

Title: *Postcolonially Resisting the Economic Shitstem: A Filipinx-Korean Reading of Luke 16:1-13 with Mel Chen's Animacies Theory.*

My parents are missionaries and I am their missionary kid to the Philippines, thirty-five years and counting. I also served as a missionary for about two years in the Philippines. Growing up in the so-called “mission field,” I was told that missionary work needs the three “Ms”: man, method, and money. “Man” is obviously the sexist and patriarchal way of describing the missionaries, who are usually limited to the cis-men, preferably married with children. “Method” means the training that missionaries need to have before and during their mission. This training could be but not limited to seminary education or short-term intensive missionary training. Last, “money” obviously means the financial support that missionaries need from their sending church(es) and/or institution(s). For some, the financial support is extracted from the locals or the people of the “mission field.”<sup>1</sup> Each of these “Ms” have their own issues, which I cannot cover in detail here. I will focus though on the “money” because the economic *shitstem*<sup>2</sup>, the havoc that have caused so much damage in the mission field (for my part, to the people of the Philippines), is the missionaries’ unhealthy relationship with money. The affective relationality or the animacies between the “man” and the “money” produced significant negative consequences to the point that one has to question whether the missionaries were sent by God or by the animacy of mammon/money. As Mel Chen states, animacies consider “how matter that is considered insensate, immobile, deathly, or otherwise ‘wrong’ animates cultural life in important ways.”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps in the adage “you cannot serve God and mammon” (Lk 16:13b), mammon has a stronger animacy, more convincing affective pull, for many missionaries.

I was also told that I should search the Bible for answers to my problems. The problem is my bewilderment on how many (Korean) missionaries are affectively animated by money more than anything else. How should I (and missionaries in general) respond to such animacy to/of mammon/money? More so, how should the locals or the people of the “mission field” respond to the affective overreach, the unhealthy and even viscerally dangerous relationality, between the missionaries/landowners/employers and their unquenchable greed? And so, I found my so-called “solution” in the unconventional ethics/sly civility of Lk 16:1-13 (“The Parable of the Manager of Unjust Wealth”).<sup>4</sup> I use the term “solution” not because I am seeking for the ultimate

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Jione Havea for the reminder that missionaries extract funds as well from the people they are supposed to serve.

<sup>2</sup> *Shitstem* is rasta-speak for the oppressive system. This definition comes from the *Council for World Mission (CWM), Discernment and Radical Engagement (DARE) Global Forum 2021.*

<sup>3</sup> Mel Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>4</sup> I translate “τὸν οἰκονόμον τῆς ἀδικίας” (v.8a) as “the manager of unjust (wealth)” because I prefer to translate the genitival modifier (τῆς ἀδικίας) in the possessive form rather than the descriptive (“the unjust manager”). David DeSilva also translates the phrase in the possessive (he uses subjective/descriptive versus objective/possessive genitive) by providing textual evidence in which the same Greek phrasing is translated with objective/possessive genitive form. For example: Lk 16:8b’s “sons of this age... sons of light” (οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου... τοὺς υἱοὺς τοῦ φωτός) are not translated as “worldly sons or radiant sons” even if their grammar is similar with “τὸν οἰκονόμον

answer/truth/interpretation to either my problem or the aforementioned passage. Rather, the choice of the word with quotation marks encapsulates/reflects/mimics my critique against missionaries' tendency to justify their cause/reasoning by quoting a biblical passage that works for them. And so, I chose this passage as a way to mirror that aforementioned tendency, ironically concluding with an interpretation that is critical and oppositional to the mammon-reliant missionary enterprise. Hence, I “resonate” with the characters and the plot of the narrative. As a relatively well-to-do Korean who lived in a palatial so-called “mission center” with Filipinx workers catering to our needs felt like a modern-day *latifundium* (Greco-Roman large estate), as espoused in Lk 16:1-13. Our Filipinx workers signify the manager (*oikonómos*). Moreover, the discombobulating interaction that happened between the landowner/employer (*plousios*)<sup>5</sup> and the manager of Lk 16:1-13 actually happened and are still happening today. That is why I argue that Lk 16:1-13 is a parable that is based on experiential narratives that the audiences of Luke (and even perhaps Jesus himself) have actually encountered in their daily lives. Lk 16:1-13 divulges a haunting narrative on the animacies of the economic *shitstem* happening in the *latifundia*. The parable is also teaching a method of survival and resistance for the workers/managers (in my case Filipinx workers) and even slaves who had to traverse the difficulties of living in the *latifundia* or modern-day mission centers by tapping into the animacies of money.

### Addressing the Discombobulation

Taking a step back, one has to summarize and address the discombobulating interaction found in Lk 16:1-8a. First, the manager (not a slave)<sup>6</sup> or the protagonist of the parable was apparently terminated or at least was about to be terminated for allegedly embezzling the assets of his employer. There was no due process for the manager. He was instead sentenced to begging or digging. I use the verb “sentenced” here because digging (*skáptein*) or begging (*epaiteîn*) are social (and impending physical) death for the manager because he is not accustomed to such

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τῆς ἀδικίας”. See David A. DeSilva, “The Parable of the Prudent Steward and Its Lucan Context.” *Criswell Theological Review* 6.2 (1993): 264-6.

<sup>5</sup> I will use “employer” as the catch-all translation for *plousios*. Such utilization is due to expediency even though *plousios* could be translated in other ways. Moreover, I do not think that *plousios* represents God or Jesus. Rather, *plousios* is just any rich person who owns a *latifundium*. As Bernard Brandon Scott points out, *plousios* in Luke (6:24; 12:16; 14:12; 16:19, 21, 22; 18:23, 25; and, 21:1. But contrast these with Zacchaeus [19:1-10] who has a more redeeming narrative) has negative connotations. Thus, representing the divine/messianic in such sustained negativity does not bode well to the message of the Gospel. See “A Master’s Praise: Luke 16,1-8a.” *Biblica* 64:2 (1983): 179-80.

<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Glancy does not see the *oikonómos* (manager) as a slave because slaves would be severely punished or even killed for such alleged wrongdoing. See Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 108-10. Herzog considers the manager as a “retainer” (not a slave). Retainers usually handle the business of their employers because their employers/landowners are frequently absent from the land/compound. William R. Herzog II, *Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 241. On the other hand, King, Beavis, and Hopkins argue that slaves are sometimes released not because of kindness but due to financial expediency. So, one cannot simply preclude the manager from being a slave. Fergus J. King, “A Funny Thing Happened on The Way to the Parable: The Steward, Tricksters and (Non)Sense in Luke 16:1-8.” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 48.1 (2018): 20; Mary Ann Beavis, “Ancient Slavery as an Interpretive Context for the New Testament Servant Parables with Special Reference to the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-8).” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111.1 (1992): 49; and, Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 117-20.

intense and unreputable work, let alone being found with other expendables of his time. Rather than accepting his horrible fate, the manager's "solution" or his drastic response to his negative future was to reduce the loans owed by his employer's debtors.<sup>7</sup> The response of the employer is also bewildering. Instead of anger and/or even imprisonment/death, the employer seems to commend the manager's actions of lowering his account receivables, even depicting such arbitrary decision as shrewd act that is worth emulating by others. It didn't end there. Verses 8b-13 seem to act like a commentary for the parable.<sup>8</sup> This commentary doubles down on the unconventional interaction that just happened (v.1-8a) by arguing that managing dishonest wealth is not only inevitable but even necessary in preparing oneself for friendship (v.8b-9a), to be welcomed "into eternal homes" (v.9b), and to manage various forms of wealth (v.10-12). The pericope ends with an adage that baffles and even contradicts the previous listing of teachings: "no servant can serve two masters... you cannot serve God and wealth/mammon" (v.13).

The parable baffles because perhaps we, the readers/interpreters, are deeply entrenched and invested in the economic *shitstem* of our context(s): money and emotions are strange bedfellows. What if the parable is an invitation to divest from our economic *shitstem*, as the employer's reaction reflects our own uneasiness and discombobulation, even if such divestment is viscerally uncomfortable? The manager of Lk 16:1-8a does not have the military, political, or financial power over the employer. That is why the manager chose a path of resistance that is unconventional, even discombobulating to the point of unnerving the employer. The manager's resistance is "unconventional" in an economic system that is ruled by law, with a modicum of civility and justice. However, in an economic *shitstem* that is ruled by oppressive structures, with civility and justice defined by the colonizers/oppressors, the manager's resistance manifests clever and evolving survival response. As William R. Herzog II argues, "There is no monolithic moral system to which everyone consents and by which everyone is judged. The entire system of which the steward [manager] is a part is exploitive and predatory."<sup>9</sup> From West African peasant farmers' perspective, Justin Ukpong reinterprets the manager's redistribution of wealth as the assertion for positive economic system: "the manager's action of sharing the debts of his customers is in line with this latter [material wealth is regarded as God's own gift to humanity to

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<sup>7</sup> Was the reason for this reduction a cancellation of usury or lowering of high interest rate? The parable does not elaborate. And yet, scholars find the Jewish (Ex 22:25-27; Deut 23:19-20) and/or Palestinian economic milieu a fertile ground in explaining the conundrum even if usury/ high interest rate/ promissory notes are common in the Greco-Roman world. See J.D.M. Derrett, "Fresh Light on St. Luke XVI. I. The Parable of the Unjust Servant." *New Testament Studies* 7 (1960-61): 198-219; and, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Parable of the Dishonest Manager (Lk 16:1-8a)," in *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV* (The Anchor Bible; New York Doubleday, 1985), 1097. In any case, Ireland marshaled various scholarly arguments on the reasons why the manager resorted to reducing the debts. His comprehensive work summarizes various interpretations of this passages beyond the issue of the reduction of debt. Dennis Ireland, *Stewardship and the Kingdom of God: An Historical, Exegetical, and Contextual Study of the Parable of the Unjust Steward in Luke 16:1-13* (Netherlands, Brill, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> There is no scholarly consensus on the ending of the parable. The possible endings for this parable are verse 7 (Jeremiah Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* [London: SCM, 1963], 46-48); verse 8a (Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant: A Literary and Cultural Approach to the Parables of Luke* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976]; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Story of the Dishonest Manager," *TS* 25 [1964]: 23-42; John R. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable: Metaphor, Narrative, and Theology in the Synoptic Gospels* [New York: Fortress Press, 1988], 162-179); verse 8b (W.O.E. Oesterley, *The Gospel Parables in the Light of the Jewish Background* [New York: MacMillan, 1936], 198); verse 9 (A.H. Baverstock, "The Parable of the Unjust Steward: An Interpretation," *Theology* vol.35, 206 [1937]: 81). These are just a few references compared to King's latest count of at least 107 (a combination of) books/articles/book chapters on this parable as of 2017. See King, "A Funny Thing Happened on The Way to the Parable," 18.

<sup>9</sup> Herzog, *Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed*, 253.

be shared equitably] concept of justice.”<sup>10</sup> The manager is restitutive and self-critical, like Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). He seeks to counter the colonial economic *shitstem* by going back to the divine mandate in which everyone is treated with dignity and love. Economic justice, as Ukpong asserts, must happen in radical means: the poor does not owe the rich anything; as a matter of fact, the (oppressive) rich owes the poor plus interest.<sup>11</sup>

That is why I follow Herzog’s understanding of parables as narratives written within the tense and surreptitiously disruptive agrarian milieu: parables are “not earthly stories with heavenly meanings but earthly stories with heavy meanings, weighted down by an awareness of the workings of exploitation in the world of their hearers”.<sup>12</sup> Parables “decode”<sup>13</sup> or problematize the givens, including and especially the so-called conventional ethics imposed by oppressive *shitstems*, “...whether the political form of that society was the client kingdom of Herod Antipas, the province of Judaea under the hegemony of the Temple and the Jerusalem elites, or the colonial administration of an imperial province.”<sup>14</sup> Norman Perrin sees this parable as a call for immediate action in the face of crisis; however, Perrin “spiritualizes” this crisis by qualifying it within the proclamation of the coming reign of God.<sup>15</sup> I find the crisis of the parable not in the cosmic or spiritual but in the (rural and agrarian) quotidian, the daily struggle of the colonized people. Parables are disruptions or “hidden transcripts,” as coined by James C. Scott, that utilize the “weapons of the weak” in fighting back against *shitstems*. The weapons of the weak do not engage or envision large scale violent revolts/revolutions; rather, Scott emphasizes that the weapons of the weak work with decolonial and disruptive powers of the quotidian weaponry such as “foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, [and] sabotage.”<sup>16</sup> For this parable, the manager utilizes and exposes the animacy of the money in the equivalence of olive oil and wheat (or “non-organic actants”) as a response to his negative future. His response is a glimpse to various expressions of quotidian resistance meant to engage oppressive structures right here and right now.

### **“Mission Centers” as Modern-Day *Latifundia***

I am not arguing that Korean missionaries are exploitative in general. However, we do have some missionaries with colonial mindset who run their mission centers with such oppressive methods especially against their Filipinx managers. The miscommunications and misunderstandings happen quite often due to language and cultural barriers. Since the 1980s, many Korean missionaries stationed themselves all over the Philippines, erecting mansions which they call “mission centers.” Please don’t get me wrong: these mission centers are not slave-driven, cotton-picking plantation. They provide worship services, cheap motel-like rooms for mission teams, conference rooms for meetings, and even retirement homes for the owners of the mission centers. They are built with good intentions, at least for some. However, some

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<sup>10</sup> Justin S. Ukpong, “The Parable of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1-13): An Essay in Inculturation Biblical Hermeneutic.” *Semeia* 73 (1996): 206.

<sup>11</sup> Ukpong, “The Parable of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1-13),” 207.

<sup>12</sup> Herzog, *Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Herzog, *Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed*, 21.

<sup>14</sup> Herzog, *Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed*, 53-73.

<sup>15</sup> Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 109-15.

<sup>16</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 29. King’s reading of the manager as a slave (*servus fallax/callidus*) trickster could be an addition to this list of weaponry. See “A Funny Thing Happened on The Way to the Parable,” 22-24.

mission center owners are disrespectful, even patriarchally scornful against their Filipinx workers. They mock the Filipinx workers culturally, politically, and even physically. Their condescending words and actions contradict their vocation as missionaries who came to the Philippines to serve the Filipinx people with the Gospel. In all of these, the interesting dynamic is that the mission center owners become wary of their local Filipinx workers/managers for their savvy dealings. The response of the Filipinx workers echoes the decision of the manager of Lk 16:1-13. Instead of confronting the mission center owner, the Filipinx workers mastered the mission center's operations more than their employers. When mission center owners leave for few days, even weeks, to visit the mission field or other countries, they ask their Filipinx workers to manage their mission centers. The Filipinx workers manage well in most cases. Sometimes too well to the point that they are able to come up with ways to outsmart their employers. When the mission center owners finally realize what have happened, they tend to fire their employees. However, terminating the employment of their Filipinx manager(s) is not easy because hiring a new person(s) and training them again is a daunting task. Plus, there is no guarantee that the new manager will fully follow their expectations. So, they usually reprimand their Filipinx managers, and call it a day. And yet, the bitter taste remains.

Such tension echoes the very definition of postcolonial ambivalence in which the mission center owners "hate" their local managers for their sly civility, and yet "love" or desire to be like them for their cunning methods. Unfortunately, my story on the Korean missionary mission center(s) is anecdotal; of course, who would want to write about such economic *shistem* for the public to read/hear. Hence, explaining this ambivalence with another economic *shistem* that resonates with the (Korean) mission centers, recorded and academically verified, hopefully would assist in further grounding my arguments here. This economic *shistem* is the U.S. sharecropping post-bellum southern plantation.<sup>17</sup>

Sharecropping has been the mainstream agrarian arrangement in the South post-bellum and until early 1900s. Serap A. Kayatekin even argues that it could have existed until the Civil Rights Movement in the US.<sup>18</sup> The deal was that the white landowner will provide the land, seeds, fertilizers, and other ingredients/tools needed for farming. Meanwhile, the black workers will provide labor. The profits/proceeds from the farming are supposed to be equally divided between the two party. As one would surmise, the white landowners are the descendants of slave owners who inherited the land. The black workers are the descendants of the emancipated who worked the lands of their former slave masters. For decades or even centuries, white landowners were trained to never participate in hard labor because it is supposed to be the role of the black people. In other words, high socio-economic class or financial prestige equals white race; low socio-economic class and/or dirty jobs equals black race.

This hierarchy was apparently translated into father-children relationality as well. According to Davis, B. Gardner, and M.R. Gardner,<sup>19</sup> the white race is supposed to be the "father" figure who provides, disciplines if one must, and order the "black children" to perform their filial duties. The white father figure felt the burden of caring for their wayward and

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<sup>17</sup> Another possibility is the *hacienda* system found in many Spanish colonized nations, such as the Philippines. See Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "A Mujerista Hermeneutics of Justice and Human Flourishing," in *The Bible and The Hermeneutics of Liberation*, ed. Alejandro F. Botta and Pablo R. Andiñach (Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 181-195.

<sup>18</sup> Serap A. Kayatekin, "Sharecropping and Feudal Class Process in the Postbellum Mississippi Delta," in *Re/Presenting Class: Essays in Postmodern Marxism*, ed. J.K. Gibson-Graham, S. Resnick, and R. Wolff (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> A. Davis, B. Gardner, and M.R. Gardner, *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), 19.

undisciplined “black children.” And yet, Kayatekin narrates that white landowners disdained and at the same time feared their black workers because they were afraid of the black workers’ capability to allegedly squander, embezzle, or re-distribute their produce.<sup>20</sup> The white landowners looked down upon the black workers as inferior child-like entities who needed constant care and reprimanding. At the same time, these white landowners are envious of their black workers because of the former’s assumption that the latter have carefree attitude and less worry/pressure to thrive.<sup>21</sup> Such feelings of envy and fear metamorphosized into a feeling of desire, or the desire to become like their black workers.<sup>22</sup> Kayatekin argues that this simultaneous feeling of disdain and desire reflects postcolonial ambivalence (Homi Bhabha) in which “[s]uch ambivalence, the production of contradictory feelings at the same time, can go some way in explaining the creation of a hegemonic discourse which interpellates; through and in which subjects exist.”<sup>23</sup> The production of contradictory feeling is a weapon of the weak. Interrogating interpellation by muddying ontology unnerves the hegemonic discourse. The white landowners interpellate subjectivity (Althusserian) to/with their black workers. In other words, the white landowners are imposing identity unto their black workers as a way to subjugate them. And yet, such imposition affectively pulls the white landowners to the subjected/imposed because of their own visceral and ontological involvement in the binary. To interpellate the other is to interpellate oneself in this colonial matrix where the survival of this interpellation depends upon the white landowners’ sustained transgression of the binary. By doing so, the white landowners muddy their own ontology, their supposed superior positionality as the “father,” because they have to continuously hold on to the iterations of othering - labeling black workers as “children.”

By mimicking the subjectivity of the employer, the manager of Lk 16:1-13 utilizes a weapon of the weak (ambivalence) in countering his negative futurity. The manager doubles down on this ambivalence by exposing the animacy of money. Mimicry does not conceal but over-expose. The menace of mimicry, as Bhabha discloses, “is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.”<sup>24</sup> The manager over-exposes by engaging his employers’ debtors, by “cooking the books” or lowering their debts, and by deciding the futures of everyone involved without the permission of his employer. The manager did not join a resistance movement or destroyed his employer’s *latifundium*. He also did not beg for mercy or resorted to digging. Rather, the manager magnified the latent ambivalence “produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference and reimplicate them within the deferential relations of colonial power – hierarchy, normalization, marginalization, and so forth....”<sup>25</sup> Instead of running away from the *shitstem*, the manager revealed his deferential relations with(in) the *shitstem* by demonstrating his capacity to produce the machinations of the colonial *shitstem* for oppositional ends. This demonstration manifested through the emergence of the animacy of money.

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<sup>20</sup> Serap, A. Kayatekin, “Hegemony, Ambivalence, and Class Subjectivity: Southern Planters in Sharecropping Relations in the Post-Bellum United States,” in *Postcolonialism Meets Economics*, ed. Eiman O. Zein-Elabdin and S. Charusheela (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 242-4.

<sup>21</sup> Davis, B. Gardner, and M.R. Gardner, *Deep South*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Davis, B. Gardner, and M.R. Gardner, *Deep South*, 19.

<sup>23</sup> Kayatekin, “Hegemony, Ambivalence, and Class Subjectivity,” 248. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 122.

<sup>24</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 126.

<sup>25</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 157-158.

I see the same pattern of ambivalence in mission centers. The missionaries are the so-called “father figures” who disdain their Filipinx workers for their perceived child-like laziness and ineptitude. At the same time, these missionaries envy their workers for their carefree attitude. Such biased and discriminatory perception against the Filipinx workers are obviously unfounded and a product of colonial thinking. One could even wonder if such colonial mindset of some Korean missionaries are byproducts of being colonized themselves by the US and Japan not that long ago – a manifestation of colonial mimicry, neo-colonization, and crab mentality. In any case, such ambivalent feelings between Korean missionaries and their Filipinx workers produce contradictory feelings of want and hate, of desire and repulsion. This feeling of ambivalence is exacerbated by the involvement of money that triggers and disrupts the relationality between the Korean missionaries and their Filipinx workers. Money triggers because the missionaries themselves know that such desire/repulsion for money is contradictory to their calling in the first place. The same goes with the white landowners. They are supposed to be “above” the juvenile relationality with money; they are supposed to have “mastery” over the finances, just like a father. And yet, the white landowners are constantly unnerved, acting like a child, by the animacy of money, especially at the hands of their black workers/managers.

Of course, this ambivalence could also lead to death drive for the manager (Lk 16:1-13)/mission center workers/ black workers because one cannot “take the antagonistic edge from relations of exploitation/oppression.”<sup>26</sup> The managers (and the slaves) of the *latifundia* were flogged or even killed for re-distributing the produce to their fellow workers. And yet, they still pursue such undertaking because becoming a zealot and trying to kill off the landowners did not turn out well, as history teaches. According to Bruce James, Winfried Blum, and Carmelo Dazzi, wine, wheat, and olive oil are the staple of the Roman Empire. To disrupt the production of these is to disrupt the empire.<sup>27</sup> The Roman Empire transitioned from small farms to *latifundia* because of slavery. *Latifundia* were able to produce crops cheaply because the slaves worked on the fields. The *latifundia* economic system drove small land farmers out of business. This kind of injustice happens frequently for those who are in the Greco-Roman agrarian tenant farming system. The result of this injustice is the rise of absentee landowners (who lived in the city) and the expansive hiring of managers of *latifundia*. The creation of jobs here did not translate to better living conditions. The landowner owns and profits with minimal cost/risk to himself because the managers take the brunt of the danger and hostility that comes with working/living in this economic *shitstem*. Moreover, the Roman Empire demanded more food and tax revenue from the *latifundia*, putting the managers in difficult circumstances.<sup>28</sup> Such difficulty led to insurrections, albeit their revolts failed. In other words, to disrupt the *latifundia* is to disrupt the empire. The three servile wars in southern Italy and Sicily (135-32, 104-100, and 73-71 BCE) probably is widely known,<sup>29</sup> at least for those who are concerned during the time of Luke. Thus, the manager of Lk 16:1-8a, probably knowing these circumstances and histories, chose to use surreptitious weapons of the weak (ambivalence and the animacies of money) to resist his way out of his predicament. As Peter Garnsey states, “in [the Greco-Roman] antiquity, food was [is] power.”<sup>30</sup> That is why the manager tapped into the animacies of the material.

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<sup>26</sup> Kayatekin, “Hegemony, Ambivalence, and Class Subjectivity,” 250.

<sup>27</sup> James, Bruce, Winfried Blum, and Carmelo Dazzi, “Bread and Soil in Ancient Rome: A Vision of Abundance and an Ideal of Order Based on Wheat, Grapes, and Olives,” in *The Soil Underfoot: Infinite Possibilities for a Finite Resource*, eds. J. Churchman and E. Landa (CRC Press: Boca Raton, FL, 2013), 155.

<sup>28</sup> N. Morley, “The Transformation of Italy, 225-28 B.C.” *Journal of Roman Studies* 91 (2001): 50-62.

<sup>29</sup> Bruce, Blum, and Dazzi, “Bread and Soil in Ancient Rome,” 161.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

In this ambivalence one has to note how the manager of Lk 16:1-8a tapped into the animacies of the more-than-human. Interestingly, one does not find an interpretation of Lk 16:1-13 (or however one decides the final verse of the parable should be) that taps into the animacy of olive oil and wheat, or their equivalence to money. And yet, the very idea of losing money drove the narrative into its climactic “resolution.” The manager manipulated and the employer was manipulated by the animacies of huge amounts of olive oil (100 jugs or approximately 3,500 liters/930 gallons) and 100 *kors* of wheat (630 bushels),<sup>31</sup> a significant amount of financial loss for the employer. The manager did not beg or dig because he knows the animacies of debt and/or accounts receivables. In other words, the manager lived and worked under the economic *shitstem* of oppressive/unrighteous money long enough to know their animating efficacy. That is why verse 9 teaches that one should “make friends with unrighteous wealth” or use the money brought about by the oppressive system because the animacies of such wealth or money could have enough animating powers to save oneself into the eternal dwellings of one’s friends.

### **Animating the Non-organic Actants**

I define and heavily rely upon Mel Chen’s understanding of animacy(ies). As Chen argues, animacies “has the capacity to rewrite conditions of intimacy, engendering different communalisms and revising biopolitical spheres, or, at least, how we might theorize them.”<sup>32</sup> Stemming from the posthumanist agenda of questioning human superiority and exclusivity, Chen’s animacy interrogates anthropocentrism by acknowledging the animating capacities and the affective entanglements of all entities, particularly the non-organic actants. Coined by Bruno Latour, actant is an expression that helps in eschewing anthropocentric description of the non-organic (and even animals and plants) entities as “object.” Instead, Latour prefers to call all entities/creations as actants. Latour defines actants as such: “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.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, I chose to describe all entities as actants; moreover, the inanimate actants are preferably described as “non-organic.”

Applying Chen’s animacies on Lk 16:1-13 seeks to notice and embrace the animacies of money, the influence of mammon, in the lives of the employer, the manager, and even the author and the audience of Luke. This embrace acknowledges that the non-organic actants (olive oil and wheat and their monetary equivalence) determined the outcome of the narrative and divulged one of the struggles (what to do with unrighteous wealth) of the early church/ Lukan community (verses 9-13). In other words, the parable admonishes that tapping into the animacies of the non-organic actants is a hidden transcript that teaches sly civility and unconventional ethical response for those who are trapped by the colonial dealings of the *shitstem*. 16:10-12 teaches that one has to be “faithful” (πιστός) to the “little” and “much,” even if they/actants are “unrighteous.” In other words, I interpret “faithful” here as the call to be cognizant and responsive to the actants in their various expressions (little/much, righteous/unrighteous). “Faithful” (πιστός) is attested four times in Luke: 12:42; 16:10 (x2); and, 19:17. Just like 16:10, the adjective “faithful” in 12:42

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<sup>31</sup> Manson argues that 100 *kors* of wheat equals 1,083 bushels or 2,500 to 3,000 denarii. This is based on his take on *Baba Metzia* 5:1, which sets the price of a *cor* to twenty-five to thirty denarii. See T.W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1949), 292.

<sup>32</sup> Chen, *Animacies*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> See *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (trans. Catherine Porter; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 236; and, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10-1.



and 19:17 are attested/written within the sphere of finance and in relations with non-organic actants, not as a spiritual/Christian term. These relationalities manifest the affective pull, the animating capacities, of non-organic actants with human survival and relationality. That is why the ultimatum of verse 13 divulges the reality and the necessity of working with the animacy of the non-organic actants. Perhaps, verse 13 is an admission that Luke and his audience are oppressively enmeshed with the *shitstem* of unrighteous mammon. A way to be “faithful” or resist this *shitstem* then is to admit that we are all slaves to and serve the animacy of money (verse 13). Then, just like the manager of 16:1-8a, we are invited to find ways to resist *within* the *shitstem* with the non-organic actants, a weapon of the weak that is less utilized in our revolutionary hidden transcripts.

### **Coda: Inverting the Symbolic**

Although they did not work with the concept of animacy or new materialism per se, Herzog and Kloppenborg’s interpretations/resolutions to the conundrum of the parable somewhat provide an affective resonance to the sticky entanglements brought about by non-organic animacies. First, Herzog argues that the manager actually had a long-term plan that benefits his employer, unbeknownst to the debtors. By lowering the debts, the two debtors thought that they have gotten away with free money or a better deal. However, Herzog argues that the so-called reduction of debt is actually a creation of a new contract between his employer and the two debtors. By revising their *grammata* (contracts) with the reduced amounts, Herzog argues that “the debtors have also signed a new contract with a different kind of hidden interest, and they will pay for their good fortune.”<sup>34</sup> A modern-day example of “they will pay for their good fortune” is the advertisement on mortgage refinancing in which this refinancing promises lower interest rate and reduced payment. At first, this refinancing sounds like a good deal; however, the companies who want to engage in this refinancing are tricking the homeowners, who probably spent a lot of years paying their mortgage off, to restart their fifteen or thirty-year mortgage payment plan with the refinancing companies. By doing so, the homeowners are “locked in” or trapped into another endless payment plan which in the long run means higher expenditure for the homeowners and endless profits for the refinancing companies. For the audience/readers of Luke who know the true financial implications of the reduction of debt by the manager (16:1-8a), one could only imagine the disgust, the jeers and snide remarks thrown here and there, as this parable is narrated. They probably felt it, experienced it themselves, perhaps traumatized by hearing/reading this animacy of money/non-organic actancy once again.

Meanwhile, Kloppenborg discusses the importance of honor and shame culture in reading the parable. The employer’s immediate termination of his manager for allegedly embezzling funds is expected in an honor-shame culture because the employer needs to protect/defend his honor or avoid being shamed because he was tricked/shamed by his inferior. And yet, the employer’s honor was further jeopardized because the manager was able to lower the debts of his two debtors, a further shaming event for the employer. Hence, Kloppenborg argues that the employer commended the manager or was “laughing”<sup>35</sup> at the debt reduction incident (and of himself) because this was his knee-jerk reaction to save his face, declaring to the public that he is above this incident. His reaction is his way of manifesting his hyper-masculinity in which he

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<sup>34</sup> Herzog, *Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed*, 257.

<sup>35</sup> John Kloppenborg, “The Dishonoured Master (Luke 16:1-8a).” *Biblica* vol.70, no.4 (1989): 492-3.

declares that he is above the honor-shame culture: nothing can faze him. Kloppenborg supports this reading of the parable by corroborating it with other parables with somewhat similar ethos of challenging the conventional norms: “The Parable of the Great Dinner” (14:15-24), “The Prodigal Son” (15:11-32), and “The Good Samaritan” (10:25-37). These parables, as Kloppenborg states, “challenges by inversion or burlesque, elements of the auditor’s *symbolic universe*.”<sup>36</sup>

For my reading, the *symbolic universe* that needs to be inverted and challenged is the *shitstem* of anthropocentricity and unhealthy relationality of missionaries with money. My reading of the parable echoes Kloppenborg’s reading in which the parable challenges the social codes of its time. Where we part ways is that for Kloppenborg the challenge/inversion was instigated primarily by the employer. I argue that the manager disrupts the social codes, which led to the employer’s subsequent onboarding of this challenge. Moreover, my reading adds a layer to this inversion by arguing that the non-organic actants are actually the ones who affectively caused the reactions (both manager and employer): the renegotiations and the “laughing.” To read as such takes a certain philosophical acceptance that humans are not the prime or sole mover of events. Rather, in many cases, the non-organic actants are actually the instigators of events, the contract-makers and breakers. Lk 12:16-21 (“The Parable of the Rich Fool”) speaks of the folly of storing riches in this material world but not with God. And yet, this parable’s precursor (v.15) warns of the folly of trying to control one’s happiness and future by controlling material goods or non-organic actants. Humans try to extract some form of positive emotions from non-organic actants/money: “And I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry” (v.19). However, the parable teaches that such extraction does not always happen as one expects. We, humans, need to question our anthropocentric assumption that we have a stranglehold on the non-organic or even of all entities. The animacy of the olive oil and wheat (and their monetary equivalence) moved the humans to act otherwise.

We question because money moves. Lk 16:1-8a’s manager and his employer, the Korean missionaries and their Filipinx workers, and the US post-bellum southern plantation landowners and their black workers felt the affective animacy of money. The ambivalent emotions and relationality are brought about by the animacies of non-organic actants who were able to tap into the emotions of humans, moving and controlling them in ways that are unknown to human logic. Money moves and determines who should be regarded as “worthy of being animated.” This is the so-called “lesson” of the parable: to acknowledge the precarity of anthropocentricity, and to recognize the animacy of the non-organic actants, perhaps even stronger in their affective animacy than the divine. Stronger to the point that Luke expresses his frustration, his ambivalence, in the form of coerced bifurcation: “You cannot serve God and wealth/mammon” (16:13).

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<sup>36</sup> Kloppenborg elaborates on the inversion or the challenge to the *symbolic universe* as challenge (based on the aforementioned parables) to the “security of the social and ethnic boundaries between Jews and Samaritans, or the legitimate expectations of the commensurability of achievement and compensation, or the self-evident appropriateness of insisting upon one’s honour.” Kloppenborg, “The Dishonoured Master (Luke 16:1-8a),” 494.

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