Decapolis Death Worlds
Necropolitics, Specters, and Gerasene Ethnicity among the Tombs

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The bodies and localities of poor, criminalized people of color are signifiers for those who are ineligible for personhood, for those contemporary (il)legal statuses within U.S. law that are legally illegible. These statuses are legally illegible because they engender populations not just racialized but rightless, living nonbeings, or, in Judith Butler’s words, as “something living that is other than life.”
—Lisa Marie Cacho

American political and judicial discourse depends on the exercising of power against those whose lives never actually count, who cannot count as living. What is more, they are so far outside the space of the living that whatever the authority is meted against them cannot even be called “justice.” Such is the call to which Cacho accedes above, that U.S. civil society depends on the distribution of life through legal rights, but that such “due process” is always already limited to particular subjects over against others. That such racism creates and perpetuates rightlessness, creates what Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls “a killing abstraction,” in which minoritized populations are merely “dead-to-others.” Thus, the threat to legal order, I assume in this paper, is an always already racialized subject, recognizable not just as Other, but also only as dead. This project does not stop there, however: the already dead Other, imagined in ways detailed enough to inform stereotypes, threatens both in its life and its afterlife. My starting point is Mark’s presentation of the Gerasene Demoniac (5:1-20), not just as a possessed or mentally ill individual, but a rhetorical tool by which the narrator constructs a space—

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3 Simon Mainwaring takes a different tact to most interpreters of the role of the demoniac in this passage. While most scholars are interested in allegorical reading of the man’s name and relationship to his community—which, admittedly, I undertake here as well—Mainwaring contends that this man exists as a mentally ill person, suffering the ill-effects of empire. In short,
“the tombs”—through which an ethnic group is constructed as already dead. Thus, while a Christianity may or may not be under negotiation here, my interest rests with the way any sort of group identified with Mark’s Jesus is imagined here with the construction of the Gerasenes as a necessary excess.4 Mark 5:1-20 features Jesus’ arrival in the Decapolis, called here “the country of the Gerasenes,” where the audience is immediately confronted by a demon-possessed man. But the demoniac is faced down by the Markan protagonist to a suicidal death, Jesus’ utterance mirroring a necropolitical decree of the kind characterized by Sunera Thobani: “The Empire of Terror offers a stark choice to its objects of power: incorporation or extermination. Its forms of sovereignty intend the taking of no survivors: loyalty or death.”5 For those who refuse, death beckons, but as Achille Mbembe has made clear, for others the option hardly exists.6

As I will show, the regulatory act Mark demands his Gerasene characters take up is always already a failure. These people, characterized as failed and unlivable bodies simultaneously embody a threat to an established social order and are asked to police the boundaries of their death world. In this way, policing as a performance of civic participation is constructed as an act of service or safety demanded by the state apparatus, but only for its own vitality. Jasbir Puar has noted that the practical effect of such border enforcement is the creation of a tension between a desire to accede to life and the conditions of death, out of which predetermined acceptable subjects must emerge.7 Indeed, when one accedes to the conditions of the biopolitical, they leave behind the conditions of death, within which manifold subjects subsist. This process, of constructing an ethnic Other as already dead, and the results of this process, are the realities with which this project wrestles. But as this passage demonstrates, spirits—most

4 In this way, my reading is sympathetic to the work of Denise Buell, whose concepts of race and ethnicity are contingent with religion, arguing, “Our interpretive models should seek not an original essence for Christianity but rather highlight the processes and strategies of negotiation and persuasion that permeate the very creation of Christianness” (Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity [New York: Columbia University Press, 2005], 29). Indeed, Buell notes that racial-ethnic belonging—whether fueled by religious discourses or not—can be defined by “the dynamic interplay between fixity and fluidity. Appeals to kinship and descent are one significant way in which the “reality” and “essence” (or fixity) of ethnicity/race is articulated” (9). With that said, I find myself here less interested in Christianness than I am with the Gerasenes-ness imagined by the Markan community.


6 My primary conversation partner for this project is Achille Mbembe and his signal article “Necropolitics,” trans. Libby Meintjes, Public Culture 15, no. 1 (2003), 11-40.

immediately, “Legion”—refuse the laws that divide minoritized bodies from one another. Engaging with the hauntology of Jacques Derrida, I argue that colonizing ideologies—whether espoused from the imperial center or out of the colonized margins—depend on necropolitics, not as an inevitability, but as a fiction whose own failure has been exposed by the ghosts haunting out of these death worlds, who, in the process of their mystical demystifying, create alliances across the boundaries of those necrotic spaces.

Decapolis Death Worlds

Achille Mbembe’s work with necropolitics is replete with spatial reasoning, considering lives within the “postcolony” or the “frontier.” Such spaces, characterized as “death worlds,” are the unbounded places outside the borders of civilization. Similarly, thinking spatially about the Gospel of Mark’s encounter between Jesus and the Gerasene Demoniac demonstrates the way the narrative’s locatedness does work as an ideological formation. That is, narrative spaces are more than just plot devices, but come preloaded for the author, reader, and audiences with meaning from cultural memories, histories, stories, and values. Applying such a hermeneutic to Mark’s Gospel yields similarly fruitful results. Consider Henri Lefebvre’s distinction between

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9 Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” 25-35. See also Mbembe’s On the Postcolony (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). In conversation with Mbembe, Sunera Thobani helpfully notes that the death world is that place where the liberal democratic citizen-subject is not, where “the mark of extermination that infuses its racial logic of power gives rise to the ‘Indian’ reserve, the slave plantation, the native quarter, the Bantustan, the Nazi camp, as well as the slums, prisons and refugee camps proliferating around the world” (“Prologue,” xv).

10 Critical space theorists have long pursued a socially-conditioned definition of space and territoriality over a biologically produced notion. For more see, for example, R.J.A. Johnston, A Question of Place: Exploring the Practice of Human Geography (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Henri Lefebvre, Production of Space (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith; Oxford: Blackwell 1991); Robert David Sack, Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History (Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography 7; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Christopher Tilley, A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments (Explorations in Anthropology; Oxford: Berg, 1994).

11 For a first-of-its-kind reading of the Second Gospel with a critical-space hermeneutic, see Eric C. Stewart’s Gathered around Jesus: An Alternative Spatial Practice in the Gospel of Mark (Matrix: The Bible in Mediterranean Context; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009). No doubt we should consider such a volume in light of Elizabeth Struthers Malbon’s work (cf. Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986]), but the two differ in so far as Stewart
“representations of space” and “spatial representations.” Here, in the words of Andy Merrifield, a distinction can be drawn between “conceptualized space” (representations of space) and “lived space” (spatial representations). In other words, space is manifest ideologically, through mapping, narrative, and in its material forms; space is conceptual. It is also, however, a lived reality, insofar as the subjects who move and interact with a given space are marked by it and mark it; they can accede to its ideological demands, refuse them, or simply live otherwise. As I will demonstrate below, the Markan narrator constructs an ideological space for the Gerasenes to reside, the tombs, a space marked by death, which marks them for death. The question with which we might wrestle, then, is whether or not their lived reality reappropriates such spatiality.

No doubt, Mark 5:1-20 unfurls in a spatially-rich environment. But in this specific space, the cloying stench of death lingers. Coined by Mbembe, the term *necropolitics* follows Foucault’s assertion that the modern state organizes populaces *biopolitically*. Mbembe’s innovation arrives as an assertion that control over mortality for the purpose of maximum production is actually an insufficient concept for conceiving of neocolonial centers and peripheries. *Necropolitics* accounts for the fact that contemporary states are dependent upon subjects existing outside the realm of the livable, in “death worlds.” Within such spheres, state powers see themselves as legitimate arbiters of maximum destruction against the “savage” frontiers of the colony, thereby creating a space in which existence is possible only in a “state of pain.” With a “crying” demoniac (5:5, 7), who gashes himself with stones (v. 5), the Decapolis is surely marked with such torment.

Readers are introduced to the scene as Jesus and his disciples approach the shore shortly after Jesus calms a storm upon the Sea of Galilee (4:36-41). No doubt, those attuned to deathly themes in the passage may feel a tingle as we hear they sailed to “the other side” (5:1a). Yet, as Eric Stewart argues, such a phrase also establishes a distance—indeed, an exotic character—to the Decapolis, insofar as great sea voyages were common

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12 In his 1976 volume *Lefebvre* infamously (re)elaborated a “spatial triad,” dividing space into “spatial practice,” “representations of space,” and “spatial representations,” so as to argue that “(social) space is a (social) product” (*The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith [Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Oxford University Press, 1991], 33, 26).
15 Ibid., 39-40.
16 Ibid., 38.
themes in Greek heroic tales. And while, as we shall see, this realm serves as a space of the dead, it does seem to function as a discrete territory. In other words, Hans Leander notes, Mark’s use of the Greek phrase χώρα “of the Gerasenes” (v. 1b) acts as a spatial designation—delineated also by a “boundary” (ὅριον, v. 20)—marked by the people who live there; in short, a political boundary. The region, then, belongs to a particular people, not on account of its geographical location, but on the identity of those within. The question for our purposes must become, identified according to whom? Insofar as this representation of space functions, at least partially, on the level of narrative, it also operates ideologically. That is, Mark conceptually identifies the Gerasenes within this χώρα, mapping a space into which they might fit. This discursive relationship to spatiality means, as Warren Carter argues, that the single body of the demoniac acts as a synecdoche for an entire society, in this case the occupied people of the Decapolis. But, if space is a socially-produced and socially-productive force, the way the tombs construct Gerasene ethnicity is salient for this present argument.

The pericope gains its necropolitical edge from the start: “And as he left the boat, immediately, from the tombs, a man with an unclean spirit met him” (5:2). No doubt, we can engage our analysis of this characterization of Gerasa with Mbembe’s notion that colonial powers necessarily practice “seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area—of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial

17 Stewart, Gathered, 182. Following Roy Kotansky (“Jesus and Heracles in Cadiz: Death, Myth, and Monsters as the ‘Straits of Gibraltar’ [Mark 4:35-5:43],” in Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Bible and Culture: Essays in Honor of Hans Dieter Betz, edited by Adela Yarbro Collins [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998], 160-229), Stewart argues that this voyage “becomes a voyage to the ‘Other Side,’ that is, to the edges of the oikoumenē.”

18 Leander is aware of the complexity of a conversation to delineate the boundaries of a country for the Gerasenes. The notion that a people might occupy some discrete and identifiable territory near the seashore is something of a controversial topic, Leander argues, as the city was instead located some “80 kilometers from Jerusalem” (Hans Leander, Discourses of Empire: The Gospel of Mark from a Postcolonial Perspective [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013], 214). He therefore follows Stephen Moore, who notes that the Hebrew consonants within “Gerasa” maintain the meaning of “drive” or “cast out” (Moore, Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006], 28). The term, “political space” is partially indebted to Malbon’s argument that such spaces, named properly with a people, should be understood as “geopolitical” spaces (Narrative, 15-49).

19 Carter argues that the Legion represents the possessed character of all occupied peoples (“Cross-Gendered,” 144-145). His primary interlocutor here is Maud Gleason, whose studies of Greco-Roman rhetoric point to the notion that “images of the body” work as “synecdoche for an entire society” (“Mutilated Messengers: Body Language in Josephus,” in Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire, edited by Simon Goldhill [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001], 52). Leander works with perhaps a more refined notion, arguing that this passage is very clearly marking a particular people (Discourses, 205-219).
relations.”

Indeed, he will continue, these spaces are divided violently by conquerors so as to construct lands of origin for “[people] of ill repute.” Here, too, the “savage” frontier is imagined by the Markan narrator to be out of control and wild, even demonic. The man approaching Jesus from the tombs had been chained there and broken free; he howled, “day and night,” so wild that he gashed himself with stones and “no one was able to bind him, not even with a chain” (5:3-5). At this point, the striking image of a Gerasene man, roaming the tombs and the mountains of the whole region, and screaming from his possession serves to transform the entire region into a lawless space.

In other words, the narrator presents us with a people who are open to conquest, a conquest that is justified, on account of their lack of self-control, their inability to protect their borders from the assault of outside entities.

In fact, when it comes to materializing the Gerasenes, in the past or present, spatiality and characterization may be the only tool at interpreters’ disposal to even begin some sort of reconstruction. Treatment of the “Gerasenes” as a marker of a “people” has a convoluted past in twentieth- and twenty-first-century biblical scholarship. Most readers, though, have approached the preferred majority Greek term Γερασηνῶν as something between a text-critical and spatial-political problem. Γερασηνῶν is traditionally associated with the ancient city of Gerasa, contemporary Jerash, but other possibilities have made mischief in alternate Greek manuscripts, including Γαδαρηνῶν (Gadarenes, of Gadara) and Γεργεσηνῶν (Gergesenes, of Gergesa). While “Gerasenes” seems the most likely choice, it becomes so only as lectio

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21 Ibid., 27. This phenomenon is not lost on Stewart who also notes that the wild and death-dealing behavior of the Gerasenes functions to characterize them as a wild and “uncivilized” people (Gathered, 182).
22 Carter notes that the wildness of this space, typified by the emasculated demoniac, allows Jesus to look the part of the most powerful being in the arena: “In these terms, the man as metaphor for society subdued and dominated by militarily based Roman dominance communicates in vv. 2–5 the experience of that power in terms of death (among the tombs), social alienation, overwhelming power, lack of control, self-destruction, demonic control, and antithesis to Gods empire/rule manifested by the manly man Jesus (1:15)” (“Cross-Gendered,” 145). Indeed, to be fair Carter’s argument has more to do with a Jesus versus the empire conflict at work. My argument, therefore, extends his claim to mark the whole of the territory in which this conflict is meted out.
23 Γερασηνῶν is attested by κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμε
24 Support for this moniker can be found in A C. Matthew’s use of the pericope (8:28) also deploys the term “Gedarenes,” perhaps already pointing to a trajectory of scribal skepticism over Mark’s shaky geography.
25 This reading is attested to in κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενον κείμενο
23 For discussion of this conversation, see especially Tjitze Baarda, “Gadarenes, Gerasenes, Gergesenes and the ‘Diatessaron’ Traditions,” in Neotestamentica et Semitica: Studies in Honor of
difficilior; in short, both Gadara and Gergesa were located on the Sea of Galilee, while Gerasa was located roughly thirty miles inland from the sea. Of course, as I have already begun to demonstrate, constructing the Gerasenes as a discrete, identifiable people can still be accomplished through a necropolitical reading of the passage. That is, returning to Cacho, racial-ethnic identities are always already ascribed apart from one’s hometown: racism ensures that illegality and death are recognizable identity markers, traits that make the Other knowable.

If we are to proceed under the notion that Mark is deploying the death-dealing language of conquering powers, it behooves us to consider who the conquerors are in this passage and how they operate vis-à-vis the, literally, demonized Gerasenes. When Jesus confronts the demoniac and asks for the spirit’s name, the spirit famously answers, “Legion, for we are many” (5:9b). Given this uniquely Roman moniker, scholars have long noted this passage’s not-so-veiled dig at Roman military occupation of the region in the first-century CE. But in his postcolonial analysis of the Second Gospel, Hans Leander notes that in Mark Jesus’ performance mimics that of the emperor Vespasian as described in first-century Roman texts. Both are presented as victorious military leaders in Gerasa (5:9; Josephus, Jewish War 4.488), both heal the sick in similar ways, and they


Collins, Mark, 263.


Both Jesus and Vespasian cure men with withered hands (3:1-5; Dio Cassius 65.8.1) and, with more exotic specificity, blind men with spittle (8:22-26; Suetonius, Vespasian 7).
each appear to fulfill Jewish messianic expectations (8:29; J.W. 6.312-313). Rhetorically, Jesus functions as a general as powerful and successful a military leader as the Emperor himself; practically, however, we need to also interrogate the way in which Mark not only sets up Jesus as conqueror but also the Gerasenes as conquerable. Indeed, rather than appearing as a party worthy of justice—perhaps one of Jesus’ numerous healings (1:40-45; 2:1-12; 3:1-6; 5:21-43; 6:53-56; 7:24-37; 8:22-26; 9:14-29; 10:46-52)—the Gerasenes appear worthy only of a tragic existence. Perhaps more insidiously, following the carnage of the Jewish War—in which Vespasian infamously dispatched a cavalry regiment to pillage and burn the entire countryside—Mark re-presents this suffering, extending its memory in perpetuity through his Christological manifesto. The practical effect of narratives of this kind, as Mbembe notes, is a “peaceful” imperial center, be it Rome or Palestine, London or Washington, established through comparison to the “savage” frontier in which “war without end” rages.

Policing Dead Space

We have already seen that this space, constructed as χώρα, is politically-bounded and recognizable within the Markan imaginary, but might we also interrogate the ways the narrative describes the policing of said borders, the means by which they are reinforced? Such a project emerges as critical to an interpretation of this passage because, when it comes to death worlds, policing and identity-formation come hand-in-hand. In the present example, we might note that Mark presents the residents of the Decapolis as eager to regulate the demoniac in ways that reinforce their collective identity in a constructive way, we might say that they police his behavior for their own performative ends. My argument is that Mark rhetorically creates an ethnic group performing an ideal act of policing the very death world from which they come. The narrator’s desire, however, is complicated if we maintain, as I have above, that the narrator’s characterization of the demoniac serves to construct an image of the Gerasenes as a whole. Indeed, if this is the case, this passage coopts the agency of the people of the region for the purpose of policing the very border separating them from the realm of the living. In short, they are obliged regulate their very death.

Fixing the Gerasenes with an apparently stable—if necrotic—racial-ethnic identity, I argue, is accomplished in large part through a complex negotiation of conceptual and lived spaces, beginning with a twofold rhetorical move on the part of the author to engage tombs as a concept and as a materially-recognizable space. In the first

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29 No doubt, the Gerasene is himself cured of an “unclean spirit,” but the Decapolis remains a tomb, thus maintaining the space’s and people’s necrotic identifier.

30 Leander, Discourses, 214.

place, we see an effort to construct the demoniac’s non-living status. That is, tombs are a place where the dead are supposed to reside. The lengths to which the Gerasenes went to force the man to the necropolis are telling: they “often bound him with fetters and with chains” (5:3-4), a process, thus, that was repeated. In other words, the narrator has created a situation in which a people, already associated with death, willingly maintain that identity marker.

Second, an examination of Greco-Roman tombs, broadly,\textsuperscript{32} further illuminates the ideological work done by the Markan journey to the Decapolis tombs. That is, to simply say that marking the Gerasenes with a space of the dead puts them to death is not enough. If space is socially productive, it behooves interpreters to consider precisely what sort of work cemeteries do to the subjects forced within them, particularly their unwelcome guests. In the first place, tombs across the Roman world were hardly static machinations of stone, but rather spaces through which identities were constantly negotiated. Examining Jewish tombs in northern necropolis at Hierapolis, Philip Harland has noted the ways in which “graves of those who had passed on can also further our understanding of cultural interactions among the living.”\textsuperscript{33} Harland’s main object of interest is the tomb of Publius Aelius Glykon Zeuxianos Aelianus, the tomb of a Jewish family, who left behind funds for the associations of the purple-dyers to celebrate the festival of Unleavened bread, and the carpet-weavers to celebrate the festivals of Pentecost and Kalends.\textsuperscript{34} The participation in both Jewish and non-Jewish celebrations, argues Harland, posits a question of whether the Glykon family, who clearly identified as Jewish,\textsuperscript{35} were “(born) Jews or whether they were gentiles who adopted important Jewish practices (judaizers) and then arranged that other (guilds) also engaged in these practices after their deaths.”\textsuperscript{36} More important to Harland than this family’s essential racial identity is the notion that their tomb becomes a part of the acculturation process of a relatively recent Jewish community in Hierapolis.\textsuperscript{37} No doubt, this particular tomb

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\textsuperscript{32} As my examples below demonstrate, this project is less interested in the particularities of individual necropoleis, but concerned more so with common regulatory traits shared across regions of the Empire between the first-century BCE and the second century CE.


\textsuperscript{34} Walter Ameling, Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis, Band II (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 196; cf. Harland, “Acculturation,” 228.

\textsuperscript{35} Harland will note elsewhere in this piece that the northern necropolis, which houses a majority of Hierapolis’ Jewish tombs, is marked with a large number of menorahs (Harland, “Acculturation,” 227). The Glykon tomb, however, does not feature the symbol and is found in the southeast necropolis, apart from most of the Jewish tombs.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 229.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 239-242.
serves as one example among many possible other tombs, but the point stands: the necropolis was also a space by which the dead might continue performing their identity, even after life.

No doubt, individual and group identity-formation through epitaphs operates as an explicit means by which the dead might be shown to belong to—or set themselves apart from—a given society. But such spaces also trade in an alternative, more implicit discourse of identity-formation: legality. In western necropoleis, burial plots would be marked by legally-binding “boundary stones,” writes Virginia Campbell, marking the spaces in which a body might be interred. Of course, the delineation of boundaries is, from the outset, an attempt to construct a binary between inside and out. Thus, if a legitimate party resides within the boundaries, the threat of an outside intruding ever lurks. Greco-Roman tombs were frequently inscribed with the names of the buried and buried-to-be, prescriptions for memorial of the deceased party, and penalty for violation of the space (e.g. anyone who might otherwise be buried in said tomb). Legal language, including prescriptions for behavior vis-à-vis burial spaces and punishment for violation, created criminal bodies. To put it another way, reading tombs as “representations of space,” in which both proper use and violation are presented transparently, comes preloaded with the notion that a violator of the space is a haunting threat. Without the privilege of an epigraphical naming on a mausoleum, the would-be criminal is marked by death in the tombs, not because he or she has be laid to rest, but because their sovereignty as a living subject is always already subject to rightlessness.

In this way, the move by the Gerasenes to regulate the demoniac’s behavior simultaneously figures him as dead and imagines him as a proper criminal. Yet, I argue,

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40 Campbell notes that in and around Pompeii the town council readily granted the use of public land for burial, but also argues that once a body was buried in a tomb, legal recourse was made not to municipal law, but divine law (*Tombs*, 10-11, 90-93).
whether they intend to make a criminal out of him, hope his presence within the tombs reforms him, or are simply at a loss, hardly matters.

In constructing a people as out-of-control and already dead, the Markan narrator makes a savvy move, insofar as he both conjures the Gerasenes as unable to bind their demons and gives them a material solution. His method should not appear unfamiliar to those attuned to contemporary global sexual politics. Jasbir Puar has noted the ways in which Western white queer groups are complicit in the spreading of racist ideology, which figures non-white and non-Western queer subjects as victimized by particularly hateful and backward rhetoric. Such homonationalism, as Puar terms it, incites now-normative gay subjects to join in the liberal discourse of, say, “civil rights.” Such discourses, however, are unable to comprehend the non-white, non-Western queer subject, who exists in religiously-, ethnically-, and mortally-other spaces.41 She argues, then, that biopolitical discourses depend upon a “tension” among global queer subjects, in which some are acceptably white and others are aligned with the terroristic other, thinkable only as citizens of the dead.42 Indeed, such a tension between “bio and necro” constantly reproduces itself, reinforcing the distance between the living and the dead, relying on a knowledge and fear of death as an incitement to competition, to division, and incitement to life.43

The Markan project appears quite similar. There can be no doubt, Mark’s Jesus has aspirations, as we have seen, imperial aspirations, and he performs his script well. But if the copycat maneuver enacted by this Son of God is just that, mimicry, then it should also be noted that the act looks to move him out of a similarly non-Roman subject position. That is, this Galilean peasant ironically targets the people of another Roman frontier territory for re-conquest. The recognizably normative Jesus moves to exorcise the demons of the Gerasenes, embodied within a man possessed by demons who has now offended too many Greco-Roman sensibilities—allowing himself to be penetrated, unable to control his behavior, chained and shackled, and engaging in self-harm (5:2-5).44 Yet, the Gerasenes themselves are also implicated in their failure to

41 The liberal gay subject has come to maintain an ideology of “queer secularity,” which “is also underpinned by a powerful conviction that religious and racial communities are more homophobic than white mainstream queer communities are racist… By implication, a critique of homophobia within one’s home community is deemed more pressing and should take precedence over a critique of racism within mainstream queer communities” (Puar, Terrorist, 15-16).
42 Ibid., 35.
43 Ibid., 35-36.
44 Carter helpfully notes, “This is a scathing indictment of Roman power, but we must not miss its important gendered texture. Integral to the characterization of the man in these terms in vv. 2-5 is the lack of self-control. A lack of self-control ‘calls into question one’s masculinity’ and
regulate and police him. In this way, we are returned to Puar, who notes that queer subjects are further partitioned from one another through competition in the state’s need for white marginalized groups to police the lives of those on the savage frontiers. Indeed, the “exceptionalism” given to the newly normitivized Western LGBT community becomes nothing more than a police baton, wielded against societies who fail to treat their own non-normative sexualities in the Western liberal mode. Thus, in familiar fashion, we may find a binary through which Jesus rises to political and cosmological prominence at the expense of the Gerasenes. Yet, the binary is also productive: not only are the Gerasenes on the losing end of Jesus’ “success,” but they are constructed as the necessary ethnic excess of drives to imperial-like control, an ethnic group founded as waste.

Mark has set up a space in contradiction. Certainly, what we find is a death world, but one that should be regulated; it has every opportunity to be: the borders are politically-recognized, the people have the means to “chain up” their socially-threatening subjects, and the narrative even makes clear they have no qualms about placing their criminals in the highly-regulated necropoleis of their region. Yet, as is common on the peripheries of the colonial empire, failure and death are the norm. The contradiction of this space, therefore, presents itself in the threat that the death engendered within it is policed by those who cannot contain that threat. Still, the question of power’s operation in the realm of the dead presents itself: are the threatening dead as such because their lives are inherently unlivable, or has the construction of the space as productive of criminality created the need for policing? Indeed, the Gerasenes exist in a necropolitical police state, in which they have been drafted to regulate their own state of death, an endeavor they have a priori failed.

*When the (Un)Dead Haunt*

While biopower exists “to stave off death,” as Puar summarizes Foucault’s notion, necropower assures those further from the allure of life of death’s immanence. Within this necropolitical reality, Mbembe lifts up the subject of the “suicide bomber,” in whom the deferred future comes quickly, crashing into the present as his or her only

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46 Ibid., 32.
hope of escaping their life under the inevitable shadow of death. Along with time, spatiality, too, is negotiated as warfare, in the modern world executed at distance, is collapsed into “body on body” combat. But the bio-necropolitical tension need not end at death: afterlives beckon. We may start such an investigation with an understanding that, while the suicide bomber endeavors to achieve freedom from death through death, his or her demands echo at least through a news cycle and, at most, through the memories and tears of their loved ones. Still, biopolitics leave little room—for reasons, perhaps, understandable—for discussion of transcendence. However, I believe room can be found in Mark 5, to discuss the phantom, the spectral, and the spiritual. When this spirit is exorcised from the man and “enters into” a herd of pigs, only to charge over a cliff to their death, a message is communicated far beyond the pages of the Second Gospel, and beyond the Decapolis. Spirits, in their invisibility and their unbelievability communicate; they, as Jacques Derrida and Avery Gordon argue separately in their hauntologies, make demands. Through this sacred text, and against this sacred text, this spirit preaches.

47 Mbembe argues that the suicide bomber operates with the “logic of martyrdom,” contrasted with the “logic of the survivor.” The survivor, he writes, is one who struggles against his or her enemies, only to come out alive on the other end. The martyr, though, accomplishes “homicide and suicide…in the same act.” Indeed, this means that they suicide bomber lives under a rubric which understands the logic of the survivor to be antithetical to his or her own worldview (and vice-versa). In this way, the bomber overcomes: “The body duplicates itself and, in death, literally and metaphorically escapes the state of siege and occupation” (“Necropolitics,” 36-37). Brining Mbembe’s notion of the suicide bomber into conversation with that of Gayatri Spivak, Puar again enters the necropolitical conversation, but this time working with the notion of the “female suicide bomber,” who “[disrupts] the prosaic proposition that terrorism is bred directly of patriarchy and that women are intrinsically peace-manifesting.” Indeed, for Puar, and by extension Spivak, the female suicide bomber, in her final death, exceeds the gendered binary and resistance/complicity binary. Or, in Spivak’s words, “[There] is no recoding of the gendered struggle” (Puar, Terrorist, 220; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Terror: A Speech after 9-11,” boundary 2 31, no. 2 [2004], 96-97).

48 Ibid., 37.
49 Ibid., 36.
50 Avery Gordon writes, “Any people who are not graciously permitted to amend the past, or control barely visible structuring forces of everyday life…[are] bound to develop a sophisticated consciousness of ghostly haunts and [are] bound to call for an ‘official inquiry’ into them” (Ghostly, 151; see also Denise K. Buell, “Hauntology Meets Posthumanism: Some Payoffs for Biblical Studies,” in Jennifer L. Koosed [ed.], The Bible and Posthumanism [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014], 37-38). Derrida generally avoids an explicit claim of agency for the ghost, but he accedes to an intersubjectivity between the subject and the other that, I think, Gordon and Buell generally miss: “The pledge is given here and now, even before, perhaps, a decision confirms it. It thus responds without delay to the demand of justice. The latter by definition is impatient, uncompromising, and unconditional” (see Derrida, Specters, 37).
When, as Puar has demonstrated, the apparatuses of power work to divide marginalized bodies, the opportunities for collaboration against those powers is compromised. That is, alliances with attractive political actors are demanded by the political object of desire—say full political participation and representation—within a biopolitical society, necessitating a turn against those subjects with whom the marginalized are identified. But if, as I have argued, Mark 5’s imagined Gerasene community is portrayed as always already dead, a threat to social order, and failed regulators of that threat, then the spirit, Legion (v. 9), enacts a slippery and transcendant resistance. In fact, Derrida says as much of the “specter”: that it “haunts all places at the same time.… The spectral rumor now resonates, it invades everything: the spirit of the ‘sublime’ and the spirit of nostalgia crosses all borders.”\(^{51}\) For our purposes, the border crossing arrives temporal-spatially—between first-century Palestine and twenty-first-century United States—but also collectively—the specter bursts through the boundaries erected between marginalized groups. That is, the ideological formation of the incessant, slogging march of time demands present subjects disregard past bodies as dead-to-rights, making identifying with such bodies the heinous sin of “anachronism.”\(^{52}\) Thus, it is in the name of “order” or “prosperity” that groups with otherwise common histories and accountabilities are divided against one another in pursuit of wealth, rights, and representation.

Yet it is the demand of the specter, who manages to see, as Derrida argues, invisibly as if through a visor, that we “hear voices.”\(^{53}\) With a hauntology in view, Legion slips out of the body of the Gerasene man, carrying the necrotic cries out of the necropolitical police state that is the Decapolis. Legion leaves the narrative space where the Markan ascent to Romanness would hold the spirit as a marker of the death of a people, to times and spaces in which the agency of the Gerasenes might be heard. In this way, its refusal to maintain such boundaries condemns Mark’s partition of Roman


\(^{52}\) In their respective analyses of race in antiquity Benjamin Isaac and Denise Buell both interrogate the ways racial prejudice in and around contemporary political discourse inform and are informed by conceptions of ancient identity and power. A classicist, Isaac notes that while precise language may differ discourses of power, informed by difference in appearance, language, or land of origin, reinforce violent ideologies (*The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004]). Buell, a historian of early Christianities, tracks the way “ethnic reasoning” (a term she develops) can be deployed by any group in order to give themselves legitimacy through the use of the “language of peoplehood.” The phenomenon can be seen as a methodology across space-time, even influencing how we understand race/ethnicity in our contexts through the way we view past usages of the formation (*Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* [New York: Columbian University Press, 2005]).

occupied communities against one another, a separation that figures one as pseudo-imperial and the other as dead.

Ghosts, however, do more than condemn erected boundaries, they demonstrate the boundaries themselves to be fictions. In other words, Legion bursts through the established dividing lines of demographic, of space, and of time, uniting the cries of all necrotically-bound peoples. When British gay rights groups, as Puar says, call for an end of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, while also questioning the absence of queer advocate voices from within Palestine,54 Legion continues their cry.55 More immediately, though, what might Legion cry when urban American policing policies are presented as non-racist because African-American cops also walk the beat? No doubt, these spaces, too, are constructed in the public imagination as failures of policing policy, of economic policy, of racial integration. They are, in short, considered only as death worlds, where the sexual deviant and the homophobe are thought to reside. Already queer, threatening places, we send to the realm of “broken windows” as violent regulators those who themselves lack wealth, and Legion cries. Legion cries foul at the notion that those who subsist in such death worlds are a threat that must choose between self-policing or occupation by a foreigner. Legion rejects policing strategies that pit the lower-middle class against the poor, and knows that tension must be held between #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName; and even then, Legion says the name of those trans African-American subjects rendered invisible because the only comprehensible gay body to the biopolitic is white. In all this, Legion lives into the threat, knowing only that unity in discontent, a unity which celebrates the Other’s unique subjectivity, can respond effectively to the lies of a biopolitical futurity.

54 Puar, Terrorist, 14-16.
55 The Greek term deployed for the speaking voice of the demoniac is κράζω (5:5, 7).