

EMBRACING THE NONHUMAN
IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

SBL Press

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Dong Hyeon Jeong

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	vii
Abbreviations.....	ix
1. Introduction: A Confession within the Four Walls.....	1
2. Marked by the Beast: The Wild Beasts of Mark 1:13b.....	33
3. Vegetal Lessons: How Mark's Plants Teach Us about God's Empire.....	53
4. And Say the Sea of Galilee Responded?.....	81
5. The Animal Masks of the Syrophoenician Woman and the Markan Jesus.....	103
6. Conclusion: (Re)animating the Biblical Epistemic Ground.....	125
Works Cited.....	135
Ancient Sources Index.....	163
Modern Authors Index.....	170
Subject Index.....	174

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ABBREVIATIONS

Ancient Sources

<i>Ab ubre cond.</i>	Livy, <i>Ab urbe condita</i>
<i>Agr.</i>	Cato, <i>De agricultura</i> ; Tacitus, <i>Agricola</i>
<i>Alex. fort.</i>	Plutarch, <i>De Alexandri magni fortuna aut virtute</i>
<i>An.</i>	Aristotle, <i>De anima</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	Josephus, <i>Antiquitates judaicae</i>
<i>Apoc. Mos.</i>	Apocalypse of Moses
<i>Astr.</i>	Manilius, <i>Astronomica</i>
<i>b.</i>	Babylonian Talmud
<i>Barn.</i>	Epistle of Barnabas
<i>Bell. Jug.</i>	Sallust, <i>Bellum jugurthinum</i>
<i>B.J.</i>	Josephus, <i>Bellum judaicum</i>
<i>C. Ap.</i>	Josephus, <i>Contra Apionem</i>
<i>Cal.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Gaius Caligula</i>
<i>Chers.</i>	Demosthenes, <i>De Chersoneso</i>
<i>De abst.</i>	Porphyry, <i>De Abstinentia (On Abstinence from Animal Food)</i>
<i>Dig.</i>	Justinian, <i>Digesta seu Pandectae</i>
<i>Eph.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Ephesians</i>
<i>Eth. Nic.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Ethica Nicomachea</i>
<i>Geogr.</i>	Strabo, <i>Geographica</i>
<i>Gos. Thom.</i>	Gospel of Thomas
<i>Hist. plant.</i>	Theophrastus, <i>Historia plantarum</i>
<i>Hist. rom.</i>	Appian of Alexandria, <i>Historia romana</i> ; Dio Cassius, <i>Historia romana</i>
<i>Il.</i>	Homer, <i>Ilias</i>
<i>Jos. Asen.</i>	Joseph and Aseneth
<i>Jub.</i>	Jubilees
<i>Ketub.</i>	Ketubbot

m.	Mishnah
<i>Metaph.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Metaphysica</i>
<i>Nat.</i>	Pliny the Elder, <i>Naturalis historia</i>
<i>Od.</i>	Homer, <i>Odyssea</i>
<i>Phaedr.</i>	Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i>
<i>Phil.</i>	Cicero, <i>Orationes philippicae</i>
<i>Plant.</i>	(Pseudo-)Aristotle, <i>De plantis</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Politica</i>
<i>Rom.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Romans</i>
<i>Rust.</i>	Varro, <i>De re rustica</i>
Shabb.	Shabbat
<i>Sat.</i>	Juvenal, <i>Satirae</i>
<i>Smyrn.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To the Smyrnaeans</i>
T. Benj.	Testament of Benjamin
T. Iss.	Testament of Issachar
T. Naph.	Testament of Naphtali
<i>Theocr.</i>	Demosthenes, <i>In Theocrinem</i>
<i>Tim.</i>	Demosthenes, <i>Contra Timotheum</i>
<i>Verr.</i>	Cicero, <i>In Verrem</i>
<i>Vit. Apoll.</i>	Philostratus, <i>Vita Apollonii</i>

Secondary Sources

AB	Anchor Bible Commentary
ABD	Freedman, David Noel, eds. <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ACME	<i>AMCE: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies</i>
ATI	<i>American Theological Inquiry</i>
BAGD	Bauer, Walter, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BL	Bible and Liberation
BMW	The Bible in the Modern World
BP	The Bible and Postcolonialism

BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
C21	Center for Twenty-First Century Studies
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
Colloq	<i>Colloquium</i>
CR	CR: <i>The New Centennial Review</i>
<i>Crit Inq</i>	<i>Critical Inquiry</i>
<i>EcR</i>	<i>Ecumenical Review</i>
EDNT	Balz, Horst, and Gerhard Schneider, eds. <i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–1993.
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>The Expository Times</i>
<i>Fem Form</i>	<i>Feminist Formations</i>
<i>Sim.</i>	Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude(s)
HeyM	Heythrop Monographs
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JFSR	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>J. Philos. Educ.</i>	<i>Journal of Philosophy of Education</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>Kunapipi</i>	<i>Kunapipi: Journal of Postcolonial Writing and Culture</i>
<i>Language</i>	<i>Language: Journal of the Linguistic Society of America</i>
LNTS	The Library of New Testament Studies
MELUS	<i>Multiethnic Literatures of the United States</i>
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NIB	Keck, Leander E., ed. <i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> . 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004.
<i>New Lit. Hist.</i>	<i>New Literary History</i>

NIBCNT	New International Bible Commentary on the New Testament
<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>Phoenix: Journal of the Classical Association of Canada</i>
Pelican	The Pelican New Testament Commentaries
PMLA	<i>Publications of Modern Language Association</i>
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>SocAnim</i>	<i>Society and Animals</i>
<i>SozW</i>	<i>Soziale Welt</i>
SP	Sacra Pagina
<i>Stud. World Christ.</i>	<i>Studies in World Christianity</i>
SymS	Symposium Series
TDNT	Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976.
TLZ	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
TTC	Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia
USQR	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

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1

INTRODUCTION: A CONFESSION WITHIN THE FOUR WALLS

Hiss, bark, growl, bellows the Asian body. Blunted skulls, blighted bodies.

On the unforgiving streets smeared with racism and xenophobia, Asian bodies kiss the asphalt with our bloodied carcasses. We gasp for air to breathe. No, the myth of model minority did not spare us. As a matter of fact, we are easy targets because of perceived meekness; we are hunted down because they assume that we do not bite back.

Am I next? The next animalized other?

I hate the animalization of my body. I feel like I am part of a game in the white supremacist's hunting ground, dodging bullets and arrows sanctioned by racism in its vile manifestations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am not an animal, far from it.

And yet, my body, my spirit, feels animalized. I want to say and prove that I am not an animal. I am a human being, fully and unequivocally.

So, I cower and hide within the four walls. Far from the Karens/Kens and their sharpened xenophobic rhetoric, I think that I am safe. Alas, far from it, I am wrong. The transcorporeality of racism and hatred pierce through the walls. They devour my sensibilities even through the cyberfold. Watching the daily news of another violated Asian descent invades my body and psyche—the haunting never stops. The affective reach of racism and hatred transgress through borders, cinder blocks, and even internet firewalls. The trauma of animalization is visceral, porous, aggressive, and unrelenting.

I am an animal, I am animalized after all.

The permeability of my body and my being to the animalizing rhetoric of anti-AAPI (Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders) hatred have made me realize that my being as a human—a being of Asian descent—is being

deconstructed every moment. What does it mean to be Asian when my emotions are clouded and traumatized by racism? Is there such a thing as autonomous Asian body when my body aches because I saw the news that a grandmother a thousand miles away has been hospitalized from being clobbered on her head?

An instantaneous response against racism is to distance myself from the white supremacist's claim that I am an animal, a lesser human. My gut instinct is to proclaim my full and unequivocal humanity. I am not a dog. I am far superior than the animals. But by doing so, I have fallen into the white supremacist's trap because I have succumbed to their colonial and speciesist technique of animalizing the other. I have also proclaimed, just like how the colonizers have been doing, my so-called greatness by denigrating the animal other.

This defense mechanism, as Ecclesiastes teaches, "is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl 1:9, NRSVue). We had to differentiate ourselves from the animals as a first-response survival technique against racism. However, that legacy of differentiation lingered more than it should have. As someone who cares for the earth and all of the creatures in them, I have caught myself resorting to a first-things-first approach of caring for Asian bodies. Caring for the earth, particularly the nonhumans (animals, plants, and inanimate entities), is given attention when I have the leisure to do so, which barely happens. Every time I have participated in seminars and retreats on ecojustice, I have been the only Asian descent in the space. It has surprised me that I have never found another racially minoritized person(s) in the room with me. The absence does not imply lack of concern. We, racially minoritized persons, do care. It is just that we have to deal with the unending reemergence of oppressive systems that haunt our communities. The absence is a manifestation of our racialized and animalized bodies stretched to their limits. Unfortunately, the stress that comes with fighting the good fight in various fronts has inadvertently resulted in the neglect of the nonhuman others, much to the chagrin of many AAPI persons who care for the earth. Such neglect has also trapped us into the colonial technique of crab mentality in which the racially minoritized have to claim superiority over the nonhumans in order to justify our humanity.

A lesson I have learned throughout the COVID-19 pandemic is that my Asian body and being is never in a silo, never atomized from outside influences. The color of my skin, the shape of my eyes, the figure of my body, the family name I carry, do not solely identify me as Asian. Rather, my identity as Asian is always contested by the affective reach of those

that surround me near and far. Most of all, the nonhumans affect me. The nonhumans penetrate my being *not* because the white supremacists said so. Rather, the nonhumans and I have an affective bond because we share the same trauma and pain of being othered. They have survived and lived through anthropocentrism since the beginning of time. Their scars resemble our scars. Their trauma echoes ours. So, instead of shunning the nonhumans as the other, a way to heal the wounds caused by racism through animalization is to embrace the denigrated other/self. To embrace is to acknowledge the reality of colonization/animalization in each other and to subvert the oppressive systems by invoking the life-giving responsibility between humans and nonhumans. In particular, as a biblical scholar, I choose to participate in this embrace by reimagining and reconfiguring our relationality with all of the creation (animals, plants, and inanimate entities) with the Gospel of Mark.

Tracing the Marks of the Nonhumans

So, once again, I contemplate and read the Gospel of Mark. This time, I am reading it with the intent of embracing the nonhumans from my racially minoritized perspective. I seek to read with a new relationality not just with my fellow AAPI communities but also with the nonhumans who frolic around and transgress through my porous abode. And so, I try to see and feel how the nonhumans are hissing at, crawling through, clawing back, and pollinating the pages of the Gospel of Mark. Alongside their paw prints, I have also noticed how the colonized *ethne* (ἔθνη), the colonized people of the Roman Empire, intersect or keep on emerging with the nonhumans in Mark.¹ The nonhumans intersect particularly with women, the disabled, the enslaved, the poor (Galilean peasants), and others who are colonized through animalization. Unfortunately, they also intersect as objects of animalization by the colonizers/oppressors. By animalization I follow Neel Ahuja's (2009, 557) definition as a process that "involves contextual comparisons between animals (as laborers, food, 'pests,' or 'wildlife') and the bodies or behaviors of racialized subjects."² Tracking

1. This book defines *ethne* as (human) people, groups, or community. See chapter two for further elaboration. Interestingly though, Homer in the *Iliad* (1924) used *ethne* as a collective noun for nonhumans such as *μελισσάων* (tribes of thronging bees, 2.87), *ὄρνιθων* (tribes of winged foal, 2.459), and *μυιάων* (tribes of swarming flies, 2.469).

2. Ahuja references in turn Ritvo 1997, 121–27; and Pratt 1992, 208–13.

these intersections throughout Mark, I have found several Markan passages that manifest the complex relationality of the nonhumans and the colonized *ethne* (people or group) in their various colonized assemblages.³ I have noticed that the Markan Jesus and the empire of God are reconfigured as bestial messiah and vegetal empire of God accordingly.⁴ These reconfigurations are not always positive. As colonization through animalization is deeply ingrained in psyches, discourses, and systems, Mark depicts his Jesus on a few occasions as mimicking the colonizers' animalization of the colonized *ethne* and the nonhumans.

I have read Mark in this way because my approach to antiracism is to become antispeciesist. To care for the Asian self is to care for the nonhumans. To care for the Asian self is to embrace and double down on relating oneself with the nonhumans. To care for and read with the nonhumans does not neglect the need to strengthen the citation politics of supporting Asian descent writers (Liew 2008). It also supports the importance of cross-racial biblical interpretation (Smith and Choi 2020; Wongi Park 2021; and Liew and Segovia 2022, just to name a few). To embrace nonhumans through biblical interpretation is not about assuming that one comprehends how nonhumans think or feel in the Bible, let alone how they would read the Bible. Rather, nonhuman biblical interpretation is about valuing the *responsivity* of nonhumans, to use Jacques Derrida's term (2008, 33, 124–25). Nonhumans respond and not just react; they affect and influence other entities, including and especially humans. So, the question then becomes: How are we, particularly those of Asian descent, responding to and recognizing their responsivity as they are found with(in/out) the Bible? Could we read the Bible as those of Asian descent by opening the borders of intersectionality that invites affective relationality with the

3. I define assemblage preliminarily with Bennett's (2010, 24) definition: "Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant matters of all sorts. Assemblages are emerging confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within ... Assemblages are not governed by any central head ... An assemblage thus not only has a distinctive history of formation but a finite life span."

4. I am following Moore's preference to use *empire* instead of *kingdom* or *kin-dom*. As Moore argues, himself being influenced by such scholars as Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther (1999): "I believe that *basileia* in Mark, as in other early Christian texts, is best rendered in English by the term 'empire' rather than by the more innocuous 'kingdom,' a term whose political edge has been all but rubbed smooth by centuries of theological usage" (Moore 2006, 37 n. 29).

nonhumans? Could we become Asian descent without anthropocentrism and navel-gazing?

Aside from these philosophical reasons, an ecojustice argument is more viscerally immediate in supporting this hermeneutics. Due to climate change, environmental degradation caused by various pollution, factory farming, and increasing unethical profiteering at the expense of the nonhumans, biblical interpretation cannot and should not be limited to anthropocentric readings anymore. As a matter of fact, my nonhuman reading of the Gospel of Mark not only takes ecological and nonhuman readings as valid ways of reading Mark. I also take this reading one step further by intersecting nonhuman reading with the perspectives of colonized *ethne*. To elaborate, my approach is about reading Mark with the relationality between the nonhumans and the colonized *ethne*. This relationality cares for nonhumans even to the point of philosophically blurring ontologies (in order to efface the Cartesian logic of human superiority over nonhumans). This blurring is my way of embracing the other, their whole self, even their “ontolog(y/ies).”

Confessions and Questions

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, I had already experienced animalization in various circumstances.⁵ During my early years of graduate studies in the southern United States, I was subjected to racial slurs whereby strangers aimed animal sounds (hisses, dog barks, and monkey screams) against me. But what really opened my (Asian) eyes to the power of animalization was reflecting upon how this bestial logic operated in my childhood in the Philippines. Although a Korean born in South Korea, I grew up around Manila. As fellow colonized *ethne*, one might assume that our solidarity would protect us Koreans and Filipinx⁶ from lashing out at each other. Particularly since both of our nations celebrate independence from cruel Japanese occupation and still struggle with the US and Chinese imperialism, I had naively believed that our histories had taught us to avoid such

5. My experience echoes Ngũgĩ Wa Thiongo’s Nigerian colonial education. Thiongo abhorred the punishment his fellow students received in British schools in Nigeria for speaking Gikuyu. The punishment was wearing a sign that said “I am a Donkey” (1994, 437).

6. I chose *x* over *o/a* in writing/describing Filipinx because *x* is a signifier that includes and recognizes the presence of queer Filipinx persons and communities.

animalizing colonial tactics. Yet, as a matter of confession, my Filipinx brothers and sisters and I used animalization to demean each other. I did not target the powerful oppressor(s) but hurled verbal assaults at my Filipinx friends. I had not taken into account that my East Asianness socially separated me from Southeast Asianness. As a Korean residing in the Philippines before the influx of Korean immigrants, I felt isolated and belittled for my difference. Meanwhile, my Filipinx community read me as a young man of privilege. In the world of colorism, my paler skin complemented, rather than challenged, dominant standards of a valued body. Unaware of these internalized whiteness standards within Asian groups, I participated in perpetuating these hierarchies by animalizing my Asian neighbors. Was this a residue of colonial neurosis (à la Fanon 1967) that desired the oppressors' methods? Was this a colonial mentality in which I chose to mimic the oppressors in order to escape my (former) colonized reality through demeaning others?

Such self-realization helped me recognize other manifestations of racism when I migrated to the West Coast of the United States. A white seminary student commented that she felt as if she needed a passport to travel to California because UC Berkeley felt like Asia. In fact, in 2007, a New York Times writer communicated concerns of over-representation of Asians at prominent institutions of higher education and specifically cited UC Berkeley as an example (Egan 2007). The same writer accused admissions offices of converting top ranked American universities into "Little Asias." When I arrived in California, I continued to hear about Asians as the "model minority," a stereotype meant to subjugate/silence the minoritized with racist and empty flattery (Wu 2014). And, indeed, I partook in fulfilling those expectations of being an "ethnic, but neutral" body: the virtue of "mainstream multiculturalism" (Egan 2007).

Even in academia, scholars feign interest in my perspective, my gaze, my optics—an extension of the obsession with Asian eyes as the corporeal defining imprint of my Asianness. One time when I described myself as Asian American, a white American corrected me saying that I was not a US citizen and therefore could not be American. "You are an Americanized Asian. Perhaps a Westernized Asian if you will." In other words, as I transgressed national borders, I did not enter an empty stage. My body was haunted by the ghosts of orientalism, through and against which I would be viewed. These specters of orientalism manifested themselves often through animalization. Not only are colonized *ethne* understood in animalistic language, we are read in the context of our stage, our envi-

ronment, that environment in turn being regularly conceived as fit only for animals, a step closer to the natural world than the habitat befitting proper humans.

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

This haunting is nothing new. Rachel C. Lee (2014) in *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America* discussed the “zoe-ification” of Asian Americans. *Zoe* comes from Giorgio Agamben’s concept of *zoe* versus *bios* in which the latter is a label for those who are politically worthy of life while the former reduces entities (mostly humans) to the level of the dispensable like rodents, insects, or microbes (Agamben 1998). Lee traces the bodily zoe-ification of Asian Americans in literature. Carlos Bulosan’s (1943) *America Is in the Heart* expresses the pain of being labeled as monkeys by racist Americans. The outpouring of lament against the animalization of Asian Americans persists in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Woman Warrior* (1976), Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dogeaters* (1990), and R. Zamora Linmark’s *Rolling the R’s* (2006).

Even before Derrida wrote *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Aimé Césaire in *Discourse on Colonialism* (2001) had already questioned the ontological essentialism manifested by (western European) humanism. Cary Wolfe (2003b, ix–xxiii) also accuses the liberal philosophical tradition of theorizing and redefining the human too easily, resembling the privileged mobility of “those who are on top” who do not have to deal with oppressive structures. In other words, intersecting animality with race/ethnicity/gender had become an afterthought at best when it should have been a point of departure.

African Americans have struggled side by side with Asian Americans against racialized animalization. What if Agamben, Foucault, and Derrida took the Middle Passage as the starting point for their theories rather than the precincts of Europe? Césaire, Frantz Fanon (1963, 1967), Lewis Gordon (1998), Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (2013, 2020), Sharon Patricia Holland (2012), Hortense J. Spillers (1987, 2003), Alexander G. Weheliye (2014), and Sylvia Wynter (2003) had already been disrupting the concept of enlightenment man before and alongside French theories(/ists). They

did not need to be convinced about the blurring of the human-nonhuman divide because the ontologies of their racial/ethnic environments were forcefully blurred by animalization. Their starting point was already post-human if not unhuman. That is why nonhuman studies have to bring to the forefront the struggles of the colonized and animalized other (Jackson 2013, 674).

Bringing such struggles to the forefront is not about following Marjorie Spiegel's (1996, 30) suggestion in which human suffering is simply equated with animal suffering. Sweeping the history of denigration under the rug by arguing that such comparison is only offensive to speciesists does not resolve the anthropocentric oppressive systems and issues. And yet, the reconfiguration of ontologies by nonhuman studies as fluid or as transgressing the boundaries between humans and nonhumans (i.e., as removing anthropocentric philosophical or essentialist differences between humans and nonhumans) needs more nuanced explanation. To claim this fluidity demands first and foremost acknowledgment of the histories of racism, sexism, colonization, ableism, and other oppressive structures that have used animalization as their tool of choice. Taking the lead from Wolfe's (2010, 99) argument in *What Is Posthumanism?*, a nonhuman reading of Mark should avoid the mistake of applying animality theory (or, by extension, vegetality theory and new materialism) too quickly to marginalized and colonized groups without at least recognizing their unresolved colonial-animalizing issues. In the United States, for example, minorities have been animalized as a form of oppression and segregation. W. E. B. Du Bois (2007, 75–83) fought against the horrible treatment of African Americans in schools (see Boisseron 2018) as they were treated like animals, as creatures in between humans and cattle. Animalization is so prevalent in contexts of oppression that Fanon (2004, 7–8) had to narrate the “discovery of humanity” by the colonized as a way to combat their animalization by the colonizers.

Moreover, this book's intersectional quest does not seek a foolproof way to include all who are oppressed, let alone solve their animalization, in the name of nonhuman studies. Using Judith Butler's concept (1990, 143), I resort to the “embarrassed *et cetera*,” the shorthand way of, in this case, expressing my failure to include all who are oppressed and the failure to completely resolve the issue of animalization. This failure is not avoidable, and yet should not be an ongoing reason to continue the exclusion of those who are not mentioned in this book. As a matter of fact, I hope that they will be discussed in other works. Nevertheless, my embarrassed

et cetera admits the difficulty of finding fully adequate ways to assert ontological fluidity between humans (particularly those who are animalized) and nonhumans. Moreover, my other embarrassed *et cetera* is my conversation partners in regard to the theories I have used in this book. I hope that the next iteration of my work will have more racially minoritized scholars as the primary interlocutors. I also hope that the readers of this book will be encouraged to uplift those that I have missed and upon which I have been unable to fully expound.

Embracing my Ecoinfluencers

The names and publications below do not represent a literature review. Rather, this is my version of land acknowledgment, my way of acknowledging the academic land in which I reside and from which I benefit. I acknowledge them because I am grateful and accountable to the ancestors of this terrain whose liberatory work and presence provided spaces of emergence for persons like me. As an Asian descent, I am grateful for this opportunity to express myself, centering myself as the primary voice of my own writing destiny. At the same time, I am haunted by my Asian (Korean-Filipinx) upbringing that teaches to always remember my ancestors and from where I came. My Korean name is a constant reminder of my family lineage (the “Jeong” clan, “Dong” generation, and my name is “Hyeon”). My Filipinx community taught me the enduring lesson of “utang na loob” or debt of one’s inner self (obliging to the people who helped me through positive reciprocity and social responsibility). I am not arguing that Asian writing does not prioritize the self or the liberatory work of writing that represents the voice of the oppressed. Rather, I write as I am: intersectional and ontologically fluid. My writing reflects my constant transgressions of cultural sensitivities and academic borders/walls, negotiating these spaces willingly and unwillingly. I am also inviting the biblical studies field to write literature review neither as stones to step on, nor as relics to profit from, nor as straw figures with which to critique. Rather, what if we could write and read literature review as a celebration of the richness of one’s community? Could the politics and art of choosing which literature to mention be based on affective encounters of a particular circumstance(s), of activism that lists and reviews for decolonizing ends? With that in mind, I begin with my nonhuman companions: *ganda* (my canine companion), the Underground River, Taal volcano, and the mango tree of Maranatha seminary.

Second, I acknowledge my advisor and mentor, Stephen D. Moore. Inasmuch as biblical studies (at least in the United States) is anthropocentric and dominated by white(ness), I was able to study (post)posthumanism with the New Testament and write their intersections through this book because Moore gave me wings to fly and express myself. As a matter of fact, Moore (2011, 71–93) had already more than a decade ago begun acknowledging the complexity of the presence of nonhumans in the Gospel of Mark far beyond being labeled as flat or dispensable characters. Moore's (2017a, 1) *Gospel Jesuses and Other Nonhumans* paves the way in defamiliarizing anthropocentrically interpreted "overly familiar texts, excavations of their incessantly erased strangeness." He and many other ecoinfluencers have planted the seeds that allow interpretations to give voice and value to nonhumans, even blurring ontological boundaries between humans and nonhumans. I have jumped onto this bandwagon by rereading select narratives of Mark through animality, vegetality, and animacy theory.

Third, the Roman Catholic institution where I taught while writing this book made me aware of the cornucopia of ecojustice work done by various churches (particularly the Roman Catholic Church). Among the plethora of publications I could quote here, I limit myself with two quotes. First from *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On social concerns) article 34, Pope John Paul II writes that we must participate in

acquiring a *growing awareness* of the fact that one cannot use with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate—animals, plants, the natural elements—simply as one wishes, according to one's own economic needs. On the contrary, one must take into account *the nature as each being* and of its *mutual connection* in an ordered system, which is precisely the "cosmos." (Baum and Ellsberg 1989, 36)

Here, Pope John Paul II echoes the clarion call to reject the commodification of nonhumans. This rejection is an invitation for the church and the society to take into account that the nonhumans are also divinely created entities worthy of life and dignity. Second, Pope Francis's (2015, 57) second encyclical, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, amplifies the Roman Catholic Church's work on ecojustice by dismantling the human-nonhuman hierarchy: "Yet it would also be mistaken to view other living beings as mere objects subjected to arbitrary human domination." Although these quotations do not fully reflect a philosophical critique of

agency, their ecojustice concern for the restoration of familial relationship with the earth resonates with activists and scholars seeking to establish the intrinsic worth of nonhumans.

Fourth, the Earth Bible Team and their various projects (Habel 2000, 2001; Habel and Wurst 2000, 2001; Habel and Balabanski 2002; Habel and Trudinger 2008) have courageously challenged the anthropocentricity of the field of biblical studies through their ecojustice hermeneutics: the six ecojustice principles and the hermeneutics of ecological suspicion, identification and retrieval (Habel 2000b, 24–37; Earth Bible Team 2002, 38–53). *Every chapter of this book is inspired by their work.* Although their projects do not explicitly use posthumanist concepts, this book recognizes that the Earth Bible Team’s ecojustice hermeneutics embraces the philosophical disavowal of anthropocentric subjectivity by claiming all beings to be coactive entities who respond to and affect one another. For example, Elaine Wainwright (2008, 132) in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* uses the concept of *identification*, one of the Earth Bible Project’s versions of intersectionality that “constantly expands to new areas of interdependence, creating a web of relationships that are multidimensional.”⁷ Wainwright intersects or identifies ecofeminism with other-than-human perspectives in her reading of Mark 14:3–9, the pouring of healing ointment narrative. By doing so, Wainwright argues that the dynamics between the woman and the alabaster jar/ointment manifest “the recognition of and participation in the play of dependence and interdependence in the web of relationships in which the other-than-human, the human, and the divine live out the unfolding gift event” (138).

Fifth, the progenitors of this book are the ecofeminists and ecowomanists. Beginning with Rosemary Radford Ruether (1996, 7), I am inspired by her invitation and challenge for a “less dogmatic and more creative” reading and writing of the Bible. Here, the dogmatic is the insistence on anthropocentric reading of the Bible. Susan Fraiman (2012, 89–115) and other ecofeminists remind me that before Derrida wrote his seminal essay, “The Animal that Therefore I Am,”⁸ ecofeminists since the 1960s have

7. For further examples of feminist and minority ecojustice readings, see Elvey 2002, 95–107; Olajubu 2002, 108–21; and Flor 2002, 137–47.

8. Derrida’s essay was published first in French in 1999. Then the essay was translated into English in 2002 with the title, “The Animal That Therefore I am (More to Follow).” In 2008, this essay and three other essays were compiled and published posthumously in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*.

been concerned with the animal question.⁹ Like Fraiman, Greta Gaard has expressed her frustration on how ecofeminism's work on animals and animal studies, even on new materialism, has been overlooked (Adams and Donovan 1995, 1996; Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Barad 2007; Gaard 2011, 1993). Moreover, Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan's (1995, 6) work helped me see further how anthropocentrism and misogyny are two peas in a pod. These two peas are phallogocentric (hyper-masculine, reason-exclusive, anthropocentric) because they sustain the dichotomy of affect/nature/female versus reason/culture/male in which the latter is assumed to be superior. Such an assumption is precisely one of the reasons why ecofeminist scholarship has not garnered enough attention. More than ever, one must support the work of Asian ecofeminists (Kwok 2005; Oh 2011) and ecowomanists (Deckha 2012; Harris 2016; Lloyd-Paige 2010) because their intersectional activism traverse the much needed coconspiratorial, multioptic approach toward the retrieval and flourishing of all creations (humans and nonhumans).

Sixth, having lived through and with the postcolony in the Philippines, I have been challenged by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's (2010, 135–38) book, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, to be careful from falling into the “first-things-first excuse” or the excuse of neglecting ecojustice issues because of its perceived irrelevance compared to human-related issues. Growing up in the Philippines right beside the so-called green recycling center of technology waste dumped by various countries triggered and opened my eyes to how racism evolves and manifests itself in the form of ecocide. Here in the United States, there is an illusion that the gimmick of recycling technological waste (e.g., cellphones, TVs, computers) somehow is processed through clean and humane methods. Unbeknown to many, much of this waste travels to poor countries like the Philippines where it hides from the conscionable sensibilities of consumers. And yet, for those who have to live beside these dumping grounds, we know that this is allowed and is happening because of racism that knows no borders and boundaries. Environmental racism is a form of oppression with which many (neo)colonized entities around the world and even in the

9. Other ecofeminists have already begun the discussion in reconfiguring the relationality between humans and nonhumans. See Adams 2015; Adams and Gruen 2014; Adams and Kemmerer 1990; Goodall 1967; Haraway 1990, 2003; Hearne 1986, 2007; and Ritvo 1989.

United States (particularly Native American tribal lands) struggle.¹⁰ The most difficult part of environmental racism is when leaders of these poor countries have allowed such dumping to occur in their own backyard because the amount of money earned through this deal apparently helps alleviate poverty. First things first: human concerns first; nature can wait. Huggan and Tiffin (2010, 22) argue that “human liberation will never be fully achieved without challenging the historical conditions under which human societies have constructed themselves in hierarchical relation to other societies, both human and nonhuman, and without imagining new ways in which these societies, understood as being ecologically connected, can be creatively transformed.” The same goes with biblical interpretation that claims to fight for the rights and empowerment of racially minoritized. We have to ask ourselves: Has our passionate concern for our welfare advertently or inadvertently neglected the welfare of the others, particularly the nonhumans? Have we fallen for the Cartesian logic in which we have participated in the solidification of human superiority at the expense of the perceived dispensability of the nonhuman other?

That is why antiracism has to intersect with antispeciesism, or at least we need to check ourselves from becoming neocolonizers of the earth. Of course, this challenge is already difficult because we are only able to respond in human ways in disavowing the Cartesian logic and the ongoing devastation of the earth. Perhaps, as Wolfe (2009, 572) argues, one of the best ways humans can participate in healing the earth is placing nonhuman studies at the heart of our human concerns. Moreover, continuing this theme of human limitation, Gayatri Spivak’s (1988, 271–316) rhetorical inquiry “Can the Subaltern Speak?” reminds us that subjectivity is never (anthropocentrically) autonomous and transcendental. As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2012, 11) suggests, humans are nothing but one “geophysical force” among the various geophysical forces that compose this earth: “a purposeful biological entity with the capacity to degrade natural environment.” Chakrabarty even questions the metaphysical insistence for anthropocentric ontology by arguing that humans have both human and nonhuman elements within us: “This nonhuman, force-like mode of existence of the human tells us that we are no longer simply a form of life that is endowed with a sense of ontology. Humans have a sense of ontic belong-

10. For more readings on the intersections of ecocriticism and Native American identity, culture, and literature, see Adamson 2001; Adamson, Evans, and Stein 2002; Dreese 2002; and Myers, 2005.

ing” (13). In other words, postcolonial ecocriticism insists that humans are part of the collective existence of various forces. Such insistence is what I sustain in my reading of select passages from the Gospel of Mark. The underlying intersectional interpretation(s) of these passages demonstrate more-than-human-centric readings of Mark that is mindful to the plight of the colonized/oppressed *ethne* as well.

Shuffle-Reading the Chapters

I invite the readers of this book to read it as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) suggest their readers to read *A Thousand Plateaus*. They compare reading *A Thousand Plateaus* with listening to a music record or album (xiii–iv). Depending on the day, certain songs speak to us while others are skipped. The same goes for the chapters of *A Thousand Plateaus*. Readers might be in the mood to read a certain chapter(s) depending upon the day. As this book does not intend to have the final word, hopefully the randomness of reading it will be like listening to music according to one’s mood or the ethico-political issues that haunt the day. In other words, it is up to the readers to decide if the finitude of each chapter ends at the last period of the chapter or continues to the next. Usually, books have trajectories that climax in the last chapter or in the conclusion. If readers would like to have more structure in reading this book, then they might begin with chapter 1 and then jump ahead to the chapter(s) of their choosing. Afterwards, they are invited to engage the concluding chapter as a way to wrap up the arguments with suggestions for further intersections.

Each chapter assembles various passages, texts, and narratives with theories, hermeneutics, or criticisms. These assemblages emerge and achieve flight in each chapter or plateau (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). The arguments of each chapter are in certain sense contained within that chapter. And yet, each chapter’s argumentative intensities also overflow to other chapters. The traces of arguments left behind or picked up by the other chapters transgress the boundaries of chapter markers. The reason for such overflow is to challenge readers to find further intersections and even gaps in this book. Finding those new intersections (and gaps) hopefully encourages readers to find more ways to be creative and subversive in their ethico-political readings of Mark and the Bible.

This chapter offers a critical reflection, a confession of some sorts, concerning the origins of this book and those who influenced its creation by

providing a guide on how to read the rest of the book à la Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. This chapter then provides a glossary of key concepts utilized in this book. The glossary section territorializes with traces of the studies on philosophy, ecojustice, and race and ethnicity that shape the contours of this book. And yet, the chapter leaves possibilities for other connections that could reread the Gospel of Mark from other shape-forming socioethical theories, hermeneutics, or criticisms.

Chapter 2 engages the curt but bewildering Mark 1:13b: the narrative in which the Markan Jesus was with the wild beasts. This chapter works with an animality perspective that argues for (human) life-altering experience produced through the encounter with the beast(ly) or the nonhuman. Working with Derrida's discombobulation with his cat's gaze, Adams' reflection on the death of her horse (Jimmy), and Aldo Leopold's piercing encounter with the fierce green fiery eyes of a wolf he shot and killed, this chapter finds that the animal gaze/presence affectively persuades and challenges the supposed ontological uniqueness and superiority of humans (see also Bechtel, Eaton, and Harvie 2018). The relationality that is formed by being at the presence of nonhumans, as Jesus is with the wild beasts, demands responsivity. As read in this chapter, the Markan Jesus's encounter with the wild beasts causes him to struggle in his responsivity to humans (colonized *ethne*) and nonhumans alike. The Markan Jesus is described as a bestial messiah because he tries to be in solidarity with nonhumans and those that are animalized while mimicking the bestial logics of his time.

Chapter 3 approaches the empire of God with Michael Marder's work on vegetality. Instead of relegating plants to the realm of dispensability, this chapter finds in the Gospel of Mark several passages (4:1–20, 26–29, 30–32; 13:28–31) that depict plants as either teaching or demonstrating the Markan version of the empire of God. The first vegetal lesson reconfigures the empire of God as an atelic collective being that grows through multiple interactions with other actants. Second, the vegetal teaches the alterity of the empire of God. Continuing the arguments of the second lesson, the third lesson teaches us that those who are deemed inanimate or irrelevant are those that give life and direction to the Markan empire of God. Fourth, vegetal temporality teaches how to reconfigure imperial and anthropocentric time. In all of these, I acknowledge and discuss the unfortunate colonial and anthropocentric desire manifested by the Markan Jesus in 11:12–14, 20–21 (the cursing of the fig tree). Jesus's desire to curse the fig tree reflects centuries of colonial conditioning in which the

colonized *ethne* are entangled to mimic the oppressors' disregard for those who are considered dispensable.

Chapter 4 rereads Mark 5:1–20 from the plight of the Sea of Galilee filled with pig carcasses. Working with Mel Y. Chen's animacies perspective and Sara Ahmed's understanding of the affect of disgust, this chapter argues that those that are considered inanimate, insensate, and immobile have affective potentialities to move and even transform organic actants. The affect produced by the disgusting pig cadaver-infested Sea of Galilee could have moved the Gerasenes to beg Jesus to move out of their region. The visual and olfactory disgust bring back for the colonized *ethne* (particularly the poor and the oppressed) memories of colonial disdain and current anger against the Roman Empire for their sacrificial machine that systematically makes those who are oppressed as killable. Unfortunately, the Markan Jesus reflects or mimics the oppressors' carnophallogocentric treatment of the dispensable ones even as he himself struggles to not do so.

Chapter 5 tackles the contentious dialogue between the Syrophoenician woman and the Markan Jesus (7:24–30) by providing another animality reading of this narrative through Ahuja's trope of the animal mask. Jesus's animalizing response to the Syrophoenician woman is a reflection of collective assemblage of enunciation stemming from centuries of animosity between the Israelites and the Syrophoenicians. The Syrophoenician woman's response is a form of animal mask, that is, a performative discourse that temporarily dons the bestial logics in order to reflect back to Jesus his animalizing rhetoric. Her animal(izing) performance wakes the Markan Jesus to the need to reconcile with other colonized *ethne* by healing each other (the daughter for the pericope) and in other decolonial ways.

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

A Mini-Glossary in Two Ensembles

I highly recommend reading and using this section, and perhaps even bookmarking it, as a guide for the rest of the book. The section is divided into two ensembles. The first ensemble contains concepts that are used in every

chapter of the book. The second ensemble summarizes the three ecojustice-philosophical theories selectively applied in their respective chapters.

First Ensemble: Actants, Assemblage, Colonized *Ethne*, and Nonhumans

Actant(s): another term for entity/ies. It acknowledges the affective capacities of all entities, including the so-called inanimate objects.

To elaborate, I follow Bruno Latour's (2004, 236; 2005, 10–11) definition of actants as “sources of affects and effects, actions and reactions, something that modifies another entity in a trial ... [whose] competence is deduced from its performance and not from presumptions.” This is a reaction against the anthropocentric correlation of humans as subjects and nonhumans as objects that demarcates arbitrarily the superiority and centrality of humans. To reconfigure nonhumans as actants recognizes that humans and nonhumans actually are in a network of relations mutually affecting each other: “we [humans] retain what has always been most interesting about them [nonhumans]: their daring, their experimentation, their uncertainty, their warmth, their incongruous blend of hybrids, their crazy ability to reconstitute the social bond” (Latour 1993, 142). Latour (1996, 269–81) clarifies that we humans do not grant subjectivity (or the capacity to affect) to nonhumans. Rather, we have never been the all-knowing subjects of this world.

That is why Jane Bennett (2010, 9) describes actants as “interveners” in the problematic paradigm of the subject-object dichotomy (see also Latour 2004, 75). Bennett further explains and likens the concept of actants as interveners with the Deleuzian concept of “quasi-causal operator”: an operator “by virtue of its particular location in an assemblage and the fortuity of being in the right place at the right time, makes the difference, makes things happen, becomes the decisive force catalyzing an event.” This paradigm shift dismantles the anthropocentric causality in which humans enact and nonhumans react. Causality and response are deconstructed from a fixation with human causality and human form of response. To approach humans and nonhuman as actants, then, places all “operators” in a fluid space, affecting and being-affected by one another in their finite assemblages.

(Becoming-Intersectional) Assemblage: a fluid ensemble of actants (entities) at a certain moment in time and place. Pericope

is an assemblage. Parables, in their uniqueness as a genre, are also an assemblage.

Reading the nonhumans of Mark as actants sees the various narratives of Mark as uneven topographies or assemblages that are not centered upon Jesus but on collective actants in the form of emergent properties. Each pericope and narrative I explore in the book is taken as assemblages. The trees, the Sea of Galilee, Jesus, the Syrophoenician woman, and other actants in the Gospel of Mark are all parts of various assemblages; no one actant transcends over others (although Jesus stands out the most due to the Markan author's predilection). The assemblages formed in each pericope and across pericopes exist only because of the interactions produced by the various parts that comprise each assemblage. They are considered then as "open-ended groupings" (Bennett 2010, 24) found throughout the Markan narrative.

This Deleuzo-Guattarian concept is actually a translation of the French term *agencement*. According to Manuel DeLanda (2016, 1), *agencement* or assemblage refers "to the action of matching or fitting together a set of components (*agencer*), as well as to the result of such an action: an ensemble of parts that mesh together well." Moreover, the problem with the English translation "assemblage" is that it reflects only the second part of the definition, misconceiving the term as a product rather than a constant process of territorialization and deterritorialization or the consolidation of various parts or actants and their corresponding dissolution. After sifting through various iterations of assemblages throughout Deleuze and Guattari's corpus, DeLanda finds Deleuze's statement in *Dialogue II* the most conceptually straightforward:

What is an assemblage? It is a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across sexes and reigns—different natures. Thus, the assemblage's only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a "sympathy." It is never filiations which are important, but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind (Deleuze and Parnet 2002, 69).¹¹

11. For other key references on assemblage, see Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 34, 38, 67, 73, 88, 90, 97–98, 323–24, 330, 356–57, 368, 503; 1994, 36; Guattari 2011, 47, 55, 147, 188; 1996, 154–55.

This definition captures the temporary emergences of assemblages “without investing the emergent structures of power with essentialist notions of being” (Roffe and Stark 2015b, 11).

DeLanda systematically organizes Deleuze and Guattari’s scattered definitions of assemblage into four main points. First, assemblages have “a fully contingent historical identity, and each of them is therefore an individual entity ... that does not exist in a hierarchical ontology” (2016, 19–20). The individual in question does not signify number but its historical uniqueness (6, 13). Second, assemblages are “always composed of heterogeneous components” (20) that are not “uniform in nature or origin, and ... the assemblage actively links these parts together by establishing relations between them” (2). Bennett’s (2010) definition of assemblage resonates with DeLanda’s second point: “assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant matters of all sorts. Assemblages are emerging confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within” (23). Third, assemblages can become components of larger assemblages (20). Fourth, assemblages “emerge from the interactions of their parts” (21). Assemblages are not ruled by a single component; rather, each emergent property is a vital force of the assemblage (24). As soon as an assemblage is formed, it immediately becomes its own source of limitations and deterritorialization because an assemblage cannot be reduced to its own parts or a part cannot transcend its own assemblage. Thus, assemblages are always in the process of dismantling and opening themselves for new formations because they have “finite life span” (24).

Since assemblages are finite and immanent, reading Mark’s narratives as assemblages is actually a practice of decoding or deconstructing the givens (DeLanda 2016, 22; see also Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 322, 355). In other words, decoding in biblical interpretation dismantles the assumed fixity of identities, behaviors, and rules of engagement on what is considered good/acceptable biblical interpretation. Reading narratives of Mark as assemblages intends to decode, among other things, the assumed transcendental stranglehold of anthropocentric prejudices. This reading is not simply about forcefully retrieving or interpreting texts so as to engage with the neglected nonhumans. Rather, it is about interrogating tendencies that superimpose explicitly or implicitly anthropocentric codes on all relationalities. Reading Mark’s humans and nonhumans as actants in various assemblages opens the imaginative possibilities that were once curtailed due to limitations brought about by anthropocentrism.

From an ecological perspective, the concept of assemblage resonates with the Earth Bible Team's (2000, 38–53) second ecojustice principle: the principle of interconnectedness: "Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival." Assemblage theory extends the spirit of the second ecojustice principle by continuing its ecojustice stance while drawing further its theoretical reach, as developed and provided by such thinkers as Deleuze and Guattari, DeLanda, and Bennett. Moreover, assemblage theory echoes Roman Catholic "geologist" Thomas Berry's "communion of subjects" (Waldau and Patton 2009, 11–14). Berry sees all nonhumans as relational subjects with their own agencies. The nonhumans are in communion with the world as they are capable of affecting and being affected by others. Although Berry does not use posthumanist concepts explicitly, his care for the earth resonates with the philosophical maneuverings argued by many theorists found in this book.

Following Berry's reconfiguration, the follow-up question then becomes: How are the actants within an assemblage in communion with each other? Among various possibilities, my understanding of assemblage echoes Stacy Alaimo's (2010, 6) term, *transcorporeality* or the way "in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world.... The substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment.'" Transcorporeality is Alaimo's way of recognizing the entanglements of all actants materially, socially, and even affectively. These entanglements produce relationality through the movements across various forms of bodies that are "unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors" (Alaimo 2010, 2). Thus, the transcorporeality of this book is traced through transgressions of the actants in the select Markan narratives, with the guidance of animality, vegetal, and animacy perspectives.

Before I proceed further, one has to take a pause here and acknowledge the intersectional work of ecofeminists who inspire and echo the continental philosophers. One has to begin by acknowledging the monumental contribution of Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989, 139–67; 1991, 1241–99) and her coining of the term intersectionality. Basically, intersectionality illuminates the system in which an oppressive discourse relies upon the existence of another oppressive discourse. It seeks to steer away from the naivete of looking at subjectivity and relations from just one identification point.

In *Neither Man nor Beast*, Adams (1994, 79) also echoes the importance of intersectionality, arguing that oppressive systems manifest as an “interlocking system of domination.” To fight such complex structures is to engage them with the same level of complexity in the form of intersectionality. Additive approaches, cursorily tackling another issue as if it is an afterthought, are not enough to confront the complexity of the various oppressive systems in play because, as Crenshaw (1989, 158) states, “intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism.” Thus, reading the Gospel of Mark with the nonhumans and the plight of the colonized/bestialized people illuminates the matrix of oppression(s) haunting Mark and his context. The consilience of theories, hermeneutics, or perspectives delves into deeper questions and inquiries than one perspective of interrogation would reveal. Intersectional biblical interpretation focuses on the open-endedness of any interpretation and its necessary vulnerability to being challenged and reinterpreted constantly by another interpretation.

A critique against intersectionality is that a single system of oppression by itself is already sufficiently difficult to resolve, discuss, or master. To intersect various issues could result into haphazard or amateur understandings of all the issues, resulting in an endeavor that is useless or even detrimental to all sides. Claire Jean Kim’s (2015) response to the critiques against intersectionality is her study of the tension between the Chinese exotic animal market vendors versus animal rights activists in San Francisco. In her book, *Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species, and Nature in a Multicultural Age*, Kim gathers stories, transcripts of judicial hearings, and news clippings on the tense struggle between the Chinese vendors who cried racism against the predominantly white animal rights protestors and, simultaneously, the protestors who cried speciesism against the vendors selling exotic animals. Instead of providing the solution to this struggle, Kim suggests a multioptic approach. Kim’s approach, which is a simile of intersectionality, sees each intersecting optic (racism and speciesism) from within and from without through the vantage point of the other, all while holding the confluences of the optics simultaneously so as to perceive the interconnectedness of each optic (19). Mutually avowing and conflicting optics do not lead to paralysis of critique or unreflective atomization. In fact, the level of critique actually becomes more complex as the contours of critique unveil unforeseen issues hidden within single (or even double) optic interpretations (198). The conclusions brought about by Kim’s multioptic approach do not seek some form of resolution

for each optic. Rather, her approach actually opens the doors for further intersectional possibilities.

I am also inspired by Jasbir Puar's exposition on intersectionality. Frustrated with how intersectionality has become rigid and ironically essentializing in its definition and application, Puar argues that intersectionality has to be revisited and reinterpreted away from its current state. According to Puar, one has to reread intersectionality as having the similitude of Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage. Puar (2011) even created a portmanteau for this equation, "becoming-intersectional assemblage." This amalgamation is a response against how the categories being intersected (race, gender, class, and so on) have ironically reified the subjects they represent. If intersectionality is about pointing out the instability of identity and subjectivity, the epistemological trend to do intersectionality ironically became a signifier for certain bodies. Puar highlights Rey Chow's (2006, 53) critique against this inadvertent return to the encapsulation of subjectivity by calling it as "poststructuralist signifiatory incarceration." This encapsulation is formulated in the equation of difference equals identity. As this universalizing project highlight otherness, this repetition creates a fatigue in which marginalized bodies are the new centers of self-referentiality. What this means is that racially minoritized bodies have inadvertently positioned their bodies constantly as the ultimate point of referentiality when it comes to racial issues. Queer bodies are being forced to have gender and sexuality discourse as their primary or even only point of identities. As Puar (2011, 58) suggests, we need to relearn Crenshaw's understanding of intersectionality as a process in which

Categories—race, gender, sexuality—are considered events, actions, and encounters between bodies, rather than simply entities of subjects.... Identification is a process; identity is an encounter, an event, an accident, in fact. Identities are multi-casual, multi-directional, liminal; traces aren't always self-evident.

Here, Puar finds in assemblage theory a channel to expound upon intersectionality's porous understanding of identity. Assemblage theory's attention to affect and de-privileging anthropocentric tendencies sustain the importance of "ontological irreducibility" in understanding intersectionality (62). In her book, *Terrorist Assemblages*, Puar (2007, 206) reminds her readers that

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

In other words, identity politics is left wanting if it consciously or unconsciously calcifies the ontology of the subject, leaving no room for porous transgressions of identities with the other when it is preoccupied with identity but without the political implications. The same goes with my reading of select Markan texts as (becoming-intersectional) assemblages. My reading is just one assemblage, one biblical interpretation. My take should not be calcified as the primary reading or interpretation of the pericope. To do so would incarcerate once again the fluidity of the biblical passage. Thus, I hope that Puar's argument will remind us not to calcify our interpretations of biblical passages. Such a cautionary measure will reconfigure or hopefully liberate the nonhumans and colonized *ethne* of the Gospel of Mark from anthropocentrism and animalization.

Colonized *Ethne*: a signifier for both Mark's human audience and for the human actants within the Markan narratives who are colonized by the Roman Empire.

This expression is inspired by Davina C. Lopez's monumental book, *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul's Mission*. According to Lopez (2010, 6), outside the religious construct dependent on differentiating gentiles (*ethne*) from Jews (*Ioudaioi*), *ethne* (or *gens* in Latin, which means people, groups, ethnicities, and other variations) signifies all "peoples conquered by the Romans and incorporated into (i.e., made to serve) their territorial empire."¹² Lopez's most convincing argument is materially evident through the inscriptions on the base of a relief on the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias in southwest Turkey. In the north portico of the Sebasteion, reliefs of approximately fifty personified female representations of various colonized *ethne* stand side by side as a reminder of the penetration of the

12. Please note that I translate *Ioudaioi* as Judeans in general. I translated it as "Jews" here in order to replicate how it has been translated when it is limited to religious discourses.

masculine and colonial prowess of the Roman Empire. They showcase the reach of the Roman Empire by listing the names and images of these colonized *ethne*. These reliefs have bases with inscriptions and faces of their colonized *ethne* with stereotypical markers such as hairstyles and facial features. One of the inscriptions reads: “ETHNOUS IOUDAION.”

In other words, in the eyes of the Roman Empire Jewish communities and other groups were colonized (and even enslaved) *ethne*. If the Romans, or the Roman Empire, are the central and most important group, the rest are mere *ethne*. I added “colonized” as the descriptive adjective to “*ethne*” because it highlights the overreach of Roman imperial ambitions in various facets of life, extending to animalization of its colonies.¹³

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

The Roman Empire’s animalization of their colonial subjects, or the animalization of their opponents, was a common occurrence in the ancient Mediterranean world. Aristotle apparently advised Alexander the Great to treat the colonized *ethne/gens* like ζῴων ἢ φυτοῖς or animals and plants (Plutarch, *Alex. fort.* 6 [329b]). Caligula proclaimed himself divine while treating humans as below animals: “Having collected wild animals for one of his shows, he found butcher’s meat too expensive and decided to

13. For more discussions on mixing of ethnicities, Roman citizenship, and the issues thereof, see David L. Balch, *Contested Ethnicities and Images: Studies in Acts and Art* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), chapter 1. See also Royce M. Victor’s work on colonial education of the Hellenized children during the time of Jesus in *Colonial Education and Class Formation in Early Judaism: A Postcolonial Reading* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2010).

feed them with [human] criminals instead” (Suetonius, *Cal.* 27). And yet, this inclination to animalize others was not solely the prerogative of the Roman Empire. The colonized and enslaved *ethne* also animalized each other by mimicking the bestial logics of the Roman Empire (more on this in chapter 3).

Of course, one could doubt or even question the possibility of knowing if many colonized persons experienced animalization or even worried about it. To assume that the characters in and the audience of the Gospel of Mark are all traumatized by colonization and animalization is an overreach. Not all colonized persons hated the Roman Empire. For example, the Jewish local elites of Jerusalem in the first century CE benefited from the empire. As Tat-siong Benny Liew (2008a, 227) suggests, the local elites are more complex in their relationality with the empire because they represent both “emancipation and oppression.” This ambiguity is heightened with the Roman Empire’s interest with the second temple of Jerusalem. The Roman Empire supported the Jerusalem temple not out of reverence for the sacred site but as a way to control its colony by colluding with the local oligarchs who controlled the temple (Schwartz 2001, 11–14). Perhaps the elite and those who have benefited from Roman colonization would have expressed less anger toward the colonial bestial logics because they presumed that they were not the primary target of such hatred and malignment. Nevertheless, acknowledging the psychological and physical toll that imperialism takes on both colonial and diasporic communities (wherever and whoever they may be) is not a huge leap of logic even if such suffering is unquantifiable or even denied. Moreover, this acknowledgment further responds to the suffering of *both* humans and nonhumans in their finitude, vulnerability, and passivity.

In a way, I am inviting Asian American communities to reimagine the fluidity of our identity with nonhumans. Inasmuch as the colonial discourse of animalization still haunts (Asian) minorities, this project participates in moving beyond the impasse by questioning “the discomfort zones that mark the edges of acceptable and normative practice in the guild by examining the system of exclusions” (Moore and Sherwood 2011, 130) that regulate Asian (American) biblical scholarship. I do not claim to have found *the* answer to this issue. Rather, in line with Kim’s (2015, 19) argument, I approach this irresolvability not as a hindrance but as an opportunity to find pockets of resolutions and justices in this endless flow of mutual avowal among multiplicities of optics.

This invitation to reimagine our identity(ies) in the form of assemblages is a response to the “paradoxes of auto-immunitary logic” in many (Asian) postcolonial interpretations. By “auto-immunitary,” Derrida (2008, 47) means an act of self-defense or self-preservation of a thing that in fact leads to that thing’s self-destruction (see also 2005, 35–36, 86). There is a tendency for minority scholars to engage in auto-immunitary biblical interpretation in which the plight of the colonized or minoritized is thoroughly analyzed at the expense of (consciously or unconsciously) neglecting or sacrificing nonhumans. In this biopolitical fight for (Asian) life and identity, nonhumans are on some occasions turned into scapegoats as we minority scholars auto-immunize ourselves or (un)intentionally neglect the plight of the nonhumans by focusing too much on our subjectivity or sovereignty. The search and fight for Asian-ness should not exclude animacy to nonhumans. Instead, the task of this book is to propose the transformation of auto-immunitary biblical interpretations into community-relational and creaturely intersectional interpretations that respond to the minorities’ ethicopolitical issue while fulfilling the obligation to be with and become as nonhumans.

Nonhuman(s): an umbrella term for all entities who/that are not humans.

I choose to use the term nonhuman because it questions the centrality of the human. Following Richard Grusin, humans and nonhumans have always “coevolved, coexisted, or collaborated.”¹⁴ There was never a moment in which humans became existentially different or superior than the nonhumans. The negation is a critique of anthropocentrism that haunts human-nonhuman relationality. Moreover, my preference for the term nonhuman reflects my preferential bias for continental philosophy and its proponents. Scholars in this field resonate with nonhumans over other terms, and they have worked with it for some time now.

Of course, the term nonhuman runs the risk of anthropocentrism again because it describes animals, plants, and inanimate others through negation of the human as if they could not stand on their own. Further, a definition via negation has an injurious historical legacy whereby certain

14. For further explanations for preferring the term “nonhuman” over nonhuman animal, nature, or other such terms, see Grusin 2015, ix–x.

minoritized groups have been defined as proximate or distant from the touted social ideal. In other words, certain bodies have been interpreted as either like or *not* like the perfect specimen. On such a scale, one is measured (and valued) depending on how much one lacks or strays from the pinnacle. In this vein, women have suffered substantially from men who insist upon reading women's bodies as lacking superior male elements. Women have been interpreted as inferior men with inverted male parts. Indeed, popular slang talks about men and women as opposite sexes as if unconsciously declaring women to be upside-down men. Even when women are not conceived as not-men, women still often find themselves defined in narrow biological terms, thereby forgetting how historical ideas of woman have been biologized. In this example, I convey the ridiculous nature of defining the majority of creation as not-something. Yet, for reasons I mentioned above, I begrudgingly maintain this term as a tentative, temporary placeholder as it appears to communicate the most transparent definition I am trying to convey.

Some ecofeminists have posited alternative terms attempting to express the spirit of the nonhuman. Such creative and generative options include "more-than-human" or "earthother" (Gaard 2017). Val Plumwood (2002) chooses the "earthother" as an umbrella term for plants, animals, inanimate objects, and even humans. According to Plumwood, these options seek to elevate the place of creatures who are not humans by bracketing them under the scope of the earth.

Posthuman is not a viable option because it seems to imply that humans are still the center of progress or change. According to Grusin (2015, ix), posthuman seems to claim

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

In this imperfect compromise, my usage of nonhumans is not mutually exclusive with the reasons behind the use of more-than-human and earthother. Rather, I use nonhumans to embody their spirit for countering Cartesian hierarchy and for finding better ways to be in companionship with all creatures.

Second Ensemble: Animality, Vegetality, Animacy

The constellation of theories used in this book is not unique. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's (2012, 7) editorial volume, *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*, for example, insists on the importance of intersecting animality studies with vegetality studies and new materialism: "the study of animals, plants, stones, tracks, stools, and other objects can lead us to important new insights about the past and present; and that they possess integrity, power, independence and vibrancy.... Human is not the world's sole meaning-maker, and never has been."

The constellation of animality, vegetality, and new materialism (in the form of animacy) is more than just a heuristic selection. The assemblage of these three theories/hermeneutics is geared toward engaging as many nonhumans in the Gospel of Mark as possible. The eclectic variety of theories employed in this book is not meant simply to chalk up points in an intellectual game. Rather, the variety signifies my desire to decolonize interpretive gatekeeping that compartmentalizes hermeneutics, criticisms, and theories. Intersecting various theories decolonizes and "reframes" (Wimbush and Liew 2002, 36) the arbitrary restrictions customarily imposed on biblical interpretation, a kind of (Foucauldian) epistemic stranglehold. Intersectional biblical interpretation does not seek allegiance to a single criticism or hermeneutics because it does not want one perspective to restrict and control the possibilities for imaginative and critical biblical interpretations. The diversity of interpretations, the infinity of interpretive assemblages and the endless blossoming of new ones, is the intent of this decolonizing epistemology.

Animality: a term that expresses the ontological fluidity of animals.

First (of the constellation of theories), no unanimously decided definition of animality studies exists. Even with the disagreements on the name of the field, however (animal studies, human-animal studies, zoocriticism, critical animal studies, posthuman animality studies, and others), all animality philosophers and activists agree that one of the core arguments of animality studies is the eradication of the Cartesian human-animal hierarchy and divide. Animality studies is generally understood as a philosophical engagement with transdisciplinary roots that seeks to work through "the question of the animal" (Calarco 2008, 6). It is indebted to ecofeminists, ecowomanists, Derrida, and other scholar-activists who have questioned

the ways nonhumans have traditionally been reduced to anthropocentric essentialist taxonomies and other machinations. By doing so, animality studies seeks to be responsive to nonhumans' interruptions, hauntings, and affects.

Moore (2014, 2) insists that animality studies should never disregard the work of animal advocacy groups. Animality studies is inspired by the ecological drive to erase anthropocentric legacies. It participates in animal advocacy through philosophical and theoretical work by going against methods that delimit nonhumans to the literary realms of metaphors, tropes, and data. Nonhumans are rather viewed as material entities or living creatures who affect and influence other actants. Of course, animality studies does not claim to know animal thoughts or dare to represent nonhumans with constitutively shared characteristics based on humanist presumptions. In the end, we still assume and interpret from humanist perspectives. As Wolfe (2009, 572) argues, "it is a matter, then, of locating the animal of animal[ity] studies and its challenge to humanist modes of reading, interpretation, and critical thought not just 'out there,' among the birds and beasts, but 'in here' as well, at the heart of this thing we call human."

As I have mentioned before, my primary interlocutors for animality studies are Derrida, Deleuze, and Guattari. The drawback though of choosing Derrida is that, according to Donna Haraway (2007, 20), when he reflected on his encounter with his cat, he "failed a simple obligation of companion species; he did not become curious about what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available to him in looking back at him that morning." Moore points out that Derrida seems to have anticipated such a critique because Derrida reengaged the importance of his cat's gaze:

When I feel so naked in front of a cat, facing it, and when, meeting its gaze, I hear the cat or God ask itself, ask *me*: Is he going to call me, is he going to address me? What name is he going to call me by, this naked man, before I give him woman. (Derrida 2008, 18; Moore 2014, 7–8).

This reengagement, according to Moore, reconfigured the cat's ontology not just as the constitutive other but as the hyphenated human-nonhuman-divine, that is, divinanimality (Derrida 1987, 132). Although Derrida did not engage the nonhumans along the line of Jane Goodall or Carol J. Adams, his engagement, in all its imperfections, contributed to the dismantling of Cartesian logic.

Inasmuch as Deleuze and Guattari's various philosophical concepts are monumental, Haraway is correct in her critique of their sweeping statement against the mundane, the sentimental. Haraway points out Deleuze and Guattari's (1987, 240) discombobulating statement: "*Anyone who likes cats or dogs is a fool!*" In their desire to critique Sigmund Freud and promote the importance of becoming-animal, Deleuze and Guattari qualified the relationality between humans and animals into three groups. They prefer the demonic, pack, or affect animals who are in their multiplicity of becoming are not tied down (third group) to the classifications accorded by the State's anthropocentric taxonomy (first group), or to the individuated, Oedipal regressions of those who own pets (second group). Regarding the second group, Deleuze and Guattari critiqued those who have animal companions for their "narcissistic contemplation" or resolving their daddy and mommy issues through animal companionship (240–41). According to Deleuze and Guattari, nonhumans are freed from anthropocentrism when they are liberated from the state apparatus and human sentimentality. Miffed by their shortsightedness, Haraway (2007, 30) lambasted Deleuze and Guattari for their preoccupation with the sublime over the mundane and visceral, their "misogyny, fear of aging, incursion about animals, and horror at the ordinariness of flesh." Deleuze and Guattari contradicted their own concept of becoming by limiting the possibilities of relationality between nonhumans and their human companions in the interests of countering Freud's Oedipal complex. Even though Haraway's work is not based on Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts, her work grounds my interpretations by reminding me that real nonhumans should always be in my purview in understanding the multiplicity of becoming. With this in mind, I am and I seek to be haunted and guided by Haraway's mandate as I apply Deleuze and Guattari's concepts in interpreting various Markan passages.

Vegetality: a term that conveys the affective capacities of the vegetal.

Second, vegetality studies or critical plant studies argues that the vegetal entities are capable of "accessing, influencing, and being influenced by a world that does not overlap the human *Lebenswelt* but that corresponds to the vegetal modes of dwelling on and in the earth" (Marder 2013, 8). Critical plant studies does not claim to know or speak for plants. Rather, it values the life of plants by letting plants be in their own obscurity, their otherness, and their ways of existence. Chapter 4 rereads the empire of

God and its temporality through Marder's ontophytology (vegetal ontology), which means understanding the nature of existence and temporality through plants. Jeffrey T. Nealon's argument on plant biopolitics will also be utilized in the chapter. According to Nealon (2015, 107), life is "not a static or dynamic backdrop for the myriad (im)possibilities of individual lives but as the ecological territory that cuts across all strata of life ... life as defined in rhizomatic territories."

If animal(ity) studies is still struggling to be accepted by mainstream academia, vegetality studies is subjected to outright ridicule or taken with a hint of skepticism at best. The relative newness of vegetality studies and its limited academic resources does not help in challenging this hostility.¹⁵ Nealon (2015) laments the indifference shown towards plant-life and the preferential orientation of biopolitics to fleshly organisms. To counter this neglect, Nealon propounds that vegetality invites a reconfiguration of biopolitics that is vegetal, concerned with life in the territory of the emerging: "life is an interlocking assemblage of forms of processes, a series of doings, as Deleuze and Guattari insists; it is not a hidden world possessed by an individual organism" (114). Vegetality affects other actants in ways that are not organic (centered) and molarly linear (a fixed single trajectory of life), but rhizomatic (distributive) and molecularly cyclical (an endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth), as Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 21–23) would suggest. Also, Marder (2014, xiii) in *The Philosopher's Plant* argues that "*philo-sophia*, the love of wisdom, is brought to life with the help of *phyto-philía*, the love of plants." Tracing the "intellectual herbarium" or various ways philosophers' ideas (from Plato to Luce Irigaray) are expressed through plants, Marder demonstrates that "philosophical dialogues, treatises, lectures, and meditations will grow, flourish, blossom in greater proximity to vegetable life" (xv). I, in turn, use the vegetal engagements of Marder and Nealon in reading select passages of Mark with the hope that such proximity will blossom positive vegetal engagements within the biblical studies field and contribute to the ecojustice movement.

15. Aside from Marder and Nealon's books, here are select academic resources on critical plant studies:

Doyle 2003; Hall 2002; Kohn 2013; Morton 2009.

Animacy: a term that animates the affective disruptions of inanimate entities.

Third, I follow Chen's (2012, 2) approach to new materialism: animacy theory. According to Chen, this theory reconfigures how matter "that is considered insensate, immobile, deathly, or otherwise 'wrong' animates cultural life in important ways." Chen's animacy theory intersects new materialism with gender and sexuality, race, ecojustice, and affect in order to "affectively disrupt and subvert the arbitrary hierarchy and ontological boundaries formed not just between humans and animals but also with those categorized as animate and as inanimate" (2).

The importance of this third approach, and what places it in the category of new materialism, is that it reconfigures the so-called inanimate objects (or as Bennett [2010, 36] describes them, "vibrant matter") as actants who have affective and generative agencies toward themselves and others.¹⁶ New materialism embraces the embodied particularities and finitude of humans and nonhumans. The subject-object distinction is removed not by distancing from materiality but by embracing the underlying matters that brought about the dichotomy in the first place. New materialism then becomes key in further intersecting nonhumans with the experience of objectification of the colonized *ethne* in the Gospel of Mark. It resuscitates the presence of inorganic matters as vital forces that affect human characters in Mark, even Jesus and the empire of God.

16. This book does not engage with speculative realism or object-oriented ontology, even if they have in their own ways undermined the human-subject, nonhuman-object hierarchy. On speculative realism and object-oriented ontology, see Brassier 2007; Harman 2011; Morton 2012; and Meillassoux 2008.