

Jesus' Death and Resurrection as Cultural Trauma

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Abstract

In her recent book, *The Case for Mark Composed in Performance* (2012), Antoinette Wire proposes that Mark's gospel was composed of accounts from people who retold Jesus' story over the decades, and not from scattered fragments by a single man. It seems that the first-century Jesus followers were well-acquainted with the death and resurrection story, because all four gospel traditions cover it, albeit with different emphases. Most previous scholarly discussions focused on the context, development, and oral circulation of the story (cf. Aitken 2004, 11). In my view, while these approaches are worthwhile, they do not address what I believe is the fundamental question, namely, how this story became a community story. In this article I use the cultural trauma theory to raise a different set of questions. Cultural trauma theory explores processes through which a story moves from being a particular incident to a point whereby it is represented as a collective trauma story. The theory focuses on social processes used to make listeners feel that they were attacked in a similar way. I adopted this theory after realising that Jesus' story began as a single event among many other similar stories. Thus, using cultural trauma theory, I explore how Jesus' tragic event became an experience that resonated with, or was felt as replicating, the experiences of many first-century Jesus followers.

1 Introduction

I chose Mark's version of the death and resurrection of Jesus because of the length that Mark gave to the story and because of the shared assumption among New Testament scholars that Mark's story predates other versions (Marxsen 1969, 31). It is prudent to begin by summarising the story. The story is tragic, as it culminates in Jesus' death. It begins with Jesus travelling from Galilee to Jerusalem where he was later crucified.

The story insinuates that Jesus had premonitions about his own death (Mark 10:47). The predictions were later fulfilled when the religious leaders (Mark 14:60) accused Jesus upon his arrival in Jerusalem followed by further accusation from the imperial representative, Pontius Pilate (Mark 15:15). During the final moments, in what looks like a scenic drama, Pilate succumbed to the crowd's clamour by handing over Jesus for crucifixion (Mark 15:15). This tragedy was reversed three days later by the news that Jesus had resurrected from the dead. Through use of cultural trauma theory, I aim to demonstrate how this story moved from being a story about the tragic events faced by Jesus to be a story that resonated with the first-century Jesus movement through what they experienced (Mark 16:14).

The discussions surrounding the way Jesus' story survived for decades is not a new topic. The first critical discussion came from the form-critical approach that alleges that the stories first existed as separate oral units that were later written down. Form criticism suggests that an original oral life setting or *Sitz im Leben* informs the way people remembered the stories, which means that the story about the death and resurrection of Jesus first circulated as oral independent units which were later brought together to form a continuous narrative (Bultmann [1953] 2004, 324). The inception of this view is associated with Martin Dibelius (1934) and Rudolf Bultmann ([1953] 2004) who think that a cultic setting might be the original setting of the stories. Both Dibelius and Bultmann emphasise the importance of historical reminiscence based on the needs of the earliest preaching. Betram (1922, 93) and Schille (1955) further developed this view, claiming that the story originally developed from first-century liturgy where Jesus' heroic cult was celebrated. They propose that three distinct settings shaped the memory of Jesus' suffering: the Last Supper, Good Friday remembrance, and the cultic recollection of the empty tomb. In my view, this perspective is plausible and to an extent contributes to my own study. However, the fact that the story is associated with a cultic setting may suggest that the story had become a social and religious rallying point. This further accentuates the need to investigate how the story assumed the status of a community rallying point.

A perspective that seems closer to answering this question is orality. Orality studies focus on the story's circulation and transmission. Representatives of this theory are Gerd Theissen and Werner Kelber. In arguing for the function of story, Theissen refutes Bultmann's assertion that traditions are static; he argues that the memory about Jesus accrued

different contextual meanings during the process of oral transmission (Theissen 1983, 87). The contextual experiences of the community selectively determine how the past is remembered (Kelber 1983, 17). Using this approach, we can suppose that the contextual experiences of the first-century Jesus followers were made intelligible by “keying or framing” known past memories to the present. Kelber (1983, 4) calls this “interpretation” of the past. Kirk (2005, 10), an American scholar, elaborates that through storytelling new experiences were “keyed or framed” around past memories, thereby making new experiences meaningful to the community. This perspective is plausible in that it views storytelling as a process of identity formation. Orality may help us to investigate how the first-century Jesus followers keyed their experiences around their understanding of the memory of Jesus. However, it is silent about how the story becomes a story that shapes collective identity. What processes make a particular story stand out as a frame of reference for shared community memory?

My perspective is largely informed by orality and memory studies. To illustrate, my perspective develops from the assumption that every day we watch or hear censored television or radio news. It is apparent that daily news is censored, because not every event that happens qualifies as national news. The process through which a single event moves from being an ordinary event into national shared news is the perspective of my study. Therefore, we can suppose that the story about the death and resurrection of Jesus did not come from on-lookers; instead, the story survived for approximately three decades in oral form. The question is, what social processes made the tragic event that Jesus faced become a community story? I suggest that cultural trauma theory can help to answer questions regarding the social process that changes an event into a collective story.

2 What Is Cultural Trauma Theory?

Cultural trauma theory is a perspective that developed in sociology and is associated with American sociologists such as Jeffrey C. Alexander (2004) and Ron Eyerman (2001). The theory arose in reaction to lay trauma theory from psychology, which defines trauma as a shocking event that shatters the physiological coping mechanism of the victim. An example of such an approach is to be found in the works of American psychologist

Judith Herman (1997, 34–38)¹ and American theologian, Serene Jones (2009, 27).² According to lay trauma theory, a traumatic event shatters and paralyses the individual's ability to make a logical response to an experience. In lay trauma theory, the focus is on the individual and trauma is construed as a shocking, sudden event that leaves the individual a helpless victim with no room to respond rationally.

Cultural trauma differs by disputing the notion of connecting trauma to a particular event. Cultural trauma says that “[t]rauma is not located in the simple violence of the original event in an individual's past, but rather in its unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first place—returns to haunt the survivors later on” (Alexander 2004, 8). A distinct point of departure of cultural trauma theorists is that trauma does not exist from the event itself, but in the way the event has been represented. Trauma is something created or constructed by society. It is characterised by a gradual realisation by the community that its collective identity has been fundamentally shattered. It is a gradual yet shocking realisation by the community that its existence as an effective source of support is threatened and that an important part of the collective self has disappeared. In doing this, cultural trauma makes a distinction between the actual event and its representation. What separates cultural trauma from lay trauma theory is the time gap between the actual event and the social processes that are involved in projecting an event as cultural trauma (Eyerman 2001, 1).³ Cultural trauma argues that trauma is a social process through which a particular event is represented as a fundamental threat to the existence of a community. The process seeks to find a meaning in the event itself (Eyerman 2001, 71).⁴ Alexander (2004, 10) explains that, “it is the meaning that provides the sense of shock and fear and not the event itself.” Unlike lay trauma, cultural trauma is communal, because pain enters the tissue of society (Sztompka 2000, 450). According to Alexander (2004, 1), “cultural trauma occurs when members of a

¹ Judith Lewis Herman emphasises the bodily effects caused by a traumatic event. Her study emphasises the event, not the representation of the event.

² Serene Jones uses the same approach as Judith Herman and emphasises the cognitive process of the mind in making sense of a traumatic event.

³ Eyerman explains that there is a difference between psychological trauma and the cultural process of trauma, which is how the event is mediated. As a cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and is linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory.

⁴ The representation of an event creates bridges between an event itself and individual memories.

collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories and forever changing their future identity in a fundamental and irrevocable way.”

Cultural trauma occurs when the event is associated with cultural frameworks and symbols that make an event appear as a threat to collective identity. This is an important meaning-making stage in cultural trauma. The event is associated with a pre-existing pool of shared meaning present in the community. Thus, trauma is something that is created either during the event itself or after the event as a “post hoc reconstruction.”⁵ Sztompka, a Polish scholar, succinctly concludes that a “traumatising event is always a cultural construction” (2000, 457). The way a traumatic event is represented is linked to group identity and the formation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory (Eyerman 2001, 71). However, some scholars have found problems with cultural trauma theory.⁶

There are two stages noted in the development of cultural trauma. The first stage is the “trauma claim stage” (Alexander 2004, 11). At this stage a claim is made that a terrible event happened which has fundamentally disrupted the community. At the claim stage, the event is portrayed as a historic event that has become a cultural crisis (Alexander 2004, 10). The group feels that its collective identity has been threatened or that there is a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, or a tear in the social fabric that affects this particular group of people (Eyerman 2001, 2). The trauma claim must project an event as a discomfort “entering into the core of the collectivity’s sense of its own identity. The group feels that an event has been imposed exogenously upon them, and has affected the core

⁵ See Alexander (2004, 8). Alexander denies that trauma is grounded in the objective (external or real) event. According to his theory, trauma is a phenomenon or effect of something that is absent. Its power is in the representation.

⁶ The Swedish scholar John Sundholm (2007, 117) has a problem with the idea that it is society that decides to project a certain event as cultural trauma. He argues that events such as mass rape can be culturally traumatic in themselves without necessarily being represented, because they create trauma in themselves since they shake, interrupt and break the identity of an individual or group. Such events do not need cultural or ideological mediation to affect or disrupt people’s identity. He also argues that cultural trauma pays little attention to the individual and to time. He argues that the individual and time are important in the construction of meaning. Accordingly, the time lapse between the individual and the event is an important factor in the construction of meaning.

of their identity” (Sztompka 2000, 452). The claim must make people afraid, leading to collective panic and shock.

The second stage is that of “carrier groups.” The carriers are people within the group who decide to emphasise the particular character of an event and convince the rest of the group that their collective identity has been fundamentally affected. These people might be storytellers, the media outlets such as the national radio, television, and leading newspapers. They make use of the particularities of the historical situation, the symbolic resources at hand, the constraints and opportunities provided by institutional structures; they represent an event as a fundamental threat to the entire group (Alexander 2004, 12) and convince the rest of the group to share in the trauma (*ibid.*). These people act as agents of cultural trauma. Their interest is to convince others to understand an event from an ideological viewpoint (Alexander 2004, 11). Essentially, they get involved in the process of “meaning making.” (*ibid.*). They essentialise the event by making it fit into a community’s shared cultural and ideological framework. They search for meaning that answers the profound questions raised by the group, such as why the event happened. In short, they provide meaning to an event and interpret its significance to the community.

Let me illustrate with some recent examples. Before the outbreak of the Iraqi war, the media presented the bombing of the two trade towers in New York as an imminent threat to America’s national security. Another example is the controversial painting in South Africa that depicts the exposed genitals of president Zuma, which was interpreted as a threat to national dignity and the dignity of South African men in general. In addition, in Pretoria, South Africa, the change of street names from Afrikaans to local names was widely viewed as a threat to Afrikaner identity. This illustrates that fear and panic occur when the carrier group creates ideological and material interest in the event, based on the history, the values, and the identity of the community.

3 The Death of Jesus as Cultural Trauma

Cultural trauma theory may help to argue that the first-century Christians told the story about the death and resurrection of Jesus, because the story represented cultural trauma. We can assume that the story was told because it resonated with the experiences of the community. What social processes were involved in retelling the story such that it became a shared tragedy? To unravel this, I raise four questions: 1) what was the possible

group and their context, 2) who were the carrier groups and their interests, 3) what cultural frameworks and symbols were used to make meaning of the story, and 4) what was the intended reaction or response from the community?

3.1 *A possible social situation of the community*

The first question concerns the possible community and their location. The debate around the location and identity of Mark's community is inconclusive. New Testament scholars are divided between supporting Rome or Galilee as the location of the community. Knowing the location of the Markan community would help to describe the type of cultural symbols and frameworks that were used, in order to discover the meaning of the story. A position that suggests Rome as the location of the community is supported by two arguments. Firstly, supporters of the patristic view say that Mark's audience lived in Rome (see Telford 1985, 1). This view emanates from Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, who wrote in the early second century and claimed that Mark was a disciple and interpreter to Peter (cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15). This view has been supported by some church fathers, among them, Justin,⁷ Irenaeus,⁸ Eusebius,⁹ and Tertullian.¹⁰ Recently, some New Testament scholars such

⁷ Justin (ca. 150 C.E.) writes in *Dial.* 106.3: "It is said that he [Jesus] changed the name of one of the apostles to Peter; and it is written in his memoirs that he changed the names of others, two brothers, the sons of Zebedee, to Boanerges, which means 'sons of thunder.'" If by "his memoirs" Justin means Peter's memoirs, then these memoirs must be the Gospel of Mark, since it is only in this text that the sons of Zebedee are called sons of thunder (Mark 3:17).

⁸ Irenaeus (ca. 130–200 C.E.) comments that the Gospel of Mark was written "when Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel in Rome and founding the church there." He adds, "After their departure, Mark, Peter's disciple, has himself delivered to us in writing the substance of Peter's preaching" (*Haer.* 3.1.1; cf. *Hist. eccl.* 5.8.2–4).

⁹ Eusebius reports that Clement of Alexandria (150–215 C.E.), in his now lost *Hypotyposesis*, citing an ancient tradition of the elders, described how the Gospel of Mark came into being as follows, "When Peter had preached the gospel publicly in Rome . . . those who were present . . . besought Mark, since he had followed him (Peter) for a long time and remembered the things that had been spoken, to write out the things that had been said; and when he had done this he gave the gospel to those who asked him. When Peter learned of it later, he neither obstructed nor commented" (*Hist. eccl.* 6.14.6–7). It should be noted that Clement gives as his source for this information not a particular source but "the elders from the beginning" (τῶν ἀνέκαθεν πρεσβυτέρων).

as Brian Incigneri have revived this position. Incigneri (2003, 2) proposes Rome as the possible location because the book alludes to persecution during the period of Nero (ca. 54– 69 C.E.). Adam Winn (2008, 179) claims that the community resides in Rome and that the gospel was written as a counter-claim against Imperial propaganda that Vespasian was a god. Adela Yarbro Collins (2007, 101) does not specifically support Rome as the location but she argues that the internal inconsistencies within the gospel are evidence that the author knew little about Galilee as such; she suggests that the author and his community could have been a diaspora community residing either in Rome or in Antioch.

Other scholars support Galilee as the location, based on two reasons. First, some scholars argue that Galilee was the location for the community, because it represented a new community after the death of Jesus.¹¹ Second, Ched Myers (1991, 42), Richard Horsley (2005, 35), and Hendrika Nicoline Roskam (2004, 17) think that the book reflects the political tension in Palestine that led to the destruction of the temple (ca. 70 C.E.) and further unrest in the region. Horsley refers in specific terms to the Galilean peasants' struggle against the Roman Empire.

Recently Mary Anna Tolbert and Richard Bauckham presented a third position, namely, that there is no specific historic group whose social problems form the basis for the Gospel of Mark. Rather, Mark circulated like an ancient novel (Tolbert 1989, 303). This suggests that there was no specific audience (Bauckham 1998a, 2). The gospels circulated in oral form among various groups, shaping their memory and identity. The experiences of the different audiences form a basis for the reinterpretation of the shared memory and the re-imagining of Jesus (Bauckham 1998b).

Due to limited space, I will not delve deeper into the debate between Rome and Galilee because it is inconclusive. Personally, I have a bias towards Galilee as location. However, cultural trauma theory would work for both contexts. In my view, cultural trauma theory is applicable to a community that experiences some form of suffering. Given this, either Rome or Galilee fits as the location of the community. My focus is not on the authorship of the gospel but the possible community that retold the stories. It seems that those who support Rome and those who support Galilee as the location agree on one thing, that is: the community could

¹⁰ In his dispute with Marcion and his followers, Tertullian states about the Gospel of Mark, "While that [gospel] which Mark published may be affirmed to be Peter's whose interpreter Mark was" (*Marc.* 4.5).

¹¹ See Lightfoot (1938, 124); Marxsen (1969, 93); Kelber (1979, 13).

have been experiencing some form of imperial violence. If imperial violence resulted in the loss of land, either through taxation, debt or land annexation (Myers 1991, 49), then it is plausible to suggest that the subsequent gradual realisation of loss of identity must have led to cultural trauma. As Sean Freyne (2000, 36) poignantly notes, the peasants were most affected by imperial intervention in their subsistence livelihoods. Within such a social context we can concur with Horsley that the Jesus movement was a religious movement that attracted sinners, prostitutes, and homeless people, that is, people who were victims of imperial hegemony. To the peasants, losing land would be tantamount to losing inheritance and their right to subsist. It would thus have signalled the disintegration of the community. From this understanding it is plausible to propose that the story about the death and resurrection of Jesus may have been retold as a narrative that represented the collective sense of being shattered and of despair. Within the context of the first century and that of the peasants, losing land would have triggered a ripple of negative effects such as loss of inheritance, household, and kinship. It would have resulted in families accruing debt, which would in turn have resulted in families living as tenants or as landless day labourers. Such people were shamed because they had lost the right to subsist.

3.2 *Cultural trauma claim and possible carrier groups*

The second question concerns the carrier groups and their interests. It can be assumed that the community that entertained the story about the tragic events faced by Jesus were sympathetic to Jesus' teaching. The details and amount of space that Mark gave to the story suggests that the community was well versed with this story. In remembering the story, they identified with how Jesus was brutally mistreated and how he suffered a gruesome death. I suggest that the community comprised mostly of peasants who had lost their ancestral land and lived most likely as tenants or day labourers.

Who might have started this claim of trauma, brutality, and demise, and how was it associated with Jesus' death? Horsley (2001, 188) thinks that the northern Galilee entertained Elijah and Elisha's cycle of stories and that during his ministry, Jesus strengthened family households and social bonds. Despite precarious weather and uncertain harvest, peasants survived in kinship groups. If so, this might suggest that the story was told both at the domestic level and through the cultic leaders. Scholars such as Aitken (2004, 22) entertain the idea that the story developed through the re-actualisation of Scripture in the context of its performance in ritual,

which may suggest that the carrier groups were the cultic leaders. This supports the earlier view by Martin Dibelius (1934, 13) that the early preaching gave birth to the passion story (cf. Green 1988, 175). In my view, this conclusion is limited because it confines the story to early ecclesiastical activities. A view that broadens the perspective is that of Joanna Dewey (1995, 39) who is of the opinion that storytelling mostly happened in the domestic space with women being responsible for telling the stories to the household. I therefore suggest that even household members might have told the story in various contexts.

Our main question is how the experience of the peasants—that of being landless—dovetailed with the story about Jesus’ death. I argue that in whichever context the story was told, it aimed at aligning the experiences of Jesus with those of the community. The parallel might be located in his death—Jesus was brutalised; friends and close allies were scattered from him; his few possessions were ripped from him. This story might have started within cultic settings, then later, with a gradual realisation of their own situation, people related their own experiences to those of Jesus. The suffering and dispossession experienced by Jesus might have triggered a cultural trauma claim, when realising that the same Empire that killed Jesus had also disposed them of their land, and just as Jesus had lost friends, their kinship solidarity had also disintegrated. By associating the brutal story of Jesus with their own experiences, it demonstrated for the peasants that losing land is not simply losing material property; instead, it equals gruesome violence that threatens death and the end of a community. The realisation that they too might face death due to deprivation and hunger might have triggered a sudden panic, knowing that, like Jesus, their demise was instigated by the same Roman Empire.

3.3 *The representation of the enemy: Inside and outside*

The third question concerns the cultural framework and symbols that were used to give meaning to the story. Cultural trauma theory states that trauma depends on the nature of the enemy. The scarier the enemy, the deeper cultural trauma hits. The enemy must be so scary that the listeners feel that their collective identity is under siege. The way the Markan community heard the story about the death of Jesus reveals the depth of cultural trauma. From the beginning, Mark’s story about Jesus is a story of conflict that demands of the followers to make a decisive choice as to who they want to align with. The story shows signs of a community that has disintegrated from within. For example, from the beginning, the

imprisonment of John functions as alarm that Jesus is also going to be imprisoned and suffer a similar fate (Carrol and Green 1989, 25). The motif of conflict is placed early in the narrative when the Pharisees and the Herodians conspire against Jesus how they might destroy him (Mark 3:6). Later, fear is heightened by the fact that within Jesus' own movement the boundary between disciples and enemies is porous. It is scary when one does not know whether the enemy is on the outside or inside. To express this complexity, from Mark 8:27 to 10:52 Jesus focuses his attention on his disciples whom he accuses of lacking understanding and support. Further, the disciples express characteristics similar to the people of their generation, the Pharisees, by being unbelieving, slow to discern, and aligning themselves against God's purpose. Internally, even Jesus' own family turns against him, thinking that he has lost his mind, while at the same time the scribes label him as possessed (Mark 3:35). Externally and more frightening, after Jesus' death the community realises that Jesus was killed by Romans conspiring with Jewish sell-outs. Jesus was killed through the mode of crucifixion, which was capital punishment ordinarily reserved for Roman military and political dissidents (Carrol and Green 1989, 22).

From hearing the story, cultural trauma reaches a panic note in that the story carries a web of enemies, which makes it difficult to fathom the problem. First, the enemies are inside the community in the form of neighbours, close friends, and family members. This supports the claim by anthropologists that vulnerable communities are prone to self-blame and witchcraft accusation. However, more frightening could have been the realisation that the enemy is the same Roman Empire that destroyed their villages and took their land.

3.4 Meaning making through cultural symbols

The fourth question concerns the intended reaction or response from the community. For cultural trauma to reach its peak, cherished cultural symbols must be associated with the particular event. A community derives cultural symbols from shared community experiences that form part of its identity. By associating the present experiences of hardship with shared past memories, it further raises fear and panic. It is clear that the story of the death of Jesus provided a rich variety of symbols that were dearly held by the community.

The first symbol is that of suffering, which supposes that the audience associated their experiences with suffering. In Mark's story,

suffering is closely connected to trial and decision-making: some will fail to express their true discipleship due to suffering, which is encapsulated in the treachery of the disciples (Mark 14:27–28; 16:7). True disciples are the little ones who face suffering, and as a reward they receive the revelation regarding Jesus' real identity—"truly he is the son of God" (Carrol and Green 1989, 34). The prayer in Gethsemane begins the pinnacle of suffering where Jesus felt that even his own father rejected him (Mark 14:36). The rejection was expressed fully at the cross where Jesus cried to his father, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Within the first-century Mediterranean world the cross symbolised severe suffering and a curse. This explains why the apostle Paul struggled to reverse the negative symbolism of the cross in his preaching among the Gentiles (Green 1988, 164).

It is significant for the Markan community to juxtapose their own experiences alongside those of Jesus. I concur with John Carrol and Joel Green (1989, 17) who say that the Markan community experienced suffering in line with Jesus' warning that they would be hated by all because of his name. In creating cultural trauma, the story about the tragic experiences of Jesus was interpreted as synonymous to their own situation of suffering. Like Jesus, they equated their own experience with shame and loss of honour; they had lost their land, which was the basis of their subsistence, hence they were perceived as being without honour.

The second cultural symbol is that, like Jesus, the community regarded themselves as vindicated righteous. The motif that runs throughout Mark's story is that Jesus is presented as the righteous miracle worker who died under the hands of the Romans (Carrol and Green 1989, 22). George W. E. Nickelsburg (1980, 153–184) concurs that the death and resurrection story is dictated by the motif of the suffering servant and the vindicated righteous. Similarly, Raymond Brown (1997, 383) voiced that the memory of Jesus' death was explicated by using prophetic texts, while John Dominic Crossan (1988, 25) thinks that the passion narratives are based entirely on the contemplation of the Old Testament, a view that is also supported by Werner Kelber (1979, 206). In Mark, the vindication of the righteous is juxtaposed alongside another theme: that of revelation and judgment of the enemy. For example, on the cross Jesus was revealed as the son of God (Mark 15:39) whose death rendered judgment on the temple, which is symbolised by the torn veil (Mark 15:38). The cursing of the fig tree and the temple carries words of judgment against those who perpetrated violence against Jesus (Mark 11:12ff.).

By entertaining the notion of the vindication of Jesus, it is plausible to say that the Markan community welcomed their suffering with hope. Like Jesus, they might have regarded the pinnacle of their suffering as the beginning of judgment pronounced against their enemy. This is clear from the story relating the confession by the centurion: "Truly this man was the son of God" (Mark 15:39). Joel Green succinctly notes that the story about Jesus' death is a unique event in that it is about suffering righteousness, the servant of God, the crucified messiah, and the eschatological turning point when the temple will be destroyed and judgment rendered to the enemies of God (Green 1988, 319).

The third cultural symbol, which the community associated with their own experience was that of resurrection. While the suffering of Jesus evoked cultural trauma regarding the suffering of the community, yet on the positive side, Jesus' resurrection evoked sentiments of hope. Some scholars believe that Mark 16:9–20 was not originally part of the story, it was added later to give hope and functioned as a dirge. Scholars note that the Jews held a worldview that sees little value in death. The psalmist explicitly complains to Yahweh saying, "In death there is no remembrance of thee, in Sheol, who shall give thee thanks" (Ps 6:5 RSV). The prophet Isaiah echoes a similar dirge that "For Sheol cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: They that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth" (Isa 38:18 NASV). This means that the Jews regarded death as the end of life. However, Hellenism brought the idea that death is a way of achieving glorious fame, deification, and immortality. The Hellenistic world was full of stories whereby people gave their lives for the benefit of others (Homer, *Il.* 22.393-4). For example, Heracles encouraged his soldiers to die a noble death in war when fighting against Erginus. Death was noble and rewarding especially when one died on behalf of others. It was greeted with eulogies and honour (*Il.* 22.393-4; cf. Green 1988, 168). Heracles' own death was recounted to some length to underscore his courage and the noble way in which he faced death (*Il.* 22 and 24)

Dennis R. MacDonald elaborated this discussion by arguing that the story about the death and resurrection of Jesus was influenced by the story of a Greek legendary hero, Hector. MacDonald lists comparisons between the heroic death of Jesus and that of Hector, for example that Hector found himself alone with his enemy, Achilles, outside the gates of Troy, which is similar to Jesus being abandoned by his disciples (MacDonald 2000, 190). The self-giving Jesus accepted death at Gethsemane, he did not resist death, he made no defence, and he even refused the mildly anaesthetic

drink. On the cross, Jesus gave himself up (*ibid.*). MacDonald sees this story as a mimesis of the story about Hector. Joel Green also commented three things about the resurrection, 1) that first-century Christians created the hope of resurrection, 2) death became a heroic way in which to testify about the faith, 3) the death of the martyrs was understood as effective both as an act of atoning for one's own sins and for others. Earlier, Paul tapped into the Greek cultural worldview by arguing that through weakness and death through the cross, Jesus expressed his valour by serving others (Pickett 1997, 193).

It is plausible to argue that the psycho-cultural worldview generated a perception among the Markan community that their suffering was worthwhile or noble (Green 1988, 168). I believe that the Markan community viewed Jesus' resurrection as a mythical victory to the community. In view of their suffering, the community viewed the resurrection as a soother and reversal of their situation.

4 Conclusion

The above discussion demonstrated how cultural trauma theory focuses on the social processes that are involved in representing an event as a collective experience. The study suggested how a first-century community might have heard the story about the death and resurrection of Jesus as a story that resonated with their own social situation. The study established that the Markan community experienced suffering due to the loss of land, which was a tragic loss. Within a peasant community, losing land results in losing inheritance, household, and the right to subsist. The study suggested that the tragedy faced by Jesus might have provided a narrative through which the members of the Markan community were able to retell their own experiences. Like them, Jesus faced sell-outs from his own family and disciples. He agonised in pain on the Roman cross. This narrative might have provided a gradual realisation that the Markan community, like Jesus, was faced with the inevitability of suffering and death under the hands of the Roman Empire. As a cultural trauma story, the retelling of the story about the death and resurrection of Jesus was a shocking reminder of their own experiences, yet a strong identity marker that through suffering they were truly a community of Jesus.

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