

**“Foxes’ holes and birds’ nests” (Mt 8:20):  
A postcolonial reading for South Africans from the  
perspective of Matthew’s anti-society language**

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**Abstract**

*South Africa is experiencing an exceptionally high crime rate and a considerable number of people among various ethnic groups are bearing the burden of severe poverty. The question is whether the prevalence of violence in South African is the result of neocolonialism or postcolonialism among other complicated sociological factors. This paper offers some thoughts on how postcolonial hermeneutics can provide access to the diverse complexities of the realities in the African context. Postcolonial consciousness means that the experience of the Other will be taken seriously from their own perspective. From the perspective of anti-society language in the Gospel of Matthew, postcolonial theory is presented as a tool for biblical interpretation that assists in identifying colonial intentions (be they political, cultural or economic), that informed and influenced the South African context. It calls for a constructive reading that enables the reader to see the concerns of justice. The article focuses on the Jesus saying, as influenced by Roman imperial policy, and deals with the comparison between the fate of beasts and that of the son of man, who has nowhere to lay his head (Mt 8:20).*

**1. CRIMINALITY AND POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The history of democracy in South Africa is short and democracy itself is fragile. In little over a decade the country already has already had three State Presidents. In his first “Address to the Nation” on 28 September 2008,<sup>2</sup> the newly appointed president, Kgalema Motlanthe, explicitly referred to the challenge of

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<sup>2</sup> SABC News September 28, 2008. Motlanthe reiterates govt plan to reduce poverty. <http://www.sabcnews.com/politics/government/>

breaking the spiral of criminality in South Africa and lessening the burden of poverty. In the modern-day tricontinental world criminality and poverty go hand in hand. Statistics about violent crimes for the period April to September 2007 present an alarming picture of crime in one of South Africa's more eminent regions, namely Gauteng, a province that is virtually under a "state of emergency" (see Van Aarde 2008a). During this period the police reacted to more than 134 000 calls from households reporting real crime assault in Gauteng alone. Sexually motivated misconduct reported to the police increased in this province with 15,5 percent, compared to the national increase of 4,8 percent. Is there a chance that a Biblically inspired way of living could break this spiral of violence?

In his Nelson Mandela commemorative lecture in 2006 the previous South African President, Thabo Mbeki (2006), did not express too much confidence in institutional religion's ability to contribute towards establishing constructive cohesion in the country in order to break off the spiral. Violent crimes in South Africa form an integral part of falling into the "culture of poverty" rut which is a global phenomenon and specifically common in post-colonial and neocolonial Africa. According to Jeffrey Sachs (2005:20), United Nation's statistics indicate that on average 20 000 people a day die of extreme poverty in our world every day (cited in Loader 2008a). The various efforts of explanation are so mind-boggling that one really does not know where to start a reflection on the topic. Does one start with actual or implicit violence; or with violence that is harmful on a physical, psychological, emotional, mental or spiritual level? Not to mention violence with religious, political, ethnocentric, economic, sexual and gender connotations.

For a South African Biblical scholar to address this problem in an academic paper before an international audience requires not only the ability to understand the nature of the post-colonial dynamics<sup>3</sup> of the "culture of poverty",<sup>4</sup> but also requires a sound social-scientific hermeneutical skill to apply data from the age-old Bible to a modern-day economical and political context.

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<sup>3</sup> See, inter alia, Lazare S Rukundwa & Andries G van Aarde (2007), The formation of postcolonial theory, *HTS* 63(3), pp 1171-1194.

<sup>4</sup> See Oscar Lewis (1966), The culture of poverty. *Scientific American* 215, pp 19-25; cf. Sarbin, T R 1970, The culture of poverty, social identity, and cognitive outcomes, in Allen, V L (ed), *Psychological factors in poverty*, pp 29-46. New York: Academic Press. (Institute for Research on Poverty Monograph Series.)

In Mediterranean antiquity ‘being poor’ denoted a broad phenomenon which transcended a state of merely lacking physical and material goods. Poverty encompassed a deprived condition in which aspects of life that create wellbeing in its fullest sense, including health and wealth, as well as individuals’ political belonging which presumes social-economical homecare within a specific family, tribe and nation were lacking. This kind of “familism” (Malina 1989:131) and kinship implied peace with the gods and freedom from demonic influences. In precolonial sub-Saharan Africa when world imperial powers determined the wellbeing of people, this condition did not differ all that much from Mediterranean antiquity. When dealing with the question of who the “poor and the rich” were in Biblical times (Malina 1986:148-159; Hollenbach 1987:50-63), cognizance should be taken of a subtle variation in the meaning of words in the Bible.<sup>5</sup> The term “disreputable poor” refers to the “destitute among the poor”. In Greek a distinction is made between those who are “poor but taken care of (*pénēs*) and those who are “poor but not taken care of” (*ptōchós*) (see Malina 1986:148-159; 1987:354-367; Hollenbach 1987:50-63; Van Aarde 1988:829-846; Hammel 1990:169-170, 195; Stegemann & Stegemann 1995:90-92; Crossan 1998:320-322; Corley 2002:41).<sup>6</sup>

It is possible to see the modern social distinction between “respectable poor” and the “disreputable poor” (Van Aarde 1996:952; Sarbin 1970:30) as appropriate social-scientific categories to understand the characteristics of poverty in an advanced agrarian context of peasantry (see Douglas Oakman 2008) and in the first-century Mediterranean world shaped by ancient urbanization (see Richard Rohrbaugh 1991:140-146; John Kloppenborg 2000:234-242).

However, when one addresses the burdening issue of violent crime and poverty in post-colonial South Africa, social-scientific exegetes should avoid the

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<sup>5</sup> See Stegemann ([1981] 1984:14). In ancient Greek literature *pénēs* is the term most frequently used. In the New Testament this word appears in 2 Corinthians 9:9 in a quote from the Old Testament. A semantically related word, *penechrós*, is used in Luke 21:2. Josephus preferred *aporos*. In Acts 4:34 the word *endeēs* is used. A variety of other expressions are used in a metaphorical way in the New Testament, for example *asthenēs* in Galatians 4:9, meaning weak or sick. The word *ptōchós*, according to Wolfgang Stegemann (1984:14), refers to the “desperately poor, wretched creatures who are fighting for their survival.”

<sup>6</sup> William Loader (2008b) questions whether this distinctive connotation can be ascribed to the Greek word *ptōchós*: “This ignores, however, its broader use in the LXX and the Hebrew semantic ranges reflected there.” However, in the writer’s opinion, Loader’s (2008a) discussion of these “ranges” of the Semitic equivalents of the Greek word *ptōchós* does not cast doubt on the important distinction between “being poor” and “being disreputably poor”, i.e. being destitute. These “ranges” vary from “without property, so dependent on others; poor, wretched, in a needy condition” to “the poor devoted to God as in the psalms” (cf Loader 2008a notes 4 and 5).

“hermeneutical fallacy” of misplaced concreteness. Data about alienation from resources and textual references to exclusion from common privileges, uncovered from the pre-industrial Biblical documents, should thus not be applied to post-colonial and neo-colonial contexts in an ethnocentric fashion. Therefore, a post-colonial reading strategy (Sugirtharajah 2003:13-36) can benefit by taking social-scientific criticism into account in order to avoid “misplaced concreteness”. In other words, during the process of revealing cross-cultural similarities between the first-century Mediterranean world of the Scriptures and the present-day context of readers and believers, the exegete should be culturally sensitive and should not neglect the differences in social behavior and thinking, including cosmology, ideology, and mythology.

## **2. POST- AND NEOCOLONIALISM**

In the 1930's the colonies and former colonies of European countries constituted some 84,6 percent of the world (Fieldhouse 1989:373). From the late 1950's to the 1960's African nations gained political independence. Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Mozambique followed during the 1980's and 1990's. In 1994 South Africa became a democracy.<sup>7</sup> The new politics of modernization redesigned the African landscape into democracies – although fragile – that brought an end to the politics of divisive tribes and languages that previously formed the bases of positions of power from where the common people were manipulated and exploited (see David Birmingham 1995).<sup>8</sup> However, since independence some African states have turned into “predatory states”, by becoming either one-party states or by having “parasite leaders” who are using the “new states” as large private farms for their own enrichment. Coups and counter-coups followed (Hofmeyr 2004:1307). Civil wars ensued and economies collapsed. Abuse of human rights and of the environment ensued, followed by corruption and poverty. Modern imperial nations of the world have since become involved and “freedom at last” has not materialized.<sup>9</sup> Actually, the situation in post-colonial Africa has become worse than what it was during colonialism.

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<sup>7</sup> See David Birmingham 1995. *The decolonization of Africa*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.

<sup>8</sup> See Neocolonialism. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neocolonialism>; Leong Yew 2001. Political discourse – theories of colonialism and postcolonialism (<http://postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/neocolonialism>).

<sup>9</sup> “Freedom at last” are the famous words of Nelson Mandela, following his release after more than 27 years of captivity (cf his autobiography, *Long walk to freedom* (Mandela 1994, 1996).

According to Fernando Segovia (1998:51 note 3), post-colonial studies broadly reflect “on the discourse and practice of imperialism and colonialism from the vantage point of a situation where imperialism and colonialism have come – by and large but by no means altogether so – to a formal end but remain very much at work in practice, as neoimperialism and neocolonialism.” In the context of African religiosity this post-colonial “neo-colonialism”<sup>10</sup> has resulted in churches having become engaged in the spiritual life performed in public space. Although institutional religion has lost its authority, churches have become important benefactors within civil society as the judiciary and the role of traditional rulers had been either compromised or had declined. Against such a background the relevancy of hermeneutics for the social recovery process within a post-colonial era are crucial, yet complicated. In a “post-colonial nation-state” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1998:186) the former colonial powers still exercise power through the global economy and by means of their military and cultural superiority.

Subsequently, the term “postcolonialism” appeared in the works of literary critics until about the 1990’s.<sup>11</sup> The hyphenated spelling of “post-colonial” could indicate the naiveté of assuming the break between colonialism and the “new” politics/economy to be total. The unhyphenated term ‘*postcolonial*’ can refer to the “complex relations of domination and submission, dependence and independence, desire and revulsion, resistance and collusion that can

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<sup>10</sup> Against the background of “postcolonialism”, Leong Yew (2001) describes “neocolonialism” as follows: “One common argument among postcolonial intellectuals is that it is too simplistic to say that imperialism has ended and that this occurred when the European empires relinquished their colonies during the few decades after the second world war. The use of the term, neocolonialism, is one such manifestation of this ongoing nature of imperialism. Yet it is in itself extremely contentious because it is multifaceted and loosely used, is often used as a synonym for contemporary forms of imperialism, and in a polemical way is used in reaction to any unjust and oppressive expression of Western political power. Lying underneath all these various meanings of neocolonialism is a tacit understanding that colonialism should be seen as something more than the formal occupation and control of territories by a Western metropole” (postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/neocolonialism).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example the works of Robert J C Young (Oxford University), a leading international theorist of literature, history, social anthropology:  
1987, *Post-structuralism and the question of history*, edited by Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington & Robert Young. New York: Cambridge University Press.  
1990, *White mythologies: Writing history and the West*. New York: Routledge.  
1995, *Colonial desire: Hybridity in theory, culture and race*. London: Routledge.  
1996, *Torn halves: Political conflict in literary and cultural theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.  
2001, *Post-colonialism: An historical introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.  
2003, *Post-colonialism: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

characterize the exchanges between colonizer and colonized during colonial occupation and after official decolonization” (Moore 2000:182).

As an “alternative hermeneutics” postcolonialism interprets texts by identifying “gaps, absences and ellipses, the silences and closures” in documents and “read them from our own specific locations” (Sugirtharajah 1998:16, 18). Post-colonial analysis thus focuses on both the positive and negative changes that have taken place to transform the copy into something completely new. Change is seen in terms of better or worse. Postcolonialism explores strategies of interpreting texts from the situation of people who are accommodated in a new “liberated” context, but find themselves both included and excluded from it. Their “identity” is not simply a matter of a double consciousness as though the natives do not know who they are. Their situation is rather one of permanent dislocation. Colonized people cannot return to their previous position, but are never fully integrated into the new situation. They find themselves in a culture that accommodates them, while simultaneously looking down on those who had been accommodated. It is a matter of occupying an identity of sameness and difference, of belonging and not belonging.

Postcolonial hermeneutics is concerned with linguistic, cultural and geographical transfer. Therefore there is a link between translation and postcolonialism (Young 2003:138). Translation means, “to carry across”. A colony begins as a “translation”. The original is carried across the globe to another place. This far-away reproduction differs from the original and the concept “colony” is therefore like a metaphor in the sense that the original is displaced by the image.

To translate from one language into another brings about a complete transformation of material form. When colonialism subordinated the indigenous culture to the culture of the colonial power, a transformation of all aspects of the original culture took place. Though, at the same time, certain aspects of the original culture cannot be translated. Translation is never a completely neutral form of symmetrical intercultural communication. Power relations and, therefore also political issues, are always involved. One party is doing the translating while another is in the passive position of *being* translated or transformed. This is the position in which the colonized person finds him/herself. The colonial copy is deemed “better” than the original. That which was wrong in the original is improved in the copy. The colonial language becomes more powerful than the native language. Early on in the process of colonization the oral texts of the native languages were translated and transformed into fixed written texts. In this

way translation became a way of gaining control over the language, culture and the people being translated. Not only were territories taken from the indigenous peoples, but they were also renamed, reallocated and restructured (Young 2003:140).

In light of postcolonialism's emphasis on the reordering of power structures, M A K Halliday's<sup>12</sup> (1978:164-182) notion of "antilanguages" provides an applicable "translational" apparatus to interpret aspects of a "postcolonial" society – be it a present-day or an ancient one:

The second life is a reconstruction of the individual and society. It provides an alternative social structure, with its systems of values, of sanctions, of rewards and punishments; and this becomes the source of an alternative identity for its members, through the patterns of acceptance and gratification. In other words, the second life is an alternative reality.

(Halliday 1978:168)

### **3. ANTI-SOCIETY LANGUAGE**

Ordinary language is not really adequate to express an alternative to a conventional ordered society. The re-ordering of societal ethical values needs another kind of language, namely anti-society language. Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh developed a social-scientific model in respect of antilanguage to be used in the interpretation of the Gospel of John.<sup>13</sup> This kind of "wording" can also be applied to the Gospel of Matthew.

Wording is the linguistic way by which humans express meaning. However, it has long been known that *meaning* is not a matter of "wording" alone, but that words and their meaning actually derive from a social system (cf Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:3). For the purpose of analyzing for the sake of a better understanding, languages can be said to comprise three linguistic modes of meaning: the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual (Halliday 1978:8-36, 69, 125-126; Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:6). The ideational refers to what is being

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<sup>12</sup> M A K Halliday (1978), *Language as social semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning*. London: Edward Arnold Publishers; cf M A K Halliday (1976), Anti-languages. *American Anthropologist* 78, pp 570-584.

<sup>13</sup> Malina, B J & Rohrbaugh, R L (1998), *Social-science commentary on the Gospel of John*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, pp 1-16.

said or described; the interpersonal looks at the personal qualities of the communicating partners; and the textual pertains to the qualities of language to form units of meaning at a level higher than the sentence, for example, by means of cohesion of paragraphs into some whole. Thus, *what* one says is ideational, *with whom* one speaks is interpersonal, and *how* one speaks is textual.

In the re-enacting of anti-society language by the followers of Jesus at the time when the Gospels were written, one finds tendencies of “relexicalization” and “overlexicalization” (Halliday 1978:165-166). The first refers to the practice of using new words for a reality not ordinarily referred to with those words:

Typically this relexicalization is partial, not total: not all words in the language have their equivalents in the antilanguage ... The principle is that of same grammar, different vocabulary; but different vocabulary only in certain areas, typically those that are central to the activities of the subculture and that set it off most sharply from the established society.

(Halliday 1978:165)

Within institutional Christian religion an example of relexicalization is the reference to “bread” as the “the body of Christ” or to “wine” as the “blood of Christ”.<sup>14</sup> Relexicalization points to items and objects affecting areas of central concern to the group. Overlexicalization refers to a situation where there are many words for the central area of concern. This is indicated by a set of words that has the same denotation, but has a different connotation based on the attitude and commitment the set of words entails in an interpersonal context.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In the history of Christian theology, the “patristic theologian” who is perhaps best known for religious “relexicalization” in Latin, by coining “new terms”, was Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (ca 160 – ca 220 CE), anglicized as Tertullian. Terms such as *vetus testamentum* (“old testament”) and *novum testamentum* (“new testament”), *trinitas* (“Trinity”), *treis Personae* (for the Koine Greek: *treis hypostases*) and *una Substantia* (for *homoousios*) originated with Tertullian (Philip Schaff [1908-14] 2004. s v Tertullian, *The New Schaf-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertullian>. Digitized in *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*. <http://www.ccel.org>. Cf also F Bethune-Baker 1903. Tertullian’s use of substantia, natura, and persona. *Journal of Theological Studies* 4, 440-442).

<sup>15</sup> This includes all the “I am...” statements of Jesus, for example “bread” (Jn 6:35) and “door” (Jn 10:9). These words have the same denotation in the context in which they are employed; they refer to real world objects. However, when identified with Jesus in an “I am...” proposition, each takes on some interpersonal dimension. For example, Jesus is not bread, but he is like bread for those who stay attached to him; he is not a door, but he is like a door to God for those who believe in him (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:5-6).



The consistent relexicalization and overlexicalization – along with a focus on the interpersonal and modal aspect of language – point to what Halliday has referred to as “antilanguage” (cf Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:7). *Antilanguage* is the language of an “anti-society”, which is “a society that is set up within another society as a conscious alternative to it. It is a mode of resistance, resistance which may take the form either of passive symbiosis or of active hostility and even destruction” (Halliday 1978:171).

As a rule anti-societies have a negative relation to the traditional conventions of society. They are not outside society, but in opposition to the established norms within society. Antilanguage thus arises when the alternative reality is counter-reality in opposition to the establishment (see Halliday 1978:171; Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:9). In other words, an antilanguage is a language deriving from and generated by an anti-social group. And an anti-societal group is a social collectivity that is set up within a larger society as a conscious alternative to it (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:9-11).

Antilanguage exists solely in a social context of resocialization. Like any other language, it is a means of realizing meanings from the social system of the society in question. It is a means of expressing perceptions of reality as interpreted by persons socialized in that social system. Socially, the use of language actively creates and maintains the prevailing interpretations of reality. But unlike ordinary language, antilanguage creates and expresses an interpretation of reality that is inherently an alternative reality, one that emerges precisely in order to function as an alternative to society at large.

In order to understand anti-society, one has to understand the larger society to which it is opposed. Anti-society makes no sense without the society over against which it stands. Like language itself, anti-language is the bearer of social reality, but of an alternative social reality that runs counter to the social reality of society at large. Thus, antilanguage serves to maintain inner solidarity in the face of pressure from the wider society (from which group members stem, and in which they to a large extent are still embedded). Furthermore, for individuals to maintain solidarity with their fellow anti-social members and to avoid falling back into the margins of the groups they had left or from which they were had been expelled, some kind of alternative ideology and emotional anchorage in the new collectivity are necessary. This necessity is best served by demonstrations of mutual care and concern on the part of those in the anti-social group. It is obvious that language is crucial to the social interpretation of reality and to the socialization of new members into that social interpretation.

Antilanguage is so too crucial to the social reinterpretation of an *alternative* reality and to the *resocialization* of newcomers into that alternative society.

One could almost generalize by stating that metaphorical modes of expression are the “normal” way by means of which antilanguage is articulated (cf Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:13-14). It thus takes one step forward to relate such “modes of expression” to apocalyptic type of language. Martin Hengel ([1969] 1974:210-218) indeed links “Jewish apocalypticism” to “counter-cultural language” (cf Riches 2005:136). Employing postcolonial notions and explicitly referring to South Africa (p 130), John Riches<sup>16</sup> says: “this counter-cultural language also becomes the language of the disempowered and the subaltern, opposed to the language of the rulers” (Riches 2005:136).

As a South African, and in light of my own reading of Matthew’s gospel as a narrative, the plot of which unfolds against the background of a particular *process* in history and a particular *mind-set*, I consider the insights of Hengel and Riches as rather appropriate. The *process* referred to in this instance was that of the so-called separation between the synagogue and the church that started after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE. The *mind-set* was that of an apocalypticism that Matthew took over from Mark (and a later version of Q). Like the other Synoptic Gospels, Matthew presents his understanding of the death and resurrection of Jesus in the light of this apocalyptic mind-set. The apocalyptic expectation in Matthew was that this world would be transformed into the final kingdom of God (see Van Aarde [2008b]).<sup>17</sup>

Towards the end of his book, *Matthew and Empire* (2001), Warren Carter states the following with regard to *language*:

By far the dominant way of talking about God’s purposes in Matthew is “the reign/kingdom of the heavens.” As I have explained, the language denotes “reign” and “empire.” It designates structures of domination, control, violence, hierarchy, patriarchy, elitism. Some have thought alternative expressions that shift the image from the imperial world to that of households and relationships. One option is “kin-dom.” This term helpfully

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<sup>16</sup> John Riches (2005), Matthew’s missionary strategy in colonial perspective, in John Riches & David C Sim (eds), *The Gospel of Matthew in its Roman imperial context*, 128-142. London: T & T Clark International. (Early Christianity in Context, JSNT Supplement Series 276.)

<sup>17</sup> Andries G van Aarde [2008b]. “On earth as it is in heaven”: Matthew’s eschatology as the kingdom of heaven that has come. Forthcoming in a book to published by De Gruyter Verlag (Berlin), on “Eschatology in the New Testament”, edited by Jörg Frey and Jan van der Watt.

highlights alternative communities and relationships, but it fails to express the larger cosmic dimensions of God's purposes.

(Carter 2001:177)

According to Carter, Matthew's gospel paradoxically criticizes imperialism on the one hand, but foresees God's coming triumph in the language of his own "imperialist hopes" – and this means that "God's coming triumph concerns the violent means by which God's empire is imposed." Such a "violent imposition is at odds with the way in which the Gospel conceives the empire to be at work in the present in communities of service, inclusion, healing, relieving need, mercy?" Carter does not want "violence to be the final word in imposing God's empire", because "[t]hat would make God nothing other than a copy of any emperor" (Carter 2001:178). His solution is to eliminate this type of language: "Without an imperial mindset there can be reconciliation and transformation" (Carter 2001:179).

I, however, am of the opinion that such praiseworthy hermeneutics of suspicion which tries to neutralize violence by means of "nonimperial terms such as 'reconciliation' and 'transformation' in the establishment of 'God's just world' – because these terms are "more consistent with the Gospel's vision of God's work in the present" (Carter 2001:178) – lacks acknowledgement of Matthew's anti-society language. Antilanguage appears in Matthew's gospel also in instances where the evangelist employs the "imperialist" notion of kingdom. Realizing this, one would recognize that Matthews' "king-dom" language is deprived of violent imposition. The aim of my paper is to illustrate this point. By means of this goal I apply a "postcolonial" reading strategy by interpreting Matthew's gospel against the background of South Africa's present-day culture of violence and poverty,

#### **4. MATTHEW'S "POST-COLONIAL" SETTING**

In my opinion, Matthew did not originate in Antioch,<sup>18</sup> but somewhere in northern Galilee and southern Syria after 70 CE (*Galilaea tōn ethnōn* – Mt 4:15). There was conflict in this region between the "scribe" (*grammateus*) "Matthew"<sup>19</sup> and village

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<sup>18</sup> Concurring with R T France (2007:15), but contra to, among others, W D Davies & D C Allison ([1988] 2004:138-147). According to Ulrich Luz (1985:74), "ist Antiochien nicht die schlechteste Hypothese" [= "is Antioch not a bad choice"].

<sup>19</sup> Although the tradition that the "First Gospel" should be attributed to the character "Matthew", referred to in Mt 9:9 and 10:3, originated early on (2<sup>nd</sup> century CE), the name of the author remains unknown (Luz 1985:76). Robert Gundry (2005:49-73) holds on to the reliability of this tradition, but this is again recently successfully questioned by David Sim (2007:283-299).

scribes who were in the process of establishing the first phase of a Pharisaic rabbinite.<sup>20</sup>

The Gospel of Matthew could therefore be seen, similar to Richard Horsley's understanding of Galilee as the social location of Q,<sup>21</sup> as a product of scribal activity within the context of the revitalization of villages after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>22</sup> These communities struggled to come to terms with the loss of Jerusalem and the temple. Since the city of God no longer existed, they had to find God's presence in a "conflictual" environment of village communities (cf Freyne 2004:137).

The Jesus movement in Galilee and the work of early post-70 CE rabbis, called the "earlier scribes and sages" by Horsley (1996:181-84), can be seen as a "revitalization of village communities". After the temple was destroyed, the Pharisaic scribes and sages reorganized themselves in places such as Jamnia (in Judea), Galilee and Syria. There they tried to duplicate the old value systems of the Jerusalem temple in the households of the villages, especially those regulations concerning hierarchy in society and the purity ideology of the temple. A similar activity of revitalizing village communities was found among the Jesus groups. The value system they implemented was based on Jesus' alternative understanding of the Torah. The difference in value systems and interests led to conflict between Pharisaic scribes and scribes among the followers of Jesus.

Seán Freyne<sup>23</sup> (2004:137-138) places greater emphasis on the "various other strands of Jewish thinking" than does Richard Horsley. According to Freyne (2004:149), Jesus' kingdom message was "not merely a judgment on all earthly kingdoms and their oppressive regimes", but rather calls "*for the emergence of a new and different household which Jesus and his community of alternative values were in the process of re-assembling*" (my italics). There was conflict in these villages between two sets of scribes: the followers of Jesus, who acknowledged him as messiah, and other Israelites who upheld the traditional view of the messiah. The conflict centered around the interpretation of the Torah:

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<sup>20</sup> See also Adolf Schlatter ([1933] 1963), who is of the opinion that that Matthew was probably an "ethical rigorist" and a representative of the earliest "Christian rabbinite" (cf Ernst von Dobschütz 1928:338-348; however contra Luz 1985:76-77).

<sup>21</sup> Cf Horsley, R A (with J.A. Draper) 1999. *Whoever hears you hears me: Prophets, performance and tradition in Q*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, pp 145-146, 193-194.

<sup>22</sup> Contra to John Nolland (2005:16).

<sup>23</sup> Seán Freyne (2004), *Jesus, a Jewish Galilean*, London: T & T Clark International. (A Continuum imprint.)

Jesus could be seen as the new Moses who fulfilled the Torah, versus a traditional Mosaic view as it was regulated by the temple cult. Amid Roman exploitation,<sup>24</sup> scribes were engaged in village restoration.

Conceding the differences among scholars about the “Jewish setting” of first-century Galilee, and about subtle variations regarding even diminutive detail aspects, especially with respect to the Galileans’ affiliation to the Jerusalem temple, I concur with John Kloppenborg’s<sup>25</sup> “reading of Q in the Galilee” and pass his reading scenario on to my contextual reading of Matthew (emphasized insertions added):

These scribes also resisted any efforts to impose a southern, hierocratically-defined vision of Israel [contra Seán Freyne 1981:104] in which human affairs are centered on a central sanctuary and its priestly officers. This is not opposition to the Temple; but it is also not an endorsement of the hierocratic worldview of either the priestly aristocracy or the Pharisees, both of whom come in for serious criticism. Q [= Matthew] is thus [sic] engaged in a struggle on two fronts: in support of town and village culture against the encroachments of the cities, and in support of local forms of Israelite religion in the face of pressures from the hierocratic worldview of Judaea.

(Kloppenborg 2000:261)

According to my understanding of Matthew’s social location as being in northern Galilee and southern Syria after 70 CE, scribes in the synagogues had a problem

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<sup>24</sup> Dorothy Jean Weaver (2005:114) puts it as follows: “Accordingly, while the emperor himself is not an ‘onstage’ actor within Matthew’s narrative, it is evident that his impact on the lives of the occupied populace extends both to the most mundane aspects of daily life and to the most terrifying of human catastrophes.”

<sup>25</sup> John S Kloppenborg Verbin (2000), *Excavating Q: The history and setting of the Sayings Gospel*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, pp 214-261. Kloppenborg (2000:261) concludes: “Subject to steady pressures from urbanization and the monetization of the economy and in a situation where older forms of rural patronage were threatened by the presence of a new urban elite, small-holders were in an increasingly fragile state. One bad harvest or one serious misfortune might mean the loss of everything, since the new patronal class, already viewed with distrust (Q 7:24-26 [= Mt 11:7-9]; 14:16-24 [= Mt 22:1-14]; 16:13 [= Mt 6:24]; 19:12-26 [= Mt 25:14a-29]), could not be depended upon for help. In reaction to this, the Sayings Gospel [= the Gospel of Matthew] and the scribes who framed it proposed a model of local cooperation based on strategies of tension reduction, debt release, and forgiveness, and appealing to an image of God as a generous patron and parent who could be depended upon for sustenance” (emphasized insertions added).

with Matthew's re-enactment of Jesus as Israel's new Moses.<sup>26</sup> During the period of formative Judaism, the scribe who was responsible for the Gospel of Matthew seems to have been in conflict with some scribes of the Galilean/Syrian village administration whose allegiance was given to the elite ex-Jerusalem scribes (cf Orton 1989:49). As a "scribe" (*grammateus*) that became a "disciple" of the "kingdom of heaven" (Mt 13:52), the author of the "First Gospel" could have had his roots in Jerusalem (see Käsemann ([1960] 1969:88; Hengel 1995:155, 158, 167). The "newness" – actually *the* aspect of cognitive dissonance which hindered consensus – was Jesus' anti-society language re-enacted by Matthew.

By focusing only on Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount as a point of illustration, anti-society language is to be found almost in every line. It demonstrates wording that astonished the Israelite crowds because Jesus' *authority* – and *language* – came as alternative to that of *their* scribes (Mt 7:28):

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;
- If salt has lost its taste ... it is hasn't any power more;
- If one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also;
- Your Father who is in heaven makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good;
- Our Father who art in heaven let thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;
- Consider the lilies of the field; even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these;

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<sup>26</sup> However, the debate between Jesus' teaching and the Pharisees in the gospel tradition (such as Q and Matthew using Q as a source (cf Kloppenborg 2000:200ff) should not be anachronistically seen as two established institutes, a "church" and a "synagogue", in conflict with each other. Instead, the conflicting interests were the result of a process of institutionalization that took two directions in the village communities. The gospel reports of Jesus' teaching in the synagogues in Galilee mention that he was challenged by Pharisaic scribes (see Mk 1:21, 27; 2:1, 6). Horsley (1996:184) puts it as follows: "It seems likely that the tradition of Jesus' teaching behind such literature as Mark, Q, and the Didache would have been cultivated in Galilean communities." The context of this early scribal activity among Jesus followers and Pharisees was that of the *bet-midrash* (formative Judaism) rather than that of the *bene ha-knesset* (normative Judaism). From the second century onwards, the synagogue began functioning separately from the village administration (see Cohen 1992:157-173; Levine 1992:201-222). However, Graham Stanton argues that in Matthean studies we should abandon concepts such as the "true Israel" and even the "new Israel". According to Graham Stanton (1992:11), Matthew prefers to speak of a "new people" (Mt 21:43) – "in effect a 'third race' (*tertium genus*) over against both Jews and Gentiles". Over against Stanton, Anthony J Saldarini (1994) considers the "Matthean group" as "a fragile minority still thinking of themselves as Jews and still identified with the Jewish community by others." Therefore, speaking of the "Matthean community", Saldarini uses the term "Christian-Jewish" rather than "Jewish-Christian". Paul Hertig (1998) suggests that "Matthew sought to firmly plant Jewish-Christianity in the soil of Judaism for the sake of the Jews, while simultaneously exhibiting the universal nature of Jewish Christianity for the sake of the Gentiles."

- Not every one who says to me: “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew’s anti-society language should be seen as a re-enactment of Jesus’ subversive ethics within a context similar to what we could call a “postcolonial” setting. The “translational” process of *relexicalization* in some cases – such as calling Jesus a Davidic Moses-Messiah savior figure<sup>27</sup> – and *overlexicalization* in other cases – such as in the case of the “disreputable poor” in the Matthean community and response to coercive violence – went through phases from “remembering Jesus” as codified in the Q-tradition and in Mark’s gospel, to Matthew’s re-enactment.

As far as Jesus’ context is concerned, Rudolf Bultmann is of the opinion that we know enough of Jesus’ message to be able to draw a coherent picture. In what is to my knowledge the most condensed summary of Bultmann’s reconstruction, he mentions the exorcisms, the breach with the Sabbath laws, the abandonment of purity regulations, anti-legalism, involvement with outcasts, alliance with women and children, social fellowship, and an inclusive gender companionship.<sup>28</sup>

However, this view on Jesus’ ethics can be amended. Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter<sup>29</sup> (1997) describe Bultmann’s view in terms of “conclusion and fulfillment” (i.e., the “conquering”) of Israelite legalism. Their amendment is to rather consider Jesus’ ethics as being in correspondence with aspects of Israelite tradition, but not wholly in agreement with every group of Jesus followers. In this paper the “group of Jesus followers” I have in mind, is that of Matthew and the community for whom he wrote. And for the purpose of the present paper I would

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<sup>27</sup> See Andries van Aarde (2005a). ‘IHSOUS, the Davidic Messiah, as political saviour in Matthew’s history’, in Van der Watt, J G (ed), *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on soteriology*. Leiden: Brill (Supplements to Novum Testamentum, 121), pp 7-31.

<sup>28</sup> See Bultmann, R ([1960] 1965. *Das Verhältnis der urchristlichen Christusbotschaft zum historischen Jesus*, p 11): “Mit einiger Vorsicht also wird man über das Wirken Jesu Folgendes sagen können. Charakteristisch für ihn sind Exorzismen, der Bruch des Sabbatgebotes, die Verletzung von Reinheitsvorschriften, die Polemik gegen die jüdische Gesetzlichkeit, die Gemeinschaft mit deklassierten Personen wie Zöllnern und Dirnen, die Zuneigung zu Frauen und Kindern; auch ist zu erkennen, daß Jesus nicht wie Johannes der Täufer ein Asket war, sondern gerne aß und ein Glas Wein trank. Vielleicht darf man noch hinzufügen, daß er zur Nachfolge aufrief und eine kleine Schar von Anhängern – Männern und Frauen – um sich sammelte.”

<sup>29</sup> Cf Part II of Gerd Theissen’s & Dagmar Winter’s (1997) book, *Die Kriterienfrage in der Jesusforschung: Von Differenzkriterium zum Plausibilitätskriterium*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus.)

restrict Jesus' ethics to his understanding of the "kingdom of God" – or in Matthean terms, the "kingdom of the heavens".

Despite the discontinuity between Jesus and Matthew, I would contextualize the ethics of both – that is of Jesus and of Matthew – as embedded within the context of "ethical eschatology", also referred to as social apocalypticism (see Crossan 998:273-292).<sup>30</sup> This ethics can be described as the re-enactment of Jesus' anti-society language. Through Jesus' "ethical" behavior (words and deeds as interacting with one another), Jesus subverted the systemic violence that was forced upon the marginalized peasants in Israel by the powers of the day in Rome, Sepphoris, Tiberias and in Jerusalem – the centers of the emperor, the Herodian family, and the priestly (Sadokite) elite respectively.

The continuity-discontinuity between Jesus and Matthew can be explained in terms of the notions "telling" and "showing".<sup>31</sup> The expression "telling" is used to refer to a probable act of Jesus (words and deeds intertwined) while "showing" refers to an act of faith by believers of later faith communities who were "retelling" Jesus. *Telling* thus refers to both sayings and deeds, because sayings and deeds go hand in hand, even if one or the other is not reported. *Showing* is that "enactment" or "recounting" which could be based on either something authentic or inauthentic. Irrespective of the historicity of the case, the faith assertion expressed by the enactment or retelling is so overwhelming that authenticity is overshadowed and difficult to discern. *Telling* is thus not without *showing* and vice versa. Yet telling and showing must never be confused, although in principle they should be distinguished from each other, notwithstanding the fact that they are dialectically intertwined.<sup>32</sup>

Though the Galilean world of Jesus differs from that of Matthew, both worlds share the same Greco-Roman context. Comparing Matthew with Jesus is to on the one hand ask about the similarities and differences between Jesus' subversiveness of conventional Israelite legalism and conventional Greco-

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<sup>30</sup> Crossan, J D (1998), *The birth of Christianity: Discovering what happened in the years immediately after the execution of Jesus*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.

<sup>31</sup> These terms are used somewhat differently by Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar. For them "showing" comes first and it refers to "enactment," while "telling" is the same as "recounting" (see Funk, R W (and the Jesus Seminar) 1998. *The acts of Jesus: The search for the authentic deeds of Jesus*, pp 27-28).

<sup>32</sup> What Bultmann ([1928] 1969:230) discerned with regard to the relationship between Jesus and Paul, could also, in my opinion, be applied to the relationship between the "telling" and "showing" of ethics, namely between that of Jesus and that of Matthew. It is a matter of *discontinuity in content* ("inhältliche Diskontinuität) and an expansion and deepening as *material continuity* ("sachliche Relation").



Roman legalism (in Gerd Theissen's term, "Jesus' Jewish world") and, on the other hand, the re-enactment of his subversive words and deeds by scribes among the Matthean Jesus group, also embedded in an Israelite and Greco-Roman context.

In another study I referred to the "world of Jesus" and the "world" of the later scribes as the "little tradition" over against the "great tradition".<sup>33</sup> In this regard, insights into the domestic, social, political, economic, agricultural, urban and religious structures of the various environments – that of the Galilean-Judean and that of the Greco-Roman – will assist in distinguishing the "little tradition" of Jesus from Matthew's "great tradition".<sup>34</sup> Both "traditions" represent the "Jewish world" of Roman imperialist hybridity and exploitation which burdened the culture of poverty among the common folk. Both "traditions" produced anti-society language which expresses alternative values.

Calling Jesus "the son of man" is one example of portraying both the impact of Roman imperialist hybridity and the increasing culture of poverty among Israelite peasants as its consequence on the one hand and, on the other hand, the meaning of antilanguage in both Jesus' and Matthew's "Jewish world". The shift in meaning of the expression "son of man" between the "little tradition" and the "great tradition" demonstrates Theissen's notion of *Inter-Rollen-Konflikt* between an imperial connotation of a depressive emperor's kingdom and a familial connotation of an empowering kingdom (of a divine father-like king and his heavenly-ascended son). It demonstrates also the value system of those who have benefited from this "conflictual triumph" and have begun to belong to and participate in the collaboration process of this "kingdom of heavens" as an "already-presence" (see Crossan 2007:126-127).

## 5. "FOXES' HOLES AND BIRDS' NESTS" (MT 8:20)

When Jesus and the peasantry of Galilee spoke of God, their antilanguage formed part of the "little tradition". According to David Fiensy (1991:2), the little tradition is "low culture, folk culture, or popular tradition which is passed on among the unlettered of the village community." In other words Jesus did not speak about the kingdom of God in terms of monarchical structures, that is, in the

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<sup>33</sup> See Van Aarde, A G (2004), Jesus and the son of man: A shift from the "little tradition" to the "great tradition". *Ephemerides Lovaniensis Theologicae* 80, 423-438.

<sup>34</sup> In a recent article, titled "Vom historischen Jesus zum kerygmatischen Gottessohn: Sociologische Rollenanalyse als Beitrag zum Verständnis neutestamentlicher Christologie", Gerd Theissen (2008:293) describes the shift in terms of "Inter-Rollen-Konflikt".

imperial terms of the “great tradition”. However, Matthew (like the other Gospels) does not reveal the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus’ deconstructing-imperial language, since the early *little Jesus tradition* developed into a *great tradition*. Theissen ([1999] 1999:98) calls this transition a “selective adaptation to the power structures of the world.” There are two facets to this transition, the one being that Jesus’ kingdom message was received as empowering and the other that Jesus’ antilanguage was in accordance with the value systems of the people. The transition should be understood against an agrarian background of dispossession and redistribution of land by imperial powers and the breaking up of the extended family. The disruption of land and family severely affected the lives of peasants. In other words, Jesus’ kingdom message originated orally as part and parcel of the “little tradition” in the context of peasant culture. His followers reconceptualized Jesus’ message in terms of the “great tradition”.

During Jesus’ lifetime and also in the period of the Jesus movements after his death, the peasantry (also in Herodian Palestine) experienced and perceived kings and kingdoms in a negative way. This is also true of the Matthean community and as we indicated earlier in this paper constitutes the reason, why Warren Carter (2001) in his book, *Matthew and Empire*, that the present-day Christian community should internalize a “nonimperial” mind-set in order to collaborate in the process that Jesus began, by taking care of among other destitute people, the marginalized poor to whom, according to Jesus, the “kingdom of heavens” belongs (e.g. Mt 5:3).

When this demand is considered, the ambivalence with regard to “empire-theology” is conspicuous. A hermeneutics of suspicion and an accompanying cultural-critical reading of texts could therefore be the preferable exegetical approach to Matthew’s (and other Christian theologians’) *empire-talk*.

Although I am an active practitioner of the hermeneutics of suspicion and cultural-critical theology,<sup>35</sup> in my opinion, Matthew’s re-enactment of Jesus’ “kingdom message”, should not be considered negatively at all when it is seen as anti-society language. However, this does not remove its ambivalence. Joerg Rieger (2007:8) refers to this “ambivalence” as follows:

Throughout its history, theology has often been employed in the support of empire and sometimes in the critique of it, and often there is only a thin line between the two. Nevertheless, the existence of ambivalence is itself a

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<sup>35</sup> See Andries van Aarde (2005b), Cultural criticism as an imperative for Christians. *HTS* 61(3), 683-708.

witness to the limits of empire. Post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha notes how this ambivalence is disturbing to colonial discourse and how it “poses an immanent [sic] threat to both “normalized” knowledge and disciplinary powers.”<sup>36</sup> The challenge, he argues, is a “double” vision, which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.<sup>37</sup> Ambivalence is thus a welcome companion in the resistance against empire.

There are numerous reasons for the negative perception of kings and kingdoms. One such contributing factor was the fact that the succession of kings or kingdoms in most instances led to the changing of boundaries which, in turn, was often followed by the dispossession of land.<sup>38</sup>

Jesus’ aphorism in Q (Lk 9:58//Mt 8:20)<sup>39</sup> about the comparison between the fate of beasts and that of the son of man, who has nowhere to lay his head,<sup>40</sup> is an example that illustrates not only the “translation” between Jesus’ and Matthew’ anti-society language, but also the ambivalence in their “empire-theology”. A parallel saying occurs in Plutarch’s *Life of Tiberius Graecus*<sup>41</sup> (1995:208).<sup>42</sup> The quote from Plutarch<sup>43</sup> is an excerpt from a speech about land reform delivered in the Roman Senate in 133 BCE.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See Homi Bhabha (1994), *The location of culture*. London: Routledge, p 86.

<sup>37</sup> Homi Bhabha (1994:88).

<sup>38</sup> See Fiensy, D A 1991. *The social history of Palestine in the Herodian period: The land Is Mine*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press. (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 20), pp 21-73.

<sup>39</sup> An aphorism with similar content also appears in the Gospel of Thomas (*logion* 86) where it is introduced with the formula: “Jesus said”. In a later recension of the Q tradition (also used by Luke and Matthew), this saying concludes a short narrative (confirmed by the similarity between Matthew and Luke). The *biographical* framework found in the sayings Gospel Q should be seen as a post-Easter addition to the Q tradition. Here, too, is evidence of an earlier Jesus tradition, also indicated by the parallel in the Gospel of Thomas. Multiple independent witnesses confirm the probable authenticity of the Jesus saying, which was later placed in a biographical framework. The uncomplicated introduction to the saying in Thomas 86 indicates an earlier aphoristic form (see Bultmann, R [1921] 1963. *The history of the Synoptic tradition*, revised edition, translated from the 5<sup>th</sup> German edition by J Marsh. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson).

<sup>40</sup> Bultmann ([1921] 1963:69) discusses this saying under the heading *Logia (Jesus as the Teacher of Wisdom)*. These sayings belong to the category “proverbs”.

<sup>41</sup> See Bultmann (1963:28); Horsley (1999:240); Boring, Berger & Colpe (1995:208).

<sup>42</sup> “(T)he men of wealth and substance, however, were led by their greed to hate the law ... and tried to dissuade the people by alleging that Tiberius was introducing a re-distribution of land for the confusion of the body politic, and was stirring up a general revolution. But they accomplished nothing; for Tiberius, striving to support a measure which was honourable and just with an

It is possible that this sympathetic attitude towards the poor in Italy reached the ears of the “colonized” peasants in the eastern parts of the Roman Empire, even after the era of the Republic.<sup>45</sup> Plutarch’s ethical rhetoric provided the ideal elements from which anti-society language in the oral culture of the Greco-Roman world were formed, also among the peasants in Galilee during the time of Jesus. It is of course not possible to know if Jesus when he referred to the son of man who had nowhere to lay his head, had the saying of Tiberius in mind. It is, however, possible that a similar saying of Jesus could have been taken over in the Q tradition and only later, when placed in a biographical context, was made to resonate with the saying of Tiberius.<sup>46</sup> Bultmann (1963:98) is of the opinion that the Jesus saying reflected a type of folk pessimism, such as

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eloquence that would have adorned even a meaner cause, was formidable and invincible, whenever, with the people crowding around the rostra, he took his stand there and pleaded for the poor. “*The wild beasts that roam over Italy,*” he would say, “*have every one of them a cave or lair to lurk in; but the men who fight and die for Italy enjoy the common air and light, indeed, but nothing else; houseless and homeless they wander about their wives and children.* And it is with lying lips that their imperators exhort the soldiers in their battles to defend sepulchers and shrines from the enemy; for not a man of them has an hereditary altar, not one of all these many Romans an ancestral tomb, but they fight and die to support others in wealth and luxury, and though they are styled masters of the world, they have not a single clod of earth that is their own ...” (the italicized phrase within the quotation not original; see Plutarch, Tiberius and Caius Gracchus, IX.3-5, *Plutarch’s lives* 1921:164-167).

<sup>43</sup> See Stobart, J C 1961. *The grandeur that was Rome*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition, edited and revised by W S Maguinness & H H Scullard. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, p 80; Stockton, D 1979. *The Gracchi*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p 39. According to the speech, the *poor* (*Plutarch’s lives*, IX.4) had the right to receive land taken from others. Dispossession of land led to conflict between the peasants and the “men of wealth and substance” (*Plutarch’s lives*, IX.3). Tiberius Gracchus’ agrarian bill was in an important way revolutionary, “since it aimed to find land to distribute to the needy by taking it, not from enemies defeated in war or disloyal allies punished for defection, but from rich Roman and allied occupiers” (Stockton 1979:39).

<sup>44</sup> This land reform policy was actually triggered by the will of late King Attalus III of Pergamum (see Hornblower, S & Spawforth, S (eds) 1996. s v Sempronius Gracchus, Tiberius. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. New York: Oxford University Press, p 1385). According to the king’s will, his inheritance had to be bequeathed to the Romans (cf Abbott, F R 1963. *A history and description of Roman political institutions*. Third edition. New York: Biblo and Tannen. Pp 94-95). Tiberius Gracchus and his brother Gaius Gracchus were of the opinion that Attalus’ property should not go the way of the taxes of the “unfortunate inhabitants of Asia Minor” and “flow straight into the pockets of Roman capitalists” (Stobart, J C 1961. *The grandeur that was Rome*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition edited and revised by W S Maguinness & H H Scullard. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, p 80).

<sup>45</sup> In his book *The Gracchi*, David Stockton (1979:22) wrote that the agrarian policy of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus “provide the central themes of Roman political issues for the next century” (cf Sandys, J E (ed) 1910. *A companion to Latin studies*. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press), p 268).

<sup>46</sup> According to Bultmann (1963:98) this saying of Tiberius was “applied to the person of Jesus for the first time, perhaps, in the Greek Church.”

for example Job 3:25-26 and Ecclesiastes 3:19.<sup>47</sup> This antilanguage subverts the conventional wisdom and it coheres with Jesus' vision.<sup>48</sup> In this case it subverts the conventional societal wisdom of "Jesus' Jewish world" that human beings were given a higher position than animals in the hierarchy in the order of creation.

A "translational process" can thus be traced from Jesus' antilanguage by means of which he referred to *humanity* in general (Jesus himself included), to the Q tradition, and to Matthew (and to Luke)<sup>49</sup> which identify the son of man with Jesus. It is possible that this type of anti-society language disseminated in circumstances where poverty was the result of, among other things, the dispossession of land and where the disintegration of families could have been a dire problem.<sup>50</sup>

A comparison could be drawn between the antilanguage of Jesus (the "little tradition" of the peasant culture) and the "nonimperial" language of Tiberius. In the formative stratum of the Q tradition themes such as poverty, discipleship and Jesus' vision of an alternative kingdom were integrated (see Jacobson 1992:50). John Dominic Crossan (2007), in his book *God and Empire: Jesus against Rome then and now*, explains this *collaboration* as follows (last-mentioned emphasis added; the other originally by Crossan):

But there has always been controversy about whether Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom as *future-only* – even if imminent – or as *already-present* – even if still to be

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<sup>47</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:19 reads as follows: "Sons of humanity's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both. As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless" (NIV ).

<sup>48</sup> According to Adela Yarbro Collins (1996:150), the following wisdom saying from Job 3:25-26 can be regarded as a reflection of the kind of wisdom that can be expected from Jesus: "What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil" (NIV – my italics). The version of Thomas 86 of this Jesus saying is: "But the son of man does not have anywhere he can lay down his head (and) rest" (*The Critical Edition of Q*, Robinson, Hoffmann & Kloppenborg 2000:152). The version in Q 9:58 ("And Jesus said to him: Foxes have their holes, and birds of the sky have nests; but the son of man does not have anywhere he can lay his head" - *The Critical Edition of Q*, Robinson, Hoffmann & Kloppenborg 2000:152) suggests a contrast between human beings and animals.

<sup>49</sup> This tradition was either unknown to Mark, or he chose not to use it.

<sup>50</sup> It is also possible that such a tradition could have been transmitted and interpreted in various ways during the process of the development of the tradition. Adela Yarbo Collins (1996:150) formulates it as follows: "Such folk pessimism could easily be adapted to a philosophically dualistic, apocalyptic or gnostic perspective, in which humanity has no home or rest in this world, but does find such in the heavenly world."

consummated ... One very strong proof of that [= the *already-presence* of God's Kingdom as the Great Divine Clean-up of the world] is how the Son of Man is used to interpret the Kingdom of God. Here again, scholarly debate has obscured the most important point. The main discussion has been about whether Jesus spoke of himself as the Son of Man or whether it was placed on his lips by the latter tradition. What I emphasize here is how the title "Son of Man" for Jesus – be it from him or from the evangelists (and I think it was from the evangelists) – reinforces and rephrases the claim that the Kingdom of God is now already in *collaborative process*.

(Crossan 2007:126-127).

As Jesus' antilanguage became further removed from the "little tradition" and was increasingly domesticated in the "great tradition" of school, temple and scribal activity – such as the situation of Matthew – the attribution of *titles* to Jesus could be expected. This is probably what happened to the saying in the context of *conflict* of Matthew, written in the Galilean-Syrian region in a more Hellenistic context after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

However, the question which still remains to be answered in this paper is twofold: (1), what is the ambivalence expressed in Matthew's antilanguage about "foxes' holes and birds' nests" (Mt 8:20), seen from a postcolonial theoretical perspective?; (2) of what relevance is this ambivalence to present-day South Africans who suffer because of increasingly violent crimes within a context of a culture of poverty? In my opinion, the answer lies in the distinction between the connotations associated with the terms "disreputable poor" and the "destitute among the poor", which was made at the beginning of the paper; eventually, the answer to this question, is paramount to the answer as to who the "poor in spirit" were whom the Matthean Jesus "consecrated" by proffering the "kingdom of heavens" to them (Mt 5:3).

## **6. MATTHEW'S RE-ENACTMENT OF JESUS' ANTI-**

## SOCIETY LANGUAGE APPLIED TO “POSTCOLONIAL” SOUTH AFRICA

In reply to the question as to why Matthew “spiritualizes” the Q-saying of Jesus that the poor are called blessed by adding “in spirit” (*tō pneumatī*), William Loader (2008b) answers by referring to Warren Carter<sup>51</sup> and to Jimmy Dunn.<sup>52</sup> “The poor in spirit are people, in poverty, brokenness, and need. Like Luke, Matthew employs the Q tradition ... in the context of human need ([Mt] 11:5) ... [W]ithin the focus of Jewish understandings of poverty from destitution to helpless dependence on God, Luke focuses on material poverty, whereas Matthew on “the other end of the spectrum” [Dunn]. Applied to those who are not poor, it might mean those in solidarity with the poor.” Loader, however, is rather vague about what the implications of such a “broadening” of the notion “poor” could be. In his conclusion he says (emphasis added):

Good news for the poor proves to be a fragile component of Jesus’ message. In the Jewish setting of Galilee it belonged to prophetic hope for God’s people in a way that addressed the poor and the hungry with hope. *It was not narrowed to only the economically poor and the hungry, but addressed poverty in a broad sense, including the situation in which the people found themselves caught in the systems of foreign and locally mediated domination.* It was good news for the poor because it was good news for all.

(Loader 2008b, conclusion)

The core of Loader’s intent is that the notion “poor” should not be narrowed to a person who lacks material means. I would like to concur with such an intent as long as Matthew’s “spiritualization” is not understood as a reduction of the concreteness of peoples’ experiences of being excluded from resources. By adding “in spirit” Matthew actually elaborates by also including these other traumatic experiences. It is because of Matthew’s inclusive thinking that his understanding of Jesus’ anti-society language becomes applicable to post- and neocolonial South Africa – even his use of the imperialist image of God’s already-

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<sup>51</sup> Warren Carter (2000), *Matthew and the margins: A sociopolitical and religious reading*. New York: Maryknoll, p 131).

<sup>52</sup> Jimmy D G Dunn (2003), *Jesus remembered*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, pp 524-525.

presence by means of the “kingdom of heavens” and peoples’ collaboration in the process of making those values real “on earth as it is in heaven”.

There is no doubt in my mind that the center of Jesus’ kingdom message is about the good news for the poor, just as Matthew articulates Jesus’ beatitude of the “poor in spirit”. Jimmy Dunn (2003) in his book, *Jesus remembered*, puts it as follows: “[T]he proclamation of the good news to the poor evidently ranked at the forefront of Jesus’ conception of his mission” (Dunn 2003:517). In terms of what I have referred to as the “culture of poverty”, Dunn (2003:519) writes: “Jesus would have been aware of tax burden, cycles of debt, and people forced from land and possessions” [cf Loader 2008b, note 38). According to Dunn (2003:517), the poor were “those lacked of a secure economic base”; they were “vulnerable to exploitation” (Dunn 2003:518); they needed to look to God for help (Dunn 2003:518-519).

Matthew’s ethics about the kingdom of heaven manifested on earth, amounts to the re-structuring of an anti-society. It reveals something about Jesus’ alternative lifestyle, which Matthew re-enacted. Jesus’ kingdom message advocated values totally different from Israelite and Greco-Roman convention traditions. To be a part of the kingdom of God was the opposite of being a part of the kingdom of Caesar. The antilanguage of Jesus and Matthew found in their comparison of the status of the “poor” to that of animals, is tantamount to being re-socialized into a totally different society, an anti-society. Because the notion “anti-society” is also linked to social identity, the distinction between insiders and outsiders – a fundamental first-century Mediterranean perspective – is redefined in this new, alternative society.

To re-structure social identity in the way in which Jesus did, amounts to *overlexicalization*, for example the identification of human beings (“sons of humanity”) with beasts. However, because Matthew identified Jesus with an “imperial conqueror” by calling him “the Son of man”, the evangelist re-enacted anti-society language by means of *relexicalization*. By doing this, Matthew simultaneously provided an empowering model for the Jesus followers who were threatened by opposing parties in both the synagogical and imperial settings of the first-century Galilean Syrian context on the one hand and, on the other hand, by other marginalized people such as in post- and neocolonial South Africa.

Non-violent, antilanguage is the only Christian option for present-day South Africa. In this regard the recent book by Richard Burridge’s (2007), *Imitating Jesus: An inclusive approach to New Testament ethics* – dedicated to Bishop Desmond Tutu and all of Richard’s South African friends of the “rainbow



nation” – contains a more than timely imperative. On 30 November 2007 Eerdmans Publishers published the following remarks taken from a review article by S McDonald, as published in *Library World* (Independence, MO, USA), via Amazon Customer Reviews: “The Bible still matters in many contexts. It certainly matters in South Africa, having shaped their history, both from the side of colonialism and apartheid and from the side of our liberation struggle. The South African context therefore provides an important site for the author's project. Surrounding his South African case study are an in-depth engagement with the full array of scholarship on New Testament ethics and his own careful reading of particular New Testament texts. But it is the South African site that provides the author with an answer to the "so what" question? Vast amounts of biblical scholarship stop short of moving beyond a piling up of ancient detail. The author goes beyond the detail to risk saying something about how and why the detail matters. And while readers in South Africa will derive a special benefit from this study, those in other contexts will also find much that resonates with their own contexts.”

Let me in conclusion indicate how this resonates with my postcolonial reading of Matthew:

Collaboration with the process of the already-presence of the kingdom of heavens, in South Africa as much as globally, is to continue establishing Jesus' and Matthew's non-violent anti-society language, despite ever-increasing domination and exploitation by the powers of the day – a seemingly never-ending process of collaboration for as long as one lives and proclaims that Jesus conquered evil, even when he hanged on the cross. As for Matthew our present experience is that of the *ecclesia pressa*, because of the rift with the synagogue against the background of Roman imperialism. However, as Matthew (e.g. 27:45-53), leaves his readers in the hands of God, who alone decides the close of the age, so we experience that Jesus is *God-with-us*, because the followers of Jesus, then and now, have seen the Son of man come, while we humans, sometimes worse off than animals, often have no holes or nests to provide shelter except within the kingdom of heavens – though far more alternative than what we are aware of.

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