

Transforming the Subaltern Voices of the Global World

Przekształcanie głosów osób wykluczonych z globalnego świata

SUZETTE NELLAS

Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma, Italia
ORCID 0009-0008-8960-7787

Abstrakt: Celem artykułu jest ukazanie w perspektywie globalizacji, jako głównego wyzwania dla współczesnej ewangelizacji, znaczenia kultury spotkania. Okazuje się, że misjologiczna koncepcja dialogu stanowić może motor transformacji i przywracania godności ludziom żyjących na peryferiach współczesnych społeczeństw. Dialog życia i działania jako jedno z narzędzi ewangelizacji i promocji dobra może prowadzić do powstawania strukturalnie stabilnych społeczeństw zakorzenionych w Ewangeli.

Słowa kluczowe: wykluczeni; globalizacja; ewangelizacja; dialog; kultura spotkania; transformacja

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to highlight the significance of an encounter culture from the standpoint of globalization as a major challenge to modern evangelization. It turns out that the missiological concept of dialogue can act as a catalyst for the transformation and restoration of the dignity of people living on the periphery of modern societies. Dialogue of life and action as one of the tools of evangelization and promotion of good can lead to the formation of structurally stable societies rooted in the Gospel.

Keywords: excluded; globalization; evangelization; dialogue; culture of encounter; transformation

Introduction

Globalization is a two-pronged reality in the contemporary world and mission. In his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (hereafter referred to as NMI), John Paul II reiterates the importance of having courage in the midst of the demanding and intricate context of a globalized world where cultures and peoples are interconnected in a sphere that has become small yet complex (NMI 4). Despite this complex context, Pope Francis asserts that globaliza-

tion is both good and bad; harmful and beneficial and there are gospel values that can confront these new challenges

it is good because it unites us, it can help us to be members of each other. What can be harmful is how it is implemented if it claims to make everyone uniform, it mortifies the richness and particularity of each people, it tends to make everything and everyone the same, rather than valuing diversities, peculiarities, cultures, histories, and traditions. To exemplify this thought we can use the image of the sphere and the polyhedron: in the sphere everything is equal, every point is equidistant from the center, everything is uniform, and there are no differences; instead in the polyhedron there is coherence, there is unity, but there is also diversity, variety of positions, of culture, of identity. The globalization of the polyhedron is what unites us, respecting diversity (Pope Francis, Audience with a Delegation of the Regional Journalism Group of the RAI).

Looking at the complexity of the push and pull of globalization, one can ask if indeed the subaltern can be heard. Famous Indian scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reflected on the subalternity and asked in her famous essay "Can the Subaltern speak?" Can their voices be transformed and be heard in this global world?

With this, we look at the globalization alongside subalternity within the context of the cemetery dwellers in Cebu City who, according to this writer's view are the epitome of the subalterns. From the perspective and based on a first-hand experience of a former community development officer of an NGO working with the cemetery dwellers, this work advocates the integration into the outreach programs/social work the missiological concept of dialogue and encounter towards empowerment and liberation of women as prime movers of transforming mission and to give them their voice back. In the implementation of the different programs advocated by the government, NGOs, and Church groups, the women were at the forefront of these activities since they stay "at home" to take care of the children and do domestic work.

Subalterns in the peripheries of Cebu City

NBER [National Bureau of Economic Research] Research Associate Ann Harrison notes that many studies on globalization and poverty suggest that globalization is associated with rising inequality and that the poor do not always share in the gains from open trade unless appropriate complementary infrastructures are well placed (Nesvisky). This is the phenomenon that took place in Cebu City, Philippines.

Cebu City is the Visayas' foremost center for commerce, trade, education, and industry. It is the judged second city after Manila in terms of development and most importantly the Cradle of Christianity in the Philippines. In the 1980s the City transformed itself into a global hub for shipping, furniture-making, tourism, business processing services, and heavy industry (Philippine Information Agency). This progressive landscape encouraged many Filipinos from neighboring provinces in Visayas and Mindanao to do a rural-urban transition which led to the rapid urbanization of the Philippines in general and also the speedy spike of population density and poverty in the City of Cebu. The urban poverty rate reached 14% in 2021¹ and this further aggravated the pervasive rise of people living in squatter or slum areas including the cemeteries. The families living in the cemeteries of Cebu City² are the subaltern voices that will be discussed in this paper. Specifically, it will deal with women cemetery dwellers who are collaborating and partnering with the government, NGO, and Catholic Community Development Officers.

From the economic point of view, globalization can work wonders or create more disparity between the rich and the poor in a given country or locality. It can uplift or diminish a person's dignity and status in the eyes of the society which can brand people as subaltern.

Subaltern is a word which refers to those who are socially, economically, or politically belonging to a lower class in the hierarchy or simply, those who are marginalized. The term was coined by an Italian Philosopher Antonio Francesco Gramsci in relation to the Marxist philosophy of "cultural hegemony"³. In the post-colonial theory, subaltern is a description of the lower class and other and those at the margins of the society, or those without human agency or those who are incapable of directing their own lives because of their social status (Young) and in their position the peripheries. This reality was already captured in the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution Document on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (hereafter referred to as GS) stated that "profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world that it has metamorphosed in a precipitous speed far beyond man's reach never has the human race enjoyed such abundance of wealth, resources and economic power and yet a huge portion of the world's citizens are still tormented by hunger and poverty" (GS 4). A glaring and painful reality.

Globalization, poverty, and migration

Globalization is characterized by consumerism and the throw-away culture, poverty and marginalization, information boom, migration, indifference

and individualism among others. Yet, it can also be the context where the culture of encounter, generosity, inclusion and solidarity could propel it to have positive impact on people. The impact of open trade vis-à-vis the under-skilled workers bring about one of the effects of globalization, poverty and marginalization. The labyrinth of poverty is complex in itself. In 2019, United Nations Development Programme (hereafter referred to as UNDP) reported that 1.3 billion people (23.1% of the world population) (UNDP) experience multidimensional poverty, the majority of whom are women, who come from developing countries and live in unacceptable conditions of poverty and social alienation.

Harrison reported that globalization is accompanied by increasing inequality in developing countries, and the poor need education, improved infrastructure, access to credit, and the ability to relocate out to be able to reduce poverty (Nesvisky). Joseph Malley meanwhile believes that poverty is a humungous and complex, multidimensional problem, with origins in both the national and international domains (Malley). Millions of these world citizens suffer from multidimensional poverty that “encompasses the various deprivations experienced by poor people in their daily lives – such as poor health, lack of education, inadequate living standards, disempowerment, poor quality of work, the threat of violence, and living in areas that are environmentally hazardous, among others” (University of Oxford). Moreover, in *Evangelii Gaudium* (hereafter referred to as EG), Pope Francis underscored women’s poverty. He said “doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment, and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights” (EG 212). There is the feminization of poverty. From the global perspective, the study will delve into the context of the cemetery dwellers of Cebu City especially the women who are greatly affected.

a. *Rural-Urban Transition and the Cemetery Dwellers of Cebu City*

Globalization and migration are interrelated. “Globalization causes migration and migration contributes to the intensification of socioeconomic and political relations across borders. Globalization has indeed dislocated millions of people and set in motion population” (Dokos) and has created rapid urbanization. Migration can be external or internal movements. The phenomenon of rural-urban transition or internal migration in the Philippines started in the 1980s. This transition can be caused by socio-economic, political, or climatic reasons (as in the case of victims of the 2013 Yolanda typhoon which saw massive migration from Leyte and Samar to different provinces). Although this is not unique to the Philippines, the concept of better economic opportunities in the cities leads people to migrate from rural areas to urban

districts where individualism is prevalent. For some, the city is an opportunity for mobility and integration in the economic and social mainstream for most poor migrants, it means concentration and isolation in a trap of marginal existence (International Organization for Migration). Pope Francis reminds us too that “we cannot ignore the fact that in cities human trafficking, the narcotics trade, the abuse and exploitation of minors, the abandonment of the elderly, etc.” (EG 75).

One of the common destinations of this internal migration is Cebu City. As a highly urbanized city, Cebu City is a chartered metropolis along with Mandaue and Lapu-Lapu, the two other chartered cities in the province. Chartered cities are independent of the provincial government of Cebu province. These cities are developing rapidly in terms of economic growth. In the 2020 census of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), of the highly urbanized cities in Region 7, Cebu City is one of the most densely populated with 980, 000 people living in an area of three hundred fifteen square kilometers (122 sq. miles) (Philippine Statistics Authority). Despite the booming economy of Cebu for over two decades, reality depicts the harsh truth that the economic progress being currently enjoyed does not necessarily translate into poverty reduction for its locals and migrants from nearby provinces and municipalities. Low-skilled migrants and locals who fail to find better jobs seek shelter as squatters in big mausoleums or put up shanties inside the cemeteries despite having been fenced. The higher cost of living in urban areas as well as the steep competition in finding lucrative jobs drive some people to dwell and find refuge in the haven of the dead.

Cemetery dwelling exists in mega cities like Manila and Cebu. Cemeteries which used to be the exclusive place for the dead have now become alternative dwellings for many Filipinos who live below the poverty line. These families now call the cemeteries their homes and their safe haven despite the absence of running water, electricity, good sanitation, and its socially alienating effects. They find easy access to cemeteries. To date, there are approximately six hundred families living inside the three cemeteries (Abalos). These families have found a new and unconventional community among the settlers. Cemeteries have become places of commerce, too. These dwellers wage a daily battle for survival through the husbands’ meager income from doing menial jobs outside the cemetery. On the other hand, the women seek to augment their husbands’ income through several economic activities inside the cemetery. “Most of the cemetery dwellers earn their living working right here doing everything connected to burial services such as digging and coffin making” (Thornhill). They also earn their living as tomb cleaners and caretakers, candle makers and vendors, *lapida*⁴ engravers, flower arrangers, and

prayer leaders during burials and family visits. Children help the parents augment their family income by cleaning the tombs for a fee and selling candles and flowers, especially on weekends when many people go there to visit their loved ones. At times, the family generates one hundred pesos (USD 2.00) per day which obviously, is not enough to feed a family of six with the high cost of living in a highly urbanized city. As an effect to this unfortunate reality of life in cemeteries is the noticeable number of children who are in the difficult situation of pursuing education. Generally, education at the elementary level in the Philippines is free for all but the obligatory fees, however, are considered unaffordable for the poor.

This, among many others pushes the cemetery dwellers and their children further into the depth of poverty and farther into the margins. In the following section, the reality of the subalternity will be examined and intertwined with the biblical narrative of Mark 5.

Subaltern Voices of the Cemetery Dwellers: A Biblical Mirror

b. Subaltern Voices of the Cemetery Dwellers

In the complex world of globalization, there are different voices that need to be heard to respond to this subordination. In his study on globalization, Andrew Reception, identifies some of these voices as the cries of the poor excluded from the process of economic globalization, or the exploited factory workers, children who are into child labor and prostitution, and the young who gave up education because of poverty (cf. Reception, *God's Global Household*, 70). Subordinate voices can come in many diverse forms. Pope Francis in one of his addresses, reiterates that

when the dignity of the human person is respected, and his or her rights recognized and guaranteed, creativity and interdependence thrive and the creativity of the human personality is released through actions and further the common good” (Pope Francis, Address to the Civil Authorities). The poor has many faces and for a missionary sharing mission as solidarity would require a constant search in the global village for the poor that God places beside us in the given present of our missioning (cf. Reception, *God's Global Household*, 159). The poor is taken as a mass of faceless individuals cut-off from the community and identified only by statistical data. The poor therefore is taken merely as an object of argument for or against globalization, the poor need not be excluded from economic activity for they can in fact be the motive for a new economic order through feasible and attainable projects of empowerment (cf. Reception, *God's Global Household*, 157).

As Christians called to communion with the subaltern voices, this work stresses the value of dialogue and encounter, inclusion, and collaboration with the cemetery dwellers as important means to foster solidarity, empowerment, and transformation of the subordinate voices of women cemetery dwellers towards the liberation of their families from poverty. As Recepcion asserts mission work in view of human liberation, promotion and integral human development needs to be carried out in life-nourishing relationships (cf. Recepcion, *God's Global Household*, 158).

These findings alter the panorama of the nature of poverty and it has enlarged its scope. When one lives in poverty, there is a “devaluation of the human dignity of the poor and the growing individualism are destroying the sense of community” (Mulackal 107–108) among neighbors, countrymen, and the world population. The diverse, globalized, and pluralized world shows a picture of massive consumerism and lavish lifestyle of the rich and even middle-class people vis-à-vis the heart-rending effects of capitalism to the majority on the population who continue to struggle. Pope Francis asserts that in today’s world, many forms of injustice persist, fed by reductive anthropological visions and by a profit-based economic model that does not hesitate to exploit, discard and even kill human beings” (Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, hereafter referred to as FT). Paul Knitter maintains that most of us “are familiar with to the point, perhaps, of immunity the appalling statistics about the vast numbers of people who suffer chronically from some form or forms of physical suffering because they are deprived of the most fundamental human necessities” (Knitter, 27). This assertion is supported by the UNDP, where the agency stresses that “with poverty, the most basic choices and opportunities to human development are denied, thereby losing the chance to enjoy a healthy, creative, a decent standard of living, self-respect, respect of others and their own human dignity (United Nations Development Program Report ; Pernia).

The narrative of the Gerasene Demoniac in Mark 5,1–21 aptly characterizes the context and experience of the subaltern voices living in the cemeteries of Cebu City. Here, we will see the parallelism of the biblical text with those of the cemetery dwellers using a biblical mirror and magisterial documents.

c. *The Healing of The Gerasene Demoniac (A Biblical-Magisterial Reflection)*

Mark 5,1–21 narrates the episode of the Healing of the Gerasene Demoniac. This study employs this Biblical narrative as a mirror that reflects and sheds light on the situation of the cemetery dwellers. The Gerasene demoniac can be taken as representative of the people (*anthropos*⁵) living in the cemeteries of Cebu City who experience marginalization and poverty and long for

liberation. The narrative shows a dramatic event in the ministry of Jesus and a challenge to the contemporary mission of the Church vis-à-vis Pope Francis' call for encounter and solidarity with the poor in FT. The evangelist Mark presents a very vivid and dramatic figure of Jesus' (a) crossing over and his encounter with the marginalized person from the tombs; (b) dialoguing with subaltern voices; (c) healing and liberating the person from being possessed with unclean spirits; and (d) sending the person to "go home".

Crossing Over to the Other Side and Encountering the Marginalized.

The act of Jesus in crossing over to the other side, a Gentile territory, is significant as this speaks of Jesus' intentions as well as the breadth of his mission. David Seemuth states that "the crossing over shows clearly the character of the universality of God's salvation in Jesus' mission, which is now without any distinction between God's chosen people and the Gentiles" (Seemuth 56). In Jesus' crossing over, he saw the darkness enveloping the person possessed with unclean spirits; the cemetery dwellers share the same experience of obscurity and nonexistence as they are stripped of their human dignity in their inhumane situation. In his commentary, Micah Kiel stresses that "the people clearly would have preferred to bind the possessed person, but they nevertheless had found a way to marginalize her/him. She was among the tombs, sequestered, out of sight, out of mind" (Kiel) and was howling night and day among the tombs. Truly, her loud cries and howls may have reached the town and fallen on deaf ears. This shows the indifference and individualism of the people surrounding the person possessed with unclean spirits who were isolated and ostracized.

Today, there is a parallelism between the situation of the possessed person among the tombs and the cemetery dwellers of Cebu City who experience the same exclusion, discrimination and indifference from and of the people, the demeaning effect of poverty in their human dignity that leads to the belief of being unredeemable. Antonio Pernia, on the story of the Good Samaritan, stresses that the man who was robbed of his possessions, beaten and left half-dead by the roadside can be regarded as an image of the poor of the world. The poor who are likewise robbed of their rightful share of this world's resources, stripped of their human rights and dignity, abandoned at the margins of society (Pernia 44). In view of this, the Church's and NGO's program for those with subaltern voices need to be rooted in the assertion that "the notion of God's preference for the poor signifies the priority the 'nobodies' of history receive within the scope of God's care for all creation" (Gutierrez 13) and that it goes beyond almsgiving and charity work which further demeans the dignity of those in the peripheries. These nobodies and subaltern voices are "those who are desperately in need of Good News, of curing, and of being

fed and given attention, love, dignity, understanding and hope for the future” (McKenna 15). Taking sides with these nobodies need to be both a personal and societal act of generosity that transforms the lives of the poor and the lives of the community. This act of solidarity and taking sides bring about change that begins with the marginalized family and local communities and eventually transforms the world because “global solidarity begins locally [and] local solidarity changes the world of the poor globally (cf. Recepcion, *God’s Global Household*, 158).

The encounter between the government, NGO, and Church workers, and cemetery dwellers gives a glimmer of hope to the women in the cemeteries despite the seeming hopelessness of their condition which is similar to that of the possessed person because they are slowly becoming not just recipients of aid but are slowly being seen and included in the community. Leonardo Boff emphasized that “whoever encounters the poor, encounters Christ for the person of faith, an encounter with the poor is an encounter with Christ” (Noble 142).

While Pope Francis repeatedly calls Christians to engage in a culture of encounter

work for “the culture of encounter”, in a simple way, “as Jesus did”: not only to see, but to look; not only to hear, but to listen; not only to overtake people, but to stop with them; not only to say “what a shame, poor people!”, but to be moved with compassion; and then to approach, touch and say: “Don’t cry” and give at least a drop of life (Pope Francis, “For A Culture Of Encounter”).

This is an invitation to each one to cross borders, encounter and dialogue with the poor and be in solidarity with their experience of poverty. Not only did Pope Francis call for sympathy, but he asks for solidarity which “as a normal virtue and social attitude born of personal conversion, calls for commitment on the part of those responsible for education and formation. I think first of families, called to primary and vital mission of education. Families are the first place where the values of love and fraternity, togetherness and sharing, concern and care for others are lived out and handed on. They are also the privileged milieu for transmitting the faith, beginning with those first simple gestures of devotion which mothers teach their children” (FT 114). The Christians need to see the poor as human beings with dignity and love, to hear their cry to be included in the society and to hold their hands to be stand again.

Dialogue and Transforming mission with subaltern voices. The narrative directs the readers’ attention to a despairing person the person possessed with unclean spirits the one who has been tremendously isolated from people,

who feels jubilant that Jesus has come to encounter her. This is a possible reaction from a person who is filled with insecurity and was greatly surprised that she is being sought out by an important person. The reaction raises also the sense of elation that, after all, as an “insignificant” and marginalized person, she is given importance through dialogue.

The dialogue between the person possessed with unclean spirits and Jesus transformed her life. It was a dialogue that involved not just the mere utterance of words but it involved actions that came with it. It was an encounter. A very important encounter between Jesus and the Gerasene demoniac that gave back her voice. It was a meeting that was awaited in the midst of the experience of marginalization and seclusion. Again, this is biblical mirror of the cemetery dwellers’ experience when people from the government, NGO and the Church come not just to give relief goods but to sit down, encounter and dialogue with them. This is well appreciated by the cemetery dwellers who feel dignified with the time given to them, to be allowed to speak of their situation and their needs and wants, and not fear because they are living in the cemeteries. The dialogue with women in the cemeteries leads towards the transformation of life, empowerment to work towards the rediscovery of their dignity as women, partners of men in rearing their families, and mothers working hard so that their children’s lives will be better than their own. Dialogue and encounter will slowly allow the women in the cemeteries to work towards the restoration of their dignity as women, and their family’s dignity, as they continue to struggle with their life in the cemeteries towards reclaiming their dignity as children of God. Dialogue is an encounter that is life-changing and transforming as shown in Jesus’ encounter with the Gerasene demoniac. Klaus Krämer thinks that:

dialogue, as a form of communication, indicates a serious meaningful conversation between two parties on a basis of equality a dialogue derives its vitality from the mutual nature of assertion and response. It consists of an exchange of arguments, experiences, and points of view. It is aimed at understanding, clarification, and consensus. Dialogue can pursue different aims: it can help people get to know each other or it can be a helpful instrument for solving social problems in a pluralistic society (Krämer 3).

In the dialogue between Jesus and the Gerasene demoniac, liberation took place. In the process of this liberation, transformation happened as the Gerasene demoniac was converted and became an agent of dialogue herself/himself, and was sent home to proclaim her/his encounter with the Messiah. It is in this context that the research would like to present how this dialogue can be applied and

realized in the mission among the cemetery dwellers. Dialogue transforms lives because it comes and originates from God himself. Pope Paul VI asserts that there is a need for the Church to enter into dialogue. “The Church must dialogue with the world in which it lives for it has something to say, a message to give, a communication to make” (Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, 65).

Dialogue is imperative for the Church in mission. Hence, dialogue is an integral dimension of the life of Church. It is a task every Christian needs to do. Peter Phan emphasizes that dialogue is where the modality of becoming the local Church takes place (Phan 17). Moreover, Reception argues that if dialogue is a key dimension of the mission of the Church, especially among the poor and the marginalized, then there is a need to understand the urgency of dialogue (Reception 9). It is that sense of urgency that pushes dialogue partners to dialogue genuinely to liberate themselves from the clutches of poverty. Further, Paul VI articulates that the Church’s approach to transforming mission is dialogue. Jesus’ life and ministry is filled with dialogue with the poor and marginalized such as his dialogue with Gerasene demoniac. Robert Kisala in his article, “Why Dialogue” wrote that

the inner life of the Trinity is one of dialogue, and this spills over in God’s self-communication of God-self to humanity in the dialogue of God’s mission. Since we are called to participate in this mission, our own participation is, like God’s, one of dialogue (Kisala 405).

Human beings created in the image and likeness of a God who dialogues with creation, in the salvation and in the sanctification of the church are indeed “capable not only of reacting to stimuli but also of responding to ‘the other’ through language and symbol, and in this manner, building up a community” (cf. Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences).

Missiological Direction

Since the women, mothers, and wives are normally left to tend their homes and families, they are the dialogue partners, collaborators, and ultimately missionaries in this endeavor of the government, the NGOs, and the Church to form missionary disciples in the cemeteries.

d. Healing and Liberation from the Unclean Spirits and Marginalization

Healing and liberation of the person “often includes conversation or dialogue, support, affirmation, touch, caring time spent together listening and

telling the hard truths about how we got in the situations we are in, gentleness, concern; this takes place among strangers and with friends” (McKenna 12). The Gerasene demoniac as well as the women in the cemeteries of Cebu City and “all the seekers of liberation from a fixated mindset of sorts are obligated to establish a relationship that builds a genuine dialogue with self, others, and the world. In order to establish dialogue, there ought to be mutual recognition, respect, and acknowledgment of each other” (McKenna 5).

Liberation ensues when a person, a community acknowledges the *possession* or enslavement, the situation in need of help and the need for liberation. Just as the demoniac accepted her need for God, healing, and liberation, it is thus necessary that the women in the cemeteries accept their need for liberation. “The recognition of the existence of such is the basic premise of working towards liberation gradual destruction of structures can be achieved through education a tool of enlightenment” (Kiruki 24). Conversion, formation and evangelization are closely linked. They are based on the encounter with God’s will, the acceptance of that will, and the ability to judge what is going on in the world and in people’s lives on the basis of that will, expressed in the divine plan of the Reign of God” (International Commission on Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation).

Knitter argues that “our contemporary world is a world aware, as never before so it seems, of oppression—oppression in an array of horrible forms. It is, in other words, a world painfully aware of the need for liberation, for breaking bonds, for preserving, restoring, fostering life” (Knitter 27). Pope Francis says that “each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be part of the society”⁶ to be a community of inclusion rather than of marginalization and exclusion.

e. *From Subaltern to Missionary Disciples*

Salvation and liberation of the whole person, is not only from sin and death, but from everything that dehumanizes her including oppression, exploitation, injustice, and poverty. This is to be achieved by integral evangelization and proclamation of the Good News as proposed and implemented by the government, NGOs and the Church in the cemeteries of Cebu City. As agents to bring the mercy and compassion of God to the cemetery communities, it is the poor themselves that are reweaving and uncovering their design of liberation. But their liberation also “needs the personal involvement of all those who hear their cry. The concern of believers in their regard cannot be limited to a kind of assistance but requires a loving assistance that honors the person as such and seeks out her best interests” (Pope Francis, *Second*

World Day of the Poor, 3) and to inculcate the culture of generosity and create a community of missionary disciples rooted in God's love for the poor. The government, NGOs and the Church's goal is to bring awareness, educate, and empower the women in the cemeteries that they may be agents of dialogue, empowerment and liberation in their families and cemetery communities in particular.

Jesus calls women to set off down the road of their own liberation. After all, he has incorporated them into his church. Men and women are called to adopt a view, an outlook, that acknowledges the existence and condition of women. The advancement of women is only a particular aspect of the good news that Jesus proclaims to the poor (Bidegain 1989b, 117).

The mission is to empower the women to enable them to see that there is a better world outside the cemetery that is within their reach. It is a matter of saying yes to the challenge of helping liberate themselves. A yes that will push them to transform the chaos to order and practice dialogue towards education and faith formation that will allow them to see that their dream of a better life is within their reach and is doable. A yes that is like Mary's *Magnificat*.

Mary's yes is free and responsible by which she accepts being the vessel of the new creation to be embodied by her son Jesus. It is not a yes of self-denial almost of irresponsibility. The women of contemporary society, with freedom, responsibility, and availability, accept God's invitation to be part of the church that is to carry out the new evangelization, to share in the building of the new society (Bidegain 1989a, 34).

Mary, the lowly woman-servant of God, the model of missionary discipleship, is God's decree of liberation and a model of women's action today in the midst of their quest for liberation. Like Mary, the women in the cemeteries, are able to stimulate in their children a sense of feeling for their own life, of working towards a better life for them and their families. "Women are called to find their own femininity in the likeness of Mary" (Stein)⁷ who embraced her motherhood and discipleship wholeheartedly.

In today's world of sorrow and suffering, the task of women in the cemeteries is "to advocate, foster, further and assume a commitment of building a new society, so that they may never cease to give birth" (Bidegain 1989b, 119) to children who are empowered and liberated from the sufferings, poverty and "everything that dehumanizes and prevents human beings from becoming what they are called to be" (Mulackal 107–110). Feminist Mary John Mananzan firmly believes that "there is no total human liberation without the

liberation of women in the society. And this is not automatic consequence of either economic development or political revolution” (Mananzan 64). And it certainly takes not a top down process of liberation but a formation community of missionary disciples, in solidarity with those who seek to collaborate with these marginalized and subaltern voices to become transformed and empowered men and women missionary disciples.

f. Women building a community of missionary disciples

The women are called to take part in the genuine development of their own cemetery communities according to their abilities and gifts and join hands with the community in a concerted effort to see that “the task of building structures of peace and development demands the building down of all vertical dominance subordination structures” (Mananzan 56). As women of faith, the women also have the “responsibility to empower one another to constantly struggle to move the leadership of our respective nation-states beyond the short sighted approach to peace that addresses the complex socio-economic, political and cultural conflicts with military solutions” (Mananzan 64). Women “should realize their history as a particular model of the struggle of hope in a community of justice and love, concretized for them here and now” (Mulackal 109). Undeniably, there is a need for transformation that brings about life change: chaos to cosmos, disorder to order, from mess to peace because “God’s liberation is a saving act for those who lift up to him their sorrow and distress. The bondage of poverty is shattered by the power of God’s intervention” (Pope Francis, *Message on the Second World Day of the Poor*, 4). After having experienced the healing power of Jesus and His dominance over the force of the demon whom Jesus sent to the netherworld, the person who was once possessed by legion was sitting there clothed and in her right mind, and is now calm and composed. She was “showing all the signs of rationality and peace, reacts in a radical way by asking to be allowed to leave all and follow Jesus” (Kilgallen 98). Then the people of the Decapolis who came to see what it was that had happened were amazed. Rightly the healing and transforming encounter between the demoniac and Jesus is truly a work of an extraordinary being, of the Divine, that even the greatest power of the demon cannot compare. It was God’s powerful dialogue with his people – Gentile or Jew – “that Jesus can and will bring complete liberation someday, for he has the power and the love to do it” (Kilgallen 99).

Today, there are a lot of persons that can be represented by the Gerasene demoniac, numerous poor and nameless women who go through various kinds of painful and difficult life transitions, the poor, the frustrated, the unfulfilled, the women abandoned by their husbands, and those in grief. The Gerasene

demoniac can also represent women who try to overcome obstacles in their homes, in their places of work, and in foreign countries. “The plight of today’s poor women and children reminds us of Israel’s poor people and of the world’s poor who have to continually scrounge for food to simply survive” (cf. Gallares 119–122).

Jesus asked the person to go home to her family, friends and neighbors, to share the experience of freedom and liberation she experienced. Sending her home was an assertion that God is present not only in the temples but also in the homes, in the midst of families and friends. In the Filipino context, home is always associated with women, mothers and motherhood, to their nurturing, loving and life-giving presence. To “go home” means to be sent and begin the mission among those closest to their heart. By being isolated in the tomb, the light of the home was missing. Home was enveloped in darkness, as the light was in fetters and chains. Empowering these mothers/wives and telling them to go home and to bring the light back to the home, will transform the whole family and bring them to liberation. John Paul II, in one of his discourses said:

Within Christianity, more than in any other religion, and since its very beginning, women have had a special dignity, of which the New Testament shows us many important aspects it is evident that women are meant to form part of the living and working structure of Christianity in so prominent a manner that perhaps not all their potentialities have yet been made clear (Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 1).

Jesus asked the cured person to focus her energy to proclaiming the spectacular work God has done for her and so she does. She went away and began to proclaim how much Jesus had done for her. At the end of the narrative, the possessed person found her voice. She has regained her dignity as God’s creation, as God’s image and called to share in the mission of God. Like the demoniac, the poor, including the women in the cemeteries who encounter Jesus are empowered to proclaim the good things that God has done for them. The healing word of the Lord liberates them from the shackles and chains that entangle them and emboldens them for the mission that awaits them.

Like Mary who was an instrument used by God in the fulfillment of His plan of salvation, the women in the cemeteries are called to share in Mary’s yes to the mission. Indeed, “to be a church is to be in mission, to be in mission is to be responsive to the demands of the gospel in particular contexts, to be continually reinventing itself as it struggles with and approaches new situations, new peoples, new cultures and new questions” (Bevans and Schroeder 31). The women in the cemeteries are empowered to be the prime movers of their

and their families' transformation and liberation because "man's social nature makes it evident that the progress of the human person and the advance of society itself hinge on one another" (GS 25). With this, the goal is to help empower these women, gain knowledge, and experience the goodness and mercy of God through their constant dialogue and encounter with the community development officers. Their encounter and dialogue and solidarity aim to allow the women cemetery dwellers and their fellow pilgrims to see that

against this dramatic picture of poverty, oppression, and the threat of total destruction, a new consciousness has arisen among [them] the downtrodden. This growing consciousness of the tragic reality of the Third World has caused the irruption of exploited classes, marginalized cultures (Fabella and Torres 195).

Undeniably these women will gain strength in their struggle to liberate themselves in particular and the community in general. "By stretching their own visions and paradigms, they can establish new, shared ground on which they can truly understand each other and the gap can be bridged" (Knitter 22). With this, their eyes will be opened to see that there is a better world outside the cemetery and it is within their reach, thus, change will flow from them to their children's future. Pope Francis reminded all Christians that "God's salvation is a hand held out to the poor, a hand that welcomes, protects, and enables them to experience the friendship they need. From this concrete and tangible proximity, a genuine path of liberation emerges" (Francis, *Message on the Second World Day of the Poor*). This context and response is not uncommon in other areas of the many Third World countries. In the face of poverty, encounter and dialogue are crucial in the attainment of the Church's integral evangelization program among the poor and the marginalized. As Pope Francis said in EG "every individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and to enable them to be part of society" (EG 18).

Conclusion

The biblical narrative of the Healing of the Gerasene demoniac can be a mirror that reflects and sheds light on the context or situation of the cemetery dwellers at the margins of the society. In the encounter between Jesus and the Gerasene demoniac, dialogue took place which led to the empowerment and liberation of the demoniac from unclean spirits and her/his empowerment to proclaim to others this experience of liberation. This is what Pope Francis

has been advocating the culture of encounter. Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter” (de Moraes). Pope Francis calls for culture of encounter numerous times. He believes that this culture helps in transcending differences and divisions present in the society. This means working to create a many-faceted polyhedron whose different sides form a variegated unity, in which “the whole is greater than the part” (EG 237).

The situation of the cemetery dwellers can be transformed in a meaningful way if and when the families, particularly the women, engage in dialogue among themselves and with the different community development workers of the government, NGOs and the Church who come to their aid. Like the encounter between Jesus and the Gerasene demoniac, an enriched encounter and dialogue of life and action between the women cemetery dwellers and the community development officers of the government, NGOs and the Church will bring about a liberation from the shackles of poverty, marginalization and subalternation. Truly, dialogue and encounter transform lives. The image of the polyhedron used by Pope Francis can represent a society where differences co-exist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations where each of us can learn from others. No one is useless and no is expendable... This also means finding ways to include those on the peripheries of life. For they have another way of looking at things; they see aspects of reality that are invisible to the centers of power where weighty decisions are made (FT 215).

By integrating dialogue as a missiological concept to the social work of the government, NGOs and the Church, the group’s response to the situation of the cemetery dwellers will no longer be merely humanitarian social work but be genuinely part of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Through ongoing dialogue of life and action with the community development officers, the women cemetery dwellers as well as their families overcome the prejudices and assumptions about themselves, towards each other in the community, and toward the community development officers. It gives them the opportunity to think, behave, and interact among themselves and with the community development officers in a mature way. As Pope Francis emphasis, “let us return to promoting the good, for ourselves and for the whole human family, and thus advance together towards and authentic and integral growth. Every society needs to ensure their values are passed on; otherwise, what is handed down are selfishness, violence, corruption in its various forms, indifference and, ultimately, a life closed to transcendence and entrenched in individual interests (FT 113).

Dialogue of life and action pushes and urges every woman cemetery dweller and every community development officers of the government, NGOs

and the Church to move towards the liberation of their individual lives and the community as a whole. Such dialogue builds up their appreciation of their human dignity which is an indispensable step along the path towards human self-realization. The needy generally practice the special solidarity that exists among those who are poor and suffering, and which our civilization seems to have forgotten or would prefer in fact to forget. Solidarity is a word that is not always well received; in certain situations, it has become a dirty word, a word that dare not be said... solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community. It means that lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labor rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money... solidarity, understood in its most profound meaning, is a way of making history, and this what popular movements are doing (Pope Francis, *Address to Participants in the Meeting of Popular Movements*, 28 October 2014).

Continuous encounter with the community development officers stimulates the women cemetery dwellers' understanding of "all the experiences and encounters they had in their lives and out of which come the motivations, inspirations, and commitment that make them live and decide in a particular way towards their own liberation" (Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Sociali*). This form their world view of a community capable of inclusion rather than marginalization. A community of missionary disciples who believes that "a truly human and fraternal society will be capable of ensuring in an efficient and stable way that each of its members is accompanied at every stage of life. Not only by providing for their basic needs, but by enabling them to give the best of themselves, even though their performance may be less than optimum, their pace slow or their efficiency limited" (FT 110).

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Suzette Nellas Patosa – laywoman from the Philippines who is currently pursuing her doctorate research on women, migration, and evangelization at Pontificia Università Gregoriana while working in the Finance Department of the Generalate of an International Missionary Congregation in Rome. She has also served as Co-Convenor of the IACM Continental Conferences in Asia and has co-edited a book on the conference proceedings Mission and Asia. She was the Academic Secretary of the Divine Word Institute of Mission Studies in Tagaytay City and was actively involved in organizing mission exposures and mission orientation courses for priests, religious, and the laity, treasurer@iacm-catholic.org

¹ From this poverty incidence, the City of Cebu tallies a 9% poverty incidence among families (cf. Mondonedo-Ynot).

² The families who are the subjects of this article live in the cemeteries Carreta, Chinese, and Lorega. The author was a Community Development Officer among the cemetery dwellers. The three cemeteries will be referred to as cemeteries in the subsequent parts of the paper.

³ Gramsci is a Marxist philosopher who coined “subaltern” as a synonym for the proletariat. Further, the prisoner Gramsci relates subaltern to the “dominance of culturally diverse society by the ruling class who manipulate the culture of the society the beliefs and explanations, perceptions, values, etc. so that the worldview of the ruling class becomes the cultural norm (cf. Bullock and Trombley 387–388).

⁴ *Lapida* is a carved or engraved stone made of granite which marks the grave of a dead person.

⁵ Man, in Greek, is ἄνθρωπος: *anthropos* (*anth'-ro-pos*) which means 1) a human being, whether male or female, including all human individuals in general (*Greek Dictionary [Lexicon-Concordance]*) (*The Gospel of Mark*). According to Professor Edgar Javier, *anthropos* is, by nature, a social being (Javier 53). In this study, *anthropos* (human being) will be taken to mean the women sector of the society. The person possessed with unclean spirits described in the text functions as a *symbol* of the women (especially the women cemetery dwellers) who experience marginalization in the society and will be referred to as “she” or “her”.

⁶ EG 187 as quoted in Pope Francis, *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Lenten Brotherhood Campaign 2015 in Brazil*.

⁷ (Stein) (Sanchez).