, to define his identity. Perhaps attempting to control Jesus is what counts as blasphemy?<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, the very diversity of interpretations of the various terms and turns of Jesus' acts of resistance to labelling in 3:19b-35 demonstrates that the search for clarity in Jesus' resistive rhetoric in this pericope remains elusive. Given this, I take up the emphases of some of the group readers who point to the ambiguity in this pericope, and suggest that Jesus' strategy for resistance in 3:19b-35 is less an attempt to make things clear and more an attempt to make things opaque, and that Jesus employs a strategy of ambiguity in making his defense against those who question his identity.<sup>4</sup> In positing this, I am seeking

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<sup>1</sup> Few would argue that 'Beelzebul' and 'Satan' somehow refer to different subjects, or have a rhetorical purpose which suggests so. Therefore, when considering the resistance to the labelling as 'having Beelzebul' Jesus displays in his parabolic response which includes references to Satan, I will not pursue the argument that Jesus rebuffs their charge by changing the terms of reference from Beelzebul to Satan. As with the majority of scholarship, I will not assign any greater significance to this change other than that the two names were considered to be coterminous. See E.g. Hiebert, D. E. (1994) *The Gospel of Mark: An Expository Commentary* Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press pp.97-102; Best, E. (1990) *The Temptation and the passion: The Markan Soteriology* (Second Edition) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp.12-15; Mann, C. S. (1986) *The Anchor Bible: Mark* Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc. p.254; MacLaurin, E. C. B. (1978) 'Beelzeboul' in 'Beelzeboul' *Novum Testamentum* Vol XX (2) (April) pp.157-159; Hiers, R. H. (1974) 'Satan, demons, and the Kingdom of God' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 27 (1) (February) pp.35-47.

<sup>2</sup> See Hiers, R. H. (1974) 'Satan, demons, and the Kingdom of God' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 27 (1) (February) p.43; and Anderson, H. (1976) *The Gospel of Mark* (New Century Bible) London: Oliphants p.123, who argues that a contrast is now drawn between the 'lavishness of God's grace' and the 'the incredible hardness of those who by their wilful spurning of that grace shut themselves off from its blessing'.

<sup>3</sup> Aichele, G. (1999) 'Jesus' uncanny 'family scene'' *The Journal of for the study of the New Testament* 21 (74) p.44

<sup>4</sup> Although not arguing that Jesus necessarily intends to use a strategy of ambiguity in this pericope, Keenan does argue that, both the attempts of his family to restrain him and the scribes to exclude him from their tradition by placing him beyond it in the 'false otherness of the demoniac', can be interpreted as attempts to



to explore the tension between group readers' interpretations that suggests both this pattern of ambiguity in the pericope, as well as the conviction that Jesus' resistance is effective such that it '*flipped the power relation*'<sup>1</sup> in the relational dynamics he encounters. What I am seeking to do here, then, is to practise a technique common to postcolonial biblical criticism of probing the points of tension between competing readings of texts without seeking to sublimate the difference that this tension provides.

If ambiguity is the praxis that Jesus employs in this pericope, then how might it be understood? Within the relational dynamics of this pericope, ambiguity is akin to Bhabha's notion of ambivalence which operates as a strategy that fluctuates between complicity in and resistance to colonial discourse.<sup>2</sup> Thus Jesus might be seen to employ ambiguity as a postcolonial praxis in this pericope in an attempt to create what has been termed an 'interstitial space of doubt' between himself and the accusations laid before him<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, from the perspective of the postcolonial praxes that I described in Chapter Two, this strategy of ambiguity as utilised by Jesus in this pericope is not a strategy of hidden resistance. To the contrary, it is clear from 3:19b-35 that this is a

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'bind and negate the middle path and its practice of abiding in a tensive and healthy differentiation of two truths', (see Keenan, J. P. (1995) *The Gospel of Mark: A Mahayana Reading* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.111). Similarly, my own postulation that Jesus' responses to labelling in 3:19b-35 might be read to utilise a strategy of ambiguity is not unlike Fowler's suggestion that there is a strategy of indirection in Mark, shaped by the evangelist himself (see Fowler, R. M. (1989) 'The Rhetoric Direction and Indirection in the Gospel of Mark' *Semeia* 48, pp.115-34).

<sup>1</sup> 'Well, I mean it is no longer the religious authorities who are deciding. He has flipped the power relation and he is teaching to students,' 'A' from Reading Group Three, April 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.24

<sup>2</sup> See Ashcroft, B. *et al* (2000) *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* London & New York: Routledge p.12. That ambiguity might be seen as a postcolonial praxis of resistance is a possibility that has been explored by other postcolonial thinkers. For instance, Gready has explored the role of ambiguity among other resistive strategies in the context of South African resistive praxes in the era of Apartheid (see Gready, P. (2003) *Writing as resistance: Life stories of imprisonment, exile, and homecoming from apartheid South Africa* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books p.275). See also Jefferess, D. (2008) *Postcolonial resistance: Culture, liberation, and transformation* Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press pp.57-94. Likewise, within postcolonial biblical criticism, the role of ambiguity in John's gospel has been explored by Liew in terms of the evangelist's construction of community in the gospel via a motif of misunderstanding and miscomprehension (see Liew, B. (2002) 'Ambiguous admittance: Consent and Descent in John's Community of 'Upward' Mobility' in Dube, M. W. & Staley, J. L. (eds.) *John and Postcolonialism: Travel, space and power* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press pp.193-224).

<sup>3</sup>See Logan, F. (2008) 'Authorial ambiguity: Lecture' in *The Daily Gazette* (<http://daily.swarthmore.edu/2008/2/4/authorial-ambiguity-lecture>). In literary theory, this has been understood as the doubt created for the reader by ambiguity between what is fact and what is fiction.

strategy of open defiance before one's detractors. And, as Scott suggests in his work on the hidden transcripts of resistance, open defiance is a risky strategy to employ in the face of hegemonic power.<sup>1</sup>

Putting these two pieces, doubt and open defiance, together it might be argued that Jesus inserts doubt within the framework of hegemonic power whilst still maintaining the appearance of complicity with that power by utilising the strategy of ambiguity within the binaristic terms of reference his accusers utilise to label him. Why, though, couch his rhetorical resistance in terms that both comply with the binarism he is presented, and yet do so ambiguously? It is here that this dissertation's core concept of mutuality is informative, particularly when taking into account the group readers' emphases on the profound struggle Jesus may well have experienced in the face of labelling that questioned his identity and integrity.

The key emphasis that group readers offered of this pericope in terms of the impact of the acts of labelling Jesus faced, centred on the theme of power. Drawing on their own experiences of the debilitating impact that labelling can have on individuals, readers offered what I termed a 'thicker' description of Jesus' character as facing both external and internal struggles for survival in the heat of that relational encounter. That is, if the interpretative insights of group readers who see the reception of acts of labelling as debilitating to the point of leading to 'surrender'<sup>2</sup>, to feeling like a 'separate category of

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<sup>1</sup> The specific proposition that Scott wishes to put forward is that subordinate groups have 'learned to clothe their resistance and defiance in ritualisms of subordination that serve both to disguise their purposes and to provide them with a ready route of retreat that may soften the consequences of a possible failure' (see Scott, J. C. (1995) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press p.96).

<sup>2</sup> 'It's tough, words are worse than the sword emotionally. I faced a family member head on, straight to the matter, who said I was crazy, 'you've been smoking too much crack'. I had to surrender right there. But for Jesus it was different he knew exactly what was going on,' 'C' from Reading Group Four, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.26

people'<sup>1</sup>, and to 'losing yourself for a while'<sup>2</sup>, are to be taken seriously, then it is reasonable to conclude that the struggle that Jesus faces in this pericope is the struggle between the need to defend himself<sup>3</sup> and the fact that it is 'never easy'<sup>4</sup> to do so when the mutual relating is seemingly so profoundly lacking.

From this vantage point that group readers offer, I argue that Jesus employs a strategy of ambiguity in this pericope in response to a level of scrutiny so intense that it appears to have leached the encounter of any hopes of a mutual exchange. It is my contention here that Jesus may well have perceived that there was no room, no space within the relational dynamics he faced for him to renegotiate anything more aspirational for his societal location in that community other than a rhetoric of survival. It may seem, then, that mutuality thus serves as a heuristic for this pericope not for praxis that is present but for that which is absent. The question that remains is whether Jesus' response to this lack of the praxis of mutuality can be only be understood as similarly lacking mutuality.

On one hand, Jesus' action of calling the people to himself in 3:23 looks like a clear instance of a praxis of mutuality. For the parabolic teaching that he offers to those he gathers around him is an agency that seeks to renegotiate the terms of the relational dynamics he finds himself in. As I laid out in Chapter Two, mutuality is a praxis of resisting hegemonic relational dynamics via the renegotiation, in this case, of perceptions of identity. Thus, Jesus' actions here might be seen to exercise a praxis of mutuality via terms of engagement that are ambiguous as the reassertion of an individual's rights to

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<sup>1</sup> 'C: *We have to live and act like we are a separate category of people*; D: *Oh no we shouldn't*; C: *It's just the way of life that's all*,' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.22

<sup>2</sup> 'You have to defend yourself somehow. Have to say something. They will walk all over you and you believe all these stupid things about yourself and you lose yourself for a while. It's very difficult for you,' B' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.21

<sup>3</sup> 'You have to defend yourself somehow. Have to say something. They will walk all over you and you believe all these stupid things about yourself and you lose yourself for a while. It's very difficult for you,' B' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.21

<sup>4</sup> 'It's never easy to defend yourself against the Pharisees and the Scribes. Always trying to trap you,' 'A' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.22

self-identification and properly represented agency. Jesus' use of ambiguity as a postcolonial praxis of resistance is a praxis of mutuality as much as it stakes for him a 'place at the table'. In this praxis of mutuality, he reasserts that he should be viewed as a legitimate participant in the relational dynamics of that community, and his agency embodies the refusal to be written out of the same. His reassertion, then, is the postcolonial re-imagining of a relational space of encountering that has, through the imposition of labels, taken on a heavily hegemonic form.

That said, what is limiting in Jesus' praxis of mutuality here is that in tandem as it is with a praxis of ambiguity, it is unable to be truly effective as a praxis of transformation. Thus, what is revealed in this particular pericope is the truly compound nature of mutuality as a postcolonial praxis. Utilised as a praxis of resistance alone it acts in this case as a reminder that each person should be related to as a full partner in the space of relational encounters, yet without the transformational, or what I termed in Chapter Two to be the aspirational components of this praxis, it fails to fully realise the mutual sharing of that space. It is, then, the lack of the praxis of mutuality in its full form - as both resistive and transformative - exercised in the postcolonial praxis of ambiguity in this pericope that ultimately determines the narrational outcomes of this particular reassertion of Jesus' identity. Indeed, without the aspiration for a transformation of hegemonic relational dynamics that the praxis of mutuality embodies, the effectiveness of this praxis as a form of postcolonial agency is limited.

This limit to effectiveness can be seen by reading on into the gospel. With Jesus' resistance to the first act of labelling in mind - that he is 'out of his mind' (3:21) - the resultant effect is that Jesus' 'old family' is left out of the house, outside the inner circle. Even with the ambiguity which surrounds the identity of the new family of followers -

neighbours? the crowd? the scribes? – the impact of this resistance is difficult to see in a positive light. As one set of readers put it:

*'C: It's sad for him, there's a wall between them [Jesus and his biological family].*

*A: I don't know, it's sort of like his followers were his family, that could be part of this radical love thing – love as if they were your family.*

*B: I don't know, it sort of seems he usually forgives them. What you've done proves you're not on my side, so get this, this is my real family.*

*A: It's hard'.<sup>1</sup>*

Indeed, placing the pericope into its fuller Markan context, the relationship between Jesus and his biological family only continues to take negative turns. In 6:1-6, Jesus is rejected by those in his hometown and so is distanced from even more levels of his family.<sup>2</sup> Whilst the townspeople think that they know Jesus because they can situate him within their notions of family structures as 'the carpenter, son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon' (6:3), the next sentence is telling: 'And they took offence at him' (6:3b). Following the rejection of Jesus in the hometown of his family, Jesus immediately commissions his disciples to 'shake off the dust' of any house or place which refuses to hear them 'as a testimony against them' (6:11). In 10:29-30, Jesus' response to Peter's contention that the disciples had left everything to follow him, rather enigmatically lists brothers and sisters, mothers and children along with persecutions, in contrast to what they had left. The next significant mention of family by Jesus relegates them to an even more serious level of estrangement where, instead of family relations being a source of minor conflict, they now become a source of violence, of persecution and death: 'Brother

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<sup>1</sup> From Reading Group Three, April 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.24.

<sup>2</sup> See Ahearne-Kroll, S. P. (2001) 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' Family relations and family language in the Gospel of Mark', *The Journal of Religion* 81 p.15

will betray brother to death, and father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death' (13:12).<sup>1</sup>

Rejection takes place on both sides. Jesus' rhetoric about the conventional family continues to paint that cultural norm as a source of deepening constriction and woe. He states categorically how he is without honour amongst his own kin and in his own house (6:4). Jesus' view of his townspeople and presumably also the members of his own family who lived there, is dismal as he leaves there for the final time: 'he was amazed at their unbelief' (6:6). Likewise, the family's view of Jesus in Mark, no longer mediated by the family members directly, who are left on the outside (3:31), is mediated by the extended cultural family of his hometown. Their view of Jesus, as has already been alluded to ('they took offence at him', 6:3b) is equally dim. Here, the strategy of ambiguity is much less prominent. Jesus names his 'kin' as those who fail to show him honour (6:4).

The strategy of utilising ambiguity as a form of resistance in the face of a potentially hegemonic relational encounter can hardly be lauded as an unqualified success. Furthermore, the 'new family' does not exactly provide Jesus the comfort and support a family might be expected to offer. By the end of the narrative, this new 'eschatological family'<sup>2</sup> deserts him (14:50), one member betrays him (14:44), another denies he ever knew him (14:71), and only some of the women of his 'new family' are with him to the very end at the foot of the cross (15:40-1).

A similarly bleak outlook can be traced with regards to Jesus' response to the second accusation – 'he has Beelzebul' (3:22) - made by the scribes. Jesus' parabolic and ultimately enigmatic response to this act of labelling leads to an almost consistently

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<sup>1</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, S. P. (2001) 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' Family relations and family language in the Gospel of Mark', *The Journal of Religion* 81 p.18

<sup>2</sup> Brown, R. E. *et al* (1978) *Mary in the New Testament* Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press p.286

negative series of encounters. The next reference to scribes following 3:19b-35 is in 10:33, begins a theme which foreshadows Jesus' death which, according to the text, is at the hands of (among others) the scribes, 'who will condemn him to death' (10:33). Similarly in 11:18 it is the Jerusalem scribes and the chief priests who 'kept looking for a way to kill him' (11:18). It is scribes along with elders and chief priests in the Temple who question Jesus' authority (11:27-8). Jesus then tells the parable of the 'wicked tenants' who put the beloved son of the vineyard owner to death (12:8) – a parable the scribes, elders, and chief priests then realise is directed against them (12:12). In 12:38 Jesus warns the crowd to beware of the scribes, who 'devour widow's houses' (12:40). The inevitable dramatic momentum towards Jesus' death is again emphasised in 14:1 with the scribes and chief priests 'looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.' Indeed, at the end it is from the scribes, chief priests, and elders that a crowd with swords and clubs come to arrest Jesus (14:43), and it is the same combination who assemble to try him (14:53), hold a council the next morning (15:1), and the scribes and chief priests who mock him on the cross (15:32). The only positive note between Jesus and the scribes following 3:19b-35 is in the encounter where the scribe who calls Jesus 'Teacher' is told by Jesus that he is 'not far from the Kingdom of God' (12:24-34).<sup>1</sup>

Of course, this textual trajectory of Jesus' praxes of ambiguity and partial mutuality is a presentation of what has to look like a failed strategy. To present Jesus in a way that suggests that his agency might be somehow limited in his encounters with others runs

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<sup>1</sup> True to this dissertation's stated reader-response criticism approach to the Gospel of Mark which views the text fundamentally as story, this paragraph relates the textual pattern of Jesus' deteriorating interactions with scribes. That said, I offer this series of encounters between Jesus and these religious leaders keeping in mind the history of the interpretation of these texts that has at various times been anti-Judaic. Given that this dissertation is not primarily interested in the context 'behind the text' of Mark as much as it is in the text itself, I present this as a textual trajectory not intending it to imply anything more about the complicity of religious leaders in Jesus' execution as those events may have occurred in history.

counter to the 'normate hermeneutics'<sup>1</sup> often associated with this passage that Jesus is normatively a character who is almost by definition taken to be a superlative agent in every instance. Yet, as I explored in Chapter Three of this dissertation, the form of dialogical postcolonial biblical criticism that I seek to employ in this work is one that wishes to have room for any questions to be asked and any answers to be argued with regards to biblical texts. Fundamentally, this interpretation of this particular pericope is not presented as the definitive or only way that this story might be interpreted; rather, it is presented as one way that sees the text through the emphases of readers who offer insights into the lived experience of some of the relational dynamics the text narrates. It is my contention that the sometimes transgressive expansions that these readers' emphases offer biblical interpretation are worth noting, not only for the ways in which they expand understandings of textual concerns, but for the important ways in which they draw multiple associations from text to context and vice versa.

### 4.3 Conclusion

What, then, is to be concluded about the struggles for identity that these two pericopae narrate? On one hand, the fractured picture of relating that 3:19b-35 narrates and foreshadows is far from the 'celebration' of the re-imagining of the identity of the man with the withered/divine hand in the first pericope (3:1-6) whose hybrid identity and agency were transformative and made in response to the transformational invitation to a praxis of mutuality. Indeed, whilst for the man with the withered/divine hand, stepping into the middle of the relational 'space' of that encounter is a 'hybrid moment of political change'<sup>2</sup> that offers him the room to manoeuvre in that space between Jesus and the Pharisees, Jesus' own manoeuvring is a moment of political change that does not seem to

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<sup>1</sup> See Wynn, K. (2007) 'The normate hermeneutic and interpretations of disability within Yahwistic narratives' in Avalos, H. *et al* (eds.) *This abled body: Rethinking disabilities in biblical studies* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature p.92

<sup>2</sup> Bhabha, H. (1994) 'The commitment to theory' in *The Location of Culture* London & New York: Routledge p.28



point to the restoration and transformation of relating but rather to relational encounters with family and scribes wherein the praxis of mutuality is increasingly diminished. On the other hand, bearing in mind Bhabha's stated wariness of placing agencies of survival within the 'uplifting, tall stories' of progress<sup>1</sup>, the celebration of hybrid over ambiguous assertions of identity in a comparison of these two stories should be tempered by the foreboding ending to 3:1-6 that speaks of the destruction of those who would challenge discursive patterns of power.

A further conclusion that might be drawn from this chapter's reading of 3:1-6 and 3:19b-35 is that the relational dynamics in such encounters are complex. A recognition of such a complexity naturally resists the temptation in interpretations of Mark to conceive of characters (such as Jesus and the man with the withered hand) or composite characters (such as the Pharisees, the Scribes, and Jesus' family) stereotypically, in ways that run the risk of over-simplifying their praxes. For, in these pericopae, whilst it might be tempting to perceive binaristic delineations of oppressor-oppressed, a colonial landscape wherein expressions of identity are had in the complex and fluid postcolonial praxes of mutuality, hybridity, and ambiguity is more evident.

Looking at the praxis of mutuality in 3:1-6 and 3:19b-35 more closely, on a broad level mutuality was seen not only to be at the heart of 3:1-6 and only partially present in 3:19b-35, in the former it was interpreted to be what enabled a resistive transformation to take place through Jesus' invitation to exercise agency. More subtly, though, what group readers brought out in their varied readings of these pericopae was something of the texture of relational dynamics. Interpretations of 3:1-6, for instance, highlighted the profound deficit of the praxis of mutuality as something that was true of the imagined

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<sup>1</sup> Bhabha, H. & Comaroff, J. (2002) "Speaking of Postcoloniality, in the continuous present: A Conversation" in Goldberg, D. C. & Quayson, A. (eds.) *Relocating Postcolonialism* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.31

life of the man with the withered hand, seen not only as central to an understanding of the audacity of his hybrid agency of self-identification as withered/divine, but also as a deficit that might not dissipate when the miraculous participation of Jesus in the man's life ended. Focusing on the praxis of mutuality, then, does not reveal a 'tall story' of postcolonial celebration, but rather it paints a picture of transient survival; a hybrid word returned to hegemonic discourses of 'withered-ness', yet at the same time a word that runs the risk of the ultimate denial of any praxes of mutuality: death (3:6).

Similarly, I argued that the relational struggles in Jesus' hometown narrated in 3:19b-35 are ones where the relative absence of mutuality as a postcolonial praxis do not reduce the quality of that relating to simple binarisms. Indeed, as certain group readers highlighted, tracing the contours of the relative lack of the praxis of mutuality in 3:19b-35 reveals the complexity of the struggles necessitated by its absence: struggles with both external and internal conflicts. The Jesus interpreted to inhabit such struggles in this pericope is one who reveals the complexities and contradictions of colonially situated praxes of identification.

In the next chapter, this theme of the complexity of struggles to assert identity and to exercise agency in hegemonic relational dynamics is continued. In it, I explore some of the further dimensions of the praxis of mutuality with regards to the agonisms necessitated by the construction of difference along lines of gender and ethnicity.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**NEGOTIATING MARGINAL AGENCY**

*MARK 5:21-43 & 7:24-30*

*The interpretations of the first pair of encounters in Chapter Four foregrounded the role of power in the renegotiation of relational dynamics. There, power was manifest in religious authority, physical deformation, and the significance of labels as marks of identity. This second pair of encounters (5:21-43; 7:24-30) also foregrounds power differentials: bleeding as a sign of physical difference, and sickness and demon possession as marks of narratival exclusion. These two pericopae also forefront particular power differentials with regards to gender and ethnicity. In the chapter which follows, I consider each of these differentials, asking how they impact the praxis of mutuality in ways which reflect the heterogeneity and the gradated nature of exclusion. Furthermore, I consider how agency might be practised within such gradations and how the struggle for relating does not always assume an altogether respectful dialogical exchange. That is, whilst the agency of the doubly-othered female might be celebrated in these biblical texts, the space between does not emerge as one which offers a panacea to the social ills of relating between both sexes and ethnicities. Rather, the marginal agency of females, taking place in a space of conflict and struggle, responds to hegemonic discourse utilising postcolonial praxes which are supplementary to and mimetic of gradations of power.*

## 5.11 Introduction: Agency and power

*Mark 5:21-43*

21When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered round him; and he was by the lake. 22Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet 23and begged him repeatedly, 'My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.' 24So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. 25Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. 26She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. 27She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' 29Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. 30Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' 31And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?"' 32He looked all round to see who had done it. 33But the woman, knowing what had happened to her came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. 34He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'

35While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say 'Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher further?' 36But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, 'Do not fear, only believe.' 37He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James and John, the brother of James. 38When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. 39When he had entered, he said to them, 'Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.' 40And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha cum', which means, 'Little girl, get up!' 42And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about

(she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. 43He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

*5:21-43 is often interpreted as a teaching about the significance of faith in an encounter with Jesus. As an example of a Markan sandwich or intercalation<sup>1</sup>, the pericope is often read such that the roles of Jairus and the woman with haemorrhages are understood to exemplify the centrality of faith for a life of discipleship. Other scholars argue against the grain of this interpretative trend. Particularly, feminist re-readings of 5:21-43 emphasise how the female, both within the text and in the interpretation of the text, is diminished, with attention given to the significance of bleeding, corpses, and cleanliness.<sup>2</sup> I argue below for the significance of social and economic power in this pericope in as far as it relates to the bargaining capabilities of the different characters in the story. In this regard I will focus specifically on the contrasts within the relational dynamics between Jairus, one of the leaders of the synagogue (5:22), and a woman who has spent all that she has (5:26).*

*My central interest is to see how relational dynamics are negotiated by the different characters in the pericope, paying attention to the varying gradations of power the pericope narrates. Specifically, via the interpretations offered by group readers who emphasised the power differentials between males and females in the text, both in terms of internal struggles and external actions, I argue that the agency exercised in this pericope demonstrates the supplemental nature of resistive and transformative praxes necessitated by the gradation of power. This pericope paints a*

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<sup>1</sup> The fitting of one story into another is one of the most characteristic compositional features of Mark (3:20-35; 5:21-43; 6:7-32; 11:12-26; 14:1-11, 10-25, 54-72). See Marshall C. D. (1989) *Faith as a theme in Mark's narrative* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.91.

<sup>2</sup> Haber, S. (2003) 'A woman's touch: Feminist encounters with the haemorrhaging woman in Mark 5:24-34' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (2) pp.171-192; Selvidge, M. J. (1990) *Woman, cult and miracle recital: A redactional critical investigation on Mark 5:24-34* London: Associated University Press pp.47-70, 83-91; Swindler, L. (1971) 'Jesus was a feminist' *The Catholic World* (January) pp.177-183; Barta, K. A. (1991) 'Paying the price of paternalism' in Rosenblatt, M. E. (ed.) *Where can we find her?* New York: Paulist Press pp.24-36; D'Angelo, M. R. (1999) 'Gender and power in the Gospel of Mark: The daughter of Jairus and the woman with the flow of blood' in Cavadini, J. C. (ed.) *Miracles in Jewish Christian antiquity* Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press pp.83-85

picture of relational dynamics being struggled over in which the possibility of the praxis of mutuality is already lesser for some characters than for others: relational 'space' may be shared in this pericope, but it is not done so on a level playing field.

## 5.12 Beyond modelling faith: Gender and power

### *Scholars' Perspectives*

In the interpretation of 5:21-43, the theme of faith is given centre stage by a number of scholars sampled. Many maintain faith is the hermeneutical key to unlocking the door to the meaning of the pericope, and even of the gospel as a whole<sup>1</sup>, some even indicate their preference in the title of their work<sup>2</sup>. Whether made explicit or implicit, the agency of the so-called minor characters in the text is most often defined and measured in terms of their faith in Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

Some argue that faith in the gospel as a whole operates as the conduit for all of the miracles in Mark.<sup>4</sup> In this particular pericope, some scholars emphasise that faith operates in dramatic tension with fear.<sup>5</sup> That is, faith is demanded of each of the characters

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<sup>1</sup> For example Marshall C. D. (1989) *Faith as a theme in Mark's narrative* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp.90-109

<sup>2</sup> For example Beavis, M. A. (1988) 'Women as models of faith in Mark' *Bulletin of Biblical Theology* Vol. 18 No. 1 p. 3

<sup>3</sup> Marshall C. D. (1989) *Faith as a theme in Mark's narrative* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp.93, 95, 100, 108; Beavis, M. A. (1988) 'Women as models of faith in Mark' *Bulletin of Biblical Theology* Vol. 18 No. 1 p.3, 6; Gundry, R. H. (1993) *Mark: A Commentary on his apology for the cross* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company p.272; Juel, D. H. (1999) *The Gospel of Mark* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press p.115; Van Iersel, M. F. (1998) *Mark: A reader-response commentary* JSNT Supplement Series 164 Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.204; Tolbert, M. A. (1989) *Sowing the gospel: Mark's world in literary and historical perspective* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.169-171; Cotter, W. (2001) 'Mark's hero of the twelfth-year miracles: the healing of the woman with haemorrhages and the raising of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:21-43)' in Levine, A. J. & Blickenstaff, M. (eds.) *A feminist companion to Mark* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.76; Williamson, L. (1983) *Mark: Interpretation* Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press p.110

<sup>4</sup> 'Faith, then, is the prerequisite of healing for the Gospel of Mark, not its result... The miracles in Mark are not intended as signs to induce belief; they are, instead, the visible, tangible fruits of faith,' Tolbert, M. A. (1989) *Sowing the gospel: Mark's world in literary and historical perspective* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.159

<sup>5</sup> Keenan, J. P. (1995) *The Gospel of Mark A Mahayana reading* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.145. See also Beck who argues that faith as confidence in God replaces confidence in the usual 'realistic' answer to

involved in the story even in the face of considerable fear for their own and for others' lives. This theme of faith and fear is associated with the character of Jesus in such a way that subordinates other characters' agencies to the authority and power of Jesus. Sabourin states that others need have no fears of storms or death but only need faith in Jesus.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the supreme agency of Jesus removes the need for other actors in the text to exercise judgements eliciting fear or otherwise. The only response left for those who encounter Jesus is that of faith, such that in 5:21-43 minor characters are read as submitting to Jesus' shaping of the narrative, none more profoundly submissive than the dying/sleepy/sleeping girl. They have stood as ciphers for the small, oppressed, unseen characters whom Jesus condescends to help (as in the case of Jairus) or to touch (as in the case of the girl) or to be touched by (in the case of the woman with haemorrhages).

However, looking at the text, the exercise of faith demonstrated by characters in this pericope does not necessarily take place on a level playing field. One of the most prominent contrasts in this regard is between and within genders. Mark 5:21-43 is a story about two men - Jesus and Jairus - both of whom might be read to possess a certain amount of power within the narrative. On one hand, there is Jairus, a man of religious authority, and it might be presumed, power within his community; and on the other hand, there is Jesus, a man whose authority and power is at such a level that Jairus is willing to fall at his feet (5:22) and beg him repeatedly to save his daughter's life (5:23). Similarly, for the females in 5:21-43 there are also significant contrasts. One female is twelve years old (5:42); the other has suffered with haemorrhages for over twelve years (5:25). For one, Jesus goes to her (5:24); while the other has to go to him (5:28). One is represented by someone presumably well known in the area (5:22); the other is represented by no one. One is silent; the other tells all truth (5:33). One arouses the manic

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fear, namely courageous strength (Beck, R. R. (1996) *Nonviolent Story: Narrative conflict resolution in the Gospel of Mark* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.79)

<sup>1</sup> Sabourin, L. (1975) 'The miracles of Jesus (III) Healings, Resuscitations, Nature Miracles' *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 5 (2) p.151

interest of the crowd (5:38); the other interrupts it (5:37). However, the importance of gender in this story is significant beyond these literary contrasts. This is true not only of the text itself, but also in the interpretation of the text.

Mark 5:21-43 is often read as reflecting on the question of religious power and specifically the question of purity. Typically, these themes are emphasised in ways that contrast the agency of males and females in the text. It is a widespread assumption that both of the females in question, in different ways, should be considered unclean. For Jairus' daughter, such a state of uncleanness is physically manifest in her sleeping/dying state (5:42). A dead body would have been considered to be unclean, asserts Haber, citing Numbers 19:11-21 wherein anyone who touches a corpse or enters a dwelling in which there is a dead body is rendered impure for seven days, during which their impurity may be transmitted to others.<sup>1</sup>

Ironically, as far as the girl's dramatic agency in the narrative is concerned, her sickness and impurity in death do not limit her agency. It is her non-role that realises that. Her condition renders her powerless of judgement and agency in the text. Both of those roles go to her father, Jairus. When her death renders her utterly obsolete, it is her father's faith that must make her well. This sort of non-role is not, though, the case for the woman with haemorrhages whose designation as unclean is emphasised by interpreters to have drastic consequences for her potential as an active agent in the narrative. Her bleeding in and of itself is taken for a hegemonic mark of exclusion. Some argue this on grounds that

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<sup>1</sup> See Haber, S. (2003) 'A woman's touch: Feminist encounters with the haemorrhaging woman in Mark 5:24-34' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (2) p.187, citing attestation that these purity laws were observed during the Second Temple period in Philo (*Spec. Leg.* 3.205-209), Josephus (*Ant.* 4.81), the Dead Sea Scrolls (11Q19 49.16-17; 50.10-14; 1QM 14.2-3) and the rabbinic texts (t. Par. 3.14; 10.2; 5.6; 7.4).



her bleeding makes her ceremonially unclean<sup>1</sup> and so ineligible for public worship<sup>2</sup>. Those scholars who interpret the bleeding to be vaginal in nature interpret its significance in multiple ways from mysterious to polluting.<sup>3</sup>

The significance of this designation of impurity for the woman's role as a potentially active agent in the community is interpreted in a number of different ways. For instance, the ritual uncleanliness of the woman is often extended as a factor which excludes her socially.<sup>4</sup> Such an exclusion is heavily reliant on the socio-cultural role of gender as well as the physical fact of bleeding. On one level the woman is considered to be other to Jesus and Jairus, simply because her body is female and not male. In addition, there is a combination of ritual uncleanliness and social obscurity that contrasts sharply with the figure of Jairus who has both an elevated social position and leadership in the synagogue: Jairus, as a socio-religious office-holder is contrasted to the nameless, 'office-less' woman, argues Juel<sup>5</sup>. In addition to being other, the woman is interpreted as having no class or authority and as one, unlike Jairus, who is not entitled to speak<sup>6</sup>.

Some argue the woman's bleeding leads to social exclusion but to theological exclusion as well. For instance, Kinukawa argues from an intertextual viewpoint (Leviticus 12, 15 and 20) that menstrual bleeding was considered sinful, and resulted in seclusion and in 'the ultimate humiliation' of the sin offering required after both menstruation and child-birth

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<sup>1</sup> See Marshall C. D. (1989) *Faith as a theme in Mark's narrative* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.104 and Kinukawa, H. (1994) *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese feminist perspective* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p. 35, who argue along these lines.

<sup>2</sup> Dowd, S. (2000) *Reading Mark: A literary and theological commentary on the second gospel* Macon, GA: Smyth & Helyws p. 56; Kinukawa, H. (1994) *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese feminist perspective* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p. 35

<sup>3</sup> See Dowd, S. (2000) *Reading Mark: A literary and theological commentary on the second gospel* Macon, GA: Smyth & Helyws Publishers p. 57

<sup>4</sup> Van Iersel, M. F. (1998) *Mark: A reader-response commentary* JSNT Supplement Series 164 Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.205; Kinukawa, H. (1994) *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese feminist perspective* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p. 40

<sup>5</sup> Juel, D. H. (1999) *The Gospel of Mark* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press p.115

<sup>6</sup> Kinukawa, H. (1994) *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese feminist perspective* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p. 34

(Leviticus 15:29-30; 12:6-8).<sup>1</sup> Derrett takes the debate a step further arguing for a deeper significance for blood in the text, both for the woman with haemorrhages and for the girl. He argues that within a Hebrew Bible framework the blood of these females is an allusion to the blood of Israel in Ezekiel 16:9. The significance of these females' blood, then, is not for their own status as subjects of agency in the text, but as ciphers of Jesus' supremacy over the Temple for which, Derrett asserts, Jesus is the 'total substitute' by means of expiation (Romans 3:25).<sup>2</sup> Derrett's reading which heavily relies on the assumption that Mark's theological interpretation of the significance of Jesus is to be found in his use of allusions to the Hebrew scriptures, takes the utility of the females as ciphers in the text to another level. He asserts that they stand not as characters with potential for agency in the text, but as two characters forming a composite, each sharing central characteristics as a 'Daughter of Jerusalem'. Their faith and salvation is taken as paradigmatic for salvation to come to Israel through Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kinukawa, H. (1994) *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese feminist perspective* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books pp. 35-6. However, it is not clear that these widespread interpretations of the nature of the impurity and consequent social-cultural and even theological exclusion of the woman with haemorrhages can be supported by the text and its presumed context. Firstly, it has been argued that both men and women found themselves in situations of being impure, and so it was not women in particular who were stigmatised (see Horsley, R. (2001) *Hearing the whole story: The politics of plot in Mark's Gospel*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press p.208). Secondly, Haber has argued that there is no suggestion in 5:21-43 that the contact Jesus has with the woman with haemorrhages led to his 'contamination'. Haber has pointed out that there are two potential sources for the Second Temple period's understandings of purity. Arguing that the woman in Mark 5:24-34 is an example of a *zabah* (a female with an abnormal genital discharge) as opposed to a woman with normal menstrual bleeding, Haber cites two possible sources for how such a ritually impure person might be dealt with. One is Leviticus 15:11, which states that via the rinsing of hands a *zabah* could make herself no longer contagious by touch. With such room to manoeuvre, a *zabah* might reasonably be assumed to have been able to have led a relatively normal life over the course of the condition. Indeed, the scribes and Pharisees of Mark, argues Haber, usually guardians of the purity codes, are nowhere to be seen in this scene, and so this omission places the pericope in sharp relief to other such pericope concerned with purity (2:13-22; 7:1-23). However, such leniency is contrary to the alternative source in Numbers 5:1-4, which outlines the complete exclusion of such a person from the Israelite camp. See Haber, S. (2003) 'A woman's touch: Feminist encounters with the haemorrhaging woman in Mark 5:24-34' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (2) p.189.

<sup>2</sup> Derrett, J. D. M. (1985) *The making of Mark: The scriptural basis for the earliest gospel Volume One* Warkickshire, England: P. Drinkwater p.106

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.107. Similarly, Myers *et al* argue that within the 'family' of Israel, these 'daughters' represent the privileged and the impoverished, respectively and because of such inequality, the body politic of the synagogue is on the 'verge of death', (see Myers, C. *et al* (1996) *'Say to this Mountain': Mark's story of discipleship* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.66). For Waetjen, Jesus is the 'New Human Being' who saves the woman with haemorrhages (as representative of 'tradition-bound mother Judaism') (see Waetjen, H. C.

Such acts of interpretation in the reading of females in the pericope not only reduce their potential for agency via the designation of impurity, they also relegate the role of females to that of theological conduits for Jesus' identity and mission. In this vein it is interesting that some interpretations assign the significance of the consequences of the woman's uncleanness not as much to her but to Jesus. For instance, Dowd interprets the significance of the woman's uncleanness, and indeed the uncleanness of the girl, once dead, as evidence that Jesus crosses boundaries: the boundaries of Jew-Gentile in 5:1-20, and the boundaries of clean-unclean in 5:21-43.<sup>1</sup> Robbins goes as far as to argue that Jesus 'controls the feelings and thoughts of the woman', controlling and interpreting her knowledge, feelings, and action.<sup>2</sup>

Similar concentrations on the role of Jesus, and the subsequent relegation of the role of females, can be found in the work of scholars who suggest that the significance of the pericope is not in the acts of healing themselves, but in the proclamation they point to. For instance, Hooker argues that in the narrative, Jesus does not want the woman with haemorrhages to go away thinking him to be a 'magician-healer', nor does he want the family of the girl to 'babble about his ability to raise the dead'. Instead, Hooker claims that Jesus wants the focus to be on 'the proclamation of the Kingdom of God'.<sup>3</sup> The significance of the agency of the females in the pericope, then, is not only subordinated to the presumed necessity of Jesus' agency to be dominant in the encounter of healing, the very episodes themselves are subordinated to an assumed wider theological significance.

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(1989) *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.122).

<sup>1</sup>Dowd, S. (2000) *Reading Mark: A literary and theological commentary on the second gospel* Macon, GA: Smyth & Helyws p.56

<sup>2</sup> Robbins, V. K. (1994) *New boundaries in old territory: Form and rhetoric in Mark* New York, NY: Peter Lang p.196

<sup>3</sup> Hooker, M. D. (1991) *The Gospel according to St. Mark* London: A & C Black p.151

It is clear, then, from assessing the various sampled interpretations of female agency in this text, that the issues of ritual purity and even guilt have led to a radically diminished view of that agency. Given this, I would like to consider again the relational dynamics narrated in 5:21-43 and explore how group readers' emphases in interpreting this text highlight the negotiation of healing in light of other markers of agency beyond purity.

### **5.13 Gendered alterity: Agency on an unlevel playing field**

#### *Group Readers' Perspectives*

Much like scholars who attempt to frame the Markan intercalation narrated in 5:21-43 around responses made to Jesus, group readers to a large extent read this pericope as a story about faith.<sup>1</sup> Also, scholars differentiate between the agency of the characters in this story along gender lines, so too group readers. However, whilst much scholarship focuses on issues of ritual purity and religious-cultural exclusion, that is, on external features which characterise females as distinct from males and impose a postulated external religious-cultural paradigm on the story, a significant pattern which emerged from group readers' interpretations was that gendered agency was delineated via a contrast between external and internal parameters.

One way this difference can be illustrated is by comparing group readers' interpretations offered of Jairus and the interpretations offered of the woman with haemorrhages. One of

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<sup>1</sup> 'He's a believer. He doesn't say, 'do something', he says, 'lay on your hands'. He believes Jesus can do it,' 'C' from Reading Group Four, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.37; D: 'I see her just going forward. Her faith overcoming everything. Jesus already knows. Her faith is beyond that obstacle, somehow she is going to get there and she does. She's not thinking, 'am I able?'; B: She's on a mission,' from Reading Group Four, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.38; 'He knew that she was somebody's daughter. By her faith she became Jesus', God's daughter,' 'D' from Reading Group One, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.32; 'D: I don't know, she was a little bit overwhelmed with everything. Jesus felt her faith, he felt everything about her. Her faith was too much for her to think she was doing something wrong. She knew that he was the Messiah; A: She knew it was God; D: Yeah, exactly. Her faith told her what this person is going to say. Not wrong, not in fear because she knows she is touching God,' from Reading Group Four, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts pp.39-40; 'B: Jesus said, 'your faith has made you well'; C: She doesn't know it's her faith that's healed her. She has faith but at the moment she is not thinking about anything: 'I've just gotta touch him,' from Reading Group Four, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.40

the most consistent features of the reading groups' interpretations was an accentuation of the overwhelming presence of emotional distress in the woman's life as it intersects with the story narrated in 5:21-43. Whilst one reader saw little difference between Jairus and the woman in this regard,<sup>1</sup> many others perceived the woman to be distinguished by fear and doubt. For instance, one exchange between group readers incorporated feelings of doubt, attraction, being impressed, and fear as they imagined how the woman felt as she came before Jesus in 5:33-34.<sup>2</sup> Other readers associated the woman's struggle with physicians' care, with their own desires to 'get help':

*'Do you know how she feels to have endured much at the hands of doctors?*

*B: Like the blind leading the blind. Dark doctors don't see the light.*

*D: Scary, frustrating. It hurts, it's hateful.*

*B: For every antagonism, there is an equal antagonism.*

*C: I'd be afraid of not getting the help I needed of not getting better again.*

*A: A little hopeful that I'd heal.*

*E: She gave up.'*<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, another reader associated the experience 'of not getting the help you need' with anger, sorrow, and despair.<sup>4</sup> Beyond associations around the theme of needing to get help from others, some group readers perceived the woman's struggle in increasingly desperate terms. One reader saw her as one struggling with herself, even imagining her

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<sup>1</sup> 'She was helpless and hopeless at this point, and sure I would be hoping for something to happen so she could stop bleeding. She was desperate for a cure, like Jairus,' 'D' from Reading Group One, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.31

<sup>2</sup> 'C: Maybe she thought it wasn't Jesus. She had to tell him the whole truth who did that. Maybe she had doubts. Looks like she had doubts; B: Don't forget our Lord had a magnificent presence. People were attracted to him and his charisma; A: I think that the woman is so impressed by him and so afraid and now healed she feels a lot different – standing in the presence of the God who healed her,' from Reading Group One, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.32

<sup>3</sup> From Reading Group One, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.34

<sup>4</sup> 'You get angry, pissed off, disgusted, every time you try you end up with a problem. You have no hope anymore. Sorrow and tears and despair,' 'B' from Reading Group One, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.34

to crawl on the ground to touch Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, another reader emphasised her desperation in having tried *'everything she could'*, and still not being able to *'keep her stasis'*.<sup>2</sup>

The pattern which emerges here is a marked deviation from typical views of some scholars which tend to concentrate on the external religious-cultural frames of reference regarding the state of the woman and on postulated purity codes. By contrast, group readers' interpretations viewed the woman's agency as punctuated by an overwhelming internal emotional state that, to an extent, governs her internal world. She was viewed, then, through this lens as one who has internalised her physical status on a psychological level, thus reducing her agency to the acts of a desperate woman who has no other options left but to silently stretch out to touch Jesus.

Some group readers' interpretations moved beyond this emphasis on the woman's internal emotional distress and suggested, if rather idiosyncratically, that she might be in some way responsible for her condition:

*B: She led a disordered life. She became straggly and bitchy.*

*C: It's not her fault. I don't think she is to blame.*

*B: Imperfection is disease. When does the world begin to die?*

*C: No one's perfect.*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *'She knew she had to struggle with herself. Had to crawl on the ground to get to that cloth and when she touched, she knew,'* 'D' from Reading Group Four, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.35. It should be noted that whilst it is not an unreasonable assumption that the woman may have crawled on the ground to reach Jesus, the text itself may not support such a view in its explicit description of the woman falling before Jesus to tell him the 'whole truth' a few verses later (5:33).

<sup>2</sup> *'Desperate. She knows she's tried everything she could. Maybe not just one, not just local and at that time there probably weren't more than one doctor in a town. She had sought help from other places. Spent all she had. She had a lot of money to do that but now she has no money left, and there's no recovery for herself and plus, she is getting worse. She couldn't even keep her stasis,'* 'D' from Reading Group Four, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.38

<sup>3</sup> From Reading Group Two, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.34

It is worth noting here that this association of the woman's afflicted state with her own culpability for that state was not read universally across reading groups, but was often made by male readers in particular. For instance, if the interpretations of 'B' in this exchange are compared to the interpretations of 'A', it can be noted that whilst the latter (a female reader) seemed to wish in some way to exonerate the woman, the former (a male reader) sought to implicate her. A similar pattern of differential perceptions of the woman can be seen in other reading groups. For instance, an interpretation of the woman which associated her condition with guilt and fear was made by a male reader.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, one male reader took this perception of the woman even further, arguing that she was '*a bit of a devil*', unable to say that she was '*a good woman*' or to '*show herself as a true person*'.<sup>2</sup> The aetiology of this gendered differential among group readers is difficult to ascertain. It could be that some female readers offered more sympathetic readings of the woman because she is the female other in the story. Indeed, beyond this simple association of gender, there might be a deeper association between the woman's peculiar struggle with male power in the guise of leaders like Jairus and doctors who offered no help to her in the end, and female readers' experiences with the same sort of societal and medical/professional power.

This pattern of interpretation is quite different to the interpretations group readers offered of Jairus, who in contrast to the woman was characterised by markers external to his person. For instance, he is portrayed as one who ignored his power,<sup>3</sup> and overcame

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<sup>1</sup> '*She felt guilty. Knowing what had happened, she was afraid. Maybe she felt guilty because she stood out there – not good enough for Jesus to come to her. Afraid Jesus thought she was sneaky or something,*' 'C' from Reading Group Four, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.39

<sup>2</sup> '*He's powerful and beautiful - his manifestation. She's afraid. She's only a woman and does not have any ability to say she was a good woman, a happy woman. Unable to be working, unable to get rid of the malady which scorned her - a bit of a devil. Unable to show herself as a true person,*' 'B' from Reading Group Two, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.35

<sup>3</sup> '*Emotional to start with. He ignored his power. His emotions had gone beyond his position in life. He was just as a human being and caring about his daughter,*' 'A' from Reading Group Four, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.37

his pride,<sup>1</sup> both facets secured by his externally derived status as a cultural-religious leader. Furthermore, whilst he was read to have shocked the crowds by begging Jesus to heal his daughter<sup>2</sup>, Jairus was also interpreted to have impressed the crowd with his public show of obsequiousness<sup>3</sup>.

This differentiation between genders is even more pronounced when the group readers' interpretations of the agency of Jesus is considered. The woman and Jairus are delineated in terms of her internal state and his external status, and Jesus is more akin to the woman in this regard. The significant difference in interpretations of the two, though, is that whilst the woman was interpreted to be *'afraid'*, and *'unable'*, Jesus by comparison was seen to be *'powerful and beautiful'*.<sup>4</sup> His agency is interpreted by group readers as intrinsically superlative to that of the other characters around him. For instance, Jesus is presented in the story by multiple group readers as the one who can do what doctors cannot,<sup>5</sup> as the one having command over women and men,<sup>6</sup> and as the master to his students<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, this intrinsically superlative agency is even taken to extend to his exterior and to his *'magical'* clothes:

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<sup>1</sup> *'Well along his ministry there were great crowds, many miracles. Jairus was overcoming his pride, he was desperate for his daughter,'* 'B' from Reading Group One, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.33

<sup>2</sup> *'Shock. The fact that he begged. Mixed feelings I guess,'* 'D' from Reading Group One, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.30

<sup>3</sup> *'I think the crowd were amazed, one of the most prominent members. It's very impressive to the crowds,'* 'B' from Reading Group One, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.30

<sup>4</sup> *'He's powerful and beautiful - his manifestation...'* 'B' from Reading Group One, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.35

<sup>5</sup> *'That's right, Jesus can do this doctors can't,'* 'B' from Reading Group One, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.30

<sup>6</sup> *'He is responsible for a lot of people. He has a large following himself. By making her better, Jesus would pass the word along. He did not want to convince this guy, but to show God's love to Jairus and Jairus will show that to his congregation. What better than the leader of the community? Jairus didn't pick Jesus out. Jesus picked out Jairus,'* 'A' from Reading Group Four, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.38

<sup>7</sup> *'No. It goes from black to blue, yellow, white. Always travel through what it means. That is why it is always a master and a student. That is what this is,'* 'B' from Reading Group Two, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.35



*'She feels his clothes are magical, representative of him, because at that time if a boy was missing they'd grab his clothes and remember. They think clothes have some living part of him. That is miraculous.'*<sup>1</sup>

However, this gendered power differential along internal and external lines is not all that is suggested by group readers' interpretations. When asked what part the characters played in their own healing in the story, one group reader stated that they played, *'A major role: they heal themselves. It's just the way it happens, you have to do certain things.'*<sup>2</sup> Another reader emphasised the importance of *'taking care of the situation you are in'* and practising *'self-healing'*.<sup>3</sup> The question arises, what sort of things did group readers imagine the characters in this pericope were doing to take care of their situations and bring about their healing?

As one reader put it, getting healed depends a lot on how you are trying<sup>4</sup>. It is here that the exercise of an agency beyond the seeming constraints of gendered power differentials is suggested. For the woman, her approach to Jesus, as surreptitious as it was, was seen to exercise an agency quite different to male agency in the pericope. As two of the group readers put it: *'the fact that she touched his clothes, she gets herself saved'*,<sup>5</sup> and moreover, *'the crowd think she's ripped off this situation. She takes something from him. He was going to see someone else'*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'B' from Reading Group Two, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.35

<sup>2</sup> 'B' from Reading Group Two, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.36

<sup>3</sup> *'An important role. Not sure if it is small or large. I hope it would be large. You have to take care of the situation you are in. There was not much knowledge about medication, so there was a lot of self-healing,'*

'D' from Reading Group Two, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.36

<sup>4</sup> *'Yeah, there was a point in my life, two years ago, a situation in my life. I tried everything. My expectations were unrealistic, because I wasn't looking for God. I tried to do it my way, but to no avail. When weakness came, I gave in straight away. I had played both roles: a father and a very active drug addict. It depends on how you are trying. She tried all those physicians,'* 'C' from Reading Group Four, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.38

<sup>5</sup> 'C' from Reading Group Two, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.35

<sup>6</sup> 'B' from Reading Group Two, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p. 35

What, though, does the woman 'take' from Jesus? One reader suggested that the woman touches Jesus' divinity and so in some sense takes it from him:

*'She knew she had to struggle with herself. Had to crawl on the ground to get to that cloth and when she touched, she knew'<sup>1</sup>... 'I think the crowd think she is insignificant. They couldn't feel what Jesus feels. There was something more to that touching. The crowd was indifferent to this woman, still Jesus turns around... She touched him in a certain way - in a way that through him she was healed, through his power... Like the armour of God. Someone touched his divinity and it went out from him'.<sup>2</sup>*

I will explore this possibility of the woman taking healing from Jesus more below. It will suffice here to compare this notion of the woman's surreptitious agency to that of Jairus. For Jairus, agency was read to have been exercised in quite a different way. Whilst some readers saw Jairus to be in a desperate state due to the condition of his daughter<sup>3</sup>, he still is seen as one who exercises agency publicly and openly, *'amazing' the crowd*<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, seen to operate in open and in public, Jairus was interpreted by another reader to be effectively challenging Jesus in a show of power, suggesting that perhaps Jesus heals Jairus *'of the fact that it is not good to play double games on whether or not the kind of power you have'*, going on to point out that whilst Jesus *'doesn't need to play games with anybody'* he does want *'everything to be foolproof, and the greater the trial, the stupider the man'*.<sup>5</sup> Whilst offering a rather idiosyncratic interpretation of Jairus' act of negotiating in the pericope,

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<sup>1</sup> 'D' from Reading Group Two, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p. 35

<sup>2</sup> 'D' from Reading Group Four, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.39

<sup>3</sup> *'He was desperate, fearful because of his daughter,'* 'D' from Reading Group Two, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.33

<sup>4</sup> *'I think the crowd were amazed, one of the most prominent members. It's very impressive to the crowds,'* 'B' from Reading Group One, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.30

<sup>5</sup> *'I think Christ is an unassuming man. He doesn't need to play games with anybody. He is the all-powerful God. 'I have come here to teach you to love'. He's concerned about the man's little girl. He concerned about the man's concern. He wants everything to be foolproof, and the greater the trial, the stupider the man,'* 'B' from Reading Group Two, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.34

this reader does concur with the general point about Jairus' agency in the text, that his action is open and public.

In the section below, I explore how this emphasis on a gendered differentiation of agency - between external and internal markers of character and agency, and between publicly and privately exercised agency - might have implications for how healing is negotiated in this story. Particularly, I wish to explore how, even with the radically subaltern status the woman with haemorrhages is interpreted by group readers to have, in 5:21-43 she does exercise agency. In doing so, I hope to ask again how agency in this text which has predominantly been read within a paradigm of purity, power, and exclusion, might be read, despite its liminal nature, as unrelentingly resistive and participatory.

#### **5.14 From exclusion to participation**

##### *Subaltern agent, liminal agency*

In this final section of this chapter's discussion of 5:21-43 I wish to take up the strands of the emphases present in group readers' interpretations about the differential agencies acted out in the relational dynamics of this story. There was a shared perception across reading groups that the woman with haemorrhages could be characterized as overwhelmed by significant emotions including doubt and fear,<sup>1</sup> anger, sorrow, and despair<sup>2</sup>. She was seen as a character who '*struggled*' with herself<sup>3</sup>, doing '*everything she could*', and still not being able to '*keep her stasis*'.<sup>4</sup> Contrasts were drawn between this

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<sup>1</sup> 'C: *Maybe she thought it wasn't Jesus. She had to tell him the whole truth who did that. Maybe she had doubts. Looks like she had doubts; B: Don't forget our Lord had a magnificent presence. People were attracted to him and his charisma; A: I think that the woman is so impressed by him and so afraid and now healed she feels a lot different – standing in the presence of the God who healed her,*' from Reading Group One, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.32

<sup>2</sup> '*You get angry, pissed off, disgusted, every time you try you end up with a problem. You have no hope anymore. Sorrow and tears and despair,*' 'B' from Reading Group One, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.34

<sup>3</sup> '*She knew she had to struggle with herself. Had to crawl on the ground to get to that cloth and when she touched, she knew,*' 'D' from Reading Group Four, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.35

<sup>4</sup> '*Desperate. She knows she's tried everything she could. Maybe not just one, not just local and at that time there probably weren't more than one doctor in a town. She had sought help from other places. Spent all she*

perception of the woman's internal struggle diminishing her status, the externally mediated status of Jairus as one who ignored his power<sup>1</sup> and overcame his pride<sup>2</sup> to get healing for his daughter, and Jesus' intrinsic status as '*powerful and beautiful*'.<sup>3</sup> The strong delineation above argues for a differentiation of power along gendered lines. This differentiation was argued by group readers to impact how agency is exercised within such a stratified relational dynamic. This was seen with regards to the public versus private nature of the negotiation of healing which was interpreted to take place in the pericope.

Looking at the text again, there is clearly a parallel process at work in the story between the actions of Jairus and the woman. The woman comes to Jesus surreptitiously, privatised in a very public scene, by being camouflaged by the pressing crowd (5:24b, 31). She is then brought out into the open by Jesus' demand to know who had touched him (5:30), by her own response in coming forward, and by telling the truth (5:33). Indeed, her falling at Jesus' feet is read by Myers to suggest that she now has attained equal status to Jairus who himself began his encounter with Jesus by falling at his feet (5:22).<sup>4</sup> Following this movement from private to public, Jesus then publicly names the woman 'daughter', and he states that her faith brought about healing (5:34).<sup>5</sup>

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*had. She had a lot of money to do that but now she has no money left, and there's no recovery for herself and plus, she is getting worse. She couldn't even keep her stasis,*' 'D' from Reading Group Four, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.38

<sup>1</sup> '*Emotional to start with. He ignored his power. His emotions had gone beyond his position in life. He was just as a human being and caring about his daughter,*' 'A' from Reading Group Four, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.37

<sup>2</sup> '*Well along his ministry there were great crowds, many miracles. Jairus was overcoming his pride, he was desperate for his daughter,*' 'B' from Reading Group One, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.30

<sup>3</sup> '*He's powerful and beautiful - his manifestation,*' 'B' from Reading Group One, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.35

<sup>4</sup> See Myers, C. *et al* (1996) *Say to this Mountain': Mark's story of discipleship* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.65. Beyond this, Myers *et al* argue that Jesus' exhortation to Jairus to believe and not to be afraid (5:36) suggests that Jairus should learn about faith from the previously outcast woman (*Ibid.* p.66).

<sup>5</sup> It is argued that Jesus' public designation of the woman as 'daughter' is intended to free her from fear and reintegrate her into the life of the community (see Williamson, L. (1983) *Mark: Interpretation* Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press p.110).

In contrast, Jairus begins to negotiate the healing of his daughter in public, begging Jesus repeatedly to come and lay hands on her. (5:23). As the narrative progresses, public attention to his concerns diminishes. The synagogue leader's public obeisance towards Jesus is followed by his hopes for his daughter's healing being stalled by an unnamed and previously hidden woman. People then come from his house to urge Jairus not to bother Jesus further (5:35). Following this, Jairus is led home by Jesus, past the people weeping and wailing loudly at the house (5:38)<sup>1</sup>, and into a small, unseen gathering of three disciples of Jesus, and Jairus' immediate family and companions. It is here, in private, that Jesus strictly orders those gathered that 'no one should know this' (5:43).

What, then, is to be made of this public/private reversal between Jairus and the woman? One way to view this delineation is to explore the disparity of economic power it represents. For instance, Marshall argues that Jairus' greater wealth relative to the woman might be presumed by the fact that he has a many roomed house (5:38-40) and has sufficient means to attract a number of mourners to the scene (5:38).<sup>2</sup> By contrast, it is clear from the detailed description of the text that the woman's economic status has been radically undermined by her previous attempts to find healing, spending all that she has, getting no better, and in fact only growing worse (5:26).<sup>3</sup>

From the standpoint of the relational dynamics of the story, this emphasis on two levels of agency – public and private - begs the question of whether conventional views of agency in the text might have obviated the potential for agency for these characters. That

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<sup>1</sup> The significance of disallowing the crowd from being with Jesus when he raises the girl is sometimes taken to reflect the 'messianic secret', or to reflect the crowd's unbelief (see Brooks, J. A. (1991) *Mark The New American Commentary* 23 Nashville, TN: Broadman Press p.94).

<sup>2</sup> Marshall C. D. (1989) *Faith as a theme in Mark's narrative* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp.94-5.

<sup>3</sup> Waetjen argues that this level of description of the woman's poor socio-economic status reveals the narrator's own 'lower-class bias' with the 'bitter indictment' that she had spent all that she had, 'all for nothing' (see Waetjen, H. C. (1989) *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.120).

is, it is an assumption of the scholarship sampled earlier that the woman is effectively excluded from practising agency in her context, due to her impurity, or her poverty, or as some group readers perceived it, due to an intrinsic and internal lack on her part. Thus, her liminal agency, her reaching out to Jesus, is not a display of an agency commonly in operation by the woman, but rather is the last attempt at survival of a desperate person.

However, the second strand that group readers suggested in terms of the agency of the characters in the pericope was that whilst healing power might have been openly negotiated by Jairus, the woman may have done something more akin to taking power from Jesus. Relating this emphasis to scholars' perspectives on this point reveals diverging views of the agency of the woman. For instance, Marshall argues that if 5:29 ('Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease') were to be read in isolation, then it could be implied that an autonomous transference of 'healing manna' took place, since 'power is appropriated by the woman without Jesus consciously imparting it'.<sup>1</sup> However, as soon as this possibility is raised it is quashed by the imposition of the theological panacea of the 'wider context' which shows, argues Marshall, that power is not automatically released but is 'under the governance of God, determined to limit it to the arena of repentant faith (1:15)'.<sup>2</sup>

Other scholars decide not to rule out so quickly the possibility of Jesus' not knowing who had 'taken power' and instead argue that power is 'free-flowing' and 'spontaneous' in the scene.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, some scholars not only argue for a strong role for the woman, but go on to say that, in contrast to her, Jesus is 'utterly passive', with the initiative, action, and confirmation all in her hands.<sup>4</sup> That is, argues Horsley, in the end, 'Jesus simply

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall C. D. (1989) *Faith as a theme in Mark's narrative* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.106

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.106

<sup>3</sup> See Keenan, J. P. (1995) *The Gospel of Mark A Mahayana reading* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.147

<sup>4</sup> Horsley, R. (2001) *Hearing the whole story: The politics of plot in Mark's Gospel*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press p.209

confirms what she already knows: her faith has made her well'. Horsley goes on to state that it is the woman with haemorrhages whose 'courageous work' is solely responsible for healing: 'Restorative, healing power becomes operative in this episode by the initiative and aggressive action of one perceived as weak who reveals the divine way of power'<sup>1</sup>.

Similarly, feminist re-readings of 5:21-43 argue that the woman's reaching out to Jesus enlivens a relationship which had previously been dormant or bound by the societal double-debilitation of sickness and womanhood. Kinukawa argues that in the reciprocity of the relational encounter between the woman and Jesus they both subvert the myth of contamination and break down the barrier between clean and unclean.<sup>2</sup> Or, as Heyward asserts regarding this pericope, it is because of the woman's confidence in the potential mutuality shared between herself and Jesus that she initiates an acknowledgement of that relation as *δύναμις* (*καὶ εὐθὺς ὁ ἰησοῦς ἐπιγνοὺς ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὴν ἐξ αὐτοῦ δύναμιν ἐξέλθοῦσαν*, immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, 5:30), as power in relation between persons.<sup>3</sup>

Taking up these scholarly and group reader emphases, it can be argued that the woman's decision to approach Jesus, not openly but surreptitiously, needs to not only be interpreted as the reactive urge for survival of a desperate woman, but also as an intentional and strategic praxis of agency. The question that remains here is how agency is exercised by the woman as the strategic element of the encounter is considered.

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<sup>1</sup> Horsley, R. (2001) *Hearing the whole story: The politics of plot in Mark's Gospel*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press p.210 citing Brock, R. N. (1988) *Journeys by heart: a Christology of erotic power* New York, NY: Crossroads p.84, 87

<sup>2</sup> See Horsley, R. (2001) *Hearing the whole story: The politics of plot in Mark's Gospel*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press p.44

<sup>3</sup> Heyward, C. (1982) *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* New York, NY: University Press of America p.45

On one hand, the strategically surreptitious approach of the woman might be seen to be agency exercised under the guise of hegemonic structures of power ordered by the rules of formation of gender discourse. With these structures of hegemonic power in mind, the agency of the woman in reaching out to Jesus inhabits a strategic edge in as much as it points to a possible recognition by the woman of the thinness of the relational space within which she knows she has to operate. This thinness can be seen through the lens of the praxis of mutuality. For with gradations of gendered and socio-economic power an open space for the negotiation of a healing from Jesus is not a viable option for the woman. In this sense, the woman's actions betray the lack of the praxis of mutuality between a woman in her situation – sick, impoverished, and female – and the charismatic rabbi who is soon to pass her by. Unlike Jairus whose social capital affords him the opportunity to openly negotiate a healing for his daughter, the woman with haemorrhages has no such standing.

I argue that the agency of this woman, then, as narrated in 5:21-43, cannot truly be described as a praxis of mutuality. Contrary to Heyward's interpretation of this pericope, I assert that the woman's actions are not an indication of her confidence in the presence of mutuality as power in relation, rather they are an indication that she is certain that mutuality does not exist between herself and Jesus. Thus, the agency of the woman in approaching Jesus is not truly an exercise of agency that seeks to re-imagine hegemonic relational dynamics. Her approaching Jesus is, in the end, the best chance for healing that this woman opts for in the knowledge that mutuality in this encounter is apparently a lost cause. Healing occurs for the woman whilst the relational dynamics between Jesus and her remain unaltered. It is only subsequent to the healing, and Jesus' knowledge of power having left him (5: 30), that the relational dynamics between them are addressed.



On one hand, asserting that the woman's agency in 5:21-43 is not an exercise of the praxis of mutuality may seem to contradict the definition of mutuality presented in Chapter Two: the agency that seeks to renegotiate diminished views of identity and power thereby staking a claim for the voices of othered persons in hegemonic relational dynamics. However, whilst the woman does act, her actions do not appear in the text to indicate any intent on her part to enter into such a renegotiation. Indeed, her concern, explicit in 5:28 ('If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well') is only that she be healed.

On the other hand, it may be that this apparent lack of intent to renegotiate is misleading. The group readers emphasised not only the imagined liminal societal location of this woman but also her desperate internal state. From their perspectives, she very well might desire social reintegration. Whether the woman in this story is read to seek this reintegration and thus practice mutuality, or whether her concerns are purely for physical healing, in Jesus' response to her agency in 5:29ff, I would argue that he does exercise a praxis of mutuality in his dialogical engagement with her. How far, then, might Jesus' praxis of mutuality extend? Whilst I have argued that the woman may be seen initially not to seek to renegotiate the relational dynamic she shares with Jesus, once her hiddenness is exposed, she does choose to tell him 'the whole truth' (5:33). In return, Jesus calls her daughter (5:34). Does this then speak of a transformation of the relational dynamics between male and female through this encounter?

There may be reason to pause at this interpreted picture of reciprocity and note that the woman who tells the whole truth to Jesus does so in 'fear and trembling' (5:33). Indeed, Liew argues that the significance of being named 'daughter' is less of a celebratory moment for the woman than it seems. He asserts that in naming her thus, Jesus incorporates her into his family and 'establishes himself as her spokesman, provider, and

protector in a way that Jairus is to his daughter'<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, Liew interprets Jesus' command for her to 'go in peace' (5:34) as corroboration that she is 'placed under the direction of a man'<sup>2</sup>. The praxis of mutuality in this encounter is thus tempered by the gradations of colonial power within which it operates. Indeed, there is no initial welcome into Jesus' space for the woman, no invitation as such, and following her breaking in and her attempt to 'seize the rules' of the gendered discourse that had seen her suffer much at the hands of men who had taken all that she had (5:26), she too is seized with fear and trembling as her liminal agency is uncovered.

What then is to be concluded regarding this pericope and the gradations of gendered power it narrates? In considering this question the apprehension of Homi Bhabha over 'uplifting' and 'tall stories' of progress<sup>3</sup> comes to mind. That is, there is a danger in seeing the encounter between Jesus and the woman healed of her bleeding narrated in 5:34, as one such 'tall story'. If there is any transformation of relational dynamics in this pericope, it may occur only corresponding to hegemonic power in what Bhabha calls a 'supplemental position'<sup>4</sup>. The relational dynamics of 5:21-43 might thus be viewed not as operating in a site of utopian relating, but in a site of struggle which bears the marks of 'fear and trembling' (5:33).

That said, Bhabha's description of the 'supplemental position' that 'often the most significant elements in a process of subversion and transformation'<sup>5</sup> gives pause for thought. Whilst the end of the exchange between the woman and Jesus in 5:21-43 looks sparse in its possibilities for the transformation of relational dynamics, what I conclude is

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<sup>1</sup> Liew, B. (1999) *Politics of parousia: Reading Mark Inter(con)textually* Leiden: Brill p.139

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.139

<sup>3</sup> Bhabha, H. & Comaroff, J. (2002) 'Speaking of Postcoloniality, in the continuous present: A Conversation' in Goldberg, D. C. & Quayson, A. (eds.) *Relocating Postcolonialism* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.31

<sup>4</sup> See Kapoor, I. (2003) 'Acting in a tight spot: Homi Bhabha's Postcolonial politics' *New Political Science* 25 (4) (December) p.564

<sup>5</sup> Bhabha, H. (1995) 'Translator translated, W. J. T. Mitchell talks to Homi Bhabha' *Artform* (March) p.82

that these possibilities should not be overlooked. Indeed, with this dissertation's dialogical reading of the text with persons with poor mental health in mind, and with a particular focus on female readers who may have experienced the assumption of an inability to be fully active agents in relational encounters in their particular experiences of poor mental health, this opening of possibilities even if supplemental is significant. Indeed, as the readers of one of the groups emphasised, the personal experience of societal reactions to poor mental health is in the end not something that can be had from the outside.

*'C: You have to know. You have to have some idea of what is going on to tell somebody else.*

*A: Better than reading it in a book.*

*C: To actually explain it, not unless it is happening to them.*

*D: Sometimes I wonder if anyone really knows anything anymore'.<sup>1</sup>*

So too might it be regarding the significance of the supplemental change in the lived experience of hegemonic relational dynamics. Slight alterations might be more significant than they first appear. With this in mind, the second pericope of this pair narrates the role of marginal agency beyond the intimacy of touch, and, within the invective world of rhetoric. In it, I explore how agency might be exercised in a relational dynamic where the deficit of a praxis of mutuality is not merely assumed, it is declared.

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<sup>1</sup> From Reading Group Two, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006, *Reading Group Transcripts* p.35

## 5.21 Introduction: Agency and rhetoric

Mark 7:24-30

24From there Jesus set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, 25but a woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed at his feet. 26Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' 28But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' 29Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go – the demon has left your daughter.' 30So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

*The encounter of Jesus with a Syrophenician woman in 7:24-30 looks like an exchange in a relational space thin on the praxis of mutuality. Difference is foregrounded in this pericope as the Jewish man and the Gentile woman strike up an unlikely conversation. Between comments about food and dogs this conversation has all the hallmarks of a colonised relational milieu with the us, not-them paradigm of hegemonic parlance at the forefront, this time with Jesus in the stead of the coloniser. This emphasis on difference is a consistent feature of group readers' interpretations of this text that focus on the significance of power, faith, ethnicity, and the profound struggle with the self and as well as with others that this sort of encounter can lead to. Building on these insights, I argue that the strategic element of postcolonial resistance evident in the text is seen in the woman's mimetic repetition of Jesus' authoritative voice in her rearticulation of the discursive rules of bread and miracles. Yet the extent to which this subversive act of mimicry relates to the praxis of mutuality in this pericope remains unclear. In the end, Jesus remains a character who is difficult to place, split between his appearance as healer and his troubling rhetoric.*

## 5.22 Unblotting Jesus' copybook: Saving Jesus from throwing food and insults

### *Scholars' Perspectives*

Mark 7:24-30 is a brief, yet deeply problematic pericope, in Markan scholarship. Apart from the fact that during the course of a private conversation with a Gentile woman he appears to change his mind about whether he should or should not heal a 'demon possessed' girl, Jesus appears to throw insults in the process. On one hand, this should not be surprising given that the Jesus we meet in Mark is not always a man on his best behaviour. In 5:13 he causes a zoological disaster outside Decapolis, in 11:14 he continues the agricultural theme by cursing the fig tree outside Bethany, which later withers away (11:21). Later that day (11:15) he causes a ruckus in the Temple, turning over tables and preventing people from carrying anything inside. During his ministry he calls the Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem 'hypocrites' (7:6) and one of his disciples 'Satan' (8:33). Added to this litany are his comments to the Syrophenician woman seeking healing for her daughter in 7:27: 'it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs'.

Scholarship sampled that focuses on 7:24-30 tends to frame the brief events of the story within various mitigating circumstances, with the resultant effect that the relational conflict which specifically 7:27 narrates is in some way or another palliated. Such analyses seek to attenuate the struggle for power the pericope narrates by the imposition of various paradigms which for the most part serve as apologies for Jesus' rhetoric. There are interpretations of 7:24-30 which strongly condemn Jesus' rhetorical actions in the text, ranging from accusations that Jesus is 'insulting to the extreme',<sup>1</sup> to views that his

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<sup>1</sup> Ringe, S. H. (2001) 'A Gentile woman's story, revisited: Rereading Mark 7:24-30' in Levine, A. J. & Blickenstaff, M. (eds.) *A feminist companion to Mark* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.89

behaviour is 'morally offensive',<sup>1</sup> and 'abhorrent'.<sup>2</sup> In light of these, it might be that scholars feel all the more inclined to offer extenuating explanations for Jesus in this story.

The several attempts to exonerate Jesus with regard to this pericope, are carried out on a number of levels, one is on the level of theology. Some argue that Jesus' use of the word 'dog' is intended to be a test of the woman's faith.<sup>3</sup> Others justify the harshness of the term in 7:27 as a rebuke of the woman whose request constitutes an attempt to take advantage of Jesus as if he were a 'mere' miracle worker.<sup>4</sup> The woman's perceived fault here, argues Hooker, is that she fails to realise that this singular act of healing is part of something greater: the breaking in of the Kingdom of God. The argument follows for Hooker that the woman's reply does not represent her resistance to Jesus' act of labelling, but rather her acceptance that 'salvation belongs to Israel' and thus shows her faith in something far greater than Jesus' miraculous power to heal.<sup>5</sup>

Still other analyses proceed from a postulated socio-economic perspective. Theissen argues that Jesus' response must be seen within the context of the enmity that existed between Jews and non-Jews, particularly at the largely agricultural border of Tyre and Galilee. Centring around the Roman control of the supply of food and the enormous demand for grain grown in that border area, Theissen argues that the local populations had scarce food supplies. In particular the local Jewish populations of the Hellenistic cities such as Tyre, being a minority group, suffered greatly. The argument is made that the woman in 7:24-30 is actually not from a socio-economic location that is impoverished (contrary to Horsley's depiction of the woman as representative of 'all who are

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<sup>1</sup> Theissen, G. (1991) *The gospels in context: Social and political history in the synoptic tradition* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.61

<sup>2</sup> Gnanadason, A. (2001) 'Jesus and the Asian woman: A post-colonial look at the Syrophoenician/Canaanite woman from an Indian perspective' *Studies in World Christianity* 7 (2) p.163

<sup>3</sup> Brooks, J. A. (1991) *Mark The New American Commentary* 23 Nashville, TN: Broadman Press p.120

<sup>4</sup> Hooker, M. D. (1991) *The Gospel according to St. Mark* London: A & C Black p.182

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.182

threatened with similar circumstances'<sup>1</sup> of poverty and abandonment) but from a more advantaged background.

Others assert that Jesus' response is mediated by cultural factors beyond the economic realities of the day. Some purport that Jesus is a 'victim' of his historic context which subsequently shapes his response to his ethnic foe<sup>2</sup>. Alternatively, the significance of ethnicity arises in terms of a supposed honour and shame framework. Myers, for example argues that it would have been inconceivable for an unknown, unrelated woman to approach a man in the privacy of his residence, particularly a Gentile woman soliciting a Jewish man.<sup>3</sup> Hence Jesus' words are seen as a justified response to the indignant situation that the woman's approach precipitated.

At an intertextual and cultural level, the exchange about dogs and food is often taken as an allusion to the pericope immediately preceding, 7:1-24, wherein Jesus has declared all foods clean (7:19). On a general level, Jesus in 7:24-30 could be declaring all persons clean, argues Williamson.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, Beck maintains that because food laws prohibit Jews from eating unclean food intended for dogs (e.g. Exodus 22:31) Jesus' statement in 7:27 articulates the opposite principle, that no dogs should eat clean food that is fit for humans.<sup>5</sup> It would follow that the problem in this pericope is not with unclean foods but with unclean eaters of food - Gentiles.

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<sup>1</sup> Horsley, R. (2001) *Hearing the whole story: The politics of plot in Mark's Gospel*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press p.213. See also Gill, who argues that the woman is 'of mixed race, coming from a conquered people, a second-class citizen in a country that once belonged to her people', (Gill, L. M. (2000) *Daughters of dignity: African Women in the Bible and the virtues of black womanhood* Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press p.99).

<sup>2</sup> Gill, L. M. (2000) *Daughters of dignity: African Women in the Bible and the virtues of black womanhood* Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press p.101

<sup>3</sup> See Myers, C. et al (1996) *'Say to this Mountain': Mark's story of discipleship* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.82, who argues that this affront explains Jesus' initial rebuff of the woman.

<sup>4</sup> Williamson, L. (1983) *Mark: Interpretation* Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press p.137; Brooks, J. A. (1991) *Mark The New American Commentary 23* Nashville, TN: Broadman Press p.120

<sup>5</sup> See Beck, R. R. (1996) *Nonviolent Story: Narrative conflict resolution in the Gospel of Mark* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.81

On a missiological level, one approach shifts the focus to the 1<sup>st</sup> century evangelist and his concern for the mission to the Gentiles.<sup>1</sup> The contention here is that the evangelist wishes to address a contemporary need in his own community to resist a division between Jewish followers of the Jesus movement and Gentile followers.<sup>2</sup> Also referring to the supposed context of the production of the text, Tolbert argues that the use of the metaphor 'dog' is an intentional reference to Cynic Philosophers who were distinguished not for their philosophy but for their 'impudent and argumentative style'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Diogenes of Sirope, the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE Cynic founder was called 'the dog' for his rudeness and impudence.<sup>4</sup> However, not only is Tolbert's argument tenuous – it would be the only reference to Cynic Philosophy in the Gospel and so a rather odd anomaly – it also does nothing to alter the fact that Jesus' reference for the woman who is at his feet is to a group whose reputation is tarnished as rude and impudent.

It seems, then, that there are as many mitigating paradigms used to exonerate Jesus as there are scholars to propose them. Whilst these interpretations which attempt to explain Jesus' behaviour - whether from a linguistic, theological or contextual perspective - do offer some valuable insights, they can do nothing to alter the textual presence of 7:27. Indeed, it is interesting that both the theological and contextual approaches attempt to offer justifications for behaviour which is taken in some way to be a blemish on Jesus'

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<sup>1</sup> See E.g. Van Iersel, M. F. (1998) *Mark: A reader-response commentary* JSNT Supplement Series 164 Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.250; Painter, J. (1997) *Mark's Gospel: Worlds in conflict* London & New York: Routledge p.116; Williamson, L. (1983) *Mark: Interpretation* Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press p.138

<sup>2</sup> Dowd, S. (2000) *Reading Mark: A literary and theological commentary on the second gospel* Macon, GA: Smyth & Helyws p.76

<sup>3</sup> Tolbert, M. A. (1989) *Sowing the gospel: Mark's world in literary and historical perspective* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.183

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.183



character. That is, whether attributed to the evangelist's later concerns, or to Jesus himself, 7:27 still undercuts the image of Jesus' benevolence.<sup>1</sup>

With this tendency to palliate the conflict between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman in 7:24-30, when interpretations of the character of Jesus are offered, analyses of the relational dynamics of this conflict are largely left unaddressed. Interpretations tend to move straight to the 'why' of the encounter, leaving the questions concerning 'what' actually takes place unexplored. If interpretations which directly focus on the role of the woman are considered, which feminist readings of the pericope tend to do, this trend is somewhat reversed. Often, in these cases, there is an attempt to champion the rhetorical agency of the woman, such that the 'what' of the encounter is taken to be central to an appreciation of the pericope.

For instance, Dowd argues that the woman does not so much win the argument in 7:24-30, rather she solves a riddle by changing the terms of the discussion.<sup>2</sup> It is by changing the cultural context (whilst Jews did not keep house dogs, Greeks and Romans did) from Jewish to Greek, asserts Dowd, that the Syrophenician woman solves the problem of priority by replacing an image of scarcity (Jew don't have enough food for themselves let alone for scavenger dogs) to one of abundance (Greeks have enough food to share it with their pets).<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Spargo argues that the textual location of 7:24-30, between two feeding narratives (6:34-44 and 8:1-10) suggests 'an economy which is of the woman's making'<sup>4</sup>: that she is able to translate leftovers into a symbol of having plenty to share.

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it is maintained that in no other place is Jesus found to treat any other character in such a harsh manner (see Donahue, J. R. and Harrington, D. J. (2002) *The Gospel of Mark* (Sacra Pagina Series 2) Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press p.233).

<sup>2</sup> Dowd, S. (2000) *Reading Mark: A literary and theological commentary on the second gospel* Macon, GA: Smyth & Helyws p.76

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.77

<sup>4</sup> Spargo, R. C. (1999) 'Jesus unbound: The correction of Jesus's intentions in Mark 5-8' *Religion and Arts* 3:3/4 p. 323

Thus her response to Jesus (7:28) can be seen as a corrective of Jesus' misunderstanding of his own miracle-working.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst these interpretative lenses shift the focus of biblical scholarship to the internal power dynamics of the story rather than elide such concerns, they still tend towards a movement to resolve the conflict being narrated and the struggle for and the ambiguity of power in this story. As Dube highlights in her re-reading of the Matthean counterpart (Mt 15:21-28) to Mark 7:24-30, depending on the perspectives individuals have concerning the power relationships narrated in the pericope, the Syrophenician/Canaanite woman can be read to be either a heroine paradigm for feminists who transgress intellectual and religious boundaries<sup>2</sup> or a victim of patriarchal and imperial ideology<sup>3</sup>.

As a segue from this section that has focused on a sample of scholarly approaches to the text to group readers' interpretations, it is interesting that Dube's own work with reading groups from an African context found that readers tended to emphasise the ways in which conflict and struggles for power gave way to the centrality of interdependence in acts of healing. This interpretative trend was guided by the readers' contextual concept of *Semoya*, a mode of reading that resists discrimination and articulates a reading of healing of race and gender relations as well as of individuals, classes, and nations, by underlining the interconnections of things and people rather than the disconnections.<sup>4</sup> Whilst this stress on interdependence directly considers the relational dynamics of the text, my own interest is to stay with the tensions of the story and ask group readers to consider how

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<sup>1</sup> Spargo, R. C. (1999) 'Jesus unbound: The correction of Jesus's intentions in Mark 5-8' *Religion and Arts* 3:3/4 p. 323

<sup>2</sup> Schussler Fiorenza, E. (1993) *But she said: Feminist practices of biblical interpretation* Boston, MA: Beacon Press p.12, 97

<sup>3</sup> Dube, M. W. (2000) *Postcolonial Feminist interpretation of the Bible* St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press p.170

<sup>4</sup> See *Ibid.* p.192

they read the power struggles narrated in 7:24-30, in the hope that the tendency to sublimate the agonistic tensions of the story will be resisted to some extent.

### **5.23 Power, difference, and the fracture of mutuality**

#### *Group Readers' Perspectives*

As demonstrated above, there is the tendency in scholars' readings of 7:24-30 to palliate the tensions inherent in the pericope - by placing an imagined exonerating paradigm for Jesus' behaviour or an imagined heroism of the woman - onto the text. Such a tendency leaches this story of the agonisms of its relational dynamics. No such leaning was found among group readers' interpretations. For example, when asked to reflect on how the exchange with Jesus might have made the Syrophenician woman feel, readers variously responded in a negative light. One reader stated self-reflectively that it would make her feel '*humiliated*'<sup>1</sup>, whilst another reader postulated that the woman must have internalised the rhetoric she was receiving, and be left feeling '*like a dog*' and thinking '*of herself as a child*'<sup>2</sup>. Yet, despite these imagined hegemonic effects of the actions described in 7:24-30, the woman is also interpreted by some group readers as one whose faith makes the demons leave<sup>3</sup>, and, as one who according to another reader, was stronger than Jesus<sup>4</sup>.

The question which arises from the tension perceived to be at the heart of this pericope is who in the end is in control of the conversation? On one hand, group readers argued that it is Jesus who has the advantage: he is sought out by the woman, he then sets the terms

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<sup>1</sup> **How would you feel if you were called a 'dog'?** '*I would feel humiliated,*' 'A' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.45

<sup>2</sup> **How do you think the woman feels now? Like a woman, a child, a dog?** 'A: *I think she thinks of herself as a child now, 'cause I think after this she changed her life around*'; C: '*She felt like a dog, because of what happens to her. She's been treated like a dog,*' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.47

<sup>3</sup> **What do you think has made the demon to leave her daughter?** '*I think the mother's faith,*' 'B' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.46

<sup>4</sup> '*Because I think she's stronger than him, because she comes from another area and the area she comes from is probably very powerful*' 'C' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.45

of the conversation, and it is he who decides that the woman can go<sup>1</sup>, declaring that the demon has left the woman's daughter (7:29). Similar conclusions were reached by other group readers, with Jesus, as 'Messiah',<sup>2</sup> and 'Lord',<sup>3</sup> associated by one reader with experiences of encountering mental health professionals: *'I remember a psychiatrist when starting would always have his head above mine. I've never felt that kind of thing with people I am working with now. Although I do remember trying to get into a certain living situation and my caseworker was holding the reins'*.<sup>4</sup> The notion that Jesus might have been 'holding the reins' of this encounter with the Syrophenician woman was supported by other readers who emphasised the woman's situation, in contrast to Jesus' status. She 'begs',<sup>5</sup> and requires 'mercy'.<sup>6</sup> Her position, at Jesus' feet, signified to other readers that she had placed herself in a position of trust in someone she does not know,<sup>7</sup> and could be seen as the risky action of a 'desperate' woman.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, some group readers argued that it is the woman who, in her response, has the upper hand. For, whilst she is the recipient of the enigmatic riddle concerning dogs and bread she is also the one who re-imagines the terms of the debate (7:28), and in the end

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<sup>1</sup> *'I think Jesus is trying to exhibit control by saying, 'You may go now''*, 'A' from Reading Group Two, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.49

<sup>2</sup> *'She has faith that he is the Messiah'*, 'D' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.44

<sup>3</sup> *'She saw the Lord, she was astonished'*, 'B' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.44

<sup>4</sup> 'A' from Reading Group Three, Cambridge, MA, April 24<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.49

<sup>5</sup> *'She had humility. I beg to people sometimes, well yeah, if I'm asking for forgiveness or I don't want to be punished. Like with the staff at the home - be merciful, have mercy,'* 'C' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.44

<sup>6</sup> *'For her forgiveness, she needs to be forgiven'* 'A' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.44

<sup>7</sup> *'A: Could be, opening up to someone you don't really know. B: Where he comes from it is. A: It shows trust. I myself wouldn't trust in doing it like that,'* from Reading Group Two, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts pp.47-48

<sup>8</sup> *'Well it seems to me that she's kind of desperate. Her daughter has a demon or whatever. She doesn't quite know what to do about it. She's probably tried numerous things without getting anything out of it. So she's looking to somebody to help the situation she has,'* 'A' from Reading Group Two, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.48

gets what she desires<sup>1</sup>. Perhaps she has the advantage because as a recipient of Jesus' rhetoric she now holds his reputation in her hands. Jesus offered the woman what could easily have been interpreted as an insult in a place where his fame had spread (3:8), the choice is hers as to how she might respond. As one of the group readers commented, Jesus' agency in the encounter '*depended on her saying the right thing*'<sup>2</sup>.

The question of power in 7:24-30, then, is fraught with ambiguity. Indeed, reflecting on the psychological tension inherent in the exchange between Jesus and the woman, not only is the question of who has control of the exchange not clear, one reader suggested that the encounter is itself set on edge between control and the loss of control:

*'How do you think Jesus felt about her doing that [bowing at Jesus' feet]?*

*A: Merciful.*

*C: He probably said, 'you don't have to keep crying all the time', otherwise she might go into a frenzy and go mentally ill.*

*A: She could have been in danger of losing her mind.*

*C: Sure they had mental illness, even in those days'*<sup>3</sup>

Another feature which group readers emphasised was the dynamics of difference in the story. Specifically, readers stressed the difference Jesus sees between himself and the socio-cultural group represented by the Syrophenician woman. For instance, one reader suggested that 'dogs' referred to the scarcity of faith as well as of food among those

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<sup>1</sup> *'Does the Syrophenician woman expect too little? Should she also have a place at the table?*

*I don't know. Her kid gets cured. It seems that this is all she is asking for in the first place', 'A' from Reading Group Three, April 24<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.50*

<sup>2</sup> *'Who is in control of this situation? Definitely I think Jesus. It seems almost like he's saying aphorisms, its like he's throwing something at her, something small and profound for her to think about. I guess Jesus...but it depended on her saying the right thing', 'A' from Reading Group Three, April 24<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.50*

<sup>3</sup> *From Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.44*

whom Jesus is addressing.<sup>1</sup> Another reader suggested that the term ‘dog’ referred to a lack of equality between Jesus and the others the woman represented, with the implication being that these others were ‘*people beneath him*’.<sup>2</sup> For another reader, the difference was just a matter of ethnicity: ‘*Well the dogs are the people whom Jesus doesn’t recognise as part of his people.*’<sup>3</sup> In multiple ways the difference of the other is not recognised and embraced in this encounter. Instead of offering words of healing, as one group reader stated, Jesus is found to be ‘*throwing an aphorism*’ at a woman in need.<sup>4</sup> In return, another group reader does not see Jesus here gaining a follower as much as ending up ‘*with a fight*’ on his hands.<sup>5</sup>

Whilst the Syrophenician woman is celebrated by some scholars as a biblical heroine of female rhetorical agency<sup>6</sup>, for some group readers the impact of the fractured relational dynamic narrated in this story was associated with experiences of othering in relation to mental health. One reader stated simply that in the face of such an encounter you can end up ‘*hating yourself*’.<sup>7</sup> Other readers suggested that there might be a danger of ‘*losing your mind*’ and going ‘*into a frenzy*’.<sup>8</sup> Such reflections were put into sharp contextual relief by

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<sup>1</sup> ***And the dogs?*** A: ‘*People who don’t have any food*’; D: ‘*Or the people who don’t believe,*’ from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.45

<sup>2</sup> ‘*Doesn’t sound too good, no, when he calls them dogs. Those are people beneath him, he doesn’t recognise them as equal,*’ ‘C’ from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.45

<sup>3</sup> ‘B’ from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.45

<sup>4</sup> ‘*It’s enigmatic. It’s metaphorical. She’s asking him for something, he is throwing an aphorism at her. It doesn’t really make sense to me. It’s definitely open to interpretation, that he is calling her a dog. It’s disturbing. It’s not a compassionate, loving thing to do,*’ ‘A’ from Reading Group Three, April 24<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.50

<sup>5</sup> ***Does the way the woman answers back work as a way of resisting the label Jesus offers?*** B: ‘*You might end up with a fight on your hands*’; A: ‘*If you wanted a fight, I presume it would be fine to do that*’; B: ‘*Could be verbal or physical*’; A: ‘*It could happen*’; from Reading Group Two, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.48

<sup>6</sup> See Schussler Fiorenza, E. (1993) *But she said: Feminist practices of biblical interpretation* Boston, MA: Beacon Press p.12, 97

<sup>7</sup> ‘*I think some people have this mental constitution to react in that way but to the extent that mental health problems can overlap with problems with hating yourself, feeling depressed and getting really high and manic – yeah this part just feels like a story, it doesn’t feel like something that could really have happened,*’ ‘A’ from Reading Group Three, April 24<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.50

<sup>8</sup> C: ‘*He probably said, ‘you don’t have to keep crying all the time’, otherwise she might go into a frenzy and go mentally ill*’; A: ‘*She could have been in danger of losing her mind,*’ from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.44

one reader who found the begging woman in 7:24-30, who would be called 'dog' by the one from whom she is begging, to be a reminder of his own experience of begging from others: *'She had humility. I beg to people sometimes, well yeah, if I'm asking for forgiveness or I don't want to be punished. Like with the staff at the home - be merciful, have mercy'*.<sup>1</sup>

Such emphases, then – of an ambiguous struggle for power, the significance of difference, and fractured relating resonating with the dissonances of living with poor mental health in today's North-Atlantic societies – are distinct from scholarly perspectives sampled earlier that elect to palliate the conflict inscribed in the encounter. Building on the expansive interpretative work of these group readers, I will now turn to the pericope again and ask how the forefronting of these emphases might inform readings of the text in ways that honour both the potential that in this story the Syrophenician woman is left 'hating herself', and a contrary possibility that she might have ended up feeling transformed and empowered by the exchange.

#### **5.24 Mutual transformation?**

##### *The cost of negotiation*

Above all, what the emphases of the group readers point to in the relational dynamics of 7:24-30 is the predominance of difference. First, there is no clarity as to who might have had control of the pericope in the end. The network of power in this pericope is diffuse and unclear. Second, faith, ethnicity, and some measure of equality were all seen to create tensions between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman such that these various marks of difference were not seen to be resolved by group readers. Third, and similar to the second point, the picture of relating that group readers painted of the encounter narrated in 7:24-30 is one where the fractures of difference are not somehow healed by the end of the exchange, rather they remain as an agonistic presence that is not in the end overcome.

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<sup>1</sup> 'C' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.44

What, then, do these various emphases point to in terms of the praxis of mutuality in this pericope? As I defined it in Chapter Two, mutuality in its full form is a praxis wherein both the self and the other are recognised as mutual partners in a relational encounter, and where there is the establishment of forms of relating where each has room for the difference of the other. With this definition in mind, it is hard to see through the lens of group readers' interpretations how mutuality is practised in its full form in this pericope. What is seen is more a partial resistive strand of the praxis of mutuality wherein the Syrophoenician woman seeks to reassert her agency and her rights to healing power in her renegotiation of the terms of the hegemonic relational dynamics Jesus puts forth to her.

Beyond this, though, and contrary to the limit of mutuality that I argue is prevalent in group readers' interpretations, some scholars suggest by their interpretations of this pericope that mutuality as a praxis of resistance and aspirational transformation is present in its full form in this encounter. Arguing such a case for transformation, Kinukawa postulates that the woman knowingly neglects social custom and bows down to Jesus, which is an expression not of honour and respect to him, but of disgrace, all in an attempt to bring healing to her daughter.<sup>1</sup> Via the woman's crossing of her cultural border she frees Jesus 'to be fully himself...the boundary-breaker'.<sup>2</sup> By this interpretation, it is Jesus who is encouraged to step across the boundary, to the woman's side. Kinukawa argues that the woman enables Jesus to see the situation in a different way via a 'mutual transformation'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> She argues that women of that time were not expected to come out of their homes, much less make a plea in a public setting. Her invasive solicitation would make a man 'lose his face in a culture of honor/shame'. See Kinukawa, H. (1994) *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese feminist perspective* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.54.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.60

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.61. A similar cultural argument is proposed by Gill reading from an African woman's perspective with a particular eye on Matthew's account of the story. Her reading emphasises the perseverance of the woman even in the height of her humiliation before Jesus. She is likened, then, to black women in 'Africa' whom Gill argues have persevered in spite of degrading circumstances, 'retaining the core virtues that black



Similarly, in another article, Kinukawa argues that what is predominant in this pericope is not a segregation of the Syrophenician woman from Jesus, but an interdependence between them. Arguing that the woman identifies not with the referents of 'the dogs' in 7:27, but more with Jesus and the economic struggles of his own people, Kinukawa posits that what the woman negotiates in this story is not one side of a relational dynamic of difference, but the solidarity that Jesus and she share. That is, she leads the dialogue towards an interdependent relationship between Jesus, the children of Israel, herself, and her daughter.<sup>1</sup>

Through a Bhabhian lens, Perkinson's work also can be seen to suggest that mutuality is practised as both a form of resistance and transformation. Perkinson argues that Matthew's treatment of Mark's encounter between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman represents an iteration of the word of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> That is, he argues that Jesus' words to the woman – who in Matthew's gospel is presented as a Canaanite – are interrupted by the woman and repeated back to Jesus, thus negotiating difference with the discourse's own terms. Again utilising Bhabha, Perkinson describes this dialogical exchange as the presence of a time-lag in that the past catches up to the present with the Canaanite [Syrophenician] difference included in the repetition of the authorial voice of Jesus, thus shifting the boundaries of the discourse. What Perkinson suggests is in operation here is the praxis of mimicry, such that the terms of hegemonic discourse are re-articulated in an act of dialogue. This is not just, though, a renegotiation of difference on ethnic grounds, or on grounds of who is permitted to receive healing from the hand of Jesus, this is also the inscription of a theological transgression. In this mimetic return of Jesus' seeming

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women have had to internalise in order to survive in a country that humiliated them and considered their people dogs' (Gill, L. M. (2000) *Daughters of dignity: African Women in the Bible and the virtues of black womanhood* Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press p.102).

<sup>1</sup> Kinukawa, H. (2004) 'Mark' in Patte, D. (ed.) *Global Bible Commentary* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press p.372

<sup>2</sup> Perkinson, J. (1996) 'A Canaanitic word in the Logos of Christ; or the difference the Syrophenician woman makes to Jesus' *Semeia* 75 pp.61-85

disavowal of the Canaanite [Syrophenician] woman, Perkinson argues that a hybrid space opens up between Jesus and the woman.<sup>1</sup> He argues that for a brief moment, as she returns Jesus' words to him, she speaks not only to Jesus but also in his place: 'She briefly occupies the space (even the subject-position) of 'Christ' in her speaking to and against Jesus, speaking briefly 'in his place' without entirely giving up her own'.<sup>2</sup>

Is this, then, a happy resolution to the problem of 'dogs' and 'bread' in 7:24-30? Arguing along the grain of Perkinson's thesis, it could be said that not only is this the resolution in the encounter that the mother of the sick girl desires – her daughter's healing - the relational encounter also displaces the power imbalance presented by the knowing lord and the bowing servant. In a similar vein it is argued that Jesus' ministry is enlarged by the woman's ministry to Jesus,<sup>3</sup> and that 'it is the evangeliser who is being evangelised now'.<sup>4</sup> Mitchell asserts that the happy resolution might be that the woman offers a model of emancipatory dialogue. That is, 7:24-30's rhetoric 'demonstrates how personal speech can create tension with oppressive social assumptions and re-describe reality'.<sup>5</sup> Mitchell goes on to argue that this particular pericope offers dialogue as a potential space where people can 'entertain one another's truth claims, deconstruct oppressive social reality, and construct inclusive Christian community'.<sup>6</sup>

Difference is thus not only present in this pericope between the characters in the text, it is also clearly present between scholarly interpretations such as the ones described above and the emphases of group readers. The question remains, then, whether the praxis of

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<sup>1</sup> Perkinson, J. (1996) 'A Canaanitic word in the Logos of Christ; or the difference the Syrophenician woman makes to Jesus' *Semeia* 75 p.80

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 81 Gill argues even more strongly, stating that the healing that the woman persuades Jesus to perform authenticates Jesus' divine status (Gill, L. M. (2000) *Daughters of dignity: African Women in the Bible and the virtues of black womanhood* Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press p.104).

<sup>3</sup> Kwok, Pui-Lan (1995) *Discovering the Bible in the non-biblical world* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.80

<sup>4</sup> Sugirtharajah, R. S. (1986) 'The Syrophenician woman' in *Expository Times* 98 (October) p.14

<sup>5</sup> Mitchell, J.L. (2001) *Beyond fear and silence: A feminist approach to the Gospel of Mark* London & New York: Continuum Press p.110

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.113

mimicry that Perkinson argues to have been exercised by the Syrophenician woman operates as an enabler of a mutual relating or whether the group readers' reluctance to see mutuality in this encounter subverts such confidence. That is, is it reasonable to suggest with Perkinson's reading of the woman's use of mimicry, that this is a form of postcolonial praxis that not only expects a more spacious set of relational dynamics be created, but also offers to Jesus as an invitation to the same? Moreover, can Jesus' word offered in return to the Syrophenician woman in 7:29 - 'for saying that, you may go' – be reasonably seen as a reciprocation of such a postulated invitation to mutuality?

It is my contention that in the end such definitive conclusions about the mutual nature of the exchange between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman between verses 28 and 29 remain elusive. It is not clear at all that Jesus practices mutuality in his encounter with the Syrophenician woman in 7:24-30, and so it cannot be concluded that the postcolonial praxis of mimicry that Perkinson reads to be present in the relational dynamics of this text actually enables anything more than healing for the woman's daughter. That is, it is reasonable to conclude that the agencies in this pericope are exercised without any certainty as to the status of mutuality in the encounter. The presence of mutuality remains a question which hangs over interpretations that might be made of the text.

I argue that such irresolution is created by the ambivalence of Jesus' presence in the text. Jesus in this pericope remains a character who is difficult to place. Every designation of Jesus in 7:24-30 is undercut by a contrary designation which in the end subverts the attempt to come to definitive conclusions about his agency and the agency of the woman in return that he inspires. Jesus' presence in the text and the humiliation he perpetrates still, in Mitchell's words, bring the reader 'up short'<sup>1</sup>. As Mitchell argues, there is a disturbing ambivalence here which tears the reader between a celebration of the

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell, J.L. (2001) *Beyond fear and silence: A feminist approach to the Gospel of Mark* London & New York: Continuum Press p.97

woman's agency and 'lament or even rage' at the treatment she receives.<sup>1</sup> Similarly for the varied interpretations of group readers, the presence of Jesus remains ambivalent. He is for some readers the 'Messiah',<sup>2</sup> and 'Lord',<sup>3</sup> yet for others he is the one who leaves the woman feeling 'beneath him',<sup>4</sup> 'humiliated',<sup>5</sup> 'like a dog' and left thinking of 'herself as a child'.<sup>6</sup>

With the troubling presence of Jesus in this text - split between an appearance as both one who heals and one who 'humiliates' - this state of irresolution in the interpretation of this text is consonant with Donaldson's suggestion that a third ambivalent character in this story might leave the tension between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman unresolved. This character takes the form of a seemingly absent body: that of the Syrophenician girl. Whilst for some of the group readers, she is 'auctioned, a bargained thing',<sup>7</sup> for Donaldson she is a spectral presence in the text,<sup>8</sup> calling forth a silent witness to both her absence and her presence in the text. For whilst she remains silent and nameless, what the text is also very clear about is that she is restored to health (7:30). The very ambiguity of her presence, as Donaldson suggests, haunts the text and the conclusions which might be brought to bear upon it, for she is at the same time both written out yet indelibly written into the text, and into the encounter between Jesus and her mother who appeals to him

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell, J.L. (2001) *Beyond fear and silence: A feminist approach to the Gospel of Mark* London & New York: Continuum Press p.99

<sup>2</sup> 'She has faith that he is the Messiah', 'D' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.44

<sup>3</sup> 'She saw the Lord, she was astonished', 'B' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.44

<sup>4</sup> 'Doesn't sound too good, no, when he calls them dogs. Those are people beneath him, he doesn't recognise them as equal,' 'C' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.45

<sup>5</sup> **How would you feel if you were called a 'dog'?** 'I would feel humiliated,' 'A' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.45

<sup>6</sup> **How do you think the woman feels now? Like a woman, a child, a dog?** 'A: I think she thinks of herself as a child now, 'cos I think after this she changed her life around'; C: 'She felt like a dog, because of what happens to her. She's been treated like a dog,' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.47

<sup>7</sup> 'A' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.47

<sup>8</sup> Donaldson, L. E. (2005) 'Gospel hauntings: The Postcolonial demons of New Testament criticism' in *Postcolonial biblical criticism: interdisciplinary intersections* Moore, S. D. & Segovia, F. F. (eds.) London & New York: T & T Clark International p.101

for healing. Indeed, to view the girl in 7:24-30 as a spectral presence in the text is to move beyond the role of persons with disabilities as 'the body silent', 'not allowed to speak', and designated as 'not able to speak up' thus leading to 'representative others' assuming the need 'to step in – like ventriloquists – as 'voices of the voiceless''.<sup>1</sup> Rather, as a spectral presence, the girl though silent in the pericope, continues to undo speaking done for her that might rest at easy resolutions.

Thus, when no longer seen as a discreet encounter between Jesus and his ethnic other, but one between a healer, a mother, and an absent-yet-present sick girl the ambivalence that might be felt concerning Jesus' rhetoric in this pericope is only accentuated especially when the insights of the group readers are brought to the fore as ones who have known what it is to beg for mercy<sup>2</sup> from those who seemingly '*hold the reins*'<sup>3</sup> of power and wellness.

So, whilst Guardiola-Saenz's comment on this pericope - that it is only at the level of the table (as equals) and not under the table (as inferiors) 'that a constructive dialogue and a fair reconstitution of the world can be achieved'<sup>4</sup> – is true in as much as that is what might constitute 'fairness', it is not in fact where the dialogue of this text takes place. The relational space of 7:24-30 is not 'fair. It is not a space of utopian equality wherein

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<sup>1</sup> See Betcher, S. (2004) 'Monstrosities, miracles, and mission: Religion and the politics of disablement' in Keller, C. *et al* (eds.) *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press p.97

<sup>2</sup> '*She had humility. I beg to people sometimes, well yeah, if I'm asking for forgiveness or I don't want to be punished. Like with the staff at the home - be merciful, have mercy*', 'C' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.44

<sup>3</sup> '*I remember a psychiatrist when starting would always have his head above mine. I've never felt that kind of thing with people I am working with now. Although I do remember trying to get into a certain living situation and my caseworker was holding the reins*', 'A' from Reading Group Three, April 24<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.49

<sup>4</sup> Guardiola-Saenz, L. (1997) 'Borderless women and borderless texts: A cultural reading of Matthew 15:21-28' *Semeia* 78 p.69

'constructive dialogue' takes place; it is a space where agency both transforms, and at the same time tears at the fabric of, relational dynamics.<sup>1</sup>

### 5.3 Conclusion

Drawing these two pericopae together, which narrate the struggles of females in Mark's gospel, one fundamental feature can be concluded about the kind of postcolonial reading that I have offered of the texts: the agonisms inscribed in those relational encounters cannot easily be sublated. The relational encounter with Jesus is not a panacea for hegemonic power wherein power relations are neutralised via some sort of theological conjuring trick. Rather, it is an encounter within which the praxis of resistive and transformative mutuality is played out in the midst of that power.

Given this, what might be made of the forms of female agency that I have highlighted in these two stories? On one hand, the forms of agency exercised by females in these pericopae can be seen to achieve what they desired: healing. At the same time, both forms of agency achieved their ends only at a cost. For the woman with haemorrhages the cost entailed being made public; for the Syrophoenician woman the cost entailed a potentially humiliating dialogue. One significant difference in how group readers viewed the two women was in their perception of the characters' subject locations. Whilst the Syrophoenician woman was viewed as suffering humiliation at the hands of Jesus, to the point that she might have ended up '*hating*' herself<sup>2</sup>, she was not interpreted to have begun the encounter at a significant loss in terms of her potential as an agent in the

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Liew argues strongly that 7:24-30 'betrays an alliance between racism, or ethnocentrism and sexism' Liew, B. (1999) *Politics of parousia: Reading Mark Inter(con)textually* Leiden: Brill pp.135-136. He goes on to argue that this is true of Jesus' interactions with women throughout the gospel, such that Jesus so-called re-definition of the family in 3:19b-44 does not free women from 'obligations of home and family' (*Ibid.* p.139).

<sup>2</sup> 'I think some people have this mental constitution to react in that way but to the extent that mental health problems can overlap with problems with hating yourself, feeling depressed and getting really high and manic – yeah this part just feels like a story, it doesn't feel like something that could really have happened,' 'A' from Reading Group Three, April 24<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.50

negotiation of relational dynamics other than facing the power gradations of gender. Indeed, whilst scholars emphasise the significance of the ethnic and possible economic subject locations of the Syrophoenician woman, the group readers offered little implication that these differentials rendered her fundamentally debilitated in terms of her internal state.<sup>1</sup>

This was not the case for interpretations of the woman with haemorrhages in 5:21-43, whose very person was perceived to be characterised in her 'desperate' attempt to reach out to Jesus. Indeed, whilst it was the case that the Syrophoenician woman was seen to display desperation for her daughter in her begging Jesus, bowing at his feet (7:25), the woman of 5:21-43 is seen as desperate *for herself*, and this attracted more attention from readers leading to much more pointed portrayals of her diminished selfhood. So, whereas the Syrophoenician woman was seen to leave her encounter with Jesus feeling 'humiliated'<sup>2</sup>, and feeling like a 'dog' or a 'child'<sup>3</sup>, this paled in comparison to the woman with haemorrhages in 5:21-43 who was seen as one who '*led a disordered life*', and who '*became straggly and bitchy*', as '*a bit of a devil*'<sup>4</sup>, '*unable to say that she was a good person*' or to '*show herself as a true person*'<sup>5</sup>, and even as one who was overtaken by fear and guilt for her

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<sup>1</sup> Although there was some reference to the torment she might have endured over the suffering of her child (for example: '*Well it seems to me that she's kind of desperate. Her daughter has a demon or whatever. She doesn't quite know what to do about it. She's probably tried numerous things without getting anything out of it. So she's looking to somebody to help the situation she has,*' 'A' from Reading Group Two, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.48).

<sup>2</sup> **How would you feel if you were called a 'dog'?** '*I would feel humiliated,*' 'A' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.45

<sup>3</sup> **How do you think the woman feels now? Like a woman, a child, a dog?** 'A: *I think she thinks of herself as a child now, 'cause I think after this she changed her life around*'; C: '*She felt like a dog, because of what happens to her. She's been treated like a dog,*' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.47

<sup>4</sup> 'B' from Reading Group Two, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.34

<sup>5</sup> '*He's powerful and beautiful - his manifestation. She's afraid. She's only a woman and does not have any ability to say she was a good woman, a happy woman. Unable to be working, unable to get rid of the malady which scorned her - a bit of a devil. Unable to show herself as a true person,*' 'B' from Reading Group Two, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.35

condition<sup>1</sup> and was left *'struggling with herself'*<sup>2</sup> - all in some sense exposed publicly to the crowd.

Is this, then, a fundamental difference in the strategies of agency exercised in the two pericopae? Is it the case that whilst both the liminal supplemental agency in 5:21-43, and the rhetorical agency that took place behind the doors of a home in 7:24-30, operate necessarily within the hegemonic discourses of gendered alterity, that it is the internal malaise of the woman with haemorrhages that sets her agency apart? If this is so, then it can be argued that what sets these two acts of agency apart is the perception of wellness. As was the case with the man with the withered hand in 3:1-6, when the wellness of the individual in question is in doubt, there seems to be in the interpretations of group readers a much greater obstacle to overcome in terms of agency.

Taking this observation a step further, I argue that in relation to mental health and wellness, what might be concluded from the collective interpretations of these pericopae is that the presence of the praxis of mutuality is put into question by perceived unhealthiness. It is more difficult for characters perceived as lacking wellness to overcome than for the well to do the same. What group readers might be recognising in these characters is a sense of estrangement that accompanies seasons of poor mental health, and in that estrangement the status of the self in relation to others becomes questionable. How this observation might relate to the lived experience of persons with poor mental health in contemporary societies will be addressed in the final chapter of this dissertation. However, before moving on to that, the last of the three pairs of pericopae

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<sup>1</sup> *'She felt guilty. Knowing what had happened, she was afraid. Maybe she felt guilty because she stood out there – not good enough for Jesus to come to her. Afraid Jesus thought she was sneaky or something,'* 'C' from Reading Group Four, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.39

<sup>2</sup> *'She knew she had to struggle with herself. Had to crawl on the ground to get to that cloth and when she touched, she knew,'* 'D' from Reading Group Four, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.35



will be explored, one of which narrates the story of the man among the tombs (5:1-20), and the other Jesus before Pilate (15:1-5).

**CHAPTER SIX**  
**DIALOGUE AND MUTUALITY**

MARK 5:1-20 & 15:1-5

*The final pair of readings considers the encounters of Jesus with two men: the first is the demon-possessed man found outside the city in the country of the Gerasenes (5:1-20); the second man symbolises the imperium of Rome in the city of Jerusalem – Pontius Pilate (15:1-5). With these two texts I consider dialogue and how in 5:1-20 it enables one man to proclaim what has been done for him, whilst in 15:1-5 the relational encounter inhibits further possibilities for dialogue and relational exchange. Both the content and form of dialogue will be considered in this pair, as well as the potential of the praxis of mutuality as an enabler of dialogical praxes of resistance and transformation.*

## 6.11 Introduction: Radical alterity and the possibility of dialogue

*Mark 5:1-20*

1They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. 2And when *Jesus* had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. 3He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; 4for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. 5Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. 6When he saw *Jesus* from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; 7and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, *Jesus*, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.' 8For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit! 9Then *Jesus* asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.' 10He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. 11Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; 12and the unclean spirits begged him, 'Send us into the swine; let us enter them.' 13So 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 lake, and were drowned in the lake.

14The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. The people came to see what it was that had happened. 15They came to *Jesus* and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. 16Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. 17Then they began to beg *Jesus* to leave their neighbourhood. 18As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. 19But *Jesus* refused, and said to him, 'Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.' 20And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much *Jesus* had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

*The Markan narration of the story of *Jesus*' encounter with the man who lived among the tombs is a text rich with interpretative possibilities. It has been explored as a story narrating the expansion*

*of Jesus' ministry among the Gentiles, as a cosmic struggle with the powers of evil, as a critique of Roman hegemonic power under the guise of a story about demon-possession, and as a prime case for Jesus' superlative status as an exorcist. Such interpretative work typically pays little attention to the existential condition of the man among the tombs around whom the story revolves. Building on the insights of group readers, I explore how an appreciation of the man's condition extends the frame of this interpretative work to include a view of the man as a survivor of dead ends. Thus, 5:1-20 as a survivor's recovery story is able to emphasise more centrally the emancipatory potential of dialogue as a postcolonial praxis of mutuality and strategy of relational transformation.*

## **6.12 Deciphering the man among the tombs**

### *Scholars' Perspectives*

The man possessed in 5:1-20 is a character whose identity in any sort of complex form is submerged in much interpretation of the story. Even though the opening verses of 5:1-20 (vv. 3-5) offer a rare detailed description of the lived experience that the man endures, scholars sampled tend to move past this textual feature.<sup>1</sup> That is, whilst Van Iersel is right to state that 'words are inadequate' to express the man's suffering<sup>2</sup>, most often scholars do not make any real attempt to explore the quality of the man's existence.<sup>3</sup> Those who do tend to pay at least some attention to his existential condition usually limit such descriptions to simple phrases. For instance, for Deibert, the man is 'a mere

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<sup>1</sup> The other pericope studied in this dissertation that has a similarly detailed description of a minor character's circumstances is 5:21-43 in its description of the woman with haemorrhages. Schipper argues though, particularly in relation to disability, that such detail is something of an anomaly in biblical texts with narratives found largely to pass over the lived experience of disability 'in favour of the metaphorization of disability as a tool for social commentary' (see Schipper, J. (2007) 'Disabling Israelite Leadership: 2 Samuel 6:23 and other images of disability in the Deuteronomistic history' in Avalos, H. *et al* (eds.) *This abled body: Rethinking disabilities in biblical studies* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature p.113).

<sup>2</sup> Van Iersel, M. F. (1998) *Mark: A reader-response commentary* JSNT Supplement Series 164 Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.198

<sup>3</sup> For example, Dowd briefly describes the man as a 'tormented specimen of humanity' and then goes on to describe Jesus' transformation of the man as a demonstration of 'his Creator's' power. See Dowd, S. (2000) *Reading Mark: A literary and theological commentary on the second gospel* Macon, GA: Smyth & Helywys p.55

shell...inhabited by evil',<sup>1</sup> whilst for Williamson he is 'a tormented personality'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Anderson points out how the textual emphasis in 5:3-5 on the setting of the man's life amongst the tombs, 'vividly describes the utter lostness of the man'.<sup>3</sup>

Much of the reason for this scant attention to the man's existential condition is that he is often taken as a symbol. He is the 'Gerasene Demoniac'<sup>4</sup> whose significance in the pericope is read variously: for some he is a supporting actor in Jesus' eschatological victory over the chaos of the 'demonic sea' and then the 'demonic man',<sup>5</sup> for others he serves the text's notion of Jesus' evangelistic purpose for the Gentile peoples.<sup>6</sup> Alternatively, the man is read to serve the text's purpose in making a christological point about Jesus' greatness.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, in light of this tendency in scholarship to categorise the man in 5:1-20, there is some irony to Benjamin's assertion that the man among the tombs fears that he will forever be known by his past, known only as 'Legion',<sup>8</sup> and also to

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<sup>1</sup> Deibert, R. I. (1999) *Mark Interpretation Bible Studies* Louisville, KY: Geneva Press p.50

<sup>2</sup> Williamson, L. (1983) *Mark Interpretation* Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press p.108

<sup>3</sup> Anderson, H. (1976) *The Gospel of Mark* (New Century Bible) London: Oliphants p.148

<sup>4</sup> See for example Gundry, R. H. (1993) *Mark: A commentary on his apology for the cross* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company pp. 256-7. Gundry actually refers to the man as the 'Gergasene Demoniac' so as to make sense of both geographical and extra-canonical referents. See also Kinukawa, H. (2004) 'Mark' in Patte, D. (ed.) *Global Bible Commentary* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press p. 367; Derrett, J. D. M. (1985) *The making of Mark: The scriptural basis for the earliest gospel Volume One* Warwickshire, England: P. Drinkwater p.98; Camery-Hoggart, J. (1992) *Irony in Mark's Gospel: Test and subtext* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.135; Hamerton-Kelly, R. (1994) *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.93.

<sup>5</sup> Dowd, S. (2000) *Reading Mark: A literary and theological commentary on the second gospel* Macon, GA: Smyth & Helyws pp.52-3; Camery-Hoggart, J. (1992) *Irony in Mark's Gospel: Test and subtext* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.135

<sup>6</sup> Van Iersel, M. F. (1998) *Mark: A reader-response commentary* JSNT Supplement Series 164 Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.201

<sup>7</sup> Gundry, R. H. (1993) *Mark: A commentary on his apology for the cross* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company p. 255

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin, C. (2006) 'What do you have to do with us, Son of the God Most High? Mark 5:1-20' in Fleer, D. and Bland, D. (ed.) *Preaching Mark's Unsettling Messiah* St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press p.134. Brooks also argues that whilst at times the man seems to speak and at other times the demons do, 'inasmuch as he was possessed, no distinction should be made'. The man is thus, according to Brooks' reading, reduced only to the sound of his possession/illness. See Brooks, J. A. (1991) *Mark* The New American Commentary 23 Nashville, TN: Broadman Press p.90.

Painter's point that the man's own identity in the story has become destroyed or obscured, 'leaving only the fragmented voice of the demons'.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, in terms of the circumstances in which the story finds the man, some scholars are less concerned with the experience of such living conditions, and more interested in inter-textual and intra-textual associations. For instance, Watts argues for two inter-textual allusions in 5:1-20: one to Isaiah 65:4, in relation to the presence of tombs and swine<sup>2</sup>, and another to Exodus 14:26-28, corresponding to the drowning of the swine in the lake echoing Israel's deliverance from bondage in the drowning of Pharaoh's armies.<sup>3</sup> Others similarly overstep the human level of the story in highlighting the significance of intra-textual links between 5:1-20 and the preceding pericope, 4:35-41, with the movement in 4:35-41 from storm (4:37) to calm (4:39) paralleled in 5:1-20 with the movement from possession and terror (5:3-5) to peace in the man's right mind (5:15).<sup>4</sup> Intra-textual links also are forefronted with regards to a previous Markan instance of Jesus healing a man with unclean spirits in 1:21-28. Here, Broadhead highlights various parallels: both of the men are described as violent and cry out to Jesus (1:24; 5:7); both recognise Jesus and seek to name him (1:24; 5:7); and both fear torment at the hands of Jesus (1:24; 5:7). These parallels lead Broadhead to suggest that 5:1-20 should be read not only as a variation on a traditional story form, but also as a second reading of the

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<sup>1</sup> Painter, J. (1997) *Mark's Gospel: Worlds in conflict* London & New York: Routledge p.90

<sup>2</sup> Watts argues that the combination of tombs and swine points to the Isaiah text, particularly given the presence of demons in the LXX version. Watts, R. E. (1997) *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic p.157.

<sup>3</sup> Watts, R. E. (1997) *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic p.159. Indeed, Watts argues that the total loss of the Egyptian army (Exodus 14:28) parallels the unclean Romans, personified in the 2000 pigs, being totally lost. Furthermore, Derrett argues for parallels between the Markan narrative and Haggadic accounts with both cases of drowning inspired by demons (see Derrett, J. M. (1979) 'Contributions to the Study of the Gerasene Demoniac' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 2 (3) p.7). That there might be a connection between foreign rule and the rule of demons is plausible according to Theissen. He emphasises that the Roman standard was suspected as an idol (1Qp Hab 6.3 ff) and that idols were considered demons (Deut. 33:17; Ps. 95:5; Eth. Enoch 19:1; 99:7; Jub. 1:11; 1 Cor. 10:20). See Theissen, G. (1978) *Sociology of early Palestinian Christianity* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p. 102

<sup>4</sup> Camery-Hoggart, J. (1992) *Irony in Mark's Gospel: Text and subtext* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.135

exorcism in 1:21-28. That is, as Broadhead argues it, 5:1-20 serves to demonstrate Jesus' power in a setting much more foreboding than Capernaum. Here, he asserts, the scene is saturated with uncleanness and the exorcism becomes an event of regional significance. Hence, Jesus' status is elevated even more by this second reading of the earlier pericope.<sup>1</sup> The man's significance on the other hand, is left unaddressed.

Postcolonial and other socio-political interpretations of the pericope foreground the struggle of the man among the tombs as set within a colonial landscape, yet focus on this insomuch as it speaks allegorically to the struggle of an entire people. For instance, Horsley argues that the pericope serves as a counter-Rome Markan metanarrative and thus emphasises the colonial structures of power which dominated communal life.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Myers asserts that the story offers a symbolic portrait of how Roman imperialism was destroying the hearts and minds of a colonised people.<sup>3</sup> Given this, a common tendency of such interpretations is to focus on the pericope's military imagery. The primary term of interest is the name of the unclean spirit, Legion (5:9), which Myers asserts connotes a division of Roman soldiers.<sup>4</sup> The use of this imperial reference is seen by many scholars as an attempt to connect 'demon possession and colonial oppression'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Broadhead, E. K. (2001) *Mark* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.50

<sup>2</sup> Horsley is clear about the political context for Mark as a whole: 'The Gospel of Mark...is about people subjected by an ancient empire', (see Horsley, R. (2001) *Hearing the whole story: The politics of plot in Mark's Gospel*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press p. 30). He describes the systems of imperial exploitation as breaking down traditional socio-economic infrastructures with exorbitant taxes and tributes, leading to a rising indebtedness, and a loss of land for a people whose subsistence relied upon it (see Horsley, R. (1993) 'The imperial situation of Palestinian Jewish society' in Gottwald, N. & Horsley, R. (eds.) *The Bible and Liberation* (Revised Edition) Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p. 401).

<sup>3</sup> Myers, C. *et al* (1996) *'Say to this Mountain': Mark's story of discipleship* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.59

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Myers argues that the term had only one meaning in Mark's social world: a division of Roman soldiers perhaps referring to the presence of the Tenth Roman legion garrisoned in Palestine (see Myers, C. (1988) *Binding the strong man: A political reading of Mark's story of Jesus* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.191).

<sup>5</sup> See Crossan, J. D. (1994) *Jesus: A revolutionary biography* San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins p.89 and Moore, S. D. (2006) 'Mark and Empire: "Zealot" and "Postcolonial" readings' in Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing p.194). Beyond this simple allusion, Geyer argues that there might reasonably be two associations with legions that were common during the imagined historical location of the story. One is the image of a legion of soldiers as 'a tenacious corporate entity that

In a similar vein, Derrett argues that Jesus' command for the demons to leave the man (5:8) contains military overtones.<sup>1</sup>

With this symbolism in mind, it can be argued that Mark 5:1-20 might be understood in a way that is subversive to colonial rule: the violence done to the local Galileans is to be done to the Roman legions in return. Moreover, Moore argues that the pericope can be read to suggest that it is not just 'the invaders who must be swept away, but the comprador class who have made the invaders' continuing control of the land and its people possible', linking the exorcism of the man among the tombs to the 'exorcism' of the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

However, when it comes to the relational dynamics of the text, the above postcolonial readings of 5:1-20 tend to constrict a narrative of individual struggle and transformation to a metanarrative of communal struggle. These sorts of postcolonial readings are in danger of being too selective, predominantly asking only those questions of texts which point to subtextual critiques of empire. Thus, as with the interpretations assessed earlier in this chapter, the personal quality of the man's struggle is somewhat elided in favour of

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seeks to resist confronting powers', and to maintain itself as a unit while doing so. Fundamentally, the argument being made is that the legion was seen as a unit that worked together powerfully. The second association is that legions hated to be defeated and any loss was typically followed by massive retaliation whenever the opportunity presented itself (see Geyer, D. W. (2002) *Fear, Anomaly, and Uncertainty in the Gospel of Mark* Lanham, Maryland & London: The Scarecrow Press Inc. p.137).

<sup>1</sup> Derrett argues that Jesus' command in 5:8 for the demons to leave the man can be argued to mimic the issue of a military command. Also, he asserts that the number of pigs is not accidental, with a thousand being a military unit in ancient Hebrew idiom (see Derrett, J. M. (1979) 'Contributions to the Study of the Gerasene Demoniac' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 2 (3) p.6).

<sup>2</sup> See Moore, S. D. (2006) 'Mark and Empire: "Zealot" and "Postcolonial" readings' in Sugirtharajah, R. S. (ed.) *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing pp.195-196. The argument which justifies such readings is that below the surface, 'hidden transcripts' of resistance can be discerned in the text via an assumption of the knowledge of events recent to the postulated production of the pericope. For instance, Myers suggests that there might be an allusion in the drowning of the legion of swine in the nearby sea, to the account in Josephus (Ant XIV; xv, 10) to 'seditious Galileans' who drowned Herodian nobles in a lake during one of the uprisings, and to the Roman retaliation during Vespasian's re-conquest of northern Palestine during the late years of the Jewish Revolt. See Myers, C. (1988) *Binding the strong man: A political reading of Mark's story of Jesus* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.193.



other textual and ideological concerns that end up leaving little consideration of the agency of the possessed man himself.

With this critique in mind, I explore another strand of postcolonial interpretations that address the role of individual agency. Hollenbach follows such an interpretative interest in reading this pericope. His work pays attention to the interpersonal level of the encounter, attempting to emphasise both the significance of the socio-political and the personal context of the pericope. Hollenbach offers two interpretations of 'possession' in Mark 5:1-20. First, possession is interpreted as a form of defence or retreat in the face of colonial oppression, what Hollenbach calls 'salvation by possession'.<sup>1</sup> That is, 'mental disorder' becomes an escape from, as well as a symptom of hegemonic relational dynamics.<sup>2</sup> Hollenbach's second interpretation is the reading of 'possession as protest', what he terms an 'oblique aggressive strategy where the powerless deal with their powerful oppressors...in a way that does not threaten the social position of the latter'.<sup>3</sup> What Hollenbach means by this is that the demoniac is able to 'give the Romans the devil' by identifying their legions with demons. He is only able to do this obliquely – as a hidden resistance – through 'madness'.

Hollenbach thus leaves Jesus' exorcism of the 'Gerasene Demoniac' to be interpreted in two ways. With his first possession-as-salvation interpretation in mind, Jesus' action might be seen as one which liberates the man – and perhaps by extrapolation, colonised people more widely – from a delusional and ineffective means of escape. However, his second possession-as-resistance reading might lead to a different interpretation of the

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<sup>1</sup> Hollenbach, P. W. (1981) 'Jesus, demoniacs, and public authorities: A socio-historical study' *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, XLIX (4) p. 577

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 575. However, is such a defence sustainable? Fanon, whom Hollenbach's interpretation of this pericope draws upon, argues that 'ego-withdrawal as a successful defence mechanism is impossible for the Negro. He requires a white approval.' (See Fanon, F. (1967) *Black skin, White masks* Weidenfeld, NY: Grove Press (original work 1952) p. 51).

<sup>3</sup> Hollenbach, P. W. (1981) 'Jesus, demoniacs, and public authorities: A socio-historical study' *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, XLIX (4) p. 577

liberative quality of Jesus' action. For instance, Sugirtharajah suggests rather than seeing Jesus' action as restorative and liberative, that it might be seen as removing 'one of the potential tools in the hands of subjugated people.' Thus, Jesus is not the liberator, but is colluding with colonial domination by unmasking an act of hidden resistance. This is not a claim that Jesus in Mark is a co-conspirator with the Roman authorities against the colonised people of Palestine; rather, Sugirtharajah's point here is that 'Jesus simply treated the symptom without confronting the system which produces such behaviour.'<sup>1</sup>

Hollenbach's twin readings of 5:1-20 remain intentionally ambiguous. However, as far as the Gerasene Demoniac is concerned, Jesus' actions – whether viewed as an emancipation from an ineffective form of escape or a denial of the man's form of resistance – seek to remove the condition which typifies him: his 'demonic' state. On one hand, as a textual feature this is not objectionable: the man is recorded in Mark 5:1-21 as 'living amongst tombs, restrained with shackles and chains, always howling and bruising himself with stones'. On the other hand, as a pointer to the lived experience of persons with poor mental health, Jesus' actions might be viewed not to speak to this condition or to engage with the person living with it, but only to subdue it.

In contrast, I wish to explore a reading that sees Jesus engage, not subdue, the man among the tombs in this pericope. Indeed, considering the interpretations of group readers in the section below, a complex exegesis of both the man's human condition and his encounter with Jesus is possible if the reading explores more deeply the question of identity.

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<sup>1</sup> See Sugirtharajah, R. S. (2002) *Postcolonial criticism and Biblical Interpretation* Oxford: Oxford University Press p.94

### 6.13 'It's so painful this story'<sup>1</sup>: 'Thick' hermeneutics?

#### *Group Readers' Perspectives*

Unlike biblical scholars who either overstep the human quality of the opening verses of 5:1-20 (vv. 3-5), or consider that the character's designation as 'demoniac' makes his residence among the tombs 'a suitable spot'<sup>2</sup>, the group readers emphasised, with Gundry, that the context of the man's life reflects the power of death<sup>3</sup>, and with Kinukawa, the total isolation of the man's existence.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, readers' descriptions of the man's condition were overwhelming in their emphasis on negation and despair. Across the reading groups the man was described as 'troubled',<sup>5</sup> punished,<sup>6</sup> 'a loser' whom nobody liked,<sup>7</sup> as one who 'belongs with the dying',<sup>8</sup> 'worthless' and 'desolate',<sup>9</sup> 'in bondage, trapped in his suffering', 'helpless' and 'howling',<sup>10</sup> one who was 'polluting', one who might 'have caused others to go insane', and someone they didn't want their children to be

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<sup>1</sup> 'B' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.61

<sup>2</sup> Hooker, M. D. (1991) *The Gospel according to St. Mark* London: A & C Black p.142

<sup>3</sup> Gundry, R. H. (1993) *Mark: A commentary on his apology for the cross* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company p.249

<sup>4</sup> Kinukawa, H. (2004) 'Mark' in Patte, D. (ed.) *Global Bible Commentary* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press p.368

<sup>5</sup> 'Troubled. Seeking a miracle in life from the Lord. He's going through hard times and needs a good miracle. He really needs something good to happen to him', 'B' from Reading Group One, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.54

<sup>6</sup> 'It's a kind of punishment. Maybe they thought they were protecting him', 'D' from Reading Group One, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.54

<sup>7</sup> 'He might have seemed a loser, might not have liked him. No one wanted to have anything to do with him', 'C' from Reading Group One, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.56

<sup>8</sup> 'Close to the spirit world. He's probably unconscious of that being a taboo. He feels he belongs. That means that he belongs with the dying', 'B' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.60

<sup>9</sup> 'B: With. He seems like he's worthless. I relate - when I'm tormented by my thoughts I have a tendency to say 'what do you want from me God?' Why are you doing this?; A: It's like there is a piece of him that is aware. He's so broken, so ill that he lives in this desolate existence. Mental illness can be like that. There is a lot of anguish in mental illness,' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.60

<sup>10</sup> 'B: In bondage, trapped in his suffering. No one can help him. He can't help himself; A: Helpless, he's howling,' from Reading Group Three, Cambridge, MA, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.60

around<sup>1</sup>. In other words, as one group reader put it: *'There is war inside of him battling it out. He gets left in the corner with all the voices'*.<sup>2</sup>

What is striking about this strong and relatively consistent set of interpretations that emphasised the profound level of alterity of this man is that group readers did not interpret his agency with the same consistently dim view. Indeed, for group readers, the man among the tombs was an ambiguous figure in this regard: *'We don't know who's speaking, the man or the demons.'*<sup>3</sup> He is both a man inhabited by a legion of demons and also a man who 'needs' *'a life...like everyone else...maybe he needed somebody just to listen to him and just to care'*.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, whilst one reader saw the man as someone who wanted to be *'taken care of'*,<sup>5</sup> another reader saw him as a bold representative of the needs of others, of the *'lot who were left out because they were a little different'*.<sup>6</sup>

Along with this pattern of contrasting reads, the group readers' more consistently interpreted the man as someone who whilst *'seeking a miracle'*,<sup>7</sup> is one who refuses to give up<sup>8</sup>. Indeed, despite being seen as a person who in his possessed state was associated

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<sup>1</sup> *'They might have had the assumption that someone with insanity would be polluting for them to be among the rest of society. They might have thought it would have caused others to go insane. They didn't want him around their children'*, 'A' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.60

<sup>2</sup> 'B' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.61

<sup>3</sup> 'E' from Reading Group One, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p. 55

<sup>4</sup> ***What does this man need?*** A: *A life*; B: *That's it*; A: *Like everybody else*; B: *Maybe he needed somebody just to listen to him and just to care,*' from Reading Group One, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.54

<sup>5</sup> *'Probably in the conversation before, he had told him how his life was, he probably just wanted to be with Jesus. He knew if he was he would be taken care of,'* 'B' from Reading Group One, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.57

<sup>6</sup> *'Maybe they might have meant that there were other people that were there. They were too afraid to come out - 'I'm standing here, speaking for everyone' - a lot who were left out because they were a little different,'* 'C' from Reading Group One, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.56

<sup>7</sup> *'Troubled. Seeking a miracle in life from the Lord. He's going through hard times and needs a good miracle. He really needs something good to happen to him,'* 'B' from Reading Group One, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.54

<sup>8</sup> 'A: *It shows the swine - an animal - and they don't go to heaven but the man who had demons in him didn't kill himself, he lived with it, he knew he had an immortal soul. You would say swine don't have an after life. A person should not give up in suffering;* B: *Absolutely yeah. And he was prepared to do more and when he saw Jesus he could let him go,'* from Reading Group Two, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.59

with wishing to 'hold onto his illness,'<sup>1</sup> he was also associated with the hope inherent in 'clinging to the promise of healing'<sup>2</sup>. And when readers considered the man's response to Jesus, after being restored to his 'right mind' he was seen as a 'new priest',<sup>3</sup> called to agency, 'trusting himself to make decisions without the crutch of another'<sup>4</sup>, 'bearing witness'<sup>5</sup> and 'planting seeds'<sup>6</sup> for the one who healed him.

Thus whether seen as a man who wants to be taken care of<sup>7</sup> or seen as one who wishes to represent the needs of others<sup>8</sup>, a consistent theme that group readers' offered was that the man among the tombs is a person who has endured. He has refused to give up; despite his possessed condition he enters the scene in 5:1-20, according to the view offered by group readers, as one who is able to exercise agency.

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<sup>1</sup> 'B: I read it like the man is begging Jesus not to send his legions out of his body. The country is like his body which is like his country; A: Maybe I do relate to that, I hold onto my illness; B: I know for me, if you think you have special power, or special...maybe you think you have something. I can relate to OCD [obsessive compulsive disorder] like you have a magical power and so rituals to fix things and if you give up special powers to fix things. Even if you want the truth, you don't want to give up the ritual. If I think a thought, if I don't like it, I think another thought and cancel it out - a special power, a magical power; A: It's giving up the control; B: You dare to let go, like the OCD, you dare to be mediocre,' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts pp.61-62

<sup>2</sup> 'Also there's a sense of authority, a sense that God allowed him to be in this state. What else will he do? 'Don't torment me anymore'. He doesn't realise God is ready to heal him. Just last night I asked, 'God, what do you want from me?' The good thing is he gets healed in the end, so let me cling to that promise,' 'B' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.60

<sup>3</sup> 'He was kind of a new priest, because it wouldn't have served any purpose to go with Christ. He gave him a challenge. We know that Jesus had enemies and many were martyred for the cause of Jesus. Christ was asking him to be a witness to his power,' 'A' from Reading Group Two, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.59

<sup>4</sup> 'People who believe Jesus is the living Christ and lives in a person, he never leaves or forsakes you, so in a way it's a beginning. I relate to that begging of Jesus, to stay with me, I've written a song about it and part of my illness is not trusting myself to make decisions when he gave me a mind and heart to make decisions,' 'B' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.63

<sup>5</sup> 'Christ was asking him to be a witness to his power,' 'A' from Reading Group Two, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.59

<sup>6</sup> 'It would have been good for him to follow, but things don't happen outright. Planting the seed and seeing what it grows into I guess,' 'C' from Reading Group Two, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.59

<sup>7</sup> 'Probably in the conversation before, he had told him how his life was, he probably just wanted to be with Jesus. He knew if he was he would be taken care of,' 'B' from Reading Group One, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.57

<sup>8</sup> 'Maybe they might have meant that there were other people that were there. They were too afraid to come out - 'I'm standing here, speaking for everyone' - a lot who were left out because they were a little different,' 'C' from Reading Group One, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.56

The significance of this emphasis on the man as one who has endured and still exercises agency was made apparent by group readers in their explicit associations between the man's plight and his subsequent refusal to give up, and their own experiences of living with poor mental health. One of the ways in which this was manifest was in questioning whether the man was being punished by God - *'Suffering. He seems like he's worthless. I relate - when I'm tormented by my thoughts I have a tendency to say 'what do you want from me God?' 'Why are you doing this?'*<sup>1</sup> - and then viewing his endurance through it in a positive light: *'Was this God's punishment for the man then? Yes. He has to take up his cross. Every good Catholic is required to take up his cross.'*<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the man among the tombs was likened to *'a saint'*, or at least one who was *'heading that way'*.<sup>3</sup> For other readers though, whilst the man's condition was one of desolation and anguish - *'like mental illness'*<sup>4</sup> - his suffering was considered as a *'cleansing'* and as a *'way of growth'*.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the expansive view that group readers' various interpretations offered of this text was that this man has suffered and survived and is able to initiate a healing episode with Jesus. These are more than just interesting exegeses of the pericope, they are interpretations that have an interest in this sort of trajectory for the story. For, whether the readers' comments are associated with divine punishment, define a way of redemptive anguish, reflect parallels to crucifixion, or are seen as ways of cleansing and growth, the fundamental conceptual shift that group readers offered the interpretation of

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<sup>1</sup> 'B' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.60, when asked the question: *'What do you think of the fact that he was bruising himself with stones?'*

<sup>2</sup> 'A' from Reading Group Two, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.58

<sup>3</sup> *'Many saints do this like that. I know they used to sleep on a concrete slab - like a penance, trying to get it out. He bangs his head, scrapes his head, like he's doing penance in a way. I'm not saying that he was a saint, but he was heading that way maybe,'* 'A' from Reading Group Two, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.57

<sup>4</sup> *'It's like there is a piece of him that is aware. He's so broken, so ill that he lives in this desolate existence. Mental illness can be like that. There is a lot of anguish in mental illness,'* 'A' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.60

<sup>5</sup> *'Is mental illness a punishment from God? B: It's not a punishment. It's a cleansing of the soul; C: A way of growth,'* from Reading Group Two, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.58

this text was to see it as a recovery story<sup>1</sup>. Contrary to Hooker's interpretation, which sees the man as wishing to destroy himself,<sup>2</sup> readers saw him as a man who did not give up on himself, indeed he was taken as an exemplar of perseverance in the midst of suffering: *'It shows the swine - an animal – and they don't go to heaven but the man who had demons in him didn't kill himself, he lived with it, he knew he had an immortal soul. You would say swine don't have an afterlife. A person should not give up in suffering'*.<sup>3</sup> He is one who clings onto the promise of healing, the promise of re-membering his fragmented identity and of re-membering the pieces of right relating within a fractured and amnesic community. As one reader put it: *'I think we have to ask how he is constructing the narrative. I would imagine it to be a recovery story. I was lost, I was insane, hanging out with the dead. Jesus brought me back to life'*.<sup>4</sup> This shift was particularly resonant with readers for whom the associations of going through *'the hell'* of *'being out of your mind'* were all too well-known.<sup>5</sup>

The other fundamental opening of the text that readers offered was of the significance of dialogue in the story in enabling that recovery. Whilst one group reader asserted that Jesus' first concern was to get the man *'out of a rut'*,<sup>6</sup> it was also stated by another reader that Jesus wanted to know the man,<sup>7</sup> and in extending this desire into conversation, Jesus was able to open up space for the man to show that he is normal:

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<sup>1</sup> From a different perspective a similar emphasis is offered by Mellon, who argues that the pericope depicts alcoholism as a force seeking to destroy the world, its power proportionate to the number of victims it claims. See Mellon, J. C. (1995) *Mark as a recovery story: Alcoholism and the rhetoric of gospel mystery* Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press p.191.

<sup>2</sup> Hooker, M. D. (1991) *The Gospel according to St. Mark* London: A & C Black p.143

<sup>3</sup> 'A' from Reading Group Two, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.59

<sup>4</sup> 'A' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.63

<sup>5</sup> ***It says he was howling at night. What do you think that is about?*** C: *Going out of his mind; A: Going through hell. It could be the work of the devil too you know,* from Reading Group One, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.54

<sup>6</sup> *'His heart broke for the man. First he wants to get him out of the rut. It's the character of God to love his people. He doesn't want them to suffer. Then he has a conversation,'* 'B' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.61

<sup>7</sup> *'Jesus was an obvious believer in truth and wanted to know this man,'* 'B' from Reading Group Two, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.59

*'C: Jesus was talking to him. Jesus started talking, 'you are not possessed no more, keep it down'.*

*B: I think it shows great compassion for the man and I also think that it was proof that he had done the miracle since the man was clearly OK.*

*A: They were resting together.*

*E: Talking to him.*

*A: Yeah exactly.*

*E: Showed that he is normal now.*

*C: Might have been talking about life, if he had a wife, if he had kids, what he used to do before he lost his mind to those demons.<sup>1</sup>*

Furthermore, in that dialogue, the man was able to remember his forgotten identity,<sup>2</sup> and demonstrate his transformation: *'That he was screaming, naked, beating himself, lonely – now he is OK, I think that to me is no joke. I pray for that every day'.<sup>3</sup>*

Group readers' interpretations, then, offered a re-imagining of the play of power in this pericope. Whilst group readers made little direct reference to the colonial context of the story or to its suggestive vocabulary, they did offer interpretations which resonated with the postcolonial theorists' penchant for ambiguity of identity and agency. More than that, though, where group readers pushed at the boundary of other readings of this text, was in their emphases on the struggles this man inhabits, punctuated both by suffering and his refusal to give up. Through their association of this man's suffering with their own experiences, a story of possession and exorcism was read also as a story of survival and recovery. In this final section, I consider how these themes expand the interpretative frame of this text, and specifically how dialogue acts as an emancipatory tool for recovery.

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<sup>1</sup> From Reading Group One, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.57

<sup>2</sup> *'A: It depends if he was going to remember what he experienced in his life before; B: He must remember in some way; A: He remembers in a rough shape,'* from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.62

<sup>3</sup> *'B'* from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.62



#### 6.14 'They were resting together'<sup>1</sup>

##### *Dialogue as an emancipatory tool*

Group readers' interpretations focused on the radical alterity of the man among the tombs. Rather than brushing over the profoundly othered societal location of this man, group readers strongly emphasised it. The significance of this is not only in how group readers offered a closer reading of the suffering the man endured, it is also in their emphasis on how, given this suffering, the man did not give up. In their view, it is a survivor of dead ends that Jesus encounters in 5:1-20.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, group readers' noted emphatically that Jesus chooses to engage the man in dialogue suggesting that the actions of Jesus towards the man are not necessarily actions that seek only to reduce or remove the man's condition. Indeed, Jesus does not delay dialogically engaging the man until he is 'in his right mind' (5:15). Just as Elshout argues for a reading of the Bible that might give persons with disabilities back the power to imagine self differently and craft a reality which more accurately reflects the talent of surviving,<sup>3</sup> so group readers' interpretations suggested that this pericope be interpreted not as the negation of the unclean by the clean, but as the opening of an opportunity for the man in 5:1-20 to articulate his own talent for surviving.

Given this emphasis, the central argument that I wish to offer concerning this pericope is that it is only when the man is reengaged in the story, through the praxis of mutuality exercised between the man and Jesus, that healing is made possible. Indeed, whether the

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<sup>1</sup> 'A' from Reading Group One, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.56

<sup>2</sup> Such a view of the man links to Eiesland's theology of disability that presents Jesus Christ as the 'disabled God', one who is not the 'overcomer God' but is 'God as survivor'. Furthermore, in another interesting parallel, 'the disabled God is God for whom interdependence is not a possibility to be willed from a position of power, but a necessary condition for life' (see Eiesland, N. L. (1994) *The Disabled God: Toward a liberatory theology of disability* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press pp.102-103).

<sup>3</sup> Elshout, E. (1999) in 'Roundtable discussion: Women with disabilities – A Challenge to Feminist Theology' in Bach, A. (ed.) *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* London & New York: Routledge p.440

man's 'possession' is interpreted politically<sup>1</sup>, or as part of a cosmic struggle between Jesus and Satan<sup>2</sup>, or even as a part of the parabolic teaching of the evangelist about how to be good soil in the kingdom Jesus ushers in,<sup>3</sup> the textual fact of the matter is a man whom others had left in the place of the dead, chained, and unheard, acts to dialogically engage with Jesus. Whilst group readers reflected that the experience of poor mental health is one where others often fail to see what is '*holding them back*',<sup>4</sup> one group reader argued that the encounter with Jesus '*brought a sense of clarity*' to the man's speech.<sup>5</sup> Thus this man who according to Davies and Vincent had kept up a 'violent monologue with himself'<sup>6</sup>, is able to move towards the re-membering of his fragmented identity.

The form this reengagement and re-membering takes is through a conversation, which begins with the man running towards Jesus and shouting at the top of his voice (5:2, 6-7). Thus, it is the man among the tombs, so often written out of any significant role in this pericope, who initiates the process of reengagement that ultimately leads to his healing. For whilst some group readers associated the struggles of the man in 5:1-20 with divine punishment, the character who encounters Jesus is no passive victim of divine or indeed any other form of retribution. Rather, he is, as many group readers stressed, a survivor. He is one who has endured, and when he sees the opportunity for healing arrive in the person of Jesus, he seizes the moment and begins to negotiate his healing in dramatic fashion.

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<sup>1</sup> See Myers, C. (1988) *Binding the strong man: A political reading of Mark's story of Jesus* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.191; Sugirtharajah, R. S. (2002) *Postcolonial criticism and Biblical Interpretation* Oxford: Oxford University Press p.92; Waetjen, H. C. (1989) *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.116; Horsley, R. (2001) *Hearing the whole story: The politics of plot in Mark's Gospel*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press p.50

<sup>2</sup> Gundry, R. H. (1993) *Mark: A commentary on his apology for the cross* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company pp.252-255

<sup>3</sup> Tolbert, M. A. (1989) *Sowing the gospel: Mark's world in literary and historical perspective* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.265

<sup>4</sup> 'A' from Reading Group Two, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.58

<sup>5</sup> 'A' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.61

<sup>6</sup> Davies, J. D. & Vincent, J. J. (1986) *Mark at work* London: Bible reading fellowship p.56

The dialogue between the man and Jesus begins with two acts of naming, both enunciated by the man: Jesus, named as Son of the Most High God (5:7), and the man, named as Legion (5:9). Van Iersel states that the naming of the man acts as a form of surrender.<sup>1</sup> What sort of surrender though is this? Gundry argues that it is the surrender of the cosmic powers of Satan to the 'Lordship' of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> One set of group readers offered another insight: the surrender the man is performing is of control. Beginning with the offering of a name, the man once possessed is daring to let go of that which had caused him suffering yet had given him power:

*'A: Maybe I do relate to that, I hold onto my illness.*

*B: I know for me, if you think you have special power, or special...maybe you think you have something. I can relate to OCD [obsessive compulsive disorder] like you have a magical power and so rituals to fix things and if you give up special powers to fix things. Even if you want the truth, you don't want to give up the ritual. If I think a thought, if I don't like it, I think another thought and cancel it out - a special power, a magical power.*

*A: It's giving up the control.*

*B: You dare to let go, like the OCD, you dare to be mediocre'.<sup>3</sup>*

At the heart of this pericope, then, is the mutual act of surrender that the praxis of mutuality in dialogue represents. That is, it is a dialogue wherein each participant begins to recognise the other fully as a person. This simple act of dialogue thus addresses one of the fundamental relational deficits in colonial societies, what Frantz Fanon, the early postcolonial thinker, noted as most often absent between coloniser and colonised: 'talking...itself a problem between the ruler and the ruled'.<sup>4</sup> The man and Jesus practise dialogue as a form of emancipation. They recognise one another and, by dialogically engaging one another, opportunity is opened up for the man to articulate his own talent

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<sup>1</sup> Van Iersel, M. F. (1998) *Mark: A reader-response commentary* JSNT Supplement Series 164 Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.199

<sup>2</sup> See for example Gundry, R. H. (1993) *Mark: A commentary on his apology for the cross* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company pp.198-9

<sup>3</sup> From Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.62

<sup>4</sup> Vaughan, M. (1991) *Curing their ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* London: Polity Press p.225

for surviving. For despite being chained and removed from the possibility of relational engagement, he has managed to break that which binds him and thus is already a survivor. As one of the group readers stated: *'To me the image is powerful – breaking chains'*.<sup>1</sup>

Given the opportunity, then, the ill man indicates to Jesus the means of his own transformation (5:12). Put another way: the man tells how he should be healed. In opening himself up to the relational encounter he has with the man, Jesus also remains open to being corrected in the art of transforming a tortured soul. In other words, it is in his receptiveness to the man's agency in dialogue that Jesus clears the way for healing to occur, such that, from Jesus' command narrated in 5:8 for the unclean spirit to come out of the man, the man re-aligns Jesus' approach towards 2000 nearby pigs (5:11).

From this reading it is clear that whilst the people of the nearby city need to keep the man in chains, Jesus does not.<sup>2</sup> The dialogue between the man and Jesus undermines the destructive power of the value system which chained the man up in the first place.<sup>3</sup> While chained, the man is denied mutual relating. Furthermore, he is denied the opportunity to break free from his amnesic identity and the community remains forgetful of him and their responsibility to him. Much like persons who experienced poor mental health in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, he is shuffled off the horizon of societal concern,<sup>4</sup> and confined to his

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<sup>1</sup> 'A' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.61, in response to the question: *Is the man powerful or powerless would you say?*

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, as Hamerton-Kelley argues, the fact that they chained him in the first place shows how much they needed him as a scapegoat for their violence. They want him to remain in the 'shadows of the cemetery' as a guarantee of their complacency, and indeed their complicity with the system which chains him. See Hamerton-Kelley, R. (1994) *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.93.

<sup>3</sup> Maluleke, T. S. (2002) 'Bible study: The graveyardman, the 'escaped convict' and the girl-child: A mission of awakening, an awakening of mission' *International Review of Mission* 91 (January) p.553

<sup>4</sup> Foucault, M. (2001) *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (Routledge Classics Edition) London & New York: Routledge (original work 1961) p.45

alterity. Even broken free from his chains, he is now chained by the silence of being unheard.<sup>1</sup> Yet Jesus breaks that silence; he *'wanted to know'* the man.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps it should not be surprising, then, that when the people who had once chained him come to see how their chains had been broken (both literally and figuratively), they are both afraid (5:15) and keen for Jesus to leave (5:17). For what is revealed in the dialogical engagement between the man among the tombs and Jesus is the potential power of the praxis of mutuality as an agency for the re-imagination of hegemonic relational dynamics. Thus, the man whose radical alterity was emphasised by group readers is re-imagined as a partner in the act of his own healing. Furthermore, this re-imagining is only possible through the praxis of mutuality that had for so long been denied him. The man among the tombs is not, therefore, the passive recipient of a healing bestowed upon him by Jesus, he is one who joins with Jesus in the mutual space their dialogue opened up.

Moreover, as Staley argues in exploring the reasons why the townspeople might be afraid of the sight of the man clothed and in his right mind, it is possible to conjecture that the man is now more of a threat to them than before. Claiming that changes in clothing reflected changes in social status in ancient cultures, Staley suggests that the clothing of the man among the tombs might represent a form of colonial mimicry, threatening both to coloniser and colonised.<sup>3</sup>

However, if the analysis remains at this point of the narrative – of the man sitting, clothed and 'in his right mind' (5:15) - the full significance of the encounter between Jesus and the

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault, M. (2001) *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (Routledge Classics Edition) London & New York: Routledge (original work 1961) p.248

<sup>2</sup> *'Jesus was an obvious believer in truth and wanted to know this man,'* 'B' from Reading Group Two, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.59

<sup>3</sup> See Staley, J. L. (2006) "'Clothed and in her right mind": Mark 5:1-20 and postcolonial discourse' in *Voices from the margins* (Revised and Expanded Third Edition) Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.324

man will be missed, for a further feature of this encounter is a commissioning. Having been healed, the man asks Jesus if he can follow him on the way. Rather than permitting him to do so, Jesus sends the man back home and beyond to the ten cities of the Decapolis 'to tell how much the Lord has done for you' (5:19).

From the perspective of the praxis of mutuality this refusal on Jesus' part might look like a limit that Jesus is placing on the extent of mutuality between himself and the now restored man. Indeed, Belo argues that Jesus' commissioning of the man speaks more to Jesus' own needs to avoid danger than the man's needs, such that in the Gentile territory in which the story is set, there is no command from Jesus for secrecy; rather, in the absence of danger for Jesus, the man is encouraged to 'broadcast the news' of his transformation.<sup>1</sup> An alternative explanation is offered by Painter, who argues that the man is not allowed to follow Jesus because he is a Gentile, 'being healed did not qualify a person to become a member of Jesus' mission'.<sup>2</sup> However, such an explanation is hard to reconcile with the fact that he commissions the man in 5:19b or with the confession of the Roman centurion at the cross in 15:39.

I argue that at the heart of this refusal is that Jesus has confidence in the capability of the man to carry out his work beyond his supervision as 'one who does the will of my Father' (3:35). However, this is more than the commissioning of a man who has had his symptoms dealt with. Whilst some group readers interpreted Jesus' refusal to have the man follow him on the way (5:19a) as a recognition of the man's primary duty as a new adherent to '*preach the gospel*' (5:19b)<sup>3</sup>, it might be argued that the refusal acts as a

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<sup>1</sup> Belo, F. (1981) *A materialist reading of the Gospel of Mark* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.130

<sup>2</sup> Painter, J. (1997) *Mark's Gospel: Worlds in conflict* London & New York: Routledge p.92

<sup>3</sup> 'B: He wanted this man to preach the gospel. Whatever it is, the people he goes to will see that he is in his right mind – not in the cemetery – he is preaching the word of God, being a witness to Jesus; A: He was kind of a new priest, because it wouldn't have served any purpose to go with Christ. He gave him a challenge. We know that Jesus had enemies and many were martyred for the cause of Jesus. Christ was asking him to be a witness to his power,' from Reading Group Two, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.59; see

recognition of the man's primary need to attempt to restore the praxis of mutuality in the community that had previously denied it. He is sent 'home' (5:19a) to be, as Dowd asserts, no longer amongst the dead but the living,<sup>1</sup> now to serve as a reminder not only to friends and those at 'home', but presumably also to those who may have moved to chain him in the first place, of their attempts at subjugation and silencing and their failure to succeed. He is, then, sent back to reengage in the art of dialoguing with the violence done to him and furthermore with the violence he had done to himself (5:5), in the form of, as Hamerton-Kelly puts it, the 're-integrated victim'.<sup>2</sup>

There is also a more personal significance to the commissioning of the man. Tolbert argues that Jesus' refusal of the man's wish to follow him is an indication that 'good soil' does not need the nurturing of 'the farmer'.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Davies and Vincent argue that Jesus denies the man's request because he does not want the man to become a dependent adherent by adopting Jesus as his alter ego.<sup>4</sup> The refusal that Jesus gives the man, then, might be interpreted as a prompt for the man to continue to articulate his own survival. It is a prompt for the man to cling no longer, neither to that which had bound him, nor to the one whom he might erroneously perceive he should surrender his agency to. In his refusal and commissioning of the man, Jesus is asking him not to surrender his agency but to exercise it through the transformed identity their encounter, and the praxis of mutuality within it, opened up for him. Perhaps the begging of the man (5:18) reflects the

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also Van Iersel, M. F. (1998) *Mark: A reader-response commentary* JSNT Supplement Series 164 Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.201

<sup>1</sup> Dowd, S. (2000) *Reading Mark: A literary and theological commentary on the second gospel* Macon, GA: Smyth & Helyws p.56

<sup>2</sup> Hamerton-Kelly, R. (1994) *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p. 94. Indeed, it has been argued that the individual person and the community have a 'dialogic relationship' through which a model community or *familia/communidad* is reflected (see Gonzales, M. A. (2004) 'Who is American/o? Theological Anthropology, Postcoloniality, and the Spanish-speaking Americas in Keller, C. et al (eds.) *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press p.75).

<sup>3</sup> Tolbert, M. A. (1989) *Sowing the gospel: Mark's world in literary and historical perspective* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.265

<sup>4</sup> Davies, J. D. & Vincent, J. J. (1986) *Mark at work* London: Bible reading fellowship p.57

fear that such a participation elicits, for his encounter with Jesus had been an encounter punctuated by fear and unknowing (5:7, 15, 18). Yet, as I have argued, it is also an encounter readers might find is imbued with hope: *'I relate to that begging of Jesus, to stay with me, I've written a song about it and part of my illness is not trusting myself to make decisions when he gave me a mind and heart to make decisions. Jesus encourages the man that you can do it on your own'*.<sup>1</sup>

The significance of this re-imagining of the man in 5:1-20, who is reengaged in the praxis of mutuality through dialogue, lies in its readership. For, in focusing on the debilitated condition and radical alterity of the man, and the subsequent reengagement, dialogue, and commissioning the encounter narrates, the group readers of this dissertation prompt a re-imagining of the man of 5:1-20 not as a symbol of despair and depravity but as a representative of survival and of the possibility of counter-discourse. As one of the readers points out, *'healing comes in a lot of forms'*.<sup>2</sup> At its core, 5:1-20 is a story about resisting dead-ends and the about recognition that the reengagement of dialogue is a profoundly emancipatory act. The final of the six pericopae this dissertation focuses on paints the opposite sort of picture. Here, the dialogical confrontation of questions about identity does not lead to emancipation, but ultimately to the closure of dialogue.

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<sup>1</sup> 'B' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.63

<sup>2</sup> 'B' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.63



## **6.21 Introduction: Where is the good news?**

*Power, identity and the failure of dialogue*

### **Mark 15:1-5**

1As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. 2Pilate asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' He answered him, 'You say so.' 3Then the chief priests accused him of many things. 4Pilate asked him again, 'Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.' 5But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

*In this final pericope, Jesus is seen in a subordinate position as he faces the embodiment of colonial power in his hearing before Pilate. Much scholarship that considers the relational dynamics of the pericope focuses on how the dialogical exchange between Jesus and Pilate serves in a number of different ways as a conduit for other textual, intertextual, and theological agendas to be played out. Yet, when the dialogue between the two men is more closely attended to in its own right, the brevity of the exchange is complicated by the debated significance of power and silence. Below, through the particular lenses of group readers' experiences both of this text and of encounters akin to being bound and led away, the roles of power and silence are explored. Specifically, silence within dialogical exchange is assessed as a strategic form of resistance that may interact with the praxis of mutuality in more ways than one.*

## **6.22 The significance of dialogue in the interpretation of 15:1-5**

*Scholars' Perspectives*

The question, 'Who do you say that I am?' (9:29) is one which reverberates throughout Mark, with allusions in every chapter of the gospel.<sup>1</sup> In this final pericope (15:1-5), this question returns to its interlocutor in a dramatic climax of the theme of Jesus' identity,

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<sup>1</sup> See Mark 1:7, 11, 24,37,45; 2:7, 18; 3:11, 35; 4:41; 5:7, 19; 6:51; 7:28, 36; 8:11, 27-38; 9:7, 17, 30-32, 38, 41; 10:17-18, 32-34, 38-45, 47-51; 11:3, 10, 28; 12:6, 32, 35-37; 13:26-27, 32; 14:14, 21-24, 36, 41, 45, 61-62, 71; 15:2, 18, 26, 32, 34, 39; 16:6.

with Pilate's question, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' (15:2), paralleling the preceding question of the High Priest, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?' (14:61b).

My own interest within the encounter between Jesus and Pilate narrated in 15:1-5 is how dialogue is employed in the negotiation of the relational dynamics of the meeting. Standing as the pericope does, at a dramatic point in the Markan narration of Jesus' journey to the cross, the brief exchange of 15:1-5 assumes significance for scholars from a diverse set of theological and textual perspectives. Primarily, the attention to the dialogue in 15:1-5 is subordinated to an interest in various postulated identities of Jesus. According to Waetjen, the designation of Jesus' identity as 'insurrectionist'<sup>1</sup> has determined that Pilate, as a symbol of the imperial oppressors of Rome, is one who seeks to suppress any attempt at subversion and who is guilty of 'flagrant abuses of power'<sup>2</sup>. Alternatively, the designation of Jesus' identity as 'religious dissident/blasphemer' determines that it is not the Roman but the Jewish (religious) leaders who are to be viewed as negative characters in the text. Pilate emerges from this sort of reading, argues Hooker, as merely an instrument by which the Sanhedrin's sentence is carried out.<sup>3</sup> The characters, then, of 15:1-5 are not read as agents having a genuine dialogical exchange in the text, but more as ciphers in a gruesome theological or political end-game.

The subordination of the role of dialogue in the text has also results from the presumed importance of intra and inter-textual levels of analysis. Intra-textually, it is argued that the actions of Jesus and those encountering him in 15:1-5 follow a pattern of repetition and fulfilment. In terms of repetition, whilst the significance of the preceding

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Campbell, W. S. (2004) 'Engagement, disengagement and obstruction: Jesus' defense strategies in Mark's trial and execution scenes (14:53-64; 15:1-39)' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (3) p.290; Horsley, R. (2001) *Hearing the whole story: The politics of plot in Mark's Gospel*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press p.100; Waetjen, H. C. (1989) *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press pp.226-7

<sup>2</sup> See Waetjen, H. C. (1989) *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.7

<sup>3</sup> Hooker, M. D. (1991) *The Gospel according to St. Mark* London: A & C Black p.366.

hearing/trial scene in 14:53-64 is emphasised, so too is the repetition of Jesus' silence – interpreted as the absence of dialogue in the two hearings/trials.<sup>1</sup> Others assert that 14:53-64 and 15:1-5 are juxtaposed to highlight the similarities between the two scenes<sup>2</sup>, contrary to scholars who posit that the parallel construction highlights their differences<sup>3</sup>. In terms of fulfilment, much is made of the way in which the encounter narrated in 15:1-5 is predetermined by intra-textual predictions of the passion. For instance, Gundry argues that the 'handing over' of Jesus to Pilate (15:1) fulfils the prediction of 10:33: the 'Son of Man' is to be handed over to the Gentiles.<sup>4</sup>

Similar arguments along a fulfilment theme are postulated as interpretative lenses intertextually. Jesus' silence in response to the charges made against him by the chief priests (15:3-5) is argued to evoke images both of Psalm 38:13-15 and 39:9,<sup>5</sup> and also of the 'suffering servant' of Isaiah 53:7-9, 11-12.<sup>6</sup> For instance, Schnabel asserts that whilst in the preceding narratives of the gospel Jesus almost always answers his opponents in some way,<sup>7</sup> he remains silent here because he knows that he will not be able to make himself understood as his accusers will not be able to grasp the 'true nature of his claims' – what

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<sup>1</sup> Hooker, M. D. (1991) *The Gospel according to St. Mark* London: A & C Black p.366; Gundry, R. H. (1993) *Mark: A commentary on his apology for the cross* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company p.924

<sup>2</sup> Myers, C. (1988) *Binding the strong man* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.378

<sup>3</sup> Humphrey, R. L. (2003) *Narrative structure and message in Mark: A rhetorical analysis* Lewinston, NY: The Edwin Mellor Press p.75

<sup>4</sup> Gundry, R. H. (1993) *Mark: A commentary on his apology for the cross* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company p.923. Also see Painter who argues that Jesus' refusal to clearly answer Pilate's question in 15:2 ('*Are you the King of the Jews?*') might be because in the mouth of the Roman Procurator, the title meant 'something more overtly political and military than the reality of his messiahship...but for Mark the 'King of the Jews' legitimately reveals the crucified one' (Painter, J. (1997) *Mark's Gospel: Worlds in conflict* London & New York: Routledge p.199).

<sup>5</sup> Marcus, J. (1992) *The way of the Lord: Christological exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press p.173

<sup>6</sup> Van Iersel, M. F. (1998) *Mark: A reader-response commentary* JSNT Supplement Series 164 Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.460

<sup>7</sup> Schnabel, E. J. (1999) 'The silence of Jesus: The Galilean Rabbi who was more than a prophet' in Chilton, B. & Evans, C. (eds.) *Authenticating the words of Jesus* Leiden: Brill p.205. See for instance, Jesus' clarification of his pronouncements (e.g. 9:12-13; 10:11-12); his explanation of his power to exorcise (e.g. 9:25); his response to 'unclean spirits', even if only to silence (e.g. 1:25); and, his quoting of scriptures to interlocutors who oppose him (e.g. 2:25-6; 7:6-10; 10:7-8).

Schnabel calls Jesus' 'divine dignity' – and because he knows his death is inevitable.<sup>1</sup> It is also argued that other characters' actions and responses in the pericope follow a pattern of prophetic fulfilment. For instance, Marcus suggests that Pilate's amazement at Jesus' silence (15:5) echoes Isaiah 52:15.<sup>2</sup>

A similar textually-driven reading of 15:1-5 is seen in the scholarship of those who postulate that 15:2 (Jesus' ambiguous reply to Pilate's question), and 15:5 (Jesus' silence following Pilate's asking if he has anything more to say following the accusations made against him) form the first two parts of a Markan triad. The questioning narrated in 15:2 and 15:5 is argued to be followed by a third line of questioning in 15:8-14 which centres on the dialogue between Pilate and the crowds. Jesus' silence in 15:5, it is argued, serves compositionally to reduce the impact of the first two questions and to emphasise the significance of the final, third question thus switching the focus from Jesus on trial to Pilate and the people who in a sense, argues Broadhead, are now on trial.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars also pay particular attention to the issue of power in the pericope. Indeed, Hamerton-Kelly describes the pericope as 'the roll call of the powers of this world' (Roman and Jewish), within which Jesus is interpreted as the victim of a struggle for dominance.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars argue that Jesus is a character who has little choice and maintain that Pilate holds the power of choice in the pericope<sup>5</sup>. Others suggest that the Jewish authorities already have negated the opportunities for Pilate to make a choice by

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<sup>1</sup> Schnabel, E. J. (1999) 'The silence of Jesus: The Galilean Rabbi who was more than a prophet' in Chilton, B. & Evans, C. (eds.) *Authenticating the words of Jesus* Leiden: Brill p. 256

<sup>2</sup> 'Thus many nations shall wonder at him, and kings shall shut their mouths' cited in Marcus, J. (1992) *The way of the Lord: Christological exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press pp.187-8

<sup>3</sup> Broadhead, E. K. (2001) *Mark* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.123

<sup>4</sup> Hamerton-Kelly, R. (1994) *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.54

<sup>5</sup> Derrett, J. D. M. (1985) *The making of Mark: The scriptural basis for the earliest gospel Volume Two* Warkickshire, England: P. Drinkwater p.260

presenting Jesus to him already bound<sup>1</sup>. Arguing along this second trajectory, Bammel posits that presenting Jesus bound before Pilate, demonstrates that the Sanhedrin consultation had already sealed Jesus' fate<sup>2</sup> with Pilate taking up the finding of the previous hearing from the outset (15:2).<sup>3</sup>

In each case, the choices Jesus may or may not be able to make are subjugated textually by the necessity for the outcome of the hearing/trial to be a sentence of death. Whether from a reading of prophetic fulfilment or political powerlessness, Jesus is interpreted as a character who is lacking the opportunity within the context of 15:1-5 to exercise power. Indeed, textually, it is argued that he is framed within a vocabulary of binding and being handed over (15:1, 7, 15).<sup>4</sup> This Jesus, who accepts the inevitability of his death is a character who is the passive, powerless victim of his dire circumstances yet, as some argue, fulfilling his cosmic purpose<sup>5</sup>. In this role he is also a model for such passive acceptance by others who suffer persecution. For example, Witherington argues that the

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<sup>1</sup> Bammel, E. (1984) 'The trial before Pilate' in Bammel, E. & Moule, C. F. D. (eds.) *Jesus and the politics of his day* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.415.

<sup>2</sup> This argument of course is based on the establishment that the charge of the first hearing/trial (14:61b 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?') is the same and not different to the charge in the second in (15:2 'Are you the King of the Jews?'). See Myers, C. (1988) *Binding the strong man* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.378, who argues that the two questions and structures of the episodes serve to emphasise their sameness. Conversely, see Humphreys, R. L. (2003) *Narrative structure and message in Mark: A rhetorical analysis* Lewinston, NY: The Edwin Mellor Press p.75, who argues that the parallels highlight their differences not similarities. See also Santos, N. F. (2003) *Slave of all: The paradox of authority and servanthood in the Gospel of Mark* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.251 for a detailed textual comparison of the two episodes.

<sup>3</sup> Such an interpretation is not without potential problems. One is that the assumption that the Jewish authorities had such powers of persuasion over the Roman Procurator, is not an opinion shared by all scholars (see for example Waetjen, H. C. (1989) *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.7) although within the text alone the persuasive power both of the Sanhedrin and the crowd is significant (15:11, 13-15).

A second problem is the assumption that the Jewish authorities had the power to perform an execution, whether by stoning or not. This has been a highly contentious issue in the history of interpretation, particularly given the charges of *Deicide* which have been placed before Jewish peoples in centuries passed (see for example Winter, P. (1974) *On the trial of Jesus* Berlin & New York: Walter De Gruyter p.18).

<sup>4</sup> Dowd, S. (2000) *Reading Mark: A literary and theological commentary on the second gospel* Macon, GA: Smyth & Helyws p.156

<sup>5</sup> See Lane, W. L. (1974) *The Gospel according to St. Mark* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, p.552, who writes that the reader of 15:1-5 senses in Jesus' passivity and silence 'that the Sovereign Lord of history is accomplishing his mysterious purposes to which even the Son of Man must be submissive'.

binding and handing over of Jesus to the authorities must have recalled for a Gentile audience their own handing over to authorities and furthermore that 'Mark shows his audience how to behave by the example of Jesus'.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, it is argued that Jesus is portrayed in this pericope primarily as the servant of others<sup>2</sup> who receives willingly and silently the accusations of religious authorities (15:1), the shouts of the crowds (15:13), the release of Barabbas (15:7), the sentence by Pilate (15:15) and the mistreatment he suffers at the hands of Roman soldiers (15:19), with all of the above taken to exemplify true servanthood.<sup>3</sup>

It is rather ironic given the predominance and indeed pre-eminence of Jesus as a participant in dialogical engagement in the gospel, that the significance of Jesus' dialogical contributions in 15:1-5 are so readily written out of the act of interpretation by so many.<sup>4</sup> However, not all scholars agree that Jesus is powerless in this narrative's encounter with Pilate. Many look to the practice of dialogue for an alternative understanding of the relational dynamics of the text. Scholars who assess more directly the dialogical exchange between Jesus and Pilate argue from a number of perspectives. Some focus on Pilate's question to Jesus in 15:2 ('Are you the King of the Jews?'), which is

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<sup>1</sup> Witherington, B. (2001) *The Gospel of Mark: A socio-rhetorical commentary* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, p. 389. See also Santos, N. F. (2003) *Slave of all: The paradox of authority and servanthood in the Gospel of Mark* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.253.

<sup>2</sup> Kingsbury, K. D. (1989) *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, authorities, disciples* Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press pp.49-50; Tannehill, R. C. (1979) 'Mark as Narrative Christology' *Semeia* 16 p.81

<sup>3</sup> Santos, N. (2003) *Slave of all: The paradox of authority and servanthood in the Gospel of Mark* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.253

<sup>4</sup> Derrett, J. D. M. (1985) *The making of Mark: The scriptural basis for the earliest gospel Volume Two* Warkickshire, England: P. Drinkwater p.260; Lane, W. L. (1974) *The Gospel according to St. Mark* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, p. 552; Bammel, E. (1984) 'The trial before Pilate' in Bammel, E. & Moule, C. F. D. (eds.) *Jesus and the politics of his day* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p. 415; Brown, R. E. (1986) *A crucified Christ in Holy Week: Essays on the four Gospel passion narratives* Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press p. 29; O'Neill, J. C. (1969) 'The Silence of Jesus' *New Testament Studies* 15 (2) p.165; Schnabel, E. J. (1999) 'The silence of Jesus: The Galilean Rabbi who was more than a prophet' in Chilton, B. & Evans, C. (eds.) *Authenticating the words of Jesus* Leiden: Brill pp. 255-6; Marcus, J. (1992) *The way of the Lord: Christological exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press pp. 187-8; Pallares, J. C. (1986) *A poor man called Jesus: Reflections on the Gospel of Mark* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.98; Hamerton-Kelly, R. (1994) *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press pp.54-5

read variously as a dangerous accusation (given who is making it and the consequences for opposing Rome's hegemony in Jerusalem),<sup>1</sup> as sarcasm,<sup>2</sup> and as filled with contempt.<sup>3</sup> Pilate's decision to inquire about the titular 'King of the Judeans' and not 'King of Israel' is seen as a deliberate reminder that Judeans were not sovereign in their own land.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, it is argued that Pilate's question to Jesus is more directly concerned with a political reality of the day. That is, as Belo asserts, Pilate's concern may be to ascertain whether Jesus is in some way connected with the Zealot movement, which would be perceived as a threat, or at least as an irritant to Roman power in Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> From another perspective, Pallares argues that Pilate's question is a deliberate manoeuvre to make it more difficult for him to hand down a 'not guilty' verdict for Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

Other scholars focus on Jesus' response to Pilate's question. France argues that Jesus' answer to Pilate in 15:2b constitutes some sort of attempt to open dialogue inasmuch that it affirms Jesus to be the 'King of the Jews', but not as Pilate understands it.<sup>7</sup> Campbell suggests, rather differently, that Jesus' answer is a genuine attempt to open the dialogical space to questions and answers rather than to dismiss Pilate with an enigmatic reply. He argues that faced with hegemonic circumstances, Jesus chooses to practise a three-form strategy of resistance: engagement, disengagement, and obstruction.<sup>8</sup> The central claim Campbell makes, contrary to the interpretation of Jesus as passive victim, is that Jesus neither acquiesces to the end he potentially faces, nor to the circumstances that might

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<sup>1</sup> Van Iersel, M. F. (1998) *Mark: A reader-response commentary* JSNT Supplement Series 164 Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press p.459

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 459

<sup>3</sup> Myers, C. (1988) *Binding the strong man* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p. 378; Hooker, M. D. (1991) *The Gospel according to St. Mark* London: A & C Black p.367.

<sup>4</sup> Myers, C. *et al* (1996) 'Say to this Mountain': *Mark's story of discipleship* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.196

<sup>5</sup> Belo, F. (1981) *A materialist reading of the Gospel of Mark* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.224

<sup>6</sup> Pallares, J. C. (1986) *A poor man called Jesus: Reflections on the Gospel of Mark* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.95

<sup>7</sup> France, R. T. (1990) *Divine Government: God's kingship in the Gospel of Mark* London: SPCK p.91

<sup>8</sup> Campbell, W. S. (2004) 'Engagement, disengagement and obstruction: Jesus' defense strategies in Mark's trial and execution scenes (14:53-64; 15:1-39)' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (3) p.283

lead to it. That is, 15:1-5 and the surrounding texts do not paint the picture of a man who refuses to defend himself at trial, willingly enduring his arrest, trials, persecutions and crucifixion. Rather, the picture painted is one of resistance.

This is not though, argues Campbell, the resistance of a man who is bent on defiance and disdain for the procedure before him, as Myers argues,<sup>1</sup> nor of one who is contemptuous of his interlocutor, as Hooker states in her claim that the emphatic 'you' both in Pilate's question and Jesus' response is an expression of their mutual contempt for each other.<sup>2</sup> Campbell's point is that Jesus chooses to dialogically engage with Pilate with his enigmatic response in 15:2b. He argues that whilst Jesus disavows the attribution of being 'King of the Jews', he does signal a willingness in his answer to continue in dialogue; as Campbell states, his reply 'cries out for a follow-up'.<sup>3</sup>

However, the problem with Campbell's framing of Jesus' response as a genuine attempt to open up dialogue is that it is couched in such ambiguous terms that providing a response in a publicly-charged setting would be risky indeed. It is not surprising, then, that other scholars prefer to focus on the diffusion of meaning and invitation to dialogue rather than its opening up. For instance, some argue that the exchange is laced with irony, wherein the further the dialogue attempts to proceed the more implicated the characters who end up negotiating Jesus' death sentence seem to appear.<sup>4</sup> Similarly

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<sup>1</sup> Myers, C. (1988) *Binding the strong man* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.378

<sup>2</sup> Hooker, M. D. (1991) *The Gospel according to St. Mark* London: A & C Black p.367

<sup>3</sup> Campbell, W. S. (2004) 'Engagement, disengagement and obstruction: Jesus' defense strategies in Mark's trial and execution scenes (14:53-64; 15:1-39)' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (3) p.289. Arguing from a more political reading of the text, a similar point is made by Jennings, who asserts that Jesus' answer to Pilate is so phrased as to 'throw the responsibility back to Pilate', such that Pilate now either has to 'acknowledge Jesus' authority as the legitimate ruler or he must deny this authority'. See Jennings, T. (2003) *The insurrection of the crucified: The 'Gospel of Mark' as theological manifesto* Chicago, IL: Exploration Press, Chicago Theological Seminary p.276.

<sup>4</sup> See Tolbert, M. A. (1989) *Sowing the gospel: Mark's world in literary and historical perspective* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.278, who argues that all dialogue after 15:2b to 15:34 is ironical, 'further implicating them as the wicked tenants'.



others see the irony in that it is Pilate, Rome's representative, who accords Jesus with his rightful political status, only to execute him on grounds of sedition.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst the scholars sampled above do attend to the relational dynamics of the encounter between Jesus and Pilate, the function of power, choice, dialogue, and silence as expressions of agency is not altogether clear. I now turn to group readers' interpretations whose readings of the text focus on these themes and bring to the pericope particular experiences that might offer fresh insights into the relational dynamics of the encounter narrated.

### **6.23 'It has to do with people wanting power...'<sup>2</sup>**

#### *Group Readers' Perspectives*

At the forefront of group readers' varied interpretations of 15:1-5 is the question of autonomy. Focusing on Jesus' lack of freedom<sup>3</sup>, the '*cruel and unusual punishment*' he suffered<sup>4</sup>, and the '*torture*' he endured<sup>5</sup>, Jesus was read as a character whose power to choose within the context of 15:1-5 was severely attenuated: '*He did not have the ability to overcome the things before him. He was unable to speak for himself in that he wanted to save the world. We learn to grow, to love, to hope, even though he could not help himself physically because he was not well enough*'.<sup>6</sup> Another reader saw Jesus' lack of choice through a theological lens: '*God made his choice; Jesus had no choice*'.<sup>7</sup> In either case, the group readers identified a certain lack of control on Jesus' part.

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<sup>1</sup> Myers, C. (1988) *Binding the strong man* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.378.

<sup>2</sup> 'A' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.69

<sup>3</sup> '*I don't like the idea of him being bound up because he's not free anymore, he's captured*,' 'A' from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.65

<sup>4</sup> '*It's cruel and unusual punishment. I think they were jealous, that this man was actually saying to him in his own way he was just as good or better than Pilate and he saw Jesus as a threat to his relationship to Rome*,' 'A' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.68

<sup>5</sup> '*What they did was torture him. That is torturing, binding someone like that*,' 'B' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.69

<sup>6</sup> 'B' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.70

<sup>7</sup> 'B' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.70

The interpretations of group readers were personal and often associated with some of their own experiences of losing autonomy. They likened the experience of being bound (15:1) to being locked up in *'the [psychiatric] ward'*<sup>1</sup> or being threatened that this would happen if behaviour did not improve<sup>2</sup>. Central to this experience was a loss of autonomy suffered by those who are 'bound' or locked up: *'I haven't been locked up except on the wards. It's pretty hard to be taken from your house.'*<sup>3</sup> In addition, the loss of autonomy was elaborated upon in readers' associations with Jesus being led away (15:1). Here it was not only the physical restraining that was highlighted– *'Actually, they put one of my friends in restraints, I didn't like that'*<sup>4</sup> – it was also the psychological restraining which is seen to be doubly hegemonic:

*'Yeah, I didn't like being hospitalised. They put me in 'human resources' instantly. Something about it tortured my mind. Well, I had dreams that I cut my wrists with razors. I had a dream, thinking I was beautiful'.<sup>5</sup>*

Finally, the handing over of Jesus to Pilate (15:1) resonated with one reader's experience of being moved from residence to residence.<sup>6</sup> Another reader's experience associated the loss of autonomy in being 'taken' and 'locked up' with a loss of knowing:

*'In a way that's happened to me. It was the middle of the night and I was trying to get better in hospital. They took me bodily and put me in a hot shower. I didn't know what to do. I don't know why they did it; I felt frightened by that'.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> *'Have you ever been led away to a place you didn't want to go to? C: Yes; B: Locked up in the ward,'* from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.66

<sup>2</sup> *'No freedom. Can't get out, can't go nowhere. Staff at the house... 'if you do this one more time, you will be locked up,' 'C' from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.66*

<sup>3</sup> *'B' from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.66*

<sup>4</sup> *'C' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.69*

<sup>5</sup> *'B' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.69*

<sup>6</sup> *'I've been that way, from residence to residence and home. The part of LA [Los Angeles] I came from they give you a place, an apartment, though you have to go through all kinds of heck. I'm not against Massachusetts, it just takes awhile to do things,' 'C' from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.66*

These group readers interpreted Jesus, and with him themselves, as one who is disempowered by his circumstances. He is one who was seen to be utterly limited by his lack of choice: *'I don't think anybody likes being out away where they have no choice'*.<sup>2</sup>

However, this was not the only way Jesus was seen in this pericope. When readers were asked more directly about the nature of the negotiation between Jesus and Pilate, the questions of choice, autonomy, and power were less clear-cut than the associations described above might suggest. For instance, whilst one group reader saw Pilate's question in 15:2 as an act of sarcasm, or as *'poking fun'* at Jesus<sup>3</sup>, thus confirming the picture of powerlessness, other readers wondered whether Pilate was in some way afraid for Rome.<sup>4</sup> Focusing on the notion that the two men were trading jibes with each other, one group reader interpreted Jesus' response to Pilate in 15:2 ('You say so') as Jesus *'rebutting the whole group'*<sup>5</sup> or as another reader put it: *'Jesus hit him back'*.<sup>6</sup> Another reader saw Jesus' response as mockery: *'He's been laughed at by Jesus'*.<sup>7</sup>

What, then, did group readers make of the nature of the power differential in the pericope in relation to the silence employed by Jesus? One reader stated that even if *'the words were good'* that Jesus used, he still had no power in the situation.<sup>8</sup> Another reader saw the encounter as one which was hopelessly skewed in Pilate's favour, and in not telling Pilate what to do – in remaining silent – Jesus demonstrates how he was

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<sup>1</sup> 'A' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.69

<sup>2</sup> 'B' from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.66

<sup>3</sup> *'I think he was probably trying to poke fun at him. He asked it, almost sarcastically,'* 'B' from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.66

<sup>4</sup> *'Well I think Pilate was seeking to find a way to accuse him of trying to take over the city of Jerusalem. He was really afraid; he was gaining more control, more and more people. He was afraid he might overthrow the Roman Empire. So they scapegoated him instead,'* 'B' from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.66

<sup>5</sup> *'I think it's a brief way of rebutting that whole group of people. He was angry at this point,'* 'B' from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.67

<sup>6</sup> *'Jesus hit him back,'* 'A' from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.67

<sup>7</sup> 'A' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.70

<sup>8</sup> *'It's good, the words were good, it's just he has no power,'* 'D' from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.68

'overwhelmed'.<sup>1</sup> These sorts of interpretations were elaborated upon by some readers in an association of silence with the quality of relating they perceived themselves to have with staff members at the day centres they attended:

*'A: Silence and subjection. It's submission, humility. We're subservient to the staff, we take advice and protection but we have to help them to wash dishes and...*

*C: We help them out because they help us. One of the greatest things is to be a servant.*

*A: What they say counts.'*<sup>2</sup>

Or as another reader put it: *'Sometimes the most you can say is nothing'*.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus' silence in 15:1-5 was interpreted by most group readers as a sign of Jesus' lack of power in the encounter. However, for some readers, Jesus did have power in the situation and this was interpreted more in line with the theological tone of some scholars' perspectives on the pericope: *'I place my hope in you Father, because of what you say, not I'*.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, other readers focused on the designation of Jesus as being from a power beyond the one being represented before him in Pilate, such that, *'He [Jesus] didn't need a show of power'*,<sup>5</sup> and that he had *'abilities Pilate never dreamt of'*.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, others felt that his silence took on a more combative role as a sign of his refusal to *'dignify all this with a reply'*,<sup>7</sup> and also an act of engaging Pilate only to condemn him.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, one group

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<sup>1</sup> *'Pilate has power; he's an elected official. They really make a show court out of it. He did not tell Pilate what to do. He was overwhelmed', 'C' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.71*

<sup>2</sup> *From Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts pp.70-71*

<sup>3</sup> *'A' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.71*

<sup>4</sup> *'B' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.70*

<sup>5</sup> *'He didn't have to impress anybody. He didn't need a show of power, they made him a little lower than the angels,' 'E' from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.67*

<sup>6</sup> *'Because the king is like Pilate and Pilate is like the Pope. If Jesus is king then he may be greater than the representative of the Emperor. He has abilities Pilate never dreamt of, he has a power beyond description,' 'C' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.69*

<sup>7</sup> *'Well, I think he's preached so much to people, he doesn't think he should dignify all this with a reply,' 'B' from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.68*

<sup>8</sup> *'Frustrated. He's been laughed at by Jesus. His silence condemns Pilate,' 'A' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.70*

reader focused on the fact that even in the face of the seemingly complete absence of power at his disposal, Jesus *'has the power to choose not to answer...'*<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, as another reader speculated, in that moment, *'Jesus might have given power to Pilate deliberately so Pilate could do his job...'*<sup>2</sup>.

Whether Jesus was interpreted to have power or to lack it, what the group readers' interpretations do suggest is a picture of power in the pericope that is far from clear: *'I think at first power is to Pilate. He's the big shot, but as Jesus doesn't answer him it slips away and slips right back to Jesus.'*<sup>3</sup> Through the role of silence, group readers variously saw the play of power that Mark 15:1-5 narrates as being complicated. What the group readers' interpretations presented was a lack of consensus regarding the agency exercised within the text. It is this very agonism, left unresolved in the reading groups, that I now wish to probe in returning to the text and asking how Jesus practises his own resistive agency in speech and in silence and how this agency relates to the praxis of mutuality.

#### **6.24 Silent agency**

##### *The choice for silence and mutuality*

Group readers' interpretations of this pericope and in particular of the themes of power, dialogue, and silence, reveal the same sort of heterogeneity that scholars' interpretations do. Jesus, in particular, was read by some as a person who remains silent in the encounter confident in *'abilities Pilate never dreamt of'*,<sup>4</sup> yet was read by others as not offering a reply to Pilate's question in 15:4 ('Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring

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<sup>1</sup> 'B' from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.68

<sup>2</sup> 'A' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.71

<sup>3</sup> 'A' from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.68

<sup>4</sup> *'Because the king is like Pilate and Pilate is like the Pope. If Jesus is king then he may be greater than the representative of the Emperor. He has abilities Pilate never dreamt of, he has a power beyond description,'* 'C' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.69

against you') because he is 'overwhelmed'.<sup>1</sup> The roles of silence and dialogue in this pericope thus remained unclear.

That said, there is one set of emphases that remained peculiar to group readers in their interpretations of this pericope: the strong associations made between the narrated experience of Jesus in the story and their own real life experiences. Not only were associations made between Jesus' experience of being bound<sup>2</sup>, being led away<sup>3</sup>, and being handed over<sup>4</sup>, associations were also made with silence. Silence was associated by one reader with 'subjection', 'submission' and subservience<sup>5</sup>, whilst another stated that 'Sometimes the most you can say is nothing'.<sup>6</sup> These two sets of associations – of being bound, led away, and handed over, and of the place of silence in the lives of persons with poor mental health - when taken together, suggest a way of probing this pericope that asks how silence might operate as a postcolonial praxis.

The possibility that I explore below is that Jesus' decision to be silent rather than speak - and that this is not an indication that he is one who seeks to side with the oppressed,<sup>7</sup> nor that he is one who passively endures his cosmic fate<sup>8</sup> - is an indication that silence might

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<sup>1</sup> 'Pilate has power; he's an elected official. They really make a show court out of it. He did not tell Pilate what to do. He was overwhelmed', 'C' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.71

<sup>2</sup> 'Have you ever been led away to a place you didn't want to go to? C: Yes; B: Locked up in the ward,' from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.66

<sup>3</sup> 'Actually, they put one of my friends in restraints, I didn't like that' 'C' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.69

<sup>4</sup> 'I've been that way, from residence to residence and home. The part of LA [Los Angeles] I came from they give you a place, an apartment, though you have to go through all kinds of heck. I'm not against Massachusetts, it just takes a while to do things,' 'C' from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.66

<sup>5</sup> 'Silence and subjection. It's submission, humility. We're subservient to the staff, we take advice and protection but we have to help them to wash dishes and...' 'A' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.70

<sup>6</sup> 'A' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.71

<sup>7</sup> Pallares, J. C. (1986) *A poor man called Jesus: Reflections on the Gospel of Mark* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.98

<sup>8</sup> Lane, W. L. (1974) *The Gospel according to St. Mark* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company p.552

function in this pericope as a dialogical strategy. Campbell already makes this point arguing that Jesus' silence is an act of disengagement in the face of the testimony of the chief priests in 15:3, and a strategy that amazes his previous interlocutor, Pilate (15:5).<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Pallares asserts that the religious authorities of Israel no longer fully recognised Jesus as a person, such that 'Jesus cannot speak to them in a language they are willing to use'.<sup>2</sup> Jesus' silence, continues Pallares, serves to unmask the 'farce' of his so-called trial.<sup>3</sup> Contrary to these interpretations, I wish to explore the possibility that the employment of silence by Jesus is an act of dialogical engagement with Pilate.

That silence was utilised as a strategy during legal proceedings in antiquity is suggested by a number of scholars. For example, Campbell cites how in *Philostratus, Vit. Apol.* 8.2, Apollonius refers to silence as the 'fourth excellence in a court of law', highlighting Socrates as a model.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Bammel cites Josephus' report that Jesus, son of Ananias, was acquitted after refusing to offer a defence before Jewish and Roman authorities.<sup>5</sup> Jesus' silence in 15:3-5 also can be argued to resonate with the theological principle advocated in 13:11: 'When they bring you to trial and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say; but say whatever is given to you in that hour for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.'<sup>6</sup>

How, then, might Jesus' silence be interpreted textually as a strategy of engagement with Pilate? One possibility is to interpret Jesus' silence as opening up a shared dialogical

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<sup>1</sup> Campbell, W. S. (2004) 'Engagement, disengagement and obstruction: Jesus' defense strategies in Mark's trial and execution scenes (14:53-64; 15:1-39)' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (3) p.290

<sup>2</sup> Pallares, J. C. (1986) *A poor man called Jesus: Reflections on the Gospel of Mark* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.98

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.98

<sup>4</sup> Campbell, W. S. (2004) 'Engagement, disengagement and obstruction: Jesus' defense strategies in Mark's trial and execution scenes (14:53-64; 15:1-39)' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (3) p. 286

<sup>5</sup> See Bammel, E. (1984) 'The trial before Pilate' in Bammel, E. & Moule, C. F. D. (eds.) *Jesus and the politics of his day* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.422

<sup>6</sup> See Campbell, W. S. (2004) 'Engagement, disengagement and obstruction: Jesus' defense strategies in Mark's trial and execution scenes (14:53-64; 15:1-39)' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (3) p.289

space in order to affirm the potential of Pilate to act within that space. Keenan suggests that Jesus' silence reveals who he is by mirroring the presence of Abba in his broken humanity, 'standing unprotected before the plans and machinations of deluded minds'.<sup>1</sup> What, though, if Jesus' silence were not argued to be an attempt to engage Pilate's 'deluded mind', but to affirm his potential to act?<sup>2</sup> Jesus' emptying of the dialogical space between himself and Pilate, and by extension between himself and the assembled crowd, clears the way for Pilate, the crowds, and by an even further extension the reader, to choose to answer the pre-eminent Markan question: 'Who do you say that I am?' (9:29).

Jesus can be interpreted in 15:3-5 to withdraw as a speaking dialogue partner in order to allow the other agents in the text to exercise agency at the critical moment of the encounter: the ethical moment of life and death. Through the lens of mutuality as a postcolonial praxis, this strategy of engagement is one which seeks to re-imagine a postcolonial space of relating into being at the very site of colonial power. This is not, though, sly civility that Jesus presents in the face of power, and it is certainly not the passivity of the suffering servant. This is an open attempt to re-imagine colonial discourse as it occurs.

Yet as a postcolonial praxis that might invite others into the re-imagining of hegemonic relational dynamics, the extent to which silence can be argued to operate as a praxis of mutuality is limited by the ambiguity of its operation in 15:1-5. On one hand, it could be argued that Jesus' silence in the encounter stands as an invitational praxis that seeks to draw Pilate into a dialogical exchange beyond the charges of the chief priests and into a space where hegemonic and colonial relational dynamics are not only resisted, but

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<sup>1</sup> Keenan, J. P. (1995) *The Gospel of Mark: A Mahayana Reading* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books p.373

<sup>2</sup> The notion that silence might be interpreted as a dialogical strategy of engagement resonates with arguments in pastoral theology about the need to foster 'more mature' models of human adequacy 'in relation to God' which move beyond human infantile dependency and God as super-father-figure (see Woodruff, C. R. (1978) 'Toward a theology of maturity in pastoral care' *Pastoral Psychology* 27 (1) (September) p.26).



through the agency of the colonial power *par excellence* – Pilate - have the potential to be transformed. In this sense, Pilate may say anything of his choosing within the dialogical space that Jesus' silence opens up. In some ways, then, the role of silence as a postcolonial praxis might be likened to the invitational praxis of mutuality in 3:1-6 in Jesus' word to the man with the withered hand to 'come forward' (3:3). In 15:1-5 it is Pilate to whom the invitation to 'come forward' is made. Indeed, keeping in mind the question that Jesus poses to those who were watching in the synagogue in Capernaum – 'Is it lawful to do good or do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?' (3:4) – and the response of those to whom it is put - 'But they were silent' (3:4) – Mark 15:1-5 might be seen as a mirror image of that earlier encounter, with the same question of the lawfulness of saving a life still hanging over Jesus' ministry. Here it is Pilate, seen through the lens of an invitational praxis of mutuality that seeks the transformation of the life-denying relational dynamics of the scene, who is challenged to come up with a definitive answer.

On the other hand, it could be argued that the role of silence in 15:1-5 is limited to a praxis of mutuality that is only resistive, and does not aspire to transformation. That is, Jesus could be argued to utilise a strategy of silence in order to reassert his identity as a person who still retains at least some power in his encounter with Pilate: *'I think at first power is to Pilate. He's the big shot, but as Jesus doesn't answer him it slips away and slips right back to Jesus.'*<sup>1</sup> Thus, the operation of silence in this pericope might be seen to function similarly to the way the ambiguity utilised by Jesus in 3:19b-35 functions: as a strategy through which Jesus sought to distance himself from the charges being brought before him. Yet silence does not operate in a way that enables the transformation of the relational dynamics Jesus is faced with. Indeed, it is striking how Jesus' ambiguous silence here follows charges that are made against him by the chief priests (15:3) just as

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<sup>1</sup> 'A' from Reading Group One, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.68

his ambiguous binarism in 3:19b-35 follows charges also brought by religious leaders (the scribes who 'came down from Jerusalem', 3:22).

Whilst the extent to which silence as a postcolonial praxis operates as a praxis of mutuality is difficult to ascertain, the effectiveness of the strategy is not. With the teleology of 15:1-5 in mind – Jesus' execution – the strategy of silence that Jesus employs in the encounter with Pilate and the crowd is a failed one. For whether intended by Jesus to be invitational or intentionally ambiguous, the fact is that Pilate does not respond proactively to the silence he encounters in Jesus other than being amazed (15:5).

To view silence as a strategy of engagement and resistance that attempts to call forth the agency of others might be in the light of the group reader's perspectives a rather utopian notion of the significance of silence in dialogical relating. However, as I have already argued previously in this dissertation, struggles within hegemonic relational dynamics should not be seen as agencies that necessarily lead to a utopian transformation of hegemonic relational dynamics. Indeed, perhaps it is the inevitability of Jesus' sentence to death that reveals the utility of the praxis of silence. For what silence affords is a space of dignity within relational dynamics that seek to deny such a place for the 'other'. This praxis thus enables a sense of mutuality within the self when all other hopes for mutual relation are lost. Silence, then, might be seen as a praxis that undermines colonial power in circumstances where open resistance is clearly a lost cause, not in the hope of toppling colonial rule, but in the hope of finding solace in the face of that power's inevitable reach. If it is the case, then, as one reader proposed, that '*sometimes the most you can say is nothing*'<sup>1</sup>, perhaps silence ends up saying a great deal, even if the subaltern voicing of such silent speech is most often irretrievable.

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<sup>1</sup> 'A' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.71

With the other texts of this dissertation in mind, the above exploration of the dialogical function of silence should not be limited to this pericope. For instance, one reader commented in relation to the attack on Jesus' character in 3:19b-35: *'Even so-called regular people, if you say the truth, people let you have it. Even regular people have to shut up. Jesus had to keep his mouth shut sometimes. That's the way of society'*.<sup>1</sup> Similar interpretations of the absence of speech were suggested about the man with the withered hand in 3:1-6 who was seen by some group readers to be hiding and *'cowering in a corner'*,<sup>2</sup> *'afraid'*.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, in 5:21-43, the woman with haemorrhages was seen by one group reader as crawling on the ground due to an inability to speak openly with Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, whilst silence is explored here in the analysis of Mark 15:1-5, it was actually a prevalent feature of group readers' interpretations across the different pericopae, especially when their interpretations of so-called subaltern characters in the text are considered. It might be argued that what these interpretations constitute as a collection of insights is the strand of postcolonial biblical criticism that Sugirtharajah states attempts to *'resurrect lost voices'* which have been distorted or silenced in the canonised text.<sup>5</sup> Here, though, what is being heard are lost *'voices'* of silence, heard in multiple ways and in multiple settings. This exploration of the role of silence does not seek to reify the agency of the oppressed in a suggestion that somehow silence is a more significant agency than it actually is in the text, rather it seeks to serve as a reminder of the struggles that living within hegemonic relational dynamics might entail.

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<sup>1</sup> 'A' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.22

<sup>2</sup> *'He's hiding, cowering in the corner. They wouldn't have wanted him to get help just because it was that day,'* 'D' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.11

<sup>3</sup> *'Could be afraid to for societal reasons. The fact that they wanted to destroy the man who healed him – I can see he would be afraid they were going to destroy him too, he would be petrified,'* 'B' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.12

<sup>4</sup> *'She knew she had to struggle with herself. Had to crawl on the ground to get to that cloth and when she touched, she knew,'* 'D' from Reading Group Four, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.35

<sup>5</sup> Sugirtharajah, R. S. (1999) 'A brief memorandum on Postcolonialism and biblical studies' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 73 p.4

This emphasis on silence also links back to this dissertation's societal location as a piece of contextual biblical criticism and the significance of silence in the lived experience of poor mental health in North-Atlantic societies. In Chapter One, Foucault's genealogical exploration of poor mental health sees silence as a prominent feature of the societal landscape of persons with poor mental health,<sup>1</sup> and Gilman argues that the exclusionary societal practices related to language have tended to reduce persons with poor mental health to silence.<sup>2</sup>

### 6.3 Conclusion

What, then, should be made of dialogue in these pericopae? In terms of 15:1-5, dialogue is a process, even in silence, that always has the potential to collapse into monologue. Jesus' agency fails because as soon as his silence attempts to open up space for another's agency in that relational encounter, the execution cries of the crowd (15:13-14) and Pilate's sentence (15:15) collapse all chances for dialogue to continue. Jesus remains bound, led away, and handed over, and his condition only worsens until his own breaking of his silence in his cry of dereliction from the cross (15:34). The praxis of dialogue, such as it operates in this pericope is exercised within a thin space of hope.

In this vein, the dialogical agency of the man among the tombs in 5:1-20 also is exercised within a thin space of hope, yet with quite different results. For, whilst Jesus' encounter with Pilate foreshadows death, the man who lived among the tombs had already

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<sup>1</sup> 'Madness which for so long had been overt and unrestricted, which had for so long been present on the horizon disappeared. It entered a phase of silence from which it was not to emerge for a long time; it was deprived of its language; and although one continued to speak of it, it became impossible for it to speak of itself' (Foucault, M. (1962) *Mental Illness and Psychology* (Revised Edition) Berkley, CA: University of California Press (original work 1954) p.68); 'All the rest is reduced to silence...the silence of mental disease, as it would develop in the asylum, would always only be of the order of observation and classification. It would not be dialogue (Foucault, M. (2001) *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (Routledge Classics Edition) London & New York: Routledge (original work 1961) p.59); 'Delivered from his chains, he is now chained by silence.' (*Ibid.* p.248).

<sup>2</sup> 'One does not even have to wait for the insane to speak. The mentally ill are instantly recognisable' (Gilman, S. L. (1988) *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press p.48).

managed to survive amidst the dead. Moreover, the man not only survives dead ends, also, through the praxis of mutual dialogue, he recovers from them. Thus, 5:1-20 is a recovery story, where dialogue is an effective emancipatory tool leading not only to the man's recovery from that which possessed him, but also to the recovery of the possibility of mutual relating in the town from which he had come.

In terms of the praxis of dialogue, what clearly separates these two stories is that whilst in 5:1-20 dialogue is enabled by the praxis of mutuality between Jesus and the man among the tombs, in 15:1-5 there is little room at all given to such praxis even if Jesus' strategy of silence is understood as one that sought out the transformation of a hegemonic relational dynamic. In the end Jesus' praxis of mutuality is not reciprocated. Without mutuality, dialogue as a tool of emancipation and transformation, as presented in these texts at least, is a lost cause.

More of the role and efficacy of the praxis of mutuality will be addressed in Chapter Seven. With this what will be asked of these readings is how such explorations of biblical texts might speak to everyday relational dynamics of persons with poor mental health and the discourses which shape those dynamics. It is to this task that the final chapter of this dissertation now turns.

**CHAPTER SEVEN**  
**MUTUALITY AND MARK**  
*REFLECTIONS: TEXTUAL AND CONTEXTUAL*

*In this dissertation I have explored the thesis that mutuality is an effective form of resistive and transformative postcolonial praxis. In this final chapter, I assess this thesis to ascertain what has emerged by placing perceptions of the lived experience of poor mental health into conversation with the biblical texts.*

*My primary interest lies in assessing the operation of mutuality as a postcolonial praxis within the Markan texts analysed in this dissertation. Specifically, I explore below how this praxis operates within the agonisms of power differentials, how the praxis of mutuality might delineate according to gender and according to an axis of hidden versus open agency, and how mutuality acts as an enabler of other postcolonial praxes. Considering these features, I ask how effective mutuality is as a praxis with the potential to be both resistive and transformative of relational power dynamics, and I assess its significance as a praxis that is supplemental. Following this, I suggest how the products of this dissertation offer expansions for interpretation and hermeneutics in biblical scholarship. I also explore various methodological limitations that future work might seek to address.*

**7.1 Mutuality as a postcolonial praxis**

*Qualities and efficacies within textual relational dynamics*

The thesis statement that I set out to test in this dissertation is that **mutuality is an effective form of resistive and transformative postcolonial praxis**. As I argued in Chapter Two, to see mutuality as both a resistive *and* a transformational praxis is to push at the boundaries of what counts as postcolonial agency, that is, beyond praxis only as reactive survival operating from within the assumption of hegemony. I explored the effectiveness of mutuality as an agency that might hold the potential both to resist hegemonic discourses, as well as to some extent to begin to transform those discourses.

As a work of contextual biblical criticism, this dissertation has followed the classic pattern of moving from context to text and then back again to context. This work speaks to context through the analysis of the relational dynamics of textual encounters between Jesus and other characters in Mark, informed by the readership of persons who have experienced the societal contexts of poor mental health. It should be stated clearly here that this dissertation has never intended to offer a biblically-generated prescriptive model for context. Relational dynamics of ancient near east texts cannot simply and unproblematically be translated into 21<sup>st</sup> century contexts; the praxis of mutuality and indeed the other forms of postcolonial praxes analysed in these Markan texts are not suggested as options for real life acts of relating. Rather, I offer this work as a correlative to possible lived experiences of mental health in contemporary society, such that this work might offer heuristics for relational encounters with persons with poor mental health. Such a stance acknowledges that whilst ancient biblical texts cannot simply be superimposed onto modern day contexts, they may well inform such contexts. The practice of reading from context to text, and back from text to context, can be valuable if the status of such a correlation remains heuristic and not pedagogical or prescriptive.

In making this full circle back to context, it is informative to locate the interpretations of this dissertation within recent developments in mental health services and the literature related specifically to the recovery of people who have experienced seasons of poor mental health and the agency of such persons in that recovery. This focus is important as the agency of characters in the Gospel of Mark in their 'recoveries' was the one of the central emphases of this dissertation. The significance of dialogue as a part of therapeutic encounters with persons with poor mental health has come to the forefront over the past fifteen years. Central to this attempt has been a re-consideration of the agency of persons with poor mental health in their ability to make choices. For instance, Anthony, who is a leading advocate of the recovery movement in psychiatric discourse, argues that whereas

historically, choice had been taken away from persons with poor mental health under the belief that they could not make useful choices for themselves,<sup>1</sup> longitudinal research has found that listening to people who seek to recover from episodes of poor mental health is crucial to the success of that recovery.<sup>2</sup> Anthony asserts that much present medical practice takes choice away from users such that so-called recovery programs are mandated and not cooperative, with providers neglecting to acknowledge complicity when users fail to attend sessions or fail to recover.<sup>3</sup> It is in this vein that the centrality of dialogue is highlighted again and again in the literature<sup>4</sup>: 'I'm tired of being talked about, treated as a statistic, pushed to the margins of human conversation, I want someone who will have time for me'.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Wright argues that it is not simply the fact of relationship and dialogue that is significant, but predictably, it is the quality of the same.<sup>6</sup>

A further correlation between text and context in recovery work is the recognition that individuals with poor mental health are more than mere descriptions of their pathology. Disregard for this leads to a skewed power dynamic from the outset of a relational encounter;<sup>7</sup> as one group reader testified: '*You think misdiagnosis—label—say schizophrenic and you really aren't one...and we might feel inferior.*'<sup>8</sup> This recognition of users as participants in their medical treatment has most significantly been demonstrated by the

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony, W. A. (2003) 'The decade of the person and the walls that divide us' *Behavioral Healthcare Tomorrow* April p.24

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.24

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.25

<sup>4</sup> See for example Green, J. (2003) 'User-centred initiatives: Guiding Lights – beyond user involvement' *Updates* 4 (13) (April) London: The Mental Health Foundation p.3; Faulkner, A. (2000) *Strategies for living: A report of user-led research into people's strategies for living with mental distress* London: The Mental Health Foundation p.2; Wright, S. (2001) '*Is anybody there?*' *A survey of friendship and Mental Health* London: The Mental Health Foundation p.35

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert, P. N. V. (2003) *Inspiring Hope: Recognising the importance of spirituality in a whole person approach to Mental Health* London: National Institute for Mental Health in England p. 1

<sup>6</sup> Wright, S. (2001) '*Is anybody there?*' *A survey of friendship and Mental Health* London: The Mental Health Foundation p.14

<sup>7</sup> Anthony, W. A. (1993) 'Recovery from Mental Illness: The guiding vision of the Mental Health service system in the 1990's' *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal* 16 (4) p.536

<sup>8</sup> 'C' from Reading Group Three, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.13



emergence of the 'user-led' movement.<sup>1</sup> It is argued that users of mental health services need to be able to develop their own strategies for treatment and so forge their own path – articulate their own way – to recovery and healing.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Green suggests that the very concept of recovery requires that people with poor mental health take control and that models of best practice make the move away from a medical model of the person as patient and towards a user-led model of the person as survivor.<sup>3</sup> Anthony states that the professional should no longer be seen as the provider of treatment but as the facilitator of recovery<sup>4</sup>. In an interesting parallel to the dialogical method of this dissertation, the need for psychiatry<sup>5</sup>, and perhaps more widely for discourse on mental health, to 'listen to the stories' of persons with poor mental health, is a view that is expressed with increasing volume and acceptance.<sup>6</sup>

There are several ways in which these contextual developments that focus on recovery correlate with the interpretative insights of this dissertation. The agency of individuals to make choices, the centrality of listening to people such that this might lead to their recovery, the importance of give and take in dialogue and the quality of the relationship between dialogue partners, the movement towards a user-led understanding of recovery whereby individuals might articulate their own ways to healing, and the conception of

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Green, J. (2003) 'User-centred initiatives: Guiding Lights – beyond user involvement' *Updates* 4 (13) (April) London: The Mental Health Foundation; Faulkner, A. (2000) *Strategies for living: A report of user-led research into people's strategies for living with mental distress* London: The Mental Health Foundation

<sup>2</sup> Faulkner, A. (2000) *Strategies for living: A report of user-led research into people's strategies for living with mental distress* London: The Mental Health Foundation p.3

<sup>3</sup> Green, J. (2003) 'User-centred initiatives: Guiding Lights – beyond user involvement' *Updates* 4 (13) (April) London: The Mental Health Foundation pp.2-3

<sup>4</sup> Anthony, W. A. (1993) 'Recovery from Mental Illness: The guiding vision of the Mental Health service system in the 1990's' *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal* 16 (4) p.531

<sup>5</sup> Spaniol, L. (2001) 'Recovery from Psychiatric Disability: Implications for rehabilitation counselling education' *Rehabilitation Education* 15 (2) p.169

<sup>6</sup> See Chavez, N. (2000) *Participatory dialogues: A guide to organizing interactive discussions on Mental Health Issues among consumers, providers, and family members* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services Consumer Information Series Vol. 3 (<http://download.ncadi.samhsa.gov/ken/pdf/SMA00-3472/SMA00-3472.pdf>)

professionals as facilitators in the recovery process are all features that relate to the operation of mutuality in the relational dynamics of Markan texts as illumined in this dissertation. Indeed, the primacy of identity, agency, and dialogue has framed this dissertation's treatment of those texts.

Beyond these general correlations, there are multiple ways in which this dissertation's core concept of the praxis of mutuality offers heuristics for the lived societal experience of poor mental health that I argue below offer an expansion to these contextual developments. These heuristics are made explicit in interpretations of the textual relational dynamics of Mark. The first heuristic is that mutuality operates within and not beyond the structures of discursive power. From a Foucauldian perspective, this might look like a statement of the obvious. However, it needs to be stressed again that, quite different to the theological and hermeneutical teleologies of liberation hermeneutics and its motif of liberation from the margins, the praxis of mutuality operates within the agonisms of relational power, seeking to resist the tendency in biblical interpretation to move to sublation or resolution.

A striking example of mutuality operating within the structures of discursive power proceeds from the analysis of 5:1-20, the man who lives among the tombs. This pericope narrates only the partial transformation of what binds the man – his 'unclean spirits'. However, the townspeople, who supposedly had bound him in the first place, also held power over the man and are still present at the end of the pericope as troubling purveyors of power. There is no sense in this story that the man is to be liberated from this continued presence of discursive power by being granted his request to follow Jesus onto the boat and out of the relational tension that surrounds him. Rather, he is commissioned to go back to the people who had denied his own power for self-survival and mutual relationship. This aspect of domination is neither sublated nor resolved in the

passage and hence 5:1-20 can be seen as only the beginning of a struggle for mutual relating.

Similarly, at the end of 3:1-6, the power structures still remain and emerge as threatening after the physical transformation of the 'man with the withered hand'. The somewhat enigmatic 'they,' introduced in 3:2, are not included in the relational dynamics of the transformation they witnessed inside of the synagogue, yet 'they,' now named as the Pharisees at the end of the pericope, displace the seemingly liberatory nature of that space by their gathering with the Herodians outside of the synagogue to seek ways to destroy Jesus (3:6). Therefore, Jesus' invitation and the man's choosing to respond to it do not render the relational dynamics of this scene liberated from exclusion and dominating power. Rather, with the supposed threat that such an act of transformation presented to religious authorities, struggles with those authorities were imagined to have continued. For Jesus, the struggle beyond this encounter points forward into Mark forebodingly all the way to the cross. As for the man, the reader is left to speculate as to how his open struggle to renegotiate identity and power leaves him within the discourse of religious/theological and political power of Capernaum. Whilst his physical recovery might be celebrated, his societal status is far from secured. Indeed, as one group reader put it: *'They might cut off his head'*<sup>1</sup>.

Structures of power are also retained in the struggles for survival and transformation in the two encounters Jesus has with women. Drawing on the emphases of group readers and feminist critiques of 5:21-43 and 7:24-30, Jesus is not seen as one who breaks the bonds of gendered and ethnic domination; rather, he is seen to an extent to collude with them. In 5:21-43, unlike the male protagonist in the story, Jairus, who openly negotiates his daughter's healing, the woman is forced to take healing and power from Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> 'A' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.10

surreptitiously. Her gendered alterity is not somehow surpassed in the pericope. Similarly, in 7:24-30 the woman faces the pejorative structures of power wherein ethnically charged difference is retained in the story such that whilst healing is gained for her daughter, the woman is humiliated in the process. Perhaps there is nowhere in the six pericopae of this dissertation more than in 15:1-5 wherein the structures of hegemonic power are retained. Here, no amount of incitement to re-imagine power via the spacious silence of Jesus is enough to transcend structures of power and death that seem to run with dramatic inevitability throughout the gospel to this point.

Thus, from the readings of the pericopae studied in this dissertation, the praxis of mutuality clearly operates within the retention of power differentials. This conclusion is significant for the recovery movement within mental health, particularly keeping in mind the movement's emphasis on partnership and dialogue. This dissertation offers the point that 'recovery' takes place for these textual characters within the struggles of hegemonic relational dynamics. On one hand, this emphasis simply reinforces a key proposition of pastoral care practitioners who utilise a liberation hermeneutics paradigm: that the relational dynamics of poor mental health are set within a social structure of power that is in ways hegemonic.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it offers a crucial development: encounters with persons with poor mental health exercising agencies of recovery are encounters that expect the agonisms of societal power to remain largely intact for such persons, and not give way to a liberative site of the resolution of those agonisms. Viewed through the textual lens of this dissertation, various degrees and forms of hegemonic societal power might be seen as constants in the emergence of recovery.

A second heuristic drawn from this work is that mutuality operates in these texts according to gender-specific delineations of power. This can be demonstrated in

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<sup>1</sup> Pattison, S. (1997) *Pastoral Care and Liberation Theology* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p.94

analysing the axis of open versus hidden forms of agency, as alluded to above. The question of the potential hiddenness of postcolonial agency was raised in Chapter Two, where in considering the work of James C. Scott it was asked whether or not mutuality might be seen to operate in Markan texts as an open or as a more hidden form of postcolonial praxis.<sup>1</sup> In terms of the readings of the pericopae of this dissertation, the results are split almost entirely along lines of gendered differentiation. For instance, in 5:21-43 the agency of the woman with haemorrhages is seen to be an intentionally hidden and liminal act of survival. Similarly, the confrontation that the Syrophenician woman initiates in 7:24-30, as direct as it might be, takes place in the privacy, or hiddenness, of a home. Interestingly, neither of these encounters was read by group readers to be ones wherein mutual relating was seen to be present much at all. Even if the movement within each pericope towards greater intimacy is taken as evidence of the praxis of mutuality, it is seen to operate more as a by-product of other agencies rather than as a praxis that was intended from the outset of the encounter. Thus, what might distinguish the instances of more hidden postcolonial praxes of resistance and transformation is that where the praxis of mutuality does seem to become augmented, it is pushed into the situation more than invited.

For instance, the Syrophenician woman is seen to renegotiate the terms of colonial relational dynamics and thus possibly bring Jesus to a more mutual form of praxis via the use of rhetorical mimicry. The mutuality of the encounter, if it is argued to be there, serves as a corollary of mimicry not an enabler of it. Similarly, the debated greater mutuality that emerges between Jesus and the woman with haemorrhages in 5:33-34 is a result of the surreptitious nature of her agency being made public. Mutual relating is not sought at the outset. Jesus does not, at first, notice the woman; she has to stretch out to reach him.

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<sup>1</sup> See Scott, J. C. (1995) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press

By contrast, a male, Jairus, who in 5:21-43 negotiates a healing for his daughter in public stands as a clear example of open agency. Such open acts of resistive praxis are seen with the other males of the pericopae: such as the man among the tombs in 5:1-20 who runs towards Jesus in full view; the man in the synagogue in 3:1-6 whose decisive action was open and public, literally in the middle of relational space in the synagogue at Capernaum; and finally Jesus himself as interpreted in 15:1-5 to offer an open yet silent moment of mutual relating, albeit one that ultimately fails.

The praxis of mutuality is not a more hidden form of postcolonial agency by nature. Rather, this praxis delineates along lines of gender identity. As a praxis operating within hegemonic relational dynamics, the embodied double-othering of females is played out through the perceived operation of mutuality, such that the subaltern females of these texts are seen to exercise a hiddenness in their praxes. This is the reverse of Heyward's notion of relational power as the mutuality which might be expected to exist between persons<sup>1</sup>. For in the case of these women it appears that there was an expectation that mutuality would be absent, not present, thus necessitating more hidden forms of agency. For males acting within colonial relational contexts, open displays of mutual relating were demonstrated as not only permissible, but beneficial.

Not only is the openness of the praxis of mutuality in these pericopae gender specific, a third heuristic drawn from this work is that male praxis of mutuality opens the way to transformative encounters not as a by-product of other praxes, but as an enabler of them. For instance, in 5:1-20 Jesus and the man among the tombs are both characters whose identities and agencies in the text are subversive of hegemonic relational power. Their praxis is successful as an emancipatory tool due to the relative presence of mutuality in dialogue. By contrast, Jesus' binaristic rhetoric in 3:19b-35, which is shrouded in

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<sup>1</sup> See Heyward, C. (1999) *Saving Jesus from those who are right: Rethinking what it means to be Christian* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press p.3

ambiguity, is marked by a profound absence of mutuality in its full form. Whilst it is resistive, it is not aspiring of a positive transformation of relational dynamics he shares with his biological family or with the scribes from Jerusalem. Indeed, the strategy of ambiguity that I stated Jesus employed in 3:19b-35 is one that does not succeed effectively to resist the hegemonic acts of labelling he faces, let alone work to transform those relational dynamics. In fact, as presented in Chapter Four, the absence of the fuller praxis of mutuality serves as a prelude to the souring of relations between his family and the scribes as the gospel narrative goes on.

Where there was a relative absence of the praxis of mutuality, effective resistance was present but the transformation of hegemonic relational dynamics was less so. In the two pericopae where the agency of females was explored – 5:21-43 and 7:24-30 – the relative absence of mutuality in those relational encounters did not mean, as I have shown, that agency was entirely ineffective in those instances. Fundamentally, these pericopae are stories about the desire for healings, both of which successfully occur. The relative absence of the praxis of mutuality in these encounters does not undermine the notion that mutuality serves as an enabler of other praxes; it merely points to the conclusion that other postcolonial praxes can operate successfully without the aid of mutual relating as forms of resistance, but they do not operate as successfully as praxes that facilitate the transformation of hegemonic relational dynamics.

This role of mutuality as an enabler of other praxes corresponds to what I argued in Chapter Two about the potential of mutuality as a praxis that works in conjunction with other postcolonial praxes. In that chapter I posited that the postcolonial praxes of hybridity, mimicry, ambiguity, sly civility, and other such incremental and supplemental forms of agency might be present and interact with the praxis of mutuality in the relational dynamics between characters in the selected Markan texts. Yet I also argued for

a crucial delineation between these postcolonial praxes and mutuality, such that mutuality is a praxis that is both resistive and aspiring of the transformation of hegemonic relational dynamics and thus, in its full form, is inherently a more positive and hopeful praxis than its counterparts are.

How hopeful has the praxis of mutuality in these textual relational dynamics been? Whilst I never argued that the praxis of mutuality was likely to tell 'tall tales' of the overthrow of colonial structures, given these conclusions above about the operation of mutuality in the relational dynamics of Mark's gospel, it might be stated that the high hope that mutuality as a postcolonial praxis might push at the boundaries of postcolonial notions of agency has not altogether been realised. For as it operates in these Markan texts, mutuality is discernible as a praxis that remains tied to structures of colonial power in general, and to gender in particular.

Is it the case, then, that mutuality in the end emerges more as an effective praxis of resistive survival than of transformation? When the pericopae of this dissertation are considered again, it is truly only in the story of the man among the tombs (5:1-20) that the praxis of mutuality opens the way for the relational dynamics of the man's life to be transformed. This man who had elicited the fear of others to the point where he was chained up and left among the dead (5:3-4), through the mutual praxis of dialogue about the man's way to healing between Jesus and the man among the tombs, ends the pericope leaving the very people who had shunned him amazed (5:20). In no other pericope is such a transformation of relational dynamics witnessed. For whilst in 15:1-5 Pilate is also 'amazed' at Jesus' potentially invitational praxis of mutuality in silence (15:5), the outcome of that exchange is not the transformation of hegemonic relational dynamics but the execution of the silent man. In 3:1-6, a pericope in many ways demonstrative of the efficacy of mutuality to enable another praxis of resistance and transformation, in this



case hybridity, the foreboding ending to the story ('The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him' (3:6)) leaves a question mark over the extent of the transformation of the man with the withered/divine hand's relational dynamics, even if his physical transformation is more clear. Similarly, the relational dynamics of 3:19b-35 reveal no transformation of the rift narrated in the pericope between Jesus and his family and some scribes from Jerusalem.

It is tempting, therefore, to view the operation of mutuality in its full form of aspiring transformation as limited within the relational dynamics of these texts. However, in cases where the praxis of mutuality is seen to operate at least to some extent, its effect on the dynamics of power is such that although power dynamics are not overcome, they are rendered more diffuse. For instance, in 3:1-6, the dynamics of power held in tension between Jesus and those watching him, through the praxis of mutuality, appear to become diffused as that dynamic opens to include the hybrid power of the man with the withered/divine hand. Similarly, in both 5:21-43 and 7:24-30, women othered by power differentials of gender, economics, and ethnicity, whilst not interpreted in this dissertation to transform hegemonic relational dynamics, do offer those relational contexts what Bhabha has called a 'supplemental position' to or 'slight alteration' of such dynamics<sup>1</sup>.

This potential of the praxis of mutuality to render power dynamics more diffuse might easily be overlooked. However, I argue that this operates as more than just an instance of resistive survival, but actually serves as a beginning for a change in hegemonic relational dynamics operating as a transient form of praxis. For, in returning to the Foucauldian understanding of how counter-discourses might be articulated, the praxis of mutuality might be seen as an *ad hoc* counter-discourse to hegemonic discourses that by necessity

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<sup>1</sup> Bhabha, H. (1995) 'Translator translated, W. J. T. Mitchell talks to Homi Bhabha' *Artform* (March) p.82

must be exercised again and again in the re-imagining of power.<sup>1</sup> The question remains as to how the textual exploration of this final heuristic drawn from this dissertation of a supplemental and incremental form of postcolonial agency might correlate with praxes in context. Of course, as I argued in Chapter Two regarding the supposed efficacy of *Third Space* praxes of resistance, James C. Scott's work on the hidden nature of resistance suggests that the presence and effectiveness of mutuality as a supplemental and incremental praxis in context will be difficult to assess.<sup>2</sup> Yet perhaps it is this heuristic which might be most effective of all in the operation of mutuality as a postcolonial praxis of resistance and transformation. Indeed, as Bhabha argues, incremental and often liminal praxes of 'slight alterations and displacements' are 'often the most significant elements in a process of subversion and transformation'.<sup>3</sup>

Such then are the correlative heuristics of this dissertation's read of the relational dynamics of six Markan pericopae. To conclude that the most that is seen of mutuality in terms of a praxis that might lead to the transformation of hegemonic relational dynamics is a supplemental and incremental form of agency seems to offer very little. Yet with the multiple and generally consistent emphases of group readers on the struggle of the characters of these texts, and their associations with their own lived experience of struggle, such a thin space of hope is significant. Indeed, I would herald these interpretations of textual instances of resistance, and the beginnings of the transformation of hegemonic relational dynamics to postcolonial ones, as the most significant achievements of this dissertation. For in them, the difference that this perceived alterity embodies is not overcome, nor is it sublated, rather it is seen as an avenue for survival

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault, M. (1982) 'The Subject and Power' in Dreyfus, H. & Rabinow, P. (eds.) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press p.221

<sup>2</sup> 'Unless one can penetrate the official transcript of both subordinates and elites, a reading of the social evidence will almost always represent a confirmation of the status quo in hegemonic terms' (see Scott, J. C. (1995) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press p.90).

<sup>3</sup> Bhabha, H. (1995) 'Translator translated, W. J. T. Mitchell talks to Homi Bhabha' *Artform* (March) p.82

and even hope. Such insights into these biblical texts have possible because of the partners in reading that were engaged in this dissertation. It is to an assessment of that hermeneutical decision that this dissertation now makes its final turn.

## 7.2 Mutuality and Mark

### *Hermeneutical achievements and limitations*

In terms of this dissertation's location within biblical criticism, one of the key components of this work is its use of a dialogical reading method. One of the central achievements of this approach is that group readers offered an expansion of the interpretation of the relational dynamics of the texts in question. This occurred in several ways. First, group readers related their own struggles to those of the characters in the pericopae. For instance, the struggles interpreted by group readers to be present in 3:1-6 described feelings of unworthiness,<sup>1</sup> 'prejudice',<sup>2</sup> name-calling,<sup>3</sup> and as reflecting personhood that is 'different'<sup>4</sup>, hidden<sup>5</sup>, 'cursed'<sup>6</sup>, 'alienated',<sup>7</sup> a 'project' and an 'experiment'<sup>8</sup>, rejected<sup>9</sup> and even

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<sup>1</sup> 'It is said in the Bible, Jesus said go and sin no more. That part always scares me. Somehow sin is attached to affliction. I struggle with that sin leads to punishment. There are different schools of thought that mental illness is possession or spiritual warfare,' 'C' from Reading Group Three, April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.12 commenting on 3:1-6.

<sup>2</sup> 'A: Yeah. It's called prejudice. They don't understand, they hate them automatically. They make up stories. Our Lord never had prejudice. He tried to help as many people as possible; B: They were probably afraid that sometimes they might find it, might call it an illness in the hand. People are afraid of the mentally ill; D: You think so?; B: Yeah,' from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.3 commenting on 3:1-6.

<sup>3</sup> 'They call you names – loony, crazy,' 'B' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.8, commenting on 3:1-6

<sup>4</sup> 'Yes, I feel that when you are different you stand out. Everybody watches him and is seeing what you are going to do about him.' B from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.3 commenting on 3:1-6

<sup>5</sup> 'He hid out. He wasn't accepted, he was different,' 'B' From Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.8 commenting on 3:1-6

<sup>6</sup> 'Maybe he had a family but when he got disabled, they said, 'you got yourself cursed, get out of here', 'C' from Reading Group Three, April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.12 commenting on 3:1-6

<sup>7</sup> 'When Jesus was going about teaching and preaching these people were so obsessed with the law. When you were struck with leprosy at that time there was no cure. They were alienated from normal people', 'B' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.15 commenting on 3:1-6

<sup>8</sup> 'He became a project - he was used, like an experiment', 'B' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.15 commenting on 3:1-6

<sup>9</sup> 'The crowd rejects him the same reason they reject Jesus. They don't want to identify with Jesus', 'C' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.15 commenting on 3:1-6

'guilty'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, beyond this pericope, it was questioned by readers whether characters in relational encounters felt stupid and wondered if they were 'normal',<sup>2</sup> begging,<sup>3</sup> requiring mercy,<sup>4</sup> trusting people they did not know,<sup>5</sup> and taking risky actions out of desperation.<sup>6</sup>

The fundamental expansion that group readers offered, and this was seen across reading groups, was the emphasis on the profound alterity that biblical characters were perceived to inhabit. This made relational encounters much less straightforward than some of the staid subject locations often presented in biblical scholarship of characters such as Jew and Gentile (5:1-20), male and female (7:24-30), Jesus and 'the Pharisees' (3:1-6) and so on. What was added by group readers was a thicker description of the imagined personal nature of colonial landscape. Thus, encounters were seen as 'upsetting' experiences,<sup>7</sup> so much so that 'sometimes the most you can say is nothing'.<sup>8</sup> When encounters were read to be more hopeful in their emancipatory possibilities such hopefulness was often set in relief to a more existentially rich backdrop. For instance, in the case of the man among the

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<sup>1</sup> 'I think he was probably ambivalent. He wanted to be healed but he felt guilty. We know how that is. Guilty that he didn't go to Jesus of his own will', 'C' from Reading Group Four, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.16 commenting on 3:1-6

<sup>2</sup> 'B: Stupid. Because he is just standing there. His hand is not like anyone else's. He's wondering if he is normal; C: The man feels responsible; A: He can't help it, although I think some of the people are wondering how he had it; D: He might be nervous or afraid, in the spotlight. Before he was not in the spotlight, now everybody can see him', from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.6 commenting on 3:1-6

<sup>3</sup> 'She had humility. I beg to people sometimes, well yeah, if I'm asking for forgiveness or I don't want to be punished. Like with the stuff at the home - be merciful, have mercy,' 'C' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.44, commenting on 7:24-30

<sup>4</sup> 'For her forgiveness, she needs to be forgiven' 'A' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.44, commenting on 7:24-30

<sup>5</sup> 'A: Could be, opening up to someone you don't really know. B: Where he comes from it is. A: It shows trust. I myself wouldn't trust in doing it like that,' from Reading Group Two, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.47, commenting on 7:24-30

<sup>6</sup> 'Well it seems to me that she's kind of desperate. Her daughter has a demon or whatever. She doesn't quite know what to do about it. She's probably tried numerous things without getting anything out of it. So she's looking to somebody to help the situation she has,' 'A' from Reading Group Two, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.48, commenting on 7:24-30

<sup>7</sup> 'It would be upsetting. I would feel disillusioned, not know what to say, or say I didn't think you were like this...I think some people have this mental constitution to react in that way [referring to the Syrophenician woman's reaction to Jesus in 7:28] but...mental health problems can overlap with problems with hating yourself, feeling depressed and getting really high and manic...' 'A' from Reading Group Three, April 24<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.50, commenting on 7:24-30

<sup>8</sup> 'A' from Reading Group Two, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.71, commenting on 15:1-5

tombs in 5:1-20, despite being described as a person who was *'troubled'*,<sup>1</sup> punished,<sup>2</sup> a *'loser'* whom nobody liked,<sup>3</sup> and so on, such a relational encounter was still seen as a possibility for hope and transformation, of *'giving up the control'* and daring to *'let go'*.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the breaking of chains,<sup>5</sup> and becoming *'OK'* were profoundly significant images for certain readers<sup>6</sup>. Fundamentally, group readers did not overlook, rather they probed as an important aspect of biblical interpretation, the profundity of human struggle when set within contexts where mutual relating is deficient.

Another significant hermeneutical feature that I argued pursuing a dialogical form of postcolonial biblical criticism would enable is the resistance of the tendency to elevate the identity and agency of Jesus, and relegate the identity and agency of so-called minor characters. However, what actually occurred was a fairly consistent pattern of interpretations across reading groups that elevated Jesus' status, often at times beyond the text's narration (e.g. Jesus was described as *'our Lord'* who *'never had prejudice'*<sup>7</sup>, as one who is *'divine'* and who *'didn't make mistakes like human beings'*,<sup>8</sup> and as the *'all-powerful God'* who *'doesn't need to play games with anybody'*<sup>9</sup>). As well as this, though, so-called

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<sup>1</sup> *'Troubled. Seeking a miracle in life from the Lord. He's going through hard times and needs a good miracle. He really needs something good to happen to him'*, 'B' from Reading Group One, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.54, commenting on 5:1-20

<sup>2</sup> *'It's a kind of punishment. Maybe they thought they were protecting him'*, 'D' from Reading Group One, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.54, commenting on 5:1-20

<sup>3</sup> *'He might have seemed a loser, might not have liked him. No one wanted to have anything to do with him'*, 'C' from Reading Group One, April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.56, commenting on 5:1-20

<sup>4</sup> *'A: It's giving up the control; B: You dare to let go, like the OCD, you dare to be mediocre.'* from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.62, commenting on 5:1-20

<sup>5</sup> *'To me the image is powerful – breaking chains.'* 'A' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.61, in response to the question: *Is the man powerful or powerless would you say?* in 5:1-20

<sup>6</sup> *'That he was screaming, naked, beating himself, lonely – now he is OK, I think that to me is no joke. I pray for that every day.'* 'B' from Reading Group Three, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.62, commenting on 5:1-20

<sup>7</sup> *'Yeah. It's called prejudice. They don't understand, they hate them automatically. They make up stories. Our Lord never had prejudice. He tried to help as many people as possible.'* 'A' from Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.3

<sup>8</sup> *'Jesus was divine, he didn't make mistakes like human beings.'* 'D' from Reading Group One, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.20

<sup>9</sup> *'I think Christ is an unassuming man. He doesn't need to play games with anybody. He is the all-powerful God.'* 'B' from Reading Group Two, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.34

minor characters were also seen as significant agents in the relational spaces they shared with Jesus (e.g. from the man in 3:1-6 who demonstrates belief<sup>1</sup> and holds on to hope,<sup>2</sup> to the woman in 5:21-43 who 'takes something' from Jesus<sup>3</sup> and heals herself<sup>4</sup>). In this vein, it is not the agency of Jesus, nor the agency of textual 'others', but the dynamics of power between these characters that is stressed.

This emphasis on the dynamics in between characters relates to the place that this dissertation's reflections on Mark have in postcolonial biblical criticism in two specific ways. One is that in this work Jesus and the characters he encounters do not act either as simply pro- or anti-colonial agents. Rather, what emerges is more akin to Samuel's notion of characters as operating along an axis of both antagonism and affiliation to colonial discourse.<sup>5</sup> For instance, on one hand, Jesus undermines hegemonic praxis, such as in his recognition of and dialogical engagement with the man among the tombs in 5:1-20, or in his subversion of the authority of those who watch him in 3:1-6 in his invitation for the man with the withered hand to come forward. On the other hand, Jesus also colludes with the structures of hegemonic relational dynamics such as in his ethnocentric othering of the Syrophoenician woman in 7:24-30. Indeed, as I argued in Chapter Five, in 5:21-43 the woman with haemorrhages exercises agency liminally, expecting Jesus to act complicity within hegemonic gradations of gendered power, and by the same token, Jairus acts under the same assumption, but to his favour, by exercising agency openly.

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<sup>1</sup> 'He played a big part. He had to believe,' 'C' Reading Group One, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.6

<sup>2</sup> 'He accepted what had happened to him and he did not try to deny them because he went and accepted them. He tried to hold on to hope and he got better,' 'E' from Reading Group Two, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.9

<sup>3</sup> 'The crowd think she's ripped off this situation. She takes something from him. He was going to see someone else,' 'B' from Reading Group Two, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.35

<sup>4</sup> '**What part do you feel each person plays in their own healing?** B: A major role: they heal themselves. It's just the way it happens, you have to do certain things; **And in the story?** D: An important role. Not sure if it is small or large. I hope it would be large. You have to take care of the situation you are in. There was not much knowledge about medication, so there was a lot of self-healing,' from Reading Group Two, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.36

<sup>5</sup> See Samuel, S. (2007) *A postcolonial reading of Mark's story of Jesus* London & New York: T&T Clark International p.156

The importance of agency and the view of encounters between characters in Mark as negotiations with power resonate with the other connection to postcolonial biblical criticism that this dissertation sought to explore: the attempt to 'resurrect lost voices' in the hope that 'the once-colonised' might produce 'knowledge of their own'<sup>1</sup>. This is exactly what I argue to occur in these pericopae in the central role that characters have in negotiating the dynamics of relational power within the hegemonic structures of their situation. Radical alterity, postcolonial agency, and the possibilities of hopeful counter-discourse all offer expansions of how the Markan texts of this dissertation might be read. These are articulations of lost voices.

Yet the significance of the dialogical method in postcolonial biblical criticism extends beyond the text alone, and to the act of inclusion that this method represents. As a practical attempt to answer Spivak's challenge regarding subaltern speech<sup>2</sup>, the voices of those who have variously described what it is to know struggles within the hegemonic relational dynamics of poor mental health, serve as a reminder to biblical studies of the significance of the colonial experience beyond the communal/structural level of analysis, and at the interpersonal level wherein the structures of power are felt. This simple yet profound emphasis should not be overlooked in how it correlates with the lived contexts of mental health today.

In this dissertation, mutuality served as a heuristic for developing a dialogical reading space. The hope inherent in this methodology was that no single interpretative approach or conclusion was valued or validated over another, and that readers were encouraged to retain the tensions of different interpretations of the texts as they emerged in reading. Reflecting on the practice of this methodology, by and large tensions were retained. In

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<sup>1</sup> Sugirtharajah, R. S. (1999) 'A brief memorandum on Postcolonialism and biblical studies' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 73 p.4

<sup>2</sup> Spivak, G. (1988) 'Can the Subaltern speak?' in Ashcroft, B. *et al* (eds.) *The Postcolonial studies reader* London & New York: Routledge pp.24-28 (original work 1988)

part this was the product of pursuing a flatter reading relationship between readers and myself as facilitator, as discussed in Chapter Three. Of course, it is difficult to assess how well this 'flatness' was achieved. On one hand, the reading transcripts that are included in the appendix of this dissertation offer testament to the relative success of the model. For instance, one reader stated in the middle of an exchange between himself and another reader: *'We all have our opinions here, right 'D'?'.*<sup>1</sup> I might hope that this was a function of the sort of interpretative space that I endeavoured to nurture during readings.

On the other hand, the success of this dialogical model was in the end limited in part by the challenge faced in numerous reading groups to remain focused on the act of reading. Such distractibility sometimes resulted in readings that look disparate and even incoherent. Whilst this is a fair criticism, it should be qualified. While for some of the readers the ability, or indeed the desire, to focus on one task in the company of others was limited, this is also where the gift of these interpretations was found: the unexpected and unlikely interpretations of these biblical stories by these group readers.

That said, it is clear that my practice of a dialogical form of postcolonial biblical criticism is also open to further critiques. One is that despite engaging with a reading population that was hitherto underrepresented in biblical studies, an area for future research might be to probe more extensively the significance of intercultural differences in reading insights. Although the reading groups included Caucasian, African-American, Italian, and Latino readers, the groups were not as culturally diverse as those of other dialogical projects<sup>2</sup>, nor was there any attempt to probe such cultural diversity as a measure of interpretation. Indeed, it would be an invaluable asset for biblical studies within the area

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<sup>1</sup> *'What role does Jesus have in this? C: Nothing, Jesus had no role in it; B: He's the saviour; D: I think Jesus cast the demon out; C: I think the devil has to leave. We all have our opinions here, right 'D'?' from Reading Group One, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006, Reading Group Transcripts p.47*

<sup>2</sup> See de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) (2004) 'Through the eyes of another: Objectives and backgrounds' in *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.32



of mental health to be expanded by the vast diversity of global perspectives on reading texts in contexts beyond the ones this dissertation explored.<sup>1</sup>

Another limitation of this work and an area for future research is the relationship between Bible reading and its impact on social structures.<sup>2</sup> Whilst such a research concern is beyond conventional biblical criticism, it does invite an interdisciplinary approach to reading biblical texts that this dissertation's contextually-driven work at least points towards. Indeed, one of the most significant shortcomings of this dissertation is the absence of directly related engagement in praxis in relation to mental health. Gerald West is clear that the work of his own Contextual Bible study consortium is not work done for the sake of research alone, but is done to effect change. Future work might take up West's challenge and attempt to embed academic work into the daily contexts of persons who experience poor mental health.<sup>3</sup> That said, it would be remiss to entirely discount the practical impact that the dissemination of ideas in the form of the written word can have in North-Atlantic societies. For instance, it is argued that one practical impact that may lead to a change in the praxis of readers is 'perspective transformation', the idea that through acts of reading participants alter their views of each other and of the issues that the reading highlights.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See for example de Wit's intercultural reading project which highlighted the significance of liturgical framings of reading experiences (see de Wit, H. & Kool, M. (2004) 'Tableaux vivants' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.58) as well profoundly varied contextual locations (see for example a reading group from El Salvador who experience 'violence on the streets, in homes, in school, and between rival gangs. People in former war zones have been traumatized. Others experience oppression, daily hunger, and homelessness' (see *Ibid.* p.81).

<sup>2</sup> See de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) (2004) 'Through the eyes of another: Objectives and backgrounds' in *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.42, who argues that very little is still known about the exact nature of this relationship.

<sup>3</sup> See West, G. (2004) 'Artful facilitation and creating a safe interpretive site: An analysis of aspects of a Bible study' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.211

<sup>4</sup> See Schipani, D. *et al* (2004) 'Through the eyes of practical theology and theological education' in de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.440

A further limiting factor is that the texts for this dissertation were selected by me before reading with groups began, indeed before the readers were even met. Whilst it was decided that the highly varied population of group members from week to week in each reading location necessitated the pre-selection of texts and the questions attached to those texts, future research might wish to embed more closely within a reading community, enabling such communities both to select texts and to generate more of their own questions regarding those texts, particularly before the Bible studies occur. Indeed, that the texts were biblical was also decided beforehand, and thus reflects a limitation that future work might wish to address by exploring extra-biblical texts that readers themselves might wish to explore.

Beyond group readers not selecting texts and questions for the textual studies beforehand, another limitation of this work is in how undeveloped the relationship was between group readers' and trained scholars' interpretations. I chose to offer no information to group readers about the historical background to texts or about the varying interpretations of scholars concerning the relational dynamics of the particular stories. This was avoided in order to offset a strong division in expertise between myself as facilitator and the group readers. Thus the ways in which these differing interpretations of group readers and trained scholars were held in tension was something that I did unilaterally as the author of this work. That is, in the end this aspect of the dissertation lacked mutuality; mutuality hit its glass ceiling.

A further limitation that also relates to the interpretative insights of group readers is that such readers' insights into biblical texts were solicited but no critiques of the same were offered. In organising group readers' interpretations, what I looked for was consistent with the sampling methodology that I employed in reviewing scholars' perspectives.

That is, I highlighted certain tendencies and emphases that I saw in the group readers' interpretive work.

That said, I believe that the decision not to offer critique of readers during the Bible study process is justified for two reasons. Firstly, to have offered critiques of group readers' perspectives in the course of the Bible studies may have threatened the hermeneutic pursued, which sought to maintain as flat a reading relationship as possible. It could be argued that critique may have produced a genuine dialogue about the differences between the readers' interpretations and the critique being offered. However, critique also would have run the risk, at best, of encouraging group readers only to offer the sort of interpretations that they believed the facilitator wished to hear, and at worst, of shutting people down from contributing anything at all. This last possibility is no small thing for persons with poor mental health who might find themselves in other settings in the presence of experts who offer corrective visions of their insights.

Secondly, it would have been nonsensical to take insights from group readers, offered spontaneously and without edit, and after the act of reading was over, to apply the same sort of critiques that are applied to biblical scholars whose work has been developed over the course of many years of training. Not only would this inhabit a certain level of dishonesty and non-mutuality – by offering no critique in the presence of group readers, only to offer it when they are no longer present to hear it – it would miss the point about the significance of these group readers' contribution to biblical interpretation. Group readers offer fresh insights and expansions of textual interpretations freed from some of the tried and tested trajectories and theological teleologies often in operation in biblical scholarship. To then apply those trajectories to such expansions without the platform to have those criticisms returned would potentially set up group readers' contributions for failure from the outset.

This tension within this project between so-called trained and untrained interpretative work begs the question as to the place within the rigour of academic dialogue that readers such as the group readers of this dissertation have. Indeed, given this dissertation's core concept of the praxis of mutuality, the question is how much can dialogical biblical studies truly be mutual? The challenges of keeping focus, and at times keeping individuals engaged in the reading process in any coherent way at all, were significant in this work. As I argued above, the possibility of embedding within the life of a community over a long-term period might offer various benefits. It might be more possible for the same group readers to engage in the initial reading process in dialogue with each other, subsequently to come into dialogue, via the facilitator, with the insights of trained biblical scholarship in general, and then perhaps even with the facilitator in particular. This, of course, runs the risk of changing the relationship between group readers and facilitator, but if the aim of such an approach is to develop an organic intellectual reading relationship with group readers, then perhaps change in that relationship is what is desired. This dissertation's reading population, with its transient attendance at the locations reading groups met, would not allow for such a development. However, work not dissimilar to this has been done in Hans de Wit's intercultural reading project, wherein reading groups exchange communal interpretations with global partners and then respond to the same, enabling both groups to see the text through the eyes of another group's interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of future research, there are three further areas of interest that might relate well to this dissertation's core concept of mutuality. The first area of interest lies within the developing field of postcolonial theologies<sup>2</sup> and specifically the Korean concept of *jeong*

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<sup>1</sup> de Wit, H. *et al* (eds.) (2004) 'Through the eyes of another: Objectives and backgrounds' in *Through the eyes of another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies p.5

<sup>2</sup> See Keller, C. *et al* (eds.) *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press

presented by Anne Joh.<sup>1</sup> *Jeong*, argues Joh, 'connotes with the compassion, empathy, solidarity, and understanding that emerges between connected hearts', blurring boundaries between self and other.<sup>2</sup> Yet *jeong* also captures the sense of struggle that relational dynamics inhabit, emerging 'out of relationships that are not always based on mutuality'.<sup>3</sup> Despite the commonalities between my own work and Joh's presentation of *jeong*, her interpretation of Jesus sees him blur and transgress the boundary between oppressor and oppressed through the *jeong* of compassion and empathy. However, exactly how such a transgression is manifest in the gospels, especially where the praxis of Jesus looks to be much less in the spirit of *jeong* (such as in 3:19b-34 and 7:24-30) is unclear.

The second area of interest for future research lies within disability studies. Beyond the work of Nancy Eiesland that I explored in this dissertation because of her interest in mutuality, future research might relate the concept of mutuality as a postcolonial praxis to theologies of disability that have a Trinitarian theological grounding. One such theological approach to disability is offered by Jennie Weiss Block, who proposes a theological interplay between the Church and the disability-rights movement<sup>4</sup> via the notion that the 'true human being' finds itself in a Trinitarian grounded communion with others where inclusion is found within the 'copious host', Jesus Christ. Humans then act as co-hosts of that Christ in being present to the other. For Block, this co-hosting can only take place when persons with disabilities are also present.<sup>5</sup> On one hand, this sort of mandate to recognise the previously othered subaltern is a relatively common theme in

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<sup>1</sup> See Joh, W. A. (2004) 'The transgressive power of Jeong: A postcolonial hybridization of Christology' in Keller, C. *et al* (eds.) *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press pp.149-163

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp.152-153

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.153

<sup>4</sup> See Weiss Block, J. (2002) *Copious Host: A theology of access for people with disabilities* New York, NY: Continuum Press p.21 cited in Reinders, H. (2008) *Receiving the gift of friendship: Profound disability, theological anthropology, and ethics* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company p.181ff

<sup>5</sup> See *Ibid.* p.181ff

the textual interpretations of this dissertation where the initial manifestation of the praxis of mutuality was often seen as an agency that sought recognition. For the man with the withered hand (3:1-6), Jesus recognises the already-present man with disability. For the man among the tombs (5:1-20), it is the man's running towards Jesus that demands recognition that he is a capable agent present within relational dynamics. For the woman with haemorrhages (5:21-43), her reaching out to touch Jesus was the demand that her very body be recognised as being present in the midst of the business of healing being transacted between Jesus and Jairus. On the other hand, when Block's notion of the Christ of the Trinity as 'copious host' is considered, this dissertation's reading of 7:24-30 immediately comes to mind as an agonistic conversation partner for such a theological prolegomenon, where Jesus' hosting involves the throwing of food (metaphorically at least) and insults.

The third and final word concerning possible future directions for this dissertation's work should go to Stanley Hauerwas. In his own work, Hauerwas decided to stop writing on the subject of intellectual disability, stating that if one is really to care 'about' such individuals then one cannot write about them, only with them.<sup>1</sup> In other words, there is an ethical imperative to know such people lest writing not refer to actual people but merely be about the memory of persons.<sup>2</sup> There is a spectral or phantasmal presence in the pages of this dissertation, and indeed all biblical scholarship that seeks to be contextual, which demands that such work does not fall prey, as Reinders has warned, to using other people for our own purposes.<sup>3</sup> It remains, then, an open question and critique of this work, as well as an invitation for future scholarship, as to how much persons with poor mental health have been encountered and known in any sort of mutual relationship

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<sup>1</sup> Hauerwas, S. (1998) 'Timeful friends: Living with the handicapped' in *Sanctify them in the truth: Holiness exemplified* Nashville: Abingdon pp.143-156

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.144

<sup>3</sup> See Reinders, H. (2008) *Receiving the gift of friendship: Profound disability, theological anthropology, and ethics* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company p.205

through the course of this dissertation. Indeed, as Reinders urges, there is a theological necessity for friendship with persons with intellectual disabilities, and by extension persons with poor mental health, that no level of accrual of civil rights can secure<sup>1</sup> but must be received first as a gift<sup>2</sup>. It is in this hope for friendship that I desire that debate should be provoked by this work, not only from within the corridors and studies of the academy but in the thin spaces of struggle persons with poor mental health, such as the group readers of this dissertation, live with everyday. It is here that I wish for the debate to be most real and most incisive, for it is here that academic production will count, or in the end, it will count nowhere at all.

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<sup>1</sup> Reinders, H. (2008) *Receiving the gift of friendship: Profound disability, theological anthropology, and ethics* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company p.43

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.225

**APPENDIX**  
*READING GROUP TRANSCRIPTS*

**8.1 Reading Group Transcripts:** *Mark 3:1-6*

1Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. 2They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3And he said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Come forward.' 4Then he said to them, 'Is it lawful to do good or do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. 5He looked at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

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- V1 Who was this man 'with a withered hand'?
  - What might it feel like to be him?
  - Where is he to be found and how is he to be recognised?
  - What do we learn about this man?
  - Where are his friends?
  - What do you think he is doing in the synagogue?
- V2 Who are 'they'?
  - What do they know about Jesus?
  - What does Jesus know about them?
  - Why do you think 'they' are watching Jesus?
- V3 'Come forward'
  - What does this sound like to you? A command? A request?
  - Has anyone asked for help?
  - What is the 'man with the withered hand' come forward for?
  - Where was he? Can you picture where he might have been? Was he hidden?
  - Have you ever been asked to 'come forward'?
    - Who asked you?
    - What did it feel like?
  - Who or what is the focus at this point?
    - Jesus?
    - The man withered hand?
    - The withered hand without much attention given to the man?
    - 'Them'?
    - A teaching about the Sabbath?
    - Something else?
- V4 He said to them
  - Who gets to speak in this passage as a whole?



- Why do you think there isn't much of a conversation?
- What do you feel about that? Do you ever feel like you don't get to speak?
- V4 'Is it lawful to do good or harm...'
- What is Jesus most concerned about in this passage as a whole, healing the man or having an argument?
- What do you think he *should* be concerned about?
- V4 But they were silent
- Why do 'they' remain silent?
- Why do you think 'they' aren't named from the start?
- What sort of conversation would you describe this as? A good one? A bad one?
- Have you ever been in a situation like this, where people don't answer?
- V5 He looked around at them with anger
- Jesus is angry. How does that make you feel? Do you think he should be angry?
- Is anyone else angry?
- How do you think that 'the man with the withered hand' feels? How would you feel if you were him?
- V5 'Stretch out your hand'
- How do you think Jesus might have said this? Could you say it in the tone of voice you think he might have used?
- How does the man with the withered hand feel now? Do you think that he has any choice in what is happening?
- What about 'them', how do you think they feel?
- V5 He stretched it out and his hand was restored
- What part does the man play in his own healing?
- Did it cost him anything?
- What do you think 'they' think of the man now? How do you think 'they' will treat him?
- What is the most important thing to you about this episode?
- What kind of relationship is shared between the parties? Do you feel happy or not as happy about the quality of the relationships between the people involved?
- V6 The Pharisees...conspired with the Herodians...how to destroy him
- Now 'they' are named. Why are they named now, at the end, do you think?
- How do you feel towards them?
- Why do you think they reacted the way they did and planned how to destroy Jesus?
- What do you think 'destroy' might mean?
- Have you ever felt like someone was trying to destroy you?
- Where is Jesus now and where is the man? What is the nature of their relationship now?
- Do you think this episode was intended to solve problems or to cause them?
- Have you ever felt like any of these characters or that you have been in a situation like this before?

## READING GROUP ONE

March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006

A: Is it near the crucifixion. Are they ready to kill him? It's amazing how he can be so good to people all the time when the Pharisees were going against him.

**Who was this man 'with a withered hand'? What might it feel like to be him?**

A: A profound moment in his life. He saw the Lord in person. He heard him defend himself to the Pharisees. He was probably there to make a sacrifice in the Temple. Jesus put it to them squarely.

B: I think that he [the man with the withered hand] was sad, upset. In those days there was not much hope for the handicapped.

C: Everybody else in the place had a good hand.

D: Difficult to make a living. It didn't sound like he wanted to get help.

A: Just that Jesus was there, a coincidence.

B: He was just standing there.

**Where is he to be found and how is he to be recognised? Would people have noticed him?**

E: No. I don't know. There is so much evil in the world now.

B: Some of the crowd would call him names, making fun of it, because that's the way things are in the world.

A: Yes.

C: Others were feeling pity for him.

E: The crowd was making fun of him. Making fun of Jesus too, because he is trying to cure sick people. Maybe they thought he was a doctor; he was the Son of God.

B: Yes, I feel that when you are different you stand out. Everybody watches him and is seeing what you are going to do about him.

E: He without sin throw the first stone, so everybody is different.

**Different?**

A: Yeah. It's called prejudice. They don't understand, they hate them automatically. They make up stories. Our Lord never had prejudice. He tried to help as many people as possible.

**Where are his friends?**

B: They were probably afraid that sometimes they might find it, might call it an illness in the hand. People are afraid of the mentally ill.

D: You think so?

B: Yeah.

D: Some people, not all.

**Why?**

B: *They don't know how to behave toward them.*

E: *They think we're crazy. We're not sick. This is not our home, we don't live here.*

**What might it feel like to be this man?**

B: *Could be embarrassed. All the people were looking at his hand.*

D: *Maybe he's been praying for a cure. Nobody really hears him. But Jesus hears him and Jesus repairs his hand.*

**Would you have liked to have known more about him?**

B: *I would like to hear how he accepts it from the people how he thought he looked at him. His whole hand was deformed probably.*

C: *Diabetes.*

A: *If his hand was crooked.*

B: *How he felt.*

**Does Jesus understand how he feels?**

B: *No.*

A: *Yes. Maybe he already knew what the man was thinking.*

**Why didn't Jesus ask him if he wanted help?**

A: *Because he was the Son of God. He already knew the facts about it.*

**Who are 'they'?**

D: *Pharisees.*

**Why do you think 'they' are watching Jesus?**

D: *To see what he would do next.*

C: *Curious.*

A: *They already hated Jesus no matter what. They knew something was going to happen.*

B: *Maybe they thought he was a fake. They wanted to argue with him.*

**'Come forward' What does this sound like to you? A command? A request?**

B: *I think he was asking him.*

A: *A command. More of a command. Just by the way he said it, more of a command.*

**Has anyone asked for help?**

D: *He was praying for it for a long time.*

A: *We all ask for help now and again.*

**Why did he come forward?**

C: *I don't know.*

D: He believed.

**Where was he? Can you picture where he might have been? Was he hidden?**

B: He might have been in a corner, in the crowd.

A: Jesus could still see him.

B: Something different always stands out in the crowd.

A: That's true.

E: He was very different.

B: Yes.

**Have you ever been asked to come into the middle?**

C: I'd avoid it, because I usually mind my own business.

B: Always avoid those people.

**Was he under pressure?**

B: Yes

A: He was embarrassed. Coming to the middle of the Temple.

D: He was the focus. Everyone found a man with a withered hand. But then everyone was focused on Jesus, what he was going to do.

**'He said to them': Who gets to speak in this passage as a whole?**

A: It sounds like to me that Jesus is in command of the whole situation. He always knows how to defeat plans with a good saying.

D: The Pharisees were temporarily defeated. That's why they are so quiet.

**'Is it lawful to do good or harm...': What is Jesus most concerned about in this passage as a whole, healing the man or having an argument?**

C: Not to kill.

A: The healing of the man. Because he can stand out in the crowd Jesus wanted to do a lot for him and wanted them to understand because they didn't get it because they remained silent.

D: Because Jesus is Jesus and Jesus is superior.

B: Maybe they didn't know how to reply to him.

A: Proving a point. It is because this is a forerunner to the crucifixion and he knows he will save the life of all.

**'But they were silent': Why do 'they' remain silent?**

C: Couldn't give him a good answer.

D: If they answer one way, there can be no answer. They would look bad either way.

B: We don't know what they're thinking.

**He looked around at them with anger: Jesus is angry. How does that make you feel? Do you think he should be angry?**

D: He gets angry with them, they don't give him a straight answer.

A: He very rarely gets angry. If he does it was in the synagogue. They have it in their hearts to do away with him.

C: They were very picky. He wanted to establish new laws of his Father.

B: He ran out of patience.

C: Oh sure, why not? He was only human. Once in a while we can see his human side.

**How do you think that 'the man with the withered hand' feels? How would you feel if you were him?**

B: Stupid. Because he is just standing there. His hand is not like anyone else's. He's wondering if he is normal.

C: The man feels responsible.

A: He can't help it, although I think some of the people are wondering how he had it.

D: He might be nervous or afraid, in the spotlight. Before he was not in the spotlight, now everybody can see him.

**'He looked around at them with anger': Jesus is angry. Is anyone else angry?**

D: They [the Pharisees] should have been more compassionate.

**'Stretch out your hand': How does the man with the withered hand feel now? Do you think that he has any choice in what is happening?**

B: I think you always have a choice.

A: I think he was trying to show the Pharisees something more important than the Mosaic law: the law of Christ.

D: Jesus didn't ask because the man had already said so many prayers to Jesus and he had already heard him that Jesus already knew his [the man's] answer. So the man has got faith.

**'The Pharisees...conspired with the Herodians...how to destroy him': Why do you think they reacted the way they did and planned how to destroy Jesus?**

A: They were very angry, always getting angry with Jesus.

D: They wanted to destroy him.

A: Yes.

**V5 'He stretched it out and his hand was restored': What part does the man play in his own healing?**

C: He played a big part. He had to believe.

A: He saw the Son of God and knew he could help him.

**How does the man feel now?**

A: Happy.

B: Grateful, relieved.

D: His belief got stronger.

**Did it cost him anything?**

A: A little embarrassment.

B: But for what he received, surely he would have forgot all about that.

C: They [the Pharisees] might have felt that he was in cahoots with Jesus, that he was a fake.

E: They are not good.

D: Jealous because they couldn't do that.

**'The Pharisees...conspired with the Herodians...how to destroy him': How do you feel towards them?**

D: They're always biased against Jesus. It proved that they can't do all his miracles.

A: They're terrible people to me. It's hurtful when someone wants to kill you.

C: They want Jesus to just go away.

**What is the most important thing to you about this episode?**

A: Jesus is the centre of attention. Helping this man he got more followers.

D: The man with the withered hand had a problem and Jesus wanted to solve it.

**Have you ever felt like someone was trying to destroy you?**

A: My own conflicts, yes, but I don't recall.

B: Sometimes I get angry with what people say if they don't know the truth about what is going on with me.

A: I can see Jesus being very angry about the Pharisees.

## **READING GROUP TWO**

March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006

A: Jesus was a good guy.

B: He helped a lot of people.

A: Back in those days, things were so different. Hard.

B: They were trying to trick Jesus.

**Why?**

B: Because they...

A: Didn't believe in him.

C: Didn't know who he was, didn't trust him.

D: No evidence.

B: He [the man with a withered hand] probably searched high and low to find hope.

E: A friend turned to God in her own way, read from the Bible, addressed her disputes.

**Who was this man 'with a withered hand'? What might it feel like to be him?**

B: He hid out. He wasn't accepted, he was different.

E: My friend, she found out she is not alone. She has trouble feeling good inside.

**Where are his friends?**

C: None. He was handicapped.

B: Sometimes when people are handicapped, people shun them, like the mentally ill, some people shun you. They think that you're crazy.

C: Some people don't understand.

A: Some do.

E: They shouldn't do that. Wouldn't wish it on anyone.

B: They call you names – loony, crazy.

**What might it feel like to be him?**

C: Scared.

E: Depressed.

**What is he scared of?**

C: What's going to happen to him.

E: Mental anguish, pain.

B: Sometimes you don't know what is going to happen.

**What do you think he is doing in the synagogue?**

E: He went to pray.

A: Maybe he hoped to get cured. He heard what Jesus was doing. It spread.

E: Maybe he wants to understand how he feels. He's going to the synagogue to help him understand, to try to cope.

D: It may be difficult for that person. Helps him feel better.

**Who are 'they'?**

B: The Pharisees. They didn't trust him. What is he up to?

D: Discouraged, insulted. They didn't trust him, didn't believe in him.

E: They thought they were better. Personally, I think they looked down on Jesus. You wonder whether they are ill. There are a lot of people like that, unfortunately.

D: You never know what's going to happen in the future.

**'Come forward'. What does this sound like to you? A command? A request?**

A: Telling him.

C: They wanted to have hope. He tried to help.

**Why come to the front?**

B: He wanted to be cured, so he wouldn't be victimised anymore. He believed Jesus could cure him.

C: He was hiding.

D: He feels a bit embarrassed because they had ridiculed him.

A: Triumphant.

B: Nervous but hopeful.

E: He accepted what had happened to him and he did not try to deny them because he went and accepted them. He tried to hold on to hope and he got better.

**Who are 'they'? Why do you think 'they' are watching Jesus?**

A: They wanted to see what he could do, if he could really perform miracles .

E: He believed so much in his faith of a tiny mustard seed.

B: There's always a reason why they think the way they do.

D: Sometimes the Pharisees turned to God and didn't get a response.

C: Sometimes you feel people are against you. Whispering. They don't like you. You have a stigma.

B: Stigma.

E: Many people in the Catholic faith have the rosary, ten Hail Mary's five times...

B: It's upsetting. Can't always accept how I feel.

**What is most important in this passage: the man's healing or Jesus teaching a lesson to the Pharisees?**

D: The man's healing. Because he wanted to be whole again.

C: I feel it is important to have all your faculties so you can work.

**'He looked around at them with anger' Jesus is angry. How does that make you feel? Do you think he should be angry?**

E: It may not explain how he felt and he went ahead and accepted.

B: He said, 'this is the way I see it'.

E: He didn't mean to be unkind.



B: Yes.

C: That showed him that people didn't believe in him.

E: He wanted to help them but they didn't allow it

**'Stretch out your hand' How does the man with the withered hand 'feel now? Do you think that he has any choice in what is happening?**

E: Stop this fighting over me, I don't want any more fighting.

**'He stretched it out and his hand was restored'. What part does the man play in his own healing?**

E: He played a very important part. He showed he believed. As tiny as a mustard seed, just a small amount.

B: He had nothing to lose.

**'The Pharisees...conspired with the Herodians...how to destroy him' Why do you think they reacted the way they did and planned how to destroy Jesus?**

C: They were jealous of him.

A: He had power, they wanted that power.

E: Perhaps we learn from our beliefs.

**How does the man feel now?**

D: He probably feels so much for Jesus because he helped him.

A: Worried for himself.

D: He may be a little afraid of the Herodians.

A: They might cut off his head.

**Have you ever felt like someone was trying to destroy you?**

E: He found those he trusted and they hurt him. They did not want him to think of himself as perfect. These people were his people. Not fair to single this one out as not worthy. Some of them did not feel worthy.

B: Made me feel how I was treated in school.

### **READING GROUP THREE**

April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006

**Who was this man 'with a withered hand'? What might it feel like to be him?**

A: Frustrating.

B: Difficult back then to be crippled. I just imagine the awkward attention towards a man with a physical impairment. People might have been a lot less welcoming and friendly and nice.

C: 'I desire mercy not sacrifice'. Makes me think of my own life and how God does want to heal me even if I don't deserve it. Maybe even makes me think I should pray to God. I forget about God and that he wants me to have healing.

A: Perhaps the people were more concerned about Jesus and not the man - of sticking to the letter of the law.

B: It's hard, today there is medical knowledge and research and nursing assistance. Back then it was not known. Imagine how that added mystery and questions in the mind of how a person got that way.

C: Why God would have created them that way.

B: It's counter-intuitive that people would not have wanted him to get helped.

C: I struggle with God's prestige so my mind doesn't work, but is it spiritual blindness or physical blindness. They may have heard that he was punished by God. But Jesus says if your eye causes you to wrong then pull it out.

B: Values versus laws.

**Where is he to be found and how is he to be recognised?**

A: Back, asked to come forward, into the middle.

B: He's an outcast. He's back, pushed there because of his disability or maybe he's ashamed.

C: In the middle, well...yeah, the centre of attention.

D: He's hiding, cowering in the corner. They wouldn't have wanted him to get help just because it was that day.

C: He didn't want to be judged or be different because of something.

B: I think the people, the priests and the congregation were unconscious of the man, I think that probably explains why Jesus says come forward, not to be afraid to approach him and be known.

**Who are 'they'?**

A: Pharisees.

C: People who were doubting that this was the Son of God...people who doubted.

A: It's named the Pharisees.

B: Not clear. 'They' could have referred to a whole lot of people who were sceptical.

**What do you think 'they' care about the man?**

B: They don't care about him at all. They are more concerned with gathering evidence against Jesus. It says at the end how they planned to destroy him. I am assuming destroy means Jesus. And they were silent when a question was asked. Although it is clear from the second verse they are watching to see what is going to happen, although that part doesn't necessarily mean that they completely despised him, although later on when he asks them in verse four, I don't know, he could be teaching them or could he be defending his actions? I see that ambiguity.

A: I don't see Jesus feels the need to explain himself.

C: Jesus brings radical love to a people whose hardness of heart is against him, telling people to love people who hate you. I am sure there were people who demonstrated what love really is, and mercy...I don't have mercy on myself more than anybody else. Even people who don't like me probably would be more merciful to me.

B: Yes.

C: I think that it's not necessarily the case from this. It is not that they have forgotten about mercy but it could be based on ways to act at that time. That reminds me of society today as a whole where people of all positions and different kinds of responsibility think that it is a good thing to do but can't do it right now. It could be about an insecurity instead of helping people. They want to make more money. Many people think they can't behave in a caring way because of this reason.

B: I think it's psychologically normal for people at times to do things outrageous or provocative.

**Where are his friends?**

A: Maybe he doesn't have any.

C: Maybe he had a family but when he got disabled, they said, 'you got yourself cursed, get out of here'.

B: If you read the last sentence of this thing during the healing on the Sabbath, if someone is capable of killing someone, then they are capable of ostracising this guy not just because he is a cripple, but because it means something to them.

C: It wasn't an attitude of some people who sinned. It is said in the Bible, Jesus said go and sin no more. That part always scares me. Somehow sin is attached to affliction. I struggle with that sin leads to punishment. There are different schools of thought that mental illness is possession or spiritual warfare.

A: I just think that life's not fair like only bad things happen to bad people. I say that bad things happen to good people.

C: It's just tough to understand different scriptures, that it rains on the good and the bad. No one is righteous, we are all in the same boat.

**'Come forward'. What does this sound like to you? A command? A request?**

B: With authority.

D: Probably in an encouraging tone of voice. Loving.

B: Yeah, lots of things discourage being there in the first place but a benevolent tone of voice...

**Has anyone asked for help?**

B: Could be afraid to for societal reasons. The fact that they wanted to destroy the man who healed him – I can see he would be afraid they were going to destroy him too, he would be petrified.

C: Yeah bleeding woman...

B: I wanted to say something. The meaning of a person being crippled, has a deeper significance. I think I see. I think that this applies to not only people who suffer, but applies to different religions and how they treat each other. Regardless of the state of the person who is blaspheming. I guess I'm reading meaning far more into it. I see a lot of people assigning deeper meaning to a lot of other people, and often they make conclusions about the attitude of the people being judged and

*then God judges them. It may be a healthy prosperous nation they are saying is bad off because of this or that deeper meaning.*

*C: Kind of most people already have to strike the balance that this way of doing things is correct and in the process they can write other peoples' beliefs off as crazy or not favoured by God.*

*B: I think the religious form of this problem is a prominent form of this.*

*C: I think very often, more a feeling or knowing and a willingness and desire to take responsibility of judging. In my own view mental health professionals as a group can be judgemental to greater extents than some others.*

*B: Because they have some knowledge that they didn't give up. People who go into the field want to help with 'diagnosis'. I think that when a person decides to devote their life to that kind of thing...*

*C: They have issues...(laughs).*

*B: I think they'll encounter some arguing, some hostility even and also the nature of the idea of a psychological illness is a very significant collection of beliefs. Persons with issues have different labels, reasons why their judgment might be this way, they might feel like they are not being reasonable or normal.*

*C: It's hard not to feel patronised and its tough not to feel stymied.*

*A: And not to blame individuals who go into the field because its part of how it is taught.*

*B: It's a problem of great complexity. People read too much into things.*

*C: You think misdiagnosis – label – say schizophrenic and you really aren't one.*

*A: I think it is a name of something. It is useful when someone like us walks into an office there may be a whole lot of reasons why our judgment might be off.*

*C: And we might feel inferior to the person.*

*B: You can feel invalidated.*

*C: It's difficult, you always know it is a professional argument. It's really tough, learning how to live with it and in the midst of it. I can be paranoid.*

*B: It's almost like a caste system of your brain. Technically I can't judge my teachers.*

*C: They take us back*

*A: That can be one really positive aspect, you can be forgiven because they understand you're dealing with a lot.*

*B: I don't want you to say that I can't judge them, it's just you don't have the same education as they do.*

*A: I think there's healthy judgements.*

*C: Sometimes judgments are off. Sometimes they see things you are not seeing.*

***In this passage, is Jesus' primarily concerned with teaching a lesson here and so using the man or is his primary concern healing?***

*D: I hope it is about healing.*

*A: Why couldn't he have said 'let's go into that corner', and heal him?*

*B: I can see how he was trying to help this man. Not just physically if we consider he was outcast, shunned. He encountered him, calling him publicly. Basically through the people, Pharisees, and the crowd he's healing him right in front of them and defends that action. In fact that may not be the most important thing he's doing. The most important thing might be the way he is doing it. Healing is the operative thing. If he was using the guy to make a point then I think that would be going in the direction of the people he is saying this to and I think one of the huge points is that he is completely different in important ways. There's no way he's embodying objectifying. To the Pharisees their relation to the law was more important than whether this guy is suffering. The most obvious thing in this passage: Jesus feels different.*

*A: Basically, could not Jesus wait a day?*

*B: Why would he do that? Maybe he's taking the opportunity to teach something rather than setting out to do so.*

*C: He was angry too. Don't forget all these people who wanted destroy him. It's to his advantage to be as public as possible. It is far less effective to do it privately.*

***'But they were silent' Why do 'they' remain silent?***

*D: They didn't have any answer.*

*B: Nothing in the rules spelled out an answer. In the moment they were stuck.*

*C: They were waiting for him to make a mistake so that he might have need of them.*

***'Stretch out your hand': How does the man with the withered hand feel now?***

*D: Fearful.*

*B: Exposed. Confronted.*

*A: Embarrassed.*

*C: Reminds me of the woman at the well. She was confronted with what Jesus already knew about her.*

*B: Vulnerable.*

*A: Not safe.*

*C: Well if he was the Son of God it has an effect on people. Did he have doubts and then he believed? Jesus has an effect on him.*

## READING GROUP FOUR

April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006

**Who was this man 'with a withered hand'? What might it feel like to be him?**

A: Embarrassed.

B: Painful.

C: Mad angry, because he has a crippled hand and can't use it. Everyone was laughing at him.

B: I had a hand like that with radial nerve palsy. The man felt a bit like I didn't want to be a spectacle. But he was willing to do it, probably had faith that Jesus could heal his hand back.

D: The Pharisees were scared when they saw that, they had just met God and so they were afraid. They knew that God was going to judge them for their hardness of heart. They were afraid.

A: It is like a set up. It says that they watched him. Like a set up – pre-meditated to trap Jesus.

B: When Jesus was going about teaching and preaching these people were so obsessed with the law. When you were struck with leprosy at that time there was no cure. They were alienated from normal people.

A: Jesus had to contend with them.

E: This man was brought as a witness.

D: Why would he have to witness to that which he created?

E: The Sabbath day was the holiest of days and a man with a withered hand – Jesus needed to show the true miracles of God.

**Where are his friends?**

A: He is held against his will. They grabbed him – do this.

B: He became a project - he was used, like an experiment.

D: Sounds like he was visible right when Jesus walked in.

C: He looked like he didn't belong there. You could tell there was something different about him.

A: Forced to go there.

C: The crowd rejects him the same reason they reject Jesus. They don't want to identify with Jesus.

A: The man is not only embarrassed, but angry with the fact that he's brought forward. It was so grotesque then.

B: I have a picture of the synagogue. A circle. In the middle, empty and everyone can be a witness. That way it's like a stage.

E: They knew he would heal him on the Sabbath. Their concern was the Sabbath.

**'Come forward' What does this sound like to you? A command? A request?**

B: A request.

A: Command.

D: Oh yeah not a command as we say but Jesus has nothing but love - soothing. It probably just shocked the whole room. We wonder why the whole room was still. Jesus was silent, just the Holy Ghost speaking through the Father.

C: The same way a mother would tell a four year old to put a seat belt on: a statement made with love.

**What is the man with the withered hand come forward for?**

C: I think Jesus knew exactly what was going on. What their intentions were.

A: He [Jesus] was probably making a point. They were trying to have some evidence to accuse him of wrongdoing. You Pharisees are looking to kill and on the Sabbath.

D: Because this being is used of God, he probably wanted to be healed of his deformity. He couldn't even offer things to God because of his deformity.

**In this passage, is Jesus' primarily concerned with teaching a lesson here and so using the man or is his primary concern healing?**

D: In his sovereignty everything is efficient. It doesn't become a matter of what is most important. This one act will heal and demonstrate how wicked they are, right?

A: I think he wanted to heal the man, he hears whether he did this in front of the Pharisees they would see his way. They were not going to believe anyway.

**Was this man with the withered hand used by Jesus to make his point?**

A: Yes.

C: I think he was probably ambivalent. He wanted to be healed but he felt guilty. We know how that is. Guilty that he didn't go to Jesus of his own will.

D: These people were seeking to accuse the Father himself. That was the true fight – it was a fight to accuse the Father. The authority that Jesus had was so unbelievable, he could feel God's grace as well as the pain.

**But they were silent. Why do 'they' remain silent?**

B: Because it took them a minute to figure out the significance. They realised they were totally uncovered – how could he know our thoughts.

C: Maybe they were silent because they realised that what they were doing was just as bad as harm. By this set up, they felt foolish. When he asked them a question, he just saw through them.

A: He felt sorry for them.

C: That's a trip, we'd want to kick them in the face.

**'Stretch out your hand'. How does the man with the withered hand feel now? Do you think that he has any choice in what is happening?**

D: He knew he was going to be used of Jesus. He did so understanding that he would be the one.

B: Just a spectacle. He didn't understand, he was just grieved.

*C: Maybe he felt Jesus had such authority, he felt like a child, he just obeyed him.*

*B: Unworthy, right.*

*A: Unworthy.*

*D: It was a fight against good and evil.*



## 8.2 Reading Group Transcripts: *Mark 3:19b-35*

Then he went home; 20and the crowd came together again, so they could not even eat. 21When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind'. 22And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.' 23And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, 'How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 27No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man: then indeed the house can be plundered.

28Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin' – 30for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit'.

31Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.' 33And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' 34And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! 35Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother'.

- 
- V20 Can you imagine Jesus' home?
    - What is it like?
    - Is it a place of comfort for him?
    - And at this point in the story, is it a place of comfort?
    - What kind of people are in 'the crowd'?
    - What do they want?
    - Where does Jesus find nourishment?
    - What is it like to be him?
  
  - V21
    - What had Jesus' family heard?
    - Why are they so worried?
    - Who are they worried for?
    - How might they 'restrain him'?
    - Have you ever felt 'restrained'?
    - Can you imagine Jesus 'out of his mind'?

- If he were would 'restraining' him help?
- V22
  - Why do you think the scribes have come from Jerusalem?
  - What are they hoping for?
  - How might Jesus 'have' Beelzebul? Who is in control of whom?
  - What do you imagine Beelzebul to be?
  - And demons, what do you imagine those to be?
  - What have these got to do with Jesus' mind?
- V23 And he called to them
  - Why does Jesus call to them?
  - How do you think he might have called? With what tone of voice? And with what gestures?
  - And why speak in parables?
- V23 'How can Satan cast out Satan?'
  - Does Jesus think they are accusing him of being Satan?
  - Has Jesus got it right or wrong?
  - How do we know Jesus wasn't Satan?
  - Who is Satan anyway?
- V24-25 A kingdom/house divided against itself
  - What does a house divided make you think of?
  - Is a divided kingdom anything any different?
  - Could you live in a divided house?
  - Are there aspects of your life that are divided; even your own house?
  - What might this have to do with Jesus' mind?
- V26
  - What do you feel about Satan?
  - Do you think his 'end will come'?
- V27 Binding the strong man
  - Who do you think the strong man is?
  - Who is tying him up?
  - Is there anything wrong with plundering? Are you comfortable with what Jesus seems to be advocating here?
- V28-30
  - Who needs forgiveness of sins in this passage?
  - What is blasphemy to you?
  - Why 'blasphemes against the Holy Spirit'?
  - What is an eternal sin? Is it different do you think from other sins?
- V28-30 Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit
  - What answer can be given to Jesus here when he says that 'they' have blasphemed against the Holy Spirit?
  - Who do you think 'they' might be?
  - Who has said the worse thing?
    - The scribes who said to Jesus: 'He has Beelzebul'
    - The people who said: he has gone out of his mind?

## READING GROUP ONE

April 4<sup>th</sup> 2006

**Can you imagine Jesus' home? What is it like? Is it a place of comfort for him?**

C: No idea.

D: A place to rest, comfortable for him.

B: He's home but the crowd are eager to seize him. He's tired, couldn't get any rest.

A: Jesus needs a place to get away.

C: Was Satan an angel or I think separate from God because I just think so.

**What had Jesus' family heard?**

A: People were saying he's gone out of his mind.

B: Everybody was exhausted.

D: They wanted to protect him from the crowd.

C: It's all good.

**How might they 'restrain him'?**

C: To stop him from doing things.

D: First tell him then touch him. He might have told his family he could do it and they said no.

C: What was Jesus? Couldn't have been human. What was he? A superhuman? Batman or Hercules?

**What do you think?**

A: He is God; just God.

C: Lots of people think this is hell. This is life, the eternal everlasting universe.

**Can you imagine Jesus 'out of his mind'?**

C: Gone crazy. Saying things that can't be true.

B: Things he does, the way he talks. Thought he could do this, do that.

A: They didn't understand what he was trying to do. They wouldn't believe what he had done. He keeps doing these strange things, they couldn't understand him so they told him that he was out of his mind.

C: Anybody could be not trusted. God could make a spectacle. He [Jesus] could be drunk on beer or wine and go crazy that way too.

A: Well that's a problem with me, to me if he did he wouldn't have been able to preach. Maybe he was just tired.

D: Jesus was divine, he didn't make mistakes like human beings.

**Why do you think the scribes have come from Jerusalem?**

D: *May have been that they came to catch him making a mistake.*

B: *To uphold the law, to see if he was going to break the law.*

A: *They were always trying to catch him during his whole life with their 'iddy-biddy' laws.*

**Were those laws important?**

A: *Not as important as his laws*

C: *Not important. I believe the Lord has his own space. The modern day Lord, he flies in a UFO in space.*

**How might Jesus 'have' Beelzebul? Who is in control of whom?**

C: *That he is doing everything the wrong way. Satan has control over him, that is he his doing all his miracles.*

D: *An accusation, not a fact.*

**Can you imagine Jesus 'out of his mind'?**

A: *Even in the case where Jesus throws out seven demons from a man, he has to argue with them over the law.*

B: *I hope not.*

A: *I hope not either.*

C: *We are all complicated because everyone has to get along. We would have to be constantly wary of these spirits and they would be pretty bad.*

**Have you ever known someone to be out of their mind?**

B: *Heard a few stories about possession and people trying to get hold of them. But it was sort of jumbled in their mind. Wondered if it was real or not.*

**'And he called to them' Why does Jesus call to them?**

C: *Maybe out of curiosity and to find out why they are that way.*

A: *Because he sought to teach them again what was important and what was not important. He wanted to teach them the difference between fake and God. He couldn't let them go on by.*

B: *You have to defend yourself somehow. Have to say something. They will walk all over you and you believe all these stupid things about yourself and you lose yourself for a while. It's very difficult for you.*

**A kingdom/house divided against itself: What does a 'house divided' make you think of?**

A: *Everybody arguing with one another. You don't achieve anything.*

B: *I think it's something about yourself. A soul divided into pieces cannot function properly. It's hard to believe it's a real house.*

D: *A soul divided against itself, given over to sin and personal pressures. Before you know it is all messed up.*

C: *Everyday I'm called that. They said it was an inner conflict.*

**Binding the strong man: Who do you think the strong man is?**

B: God or Jesus.

C: Hard to say. Have to figure out who the strong man is. A man with a good soul and the devil comes and ties him up and his whole person would be ravaged.

**Who needs forgiveness of sins in this passage?**

A: The crowd, because they accused him of all those problems he didn't have

**Does Jesus' family need forgiveness?**

D: Not really. Well...this was their son, they tried to protect him.

**Who has said the worse thing? The scribes who said to Jesus: 'He has Beelzebul' or the people who said: he has gone out of his mind?**

C: No idea Simon.

B: Well we don't have this horrible thing where they say devils on you like they had in the Bible, I think the worse thing is saying you are out of your mind.

A: Cruel.

B: Yes I think so. I most certainly do.

A: It's never easy to defend yourself against the Pharisees and the Scribes. Always trying to trap you.

C: It's worse being called crazy. It's unfair.

A: Yeah, that's right.

C: Sometimes people suffer for real. Sometimes I suffer so much I don't see reality and I don't realise what people are doing. When I finally get through I find that people are just living. It's all a racket. You've got to even pay to die. It's not worth it. If you really think about being in the world today you go nuts. You go off the deep end. When a person has faith, these people don't think about these things. It is the small things that put you over. You can't think over and over about the same thing.

A: Oh yeah, I see that.

B: I get that a lot.

A: Even so-called regular people, if you say the truth, people let you have it. Even regular people have to shut up. Jesus had to keep his mouth shut sometimes. That's the way of society.

C: We have to live and act like we are a separate category of people.

D: Oh no we shouldn't.

C: It's just the way of life that's all.

### READING GROUP THREE

April 10<sup>th</sup> 2006

**Can you imagine Jesus' home? What is it like? Is it a place of comfort for him?**

A: A place of comfort for him.

**How might they 'restrain him'?**

A: It definitely sounds like a physical word.

B: I don't know...no I mean it's the text, it leaves it up in the air.

**Does it sound protective to you or repressive?**

B: We don't know the rest of society to know how crazy or not he is to lock him up.

**What do you think it felt like to be Jesus with his family trying to restrain him?**

A: Completely let down.

C: Frustrating.

B: At the same time they might want to protect him and keep him quiet.

A: I think they might want the criticism to go away.

**Can you imagine Jesus 'out of his mind'?**

A: Yeah, depending on what it means. I feel like it's a strong psychological temptation to be megalomaniac, where you consider yourself to be really great. I imagine Jesus to be a really good teacher. It's plausible that hearing the crowd this could go to his head. He could consume himself that he could do more than he really could, more than just an ordinary man.

**Were the family justified in what they did?**

B: I don't have enough detail about the story. It could be Jesus was humble and saw himself totally accurately. It could be the opposite end and that he is unrealistic. Even then, restraint is something that...an extreme measure. If he wasn't going to hurt anybody or himself.

**Why do you think the scribes have come from Jerusalem? What are they hoping for?**

B: They might have been concerned that they were losing popularity. They wanted to maintain power.

A: They might have been worried about passing on the tradition and ensuring that the Messiah could come eventually.

**How do you feel about them labelling Jesus?**

B: It depends on the person. He does a good job of thinking of something to say.

**Do you think we should ignore labels or resist them?**

B: There's a woman I know with bipolar. She has a guy friend who tells her that she is a manic depressive. She left, sat in the car and cried. Then she went back and said, 'go to hell'. Then she left, she didn't want to give him more fuel. I think she wanted to represent herself and all people with bipolar in a positive light. If she had stayed to argue she might have got angry in the heat of the moment and wouldn't have helped this guy to see mental illness in a positive light.

***'And he called to them'. Why does Jesus call to them?***

A: Well, I mean it is no longer the religious authorities who are deciding. He has flipped the power relation and he is teaching to students.

B: He's calm.

***Who has said the worse thing? The scribes who said to Jesus: 'He has Beelzebul' or the people who said: he has gone out of his mind?***

B: Out of his mind.

A: I agree. I think being possessed is not really true, but in my perception there is mass possession if you lose your mind. Not that mental illness is that but that can be an ingredient.

***Can you imagine Jesus 'out of his mind'?***

B: I think you can have a person who is completely out of his mind at a certain time. Someone who is deluded about certain things. There is a spectrum from fully sane to insane.

C: People like to label, it's convenient.

A: And especially when a person is troubling you but you don't want to argue with them. It's easy to say he is an idiot. Then deep down I need to be in conflict with myself about those things he is saying.

***Should you resist this?***

A: No. No fighting. You need it, not to create anymore tension.

B: Show, don't teach. He can say he is not a disciple of Satan until he is blue in the face. He demonstrates it. He shows he is not controlled by evil.

***Is it hard to shake a label off?***

B: I guess for me it's not as much about the label than how well I'm doing. Am I safe? Am I in touch with reality? Are my moods stable or not? I don't know that people respect me or consider me mentally ill.

A: I have no problem with labels.

B: Labels can be useful, giving people an idea of what history might be there, what symptoms to look for with family and friends. Really getting a sense of the problems I've been facing.

***How do you feel about the situation at the end of the reading concerning Jesus' family***

C: It's sad for him, there's a wall between them.

A: I don't know, it's sort of like his followers were his family, that could be part of this radical love thing – love as if they were your family.

B: I don't know, it sort of seems he usually forgives them. What you've done proves you're not on my side, so get this, this is my real family.

A: It's hard.

## **READING GROUP FOUR**

April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006

***Can you imagine Jesus' home? What is it like? Is it a place of comfort for him?***

A: Chaos.

B: No comfort. It's no surprise to him. He was doing everything. He was speaking all the laws. He didn't respect the Sabbath. He claimed to be the Messiah. They were waiting for another Messiah. They were all thinking that he was demented, he's a nut.

***What kind of people are in 'the crowd'? What do they want?***

A: Eternal life.

C: They wanted, expected Jesus to lead them against the Romans. When he didn't do that they saw he wasn't about to gather an army like the 40 years in the desert, he just preached to love your enemies.

***What had Jesus' family heard?***

A: That he was a lunatic.

B: They wanted to see a miracle. They didn't want to believe, they wanted to see something concrete.

A: They didn't believe.

***Why do you think they wanted to restrain him?***

C: They were afraid something might happen to him.

A: If it was your child, you'd want to.

B: They were trying to protect him.

A: To take him out of there.

B: It was more like a request, because Mary already knew who she was dealing with.

***How do you imagine Jesus feels about this?***

C: Sad, he came here to teach so the world could be saved. He loves us like we love our child. We teach children fear. They feared him.

***Why do you think the scribes have come from Jerusalem?***

B: The scribes were sent by their superiors. Jesus posed a threat to them, discrediting them for all the things they were doing.

A: Threatening their tradition.

C: Jesus goes against the law of Moses.

***Who has said the worse thing? The scribes who said to Jesus: 'He has Beelzebul' or the people who said: he has gone out of his mind?***

B: They were saying he is of Satan, that is more damaging because Satan is Satan, he wants to destroy everything he's teaching.



A: Satan existed in those days.

B: The devil is the antithesis of what he is trying to teach. 'Out of his mind' is a physical model. Satan, that's spiritual not physical.

**What about you?**

B: I'm not out of my mind.

A: Not nice.

B: I know if they said I had Satan I'd rather say I was nuts.

C: It's tough, words are worse than the sword emotionally. I faced a family member head on, straight to the matter, who said I was crazy, 'you've been smoking too much crack'. I had to surrender right there. But for Jesus it was different he knew exactly what was going on.

**Is mental illness a punishment?**

C: I talk like that, because of all the stuff I have done.

B: I'm a firm believer that Jesus will not give up on me. I've seen work in my life I really believe is of God. Only be taught as a child. When you are subject, then there is freedom to rationalise it and continue to do something wrong. I knew that I was enslaved to my disease. When I used to get high I was a devil. The walking dead. Trying to use self-defeating thoughts to be my excuses.

C: I fell out of consciousness one time. It was the first time she, my girlfriend, saw fear in my eyes. That changes you.

### 8.3 Reading Group Transcripts: *Mark 5:21-43*

21When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered round him; and he was by the lake. 22Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet 23and begged him repeatedly, 'My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.' 24So he went with him.

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. 25Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. 26She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. 27She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' 29Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. 30Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' 31And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?"' 32He looked all round to see who had done it. 33But the woman, knowing what had happened to her came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. 34He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'

35While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say 'Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher further?' 36But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, 'Do not fear, only believe.' 37He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James and John, the brother of James. 38When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. 39When he had entered, he said to them, 'Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.' 40And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha cum', which means, 'Little girl, get up!' 42And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. 43He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

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- V21
  - How might it feel to be Jesus at this point?
  - What are the crowd gathering round him for?
  - What sort of atmosphere do you imagine there being?
- V22-24
  - What sort of man is Jairus?
  - What does the crowd think of him falling at Jesus' feet?
  - What does Jesus think of Jairus falling at his feet?
  - How do you imagine Jairus begging?
- V23 'Come lay your hands on her'
  - What sort of hope does Jairus have?
  - Have you wanted to have or have had that sort of hope?
  - Do you think that Jesus' hands can make people well?
  - Why do you think Jairus believes this?
- V24 So he went with him
  - What makes Jesus go with Jairus? Because he is a powerful man? Because he begged?
  - And how do the crowd feel about all of this?
- V25-26 'Now there was a woman...'
- Where do you think this woman is to be found?
- How do you imagine she has 'suffered'?
- V26 She had endured much under many physicians
  - What do you think she might have endured?
  - Do you know how she feels to have endured much at the hands of doctors?
  - How has this left her?
  - How important do you think this woman is?
  - What do you think it is like after all that treatment to get worse not better?
  - What do you think the crowd think of a woman like this?
- V27-28
  - What do you imagine she had heard about Jesus?
  - Why do you think she comes up behind him and not go to him in front of him?
  - How do you think she feels to be doing this?
  - What do you make of her hope in Jesus that after all these years of treatment that if she only touches his cloak she will be healed?
  - Could you imagine yourself thinking like that?
- V29-30
  - Why do you think that her bleeding stopped so suddenly?
  - How did she know she was healed?
  - How do you think Jesus knew, immediately, that 'power had gone forth from him'?
  - Is the woman in sight do you think?
- V30 'Who touched my clothes?'
  - In what tone of voice does Jesus say this do you think?
  - Why do you think he wants to know?

- V31-32
  - Why do the disciples question Jesus here?
  - How do you think they feel about the crowd?
  - What do you think Jairus is making of all of this?
  - Do you think the disciples are concerned about what Jairus thinks?
  - Do you think Jesus is concerned about what Jairus thinks of all this?
  - He looked all round to see who had done it
  - Why is Jesus persisting in looking for the person who had touched his clothes?
  - How do you think the woman feels about Jesus' persistence?
  
- V33-34 But the woman...came in fear and trembling
  - Why does the woman come in fear and trembling?
  - Do you imagine her falling at Jesus' feet in the same way as you imagine Jairus falling at his feet?
  - Why does Jesus call her daughter do you think?
  - What will give her greatest peace now do you think?
  
- V35-36 Why trouble the teacher anymore?
  - Is it trouble for Jesus to do what he does?
  - Who do you think lacked faith at this point?
  - How do you think Jairus felt when Jesus asked him not to fear?
  - Can you imagine yourself in that situation? How does it feel to be told your daughter is dead and at the same time that you should not fear?
  
- V37-41
  - Why do you think he only allowed Peter, James and John to follow him to Jairus' house?
  - How do you think the other disciples felt about this?
  - Why was there such a commotion?
  - Do you think this concerned Peter, James and John at all?
  - What do you think the crowds might have been expecting?
  - How do you feel about the people laughing at Jesus? Would you have laughed?
  - Do you think Jairus laughed?
  - Do you think the disciples laughed?
  - Why do you think he only allowed a few with him to see the child?
  
- V41-43 He took her by the hand
  - How important is touch do you think in this whole passage 5:21-43?
  - How do you imagine Jesus' voice saying 'Talitha cum'?
  - Who do you think was overcome with amazement?
  - Why do you think Jesus wanted this to be a secret?

## READING GROUP ONE

April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006

**What sort of man is Jairus?**

D: Better off than others, not rich but not poor.

B: I think the crowd were amazed, one of the most prominent members. It's very impressive to the crowds.

**What does Jesus think of Jairus falling at his feet?**

B: Well along his ministry there were great crowds, many miracles. Jairus was overcoming his pride, he was desperate for his daughter.

**Does Jairus care what people think?**

A: He is only thinking about his child.

B: That's right.

**Why do you think he wants Jesus to lay his hands on his daughter?**

C: His powers.

D: To make the child well, from hearing about all the other miracles he'd performed.

**Have you ever wished this? To be made well by the laying on of hands?**

A: I wish.

B: Oh yeah, he certainly was hopeful. In fact he knew enough to ask Jesus to help him, oh yeah. He had heard about other people being helped. If my daughter was dying I'd do anything.

**'So he went with him'**

**What makes Jesus go with Jairus? Because he is a powerful man? Because he begged?**

B: Because the man shows such great faith – come lay hands on her – he assumed our Lord's powers.

**Is faith important?**

E: Oh yes, because if you have faith, you believe that the Spirit of God is in three Persons when they try to heal you. They can do what doctors can't do.

B: That's right, Jesus can do this doctors can't.

**And how do the crowd feel about all of this? Jesus going with Jairus I mean.**

D: Shock. The fact that he begged. Mixed feelings I guess.

B: They were curious to see if our Lord would actually cure his daughter.

**'Now there was a woman...'**

**Where do you think this woman is to be found?**

A: On the street with the crowd.

C: Just wandering anywhere, even though she had that. That wouldn't stop her from doing anything, just uncomfortable.

A: She has to be pretty near him to get his attention for five minutes.

D: Pushing through the crowd to catch up: 'she came from behind'.

**What do you make of her hope in Jesus that after all these years of treatment that if she only touches his cloak she will be healed?**

B: She asked the Lord to help her, praying to the Lord, asking Jesus to heal her.

A: When doctors make mistakes I make them pay.

D: She was helpless and hopeless at this point, and sure I would be hoping for something to happen so she could stop bleeding. She was desperate for a cure, like Jairus.

E: It must be a beautiful feeling to have a real bad disease and then be cured by the Lord – all gone.

**Out of Jairus' daughter and the woman, who is worse off?**

C: They're both in the same boat. Equal.

A: It says the young girl was 12 years old on her deathbed. This lady had it for 12 years.

D: I think the little girl is in worse shape. She actually passes away.

B: I'd say the little girl because right there she is at the point of death but doesn't. The lady with the haemorrhages is not at the point of death.

**How important is this woman?**

A: Not that important really, probably nobody really cares about her.

D: Rich. She had spent all her money on doctors.

C: An everyday woman.

**What do you think the crowd think of a woman like this?**

B: Some might have thought, 'how dare she touch him'.

C: Just sometimes how people think.

E: He questioned: 'who touched me?' They thought nothing happened to them when they bumped into him.

**Why do you think she comes up behind him and not go to him in front of him?**

D: Maybe she couldn't get to the front of the crowd.

B: Either she was afraid of something, that he wouldn't cure her and not do a miracle for her.

A: She's humble. She knew just the clothes would do it.

C: Maybe the Lord made her do that. Just the way he wanted her to walk. No need really.

A: It was just she was so desperate she did it as a last resort. Maybe somehow...or she could feel his power and she was captivated by that.

B: Her faith was that strong.

E: No one ever failed to get healed.

**'Who touched my clothes?' Why do you think he wants to know?**

D: Maybe he wanted to see with his own eyes, who had that much faith that even if I touch him I'd be healed. To see if the person will come forth, 'yeah I did it'.

**In what tone of voice does Jesus say this do you think?**

D: Not angry. A normal tone, he just asked the question.

**What do you think the disciples and the crowd think here?**

A: They probably want him to get moving to the girl's house. There were a lot of people pressing on him.

**And Jairus?**

A: Hurry up!

B: Very upset at this point to think that our Lord would help a woman who was bleeding but not dying, wishing Jesus to come to his house right away.

**'But the woman...came in fear and trembling'. Why does the woman come in fear and trembling?**

D: Because Jesus asked, 'who touched me?' She knows it was her, like she did something wrong.

C: Maybe she thought it wasn't Jesus. She had to tell him the whole truth who did that. Maybe she had doubts. Looks like she had doubts.

B: Don't forget our Lord had a magnificent presence. People were attracted to him and his charisma.

A: I think that the woman is so impressed by him and so afraid and now healed she feels a lot different – standing in the presence of the God who healed her.

C: Unless it was a beautiful blessing. She didn't think one person could get rid of it all.

**Why does Jesus call her daughter do you think?**

C: Just a figure of speech – 'how you going son?' – like that. Someone you don't even know.

D: He knew that she was somebody's daughter. By her faith she became Jesus', God's daughter.

C: I don't know about that.

A: I always thought of this woman as being an older woman. She could have been even younger than Jesus.

**Why trouble the teacher anymore? How do you think Jairus felt when Jesus asked him not to fear?**

D: Extremely hurt and crushed. But then, I guess Jesus reassured him, because in the beginning he was going on his belief, on faith, so Jesus told him don't let you faith go away, just believe.

**'He took her by the hand'. How important is touch do you think in this whole passage 5:21-43?**

E: Who Jesus was, in motion, blessed motions, he could knock on a door and you would know it was him.

D: Jesus had a certain touch to him.

*E: I think touch is important even now. A sign of affection, or consolation, but when Jesus touched people his divine power was ever present. It could change a person of a terrific nature – bringing people back from the dead.*

***What part do the characters play in their own healing?***

*D: I think the young girl played no role. Her father did. The other lady, her faith played a big role in it: if she laid hands on Jesus she would be saved.*

*C: They're just there, ordinary people on the streets, down the marketplace, seeing Jesus. They just need help and see Jesus walking by and say 'hi' if he's walking by.*

*B: From the text they recognise our Lord, fall at his feet and the bleeding woman who told the truth had both the protagonists role and recognised a great leader and that somehow he could cure her.*

## **READING GROUP TWO**

*April 18<sup>th</sup> 2006*

***What sort of man is Jairus?***

*A: Probably protective. He wanted to see what was going on. He had a job to perform.*

*C: He is a leader, makes sure the tradition is being upheld - a responsibility for what was happening.*

*B: I guess Jairus, maybe he was a small time religious person. He knew Jesus could perform miracles. He didn't have any qualms. Being a religious person he would know humility, because he recognised the magnitude of the kingdom of God. He had justification.*

*D: He was desperate, fearful because of his daughter.*

***How do you imagine Jairus begging?***

*E: He is just taken over with emotions.*

*B: Emotions taken over by their desperation, his desperation and love for her. He wanted the cry of right. He wanted to bring back something that he cherished tremendously.*

***'Come lay your hands on her' What sort of hope does Jairus have?***

*D: That she get well. That she is healed.*

*B: That's self-evident, but the point is Jairus says my daughter is at the point of death. But he doesn't know. He is not a physician.*

*C: Christ can see everything*

*B: Maybe he is telling Jairus, he has conflicting views. Maybe he heals Jairus of the fact that it is not good to play double games on whether or not the kind of power you have.*

***Is Jairus trying to trick Jesus you mean?***

*B: He may be.*



**'So he went with him'. What makes Jesus go with Jairus?**

D: Because Jairus is a good man, well maybe a good man. Jesus felt he deserved to be helped. His daughter being so young needed to be helped too.

E: What's Jesus going to do anyway?

B: I think Christ is an unassuming man. He doesn't need to play games with anybody. He is the all-powerful God. 'I have come here to teach you to love'. He's concerned about the man's little girl. He concerned about the man's concern. He wants everything to be foolproof, and the greater the trial, the stupider the man.

**Are you saying that Jairus is somehow to blame for his daughter's condition?**

B: No, not at all. It was pre-ordained she would be ill.

E: Usually there is a reason why someone is like they are.

**Was the woman with haemorrhages to blame for her state?**

A: No.

B: She led a disordered life. She became straggly and bitchy.

C: It's not her fault. I don't think she is to blame.

B: Imperfection is disease. When does the world begin to die?

C: No one's perfect.

**Do you know how she feels to have endured much at the hands of doctors?**

B: Like the blind leading the blind. Dark doctors don't see the light.

D: Scary, frustrating. It hurts, it's hateful.

B: For every antagonism, there is an equal antagonism.

C: I'd be afraid of not getting the help I needed of not getting better again.

A: A little hopeful that I'd heal.

E: She gave up.

**What do you think it is like after all that treatment to get worse not better?**

D: It complicates it even more.

B: You get angry, pissed off, disgusted, every time you try you end up with a problem. You have no hope anymore. Sorrow and tears and despair.

**Why do you think she comes up behind him and not go to him in front of him?**

D: She's scared.

C: Embarrassed. She's a woman and he's a man. This way she doesn't have to deal with this discovering about the problem as a woman.

E: Hopeless.

**What do you make of her hope in Jesus that after all these years of treatment that if she only touches his cloak she will be healed?**

B: She feels his clothes are magical, representative of him, because at that time if a boy was missing they'd grab his clothes and remember. They think clothes have some living part of him. That is miraculous.

**Could you imagine yourself thinking like that?**

D: That would be good.

B: No. It goes from black to blue, yellow, white. Always travel through what it means. That is why it is always a master and a student. That is what this is.

**Is mental health like that?**

C: You have to know. You have to have some idea of what is going on to tell somebody else.

A: Better than reading it in a book.

C: To actually explain it, not unless it is happening to them.

D: Sometimes I wonder if anyone really knows anything anymore. The world is dying, killing itself.

**What do you think the crowd is making of all this?**

E: Crazy, maybe afraid for her.

B: The crowd think she's ripped off this situation. She takes something from him. He was going to see someone else.

C: She did get healed.

D: I think maybe the crowd knew it took place, they could see it on her face. They wanted a piece of the action too. They wanted something to be healed.

**But the woman...came in fear and trembling' Why does the woman come in fear and trembling?**

B: He's powerful and beautiful - his manifestation. She's afraid. She's only a woman and does not have any ability to say she was a good woman, a happy woman. Unable to be working, unable to get rid of the malady which scorned her - a bit of a devil. Unable to show herself as a true person.

C: The sole purpose of a woman was to bear children. She hasn't been able to do it - she's childless - and the fact that she touched his clothes, she gets herself saved.

B: Maybe she's shy and sly and distraught. A shady woman.

**Why does Jesus call her daughter do you think?**

C: She is born again. A son or a daughter of God.

B: He is the Son of God, everybody believes. It adds validity to himself of what was being said of this Son of God.

**What do you make of the phrase, 'your faith has made you well'?**

D: She knew she had to struggle with herself. Had to crawl on the ground to get to that cloth and when she touched, she knew.

**Was it her faith that healed her?**

C: God knows that he heals, but he wants her to know when you have faith in what I am, your faith heals you.

**Why trouble the teacher anymore? How do you think Jairus feels right now?**

D: He feels very few who make it know they are healers. Jairus is seeing all these people gathering around and my daughter dies. Will he be able to bring her back? Is the time gone?

C: Did I lose my opportunity?

B: He is groping and grasping to get his daughter help. So the news is a devastating blow to his whole purpose.

A: Maybe he has hope, some. 'I want you to see her. Show me what needs to be done. Even though I didn't get along with these people and they don't listen to me. Maybe he holds this against the people.

**How do you think Jairus felt when Jesus asked him not to fear but only believe?**

B: He already knew, Jesus is self-fulfilled.

A: He was trying to eliminate the emotion from this and just believe.

B: He is saying, 'there is nothing more accurate to say than this – do not fear, only believe'. It doesn't hurt his belief. No part of him at all. I'm not going to tell you that she's not dead, but he's a king, majesty.

**What do you learn from that?**

B: You are free from duality, free from death.

**How do you feel about the people laughing at Jesus? Would you have laughed?**

C: I don't know, Christ is all knowing.

D: What a relief, only sleeping!

**Who do you think needed healing the most?**

B: It's self-evident, the woman receives a blessing, the child is secondary, or it wouldn't be that way. Things accordingly happen in the story.

**What part do you feel each person plays in their own healing?**

B: A major role: they heal themselves. It's just the way it happens, you have to do certain things.

**And in the story?**

D: An important role. Not sure if it is small or large. I hope it would be large. You have to take care of the situation you are in. There was not much knowledge about medication, so there was a lot of self-healing.

A: There are a range of healing techniques. It is hard to come by the holistic approach.

C: I think they did. People who wanted to know Jesus and love him, they wanted him to set them free from a bondage and wanted to be happy.

B: Treat the problem. There is no way to direct every God damn problem there is because God demands it.

## READING GROUP FOUR

April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006

**How might it feel to be Jesus at this point?**

B: He probably feels he's back in the lion's den.

D: He probably feels he can't let the fame go to his head. All the people pushing around saying, 'Lord, Lord'. He had to keep his mind open so he wouldn't become prideful. His position in life meant that he couldn't look at himself fully until he was glorified.

C: He's humble.

D: He is humble but people are still following him. We can't comprehend the goodness of Jesus. Imagine having people begging you for life. I just can't imagine being in that position. But he didn't show any pride. He wanted people to understand how he loved them: most powerful and most humble.

**What sort of man is Jairus?**

A: Emotional to start with. He ignored his power. His emotions had gone beyond his position in life. He was just as a human being and caring about his daughter.

B: He believes in Jesus and in asking for his help somehow he believes he is superior to him.

**Do you think Jesus pays more attention to Jairus because of his status?**

A: I don't think so. He's not trying to prove a point, he is just being a servant of God.

D: He wasn't looking for publicity. He was just doing things in the simplest terms.

C: Jesus was not a respected person. He healed one of the Roman centurion's slaves.

**What does the crowd think of him falling at Jesus' feet?**

A: They didn't want to leave Jesus. I don't think they thought it out of the ordinary. I know I would never have left his side.

D: Well his disciples might have thought, 'I don't know.' I just think that Jesus, in his goodness, encouraged everyone around him. No darkness at all was able to exist around him. The Shekinah of God. The glory of God.

**'Come lay your hands on her' What sort of hope does Jairus have?**

C: He's a believer. He doesn't say, 'do something', he says, 'lay on your hands'. He believes Jesus can do it.

A: Jairus must have seen him before. He saw what Jesus did. He knew no one could do these things unless they were from God.

**Have you wanted to have or have had that sort of hope?**

C: I guess so yeah, but I accept my lot in life. I've reaped what I've sown.

A: My mother had a stroke, my sister is in a coma. What's to be is God's will. It's God's will.

**Why do you think Jairus believes this?**

A: He is responsible for a lot of people. He has a large following himself. By making her better, Jesus would pass the word along. He did not want to convince this guy, but to show God's love to Jairus and Jairus will show that to his congregation. What better than the leader of the community? Jairus didn't pick Jesus out. Jesus picked out Jairus.

B: He never backed down.

C: He could have just said the word, 'your daughter is healed'. I wonder why he goes with Jairus and not with the centurion. Could it be he just felt like going?

**What do you think the crowd is thinking?**

C: Why is he going so far out of his way for the people who are against him? Why raise the daughter of a leader who hates him. Bold-faced hypocrites.

B: They wanted to see it.

A: Curiosity.

B: They all know.

**'Now there was a woman...' How do you imagine her?**

A: Desperate. She knows she's tried everything she could. Maybe not just one, not just local and at that time there probably weren't more than one doctor in a town. She had sought help from other places. Spent all she had. She had a lot of money to do that but now she has no money left, and there's no recovery for herself and plus, she is getting worse. She couldn't even keep her stasis.

**Do you know how she feels to have endured much at the hands of doctors?**

A: You're drowning.

D: Or if all the drugs are sucking the life out of you, you try to touch that hem.

B: It's because you are trying that you are desperate.

C: Yeah, there was a point in my life, two years ago, a situation in my life. I tried everything. My expectations were unrealistic, because I wasn't looking for God. I tried to do it my way, but to no avail. When weakness came, I gave in straight away. I had played both roles: a father and a very active drug addict. It depends on how you are trying. She tried all those physicians.

A: She had an awful lot of faith.

B: She saw what she was doing.

**How do you picture her coming towards Jesus?**

D: I see her just going forward. Her faith overcoming everything. Jesus already knows. Her faith is beyond that obstacle, somehow she is going to get there and she does. She's not thinking, 'am I able?'

B: She's on a mission.

**How important is this woman?**

D: Just a pauper, a beggar...whatever, a common person.

C: A commoner.

A: *But she had money to spend. She wasn't poor.*

D: *She didn't use to be.*

B: *There were no HMO's!*

**What do you think 'the crowd' think of a woman like this?**

D: *I think the crowd think she is insignificant. They couldn't feel what Jesus feels. There was something more to that touching. The crowd was indifferent to this woman, still Jesus turns around.*

C: *Just one of many.*

D: *She touched him in a certain way. In a way that through him she was healed, through his power.*

B: *She had so much faith.*

A: *All through the crowd, quite a few touched his clothes, but he knew what had happened. He wanted her to come forward.*

D: *Like the armour of God. Someone touched his divinity and it went out from him.*

**Why did Jesus say, 'your faith has made you well'?**

C: *Because she believed through him.*

D: *She believed so much that she touched Jesus' divinity, his knowing goodness, his true clothes.*

**Do you think that the woman contaminated Jesus?**

D: *No, not at all. That woman was just like his disciples, following him for the rest of his life.*

C: *No, because she was faithful.*

**What role does the woman play in her own healing?**

A: *She was desperate, looking for help.*

C: *She felt guilty. Knowing what had happened, she was afraid. Maybe she felt guilty because she stood out there – not good enough for Jesus to come to her. Afraid Jesus thought she was sneaky or something.*

B: *She'd done something wrong.*

**Is that true?**

D: *No, she didn't do something wrong.*

A: *I don't think she thought she did anything wrong.*

D: *I don't know, she was a little bit overwhelmed with everything. Jesus felt her faith, he felt everything about her. Her faith was too much for her to think she was doing something wrong. She knew that he was the Messiah.*

A: *She knew it was God.*

D: Yeah, exactly. Her faith told her what this person is going to say. Not wrong, not in fear because she knows she is touching God.

C: She was a sinner – ‘he’s going to look through me and see me a sinner.’

**Did she heal herself?**

A: Yeah.

B: Yeah.

D: No, hold on.

B: Jesus said, ‘your faith has made you well’.

C: She doesn’t know it’s her faith that’s healed her. She has faith but at the moment she is not thinking about anything: ‘I’ve just gotta touch him.’

B: She’s hoping.

**Why does Jesus call her daughter do you think?**

C: ‘Cos he’s God.

D: She’s one of God’s children.

A: He has accepted her into his family.

B: But why daughter when others are friends.

D: Putting the Father’s words on Jesus’ lips reveals the Word of God himself.

**How is Jairus feeling while this is happening do you think?**

D: Just attentive. Just listening, letting the guy do his thing.

B: He wants Jesus to hurry up. ‘Let’s go’. To him that time is an eternity.

**Is he giving up hope?**

D: No, not giving up hope.

C: He’s so confident in Jesus. The crowd couldn’t leave Jesus.

A: Jairus is fearful he will lose his daughter. On the other hand he has just seen a miracle and that gives him confidence. He feels both at the same time. Fear and a reaffirmation that this Jesus will help his daughter.

**Did Jairus’ daughter want to be healed?**

C: Yeah, if she believed, yeah. But if she had no faith, then she wanted to die instead of suffering.

B: She’s still a child, she’s immature.

A: How can we even speculate, the first time we hear, she is at the point of death.

B: For her, being so sick, she didn’t realise what was going on.

**Why do you think Jesus wanted this to be a secret?**

*C: He wasn't ready to...this was big, and I think he knew the people were already planning something for him. This would go over the limit and they would use it against him.*

*D: He was ready to be that famous. Jesus was never unready. He just knew his time, all planned out.*

*A: With him being the humble person he was, he didn't want to make this into a publicity event. He didn't want her to become notorious for this. In a way, she had an ally when he walked out of the house. Others would say he did it on purpose, to make it happen for fame. Jesus did it from his heart. He did it privately.*

**Who needed healing the most in this passage?**

*C: Hard to say...I think the woman. She's older, she had sinned more. She needed more healing.*

*A: The child was innocent – only 12 years old. The woman needed more healing when you look beyond the haemorrhages and everything. Maybe she wasn't an adulterous person, but she committed sins. So for that, yeah, she needed more healing.*

*B: Outwardly, the girl who was dying more than the woman. She [the woman] could live. She could live even though it was a bit messy.*



#### 8.4 Reading Group Transcripts: *Mark 7:24-30*

24From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, 25but a woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed at his feet. 26Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27He said to her, 'Let the children be feed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and through it to the dogs.' 28But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' 29Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go – the demon has left your daughter.' 30So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

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- V24
  - Where is Jesus now? What is the significance of Tyre?
  - Why didn't he want anyone to know where he was?
  - How do you think Jesus is feeling here?
  - How do you think he felt knowing that he could not hide even if he wanted to?
- V25
  - How do you think it was possible that the Syrophenician woman immediately heard about Jesus?
  - Who told her?
  - Why do you think she comes and bows at Jesus' feet?
  - Was there anything odd about this?
  - How do you think Jesus felt about her doing that?
- V26
  - What significance is it do you think that the Syrophenician woman was a Gentile?
  - Why does she beg?
  - What do you think she believes about Jesus?
  - Can you imagine yourself in her position, begging?
- V27
  - Who are the 'children' that Jesus refers to do you think?
  - Why should they be fed first?
  - Who are the dogs?
  - Why should they have their food thrown to them?
  - Which do you mostly associate with: the children or the dogs?
  - How do you feel about Jesus using the word 'dog' to describe another person?
- V28 But she answered him...
  - How do you feel about her answering Jesus back?
  - Has Jesus said something wrong that the Syrophenician woman needs to correct him?
  - Why do you think she calls Jesus 'Sir'?
  - Why should the dogs only get crumbs to eat?
  - Does the Syrophenician woman expect too little? Should she also have a place at the table?

- Who do you most associate with in this story?
- V29 For saying that...
  - What do you think Jesus means when he says, 'for saying that...?'
  - Did the Syrophenician woman say something wrong?
  - How does Jesus feel at this point do you think?
- V29 ...you may go
  - Was the Syrophenician woman free to leave before now?
  - How do you think she feels just at this point? Has she pushed Jesus too far?
  - What do you think has made the demon leave her daughter?
- V30
  - How has the girl been all this while?
  - Was she something to be bargained over?
  - How do you think the woman feels now?
  - Is she one of the children now or still a dog?
  - How about Jesus? How do you think he feels now?
  - Did Jesus learn anything from this encounter?

## READING GROUP ONE

April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006

*C: Everybody has their place, even the birds.*

**Where is Jesus now? Why didn't he want anyone to know where he was?**

*B: Might have been tired, wanted to rest.*

*D: He didn't want his enemies to know where he is.*

**How do you think he felt knowing that he could not hide even if he wanted to?**

*A: Maybe he wanted personal space.*

*C: Paranoid. We always think that people were after him, yeah he had a persecution complex.*

**What does it feel like when you don't manage it?**

*D: Probably maybe frustrated and aggravated.*

*C: I think he was relieved that someone found him, someone he could talk to.*

*B: Love the one you're with. If you can't be with the one you love – God – love people you are with.*

**How do you think it was possible that the Syrophenician woman immediately heard about Jesus?**

*B: He was probably doing a lot of miracles, so he was just in the next town. They were probably following him. I'm sure he didn't walk in the house all by himself.*

**Why do you think she comes and bows at Jesus' feet?**

*D: She has faith that he is the Messiah.*

*B: She saw the Lord, she was astonished.*

*C: She had humility. I beg to people sometimes, well yeah, if I'm asking for forgiveness or I don't want to be punished. Like with the staff at the home - be merciful, have mercy.*

*A: For her forgiveness, she needs to be forgiven.*

**How do you think Jesus felt about her doing that?**

*A: Merciful.*

*C: He probably said, 'you don't have to keep crying all the time', otherwise she might go into a frenzy and go mentally ill.*

*A: She could have been in danger of losing her mind.*

*C: Sure they had mental illness, even in those days.*

**Was it significant that she is a woman begging?**

*C: I don't think so.*

*A: A woman is more likely to beg to a man than another man.*

*B: Jesus is Lord, there is no sexual connection to the woman.*

*C: A man still has pride.*

*D: A woman is more emotional.*

*A: Some men just can't get over their egos and be just as spiritual with Jesus as the women are.*

*D: A man can be just as humble as a woman, I changed my mind.*

**Is she an outsider?**

*B: Well I think Jesus found her very interesting, to figure out how she found him since she is an outsider.*

*D: Since she was an outsider she took a risk going to see him.*

*A: I think it took courage to beg, to be humble.*

**How does she feel, begging, do you think?**

*D: She went to Jesus to get the demon out of her daughter. She is very confident he can do it.*

*B: I think she is thinking about herself and her daughter. When somebody dies you feel sorry for yourself too. She doesn't want to feel sad, or lonely.*

*A: They belong to each other – her daughter and her – a special bond.*

**Who are the 'children' that Jesus refers to do you think?**

*C: The children of the neighbourhood I guess.*

*D: The Jewish people.*

**And the dogs?**

*A: People who don't have any food.*

D: Or the people who don't believe.

B: Well the dogs are the people whom Jesus doesn't recognise as part of his people.

C: Doesn't sound too good, no, when he calls them dogs. Those are people beneath him, he doesn't recognise them as equal.

**And how do you feel about them having their food thrown to them?**

C: No good either, doesn't have any manners.

**How would you feel if you were called a 'dog'?**

A: I would feel humiliated.

C: I would ask him to change his view in the way he was looking at the daughter.

B: What is he referring to? Is he saying that the daughter is a dog?

A: Sounds like it.

D: She's possessed by a demon.

C: I think the devil can take it out, God can't.

D: I disagree with that.

B: I think he could be referring to the demons as dogs – throwing food to dogs – talking to the demons.

**Do you think that 'dog' might refer to the woman?**

C: No. I don't think she can know the dog in the devil, talking about the demons under the table

D: It's just a figure of speech.

A: Everyone needs a chance sometimes.

**Does this seem like a negotiation to you?**

C: Yes, to fix the daughter, to be well, to get him to rid the demon, the devil.

**'But she answered him...' How do you feel about her answering Jesus back?**

A: Well she's not like him, so she's really afraid of what she says.

**Why's that?**

C: Because I think she's stronger than him, because she comes from another area and the area she comes from is probably very powerful.

**So she's not afraid to answer back**

C: No.

**Does the Syrophenician woman expect too little? Should she also have a place at the table?**

A: She should have said, 'I have a place at the table too,' that's the best answer.

C: Well, maybe she wants him to be with her, so that she can help him, and he could help her. Maybe she's looking for a mate.

D: *I think she's humbling herself even more, she's showing she has faith too.*

**How has the girl been all this while?**

C: *Like in the exorcist.*

B: *Sick.*

**Would you have liked to have known more about her?**

A: *Yes.*

D: *Why was she possessed in the first place?*

C: *Well, what caused her to be possessed? That would help figure out a way to get rid of the demons, how to go about it.*

**How do you think Jesus feels when she answers back?**

A: *Surprised, well he...*

B: *I don't think he was angry.*

C: *It doesn't say Jesus got the demon out, all it says is that the demon left her. It would have said, 'Jesus took the demon out'.*

**What do you think made the demons leave?**

C: *The demon himself left.*

**Why?**

C: *I don't know, Simon.*

**Does the woman push Jesus too far?**

A: *I think she wants to see how far she can push him, what he's able to do.*

C: *I don't think Jesus had enough power to get rid of the demon. I think the demon had to leave by himself.*

D: *I don't think so, not too far.*

B: *I don't think she pushed him too far because the demon finally left.*

C: *God and the devil are separate from each other. God does his work and the devil does his work.*

D: *Don't you think the devil only has the power you give him?*

C: *I don't know 'D', it's all a feeling, a feeling you know*

**What do you think has made the demon to leave her daughter?**

B: *I think the mother's faith.*

D: *I think that the mother prayed that the demon would leave.*

**What role does Jesus have in this?**

C: *Nothing, Jesus had no role in it.*

B: *He's the saviour.*

D: I think Jesus cast the demon out.

C: I think the devil has to leave. We all have our opinions here, right 'D'?

**Do you think we could say that the girl was bargained over?**

A: She was auctioned, a bargained thing.

B: If it was a bargain, the lady got what she wanted, but what did the Lord get out of it?

**What do you think?**

C: He probably did get something. She didn't believe before, now she believes.

**How do you think the woman feels now? Like a woman, a child, a dog?**

A: I think she thinks of herself as a child now, 'cause I think after this she changed her life around.

C: She felt like a dog, because of what happens to her. She's been treated like a dog.

D: I think she's well-off and humbled herself – changed her life around.

C: Well I don't know. Yeah...

## READING GROUP TWO

April 25<sup>th</sup> 2006

**How do you think Jesus is feeling here?**

A: Not sure. Jesus was caring for people. Difficult not to be unnoticed. I'm not too sure why it would bother him.

**Why do you think she comes and bows at Jesus' feet?**

A: I'd rather she didn't, but maybe a male and female greeted one another. Hard to say. Customs at that time.

**Was it significant that she was a woman?**

A: Possibly might have made a difference. I don't know if a male would do the same thing, he might, I don't know.

**Was she an outsider?**

B: Like two ships meeting in the ocean, the story as it's told or whoever's telling the story set it up that way.

A: Possibly. Seems like the first time they met, first time.

**Is it risky to behave that way, to beg on your knees to a complete stranger?**

A: Could be, opening up to someone you don't really know.

B: Where he comes from it is.

A: It shows trust. I myself wouldn't trust in doing it like that.

**Why does she beg?**

A: Well it seems to me that she's kind of desperate. Her daughter has a demon or whatever. She doesn't quite know what to do about it. She's probably tried numerous things without getting anything out of it. So she's looking to somebody to help the situation she has.

**Who are the 'children' that Jesus refers to do you think?**

A: The hungry, basically those who don't have as much as you do.

**And the dogs?**

B: Unbelievers.

**How do you feel about Jesus' terms?**

B: Where it was and the time it was appropriate. People could relate better to what he was saying.

A: I wouldn't be very happy about it. Just the fact that the language he used wouldn't seem right, wouldn't seem the sincerity I expect him to have.

**How would you react to it?**

B: Who the hell does this guy think he is?

A: I would probably let him elaborate on his answer and try and get more of an answer from him.

**Is this anything like how you are encountered having mental health problems today?**

A: A major problem is that you don't know what it going on with a person having problems. They don't notice.

**Does the way the woman answers back work as a way of resisting the label Jesus offers?**

B: You might end up with a fight on your hands.

A: If you wanted a fight, I presume it would be fine to do that.

B: Could be verbal or physical.

A: It could happen.

**Is it a risk then to answer back?**

B: Yeah

**How do you feel about her answering Jesus back?**

A: She was expressing a certain amount of truth – kids eat, they drop food, somebody else eats it. It just keeps going.

**Is she correcting him do you think?**

A: Yeah, but I don't know if I'd call it correcting, but just elaborating on the sentence before.

**Does the Syrophoenician woman expect too little? Should she also have a place at the table?**

A: She puts herself at a certain level when she calls him 'sir'. I'm not too sure...

**Whose in control of this encounter do you think?**

A: I think Jesus is trying to exhibit control by saying, 'You may go now'.

B: There's no round up to see the daughter. A person can say things. People say many things. There's no way to validate if this is true so in some ways he has the upper hand.

***Has she pushed Jesus too far?***

*B: They both push each other too far.*

***Do you think the woman's role was significant?***

*A: Yes. I am not too sure that Jesus knows this about the daughter until she mentions it to him, but she has been experiencing this for some time.*

***Would you have liked to have had more focus in the story on the girl?***

*A: Yes, just to validate the statement that the two are making – just go in faith on what they say.*

***Do you think we could say that the girl was bargained over?***

*B: Initially, it seem more like bargaining, but eventually he was like the counsellor or a head shrink, asking her questions or giving her assurance.*

***Does he do that in the right way?***

*A: Yes I think so.*

***Even with the terms he uses?***

*A: Well, I'm not too sure there.*

***How do you think the woman feels now? Like a woman, a child, a dog?***

*A: Hard to say*

*B: Wouldn't take it. Sorry, see you later.*

### **READING GROUP THREE**

*April 24<sup>th</sup> 2006*

All answers for this session are provided by reader 'A'  
who asked for the session to be short.

***Why do you think she comes and bows at Jesus' feet?***

*Just she probably thought he was extremely holy, a saving person, maybe even something beyond that – an angel or a god.*

***Was it out of respect?***

*More respect, it could be desperation too. The text leaves it open.*

***How do you think Jesus feels about this?***

*I don't know. It could be a kind of grandiose thing, like it assumes that the historical Jesus was a regular person, but no special connection to the divine. Because of actions due to people like this he developed a problem: a God complex.*

***Do you think it is about Jesus' power?***

*I remember a psychiatrist when starting would always have his head above mine. I've never felt that kind of thing with people I am working with now. Although I do remember trying to get into a certain living situation and my caseworker was holding the reigns.*

***Why does she beg?***

*That is strange, because if somebody like Jesus has the power to heal people and is a pretty benevolent person, it should not require begging. It may be more about her desperation. She may not know much about Jesus and just knows that he heals. She doesn't know if he is a benevolent person or wants to heal.*



**Who are the dogs?**

*It's enigmatic. It's metaphorical. She's asking him for something, he is throwing an aphorism at her. It doesn't really make sense to me. It's definitely open to interpretation, that he is calling her a dog. It's disturbing. It's not a compassionate, loving thing to do.*

**How would you feel?**

*It would be upsetting. I would feel disillusioned, not know what to say, or say I didn't think you were like this.*

**Is her response realistic if imagined for a person who lives with the social experience of poor mental health?**

*I think some people have this mental constitution to react in that way but to the extent that mental health problems can overlap with problems with hating yourself, feeling depressed and getting really high and manic – yeah this part just feels like a story, it doesn't feel like something that could really have happened.*

**Is there a way to resist this sort of label?**

*Well, one way is just not to associate with that person anymore, or give them a label to write off whatever they say.*

**A label to 'write them off'?**

*Labelling back: because of this label I feel confident writing off anything you say. Just give me a crumb.*

**Are labels important?**

*Depends on the person you are reaching out to. With regards to that stuff, we've made some progress historically from the time before when there were asylums – everyone outside is safe, the insane as criminals at the same time. There's a lot more willingness [now] to see us as people too.*

**Does the Syrophoenician woman expect too little? Should she also have a place at the table?**

*I don't know. Her kid gets cured. It seems that this is all she is asking for in the first place.*

**Who is in control of this situation?**

*Definitely I think Jesus. It seems almost like he's saying aphorisms, its like he's throwing something at her, something small and profound for her to think about. I guess Jesus...but it depended on her saying the right thing.*

**Who has power?**

*I think both have some power; I can't say who has more.*

**Would you have liked to have learned more about the daughter?**

*She matters. It would be nice to get a comparison between what she is like before and after the spirit. Even the individual will have a very muddy perception of themselves, depending on the situation. It's good to keep that person in the know. You can't make generalisations without having some individual personal story. Individual stories might be useful in general for advancing scientific knowledge but they are personal stories of infinite value. It's about honouring every individual human life.*

**What makes the demon leave?**

*You could definitely read it, because the woman said the response to Jesus he did, but Jesus decided. It's not clear. Maybe the woman maybe without Jesus' action made the demon leave. I would say though it is Jesus, I think it makes more sense.*

***Who would you like it to be?***

*I guess the woman. It's cooler if she makes it happen just by saying that.*

### 8.5 Reading Group Transcripts: *Mark 5:1-20*

1They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. 2And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. 3He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; 4for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. 5Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. 6When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; 7and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.' 8For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit! 9Then Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.' 10He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. 11Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; 12and the unclean spirits begged him, 'Send us into the swine; let us enter them.' 13So 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 lake, and were drowned in the lake.

14The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. The people came to see what it was that had happened. 15They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. 16Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. 17Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighbourhood. 18As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. 19But Jesus refused, and said to him, 'Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.' 20And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

- 
- V1 -2
    - At what sort of pace is the story at just now?
    - What does it feel like Jesus?
    - Why do you think he has no place to get away from the crowds?
  
  - V3-5
    - What sort of existence has the man with the demons had?
    - What does the fact that he lived 'among the tombs' say to you about him and his life?
    - Who do you think had been restraining him with chains and shackles?

- Why do you think he was so strong?
- What would it feel like to be that man?
- Can you imagine what it might feel like to be restrained?
- V6
  - Why do you think he runs to Jesus?
  - And why bow?
  - How do you think this makes Jesus feel?
  - What do the swine herders think about this?
  - And the disciples, do you think they are around?
- V7-8
  - What do you make of his question: 'what have you to do with me?'
  - Who does he recognise Jesus as?
  - Do you think that Jesus would or should torment the man?
  - Who is doing the speaking here?
  - Who is Jesus speaking to?
- V9
  - What do you make of Jesus asking his name then and not before?
  - And what about the name 'Legion'? What does that make you think of?
- V10
  - Why is there so much anxiety about being sent out of the country?
  - Where might that be do you think?
- V11-13
  - How do you feel about the pigs being drowned?
  - Why do you think the unclean spirits wanted to go into them?
  - What do you think the pig herders thought about that?
  - Do you think Jesus had any concern for the animals or the pig herders livelihood?
- V14
  - Why do you think the herders ran off? What was their aim?
  - How do you think the crowds in the city and country reacted?
- V15
  - What has happened in the meantime?
  - How long do you think the man and Jesus have been together?
  - Are they alone?
  - Do you think they were talking to one another? What might they have been talking about?
  - Why were the people afraid?
  - Who were they afraid of do you think?
- V16-17
  - Who is reporting to whom?
  - How do you think that report was received?
  - Why do you think they beg Jesus to leave?
- V18-20
  - In what frame of mind do you think Jesus got back into the boat?
  - Had it been a good trip?

- Why is the man begging again?
- How do you feel about him still being someone who begs?
- How do you feel about Jesus refusing him?
- Is his advice to the man good advice? If so, how so?
- What do you take the word 'amazed' to mean at the end of this passage?

## READING GROUP ONE

April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006

**What sort of existence has the man with the demons had?**

B: Troubled. Seeking a miracle in life from the Lord. He's going through hard times and needs a good miracle. He really needs something good to happen to him.

C: Looks like it. Same old grind everyday. He needs a 'pick me up'.

**Who do you think had been restraining him with chains and shackles?**

A: How barbaric. Who chained him up? Why would they pick on him? Why was he elected to be chained? There must have been a reason – like a prisoner is in jail.

D: Maybe to the crowd, they thought he was going out of his mind, so they chained him up all this time.

**Does that sound fair to you?**

C: No, it's not fair.

E: Living next to the cemetery, nobody to talk to. Nobody likes to wake up in the morning and see a bunch of dead people.

D: It's a kind of punishment. Maybe they thought they were protecting him.

**What did it feel like to be that man do you think?**

B: Kind of tough. That's why he fought it all the time and so got so powerful that they couldn't retrain him anymore.

C: I wouldn't want to be him.

D: It doesn't say why he was restrained. I'd like to know.

**It says he was howling at night. What do you think that is about?**

C: Going out of his mind.

A: Going through hell. It could be the work of the devil too you know.

**What does this man need?**

A: A life.

B: That's it.

A: Like everybody else.

B: Maybe he needed somebody just to listen to him and just to care.

**Why do you think he runs to Jesus?**

D: Because Jesus is beautiful, he's God. Jesus is an absolutely beautiful human being. He was happy. He decided he was good. I'm pretty sure if we saw God we'd bow down to him too you know.

**What do you think the disciples thought about this?**

C: They might have felt the same way as the man...I don't know, they felt bad for him.

A: They might have taken his chains off.

E: Well, I read the Bible. The disciples are always very protective of Jesus and usually try to hold off the crowd.

C: I don't think they got out of the boat this time.

D: Put it this way, if one of us saw Jesus. We'd run to him too.

B: That's right.

C: Definitely.

A: He's astonished.

**What do you make of his question: 'what have you to do with me?'**

C: He said that to the Lord because the Lord could do anything, he could change his mind. God can also torment too. You can get afraid of the Lord. The Lord can go haywire, just like someone who has too many drinks.

**Do you think he was afraid of Jesus then?**

C: Might have been.

A: I think it's a conflict of witches, and those under the spell speak through the man.

D: He recognises him as the Most High God, but he also wants nothing to do with him.

E: We don't know who's speaking, the man or the demons.

C: The legions of hell.

**Do you think that Jesus would torment someone?**

C: He could. Jesus could do anything.

D: I think he's more afraid than anything, because Jesus is so good, he has all sorts of problems and thought he might be punished by God for having demons in him.

**Is mental illness a condition of being punished by God?**

A: I don't go that far.

B: It's just a disease.

**And what about the name 'Legion'? What does that make you think of?**

C: That's his name. That's his name that's all.

D: I think it means an army of evil spirits.

**Could it refer to the Romans do you think?**

E: I don't know, it doesn't sound like Romans.

C: Maybe they might have meant that there were other people that were there. They were too afraid to come out - 'I'm standing here, speaking for everyone' - a lot who were left out because they were a little different.

**Why is there so much anxiety about being sent out of the country?**

C: They send them away if they don't do your hygiene. 'Get away, get away you stink'.

B: I don't understand this. Maybe he thought...

E: Maybe he thought what Jesus thought that he should push them out too.

C: He might have seemed a loser, might not have liked him. No one wanted to have anything to do with him.

**How do you feel about the pigs being drowned?**

A: Kind of rough.

**What do you think was the biggest story was the herders ran off and told: that the man had been healed or that the pigs had run off the cliff?**

A: Yes the pigs.

D: You have to think, this was their livelihood.

C: What about both could happen?

B: I think they lost livelihood and told people Jesus drowned 2000 pigs.

**Why did the crowds come?**

D: They were amazed.

C: To praise the pigs.

B: Some might have come to get healed themselves.

D: They would have been angry.

A: Jesus has created a stir.

**What has happened in the meantime? Do you think they were talking to one another?**

**What might they have been talking about?**

C: Jesus was talking to him. Jesus started talking, 'you are not possessed no more, keep it down'.

B: I think it shows great compassion for the man and I also think that it was proof that he had done the miracle since the man was clearly OK.

A: They were resting together.

E: Talking to him.

A: Yeah exactly.

E: *Showed that he is normal now.*

C: *Might have been talking about life, if he had a wife, if he had kids, what he used to do before he lost his mind to those demons.*

**Why were the people afraid?**

E: *Of the pains of life.*

D: *Might have been afraid because of what just happened with the pigs.*

C: *I think Jesus might have given off bad vibrations, because they were afraid he could do something wrong they backed off a little. Afraid of his power, that if you do something wrong you could...well you know, you could be in trouble.*

B: *I think some were afraid because he killed the swine, some might be angry I'm sure, that is what they had to eat.*

**Why do you think they beg Jesus to leave?**

D: *Maybe they were scared, what would happen next.*

C: *Getting bad vibrations.*

**And the man?**

A: *They were probably afraid of him too.*

B: *Yeah I think so too. He had changed so much in such a space of time.*

D: *Maybe they overlook him, they forget about him. It seemed a small thing in comparison. It was overshadowed.*

**In what frame of mind do you think Jesus got back into the boat?**

C: *'Same old baloney! Perform a miracle and this is the thanks I get. I don't know!'*

D: *I think he was feeling good because he helped somebody. A good trip.*

B: *I think he thought a lot of his work. It was wonderful how he helped this poor man and bring him back to normal life. It shows the power the Lord has to change peoples' lives.*

**How do you feel about him still being someone who begs and how do you feel about Jesus refusing him?**

D: *I think he knew that Jesus was the Son of God. He wanted to be near him.*

B: *Probably in the conversation before, he had told him how his life was, he probably just wanted to be with Jesus. He knew if he was he would be taken care of.*

## **READING GROUP TWO**

April 11<sup>th</sup> 2006

**What sort of existence has the man with the demons had?**

A: *Many saints do this like that. I know they used to sleep on a concrete slab - like a penance, trying to get it out. He bangs his head, scrapes his head, like he's doing penance in a way. I'm not saying that he was a saint, but he was heading that way maybe.*



*B: They wanted to separate the man from other people. Probably they had a belief in the after life. It must have had some meaning to them. He wants to get rid of the demon. The only person who could do it for him was Jesus.*

***Can you imagine what it might feel like to be restrained?***

*A: Hard to say. I don't know how he feels. It's just that in that situation you don't know what to do about it.*

*C: Yes, it's desperate.*

***Why do you think he runs to Jesus?***

*B: Because he believes in the after-life and because Jesus is the promised Messiah and probably he heard people talk about him. I think he realises that Jesus is the only one who can get rid of the demons.*

*A: It's like mentally ill people. Some people can't see what is bothering them and holding them back. I think he [Jesus] knew. Maybe God had this suffering for him to do and he accepted it.*

*B: It just goes to show the power of Satan, he could break out of shackles.*

***Was this God's punishment for the man then?***

*A: Yes. He has to take up his cross. Every good Catholic is required to take up his cross.*

*C: Sounds like the psychiatrist. Because Jesus would listen to the man and give various advice and could ask questions. People need answers too.*

***What do you make of his question: 'what have you to do with me?'***

*C: Probably wants an answer.*

*A: I think he says, 'it's up to you Jesus'. Does Jesus think he should continue suffering or should Jesus have the demons taken out of him? I think it goes with the theology of our Catholic church, each one has our cross to bear.*

*B: It's God's will you have to go by. We have to do it. Not our will but yours.*

***Is mental illness a punishment from God?***

*B: It's not a punishment. It's a cleansing of the soul.*

*C: A way of growth.*

*A: You don't have to do something wrong. Life can just be unfair. I took a positive view: if you are suffering and you seem to be suffering more than others, maybe God has a plan for you ultimately.*

***Do you think Jesus would torment someone?***

*A: Jesus had mercy, he saw his suffering.*

*C: The easy way out. He was looking for this, and wanted the answers there and then and Jesus wasn't going to give him what he wanted.*

***Why?***

*A: Just a learning lesson that he had to go through. Everyone has to go through certain things.*

***What do you make of Jesus asking his name then and not before?***

*C: He doesn't know this. It was a searching process all the way round for Jesus and the man.*

B: Well I think with unclean spirits Jesus was saying after, if you want you can go. You aren't a follower of mine.

**And what about the name 'Legion'? What does that make you think of?**

B: An army soldier, like a great soldier.

A: The Roman Empire. In the Roman army, lots of people, maybe symbolic wisdom. Many people were afflicted by demons. He saw himself as one of many. It was Christ, he could take out everyone. He called him by his first name, legion, a lot of people who have demons. I think it's a way for Jesus to conjure up the devil and this man has wisdom. He does have wisdom, put the demons in the swine and they drowned so he cured a lot of people. It's symbolic of many people who are being cleansed by this. This is a reason for suffering.

**How do you feel about the pigs being drowned?**

C: What a waste of life, yeah.

B: Demons aren't very smart basically.

A: It shows the swine - an animal - and they don't go to heaven but the man who had demons in him didn't kill himself, he lived with it, he knew he had an immortal soul. You would say swine don't have an afterlife. A person should not give up in suffering.

B: Absolutely yeah. And he was prepared to do more and when he saw Jesus he could let him go.

**What do you think was the biggest story was the herders ran off and told: that the man had been healed or that the pigs had run off the cliff?**

C: The agricultural disaster. That's the way they made their life and then say goodbye!

A: It was different for different herders. It depended on what their faith was like. Jesus was also a human and Jewish. Maybe the pigs were symbolic, unclean, like the demons.

B: I would normally say the pigs but it was an apocalyptic time with lots of excitement about Jesus. They might have been just as interested in Jesus as anyone else. Jesus had followers and enemies. Jesus symbolically saw swine and as unclean, showing that the Devil has an end. He has dominion over the Devil. He can put an end to them.

**Why do you think Jesus remains with the man?**

C: To claim credit for the miracle. Whatever it is they could see that they were amazed by that.

B: Jesus was an obvious believer in truth and wanted to know this man.

A: I don't know if they begged him to leave, but the man begs him to stay.

**Why do you think Jesus refuses to allow the man to follow him?**

B: He wanted this man to preach the gospel. Whatever it is, the people he goes to will see that he is in his right mind - not in the cemetery - he is preaching the word of God, being a witness to Jesus.

A: He was kind of a new priest, because it wouldn't have served any purpose to go with Christ. He gave him a challenge. We know that Jesus had enemies and many were martyred for the cause of Jesus. Christ was asking him to be a witness to his power.

C: It would have been good for him to follow, but things don't happen outright. Planting the seed and seeing what it grows into I guess.

### READING GROUP THREE

April 17<sup>th</sup> 2006

**What sort of existence has the man with the demons had?**

A: Very dirty, not changing clothes, scavenging, living off whatever he can get.

B: Pretty desperate.

**What does the fact that he lived 'among the tombs' say to you about him and his life?**

B: Close to the spirit world. He's probably unconscious of that being a taboo. He feels he belongs. That means that he belongs with the dying.

**And the chains?**

A: They might have had the assumption that someone with insanity would be polluting for them to be among the rest of society. They might have thought it would have caused others to go insane. They didn't want him around their children.

**What do you think of the fact that he was bruising himself with stones?**

B: Suffering. He seems like he's worthless. I relate - when I'm tormented by my thoughts I have a tendency to say 'what do you want from me God?' Why are you doing this?

A: It's like there is a piece of him that is aware. He's so broken, so ill that he lives in this desolate existence. Mental illness can be like that. There is a lot of anguish in mental illness.

B: Is it a physical or a spiritual oppression?

A: Sure, it is hard to separate one from the other.

**What's most troubling to you about his context?**

B: In bondage, trapped in his suffering. No one can help him. He can't help himself.

A: Helpless, he's howling.

B: If he's oppressed, it reminds me of [the movie] 'The Passion of Christ', how they depicted Judas going crazy seeing things 'til he finally hung himself. He feels almost punished...I'm not sure. It also reminds me of whether or not he brought it upon himself or was it sin? Or both? It reminds me of the thief on the cross even though guilty of sin God still had mercy on him in his last hour. It's really hard to see beyond the behaviour and opinions and see the child of God, not these who they are. Not to pass judgement, like some pastors.

**Why do you think he runs to Jesus?**

A: Maybe he felt like if Jesus is there in the opposite direction to the demons he ran away to safety.

B: Also there's a sense of authority, a sense that God allowed him to be in this state. What else will he do? 'Don't torment me anymore'. He doesn't realise God is ready to heal him. Just last night I asked, 'God, what do you want from me?' The good thing is he gets healed in the end, so let me cling to that promise.

**And why bow?**

B: Imagine if you met Jesus like that. Well it says a lot because even in the midst of his torment, his presence must have been so holy he fell at his feet. I don't have that kind of humility, especially when I'm suffering - I get really mad.

**Was this reverence then and not fear?**

A: Fear of something worse. If that was the case he was aware of his condition, otherwise he would be out of it. Jesus almost brought a sense of clarity to speech. 'What do you want with me?' He knew who he was. Even the demons. I was hoping he was talking to him not just the demons.

**And the disciples, what do you think they think of all this?**

B: Well, I'm beginning to think they have remained open to him begging the Son of God. They've seen this character of God at work and how it changes people. God's presence. When God shows up it's not, I mean, these disciples lives have changed forever.

**Do they see this man positively or negatively?**

A: I guess positively.

B: Could be protective, but maybe they are getting the gist.

**He shouted at the top of his voice...?**

A: I assume it's the guy.

B: It's so painful this story.

**Who is Jesus talking to?**

B: The demons.

A: I don't know.

B: His heart broke for the man. First he wants to get him out of the rut. It's the character of God to love his people. He doesn't want them to suffer. Then he has a conversation.

**And what about the name 'Legion'? What does that make you think of?**

A: It's not like he has multiple personalities. He believes his psyche consists of thousands of soldiers.

B: There is war inside of him battling it out. He gets left in the corner with all the voices.

**Is the man powerful or powerless would you say?**

A: To me the image is powerful – breaking chains.

B: I imagine inside is a legion, all on the same side. All very well organised to combat whatever enemy.

**Could Jesus be that enemy?**

A: An enemy he is surrendering to?

**Why is there so much anxiety about being sent out of the country?**

B: He didn't want to let it go. The demons begged him.

A: I don't know.

B: I read it like the man is begging Jesus not to send his legions out of his body. The country is like his body which is like his country.

A: Maybe I do relate to that, I hold onto my illness.

*B: I know for me, if you think you have special power, or special...maybe you think you have something. I can relate to OCD [obsessive compulsive disorder] like you have a magical power and so rituals to fix things and if you give up special powers to fix things. Even if you want the truth, you don't want to give up the ritual. If I think a thought, if I don't like it, I think another thought and cancel it out - a special power, a magical power.*

*A: It's giving up the control.*

*B: You dare to let go, like the OCD, you dare to be mediocre.*

***What do you think was the biggest story was the herders ran off and told: that the man had been healed or that the pigs had run off the cliff?***

*A: If people are more concerned with economics they would obviously care more about the pigs. If they are interested in religion and spirituality then the greater significance is the human part of the story.*

*B: That he was screaming, naked, beating himself, lonely – now he is OK, I think that to me is no joke. I pray for that every day.*

***What do you think people make of the scene? Why are they afraid?***

*B: It revealed to them their own sin. They realised this wasn't just some guy, this was somebody who was significant.*

*A: Maybe they thought Jesus was a devil, helping this guy and maybe got him dressed up, speaking clearly – like a Trojan horse. Make it seem like he was normal again.*

***What had happened in the meantime? Do you think they were talking to one another? What might they have been talking about?***

*A: It depends if he was going to remember what he experienced in his life before.*

*B: He must remember in some way.*

*A: He remembers in a rough shape.*

***How do you feel about Jesus refusing to allow him to follow him?***

*B: He was one of the first missionaries in the Bible.*

*A: Also, go back to your friends. He has people to go back to.*

***How do you feel about him still being someone who begs?***

*A: The fact that he begs and doesn't ask, to me connotes a desperation.*

*B: It's spiritual, he feels he needs Jesus.*

*A: It's intense.*

***Is he fully healed if he still needs to beg?***

*B: Well, maybe he is moved by the compassion of the love of Jesus, begging him to be with him. Yes he's healed, he's just thankful. He didn't want him to go. It reminds me how Jesus is the man through whom God teaches us about relationships. He really knows this.*

***Is this the beginning of a relationship?***

*B: He doesn't want this to end.*

*A: Maybe he felt he can't do this without him and he wanted assurance that he would be OK. If the therapist goes on vacation, and it's too much of a crutch.*

*B: People who believe Jesus is the living Christ and lives in a person, he never leaves or forsakes you, so in a way it's a beginning. I relate to that begging of Jesus, to stay with me, I've written a song about it and part of my illness is not trusting myself to make decisions when he gave me a mind and heart to make decisions. Jesus encourages the man that you can do it on your own. More of the illness and not the relationship, I cling.*

***What did the man say to people that made them amazed?***

*A: I think we have to ask how he is constructing the narrative. I would imagine it to be a recovery story. I was lost, I was insane, hanging out with the dead. Jesus brought me back to life.*

*B: The love of God had mercy on me. His terms are always right. Right now is a real dark time for me. God uses those times. What I wondered is will the demons get thrown into slavery or prison? My story would be love of God. He wished it for divine reasons and had the mercy to heal me. I have fought with God. Why? She prayed for healing in her life. Her life changed people. She was healed in special ways. My story would be like that healing comes in a lot of forms. I know God is healing me.*

## 8.6 Reading Transcripts: *Mark 15:1-5*

1As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. 2Pilate asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' He answered him, 'You say so.' 3Then the chief priests accused him of many things. 4Pilate asked him again, 'Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.' 5But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

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- V1
  - What do you imagine the chief priests, elders, scribes, and whole council held a consultation about?
  - What do you imagine the mood to be like?
  - What do you think they want?
- They bound Jesus
  - How do you feel as about Jesus being bound?
  - Have you ever felt bound?
  - Have you ever been led away to a place you didn't want to go to?
  - Have you ever felt 'handed over'?
- V2 'Are you the King of the Jews?'
  - What does Pilate mean by this?
  - Is this a label that Jesus wants do you think?
  - Why do you think Pilate asks this question?
- 'You say so'
  - What do you make of Jesus' answer?
  - Who is 'you' here do you think?
  - Do you think this is a good answer to offer?
  - Is it clear what Jesus does think from this answer?
- V3 accused him of many things
  - What do you imagine they accused him of?
  - How do you think Jesus feels at this point?
  - Have you ever been accused of many things?
  - Do you think that Jesus had any chance to defend himself?
  - How would you defend yourself in this situation?
  - How have you defended yourself when you have been accused?
- V4 Pilate asked him again
  - Why do you think Pilate asks him again?
  - How do you imagine Pilate to be feeling right now?
  - How about Jesus, who does he feel?
- 'Have you no answer?'
  - Now how do you imagine Pilate feels?
  - What do you imagine Jesus' accusers are hoping for now?
  - Do you think that Jesus should speak up here?
  - Would you speak up in this situation?

- V5 But Jesus made no further reply
  - Why do you think Jesus remains silent at this point?
  - Have you ever felt like you have been reduced to silence?
  - Do you think Jesus' accusers are disappointed?
  
- Pilate was amazed
  - Why do you think Pilate was amazed here?
  - Do you think anybody else was amazed?
  - What do you think the other people gathered thought of Jesus now?
  - What do you think the other people gathered thought of Pilate now?
  - What do you think of Jesus now?
  - Who do you think has power in this encounter?
  - Who do you think is in control of this conversation in the end?
  - How important do you think silence is to this passage?

## READING GROUP ONE

May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006

***What do you imagine the chief priests, elders, scribes, and whole council held a consultation about?***

*C: They're there to find out if he is King of the Jews. They're just talking.*

*D: A big meeting about what they were going to do with Jesus.*

*B: Jesus must be becoming quite popular with the people and the chief priests were against him all along and probably talking about how to get rid of him.*

*E: They were probably holding talks. Jesus was talking to the Father and there was no answer from the Lord whether he is or not.*

***How do you imagine the mood to be like?***

*B: I think they are very happy that they are going to be getting rid of him.*

*A: They might have been very angry, loud, some of them might have been scared.*

*C: The consultation might be coming up with something, leading up to something.*

*D: Some might have seen what he did, but they were scared to speak out, scared that if they didn't follow they'd be next.*

***How do you feel about Jesus being bound?***

*A: I don't like the idea of him being bound up because he's not free anymore, he's captured.*

*C: What, with rope?*

*A: Yeah with ropes.*

*C: Why would they do that to him?*

*B: They're going to crucify him.*



C: Ah!

**Have you ever been led away to a place you didn't want to go to?**

C: Yes.

B: Locked up in the ward.

**Why?**

C: No freedom. Can't get out, can't go nowhere. Staff at the house... 'if you do this one more time, you will be locked up...'

E: No, well I think the other way. It could be prophesised he could be sacrificed.

B: I haven't been locked up except on the wards. It's pretty hard to be taken from your house.

E: Jesus knew this was going to happen.

B: I don't think anybody likes being out away where they have no choice.

**Have you ever felt 'handed over'?**

C: I've been that way, from residence to residence and home. The part of LA [Los Angeles] I came from they give you a place, an apartment, though you have to go through all kinds of heck. I'm not against Massachusetts, it just takes awhile to do things.

**'Are you the King of the Jews?' What does Pilate mean by this?**

C: Just what it says: 'are you the King of the Jews?'

E: It's leading up to the crucifixion.

**Does it seem an odd question to you?**

C: If the Lord says, 'Yes', Pilate says, 'remarkable,' and walks off.

**Do you think Pilate felt threatened?**

D: No, I don't think he felt threatened.

B: I think he was probably trying to poke fun at him. He asked it, almost sarcastically.

**'Are you the King of the Jews?' Is this a label that Jesus wants do you think?**

D: I don't think he wanted any label or to label himself.

**Why?**

D: He was the Son of God. He was confident in who he was. He really didn't need a label or title or anything.

C: I don't know...I wouldn't want to be called 'King of the Jews'. I don't know...It's like being the leader of the pack; I wouldn't want to be leader of the pack. I'd rather be the underdog than be the king...I don't know.

B: Well I think Pilate was seeking to find a way to accuse him of trying to take over the city of Jerusalem. He was really afraid; he was gaining more control, more and more people. He was afraid he might overthrow the Roman Empire. So they scapegoated him instead.

**'You say so.' What do you make of Jesus' answer?**

D: I think he said that because they were saying that, not Jesus himself. He never said that.

A: Jesus hit him back.

C: There are a couple of ways. It could be a question or returning it back to him, 'he [Pilate] says so'.

**Who is 'you' here do you think?**

E: I think 'you' is Pilate, the chief priests, the elders - all of them.

A: Jesus wasn't afraid. I'd bet we'd be afraid.

**You think Jesus wasn't afraid?**

E: No Jesus wasn't afraid. His deity and his power would have been shown.

D: I don't think he was afraid.

**'You say so.' Do you think this is a good answer to offer?**

D: Yes.

C: I don't think it's good. He could have said, 'yes I am' or, 'if you think I am, you have a right'. Three words aren't clear enough.

B: I think it's a brief way of rebutting that whole group of people. He was angry at this point.

**Is it clear what Jesus does think from this answer?**

A: No, it's a quizzical reply.

C: I don't think it is.

**'...accused him of many things.' What do you imagine they accused him of?**

C: I don't know.

B: I think one of the charges is blasphemy. To say you are the Son of God was unheard of. The chief priests were looking for ways to do away with him or at least ways to stop his power.

**Do you think that Jesus had any chance to defend himself?**

A: Probably not without all the apostles.

D: I think no matter what he has said, they would have tried to turn it on him.

**'Pilate asked him again'. How do you imagine Pilate to be feeling right now?**

D: He might have got frustrated.

B: I think Pilate became incredibly curious; why this heroic figure made no reply. Not even a word to say for himself. It was strange to a person used to trials and trying people.

E: They wanted him to take care of it.

**'But Jesus made no further reply'. Why do you think Jesus remains silent at this point?**

E: He didn't have to impress anybody. He didn't need a show of power, they made him a little lower than the angels.

C: Maybe he thought he was proud. I think Jesus was really stuck up or proud.

B: Well, I think he's preached so much to people, he doesn't think he should dignify all this with a reply.

**Have you ever felt like you have been reduced to silence?**

B: Well, I say to myself, just shut up, if you don't have nothing to say. Just be quiet.

C: Yeah I do, yeah. When I go to smoke. I like to be by myself. I don't say that much.

**Who do you think has power or control in this encounter?**

C: I don't think anybody does.

B: I think Jesus does. He has the power to choose not to answer, it frustrated the guy.

A: I think at first power is to Pilate. He's the big shot, but as Jesus doesn't answer him it slips away and slips right back to Jesus.

D: I don't think anybody has power. It's kind of a plain episode.

C: Not too exciting.

D: It's good, the words were good, it's just he has no power.

## **READING GROUP TWO**

May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006

A: I think Jesus was showing his innocence. If Jesus believed he had guilt he would have told Pilate.

B: Pilate crucified him anyway.

**What do you imagine the chief priests, elders, scribes, and whole council held a consultation about?**

A: Sounds like a lawyer and a jury, trying to find out if Jesus really was the King of the Jews or just a phoney person.

**How do you imagine the mood to be like?**

A: They want to find out the truth. First they want to find out if he deserves a higher authority, if he is King of the Jews, ruler of Jerusalem.

B: If Jesus says yes, then Jesus has a chance of being made king.

A: Sometimes people just subject to their priests.

C: But I think he may have been pompous with Jesus.

B: What they put Jesus through, partly because he was innocent. He didn't realise that that they were trying to help him not hurt him.

**How do you feel as about Jesus being bound?**

A: It's cruel and unusual punishment. I think they were jealous, that this man was actually saying to him in his own way he was just as good or better than Pilate and he saw Jesus as a threat to his relationship to Rome.

**A threat?**

C: Because the king is like Pilate and Pilate is like the Pope. If Jesus is king then he may be greater than the representative of the Emperor. He has abilities Pilate never dreamt of, he has a power beyond description.

B: Maybe he was scared he would get violent.

A: It has to do with people wanting power, Jesus was unable to say anything.

**Have you ever been led away to a place you didn't want to go to?**

A: This is a bit different. I had a dream I couldn't lift my leg – a dream I used to have.

B: Yeah, I didn't like being hospitalised. They put me in 'human resources' instantly. Something about it tortured my mind. Well, I had dreams that I cut my wrists with razors. I had a dream, thinking I was beautiful.

C: I didn't want to go to the hospital, I knew it was run down, the other one was good. Actually, they put one of my friends in restraints, I didn't like that. It was a place of a lot of tragedies. Some people started to believe things about themselves.

**Have you ever felt 'handed over'?**

A: In a way that's happened to me. It was the middle of the night and I was trying to get better in hospital. They took me bodily and put me in a hot shower. I didn't know what to do. I don't know why they did it; I felt frightened by that.

**'Are you the King of the Jews?' What does Pilate mean by this?**

B: Why not, he was head priest there, but I think Jesus wanted to save the world.

A: Maybe one thing led to another and they planned this. They saw Jesus was getting more popular.

B: Like I said, he believed Jesus had a higher power, or at least partially, or he wouldn't have asked it.

**Was Pilate being sarcastic do you think?**

C: No.

B: No the people crowned him with thorns, they wanted him to die upon a cross: it wasn't a fun and games thing.

A: He may have been testing him.

B: What they did was torture him. That is torturing, binding someone like that.

**'Are you the King of the Jews?' Is this a label that Jesus wants do you think?**

C: Not at all. He did not know what they would do to him.

B: I think he did. Well, if he did believe it he would have answered Pilate's question. If he was innocent he could be king as he knows how to rule.

**'You say so.' What do you make of Jesus' answer?**

A: He's accepting the people in government there. He was accepting he was brought to trial.

C: *What will the other people think? The people in Jerusalem, they might say to Pilate, 'you're wrong'.*

B: *I guess he's telling Pilate to tell him if he is or isn't.*

**Do you think this is a good answer to offer?**

B: *I think he is a humble man. He didn't want to say anything about it.*

A: *Jesus decided to be poor rather than rich.*

B: *They mocked him when they put those crown of thorns on his head.*

C: *Why did Jesus suffer all of that? Why would somebody do that?*

A: *I have no idea.*

C: *People were making fun of him.*

B: *God made his choice; Jesus had no choice.*

C: *I'd kick him [Pilate] in the shins*

A: *I would say, 'I've done nothing wrong. All the accusation are fake'.*

B: *He did not have the ability to overcome the things before him. He was unable to speak for himself in that he wanted to save the world. We learn to grow, to love, to hope, even though he could not help himself physically because he was not well enough.*

**'Pilate asked him again'. How do you imagine Pilate to be feeling right now?**

A: *Frustrated. He's been laughed at by Jesus. His silence condemns Pilate.*

C: *I don't think so. I think he's amazed and he couldn't get over his abilities and things of that nature.*

A: *Do you like Pilate, you're sticking up for him?*

C: *No, no. He may have been amazed at Jesus. He may not know he was a sacred person.*

**'Have you no answer?' Do you think that Jesus should speak up here?**

C: *I think sooner or later he will. I don't think he can keep silent forever.*

A: *I think he should remain silent, because if he did speak the world would be shocked.*

C: *You wonder why so many people worship Jesus when he had a fate worse than death.*

A: *Jesus preferred to cry than laugh.*

B: *I place my hope in you Father, because of what you say, not I.*

**Have you ever felt like you have been reduced to silence?**

B: *It's probably very understandable, the Father must have known.*

A: *Silence and subjection. It's submission, humility. We're subservient to the staff, we take advice and protection but we have to help them to wash dishes and...*

*C: We help them out because they help us. One of the greatest things is to be a servant.*

*A: What they say counts.*

*C: That may be a way of feeling; we can learn from thoughts.*

*A: My roommate doesn't speak at all. Well, if we watch TV and we're trying to talk, she won't even acknowledge me. She barely speaks a word.*

*C: Sometimes people want to keep something from you.*

*A: I get silent when I realise you are right.*

*B: They scourged him and crowned him with thorns and I am trying to express whoever may receive that this is kind and good and an amazingly accepting thing.*

***Who do you think has power and control in this encounter?***

*B: Well, it might not be quite what it seems. He had his apostles and tried to do the Father's work and this entailed all he was and did.*

*A: Jesus might have given power to Pilate deliberately so Pilate could do his job; to be a big shot.*

*B: Remember Jesus with the loaves and fish: he fed a group of people.*

*C: Pilate has power; he's an elected official. They really make a show court out of it. He did not tell Pilate what to do. He was overwhelmed.*

*A: Some people need to be authoritative. Jesus wanted Pilate to have a good self-image.*

***Should Jesus have said more?***

*A: He may have no knowledge of his wrongdoings. He could not say more.*

*C: Sometimes it's hard to say 'I don't know'. It's hard to say that. It's easier to remain silent.*

*A: Sometimes the most you can say is nothing.*

*B: He was humiliated and hurt. Why are people so angry about that? They made fun of him and mocked him.*

*A: They certainly did.*

*C: Sometimes when you say, 'I don't know', it's really an affirmation.*

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