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Healing of bodies as a contested colonial site in Mark

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This article aims to offer a postcolonial reading of Mark's healing narratives, interpreting them not only as sites of resistance but also as narrative pedagogy. Focusing on Mark 5:1–20 and 7:24–30, it argues that the Gospel constructs the body as a contested colonial site where imperial power, social exclusion, and symbolic violence converge. Moving beyond dominant biomedical, symbolic, and Christological interpretations, the study demonstrates that healing scenes are narratively configured to train audiences to recognise and interpret imperial domination as inscribed on bodies and social relations. By attending closely to dialogue, naming, and narrative tension, the article shows that healing functions as a pedagogical practice that forms subaltern consciousness capable of discerning and negotiating imperial power. In this way, Mark's Gospel emerges not only as a text of resistance but as a formative discourse that cultivates politically aware and responsive communities.

Contribution: This study contributes to Markan and postcolonial scholarship in three specific ways. Firstly, it advances beyond existing empire-critical readings by arguing that healing narratives function not only as symbolic resistance but as narrative pedagogy that forms interpretive consciousness. Secondly, it demonstrates through close exegetical analysis how specific narrative features – such as naming, dialogue, and boundary negotiation – operate didactically within the text. Thirdly, it reframes the Gospel of Mark as a formative discourse that equips subaltern communities not merely to endure imperial power but to recognise, interpret, and respond to it. In doing so, the study offers a more textually grounded and theoretically integrated account of healing as both political and pedagogical practice.

Keywords: Markan healing; postcolonial criticism; imperial bodies; narrative pedagogy; subaltern agency; ethical resistance; gender and ethnicity.

Introduction

Markan healing narratives are frequently interpreted within therapeutic, symbolic or Christological frameworks in which illness primarily functions as a narrative occasion for the display of divine power. While such approaches have yielded important insights, they risk abstracting the body from its historical and political embeddedness within the Roman imperial world. Horsley (2001:26–33) argues that Mark's Gospel is shaped by concrete relations of domination, in which imperial power structures inform both social experience and narrative imagination. Similarly, Carter (2006:3–9, 42–47) demonstrates the pervasive reach of Roman imperial ideology into everyday life, including the regulation of bodies, space, and identity. Building on these insights, this study argues that Mark's healing narratives do more than reflect resistance to imperial domination; they configure healing scenes as sites of narrative pedagogy. In this article, 'narrative pedagogy' is positioned as a central concept; it should be conceptualised as a teaching-oriented framework that intentionally employs narrative features – such as plot, characterisation, and point of view – to facilitate critical engagement, contextual awareness, and transformative learning within specific communities. In this regard, it resonates with dialogical and praxis-oriented pedagogies, particularly those that emphasise the interaction between text and lived experience (Freire 1970:72; West 1993:15). Unlike purely analytical approaches, narrative pedagogy foregrounds the formative, communal, and dialogical process through which meaning is constructed and appropriated. Hence, healing episodes are not only acts of restoration or symbolic resistance but are narratively crafted to form interpretive consciousness within subaltern audiences. Through these stories, Mark trains readers to recognise, interpret, and negotiate imperial oppression as it is inscribed upon bodies and social relations. Healing thus emerges as a public and socially embedded act that contests imperial claims over bodies and space rather than as an isolated miracle (Horsley 2001:94–101). This pedagogical dimension has been insufficiently developed in empire-critical scholarship, which has largely emphasised symbolic or political

resistance. Focusing on Mark 5:1–20 and 7:24–30, this study offers close readings attentive to dialogue, naming, spatial movement, and narrative tension. Drawing on Fanon (1963:30–35, 181–185) and Said (1978:1–7, 201–203), it reads these texts as dramatisations of contested embodiment under empire. By foregrounding narrative pedagogy, the study argues that Mark's Gospel forms subjects capable of discerning and responding to imperial power.

An overview of dominant interpretations of healing in Mark

In this section, I will briefly examine the overall interpretation of healing narratives in the second Gospel.

Biomedical and therapeutic readings

A dominant strand of scholarship has historically approached Markan healings through a biomedical or therapeutic lens, emphasising the restoration of physical or mental normalcy. Scholars such as Lane and France often describe these narratives as depictions of Jesus' power over disease and bodily dysfunction, framing healing primarily as a recovery of individual health (Edwards 2001, see also France 2002:225–228; Lane 1974:152–154). From this perspective, the text's central concern is to alleviate suffering and demonstrate divine authority over the natural and pathological orders. While useful for understanding the immediate effects of illness and recovery, such readings are increasingly seen as limited when applied to imperial and colonial contexts. Biomedical interpretations tend to abstract the body from its social, political, and spatial dimensions, thereby neglecting the ways in which Mark situates healing within broader systems of oppression and control. For example, the Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5:1–20) is not merely an individual case of illness but a body caught within the intersecting pressures of Gentile cultural norms and the Roman imperial presence. Horsley (2001:96–101) critiques readings that reduce the narrative to therapy or miracle, arguing that such approaches ignore the subversive potential of healing as a political and pedagogical act. Similarly, Carter (2006:67–70) observes that focusing exclusively on the restoration of health risks overlooks how Mark portrays bodies as sites of contestation over authority, identity, and communal belonging. Thus, while biomedical frameworks provide insight into the phenomenological aspects of illness and recovery, they are insufficient for capturing the full significance of Markan healings. By failing to account for colonial, social, and narrative dimensions, these interpretations can inadvertently reinforce depoliticised readings of the Gospel, obscuring the ways in which Jesus' acts of healing disrupt imperial hierarchies and recalibrate communal norms (Horsley 2001:98). This limitation sets the stage for more politically and socially informed approaches, such as postcolonial, empire-critical, and pedagogical readings, which recognise healing as a narrative strategy that challenges dominant structures while instructing the audience in new ethical and communal possibilities.

Symbolic and social-scientific approaches

Beyond biomedical interpretations, scholars have employed symbolic and social-scientific lenses to examine healing in Mark, emphasising how illness and restoration function as markers of social status, purity, and communal belonging. This approach often draws on insights from anthropology and sociology to explore how the body operates as a cultural and social symbol. Pilch and Rohrbaugh (1993:45–48), following the anthropological framework, argue that healings in Mark should be read as structured interventions that restore individuals to proper social and ritual participation, particularly in relation to purity codes and community norms. Building on this, Malina and Neyrey (1991:102–106) highlight that the body serves as a locus of social identity in Mediterranean culture, where illness or possession signals a breakdown in social harmony, and healing represents reintegration into the social matrix. For instance, the Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5:1–20) is not only physically afflicted but socially isolated; the act of exorcism restores him to participation in family, community, and civic life, illustrating the interdependence of health, ritual, and social identity. Similarly, the Syrophoenician woman's daughter (Mk 7:24–30) underlines boundaries of ethnicity and purity, where healing facilitates inclusion in a broader social-religious network (Malina & Neyrey 1991:110–112). While these symbolic and social-scientific interpretations provide valuable insights into ritual, purity, and communal norms, they are often critiqued for insufficient engagement with the broader imperial context. By focusing primarily on intra-community dynamics, they risk abstracting the body from the political and economic structures of Roman domination. Horsley (2001:97–100) observes that readings emphasising social reintegration often fail to account for the colonial power dynamics and spatial control that shape the Markan world, in which bodies are sites not only of ritual and social negotiation but also of imperial contestation. Similarly, Carter (2006:68–70) notes that a focus on social symbolism alone can obscure how healing narratives challenge Roman authority, the military presence, and cultural hierarchies. In sum, symbolic and social-scientific approaches illuminate the cultural and relational dimensions of Markan healing, particularly regarding purity, pollution, and social belonging. However, their relative neglect of imperial power highlights the need for readings that integrate postcolonial, empire-critical, and pedagogical perspectives, situating healing not only as a social practice but as a narrative strategy that interrogates and disrupts structures of domination.

Christological and soteriological readings

A third major interpretive approach emphasises the Christological and soteriological significance of healing in Mark. Scholars such as France and Lane argue that healings primarily demonstrate Jesus' divine authority and messianic identity, revealing his power over illness, demonic forces, and cosmic constraints (France 2002:223–227). Narratives such as the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5:1–20)

and the healing of the woman with a haemorrhage (Mk 5:25–34) are commonly interpreted as signs confirming Jesus as the Son of God and agent of salvation. These miracles are therefore read as evidence of the eschatological in-breaking of God's kingdom and the manifestation of divine sovereignty. While Christological and soteriological readings highlight the theological coherence of Markan healing, scholars caution against reducing these narratives to purely theological demonstrations. Horsley (2001:95–99) critiques interpretations that domesticate healing as proof of individual salvation or divine power, arguing that such approaches risk neutralising the text's subversive and pedagogical potential. Similarly, Carter (2006:67–69) notes that focusing exclusively on divine authority can obscure how Mark situates bodies within Roman imperial structures. In this context, healing operates not merely as evidence of messianic identity but also as a narrative strategy that challenges domination, social hierarchy, and ethnic exclusion.

Despite the diversity of interpretive approaches, several important gaps remain in the literature. Firstly, there is limited sustained engagement with postcolonial and pedagogical perspectives. Although biomedical, social-scientific, and Christological interpretations illuminate physical, social, or theological dimensions of healing, they rarely examine how these narratives function pedagogically for communities living under imperial domination. Empire-critical scholars such as Horsley (2001:95–101) acknowledge the political dimensions of Markan healings, yet few studies examine how these narratives instruct audiences to resist imperial norms or cultivate alternative social imaginaries. Secondly, existing scholarship often under-theorises the inscription of empire on bodies. Social-scientific and symbolic approaches emphasise communal reintegration and social identity (Malina & Neyrey 1998:102–112; Pilch & Rohrbaugh 1993:45–48), but they frequently detach bodies from the material realities of Roman imperial power. Likewise, Christological interpretations tend to emphasise divine authority without situating healing within the broader context of colonial occupation and ethnic marginalisation (France 2002:223–227). These gaps indicate the need for a synthesised approach that integrates narrative, postcolonial, and empire-critical frameworks. Such an approach understands Markan healing as simultaneously theological, pedagogical, and political, where the body becomes a contested site through which empire, resistance, and community formation are negotiated.

Theoretical framework: Postcolonial theory and the body

Postcolonial criticism and biblical studies

Postcolonial criticism offers a critical framework for interpreting Markan healing narratives as sites of contestation between imperial power and subaltern agency. Empire functions not only through political and military control but also through discursive systems that shape identities, bodies, and social hierarchies. Said's (1978:6–10, 201–203) concept of orientalism explains how imperial knowledge and representation legitimise domination and marginalise the subaltern. Applied to biblical studies, this perspective highlights how Roman imperial discourse permeates social, religious, and narrative spaces in the New Testament, including depictions of illness and healing. Gayatri Spivak's theory of subalternity further emphasises the silencing of marginalised voices and the interpreters' ethical responsibility to recognise subaltern agency (Spivak 1988:271–313). In Mark, figures such as the Gerasene demoniac and the Syrophoenician woman represent marginalised subjects whose embodied experiences reflect both oppression and resistance. Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and ambivalence show how marginalised figures negotiate and destabilise imperial authority, thereby generating spaces of resistance (Bhabha 1994:112–115, 142–145). Within this framework, healing in Mark functions not merely as a miracle but as a political and pedagogical strategy that exposes imperial structures while reimagining power, bodies, and community.

The colonised body as a site of power

In postcolonial and critical theory, the body is understood as a primary site upon which power is inscribed, contested, and resisted. Michel Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power emphasises that bodies are subjected to regulation, surveillance, and normalisation, functioning as instruments through which social hierarchies and institutional control are enacted (Foucault 1977:136–138, 170–172). Within this framework, illness, possession, and marginalisation are not merely biological or spiritual phenomena, but technologies of control that maintain social and political order. In the Markan context, those who are sick, possessed, or socially excluded exemplify bodies that are disciplined and monitored within both religious and imperial frameworks, reflecting Roman and local mechanisms of social control (Horsley 2001:96–101).

Fanon (1963:30–35, 181–185) complements this perspective by emphasising the psychological and corporeal dimensions of colonisation, showing how domination inscribes itself on the body, shaping both perception and agency. In Mark, episodes of possession or disease – such as the Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5:1–20) – can be interpreted as manifestations of imperialised or socially disciplined bodies, whose suffering and isolation reveal the material and symbolic power of oppressive structures. Healing, therefore, is not simply a restoration of health; it represents a subversive reclamation of bodily autonomy, signalling both resistance to empire and reintegration into social and communal life (Carter 2006:68–70).

By integrating Foucauldian and Fanonian insights, Markan healing narratives can be read as pedagogical devices that expose, critique, and partially destabilise the techniques of imperial control. Bodies become sites of ethical instruction, illustrating how divine authority challenges and reconfigures the operations of power while providing models of embodied

resistance for marginalised communities. This perspective shifts the reading of healing from a purely therapeutic or Christological act to a political and educational strategy, foregrounding the interplay between colonial power, embodiment, and subaltern agency.

Healing as imperial deconstruction

Within a postcolonial and critical framework, healing in Mark functions less as a resolution of physical or social disorder and more as an interruption of imperial and social hierarchies. Healing is narrativised not solely to restore bodies or the social order, but also to disrupt entrenched structures of domination, drawing attention to the ways in which Roman and local powers regulate, surveil, and marginalise certain bodies (Carter 2006:67–70; Horsley 2001:96–101). In Mark 5:1–20, for example, the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac interrupts the spatial and symbolic control of Gentile territory by exposing the fragility of imperialised authority. Similarly, the healing of the Syrophoenician woman's daughter (Mk 7:24–30) unsettles ethnic and social boundaries, demonstrating that divine intervention undermines exclusionary hierarchies without engaging in overt political rebellion (France 2002:223–227; Lane 1974:148–152).

This form of narrative resistance contrasts with political revolution in that it operates through symbolic, pedagogical, and embodied acts rather than through direct confrontation with imperial institutions. Drawing on Foucault, the narrative constructs moments of subversion within the disciplinary matrix, where bodies assert agency, challenge normative surveillance, and reconfigure communal and ethical norms (Foucault 1977:136–138, 170–172). Fanon's (1963:30–35, 181–185) insights further emphasise that these interruptions, though nonviolent, reclaim colonised bodies and subvert psychic and social domination, thereby fostering spaces for subaltern visibility and ethical formation.

Healing in Mark, therefore, operates as a discursive and embodied critique of empire, demonstrating that disruption need not always manifest as direct political overthrow. Instead, the narrative educates communities on resistance through embodied practice, ethical discernment, and communal reintegration, highlighting the pedagogical potential of healing as an instrument of subversion. By framing healings as interruptions rather than mere resolutions, Mark foregrounds the body as a site of contestation and instruction, revealing how empire is challenged, destabilised, and reinterpreted through divine action (Carter 2006:69–70; Horsley 2001:98–101).

Research methods and design

Postcolonial narrative-pedagogical reading

This study employs a text-centred postcolonial narrative-pedagogical approach to examine healing in Mark, situating the analysis at the intersection of imperial critique, embodiment, and narrative instruction. Drawing on postcolonial theory (Said 1978; see Bhabha 1994; Spivak 1988), the method explores how texts construct, regulate, and contest power while depicting bodies, spaces, and voices within structures of domination. The approach remains narrative-focused, emphasising Mark's literary and rhetorical strategies while reading them through a lens attentive to subaltern experience, resistance, and communal pedagogy. Three interrelated dimensions guide the analysis: spatial markers, power asymmetries, and voice, silence, and agency. Spatial markers – such as Gentile territories or household boundaries – highlight locations where imperial authority is asserted and contested (Carter 2006:67–69; Horsley 2001:97–100). Power asymmetries appear in the portrayal of marginalised bodies, including the sick, possessed, or ethnically excluded, revealing how authority operates within imperial and social hierarchies. Attention to voice, silence, and agency examines who speaks, who is silenced, and how marginalised figures negotiate authority, echoing Spivak's concern for recovering subaltern voices (Spivak 1988:271–313). A pedagogical lens further examines who learns, what is learned, and how resistance is narrated within healing episodes (Carter 2006:68–70; Horsley 2001:98–101).

Legion, the possessed body, and Roman Militarisation in Mark 5: 1–20

Setting and spatial marginality (Mk 5:1–5)

The narrative opens with Jesus arriving 'εἰς τὸ πέραν τῆς θαλάσσης … εἰς τὴν χώραν τῶν Γερασηνῶν' [to the other side of the sea … to the region of the Gerasenes] (Mk 5:1), situating the episode in Gentile territory within the Decapolis, a region marked by strong Roman administrative and cultural presence. This spatial movement 'across' [εἰς τὸ πέραν] signals entry into a zone where imperial structures are normalised (Carter 2006:68–70). The demoniac's dwelling 'ἐν τοῖς μνήμασιν' [among the tombs] (Mk 5:3) and his expulsion from the city underscore radical marginalisation. His body is located outside civic and cultic space, suggesting exclusion not only ritually but socially and politically. As Horsley notes, such spatial dislocation reflects conditions shaped by domination and social control (2001:96–98). The description of chains [ἁλύσεσιν] and failed attempts to restrain him (Mk 5:3–4) further emphasises a body subjected to coercive force yet resistant to containment. The narrative thus frames the body as a contested site where power is both imposed and destabilised.

Naming 'Legion' and the fragmented body in Mark 5:6–10

The turning point occurs in Jesus' question: 'Τί ὄνομά σοι' [What is your name?]; (Mk 5:9). The response, 'Λεγιὼν ὄνομά μοι, ὅτι πολλοί ἐσμεν' [My name is Legion, for we are many], introduces a collective identity that displaces individual agency. The term 'Legion' evokes a Roman military unit, embedding imperial imagery within the afflicted body. Rather than functioning only symbolically, the naming

performs a narrative unveiling: domination is identified, localised, and made intelligible. The plural voice ('we are many') signals fragmentation, aligning with Fanon's (1963:30–35) account of the colonised subject as internally divided under structures of violence. The body becomes a site where external power is internalised and multiplied. As Carter (2006:69–70) observes, Mark's narrative reflects how imperial power extends beyond institutions into embodied experience. The repeated plea 'παρεκάλει αὐτὸν πολλὰ' [he begged him earnestly / he pleaded with him repeatedly] (Mk 5:10) underscores both the persistence and instability of this occupying force. The narrative tension exposes domination not as fixed but as contingent and subject to challenge.

Exorcism and the displacement of power in Mark 5:11–13

The request to enter the herd of pigs (Mk 5:12) and the subsequent movement 'ὥρμησεν … εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν' [rushed … into the sea] (Mk 5:13) reconfigure the locus of power. The sea, often associated with chaos, becomes the site where the occupying force is undone. The destruction of approximately 2000 pigs dramatises the excess and destructiveness of the possessing power. Scholars such as France (2002:225–227) and Lane (1974:152–154) note the narrative's emphasis on visible, collective movement, suggesting that the event is meant to be seen and interpreted. The expulsion is not merely therapeutic but public and demonstrative, rendering power visible in its displacement. In this sense, the exorcism functions as a narrative act that exposes and interrupts domination rather than simply removing affliction.

Restoration, witness, and narrative instruction in Mark 5:14–20

The formerly possessed man is described as 'καθήμενον καὶ ἱματισμένον καὶ σωφρονοῦντα' [sitting there, clothed and in his right mind] (5:15), a triadic depiction signalling restored agency, social reintegration, and cognitive coherence. The contrast with his earlier state (Mk 5:3–5) highlights the body's transformation from fragmentation to wholeness.

Significantly, the narrative does not end with healing. Jesus commissions the man: '"Υπαγε εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου … καὶ ἀπάγγειλον' [Go home to your own people … and tell them] (Mk 5:19). This instruction repositions him as a bearer of knowledge. Horsley (2001:100–101) argues that such commissions function to circulate alternative interpretations of power within communities. The man's proclamation in the Decapolis (Mk 5:20) extends the narrative's reach, transforming a private healing into a public discourse. The healed body becomes a site of testimony, mediating between experience and communal understanding.

Exegetical synthesis: Healing as narrative pedagogy

Across the pericope, the narrative guides the reader through a sequence of recognition (naming 'Legion'), exposure (public exorcism), and instruction (commissioning). Each stage is textually embedded in dialogue, movement, and characterisation. Carter (2006:69–70) notes that Mark's narratives frequently operate within imperial contexts where power must be discerned and interpreted. Thus, healing in Mark 5:1–20 is not only an event within the story but also a mode of instruction enacted through it. The text teaches readers to perceive domination as embodied, to recognise its manifestations, and to imagine its displacement. The Gerasene demoniac is therefore not only healed; he becomes part of a narrative process that forms interpretive awareness and reorients communal perception within an imperial world.

Boundary, speech and negotiated healing in Mark 7:24–30

Spatial movement and hidden presence in Mark 7:24

The pericope opens with a geographical and narrative shift: 'Ἀναστὰς δὲ ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὰ ὅρια Τύρου' [Then he got up and went away to the region of Tyre] (Mk 7:24). The movement into the region of Tyre signals entry into Gentile space, extending the Gospel's engagement with territories shaped by imperial and cultural difference. The note that Jesus 'οὐδένα ἤθελεν γνῶναι, καὶ οὐκ ἠδυνήθη λαθεῖν' [He did not want anyone to know, yet he could not escape notice] (Mk 7:24) introduces a tension between concealment and disclosure. Although he seeks privacy, his presence cannot remain hidden. This tension establishes the narrative setting as one in which boundaries – geographical, social, and symbolic – are already unstable. Carter (2006:72–74) observes that such movements into Gentile regions reflect the broader imperial world in which distinctions of identity are negotiated and contested.

The woman's approach and marked identity in Mark 7:25–26

The woman enters the narrative 'εὐθὺς ἀκούσασα' [Immediately upon hearing *about him*] (Mk 7:25), indicating urgency and initiative. She falls at Jesus' feet, a posture of supplication, yet the narrator immediately marks her identity: 'ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἦν Ἑλληνίς, Συροφοινίκισσα τῷ γένει' [Now the woman was a Greek, a Syrophoenician by birth] (Mk 7:26). The dual designation (Greek, Syrophoenician) underscores her ethnic and cultural otherness. This layered identification situates her within the structures of difference characteristic of imperial societies. Said (1978:1–7) argues that such categorisations function to construct and maintain boundaries between groups. Within the narrative, her identity is not incidental but constitutive of the encounter: she approaches as one positioned outside the primary sphere of belonging. Her request – 'ἵνα τὸ δαιμόνιον ἐκβάλῃ ἐκ τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτῆς' [that he might cast the demon out of her daughter] (Mk 7:26) – aligns her with other supplicants in Mark, yet her status as an outsider introduces tension regarding access to healing.

Boundary language and narrative tension in Mark 7:27

Jesus' response introduces a metaphor structured by priority and exclusion: 'Ἄφες πρῶτον χορτασθῆναι τὰ τέκνα … οὐ γάρ ἐστιν καλὸν λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων καὶ τοῖς κυναρίοις βαλεῖν' [Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs] (Mk 7:27). The imagery of 'children' and 'dogs' establishes a hierarchy that reflects social and ethnic distinctions. The diminutive 'κυναρίοις' [little dogs] softens but does not remove the boundary. The statement articulates an order in which access is structured and limited. Again, Horsley (2001:103–105) notes, such language reflects the realities of social stratification within the imperial world. Importantly, the narrative does not resolve this tension immediately. Instead, it sustains the metaphor, inviting the reader to confront the logic of exclusion embedded within it.

Subaltern speech and reconfiguration in Mark 7:28–29

The woman's reply is both responsive and transformative: 'Ναί, κύριε· καὶ τὰ κυνάρια … ὑποκάτω τῆς τραπέζης ἐσθίει' [Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs] (Mk 7:28). She accepts the metaphor ('yes, Lord') yet reworks it by emphasising participation rather than exclusion. The image of dogs eating 'under the table' introduces proximity and shared space, subtly destabilising the boundary. Her speech does not reject the structure but reconfigures it from within, demonstrating rhetorical agency. This aligns with Fanon's (1963:181–185) observation that subjects within oppressive systems may negotiate and reinterpret imposed categories. Jesus' response – 'Διὰ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ὕπαγε' [For this saying, go your way] (Mk 7:29) – explicitly links the outcome to her speech. The healing occurs not through physical action but through dialogue. The phrase 'διὰ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον' [for this statement] indicates that her utterance has effected a shift within the narrative. Carter (2006:74–75) notes that such exchanges highlight the role of discourse in negotiating power and inclusion.

Healing at a distance and narrative resolution in Mark 7:30

The conclusion – 'εὗρεν τὸ παιδίον βεβλημένον ἐπὶ τὴν κλίνην καὶ τὸ δαιμόνιον ἐξεληλυθός' [She found the child lying on the bed, and the demon had left] (Mk 7:30) – confirms the effectiveness of the encounter. The healing occurs at a distance, mediated entirely through speech. The daughter's restored state parallels other healing accounts, yet the process differs significantly: it is achieved through dialogical engagement rather than direct intervention. This narrative choice foregrounds speech as a medium of transformation, reinforcing the importance of interpretive and rhetorical action in the story.

Exegetical synthesis: Healing as pedagogical negotiation

The pericope unfolds through a sequence of approach, boundary articulation, rhetorical response, and resolution. Each stage is structured through dialogue, drawing the reader into the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. Rather than presenting healing as immediate or unproblematic, the narrative stages a process of negotiation, in which categories are exposed, engaged, and reconfigured. Said (1978:201–203) suggests that identities within imperial contexts are not fixed but are constructed and contested. In this way, the narrative performs a pedagogical function. It teaches readers to recognise how boundaries operate, to perceive their contingency, and to imagine their transformation. The woman's speech models a form of engagement that neither withdraws from nor passively accepts exclusion but actively reinterprets it. Thus, healing in Mark 7:24–30 is not only an act of restoration but a narratively mediated process of boundary negotiation. The text forms readers who can discern structures of exclusion and envision alternative configurations of belonging within an imperial world.

Synthesis: Healing as narrative pedagogy across boundaries

Read together, Mark 5:1–20 and 7:24–30 reveal a coherent narrative strategy in which healing functions as more than restoration or symbolic resistance; it becomes a pedagogical practice through which readers are trained to perceive and negotiate imperial and social boundaries. In Mark 5:1–20, the Gerasene demoniac narrative stages healing as an act of exposing and displacing imperial power. The naming of 'Legion' (Mk 5:9) renders domination legible within the body itself, while the subsequent expulsion and destruction of the herd dramatise the instability and collapse of occupying forces. The healed man's commissioning (Mk 5:19–20) extends this moment into a public pedagogy, transforming the restored body into a vehicle of testimony and interpretive instruction. By contrast, Mark 7:24–30 shifts the narrative focus from militarised possession to negotiated exclusion and rhetorical agency. Here, healing emerges through dialogue rather than exorcistic force. The Syrophoenician woman's speech reconfigures the metaphor of exclusion ('children' and 'dogs'), demonstrating that boundaries are not fixed but can be reinterpreted from within the discourse of power. The healing of her daughter occurs precisely through this rhetorical engagement, highlighting the transformative capacity of speech to mediate inclusion.

Taken together, these narratives form a dual pedagogical movement. Mark 5 emphasises the recognition and disruption of imperial domination inscribed on the body, while Mark 7 emphasises the negotiation and reconfiguration of social and ethnic boundaries through discourse. In both cases, healing is not an isolated miracle but a structured narrative process that trains the audience to read power relationally – whether as militarised occupation or as culturally embedded exclusion. In this sense, Mark's healing traditions operate as a unified pedagogy of perception. They form readers who can recognise how power is inscribed, contested, and reworked across bodies, speech, and space. Healing, therefore, becomes the narrative means by which the Gospel

teaches communities to discern imperial realities and imagine alternative modes of embodied and social existence within them.

Implications for Markan theology and Postcolonial hermeneutics

The postcolonial reading of Markan healing narratives reshapes our understanding of Christology, ecclesial pedagogy, and ethical praxis under conditions of empire. By framing healing as a mechanism of resistance and ethical instruction, the Gospel portrays Jesus not solely as a theological figure of divine authority but as a pedagogue of subaltern empowerment, engaging marginalised bodies and communities in ways that contest imperial and social hierarchies (Horsley 2001:98–101). Christology, therefore, emerges not only as a question of messianic identity but also as a narrative of liberation, illustrating that divine authority subverts oppression through embodied action and ethical pedagogy.

The Gospel of Mark, read through this lens, functions as a counter-imperial curriculum. Healing stories serve as instructional texts, modelling how communities can recognise and navigate power asymmetries, resist domination, and cultivate alternative social and ethical frameworks (Malina & Neyrey 1991:108–110; see also France 2002:225–231). The narrative invites audiences to read empire critically, fostering resistant subjectivities and equipping subaltern figures to engage in ethical discernment and communal instruction. Such a pedagogical model situates the Gospel not only as a theological text but as a socio-political guide for communities living under conditions of marginalisation and structural oppression.

For African contexts, this reading carries profound implications. The postcolonial lens enables interpreters to view healing narratives as mirrors of local struggles against economic, political, and social domination, offering both conceptual and ethical tools to address contemporary marginalisation. By foregrounding embodied resistance, dialogical pedagogy, and community formation, the study underscores Mark's relevance for societies shaped by colonial histories, ethnic hierarchies, and systemic inequalities. Consequently, this approach not only enriches Markan scholarship but also contributes to a hermeneutics that is locally grounded, ethically engaged, and globally resonant, highlighting the continuing significance of biblical narratives for critical reflection and praxis in contexts of empire and postcoloniality.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Mark's healing narratives function not merely as accounts of miraculous restoration but as narratively constructed sites of pedagogy through which imperial and social power are exposed, negotiated, and reconfigured. Reading Mark 5:1–20 and 7:24–30 through a postcolonial and narrative-critical lens shows that healing operates as a structured interpretive process that shapes perceptions of power, bodies, and boundaries. In Mark 5:1–20, the Gerasene demoniac presents the body as a site of imperial inscription and militarised occupation, most clearly through the naming of 'Legion' and the fragmentation of identity under coercive forces. Healing here enacts a narrative displacement of imperial power, while the commissioning of the healed man extends restoration into public testimony and communal instruction. In Mark 7:24–30, the Syrophoenician encounter shifts to discursive boundary-making and negotiated inclusion, in which healing emerges through rhetorical engagement that reconfigures exclusionary categories and highlights marginalised agency. Together, these narratives form a coherent pedagogy: Mark 5 emphasises the disruption of imperial domination inscribed on the body, while Mark 7 emphasises the negotiation of social and ethnic boundaries through speech. In both cases, healing is a didactic strategy that trains readers to discern how power operates through embodiment, space, and discourse, forming interpretive subjects capable of critical and imaginative readings of empire.

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Mphumezi Hombana: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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