

*Bodies, Spirits, and the Living Landscape:
Interpreting the Bible in Owamboland,
Namibia*

Volume 1 of 2

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as a thesis for the degree of
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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between Christianity and autochthonous (indigenous, pre-Christian) worldviews and practices amongst the Aandonga of Owamboland, Northern Namibia. Using participant contributions from a series of Contextual Bible Study (CBS) sessions (with groups of men, women, and children), and supplemented by ethnographic contextualisation, it challenges the oft-contended notion that Christian worldviews and practices have erased the significance of African Traditional Religion for Ndonga (or wider Owambo) communities.

The enduring significance of autochthonous worldviews and practices is explored using responses to six biblical texts, each of which relates to at least one of three themes: bodies, spirits, and landscapes. The study examines feasting bodies (The Parable of the Wedding Banquet), bleeding bodies (The Haemorrhaging Woman), and possessed bodies (Legion). It considers possession spirits (Legion), natural spirits (the so-called 'Nature Miracles'), and ancestor spirits (Resurrection appearances). Perspectives on landscapes are highlighted particularly in relation to aspects of the natural environment (the 'Nature Miracles') and the locations explored by an itinerant demoniac (Legion). Responses to the texts engender, *inter alia*, discussions of contemporary perspectives on diviner-healers (*oonganga*), witchcraft (*uulodhi*), the homestead (*egumbo*), burial grounds (*omayendo*, *oompampa*), spirits (*iiluli*, *oompwidhuli*), ancestors (*aathithi*), material agency (for example, apotropaic amulets), and the 'traditional' wedding (*ohango*).

Having analysed the ways in which autochthonous worldviews informed participants' interpretations of the particular texts considered (Matthew 22:1-14 & Luke 14:7-11; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:26-39; Mark 4:35-41 & 6:45-52; Luke 24), each set of interpretations is brought into conversation with professional biblical scholarship. The study therefore highlights the ways in which these grassroots, 'contextual' interpretations might nuance New Testament interpretations returned by the Academy, particularly by highlighting the highly contextual nature of the latter.

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Index of Abbreviations

General

ATR	African Traditional Religion
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBS	Contextual Bible Study
ELCIN	The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia
ELOC	The Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church
GNT English	The Holy Bible, Good News Translation in English
GNT <i>Oshindonga</i>	The Holy Bible (<i>Ombiimbeli Ondjapuki</i>), Good News Translation in <i>Oshindonga</i>
NRSV	The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
SBL	The Society for Biblical Literature
SNTS	The Society for New Testament Studies
SPCK	The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge

Journals

<i>AmEth</i>	<i>American Ethnologist</i>
<i>ARA</i>	<i>Annual Review of Anthropology</i>
<i>BInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>The Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>NTStud</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBTh</i>	<i>Journal of Black Theology</i>
<i>JAmF</i>	<i>Journal of American Folklore</i>
<i>JRA</i>	<i>Journal of Religion in Africa</i>
<i>JSAS</i>	<i>Journal of Southern African Studies</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JThSA</i>	<i>Journal of Theology for Southern Africa</i>

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Introduction

Research Context

This study focuses on biblical interpretation in the area of Northern Namibia known as Owamboland and, more specifically, the Southeastern kingdom of Ondonga. The majority of the Owambo (and, indeed, Namibian) population inhabits the Cuvelai floodplain, upon which Ondonga lies.¹ This floodplain extends northwards from the Etosha salt pan (now within the Etosha National Park) up to the border with Angola (and beyond). Missionary and colonial powers knew the area as 'Owamboland' and the South African authorities designated it a homeland, or 'Native Reserve', in line with the apartheid policies operational in South Africa (and Namibia, then known as South West Africa) after the Second World War. Namibia is thus a postcolonial context, having endured the imposition of German, British and South African regimes (the last ruling from 1948-1990).

Although this area is still known as 'Owamboland' and referred to as such by many, the politically and ethnically neutral referents 'the North', 'North-Central

¹ The Aandonga occupy the Ondonga region and speak *Oshindonga*, one of the *Oshiwambo* languages. In many areas of Owamboland, Ondonga amongst them, traditional authorities (headed by chiefs or kings) co-exist alongside regional and centralised administrative systems of governance. It is thus still relevant to speak of Ondonga as a kingdom. The Ndonga and (geographically proximate) Kwanyama populations are the largest sub-groups of the *Aawambo*. However, given the lack of literature on Namibia and especially on the *Aawambo*, works will be consulted here that have focused on the *Aawambo* more widely, both outside of the Aandonga, and *Oshiwambo*-speakers beyond Namibia's borders. I have made the conscious choice to follow the terminology and spelling suggested to me by my Ndonga friend, Lucia Namushinga. This seems most appropriate for a study that will be based on fieldwork in Lucia's home village. This is also the terminology used by most recent studies on the *Aawambo* and, most significantly, by scholars from the region. The most frequently used general terms are given here (further specialist terms are glossed in the main text):

Owamboland:	Owambo region of northern Namibia.
Oshiwambo:	Wambo language, Wambo thing(s).
Aawambo/Wambo:	People/Person from Owamboland. (plural prefix: aa-)
Ondonga:	Southeastern kingdom in Owamboland.
Oshindonga:	Ndonga language, Ndonga thing(s).
Aandonga/Omundonga:	People/Person from Ondonga.
Owambo/Ndonga:	Adjectives relating to Owambo/Ondonga.

The use of a definite/indefinite article aims to facilitate a smooth reading in English: I have chosen to refer to 'the *Aawambo*' and 'an *Omundonga*,' etc. Strictly speaking, *Aawambo* already means 'the Wambo people' (or 'Wambo people,' depending on context) and *Omundonga* means 'the/an Ndonga person.'

Namibia' or 'Northern Namibia' are also commonly used. These terms have been in place since Namibia achieved independence from South Africa in 1990. The Aawambo are just one of eleven officially recognised ethnic groups in Namibia. This study will refer to the area as Owamboland in order to distinguish clearly the territory of the Aawambo in the (central) North from the Kaokoveld in the Northwest and the Kavango and Zambezi (the latter being previously known as the Caprivi) regions in the Northeast.

Historically, Aawambo territory was, of course, not limited by international boundaries and thus extends beyond the Namibia-Angola border, just north of Oshikango. The Namibian territory known as Owamboland was constituted of eight historical kingdoms of Oshiwambo-speakers, of which Ondonga is the most south-easterly and was the first to be accessed by the missionaries in 1870. Including those to be found in Angola, there are, in fact, twelve Owambo groups. What was Owamboland is now divided into four administrative districts: Omusati, Oshana, Ohangwena and Oshikoto. The Ondonga kingdom has been subsumed into the Oshikoto region. The fieldwork for this study took place between November 2013 and September 2014 in Iihongo, a small village located approximately 25 kilometres southeast of Ondangwa (the central town in Ondonga). Ondangwa is roughly 680 kilometres north of Windhoek, Namibia's capital city.

Since 1870, the Ondonga region has been significantly influenced by the arrival of Christianity. Moves to Christianise Ondonga were first (and most successfully) undertaken by the Finnish Missionary Society. Their lasting influence endures in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (hereafter, ELCIN), albeit independent since 1954. Many of the missionaries were at pains to eliminate the aspects of local culture (*omuthigululwakalo*), worldviews and practices that they felt compromised Christianity (*uukristi*). By doing so, many missionary reports and ethnographies document what they deemed to be the successful, whole-scale replacement throughout the region of local forms of African Traditional Religion (hereafter, ATR) with Christianity. Most ethnographic, missionary and socio-historical works available on Ondonga (and wider Owamboland) conclude that this substitution (Christianity for autochthonous worldviews) has been concluded successfully. However, careful

examination of that literature, as well as recourse to studies focusing on particular aspects of life in Owamboland, suggests that the situation may yet be more complex and deserving of fresh examination. This raises various questions, amongst them: What is the relationship between ATR and Christianity? Which aspects (if any) of pre-Christian worldviews and practices are of enduring importance in an Ndonga context? Does 'traditional' Ndonga culture (*omuthigululwakalo gwaaNdonga*) inform biblical interpretation in a grassroots setting (and thereby demonstrate that indigenous worldviews permeate right to the core of Christianity in an Ndonga context)? How might grassroots interpretations from this setting inform, challenge, or nuance professional biblical scholarship?

Research Questions and Scope

The current study thus probes the interface between ATR and Christianity in Ondonga, seeking to explore the possibility of a more complex interaction between autochthonous worldviews and the religion that the vast majority of Namibia's population aligns itself with (over 90%) than scholarship hitherto has unveiled. It seeks to focus on biblical interpretation, both for its significance in indicating the extent to which autochthonous worldviews might persist (right into the heartlands of Christianity), and with a view to bringing grassroots interpretations into conversation with professional New Testament scholarship. However, this study is cross-disciplinary and descriptive-analytical in nature and its aim is not just to consider biblical interpretations. It is acknowledged that in order to construct a full picture of autochthonous Ndonga worldviews, a broader approach is required – one that considers the living context as well as textual interpretation. Anthropological study has been chosen to complement CBS, broadening the focus beyond the text and avoiding inappropriate levels of textocentrism in an 'oral residual' context (Draper 1996:60).

The three Key Research Questions (RQs) addressed by the ensuing study are as follows:

- RQ1. To what extent do Ndonga worldviews and practices (Ndonga ATR) persist in lihongo?
- RQ2. To what extent do Ndonga worldviews and practices (Ndonga ATR) influence lihongo interpretations of a selection of New Testament texts?

RQ3. How might those grassroots interpretations from lihongo inform, challenge, or nuance professional New Testament scholarship?

In examining RQ1 and RQ2, this study self-consciously avoids generalisations about Owamboland and, instead, narrows its focus to a particular context: the village of lihongo. Similarly, it cannot tackle the broader considerations that an anthropological study might attempt; it does not offer a structured or comprehensive overview of lihongo or Ondonga ways of life. By way of alternative, it focuses on three themes that have risen to prominence having considered the literature falling under Owambo studies and having analysed the CBS transcripts: Bodies, Spirits, and Landscapes. Each of these themes is examined from multiple viewpoints. For example, the fieldwork chapters touch on birthing, eating, bleeding, possessed, adorned, neo-natal, dead, and buried bodies. Spirits come to the fore as prominent presences in the lihongo community, influencing the living persons, their homes, land, and movements. Perspectives on landscapes are engaged when considering domestic, agricultural, burial and wilderness spaces (as well as the metaphorical, 'social landscape'). Each of the texts considered raises questions about at least one of these three themes (in chapter order and not an exhaustive list, such is the interwoven nature of the themes):

Chapter 4: The Parable of the Wedding Banquet (Matt. 22:1-14 & Luke 14:7-11)

Bodies: Feasting, Adorned, Initiated.

Spirits: Ancestral.

Landscapes: Domestic, Social.

Chapter 5: The Haemorrhaging Woman (Mark 5:21-43)

Bodies: Bleeding, Gendered, Healing.

Landscapes: Social.

Chapter 6: Legion (Luke 8:26-39)

Bodies: Out of Place, Possessed, Naked, Buried.

Spirits: Restless, Evil, Ancestral.

Landscapes: Domestic, Burial, Agricultural, Wild.

Chapter 7: Nature Miracles (Mark 4:35-41 & 6:45-52)

Spirits: Restless, Nature, Ancestral.

Landscapes: Weatherscapes, Waterscapes, Homestead.

Chapter 8: Resurrection Appearances (Luke 24)

Spirits: Restless, Ancestral.

Landscapes: Domestic, Burial, Agricultural, Social.

Engagement with professional biblical scholarship on the texts chosen (Matthew 22:1-14 & Luke 14:7-11; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:26-39; Mark 4:35-41 & 6:45-52; Luke 24)² (RQ3) is also (necessarily) limited; discussion partners came to the fore organically, based on the themes arising from CBS sessions on each text. However, perhaps due to the anthropological bent of the study (and the fact that since the late 1970s, there has been a growing and fruitful interest in cross-cultural and interdisciplinary studies within New Testament studies), social-scientific biblical interpretation has proved to be a particularly useful dialogue partner for the contextual interpretations gathered in this study.

² The Introduction to Part II offers further details about the selection of texts, as well as a description of the mechanics of the CBS sessions.

Methodological Approaches

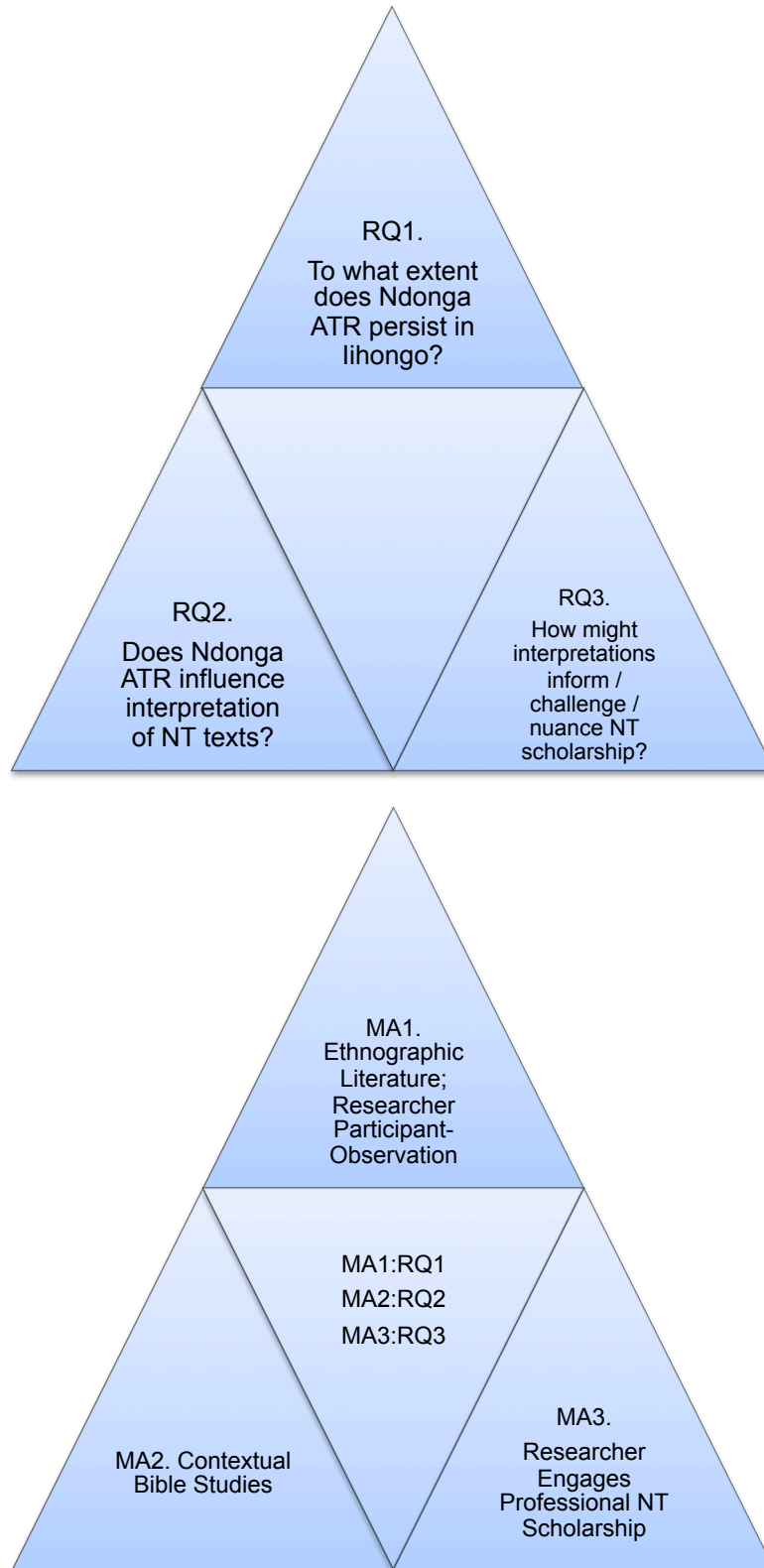


Figure 1: Key Research Questions (Abbreviated) and Respective Methodological Approaches (MAs)

In order to investigate the extent to which there might be continuity with pre-Christian worldviews (RQ1), this study necessarily required its own anthropological element. It has an anthropological backdrop and engages heavily with anthropological literature, asking, 'which aspects of local ATR and culture endure?' The use of ethnographic literature (anthropological, missionary-anthropological, socio-historical, etc.) is complemented by the participant-observation of the researcher in establishing past and present 'tradition' and 'culture' (Methodological Approach 1: MA1).

However, the study was not concerned solely with anthropological questions and, significantly, it was conducted by a researcher trained in biblical studies, not anthropology. It is concerned with the *interaction* and *interrelationship* between worldviews (RQ2), of which Christianity is one. The study also required, therefore, a methodological approach that allowed both researcher and participants to reflect on and discuss biblical texts and the participants' interpretations thereof. CBS was chosen as such a vehicle (MA2), facilitating as it does a discursive setting, in which community members can engage in free-form discussion about selected *texts*, as well as local *context* (CBS, then, addressed both RQ1 and RQ2). Sessions revolved around the researcher's questions about local culture (*omuthigululwakalo*) alongside questions about texts, enabling later analysis to trace aspects of correspondence. CBS, in addition, allowed for a firm focus on people; the study is explicitly rooted in the collaborative exploration of the themes (Bodies, Spirits, and Landscapes) with the community members amongst whom the fieldwork took place.

Engaging in a methodological approach expressly focused on the Bible was of particular significance. One could argue that it would be much less surprising to find continued practice of the 'traditional' outside of the church because that realm was further from the influence of the missionaries. To uncover the influence of pre-Christian worldviews in biblical interpretations would, by contrast, be particularly interesting, as these would be definitive evidence that the authority of the missionaries to eliminate 'pagan' beliefs continues to be challenged, and that what arrived as the 'white man's Bible' truly has been appropriated by the Owambo community. The influence of autochthonous worldviews on biblical interpretations in this context is surely a barometer of the

enduring significance of the 'traditional', of Ndonga culture (*omuthigululwakalo gwaaNdonga*) alongside and intertwined with Christianity (*uukristi*).

RQ3 – the question of how the interpretations returned by the participants might dialogue with New Testament scholarship – is specifically addressed by a third methodological element. Subsequent to the period of fieldwork, the CBS interpretations were analysed alongside contemporary interpretations from the realm of (predominantly, Western) professional scholarship (MA3). This served to highlight the salient themes in the grassroots interpretations that might inform, challenge, or nuance the interpretive approach of professional scholars by offering a cross-cultural perspective, and bring the culturally-situated, contextual perspective of the latter into greater relief.

Three methodological elements (MA1-3) combine, then, to bring about what is intended to be a holistic exploration of the persistence of autochthonous worldviews and practices in lihongo (including both their interaction with Christian worldviews and practices, and their engagement with scholarship) (RQ1-3). Investigation of missionary-ethnographic, ethnographic and socio-historical literature offers anthropological information concerning the times of the earliest missionaries to the present. In addition, a better understanding of the living context of the CBS participants has been gleaned from my residency and participant-observation in the community for a 10-month period (17th November 2013 until 15th September 2014). CBS sessions were undertaken to discuss context and interpretation of texts with community members (groups of men [*Ootate*: 'the men'], women [*Oomeme*: 'the women'], and children [*Aanona*: 'the children']). This was intended to explore whether the autochthonous informed biblical interpretation (with the Bible being the most 'Christian' of locations); were it to do so, the contention that Christianity has supplanted ATR would unquestionably be false. Finally, the sets (all group sessions on a given text) of grassroots interpretations are brought into conversation with professional scholarship.

The overall study is focused, using all of the elements above, on text (interpretation of both biblical and cultural 'scripts') as well as performance (lived experience and individual agency) in the consideration of ATR and

Christianity. All three of the above approaches are mutually informative and supportive in exploring the study's central research questions:

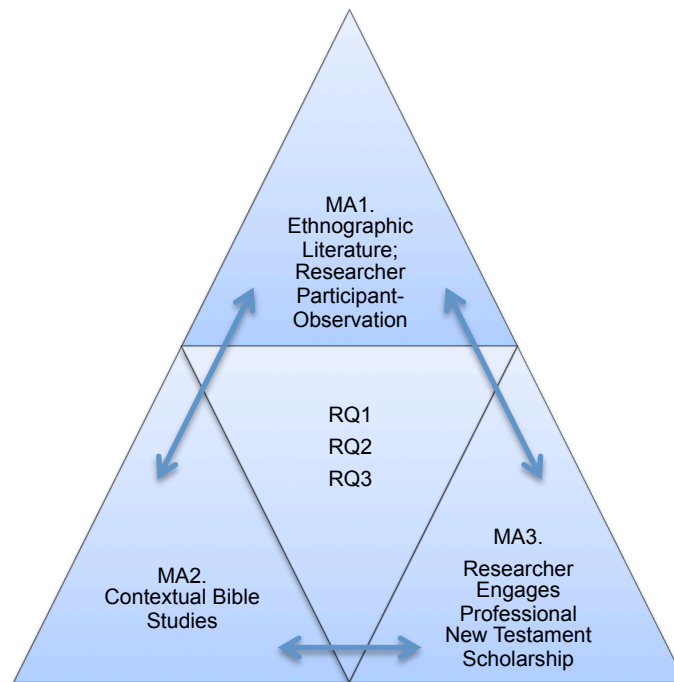


Figure 2: Mutual Support Offered by Methodological Approaches (MAs)

The interaction (Figure 2: arrows) between the complementary methodological aspects may be described as follows:

MA1 and MA2

- 5 Use of ethnographic literature enabled me to refine my questions for use in CBS sessions, whilst use of the literature combined with participant-observation facilitated the identification of enduring autochthonous beliefs and practices both in the living context and in CBS transcripts (MA1 supporting MA2, or MA1:MA2).
- 6 Discussions of text and context in CBS sessions enabled the identification of aspects of local understanding that I wished to investigate further, whether in observation of the living context or in literature (MA2:MA1).

MA1 and MA3

- 7 Cross-cultural comparisons and contrasts are drawn by engaging ethnographic literature and the researcher’s cross-cultural experience. This (in its own right, as well as for the purposes of cross-cultural biblical interpretation) enables a reflexive approach, minimises ethnocentrism, and challenges the hegemony of the Western worldview (MA1 \leftrightarrow MA3).

MA2 and MA3

- 8 An engagement between the CBS interpretations and professional New Testament studies serves to bring into relief the notable themes and trends in *both* bodies of ‘contextual’ interpretation, those of lihongo *and* professional scholarship (MA2 \leftrightarrow MA3).

In summary, then, each Research Question has a dedicated Methodological Approach. However, that MA is assisted by at least one other, as illustrated below:

Research Question	Primary MA	Additional MA(s)
RQ1 To what extent do Ndonga worldviews and practices (Ndonga ATR) persist in lihongo?	MA1 Ethnographic Literature; Researcher Participant-Observation.	MA2
RQ2 To what extent do Ndonga worldviews and practices (Ndonga ATR) influence lihongo interpretations of a selection of New Testament texts?	MA2 Contextual Bible Study.	MA1
RQ3 How might grassroots interpretations from lihongo inform, challenge, or nuance professional New Testament scholarship?	MA3 Researcher Engages Professional New Testament Scholarship.	MA1, MA2

Figure 3: Relationship between RQs and MAs (MA1, MA2, MA3)

Structure of the Thesis

Part I of the study is concerned with methodology and offers a conceptual treatment of methodological approaches taken. After a brief introduction, Chapter 1 critically engages the ethnographic literature on the Ondonga (and, where relevant, wider Owambo) region. Chapter 2 considers the Crisis of Representation in Anthropology, and details the ways in which the approach of the current study has been informed by a heightened awareness of the need for, *inter alia*, reflexivity and polyphony. Chapter 3 offers a critical appraisal of CBS and details the adapted form used in this instance. Part I concludes with a distillation of the methodological complementarity of CBS and anthropological research.

Part II of the study opens with an introductory reflection on the period of fieldwork and a description of the practical workings of the CBS sessions (including text selection, as well as the facilitation and composition of groups). Chapters 4-8 present, analyse and bring into conversation with professional scholarship the biblical interpretations returned by the CBS groups in Iihongo. This is followed by the final chapter – the conclusions – which offers a summary of the aspects of autochthonous worldviews and practices that this study has revealed to endure in Iihongo (considered thematically). It also outlines which of those aspects influenced interpretation of the New Testament texts, and distills for the reader the ways in which the grassroots interpretations dialogued with professional New Testament scholarship.

That the study aims to go beyond just an investigation of the interaction between Christianity and autochthonous worldviews becomes particularly apparent in the structure and content of the chapters analysing the CBS sessions (Chapters 4-8). Each of the fieldwork chapters presents the salient themes of the CBS discussions, contextualising them in their anthropological setting (using ethnographic and other literature) before engaging academic scholarship. The contextual interpretations must themselves be contextualised in order to appreciate aspects of continuity with past worldviews and practices (addressing RQ1 & RQ2). However, bringing forth grassroots interpretations

does not solely serve the purpose of investigating the interactions between ATR and Christianity (although it is argued to be a suitable tool to do so, focusing as it does on the *point of contact between context and text*, explicitly valuing the former in interpretation of the latter). The additional level of dialogue that threads through this study is that between the lihongo interpretations and academic scholarship concerning each of the texts considered (RQ3). The transcripts form an extremely valuable corpus of interpretations from groups of 'ordinary' readers (West 2007b). I have sought to do justice to the fresh insights the participants brought to the texts, as well as to their support for the project, by bringing the salient themes from each CBS round into conversation with biblical scholarship. Bringing to the fore the contextual nature of all interpretations (academic or not, Namibian or British [and so on]), the lihongo interpretations have challenged many of my own assumptions, offered fresh lenses through which to consider the texts, and encouraged me to reappraise critically the similarly (but often unacknowledged) perspectival nature of some of the dominant voices in New Testament scholarship.

Part I: Methodology

Introduction to Part I: Methodology

Part I of the study comprises three chapters; together they offer a *conceptual outline* of the *methodological approaches* (MA1 and MA2) taken to address the first two research questions (RQ1 and RQ2). These two questions ask the following:

RQ1. To what extent do Ndonga worldviews and practices (Ndonga ATR) persist in lihongo?

RQ2. To what extent do Ndonga worldviews and practices (Ndonga ATR) influence lihongo interpretations of a selection of New Testament texts?

As indicated in the overall introduction, to explore each of these questions I have identified a dedicated methodological approach (MA). Additionally, dedicated MAs find support in the other approaches adopted in the study. To that end, RQ1 is explored primarily by MA1: an investigation of relevant literature in the field of Owambo studies, coupled with the researcher's fieldwork experience of the context. In this section, then, the reader is introduced to the literature on the Owambo context (Chapter 1); that literature will later facilitate an analysis of the persistence of autochthonous worldviews where suggested by the fieldwork experience and CBS sessions. To complement this, I offer the theoretical reflections on the processes of fieldwork and ethnography that influenced my approach to the fieldwork itself (Chapter 2). That is followed by a conceptual treatment of MA2: Contextual Bible Study (Chapter 3), through which the reader is introduced to (and offered a critical reflection on) this process of reading and interpreting biblical texts with grassroots community groups – the focus of RQ2.

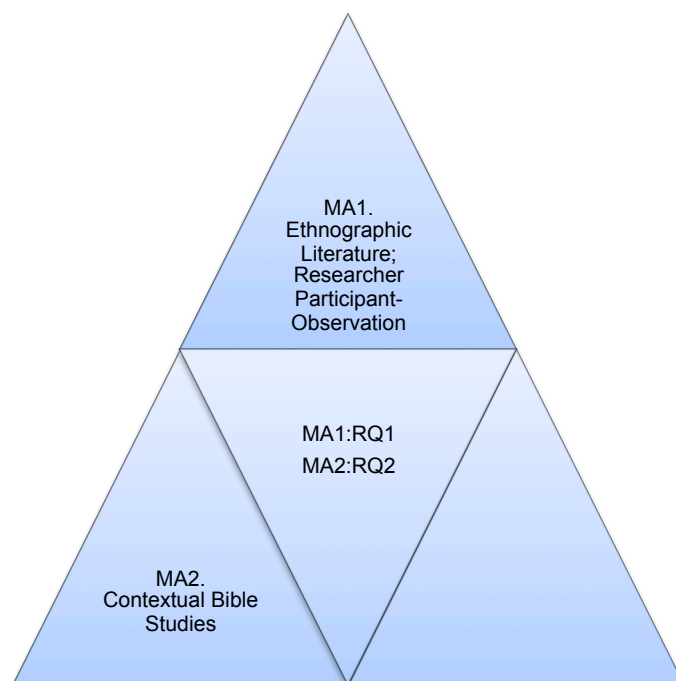


Figure 4: Methodological Approaches (MAs) Presented in Part I

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the literature on the region – that which will be later used to contextualise the interpretive responses to the biblical texts – and explores a tension therein, which acted as one of the prompts for this piece of research. Macro-scale studies of the Owambo context have concluded that the influence of indigenous worldviews has been diminished to a non-existent (or almost non-existent) level, such has been the extent and depth of the success of the Christian mission to the region. However, studies with a more particular focus (geographical or topical) often point to the enduring legacy of autochthonous worldviews. Chapter 1 seeks to investigate this literary landscape and illustrate the need for a particular and bespoke investigation of the enduring influence of autochthonous worldviews.

Chapter 2 offers the reader an overview of the ‘crisis of representation’ and ‘reflexive turn’ that occurred in social anthropology in the 1980s. These moments of profound epistemological crisis caused fundamental changes in what anthropologists could and would seek to ‘know’ and convey about the ‘cultures’ they studied and wrote about, as well as encouraging them to reflect on their own influence on the fieldwork context and the resulting ethnography. I draw on selected works from this discipline to carve out a reflexive and

polyphonic approach to the anthropological elements of this study, characterised by dispersed authority (collaboration). Chapter 2 both justifies these requirements and illustrates how they relate to the period of fieldwork in lihongo and the subsequent write-up.

Chapter 3 outlines CBS: a collaborative approach to biblical interpretation on the margins, which shares many emphases with reflexive anthropology. The choice of this methodology is justified, especially with reference to its focus on dispersed authority (decentred biblical criticism), the avoidance of ethnocentrism, and the recognition and celebration of context. I focus particularly on the work of Gerald O. West and the Ujamaa Centre as the pioneers of CBS in Southern Africa, and delimit the extent to which this project shares West's method. An exploration of the criticisms that have been levelled at CBS encourages a degree of reflexivity comparable to that stimulated by the previous chapter.

Overall, then, Part I of the study aims to set out the conceptual methodological approach adopted to investigate RQ1 and RQ2. I have engineered a methodological partnership to explore the tension identified as characterising Owambo studies: that between macro-scale studies (which present a uniformly 'Christianised' landscape) and micro-scale studies (suggestive of more complex interrelationship between autochthonous and Christian worldviews). The methodology in this study focuses particularly on biblical interpretation (on the basis that if autochthonous worldviews are in evidence in that milieu, they are likely to pervade the wider context), but has an anthropological backdrop. The conclusion to Part I briefly summarises the areas of complementarity and mutual support between anthropology and CBS in answering RQ1 and RQ2, thereby facilitating a smooth transition into Part II and the practical study: the results of the fieldwork in lihongo.

Chapter 1 The Enduring Significance of Autochthonous Worldviews and Practices in Contemporary Owambo Societies

According to Meredith McKittrick, 'from the perspective of the 1990s, ... more than 90 percent of the [Owambo] population was Christian, and virtually all indigenous religious practice, from male initiation to rainmaking to offering sacrifices to ancestors, had vanished' (2002:1). McKittrick is not alone in suggesting that pre-Christian religious beliefs and practices are no longer in evidence amongst Owambo Christians; this conclusion is representative of the claims made by broad-scope studies of religious worldviews in Owamboland. However, the picture painted by specialised and localised studies (including those focused on themes beyond the explicitly 'religious') presents a more complex situation. This study aims to probe the tension between the two (macro- and micro-scale studies) in a specific exploration of the relationship between autochthonous worldviews and Christian worldviews in Owamboland, by way of a focused study on one community in the Ondonga region. It asks the question: to what extent do pre-Christian worldviews remain significantly influential in the lives, beliefs and identities of the Ndonga Christians in Iihongo?

McKittrick's claim (and those of other, overarching studies) provide a starting point from which to bring in, for the purposes of comparison and contrast, recent (micro-scale) scholarly works on Owamboland, which point to a greater degree toward the complex nature of contemporary religious beliefs and identities of the Owambo. These works are, notably, not always focused on religion itself but offer illuminating research into material culture, illness and healing, and heritage museums, for example. The relevance and timeliness of the current study is grounded in the unresolved tension between macro- and micro-scale studies, with the overarching claims to wholesale Christianisation challenged by localised, topical studies, itself suggestive that the majority of the scholarship on religion in the region may have over-simplified the case. Dedicated research is therefore merited into the complexities of the religious landscape of Owamboland, taking into account works from Owambo studies as a whole.

Current Scholarship

A moderate amount of scholarship has been undertaken on Owambo societies, engaging with such issues as socio-historical development, missionisation, traditional belief systems, traditional political structures, and medicine. However, relatively little scholarship is available that explicitly focuses on religious belief and identity in *contemporary* Owambo communities. In particular, *locally* focused studies on the contemporary religious identities of the Aandonga are lacking. What research there is has taken an overarching approach, attempting to describe patterns of religious belief in Owamboland as a whole. The resulting conclusions from these studies are necessarily generalisations. Various scholars, therefore, present Owamboland as having experienced a neat cleavage with its religious past, frequently making reference to the success of the missionary endeavours in deliberately eliminating pre-Christian worldviews and practices and establishing Christianity amongst the Aawambo. This study aims to investigate the claim that such a seamless transition has taken place and question whether it might be a heavy-handed oversimplification of the issue, which rests (in part) on a peculiarly Western, binary notion of the 'religious' and the 'non-religious'. In particular, three articulations of the oversimplification referred to are engaged with because they are most stark in their representation of the situation: (a) Teddy Aarni (1982); (b) Maija Hiltunen (1986 and 1993); and (c) Meredith McKittrick (2002).

- (a) In 1982, Aarni undertook a study of the Owambo religious worldview (itself a generalisation), and stated that 'sources like interviews and field research amongst the Ovambos are of little use today, since most Ovambos are now Christians. The few non-Christians who exist in Owamboland are unwilling to disclose any knowledge of e.g. the old Kalunga [Owambo Supreme Being] concept to an outsider' (1982:9-10). Given that no single piece of research has investigated the extent to which traditional beliefs and practices remain influential in the lives of contemporary Christian Aawambo, this would appear to be an unjustified claim. Not only do Aarni's comments suggest that there is a homogeneous belief system shared by a whole population, but they also

betray his uncritical assumptions that the *Kalunga* and Christian belief systems are monolithic, and will be subject to a neat exchange.

(b) In the ensuing years, Hiltunen (1986, 1993) produced complementary monographs on the magico-religious world of the Aawambo, based on Finnish missionary records and her own missionary experience in the region. In her first work, she states categorically that ‘the belief in [witchcraft and sorcery] has vanished’ (1986:157). In her second study, Hiltunen concludes that ‘today good magic no longer occurs in Ovambo to the extent it did about a hundred years ago. As Christianity has gained a foothold, good and bad magic has been made obsolete’ (1993:10). These claims, too, are questionable; as stated, there has been no dedicated research to date on the continuing expression and influence of traditional beliefs in this context. In addition, Hiltunen seeks to generalise across the Owambo population.

(c) McKittrick has produced one of the most comprehensive socio-historical studies of Owamboland of recent times in *To Dwell Secure: Generation, Christianity, and Colonialism in Ovamboland* (2002). This study of Owamboland is focused on ‘why its peoples embraced Christianity with such distinctive enthusiasm’ (2002:3). McKittrick traces the phases Christianity goes through in the region, beginning with the arrival of the missionaries with ‘*uukristi*, which they opposed to something they called *uupagani*’ (2002:13). Despite the success of *uukristi* (Christianity), there were protracted ‘struggles’ regarding how distinct it had to be from *uupagani* (‘paganism’). Not all could accept the behavioural changes demanded by belonging to *uukristi* and some abandoned it entirely (2002:15). The restrictions proved particularly irksome to the older, wealthier, and more powerful members of the community (2002:92). The situation in the 1930s is notable for its ‘fluidity’, there being a ‘mass “reversion” to indigenous practices that the missionaries in the east identified’ (2002:212). However, the ‘blurring’ of the two traditions that had become apparent in the 1940s was tackled by the youth, who initiated the *Epapudhuko* (‘Awakening’) revival movement in 1952.

Thereafter, Christianity became the 'dominant social identity', with elders converting 'in large numbers' (2002:15).

Taking into account McKittrick's assessment in the opening quotation, I would now ask the question: is it reasonable to assume that 'virtually all indigenous religious practice ... had vanished' by the 1990s, not even a century (2002 publication) after the first Owambo chief was baptised (1912) and only a half century after *Epapudhuko* (1952)? Might not the 'struggles' (2002:15), 'blurring' (2002:8), and 'constant exchange of symbols, ideas, and knowledge' (2002:116) have had a lasting effect? Furthermore, there is notable emphasis in other contemporary studies on the Owambo on the resilience of traditional practices (in their 'original', revived or evolved forms). Given the exact focus of McKittrick's monograph, her exceptional scholarship and the recent nature of the work, it is with her contribution to the field that I particularly engage here.

At the outset of her book, McKittrick presents the reader with an Owambo's remarks regarding traditional religion:

Most people professed themselves unable to describe or explain a vast array of beliefs and rituals that had been recorded by missionaries and local informants from the 1870s to the 1930s. As one informant put it when asked by the author when the practice of rainmaking had died out:

All these things died with the coming of missionaries. ... Today these things are useless. If you try them today they won't work, but they were helpful in the past. I don't know what your people [Europeans] did to my people, because even non-Christians do not practice what they believe. The belief is there, but they don't practice it.

McKittrick (2002:1-2)

These comments set the tone for her treatment of traditional beliefs and practices; that is, the conclusion is drawn that 'virtually all' are no longer in evidence. It is also an example of the more subtle and complex picture that pervades her work and which the current study seeks to explore: the suggestion that elements of autochthonous worldviews might endure. In the end, McKittrick draws her conclusion *despite* repeated acknowledgements of the enduring attachment some held to traditional beliefs, as well as the resistance of many to the missionary (and later

popular youth) attempts to polarise *uukristi* and *uupagani* (2002:8, 15). She herself notes, for example, that ‘interest and impact did not necessarily correlate with conversion. A grown man who was baptized might remain a polygamist and “witch doctor,” while a child who proclaimed heartfelt belief in the missionaries’ God and had mastered the theology behind Christianity might not be baptized for years, even decades’ (2002:92-3). So, whilst pre-Christian worldviews may not be visible on the surface, they may yet have left an enduring legacy.

Reassessing the Impact of ‘Traditional’ Religion in Owamboland

The scholars above suggest that pre-Christian worldviews have, for all intents and purposes, vanished from northern Namibia. That claim presupposes that the total extinction of one religious tradition or set of worldviews has necessarily resulted from the introduction of another. It does not leave room, for example, for hybridity of beliefs and practices. It does not consider the significance of a corpus of traditional practices that continues to take place outside of the church setting. These practices may seem (even to the insider) to have nothing to do with pre-Christian worldviews. However, on closer inspection, it is possible to establish connective threads.

Thus far, the argument that a monolithic traditional belief system has been neatly replaced by a monolithic Christian belief system has not been tested. I suggest here that it should be. It may be a problematic assessment of the situation on two levels. Firstly, it is an act of considerable oversimplification to present complex belief systems as neat packages which might be exchanged, as if pawns on the chessboard of history. Secondly, the argument put forward in scholarship thus far depicts the transition from the ‘traditional’ to the contemporary Christian as a relatively seamless one that has taken place in under 150 years (1870-2015). This underestimates the persistence and resilience of worldviews held for considerably longer. It also ignores the fact that the metaphysical worldviews of Owambo communities are brought to bear not only on outward practice of faith but also on everyday life, be it life in the homestead or treatment of illness.

A survey of the literature reveals four areas in which the potential endurance of pre-Christian beliefs and practices might be investigated. Together, these areas demonstrate the appropriateness of a focused, local investigation into the interface between autochthonous culture and Christianity, in the form of the current study, and a testing of the claims of McKittrick, Aarni and Hiltunen:

- (i) Resistance to Christianisation and the Persistence of Pre-Christian Beliefs.
- (ii) Beyond Christian Heartlands: Considering ATR in 'Non-Religious' Domains.
- (iii) Use of Pre-Christian Terminology in Biblical Translation.
- (iv) A Renewed Interest in the Past.

(i) Resistance to Christianisation and the Persistence of Pre-Christian Beliefs.

It is notable that scholars examining the missionary history of Owamboland acknowledge in their own work the persistence of autochthonous worldviews, such as belief in ancestor spirits (*aathithi*) and witches (*aalodhi*). These lasted well into the second half-century of missionary activity, if primary sources such as the writings of Edwin M. Loeb are to be believed (1955a-c; Loeb, Koch & Loeb 1956). Similarly, academics at the forefront of Owambo studies do not deny that there was some resistance by the indigenous population to wholesale Christianisation; for example, that some people were reluctant to renounce polygamy, initiation ceremonies, or the services of diviner-healers (*oonganga*)³ is clear: 'girls ... were sometimes forcibly abducted from mission stations by their elders to participate in female initiation' (McKittrick 2002:113). In addition, there 'initially was not a rigorous separation between "Christian" and "pagan" but rather an intermingling, as people partook of the feasts, rituals, and beliefs of both' (2002:117). Indeed, many committed Christians had 'lapses into "paganism"' (2002:118). McKittrick refers to 'the permeability of Ovambo

³ The term *oonganga* (s.) is often translated as 'witchdoctor'. However, that designation carries pejorative connotations and may be misunderstood as aligning the practitioner with witchcraft. I translate it 'diviner-healer', recognising the diverse, positive services people sought/seek from *oonganga* (pl.). The translation 'witchdoctor' is only given when used by others, whether in scholarship or those I worked with. The term *oonganga* may be understood positively as a traditional healer who attends those who have been bewitched or who wish to engage apotropaic measures against such an eventuality. The negative connotations arise largely from the engagement between autochthonous culture and Christianity, the operations of *oonganga* being a cause of particular concern to the missionaries and leading to the demonisation of their services.

religion' and the fact that oral histories recount reversions to traditional beliefs and moving to and fro between the two, with some switching their allegiance and identity 'for many years' (2002:210). An example is provided in the first Christian Owambo king – not baptised until 1912 – who was not entirely committed to his conversion: McKittrick explains that he prohibited witchcraft but relied on diviner-healers, expelled an overseer of the female initiation ceremony but later (covertly) took another wife from just such a ceremony, and believed in the power of the sun, greeting it daily before a sacred fire (2002:142-4). Many kings, of course, were not nearly as accepting of Christianity in the first place, thinking that the missionaries were 'poisoning the culture' (McKittrick 2002:95). Additionally, for ordinary people, conversion could take a heavy social toll, often leading to 'estrangement from kin and community' and sometimes drawing them back toward the 'pagan' practice of their kin and community (McKittrick 2002:5, 118).

The strong ties of communities to traditional worldviews, as well as an unwillingness to forsake the traditional way of life meant that the 'missionaries declared themselves the arbiters of whether the necessary psychological transformation had occurred and thus whether an individual was ready to be baptized.' Sometimes this did not happen for decades (McKittrick 2002:8, 92-3). Perhaps, then, McKittrick is correct when she says that the Aawambo adopted Christianity with 'distinctive enthusiasm' – no doubt it was an enthusiastic response, but the break with pre-Christian beliefs and practices was perhaps not such a decisive one and does not necessarily merit her conclusion that pre-Christian beliefs have all but vanished. The ambiguity that she says endured into the 1940s may, after all, have lasted longer (2002:205).

Likewise, it is not clear why, despite such evidence of a protracted struggle between 'traditional' and Christian, scholars still maintain that autochthonous belief systems are no longer significant, or are not worth investigating through fieldwork in contemporary Owamboland (Aarni 1982:9). Hiltunen claims that the break converts made with traditional beliefs was 'sharp' (1986:17) and yet, later in her work (1986:30), she cites Loeb's statement that in 1955 the belief in witchcraft amongst the mission educated was 'as strong as ever' (1955a:45). Whilst this may appear to be an issue of the difference between a 'convert' and

one who is 'mission-educated', it belies a much more complex situation. Loeb's is by no means the only statement supporting the argument that pre-Christian beliefs persisted long after the arrival of the missionaries, after conversion in individuals, and to this day in some (or aspects of) Owambo societies.

There was also dispute and antagonism *between* missionaries, concerning the question of which local practices could remain, which were not 'un-Christian' (McKittrick 2002:99, 206). The Finnish missionaries were known for being against any type of syncretism (Brasche 2009:57-8; Shigwedha 2006:177), but they did not always agree on what exactly must be excluded from a Christian life in Owamboland and did not want to lose everything distinctively 'Owambo'. When the colonial officials arrived later, they positively supported the traditional ways – 'an older, more stable order' – in an attempt to maintain the *status quo* and avoid social mobility and challenge from the local population (McKittrick 2002:206, 217). This further complicates the picture, with the pre-Christian systems being bolstered by the colonisers.

In the early days of missionisation, McKittrick reports that some Aawambo oscillated between the two systems and some returned to traditional ways, unwilling to embrace monogamy or renounce engaging the services of diviner-healers (*oonganga*). She makes the rather generalised suggestion that 'many early African Christians (and, it should be said, African non-Christians as well) mirrored missionaries in their view of local and Christian religions as "mutually exclusive and even hostile to one another"' (McKittrick 2002:10, citing Elphick & Davenport 1997:90). However, she also points out that even in the early days there was cross-pollination: 'the missionaries observed the blurring of Christian and Ovambo tales of origin' (2002:8). Furthermore, there was an element of 'acculturation' to the encounter between the two traditions (2002:206).

However, McKittrick concludes that, after the youth-led revival movement (*Epapudhuko*) in the 1950s, 'one form of *uukristi* came to dominate – that which placed it in direct opposition to *uupagani*' (2002:9). As the arguments unfold below, it will become clear why a picture of Christianity in *direct opposition* to pre-Christian worldviews is problematic for the present day, even if it were true at the time of the revival. McKittrick's conclusion that traditional beliefs and

practices had 'all but vanished' in the 1990s appears to rest on this polarity. It fails to take into account the agency of individuals in expressing resistance. For example, clothing and the body have been used precisely to resist the influence of Christianisation: Vilho Shigwedha reports that some women went to church (as recently as the 1990s in one of the Western kingdoms) dressed in traditional leather costumes and crowns and with bodies adorned with red ochre, perhaps in protest at the church's or the local Christian community's denigration of (or refusal to incorporate) local custom and beliefs (2006:181-2).

McKittrick cites G. W. Dymond's remarks that the Church 'has convinced [the Aawambo] of the falsity and futility of ancestor-worship and the countless rites associated with it, without convincing them of the truth of Christianity' (1950:150). This would appear to suggest they were having success in eradicating pre-Christian beliefs. However, this is but one category of 'pagan' response to Christianity to which the missionary Dymond refers. In fact, he lists four groups (McKittrick does not mention the other three):

- i. Those who have had their thoughts 'revolutionized' and 'who have become faithful members of the Church'.
- ii. Those who 'contrive to get as much as they can out of both systems, the pagan and the Christian'.
- iii. Those for whom the effect of the arrival of Christianity has been to 'deprive them of such faith as they once had, without putting any other faith in its place.' (It is to this group that McKittrick refers.)
- iv. The 'old guard of orthodox ancestor-worshippers'.

Dymond (1950:152-3)

If Dymond was correct that autochthonous worldviews endured in two of the four groups (ii and iv), then the elimination of those worldviews (suggested by Aarni, Hiltunen and McKittrick) has supposedly occurred in fewer than seventy years (1950-2015). By contrast, Dymond's account of his time with the Kwanyama communities clearly points toward the resilience of autochthonous worldviews and the coexistence of the two systems, at least amongst some:

In the process of the years there has grown among the pagans a class of persons whose aim it is to 'run with the hare and hunt with the hounds', that is to say, who contrive to get as much as they can out of both systems, the pagan and the Christian. While they continue to practise all the rites associated with ancestor-worship, maintain several wives, call in the local diviner and so forth, they are at the same time accustomed to join Christians in church as they offer corporate prayer for rain and

thanksgiving for harvest, and celebrate the great festivals of the Church's Year. When sick these people will ask Christians to pray for them and will visit Mission hospitals as well as the diviner.

Dymond (1950:152)

Despite a clearly ethnocentric perspective, indicated by deviance-labelling the Aawambo as 'pagans', and 'these people' as 'ancestor-worshippers' (a misrepresentation of the relationship between living Aawambo and their deceased kin and clan), Dymond's information is helpful, indicating that the missionaries were not finding it easy to eradicate local customs and beliefs.

Recent scholarship also gives us evidence of the continued influence of so-called 'traditional' beliefs in a contemporary setting. We should bear in mind, for example, the reported spirit attacks in schools in Owamboland between 2004 and 2007, which formed the basis for a book chapter written by Kim Groop (2010). Groop investigated reports of disorientation, hysteria, and collapse amongst the pupils of several schools.⁴ Locals explained the events with reference to one of the following: evil spirits, witchcraft, or restless ancestor spirits (*oilulu*; *Oshindonga: iiluli*). The *oilulu*, along with *ounhifika* and *oipumbu* (all *Oshikwanyama* terms), are types of malevolent spirits of deceased persons. 'Of the three, however, it is mainly the notion of the *oilulu* (sing. *oshilulu*) which has survived the influence of Christianity' (2010:156). Groop suggests that these incidents 'brought the relationship between the Christian and the traditional to the forefront' (2010:161). Explanations of these events, offered by the local population, suggest that pre-Christian beliefs are a dynamic force in current local consciousness. He argues that the transition from traditional beliefs in a spiritual realm to Lutheran Christianity may be viewed, in terms of 'demonology' at least, as 'a poor exchange' (2010:157). Perhaps this is unsurprising, given 'the richness of beliefs about the origins of sickness and ecological disaster', to which McKittrick refers (2002:121). Groop concludes that there is a continuing belief among 'many' Owambo Christians in the

⁴ Groop's chapter opens with the following description: 'Between the years 2004 and 2007 four schools in the north of Namibia were allegedly attacked by supernatural powers. The attacks looked dramatic. Students were seen collapsing, crying, screaming or roaming around the school yard and neighbourhood. Some of the students – most of whom were females – had visions. Others feared that they would catch fire, experienced sheer panic or reacted with aggression towards all and everything. The incidents created a stir throughout Namibia and were vividly portrayed in the national newspapers and television news.' (2010:151)

existence and power of 'witchcraft and ancestor spirits' despite such beliefs being frowned upon (2010:161). At least with regard to interpretation of the school attacks, Groop is able to argue that 'Owambo traditional belief and Christian comprehensions intertwine' (2010:166). He perceives 'a tendency towards fusion between Owambo folklore and Christianity' (2010:167), which directly contradicts the claims of discontinuity between the religious systems from McKittrick and Hiltunen.

In light of the interpretations unveiled by Groop, Hiltunen's claim about the clean break with tradition seems naïve; her argument that 'witches and sorcerers play no role in the mind of the people' (1986:103) does not do justice to the interactions between the worldviews. In fact, she herself puts forward a diagram of the equivalences in the 'Deep Structure' of moral and religious reasoning, showing connections between pre-Christian beliefs and Christianity (1986:104). So why not acknowledge the potential for the continuing influence of such connections? It is unclear why, having identified areas in which concepts seem to cohere, she would suggest that autochthonous beliefs have been so thoroughly eliminated.

The studies of Ineke Koppe (1995) and Daniëlle de Jongh (1998) on illness and healing in a northern Namibian setting also suggest that witchcraft and the use of ritualists are not features of the past, but remain significant in consciousness (and sometimes practice) in the wider region. Koppe's study of traditional medicine in the Kavango region of Northeastern Namibia (adjacent to Owamboland) argues that the services of (thirteen) indigenous healers happily coexist with the provision of Western medicine and appear to be 'a part of the day-to-day life of the households' (1995:18-19, 43). The Bible is used as a divining tool (Koppe 1995:19), and 'the distinction between the high God of the Mbukushu and the Christian God slowly fades away' (1995:30, n.24). The 'Healing Churches' were also engaged in the fight against witchcraft. There is a sense, she says, in which Christian and traditional approaches to healing have been synthesised in that Kavango village: 'the indigenous cosmological order and the Christian faith seem to melt together' (1995:12). This corresponds with Groop's findings: when an Ndonga school was affected by the spirit attacks, he reports that members of the Ndonga community 'knew that there were "strong

people in traditional matters, sciences in the Ndonga traditional community” and that they “thought the [Ndonga] King would send those people to Ombalayamumbwenge village to fight these demons” (*The Namibian*, 2 March 2006)’ (2010:163).

In addition, de Jongh’s study of a district in Western Owamboland (the last Owambo regions to be missionised) suggests that to visit or seek the help of a diviner-healer was not uncommon as late as the 1990s, and particularly in cases of psychiatric disturbance. This was particularly due to an enduring concern with witchcraft, although the author notes that not all members of the community are convinced of the efficacy of traditional healers (1998:21, 29, 36-7). Nevertheless, this study demonstrates an enduring concern with the ‘traditional’.

In these two localised studies, the authors suggest that autochthonous cosmologies are still of significant influence on populations proximate to the Aandonga, both in terms of beliefs (concerning aetiology) and practices (visiting a diviner-healer). Paul J. Isaak, too, comments that ‘even many Christians still seek help from diviners and herbalists’ (1997:9). Whilst it is not entirely clear if Isaak would argue that to be the case of Namibians from *all* areas and communities, if it is a prevalent practice, we might expect the same to be true of at least *some* Christians in the Ondonga area.

(ii) Beyond Christian Heartlands: Considering ATR in ‘Non-Religious’ Domains.

Previous scholars have concluded that there is little or no evidence for the continuing practice of traditional forms of religion in the region and they use statistics for Christian adherence to bolster their claims. Certainly, the vast majority of the population in Owamboland align themselves with Christianity and are registered members of churches. Nevertheless, I would argue that it is important to look beyond the outward success and practice of Christianity in the region and consider aspects of life that fall beyond the obvious purview of Christianity; these might be spheres that I, as a Westerner, might view as having nothing to do with religious practice, or spheres that Christianity has not

affected. Otherwise, there is a danger of imposing a Western, binary opposition of religious and non-religious onto a context to which such a dichotomy does not apply. ATR in Ondonga, after all, has no canonical text, nor a dedicated place of worship; the practice of ATR might be apparent in a salt-gathering expedition, sowing seed, eating from the first harvest, treating sickness, or in one's attire. This section, then, asks whether pre-Christian practices continue, or have a lasting influence, in spheres that are not (to me) explicitly 'religious'.



Figure 5: Women in *Oohema Dhoontulo*: Contemporary 'Traditional' Dress

For example, might we appeal to material culture to demonstrate that there was no definitive break with the past and a wholesale adoption of Christianity as presented by the missionaries? Shigwedha explains that elements of traditional clothing were used by Aawambo to modify the imposed dress-code introduced by mission churches. Pre-Christian dress would have been more similar to the contemporary Himba style, with its use of red ochre on the skin and hair, and leather aprons (Shigwedha 2006:218-9; Brasche 2009:62). Shigwedha also reports that this is the clothing style that his informants wore as children (2006:124) and which many wore until the 1950s (2006:224). However, aspects of the pre-Christian fashion have been incorporated to bring about a hybrid form of local costume, for example in the *oohema dhoontulo* (Owambo women's textile dresses; See Figure 5) (Shigwedha 2006:196-8). This demonstrates not only the continuing influence of 'traditional culture' (*omuthigululwakalo*), but also a reclamation of the past, perhaps based on the bereavement and nostalgia

that Shigwedha says some feel for lost traditions (2006:261). For his part, Shigwedha is proud that there is still great 'belief in' and 'respect for the role of traditional costumes' in Owamboland (2006:261-262). In addition, as late as 1985, the older leather costumes were still in use by some in Ondonga (2006:238) and the colour red, Ian Fairweather and Shigwedha suggest, is still associated with pre-Christian traditions (2006:728; 2006:224-5).



Figure 6: Great-Grandmother Wearing Ostrich Shell Bead Strings

The jewellery often worn with traditional dress (particularly by older women) is distinctive in its appeal to pre-Christian fashions. Its style – strings of ostrich shell beads, for example (see Figure 6) – not only echoes ornamentation of the past but also traditional forms of wealth. This continuing influence is also suggested by the fact that traditional adornments are still valued to this day, such as the *oomba*, strings of beads backed by oyster shells (Shigwedha 2006:167). Shigwedha also claims that the ritual ceremony of *ezaleko lyondiwi* or *lyoshinyenye*, in which a newborn is given adornments by his/her father's clan, still takes place in Owamboland (2006:138, 215).

Attitudes to the body should also be considered: Shigwedha, for example, explains the polite sitting position for women which was significant when dressed in the pre-Christian costume (2006:138-139), which comprised of a front apron made of hide (and a rear apron to cover the hips and buttocks of a married woman) to cover one's 'nakedness' (that is, *epenge*, the genital area)

(2006:154, 190, 219; see also Wendi A. Haugh 2014:193). My own experience in Owamboland (being advised not to sit cross-legged) testifies to the fact that such rules regarding sitting positions still apply, despite the fact that contemporary clothing does not threaten to expose a woman's *epenge*.



Figure 7: lihongo Homestead (*Egumbo*) Boundary

The homestead arrangement is also of considerable interest as ‘the nucleus for traditional cultural values’ (Shigwedha 2006:215). Even when it includes block-built houses, it still has a traditional layout. McKittrick (2002) states that the traditional homesteads are ‘the most visible symbols’ of a continuing ‘emphasis on security’, with its boundary fence and winding passageways. She goes on to explain that ‘local ideas about security drew little distinction between the secular and the religious, between visible and invisible forces’ (2002:3). Of interest to this study is whether there remain associations between homestead and conceptions of the metaphysical realm, particularly as McKittrick suggests that stories about sanctuaries in the landscape that offered refuge and security (sacred groves, for example) ‘abound even today’ (2002:34).

It is reported that certain traditional ceremonies (or versions of: see Shigwedha 2006:237) are still enacted in the wider Owambo region: the ‘*efundula* [female initiation ceremony in neighbouring Uukwanyama] are still practised today and take place every year’ (Nampala 2006:44). The equivalent in Ondonga, the

ohango, last took place formally in 1947 (Shigwedha 2006:160). In addition, Christian ceremonies maintain a link with their pre-Christian incarnations through incorporation of traditional features. Several scholars report that it is still customary for a marriage token (*oyoonda*) – an ox – to be given and killed for the wedding feast (Fairweather 2003:282). Lovisa T. Nampala reports that ‘today [it] is one ox in Ondonga’ (2006:91) but it may also include hoes (McKittrick 2002:81).

Birth occasions the enacting of certain rites which, although only in some areas, also have connections to pre-Christian practices: ‘It is apparently only among the Aandonga – where babies have namesakes – that people still take the namesake issue or matter seriously’ (Nampala 2006:94). Parents may now, once again, select tribal names for their children, as opposed to being obliged to select Christian names, and this is another area in which there would appear to have been something of a renaissance and resurgence of interest post-independence. Many people have ‘reclaimed’ their traditional names, Nampala reports (2006:95). As noted above, too, newborns from the cities also return to their rural ‘home’ a few weeks after birth and still receive beads to demonstrate clan affiliation. Shigwedha also comments that ‘most people remained faithful to traditional dances, songs and other aspects relating to family and clan obligations’ (2006:217).

Nampala also discusses the burial ceremony, arguing that death rituals are to some extent influenced by pre-Christian beliefs: ‘the changing of the *oshigumbo*’s entrance is still often made by Christians and non-Christians when a death has occurred, in the same way as used to be done in the past’ (2006:94).⁵ She says of death and burial rituals that ‘elements of earlier traditional practices survived and were incorporated into services’ (2006:105). Details of an interview suggest that there is much of the ‘traditional’ worldview that survives in the farewell to the departed, such as the observation of taboos about distributing belongings and the eating of ‘*oshixuli* (fresh liver) that had been roasted on top of the head of a cow that the deceased had slaughtered when he was alive’ (2006:63). Nampala concludes her study by claiming that ‘tradition in the north of Namibia did not die completely but survived and

⁵ Homestead of the deceased: *oshigumbo*; homestead: *egumbo* (Nampala 2006:62).

changed in one way or another to meet the users' needs' (2006:103). If this were indeed the case, we would expect to find dynamic interaction between pre-Christian and Christian worldviews, which would impact upon senses of identity in lihongo and local interpretations of biblical texts.

(iii) Use of Pre-Christian Terminology in Biblical Translation

In contrast to the assertion that autochthonous forms of religion have vanished, I have suggested thus far that a lasting influence of pre-Christian Owambo worldviews might be expected. This is based on the fact that such worldviews are noted in scholarship to have persisted and that there was 'active resistance of the people to the new religion' (Shigwedha 2006:177). In addition, having gained an overview of certain aspects of Owambo life in a contemporary context, it would seem that some pre-Christian practices continue in a 'non-religious' sphere. The third area to be considered is terminology: did the missionaries unwittingly incorporate aspects of the 'traditional' when Christianity was translated for its new environment? After all, they appropriated concepts and terminology from autochthonous belief system(s) for use in vernacular liturgy.

For example, the Owambo Supreme Being's title (*Kalunga*) was used in the Oshiwambo Bible as the word for God. Thus, the two concepts are conflated and, Groop suggests, 'a form of syncretism is created' (2010:158). In addition, the missionaries appropriated the term *Nambalisita* as one of their titles for Jesus (McKittrick 2002:102), although they did not use it in the *Oshindonga* Bible. *Nambalisita/Mpamba Isita* is the name of the protagonist in a Kwanyama/Ndonga mythological narrative (Estermann 1976:186-8). Significantly, *Mpamba Isita* resurrects after being killed in the original myth. Furthermore, they appealed to local notions of sacred groves (refuges) in the landscape to explain Heaven as a sanctuary (McKittrick 2002:102).

Groop investigates further the extent to which *Oshiwambo* terminology was used when translating the Bible into the vernacular. He highlights the use of the (Kwanyama) term *oshilulu* (evil spirit, pl. *oilulu*) in the translation of *phantasma*. The disciples fear they see an *oshilulu* (*Oshindonga*: *oshiluli*, pl. *iiluli*) when

Jesus walks across the lake to their boat in Matthew 14:26. This term has pejorative connotations. As Aarni explains, it refers specifically to the spirit of a dead witch (or victim of), or of a murderer, woman who died in childbirth, or someone who died of starvation (1982:17). These 'restless, bitter dead' are one group amongst the capricious Spirits of the West, according to Gwyneth Davies (1994 ch.3:12, 30). Only these spirits wandered the land after death. *Oilulu* should not be confused with *aathithi* (the honoured deceased of kin and kingdom, plural form of *omuthithi*, 'spirit') who, although influential, inhabited the realm of *Kalunga*, underground (Aarni 1982:72). *Aathithi* are the benevolent Spirits of the East (Davies 1994).

The *Oshindonga* term *ombepo* is also used in the New Testament translation, although in pre-Christian thought it would have had neutral connotations (Groop 2010:158). Aarni explains that it could mean air, breath, wind, or the 'free-soul', which could wander outside the body when the person was dreaming (1982:66). *Ombepo*, it is argued, is the life-giving force (derived from *Kalunga*) that animates the person (Savola 1916:70-71 in Davies 1994 ch.3:2). In Luke 24:39, the resurrected Jesus explains to his disciples that he is not an *ombepo* (translation of *pneuma*), for he has flesh and bones.⁶ The Holy Spirit is *Ombepo Ondjapuki*. This is an example, then, of the appropriation of not just *single* terms (and concepts), but also *networks of concepts* – *Kalunga* is intimately linked to the *ombepo*.

In addition, inaccuracies in translation meant that *oonganga* (good magic, divination/healing) and *uulodhi* (bad magic, witchcraft) were conflated and condemned as 'witchcraft'. This is despite the Owambo belief in *oonganga* to combat *uulodhi* (Groop 2010:159), with the 'power' concerned being neutral until directed toward good or evil purposes (Nürnberg 2007:265, n.21). Understandably, use of Owambo terms for witchcraft in the biblical translation sustained beliefs in the malevolent activity of Owambo spirits and witches

⁶ The GNT *Oshindonga* uses the terms *oshiluli* (sing.) in all three verses that Groop cites. However, it does use *ombepo* when describing the man with the unclean spirit (Mark 1) and the Gerasene Demoniac (Mark 5). The term *ombepo* is also used for 'wind,' as shown in the Mark 4:39; 6:48, 51. The situation is further confused in Mark 9, when another term is introduced for the translation of *pneuma*: *ompwidhuli* appears in this narrative (vv.17, 20), as well as *ombepo* (vv.22, 25). Elsewhere, *ompwidhuli* is used to translate *daimonion* (e.g. Matthew 9, John 10). *Ompwidhuli* derives from the word *omupwidhi*, meaning madness.

(Groop 2010:165). Such an ineffective treatment of terms led, Groop argues, to an ineffective attempt to rid Owambo society of its preoccupation with witchcraft (2010:159).

Carlos Estermann suggests that spirits outrank *Kalunga* in Owambo worldviews (1976:189). Perhaps the enduring appeal to their agency is to be expected, especially if the same terminological referents have been used in Christianity. For example, local communities attributed a spate of spirit attacks to evil spirits, witchcraft or ancestor spirits; the *Oshindonga* terms for all of these appear in the biblical translation and may well perpetuate aspects of pre-Christian worldviews. Furthermore, Estermann notes that pre-Christian terms were adapted for use in a Christian setting by local people. He says of the Kwanyama setting he worked in:

Thus, for a Christian girl the term *efundula* is a synonym for marriage, and “to marry” is frequently translated as *okufukala m’okapela*, meaning “to do the puberty rite in the chapel (church).” To distinguish the old rite, the Kwanyama refer to it by saying *okufukala m’ongoma* (“to do the puberty rite with a drum”).

Estermann (1976:70)

I would argue that these incorporations must have brought to bear a lasting influence of the pre-Christian belief system on the Owambo churches and Christians. I am convinced by Groop’s argument that, through their appropriation of Owambo terminology for the translation of the Bible, the missionaries had presented the new converts with textual evidence that Jesus and the disciples acknowledged the existence of *oombepo* (free-souls/ghosts/spirits), *iluli* (evil spirits) and *aalodhi* (witches) (2010:158-9). Examining these terminological borrowings, Groop concludes that ‘despite their determination not to do so, the missionaries gave rise to a form of syncretism’ (2010:158).

(iv) A Renewed Interest in the Past

The final way in which scholarship points toward autochthonous worldviews influencing contemporary life in Owamboland is through a resurgence of interest in cultural heritage. An appeal to Fairweather’s work on the reclamation and re-invention of tradition through the performance of cultural heritage is

instructive in this line of argument (2003, 2004, 2006). He notes the conscious choice of a couple to include elements perceived as 'traditional' into their wedding ceremony. He also describes the revival of interest in 'traditional culture' post-independence, demonstrated in his study of the Nakambale Museum and of cultural groups who stage performances of dance and song. Heritage, according to Fairweather, is very much on the agenda. This claim is supported by Inga Brasche, who suggests that there is a sense of cultural 'loss' and desire for cultural 'recuperation' (2009). She, too, refers to the maintenance of tradition through performance and, specifically, education through storytelling at an *ohungi* (storytelling evening). These events continue in contemporary Owamboland (2009:77-8, 83-4).

It is important to note that the complex relationship between past and present is not just played out in terms of the religious. Fairweather's work also demonstrates the part tradition has to play in the lived experience of the contemporary Namibian as a global citizen. 'The performances of "traditional music" by young people in North-central Namibia take place in this hybrid, liminal space between localised "tradition" and global modernity' (Fairweather 2006:729). As identity is a focus here, as well as religion, the interface of tradition and modernity on this level is also of great interest. As Fairweather himself notes: 'the Comaroffs have observed that the revival of traditional beliefs "is often a mode of producing new forms of consciousness"' (Fairweather 2006:730 citing Comaroff & Comaroff 1999:284).

There is an interesting interaction between Fairweather's work on nostalgia and tradition through performance (2003, 2004, 2006, 2010) and Brasche's study of cultural loss and recuperation (2009). Brasche cites Mans, an important figure in the formation of cultural policy in Namibia, who states that: 'since independence, Namibians have been encouraged to rediscover and celebrate their own cultures' (2009:216). Brasche's conclusion is that the Aawambo feel a sense of cultural 'loss' because their community was not in control of the historical cultural change that it experienced (she notes that culture cannot be 'lost', since it is not monolithic but dynamic). In the face of the South African apartheid government's 'cultural genocide' in Owamboland (2009:229), the Owambo community will address their sense of cultural 'loss' through 'cultural

recuperation', or 'ongoing identity negotiation' (2009:171). Brasche argues that 'expressions of cultural articulation have continued both out of defiance, as well as through methods of resistance and appropriation' (2009:266). Nevertheless, 'culture' is seen as 'strongly associated with past practices and activities' (2009:267) and 'Ovambo' is depicted by the Aawambo as the 'static' 'practices and beliefs which existed before the colonial encounter' (2009:268, 45). Brasche presents Owamboland today as a 'dynamic cultural mélange of traditional and modern life' (2009:x). She suggests that polygamy, for example, is still practised, albeit in the sense of a man having a wife and other sexual partners (2009:118). Indeed, she notes that in Owamboland, cultural 'hybridisation [is] evident in all aspects of everyday life, from clothing to crop cultivation to governance' (2009:207). She notes the 'renewed interest in Ovambo cultural identity within the community' (2009:184), something of a 'renaissance', evident in the resurgence of traditional names and clothing (2009:106-7). This study would suggest that there is genuine and widespread resilience of the 'traditional' in contemporary Owambo life.

Shigwedha (2006:191-2) is certainly convinced that the Aawambo do want to revive traditions (although he mentions the ambivalence of some: 2006:246). He would recommend the rediscovery, incorporation and reclamation of traditional culture (2006:123) a return to 'African traditional values' (2006:251), agreeing with one of his interviewees that the extent to which the traditional is abandoned should be regulated by the ancestral spirits (2006:239). Both Brasche (2009:51-2, 68) and Nampala (2006:84, 91), meanwhile, note that some Aawambo make a link between the break with the 'traditional' way of life and the social ills of contemporary life. Whilst these views are critically problematic, they do demonstrate that (whether in the religious sphere or not, and whether in an original or reconstructed form) 'tradition' certainly has a part to play in the contemporary outlooks and identities of the Aawambo.

Conclusion

Whilst some scholars claim that autochthonous belief systems have almost entirely vanished, there is no study that specifically addresses the persistence of pre-Christian worldviews. Such claims, then, are speculative and superficial,

and serve to highlight an issue meriting further investigation. Scholars who make claims about the overall religious landscape of Owamboland today seem not to have done justice to the enduring resistance the missionaries met with, in the sense that it might have led to an enduring influence of pre-Christian beliefs. Although they report that the missionaries acknowledged the persistence of 'pagan' beliefs (at least up to the 1950s), they allow themselves to skim over this information in drawing conclusions about the situation today. In addition, an initial survey suggests that there has been a failure to consider the ongoing significance of traditional worldviews and practices in what a Westerner might consider a 'non-religious' sphere. Even if they are correct that the vast majority of the population no longer align themselves with 'traditional' forms of religion, the above discussion has demonstrated that the continuing influence of pre-Christian worldviews is not to be underestimated. However, establishing an effective method to ascertain the continuing influence is not straightforward, involving as it must the study of people's lives, beliefs and engagements with texts. It is recognised, too, people might not wish to divulge information to an outsider about autochthonous beliefs and practices (particularly where they might be frowned upon by the now-dominant Christian tradition). This is a limitation of the missionary ethnographies, too: relational dynamics deeply affect the outcomes of the encounter.

However, autochthonous worldviews are likely to have a high degree of influence on the lives of contemporary Aawambo and on their biblical interpretations, especially given the degree of terminological appropriation that has taken place. Lastly, the cultural traditions of the Owambo communities are having a further dimension of influence on contemporary lives in the recent (post-independence) surge of interest in 'cultural heritage'.

The simplifications that Aarni, Hiltunen and McKittrick have propagated are problematic when one considers the many areas in and levels on which missionary endeavours met with stiff resistance and the persistence of beliefs, as suggested in the historical records and contemporary scholarship. The works of Dymond, Loeb, Koppe, de Jongh, McKittrick and Groop are all testament to the fact that autochthonous beliefs have had an enduring influence through Christianity's presence in Owamboland and that the relationship between the

(by no means monolithic) worldviews is a dynamic one. In the 1950s, Dymond gave four categories of religious people in the region, only one of which was comprised of those who were fully committed to Christianity (1950:152-3). Similarly, Loeb argued that amongst the Kwanyama at roughly the same time, the belief in witchcraft was 'as strong as ever' (1955a:45). McKittrick notes of that time that there was a 'blurring' of belief systems before the *Epapudhuko* ('Awakening') in 1952. The studies of illness and healing undertaken by Koppe (1995) and de Jongh (1998) illustrate that recourse to local aetiologies and healers was commonplace in the 1990s in areas in close proximity to Ondonga. Finally, and arguably most strikingly, Groop's (2010) study of the spirit attacks in Owambo schools demonstrates that in a time of crisis, many people defaulted to foundational, 'traditional' beliefs in an effort to explain the events and expected people 'strong' in 'traditional matters' to resolve the situation (Groop 2010:163), not Christian officials. Through terminological borrowings, he argues, the missionaries confirmed the truth of Owambo beliefs in spirits and witches. The local interpretations of the events he describes, more than anything, are suggestive of a complex relationship between pre-Christian and Christian worldviews in Owamboland.

Studies on material culture, too, suggest that 'traditional' practices remain influential in contemporary Owambo lives outside of religious worship in church: clothing and jewellery (particularly that of women) retain elements of the 'traditional' or, in some cases, mimic it. When women dress in what is often labelled 'traditional' outfits, they wear *oohema dhoontulo*, which are 'Owamboised' versions of the conservative textiles dresses of the early missionaries. Today, beaded jewellery is prominent, and strings of ostrich shell beads (*oomba*) are often worn, reflecting the costumes (and one of the forms of wealth) of pre-Christian times. Certain aspects of traditional rituals endure, too, as was described regarding the female initiation ceremony (*Oshindonga: ohango*). With regard to birth rites, the use of namesakes is still common in Ondonga and people are increasingly choosing tribal (over, or as well as, Christian) names. Newborns are still returned to their home village to receive clan adornments to signal their entry into the social matrix. Nampala's explanation of death rites gives a window onto yet another area of life in which pre-Christian beliefs and practices endure: the entrance to the *egumbo*

(homestead) is often moved after the death of the household head and there is resonance with the past in the eating of particular foodstuffs and distribution of the deceased's belongings (2006:94, 63).

Interpretations of illness and healing in the wider region, and recent claims of 'spirit attacks' in schools add further challenges to the claims of Aarni, Hiltunen and McKittrick. Groop notes that due to the use of *Oshiwambo* terminology in the translation of Christian concepts generally and in the production of the vernacular Bible, the missionaries inadvertently created 'a form of syncretism' (2010:158). The use of *Kalunga* (supreme being), *ombepo* (wind, breath, free-soul), *oshiluli* (evil spirit) and *aathithi* (ancestral spirits) in the *Ombiimbeli Ondjapuki* (Holy Bible) are but a few examples of terminological (and, therefore, conceptual) appropriation from autochthonous cosmologies. At least with regard to interpretation of the school attacks, Groop is able to argue that 'Owambo traditional belief and Christian comprehensions intertwine' (2010:166). He perceives 'a tendency towards fusion between Owambo folklore and Christianity' (2010:167). It is hoped that this study will investigate this tendency across a broader range of topics. As one of McKittrick's own interviewees says of non-Christians: 'the belief is there, but they don't practice it' (2002:209). That McKittrick presents testimony *that the belief is there* raises the question of how autochthonous and Christian worldviews interact. Given the response to the spirit attacks, it would seem that McKittrick might have underestimated how widespread such beliefs might be.

Lastly, it is important to note that there is considerable concern to remember, document and reinvigorate past traditions amongst Owambo communities. Brasche, for example, has investigated cultural resilience and draws attention to the Owambo nostalgia for past practices (2009:267-8), which Fairweather has also investigated in his research into performance of culture at traditional ceremonies and heritage museums (2003, 2004, 2006). The University of Namibia has appointed an Oral History Research Facilitator to explore such things (Brasche 2009:234). Finally, recent events, such as the spirit attacks in four Owambo schools suggest that the intersection between the traditional and the Christian has come to the fore once more. As Groop recounts: 'although Christians in the north, in general, considered belief in witchcraft and ancestor

spirits rather shameful, many strongly believed that they existed and feared them' (2010:161).

This study, as a result of all of the above, seeks to explore whether pre-Christian beliefs still pervade the worldviews of an Ndonga community and influence their interpretations of biblical texts (arguably, the last place one would expect to find the influence of ATR, if it has been all but eradicated). Did the missionaries, as Groop suggests, inadvertently create 'a form of syncretism' (2010:158)? This research focuses on the plane along which the past worldviews rub shoulders with and may yet influence the present (and future) worldviews of an Ndonga community. It progresses on the understanding that this is a negotiated interface and cannot be reduced to a simple equation of 'Christianity' replaced 'traditional' with regard to either worldviews or practice. It contemplates the combined influences of 'the old' (pre-Christian worldviews) and 'the new' on Ndonga identities, including those who have known only a community in which all (or almost all) the inhabitants align themselves with Christianity as an identity-marker.

In conclusion, my challenge to the existing literature centres around two particular claims that have been made in scholarship on the Ovambo. Firstly, Hiltunen (1986, 1993) and McKittrick (2002) claim that *traditional beliefs and practices have not endured to the present day to any significant degree*. Having surveyed the literature above, further investigation would appear to be merited. To appreciate the complexity of the situation we should avoid generalisations and, rather, acknowledge the agency of the individual. This should allow full appreciation of the ways in which pre-Christian beliefs and practices may have endured: in resistance to the missionaries, in the multiple facets of life (viewed holistically), through terminological borrowing in the creation of the *Oshindonga* Bible, and in contemporary interest in 'cultural heritage'.

The second claim I would challenge is one Aarni (1982) makes: that approximately 95% of the Ovambo population are baptised and believing Christians and that, therefore, *there is little point in undertaking research into traditional religion with the current population* (1982:9). This I dispute, rather recognising that elements of the traditional outlook and associated practices are

likely to have endured in spite of mass conversion to Christianity, especially in view of the short timescale in which this transition has occurred. There is a great deal to be learned by investigating so-called 'traditional' beliefs through contemporary fieldwork, whether focusing on biblical interpretation or habitual life. Beyond CBS, fieldwork allows for an appreciation of the expression of the 'traditional' in the ordinary, in spheres beyond the obviously Christian, and avoids the ethnocentric application of 'non-religious' versus 'religious' binaries to Owambo studies.

Acknowledging 'culture' to be a 'porous and labile' entity (Brown 2002:131), one would expect Owambo traditions to have changed since the arrival of Christianity, but it would be equally unsurprising to find that elements of pre-Christian 'culture' play their part in a constantly negotiated landscape. As one of McKittrick's interviewees says of the first Ndonga King to be baptised: "Just because he was a Christian does not mean that he did not follow traditional practices" (2002:144). They have summed up my challenge: to investigate whether such an exchange of monolithic worldviews has taken place, and whether overt practice of Christianity in church precludes the observation of pre-Christian ritual, belief and practice elsewhere. If not, to what extent and in what ways are autochthonous and Christian worldviews and practices interacting in the '95% Christian' Owambo context (Aarni 1982:9)?

Chapter 2 Researcher Experience of the Living Context: the Crisis of Representation in Anthropology

The anthropological study will consider the experience of the researcher during a 10-month period of fieldwork in the village of lihongo. Whilst background research on Ndonga culture (*omuthigululwakalo gwaaNdonga*) may yield a general picture, the literature available is limited and that on autochthonous worldviews is arguably outdated. However, there are some sources available to supplement the fieldwork, such as the diaries of the earliest and longest serving missionary in the region (Martti Rautanen), accessed only indirectly (through ethnographies) due to language barriers. It is noted that much of the ethnographic scholarship on Namibia is coloured by a colonial, unsympathetic and ethnocentric perspective (Miettinen 2005:13), and it is therefore argued that an up-to-date, post-colonial study is merited.

An anthropological approach feeds into several areas of the study. It enhances the clarity and broadens the scope of the description of 'traditional' culture and worldviews in the Ndonga region, both in past incarnation(s) and the extent to which those worldviews and practices endure. Additionally, it provides me with an adequate knowledge-base with which to assess the impact of traditional worldviews upon the biblical interpretations generated by the CBS process. Additionally, it will contribute to an assessment of the attitudes of community members to autochthonous culture and beliefs. Further, employing a second methodology within the study will mitigate the limitations of the CBS process. The anthropological method adopted, however, complements the post-structuralist outlook of CBS, with both approaches regarding knowledge as 'culturally situated' with a 'human quality' (Hufford 1995:59). Further, it enables the study to give maximum voice to the members of the lihongo community, given my residence in the community for 10 months. This considerable timespan prioritises and maximises opportunities for community members to engage with the study and to voice interpretations of biblical texts. In addition, it is hoped that they will wish to further their involvement by offering their reflections on autochthonous culture (*omuthigululwakalo*) and its contemporary influences to discussions about Ndonga identities.

In what follows, I seek to outline and critique the ethnographic endeavour, in order to arrive at a set of priorities for that aspect of the research. I first reflect on anthropology's 'growing pains' and relate them to the lihongo context. Thereafter, I attempt to draw my critique together to highlight four key positive guidelines for my own fieldwork that have arisen through this reflection. I focus on the following issues that anthropology as a discipline has grappled with since the 1980s: (i) The 'Culture' Concept, (ii) Otherness, (iii) Subjectivity, (iv) Unequal Power Relations, (v) The Insider-Outsider Problem, (vi) The Identity of the Researcher, and (vii) The 'Field' of Research. Having discussed the problems surrounding each of these issues, I expand on four principles by which the ethnographic element of the study will be guided; as one proceeds through the investigation of anthropology's crisis of representation, it becomes apparent that a modern, post-colonial ethnography must be reflexive, polyphonic, facilitate equality in power relations, and be conducted with honesty and integrity.

(i) The 'Culture' Concept and the Wider Crisis of Representation

As with approaches to biblical criticism, paradigm shifts in anthropological scholarship have occurred. Clifford Geertz reports that after 1975 'questions multiplied rapidly about anthropology's colonial past, its orientalist biases, and the very possibility of disinterestedness or objective knowledge in the human sciences' (2002:9). What resulted from this questioning was the 'crisis of representation' that anthropology has experienced in the last half-century, so termed by George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer (1986). Most interestingly for this study, ethnographic studies conducted since anthropology's paradigmatic shift have tended to focus on decolonising methodologies such as collaborative ethnography. The primacy of ethical considerations rightfully dictates that we should move away from the 'colonialist paradigm' and toward methodologies that respect the language, knowledge and cultural sensitivities of the host community and the diversity therein (Turner Strong 2011:39). James V. Spickard and J. Shawn Landres pinpoint four key issues which have been put forward by anthropological critics in recent years: 'the problem of subjectivity; the insider/outsider problem; the question of researcher identity; and issues of

power' (2002:5). The ensuing discussion will centre on these (and related) concerns, all of which have come to the fore during 'anthropology's crisis of confidence' (Spickard & Landres 2002:10). Such issues question the authority of the ethnographer and the status of ethnographic knowledge-claims made prior to this intellectual crisis.

Fieldwork (and the ethnographies it generated) was traditionally undertaken with the assumption that there was a clearly identifiable 'other' and a definable, non-porous 'Culture' which one could subject to investigation. The ethnographer was traditionally viewed as engaged in an 'heroic' enterprise and, as an impartial observer, was able to document and report back to the academy the 'facts' of that culture (Clifford 1983:124). Ethnographic research after Bronislaw Malinowski was characterised by a stress on scientific realism, with culture to be 'defined' dispassionately, unlike the 'abuses' in cultural documentation perpetuated by missionary and colonial descriptions (Pratt 1986:27). However, since the 'crisis of representation' in anthropology, that such a concrete cultural 'block' exists and that external, culturally-bound language can be used to describe a foreign 'Culture' has been questioned (see e.g. Roy Wagner 1981[1975]). The publication of James Clifford and George E. Marcus's edited volume, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Clifford & Marcus 1986a), marked a fundamental transition in the approach to culture and its ethnographic documentation. The contributors levelled multiple criticisms at anthropology's epistemological claims, fieldwork methods and construction of ethnographic discourses.

Crucially, Clifford questions at the outset of *Writing Culture* the notion that culture is something to be objectively known and described. Rather, and as his discussion of poesis suggests, Clifford views culture as something made or creatively written, an 'invention' (Clifford & Marcus 1986b:2, 26). He later refers to ethnographic writing as both 'allegorical' and as 'a performance', stressing its status as 'story' with morally-charged transcendent meanings (Clifford 1986:98,100). Stephen A. Tyler, meanwhile, refers to it in similarly creative terms, as a 'fantasy reality of a reality fantasy' (1986:134). In their focus on the process of writing – absolutely integral to the field of anthropology – the contributors to *Writing Culture* stress that the academic output, the so-called

'representation' of culture, is nothing of the sort. In fact, the culture 'represented' is the documentation of the subjective ethnographer's *temporal* experience. Vincent Crapanzano makes exactly this point, too: 'ethnography is historically determined by the moment of the ethnographer's encounter with whomever he is studying' (1986:51). This 'snapshot' experience (and the way in which it is presented) is affected by multiple factors: the perspective, agenda and identity of the researcher, the agency and agenda of the host community, the power relations between researcher and hosts, and epistemological concerns surrounding insider/outsider status. The 'unruly' experience of fieldwork, as opposed to the 'myth of fieldwork', must be worked into an ordered text; ethnography would seem to be a creative endeavour, if for that reason alone (Clifford 1983:120, 119).

That ethnography is a writing process (by nature, creative) unavoidably affects the output, which cannot be said to be an objective account. According to Paul Ricoeur's theory of inscription, the textualisation of a speech event or discourse necessarily involves the separation of the text from the agents of discourse and the discourse itself. The discourse is, he argues, by its very nature as an event, transient. It is interpreted when it is written into text and that interpretation is what is taken away and further interpreted by an audience. The writer is therefore not capturing what happened, because the discourse remains in that past event. This isolates the agent from the event and portrays culture as structural, thereby eliminating the performative element (Clifford 1983:131-2). That is, individual performances are abstracted to the level of generalisations, eliminating individuality (Marcus & Cushman 1982:42-3).

Furthermore, in the textualisation of a cross-cultural experience, the ethnographer necessarily *identifies* (on subjective grounds) moments of cultural 'significance' and then *selects* (on subjective grounds) from that grouping those events and interactions to be related to the implied audience. In so doing, the ethnographer has exercised his/her agency and control over the resulting text. What the ethnographer reports, then, is (in part) dictated by what strikes them as significant and is further limited by the exclusion of events and interactions which they have not seen/noticed/labelled as significant. The result is far from objective: who they are, their mastery of the vernacular, at which points they are

present and absent, whom they meet and which events they choose to report on, make for a skewed ethnography. If the anthropologist-ethnographer does not explicitly acknowledge these issues as 'limits of representation itself' (Clifford & Marcus 1986b:10), we might argue that his/her claim to authority (once assured simply by the 'I was there' motif)⁷ is baseless.

'As in physics, the very definitions and assumptions that shape the research process partially determine the results. Moreover, the process of observation itself alters that which we observe' (Wilcox 2002:54). The first part of this citation refers back to the points made above. However, the second raises a further crucial issue: If an ethnographer is documenting a cross-cultural encounter, a spatially and temporally limited snapshot, then s/he must acknowledge his/her own presence in the field of the encounter. Landres goes further in his argument that the ethnographer him/herself is actually a part of what is being described, a part of the 'field', given that they are present in the 'snapshot'. As Landres states: 'I am not only the writer, director, and producer of my ethnography – I am also an actor in it.' The agency of the ethnographer should be recognised and 'ought to come under the anthropological gaze' (Landres 2002:111). After all, the ethnography claims to describe 'them' and 'their culture', and suggests it is able to do so through the use of photographs of, interviews with, dialogues with or observations of members of the host community. These resources are only available as a result of a two-directional encounter and the presence in the field of the ethnographer. There is no interview without two agents, at least (interviewer and interviewee), and it is the encounter that forms the interview, an encounter that would never have taken place without the influence of both. As Lynn Davidman notes (and quite apart from any material influence the ethnographer may have brought into the community), by asking participants to offer forth their biographical narratives, the ethnographer has been influential: 'the telling of lives always changes those lives' (2002:26). This is not necessarily a negative output of the ethnographic process, but it does in itself illustrate that the environment and community being studied is altered irrevocably by the ethnographer's presence.

⁷ 'The predominant mode of modern fieldwork authority is signalled: "You are there, because I was there"' (Clifford 1983:118).

A further development in anthropology and ethnographies since its self-conscious crisis of the late twentieth century is an explicit acknowledgment of so-called 'culture' as fluid, dynamic and developmental, and not as a set of fixed norms to which all individuals in a society will conform. Instead, culture may be seen as 'porous and labile' (Brown 2002:131). Clifford argues that cultures are not to be seen as 'organically unified or traditionally continuous but rather as negotiated, present processes' (1988:273). Indeed, even the idea of fenced and definitive societies is questionable, since people are highly mobile and there remain perhaps no untouched communities anywhere in the world. Once that has been recognised, 'culture' ceases to become a 'thing' at all. As Spickard has stated, the aim of a postmodern ethnography is not to reduce the encounter to an experience of a 'timeless culture', as traditional ethnographies sought to do. Every society or culture is to be seen in its historical setting and as a malleable, permeable entity. He warns against falling into the trap of 'reifying [culture] into something supposedly eternal' (2002:243).

The situational and contingent nature of meaning, as recognised by post-modern scholarship (A. W. Geertz 2002:227), is also significant. That is to say, what one understands of a text, event, dialogue or performance is subjective and interpretative. In the context of an ethnographic study, then, multiple levels of meaning and interpretation are in operation. The individual member of the host community finds meaning in and interprets his/her own cultural setting. Further, when they communicate this interpretation to the researcher, another instance of meaning-construction takes place as the researcher interprets and records the event. Yet another level of meaning creation takes place when the ethnography is read by each member of the text's audience: 'meaning is constructed (not given), multiple (not univocal), contested (not shared), and fluid (not static). And, most importantly, meaning is inscribed by readers, listeners, participants, or viewers', explains Thomas A. Tweed (2002:65).

Another way in which the ethnography delivers only 'partial' truths (Clifford & Marcus 1986b:7) is that the cultural encounter it documents is transient, even momentary in its broader historical context – a photographic still as opposed to a movie. However, as Spickard and Landres argue, at least 'the new anthropology has the merit of being honest – and it no longer speaks in the

imperial mode' (2002:9). 'The new ethnography speaks of "texts," "discourses," and "narratives." Rather than taking the role of omniscient narrator, it touts "reflexivity," "pluralism," "dialogue." It broods over the impossibility of its knowledge' (Spickard 2002:239). In this way, the new ethnography to which Spickard and Landres refer has a more human-centred approach and thereby implicitly (as well as explicitly) stresses its temporal limitations. Given that it is people- and interaction-centred, it may also highlight culture as a gendered experience, and not fixed: Davidman argues that 'the social organization of gender' is key in people's cultural experiences (2002:23).

All ethnographies are partial, not only because they reflect a transient experience of a way of life but also because what has been included (and excluded) in the final text, a redaction, necessarily prevents them from being whole. This is determined by, among other factors, the elective disclosure and retention of information by the hosts, and the discrimination between supposedly useful and superfluous information by the ethnographer. Furthermore, Davidman suggests that an ethnography may be considered 'partial' because of the biographical nature of ethnographical discourse in which identity-construction is a gradual process (2002:19).

If even a comprehensive ethnography is partial then the ethnographic elements of the current project are even more so: this study has only an ethnographic backdrop and is heavily reliant on ethnographic literature. More significantly, however, is the partiality and poesis attributable to the missionary ethnographies upon which a great deal of Owambo cultural studies is based. With the early missionaries attempting to document a fixed and bounded 'Owambo Culture', and not having heightened awareness of their own influence on the ethnographic output, the resulting sources are to be used with care. They may have been unconsciously seeking univocal contributions and filtering out dissonant articulations of aspects of culture. It is unlikely that they reflected on the profiles of their 'informants' (or sought out a balanced sample across ages and genders): most of their information would likely have come from converts whose perspectives on local culture may well have been distinctly negative.

By contrast, this study recognises that culture is not fixed: it is dynamic and is experienced and perceived differently by individuals and according to age and gender (amongst other variables). As a result, I do not seek precisely to discern or describe Ndonga culture (*omuthigululwakalo gwaaNgonga*), and I *actively* seek a variety of perspectives at every turn, working with groups of men (*ootate*), women (*oomeme*), and children (*aanona*), and noting discordant responses (inter- and intra-group), including perceptions of Ndonga culture that do not accord with my own, largely academic understanding of the context. Living in the context, and having worked closely with a considerable volume of literature, mine is but one perspective on Ndonga culture.

(ii) Challenging 'Otherness'

Having given an overview of the crisis which has befallen Anthropology as a discipline, I now move on to discuss in more detail the particular issues which have arisen within the wider debate, and which affect the execution of my research. I begin with problems associated with 'Otherness'. Edward W. Said (1978) described the bonds between knowledge and power, and the tendency of Western scholars toward 'orientalism'. Armin W. Geertz describes this as the 'cultural construction of the exotic', the tendency 'to dichotomize humanity into we-they contrasts and to essentialize the resultant "Other"' (2002:226). A focus in more recent anthropology has been the conscious move away from highlighting and, particularly, essentialising the 'Other'. Such generalisations are recognised to be reductionisms, which recognise neither the diversity within a community nor the two-way interaction that is taking place in a cross-cultural encounter. After all, the anthropologist is an 'Other' as well and will, at points, be the subject of the host community's interpretation (Tweed 2002:69). Simon Coleman also urges a shift away from the us-studying-them opposition: 'As fieldworkers, we always assume that the salient and powerful work of representation – and thus of assigning cultural identity – is carried out by us. Is this always true, however? What of the voices and actions of our informants? Do they not interpret, contest, appropriate, and perhaps re-present what we do in accordance with their own agendas? And must we continue to assume that there is a fundamental social, cultural, and analytical divide between "the field" and "home"?' (2002:77).

This study acknowledges that the post-colonial anthropologist's endeavour is 'now clearly a meeting that expands both sides' (Spickard 2002:243). It seeks to focus on diversity, particularity and polyphony (*heteroglossia*), not essentialism. It looks for areas of commonality as much as the 'exotic'. Furthermore, following the *Writing Culture* debate, Spickard argues 'that ethnographic knowledge, too, is socially generated; that our ideas are no more firmly grounded than are those of the natives we encounter' (2002:244). This should encourage a level playing field; desirable is a mutual engagement in a collaborative encounter and not the 'Us' and 'Them' dichotomy generated by the traditional subject-object framework of ethnographic research.

Just as a focus on polyvocality serves the interest of presenting the heterogeneity of a cultural context, so it mitigates the dangers of essentialism. Working *with* members of the lihongo community, I seek collaboratively to gather diverse knowledge and perspectives on this (very particular) cultural context. The expertise, in that regard, is firmly in the hands of the local community (this is a point that is to be expressly highlighted in ethnographic and CBS encounters). An extended stay in the community is required to develop an awareness of both the similarities and differences with my own way of life (reflexivity) and to establish myself as a community member and collaboration partner (integration).

(iii) Subjectivity

Having acknowledged that we must get away from subject-object divisions and essentialisms, I now turn to the perspective of the ethnographer and historical claims to the execution of objective research. The critique put forward by Clifford and Marcus questioned the 'epistemological premises' that underlie ethnographic reporting (Spickard & Landres 2002:5). They point out the assumptions underlying the gathering of anthropological 'knowledge', and the realist commitment to the detached, objective status of the participant-observer. It is argued in post-structuralist circles that realism was guilty of 'ignoring the existence of the self' and was therefore created an 'anthropocentric illusion' (Jean Piaget, cited in J.L. Jacobs 2002:89). Not only was the subjectivity of the

ethnographer ignored, but the indigenous informant is portrayed as having a typified experience of life and of the ethnographic experience. What was portrayed in traditional ethnography was a 'national character' (Marcus & Cushman 1982:32; cf. Clifford 1983:131-2 and C. Geertz 2002:5) or a 'you-transformed-to-a-they' (Crapanzano 1986:74). In fact, and obviously, the life-experience and experience of the ethnographic encounter of any indigenous participant will be unique (Pratt 1986:45).

We may ask, then, to what extent ethnography is even a realistic practice now that subjectivity is recognised to be unavoidable: 'Not only does mere presence not ensure insight (though no one ever thought it did), but also the very possibility of understanding others seems to have been lost. How much can one really know another people? How completely can one see the world through their eyes?' (Spickard & Landres 2002:4). Perhaps it is this last point that we should draw attention to, asking whether seeing the world through their eyes is what we should be aiming for, at all. 'For most anthropologists, this identity crisis has made traditional ethnography impossible' (Spickard & Landres 2002:9). Of course, if one accepts that the *traditional* mode of ethnographic research was inappropriate, then (of course) traditional ethnography would be abandoned. That is not to say, however, that ethnography has not developed into an appropriate, productive discipline. In fact, giving the community the chance to express their worldview(s) and exploring and probing those expressions through dialogue should offer us the chance to gain greater understanding, whilst not attempting to second guess what the host community 'sees' or 'feels'. In this way, the anthropologist may now appear 'prominently' (Spickard 2002:239) in the ethnography and any illusion of setting him/herself apart as an omniscient and lone authoritative presence need not be maintained. Accusations that ethnographers 'unthinkingly mix their own thoughts and concerns with those of the people they study' (Spickard & Landres 2002:5) are offset by an approach that has reoriented toward dialogue and open acknowledgement of the subjectivity and agency of both researchers and hosts.

Another possible recourse is to attempt to mine the subjective outlook of the researcher and turn it to the ends of the study, rather than seeing it as an obstacle. The 'self' used to be seen as a 'contaminant' in ethnographic

research, an obstruction to the much-heralded goal of objectivity. However, Davidman sees the self and one's own 'emotional knowledge' as a resource and perhaps part of a methodology (2002:20). Likewise, Nancy Nason-Clark, referring to her work on family violence in Canada, seeks 'to highlight the neglected, even despised, role of emotion in the life of the academic researcher' (2002:29). In addition, the self (emotional or otherwise) may now be seen as a vital resource for making the human connections that will enable a dialogical, polyphonic study to result from this endeavour. Missionaries, traditional ethnographers and modern ethnographers have all acknowledged the desirability of establishing rapport with the host community (or individual[s]) being studied. The labours of the anthropologist are considerably increased and frustrated without positive working relationships, as Edward E. Evans-Pritchard narrates in *The Nuer* (1940:9). After all, 'academic credentials are not – indeed, should not be – sufficient to earn the trust of a community' (Wilcox 2002:53).

This study is self-consciously subjective; in the first instance, the fieldwork has been facilitated by a friendship with a member of the lihongo community. Interpersonal relationships and my overall rapport with the community engendered its success and directed the encounter in innumerable ways. The subjective nature of my input as a researcher is also to be noted in my command of *Oshindonga*: I can only engage in as many spontaneous conversations on the relationship between local culture and Christianity, for example, as my language skills allow (thereby limiting the number of perspectives the study considers). This is but one of the ways in which this is a particular study based on subjective experience. The location, participants, researcher, and defined area of study are all particular, and the results are the outcome of a particular set of encounters (with associated limitations). The subjectivity of the individual participants should not be minimised, either. Their agency, experiences, perspectives, willingness to disclose (or lack of) all affect the information gathered. Based on all of the above, the study as a whole can claim only to offer a window onto a highly subjective, particular encounter.

(iv) Unequal Power Relations

I have highlighted in the previous two sections how colonial approaches to anthropology led to visions of an essentialised 'Other' and a denial of the subjectivity of the ethnographer. I now move on to examine issues surrounding the power dynamics in the ethnographer-Other relationship, as it was perceived to be. Although anthropology has now 'rejected its colonialist, museum-oriented roots' (Spickard 2002:239), it has a long history and association with the colonial endeavour and associated power dynamics. The 'complicity of anthropologists in the colonial process' is an area of research in itself (Spickard & Landres 2002:8).⁸ Anthropologists were sent out as intelligence-gatherers on behalf of the 'imperial bureaucrats' who believed that 'the better they knew their subjects ... the easier would be their sway' (Spickard & Landres 2002:7). This led to a high level of suspicion and undoubtedly affected the resulting ethnographies. Although there is no reason to believe that this study will be affected by such a specific dynamic, the question of what I represent to the host community must be considered and, as Renato Rosaldo urges, the ethnographer must not paper over the politics of domination that have led to the current research context (1986:81). After all, the asymmetry of relations with regard to wealth, education, gender and race will, of course, have a bearing on interactions and results.

'Contemporary critics argue that the greater social power of the researcher overwhelms the subject' (McCarthy Brown 2002:127) and that the resulting ethnography is therefore a closer reflection of the concerns of the ethnographer rather than subject. Karen McCarthy Brown argues that her work *Mama Lola* addressed this in two ways. Firstly, she paid 'deliberate attention to the power issues' and, secondly, she aimed for 'extended, intimate and committed contact' in the hope of establishing an appropriate and balanced relationship. The 'formal little dance' of house visits, talking and gift-giving was slowly replaced by a greater intimacy, trust and incorporation into the full and idiosyncratic life of the subject (2002:127-8).

⁸ The authors refer to Asad (1978) and Gupta & Ferguson (1997).

A hierarchical dynamic of subject to object, observer to observed, is notable in such seminal works as Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer* (1940) or Geertz's documentation of the Balinese cockfight in *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). The hierarchy is constructed through the 'over the shoulder' perspective from which the ethnographer writes (and appears to know intimately, although that is likely an illusion), as well as through generalisations and essentialisms about 'the Other'. Rosaldo calls the abounding generalisations in such works as *The Nuer*, even about 'their' character, part of a 'rhetoric of control' (1986:94). However, there is a hint that such power relations are subverted anyway through the agency of the hosts: if the researcher becomes a 'watched watcher' and the hosts are performing an idealised identity, the ethnographer arguably is not, and never was, in control of the representation delivered through the ethnography (Neil Jarman cited in Landres 2002:107).

Adopting the position of George Marcus and Dick Cushman, this study seeks a 'goal of dispersed authority' via a reflexive and polyphonic approach (1982:43). Part of the pursuit of this goal is to place the indigenous language and terminology in a position of authority. As Talal Asad urges, the ethnographer must privilege the vernacular to address the issue of 'unequal languages' (1986:156). It must be recognised that 'indigenous usage is always correct in its own setting' (Rosaldo 1986:83). Translation and explanation of indigenous terms should be directed toward serving best the sense of the original, 'the spirit of foreign words'. It is not for the vernacular to fall easily into an English translation (Asad 1986:157).

In a similar vein, the setting is crucial. It is appropriate that the research takes place in lihongo and not by a researcher who 'dips into' the community. The extended stay in the village, and residence with a family in a homestead, may go some way to dispersing unequal power relations: the researcher lives according to community norms and does not fully dictate the terms of the study. Dispersed authority is also facilitated in this case by the use of CBS: the meetings provide the context in which the cultural knowledge and expertise of the participants is requested, alongside their biblical interpretation. In this model, the researcher is a facilitator rather than a dominant figure, and the community members are the experts.

(v) The Insider-Outsider Problem

Being an outsider to the community is an obvious barrier to ethnographic research. It was traditionally seen as desirable to 'portray the natives as if from the inside' (Spickard & Landres 2002:3). However, if we accept that research toward and writing of ethnography is a creative production, this aim seems unreasonable – a genuinely emic perspective is not attainable by any outsider. The ethnography that results will always be informed by the identity and perspective of a unique ethnographer and the unique individuals and community they engage with. Further, the ethnographic account by the Western outsider-observer is written for Western academics; Spickard and Landres wonder: 'how does this social dynamic slant one's results?' (2002:6). Of course, ethnographies desire to communicate something of an 'Other' culture to their readership, but here this aim will be sought self-consciously. Through a dialogic approach, and seeking to represent the polyphonic contributions of the community, I will attempt to challenge inequalities of power, subjectivity and the tendency to essentialise the other, as discussed above. The concept of portraying the indigenous community as if from the inside seems to focus any notion of agency in ethnography solely on the researcher. This study is looking for more of a multi-agency approach, which means that I do not need to be an insider. The insiders can speak for themselves.

In addition, being an outsider need not necessarily be a hindrance. Whilst recognising that a truly emic perspective is only available to an insider, there are arguably downsides to being an insider if one is to describe one's community, worldviews or identity: one is unlikely to experience culture shock, which stimulates recognition of characteristics particular to the context. Further, 'familiarity with the group might make it difficult for [the researcher] to gain interpretive clarity'. Melissa M. Wilcox sums up the argument some would make of an insider perspective: 'insiders, in other words, cannot see the forest for the trees' (2002:49).

Prior links with the community may mitigate the problem of suspicion associated with being a total outsider – in my case, relationships have been established based on a long-standing friendship with someone born in the community.

Already, then, I have violated the traditional model to 'keep a strict social and intellectual distance', and maintain 'boundaries' to preserve the illusory objectivity of the outside-looking-in-researcher. Of course, these relationships will 'shape [the] knowledge' gained during the fieldwork period (Spickard & Landres 2002:6). It is important to note, however, that these relationships have also made the project possible in the first place!

Being an outsider by virtue of religious persuasion, and the extent to which this ought/ought not to be shared with the hosts, raises further problems. Davidman tells of her 'struggle' to separate her own worldview and biases from the worldviews of those whom she met (2002:21). When studying another tradition, not sharing the religious outlook of the host community has potential benefits and difficulties. 'As Bowie (2000, 10) notes, it is at least plausible to assume that "disbelief" can be suspended in the name of ethnographic investigation' (Coleman 2002:77). After all, bias will be in play whether one shares the faith of the group or is a non-believer (A.W. Geertz 2002:226).⁹ That I am 'religiously unmusical' (Davidman [2002:21] refers to Max Weber's phrase), therefore, should not pose difficulties in terms of studying a broadly Christian community. However, how much to share of my personal worldview raises more difficult issues and will have a bearing on the relationships to be built within the host community. There is the possibility that open acknowledgement of a non-religious outlook (and thereby not having the vested interest that an advocacy scholar might have) would enable participants in the study to be more open, not feeling the need to moderate their comments toward a conformist or orthodox expression. However, it might heighten suspicion, a sense of the researcher as outsider, and prevent the establishment of rapport. Indeed, ethnographers have encountered attempts by participants to convert the researcher (Tweed 2002:72). What one is prepared to do in order to cross boundaries of culture and the gulf between insider and outsider shapes the relationships developed in the community and therefore will be a determining factor on the ethnographic output of the study: 'the researcher must choose how to present herself and her project, aware that such decisions have a significant effect on the participation and openness of her hosts' (Wilcox 2002:51). Mary Jo Neitz reflects on her

⁹ See also David J. Hufford 1995:61: 'The tendency to count disbelief as the "objective" stance is a serious, systematic bias that runs through most academic studies of spiritual belief.'

unwillingness to participate in the communion: ‘to me, taking communion signifies belonging. It also signifies believing.’ However, she later acknowledges that ‘not taking communion as a researcher is hardly a neutral act’ (2002:39, 41).

(vi) The Identity of the Researcher

The final two issues to address concern the (potentially contested) identity of the researcher and the field of research in which the project is conducted. In the process of doing fieldwork, features of my identity made me an outsider on multiple levels, all of which come with their complications. In lihongo, I am highly conspicuous as an outsider – a white, British woman. Further distinguishing factors are my level of education, wealth, professional training and lack of religious beliefs. Which aspects of my outsider identity served or hindered the research at any given point is unclear but we can be sure that ‘age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, life experience, and one’s own religious identity also shape what one can learn’ (Spickard & Landres 2002:6).



Figure 8: Author with Host Family

The (self-defined) identity of the researcher is not the only researcher identity at play. We must also consider the identity ascribed by the hosts to their guest, as well as the identity ascribed by anthropologist to ethnographer. Likewise, the identity of the hosts is ambivalent and may take many forms over the course of

the engagement: how they perceive themselves, how they portray themselves, how they are perceived by the anthropologist, and portrayed by the ethnographer. Agendas are at work here; after all, who our audience is perceived to be affects how we self-present and how we describe others. As Geertz notes (citing Van Maanen 1988), there are four factors at play: 'the observed, the observer, the ethnographic text or tale, and the audience' (A.W. Geertz 2002:228). The relationships (which themselves are not fixed) between these four factors will have a bearing on the 'culture' that appears in the write-up.

The researcher may also have the difficult task of dealing with an assigned identity, even one which puts social constraints on them (and therefore restricts access to anthropological information) or conflicts with their sense of self derived in their native culture. The ethnographer may be represented by their host culture as 'vulnerable, weak, ignorant, or lowly' (McGuire 2002:201).

On certain occasions, gender almost certainly came into play in this study and hindered research progress amongst male sections of the community (notably, there were only one or two men present for each CBS round, and only three male CBS participants overall). However, at other points, it provided privileged glimpses into the socio-cultural world of some of the women of lihongo, which would have been inaccessible to a male researcher. In fact, gender as an identity marker may allow one to 'transcend culture' and gain extra insight, here through a sense of 'female solidarity and intimacy', thereby furthering research (Pratt 1986:45). Aspects of an ascribed identity may offer fruitful possibilities, therefore. Even if it does not, Spickard argues that the frustrations of such a situation are preferable to 'hiding behind the myth of the "universal" researcher'. However, he wisely cautions against 'accenting' one's identity 'so much so that it overcomes all' (Spickard & Landres 2002:7). Honesty and integrity are surely vital when one is in dialogue with participants in the host community: 'One must bring oneself to that dialogue, values and all – for that is what one is asking of one's respondent' (Spickard 2002:248). This brings with it the not inconsiderable challenge of fully exposing to the hosts' critique one's own identity and worldview.

If the researcher's identity affects the resulting study and their identity may be changed over the period of research – 'it is not news that anthropologists are changed by their fieldwork' (Spickard & Landres 2002:7) – a further aspect of ethnography's 'partiality' is revealed. This is true, too, of the changing relationships developed in the field and the resultant effect on the research, particularly if the ethnography focuses on an individual relationship, e.g. *Mama Lola* (Brown 2002:127-133). Fieldwork raises questions for the identity of the researcher and encourages them to reflect on themselves: 'in seeking to understand how other people make sense of their worlds, I interrogate myself as I interrogate them' (Neitz 2002:35).¹⁰

(vii) The 'Field' of Research

Before expanding on the guiding principles that have arisen from this consideration of the epistemological problems involved in ethnography, it is necessary to contemplate what, precisely, is meant by the 'field' of research. Scholars note that ethnography is the result of an encounter, is not a description of an objective reality, and such is the case with the 'field' of research, too:

The ground upon which such a researcher stands belongs neither to herself or to the other but has come into being between them, precisely because of the meeting of the two. This is ground that would not have existed apart from the relationship between the researcher and her subject.

Orsi (1998:220) cited in Tweed (2002:74, endnote 7)

Landres also articulates this point, insisting that if we seek a reflexive approach to ethnographic research the first step is 'acknowledging that "the field" includes the ethnographer himself or herself' (2002:102). After all, the ethnographer is documenting a fieldwork *encounter* and is not observing from afar. In addition, he notes that the parameters of the field may be contested and therefore affected. Landres argues for greater attention to be paid to the nature of the interaction between researcher and host community, acknowledging their part in negotiating the terms of the encounter and the extent of the field. However,

¹⁰ See also Fischer (1986:199): 'The ethnic, the ethnographer, and the cross cultural scholar in general begin with a personal empathetic "dual tracking," seeking in the other clarification for processes in the self.'

Landres takes the point further to argue that 'ethnographers do not just *represent* and *define* "the field"; they *become* it' (2002:105, emphases original). The field itself is intimately and wholly bound up with the presence and identity of the researcher, as well as those of the host community: 'inevitably... one's identity always creeps in to shape the field and its web of relationships' (Landres 2002:106-7).

It is worth reproducing here the 'eight different representational moments' that Landres documents. These illustrate why this study does not take a realist, structural view of culture and identity, and acknowledges fully the impact of the researcher herself and agency of the hosts on the output of the study:

1. 'I the Anthropologist' represent myself and people like me (i.e., anthropologists and ethnographers, even academic scholars as a group) to the 'Others'.
2. The 'Others' represent me to themselves. They decide for themselves who I really am and why I am among them.
3. The 'Others' represent themselves within their own groups.
4. The 'Others' represent themselves to me and to people like me.
5. The 'Others' represent me to myself.
6. 'I the Anthropologist' represent the 'Other' to fellow anthropologists, as well as to the public.
7. 'I the Anthropologist' represent the 'Other' to themselves.
8. Finally: 'I the Anthropologist' represent 'the Ethnographer' not only to the public, but also to my fellow anthropologists.

Landres (2002:106-110).

A Critical, Postmodern Approach for the Current Study

Having had 'a taste of the current anthropological stew' (Spickard & Landres 2002:9), and having reflected on the issues pertinent to the present study, it falls to establish the ethnographic principles that will guide this study. The traditional, realist model of an ethnographer (subject), a representative of 'Us' going to plant him/herself in a community of natives (object), in order to record a corpus of factual knowledge about 'Them' (probably as a 'national character') is rejected. As Spickard argues, in the post-colonial context the task for ethnographers is 'to find a new, more progressive, role' (2002:241).

The conception of the ethnographer as an objective, authoritative researcher who adequately records the 'facts' of what 'they' think or do, is erroneous. There is no objective researcher and there is no definitive corpus of 'culture' to be reported on. Furthermore, what is being relayed and interpreted is not a timeless culture. This is partly because cultures are dynamic, but also because the ethnography records a transient, cross-cultural interaction, of which the researcher is a part. This 'fragmentary' experience adds to the selective and partial nature of ethnographies (Tyler 1986:131). That is not to say, however, that nothing of value comes out of ethnographic research or that no knowledge of the host community and their worldview might be gained. Rather, it is to say that the research must measure its expectations against the challenges above, have a self-reflective element and lay out its limitations explicitly.

The above exploration of contemporary anthropological approaches seem to point toward four principles, whose use might mitigate the limitations of anthropological study and ethnographic writing. The study requires:

1. A reflexive methodology, focusing on personalism, dialogue and intersubjectivity.
2. The polyphonic presentation of results of research and fieldwork.
3. An ethic of equality, desirous of acknowledging and dispersing unequal power relations.
4. An ethic of honesty and integrity, highlighting the subjectivity and influential presence of the researcher.

1. The first principle exposes the commitment that ethnography is, and should be, an interpersonal engagement, an encounter. This statement implies that the presence and contributions of *all* involved parties should be acknowledged and documented (whether in archival or published form). Reflexive ethnography makes clear the influence of the researcher on the study and their subjective stance. It brings the subject, 'the "doer" of the knowledge-making activity, back into the account of knowledge' and therefore 'helps to control hidden bias' and addresses historical 'asymmetry' in relations between ethnographer and host community (Hufford 1995:58, 60, 74).

Spickard *et al.*, focusing on the ethnography of religion, state the following: 'We believe that the ethnography of religion must recognize the personal aspects of its knowledge: the fact that ethnographic knowledge is generated in interpersonal encounters between people with specific social locations. At the same time, ethnographic knowledge is not *only* personal; it aspires to something more.' The chief task is 'finding that balance' (Spickard & Landres 2002:12-13). The study should include explanation of the means by which contributions were made and the social location in which they took place: the field does not offer, as it were, the controlled conditions of a laboratory and, therefore, neither should the ethnographic account be sanitised.

Fieldwork, as well as its later depiction in the ethnographic account, depends upon dialogue in a situational, social context, and it is symptomatic of Western hegemony that indigenous voices (and ethnographers) have been silenced in ethnographies for so long. This study requires, therefore, a 'human-oriented' approach (A.W. Geertz 2002:235) and one that focuses on relationships, not just observation (Clifford 1989:562). As Spickard states, 'ethnographers of religion face the same issues as do their anthropological cousins. "Doing ethnography" in the traditional way suppresses the social context of the ethnographic enterprise' (Spickard & Landres 2002:10). Recognising the socially determined aspects of culture and ethnography is crucial: 'anthropological fieldwork [is viewed] as something closer to a social art form than a social science', involving as it does complex and ambiguous human relationships. 'Truth telling and justice' should guide its execution, rather than 'the canons of scientific research' (Brown 2002:130).

Fischer and Marcus are keen to stress that their use of the term 'dialogue' is not meant in the 'literalist naïve' sense (1989:570). The term dialogue is not being used in that sense here, either, so it does require some clarification. Dialogue in its literal and common use means exchange of ideas or a channel of communication or conversation between two *or more* agents, as opposed to duologue, which limits the

interaction to two parties. This is a determining factor in the approach to sources and contributors to this study. The interaction previously conceived as a linear one between researcher, on the one hand, and natives, on the other, is rejected. Instead, the focus is on dialogue literal *and* figurative, with the living *and* dead, with person, text *and* performance, and, finally, by no means limited to a two-way interaction.¹¹

In this case, dialogical interaction is conceived as a three-dimensional web of interactions between the researcher and *multiple* written, oral, living and dead knowledge-bases. Some of those interactions will be conversational, some figurative conversation, perhaps between researcher and scholarship or text or performance. In this case, dialogue will not only be between researcher and 'informants' (co-authors might be a more accurate and appropriate term, participants certainly so) but also between researcher and other sources, such as missionary accounts (denounced by traditional ethnographers for their bias and overly 'involved' perspective but who nevertheless have unique perspectives that this study will benefit from), extant ethnographies, scholarship on the Aawambo, oral literature, performance, the observations of the researcher and local scholarship. In addition, the ethnographic study will interact with the contextual interpretation of biblical texts. Dialogue with the past (missionary accounts) is seen as complementary to dialogue in the present. A purely historical approach to ethnography would miss the crucial role of reception in the evolution of meaning and culture but a pure focus on the present might lack engagement with cultural history. After all, culture is negotiated, contested and dynamic: the product of people over time. Both are required: historical research has much to offer but we also need to 'turn to the living' to get a full picture (Tweed 2002:65). Overall, this study aims to reflect the personal and subjective nature of the research, rather than succumbing to the 'contradiction' of old between 'engagement' in

¹¹ Fischer & Marcus (1989:570): 'The notion of polyphony or multiple voices should not be interpreted as random people the anthropologist happens to encounter, but rather points to the problem of representing systemic intracultural differences, be they competing class-linked discourses, hegemonic and counterhegemonic discourses, residual-dominant-emergent discourses, or what have you – again an exercise in social analysis, not a reduction to two-person conversations.'

research and 'self-effacement' in text (Pratt 1986:33). This approach aims to facilitate the second principle, polyphony, by pursuing multiple voices across disciplines, interests, genders, age-groups and eras, acknowledging that all are inherently perspectival and partial.

2. The second principle will be to adopt a polyphonic approach, in search of 'texture' (Fischer 1986:203). That is, there is an explicit commitment in this study to focus on the particular (a village rather than kingdom or region) but to acknowledge the diversity of interpretations, commitments and worldviews within that community by including multiple and contesting voices in the study, on the understanding that 'the more views we consider, the more reason we have to be hopeful about our conclusions' (Hufford 1995:60). In *Writing Culture*, the authors chart the progress of ethnography through the distanced description of an essentialised 'Other' (pre-1960s), to the incorporation of the ethnographer in the text in a 'self-reflexive' and 'confessional' style (post-1960s) and they recommend the polyphonic ethnography as the next step in the development of ethnography (Clifford & Marcus 1986b:14ff.). This approach not only acknowledges the subjectivity of the anthropologist-ethnographer, but the multiplicity of voices in the field and the individuality of each contributor to the project.

It should be noted that this commitment to individuality of expression will not be at the expense of seeking trends and representative themes, a tension noted by Clifford (1986:105). Nor will the highlighting of multiple and heterogeneous voices be used to silence the researcher as a significant voice. A commitment to dialogue guards against the subjugation of any party with an interest in the study (Fischer 1986:201). Further, all voices must be attributed and not mediated (or overly sanitised) by the researcher, a criticism that Crapanzano levels at Clifford Geertz (1986:72). As James Clifford notes, even a polyphonic approach with direct, named quotation has its limitations, as the ethnographer still holds the reins and controls which quotations are used and the connective text (1983:136-140).

One approach which might go some way to giving a proper podium to the contextual voices is to present participant contributions in 'natural', as opposed to 'correct' language, privileging the voice of the contributor and the character of the exchange over formal English. The effect is startling and evocative, as Micaela di Leonardo shows (1987:13-14). A further consideration must be the translation of vernacular terms: there is a challenge to remain as faithful to the exact words as possible, but also to convey the sense of what is said. The question is, then, does one report literally or idiomatically? Either way, the researcher must avoid imposing their native language on the language of the host community because one's own language is 'at base subtly ethnocentric' (Marcus & Cushman 1982:46-7). Dialogue will aim to tease out interpretation from the participants, because it is acknowledged that they will not have the option to re-word, expand upon or footnote contributions later! (Marcus & Cushman 1982:44).

Via a focus on the particular and a desire to seek out diversity, it is hoped that the charge of essentialism will be avoided. Furthermore, the rights of individuals to represent themselves and not to be controlled by outsider representation are upheld. The dialogical and polyphonic approach is deliberately 'cooperative and collaborative' and it seeks 'the mutual, dialogical production of a discourse, of a story of sorts' (Tyler 1986:126). This reference to story is not a label of fiction but rather an acknowledgment of the creative and unique ways in which authors (text-based or otherwise) interpret their surroundings and the events that punctuate their lives. Further, it recognises post-modern ethnography's task, which is to *evoke*, not to represent: 'evocation is non-representational' (Tyler 1986:129). To incorporate multiple voices and weave them into such a story not only adds depth to the description but also acknowledges the status as co-authors of 'native partners' in the ethnographic endeavour (Tyler 1986:127).

Wilcox uses the 'metaphor of parallax' in creating 'visual depth perception' to illustrate the need for multiple voices in a study in order to achieve 'analytical depth perception' (2002:51). A monophonic approach,

and especially one privileging the interpretive slant of the ethnographer, would lead to a myopic view of the community under consideration. Considering 'this "generalizing" versus "particularizing" divide' (Spickard & Landres 2002:3), this research falls on the side of the latter, not wishing to extrapolate from lihongo worldviews/interpretations what wider Owambo or Namibian worldviews/interpretations would be. In this sense, it is critical of a tendency in African biblical studies and theology to present a packaged 'African interpretation' or 'African approach'. The particularising approach 'implies a wish to understand a social or cultural scene in its full individuality' (Spickard & Landres 2002:3). I would echo Neitz's ethic: 'I am trying to locate my narrative in the local and particular.' She aims to produce 'a text that is multivocal' and one that is produced through 'collaborative conversations'. Further, she seeks to acknowledge her own interpretive influence in the production of a text about a tradition 'too diverse and idiosyncratic' to be exhaustively or definitively presented (Neitz 2002:44). Clifford Geertz, who has been critical of the 'oddly self-lacerating skepticism about the anthropological enterprise' (2002:11), also stresses the need to move toward a polyphonic model of ethnographic discourse:

The choice is not between regretting the past and embracing the future. Nor is it between the anthropologist as hero and as the very model of a postmodern major general. It is between, on the one hand, sustaining a research tradition upon which a discipline, "soft" and half-formed perhaps but morally essential, has been built and, on the other, "displacing," "reworking," "renegotiating," "reimagining," or "reinventing" that tradition, in favor of a more "multiply centered," "pluralistic," "dialogical" approach, one which sees poking into the lives of people who are not in a position to poke into yours as something of a colonial relic.

Geertz (1998:72) cited in Spickard & Landres (2002:1)

What *form* today's ideal ethnography should take is a matter for debate. Both Clifford and Tyler are adamant that its form should derive from its development and that, therefore, its form cannot be predetermined. Tyler suggests ideals of polyphonic texts, citing the newspaper and the Bible as particularly good examples (1986:127). Both display evidence of shared (and attributed) authorship with 'native partners', dispersal of power and polyphonic contribution in the form of inscribed speech-acts

and performances. Furthermore, both are firmly grounded in social locations.

3. The commitments to equality and honesty are basic tenets of the humanist approach of the study. A commitment to equality seeks to avoid unequal power relations and to put the power of expression of cultural interpretation into the hands of the host community, whilst acknowledging the interpretive hand of the researcher: 'Post-colonial ethnography bans the missionary position and its presumption of native ignorance. More precisely, equality demands that native interpretations of *our* beliefs be given as much weight as our interpretation of theirs. This changes ethnographic practice. If we are no longer imposing interpretations, but trading them, we begin to converse with our informants' in the mutually enriching dialogue of a 'cross-cultural encounter' (Spickard 2002:247). Dispersing unequal power relations in this way is an aim that modern ethnography shares with CBS: the ethnographer should be a *facilitator* in bringing together a polyphonic interpretation of a cultural context, just as the socially engaged biblical scholar described by West is meant to facilitate 'a more ambiguous and polysemic expression' of biblical interpretations in their research context (2003:96).
4. Equality goes hand in hand with the fourth commitment, honesty, the two being the 'ideals' that guide the ethnographic community (Spickard 2002:246). Honesty is required in acknowledging the subjectivity and interpretive influence of the researcher (taking a reflective and reflexive approach), as well as in seeking to be true to the interpretation of culture expressed by participants in the study. This is surely part of developing a 'a deepened sense of ethnographic responsibility' (Spickard & Landres 2002:14). Acknowledging that 'ethnographers are emotion workers' and being honest about the extent to which we access other cultures via emotion or intuition does not necessarily reject ethnography as worthless, but does make explicit the emotional involvement in the study and the methods by which ethnographers 'cross the bridges to others' (Davidman 2002:19). The position and authority of the contemporary

ethnography is uncertain and academic honesty requires us to acknowledge that: 'we are obliged in all our work, ethnographic and historical, to be as clear as possible about our confused location, to be as attentive as possible to our continually shifting position. And in that reflexivity is all the comfort available to interpreters' (Tweed 2002:73).

There are, however, some serious ethical issues to address when undertaking a study such as this (see Appendix I for further discussion of ethical considerations). Most cannot be definitively avoided but steps can certainly be taken to mitigate their effects. For example, whilst 'there is always an ethnographic bottom line of exploitation' in 'stealing' life-stories or voices for profit (fiscal or academic) (di Leonardo 1987:10),¹² the ethnographer ought to do his/her duty by the participants by, at the very least, attributing their contributions by name (or protecting their identity by pseudonym, if they so wish) (Clifford 1983:139).

It will be essential to be aware of the possibility of the 'invention of tradition', or 'rhetorical nostalgia'. Although the use of a diversity of sources offers the benefit of adding depth to the ethnographic creation, perception and memory are ultimately flawed. Rose-tinted glasses may mean that the contributions received from the participants (or other sources) have yet another layer of editing for us to work with (di Leonardo 1987:10-12). Finally, it is important to note that with the death of realism in anthropology (and the adoption of reflexivity and polyphony) comes a degree of ambiguity and uncertainty about the knowledge claims an ethnographic study can make. We must learn, David J. Hufford argues, to tolerate this ambiguity and strive instead to create a faithful presentation of the diversity and particularity of the community and individuals within it (1995:60).

¹² Tyler refers to tape-recording as theft of voice and 'a terrorist alienation' (1986:128). This is perhaps too dramatic, as pragmatic requirements necessitate being able to refer back to dialogue later on in the study. The ethnographer must, however, encourage elaboration from the participant and state their (the researcher's) understanding of the participant's statements such that they do justice to what the participant has communicated.

Conclusion

The aim of the discussion above has been to highlight some of the issues that were raised by the critical reflection on the anthropological endeavour that took place in the 1980s. Anthropology has taken a 'reflexive turn' and it is in this spirit that the present study will forge ahead. A collaborative ethnography, which focuses reflexivity, polyphony, equality and integrity, is argued to be a complementary partner (or ideal background) to CBS, which itself espouses all of those principles. The latter will focus specifically on textual interpretation and aims to establish the extent to which autochthonous worldviews influence the biblical interpretations of the lihongo participants. The former will focus on performance and the dynamic relationship between pre-Christian and Christian beliefs and practices, as evidenced beyond church and beyond responses to biblical texts. This is prompted, in part, by reflecting on the literature available on Owambo communities in a contemporary context, with relation to such issues as clothing (Shigwedha 2006), illness and healing (Koppe 1995, de Jongh 1998), rituals and ceremonies (Nampala 2006), and 'spirit attack' phenomena in schools (Groop 2010). There are hints in these works (as well as in the macro-studies of Aarni 1982, Hiltunen 1986, 1993, McKittrick 2002) that the influence of autochthonous worldviews is significant and that such worldviews interact dynamically with Christian beliefs. Anthropological study in partnership with CBS is therefore necessary in order to investigate the claims of these previous works and work towards a more subtle and nuanced picture of Owambo identities in a particular context.

Because the aim of this study is to explore the extent to which autochthonous worldviews impact upon Christian worldviews and practices in an Ndonga context, a methodology that explicitly explores biblical interpretation in a community setting is required. Contextual Bible Study (CBS) was selected, having as it does a community focus, as well as being concerned with giving a platform to muted voices and explicitly connecting text with context. A focus on text is necessary here, as the biblical text is arguably the most important point of engagement with Christianity.

The first objective in this case was to *generate biblical interpretations* through a programme of CBS at a grassroots level in a particular Ndonga community: the village of Iihongo (each group considered eight texts over six meetings). The research was executed in pursuit of ‘a dynamic equivalent interpretation of [selected texts of] the Bible’ in an Ndonga context. In other words, this study searches for an Ndonga community’s ‘Bible within the Bible’ (Pobee 1996:168).¹³ It is hoped that this little-researched context (with its heritage in ATR) might offer original interpretations and insights to be fed into the wider academy of biblical scholarship. This aim is connected to the possibility raised by West that ‘perhaps ordinary African “readers” can help us recover readings of the Bible that [training in biblical scholarship] blinds us to’ (2003:76). This is a process West calls ‘reviving the strangeness’ of the text.¹⁴ It also recognises that there exist potential connections between traditional African worldviews and biblical worldviews, which might facilitate original and insightful interpretations.

The second objective is to *assess the enduring impact of ATR in the Ondonga region*, taking into account historical records (academic studies and missionary documentation), Ndonga literature and the reflections of contemporary Ndonga Namibians (Aandongga), as well as my own anthropological engagement. This

¹³ Pobee’s reference to ‘Bible[s] within the Bible’ is a comment on the effect of perspective and context on one’s reading.

¹⁴ <http://www.trinitywallstreet.org/webcasts/videos/conferences-classes/interviews/a-focus-on-the-details> (accessed 25/10/2012).

will not form a standalone section of the research; it will thematically track each of the biblical texts examined and will offer situational context to the community interpretations returned in the CBS sessions, as well as adding a focus on performance. It will therefore form a lens through which both the biblical texts and the community interpretations may be examined. Considering its focus on pre-Christian worldviews and practices, it is hoped that the study may in some small way contribute to the recovery of Ndonga heritage and the foregrounding of traditional knowledge. For example, the study will seek to bring into relief some of the oral traditions, which were ‘all but destroyed’ by the missionaries (Draper 1996:62).



**Figure 9: Family Members Dressed for Church:
Tatekulu Laban Iyambo, Monica (L) and Klaudia (R)**

The third (and closely related) objective concerns contemporary Ndonga identity. The research seeks to *explore the extent to which ATR* (the focus of the second objective) *influences and contributes to biblical interpretations* (the focus of the first objective) *and to wider Ndonga worldviews and identities*. The third objective will be achieved, in part, by my analysis of and reflections on community-based biblical interpretations. However, it will be supplemented by

ethnographic study and discursive engagement with community members. In addition, a specific round of sessions will be dedicated to exploration of the interaction between autochthonous worldviews and practices, on the one hand, and those of Christianity, on the other. All of these aim to give voice to the community rather than focus on my subjective observations. An area of interest for this study is the point of debate identified by Tinyiko S. Maluleke: that is, 'how best to describe African Christianity' given the interaction there has been, and continues to be, between Western Christianity and African traditional worldviews (1996:16). This pertains to the issue of a potentially ambivalent religious identity that one might encounter in the Ondonga region wherein Christianity has had such a brief history (1870 onwards, with 1912 being the first time an Ondonga chief was baptised).

This project is concerned with investigating the identities and beliefs of a *particular* community (the Ndonga population of the village of lihongo) and seeks to avoid generalisations about 'African', 'Namibian', or even Owambo traditional beliefs and contemporary biblical interpretations. It is therefore deemed appropriate to adopt a research methodology which engages the community directly and which challenges the 'global structures of dominance' reflected in the chasm between the biblical scholar and the grassroots reader (West & Dube 1996b:12). The critical approaches of First World scholarship have foisted onto so-called Third and Two-Thirds World settings interpretations that do not always resonate with the reader. Takatso Mofokeng states that historical critical study of the Bible is 'the hermeneutical yoke of the oppressor' (1988:39), in that the power rests with the textually literate expert holding the text itself and the academic resources to study and interpret it. This critique complements Gerald West's argument that the official line in church in a Southern African context often 'only partially resonates with the "working" readings and theologies of ordinary people' (2003:98). Such criticisms highlight the desire to find, in such places as Southern Africa, an organic, contextually relevant and empowering method of biblical interpretation. CBS is one such methodology (or 'process', as West prefers to term it: 1993:11) and is in use in many similar locations and communities in a Southern African context (and beyond). In particular, West's work in South Africa has augmented the profile of this approach, which is in contemporary use internationally in the scholarship of

Musa W. Dube (Botswana), Teresa Okure (Nigeria), John Riches (Glasgow, UK), Louise J. Lawrence (Exeter, UK), and Janet Lees (Manchester, UK), amongst others.

The process known as CBS has risen to prominence within the wider movement of post-structuralism. As Bernard Lategan (1984) explains, there have been three major shifts in biblical criticism, the focus of the endeavour shifting onto historical interpretation and questions of origin, then to structuralism and the text itself and, lastly, a more recent trend toward asking questions about the profile and context of the reader. Within this milieu, CBS seeks to interpret the Bible cooperatively with grassroots communities and feed the unique perspectives of those communities into scholarship communicated to the wider Academy.

Why Use Contextual Bible Study?

Maluleke suggests that 'there is a deep sense in which African theology has never been *just* Christian theology' (1997:13; emphasis original), which suggests that African contexts and worldviews have a crucial role to play in engagement with biblical texts in those contexts. In that vein, it is appropriate to examine the interpretation of biblical texts in a very specific community with its very specific heritage in view. CBS provides an ideal methodology with which to accomplish this goal, focusing as it does on local readings and the celebration of contextual appropriations and understandings of texts.

Maluleke argues for the same: it is necessary 'to observe and analyse the manner in which African Christians "read" and view the Bible' in their particular context, whilst being aware of 'the vastness, divisions, affinities, and diversities in Africa'. He notes that 'on the whole, and in actual practice [as opposed to in academic theology], African Christians are far more innovative and subversive in their appropriation of the Bible than they appear' (1997:16, 7, 16). This project is oriented in a descriptive and analytical direction, in line with Maluleke's suggestion, as opposed to the advocacy stance that the majority of

West's studies take.¹⁵ However, it might bear similarities to West's work in charting encounters with the Bible across history in '(Ac)claiming the (Extra)ordinary African "Reader" of the Bible', in his edited work: *Reading Otherwise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with Their Local Communities* (2007b).

The consideration of the selected texts in this study will take place on three levels:

1. CBS in the Ndonga community, facilitated by the researcher.
2. A critical engagement with the texts by the researcher, in light of the lihongo interpretations (themselves contextualised by ethnographic literature).
3. lihongo interpretations, partnered by the researcher's engagement, and in conversation with professional biblical scholarship on the texts.

It is hoped that the unique perspectives of the lihongo community members (Christian or otherwise) will generate some unique interpretations of biblical texts and so a methodology that engages the people themselves and affirms the legitimacy of their (potentially) non-conformist interpretations is required.¹⁶ CBS has therefore been chosen as it is 'a locale where subjugated and incipient readings and theologies can be openly declared' (West 1996:33). Participants are encouraged to voice their interpretations, however unusual. All of these are written down (or otherwise recorded) and, in that very process, all are (visibly) ascribed significance. This signals to the participants that all contributions are welcome, which engenders the voicing of less conformist interpretations and contributions from those less confident.

¹⁵ What this study does *not* attempt to do is argue the case for a particular approach to Namibian or African theology. I acknowledge the work of Justin S. Ukpong (e.g. 1996), in which he advocates inculturation theology, and the work of Byang Kato, who advocates discontinuity with traditional worldviews and practices and the superiority of Christianity (on the occasion conflicts arise). However, this study aims to describe the interaction between the two worldviews and to give voice to the interpretations of the lihongo community. This study does not break into the realms of how Owambo churches *ought* to deal with the relationship between the two. To an extent, Ukpong's work on an 'inculturation biblical hermeneutic' is relevant in that this study seeks to 'read with' Ndonga culture (*omuthigululwakalo*).

¹⁶ This stress on affirming the legitimacy of a plurality of interpretations is informed by Daniel Patte's work in trying to effect a paradigm shift in biblical studies toward 'multidimensional' and 'androcritical exegesis' (1995:65,122). This applies equally to this research, despite the gender of the researcher.

Furthermore, the process is an ideal tool to generate readings particular to communities and thereby 'read communities' (Lawrence 2009:38) themselves. As a process, it encourages reflection on experience, remembering, and 'liberating the personal and collective stories of readers' (Lawrence 2009:133), all of which will assist in the exploration of Ndonga worldviews and identities. In combination with anthropological observation and interviews over a 10-month period, 'thick description' should be achieved (Geertz 2000[1973]:3-30).

If 'written African theology has always sought ... to dialogue with ATRs and African culture' (Maluleke 1997:13), this study will question whether grassroots and church theologies in an Ndonga context have done the same. The use of CBS in this setting will therefore contribute to an analysis of the following:

- i. The extent to which Ndonga Christianity accommodates and/or references autochthonous beliefs and culture.
- ii. The critical response to Ndonga Christianity.
- iii. The critical response to pre-Christian Ndonga customs and worldviews.
- iv. The prevalence of autochthonous belief and praxis today.

CBS involves a two-way learning process and seeks to avoid positioning the academic in a hierarchically dominant position to the members of the community participating in the study. This type of research assumes that both researcher and community have something to learn from the process, *both* bringing sources of knowledge to the study groups. In the current study, the researcher hopes to learn about the autochthonous worldviews and practices of the lihongo Ndonga and to learn about (and from) their interpretations of biblical texts. Additionally, as West states, the learning process is also profitable for the host participants in that there is a 'transfer of critical skills' into the community (1993:89). This leads to 'empowerment', and a breaking of the 'culture of silence' amongst the poor and oppressed. Further, it engages grassroots communities in their struggle for liberation and imbues dynamism and a practical desire to change the *status quo* (West 1993:88-89; 2003:87).

In that it acknowledges and uses diverse cultural tools, CBS enables us 'to respectfully learn cross-culturally' and thereby avoid ethnocentrism (Dube 1996:112). The researcher is not in a subject-object relationship with those

whose interpretations are being sought and steps are taken by the researcher to avoid dominating the forum of discussion; rather, they should function as a facilitator. The differences in perspectives between the researcher-facilitator and the other participants, as well as the interpretations they engender, are to be celebrated and shown 'honor' (Patte 2002), assisting as they do in seeing biblical texts afresh, through the eyes of another. In this way, 'difference enables' (West 1996:25) and the 'absolutization' of any given interpretation (and the alienation of others that this generates) is avoided (Patte 1995:83). Indeed, Eric Anum argues that an 'Afrocentric' hermeneutical approach, taking African traditional culture into account is most appropriate (2007:7). I would argue that this study will embrace that requirement, focusing as it does on Ndonga traditional religion, culture, literature and local voices as aids to interpretation of biblical texts.

The context in which this study takes place will demand, in particular, an approach that recognises the sociological, psychological and cultural damage caused by the missionary endeavour in this region and beyond. With Maluleke (and contra Kwame Bediako and Lamin Sanneh), I would initially argue that the imposition of Christianity onto the African landscape cannot be disentangled from the colonial enterprise on the continent (Maluleke 1996:16). However, research must be dedicated to investigating the relationship between missionisation and colonialism, considering West's point (with Bediako and Sanneh) that 'in Africa (and elsewhere) the encounters with the Bible began when Africans were substantially in control of their own contexts...' (West 2007b:46). On whose terms and under what auspices, then, did the Aandonga convert? Certainly, we must take into account the effect of socio-economic realities that may have affected the decision. McKittrick (2002), for example, explains that becoming a Christian in Owamboland offered a different pathway into adulthood and authority than was available otherwise, as well as offering greater access to desirable goods. This affects the extent to which it can be argued that they were, as West says, 'substantially in control' of the context of conversion. Maluleke refers to Christianity as an 'invading world religion', which Africans must respond to through intellectual critique rather than uncritical acceptance. There is a need, therefore, to analyse the effects of missionisation on religious and cultural worldviews (if the two can be distinguished) and to

consider the manner in and extent to which Christianity has been adopted, in this case in Ondonga. As Dube notes, Western Christianity was ‘prepackaged and imported to the colonies and expected to be a good fit universally’ (1996:111-12). Implied here is the fact that it was not; hence, we might expect aspects of pre-Christian worldviews to remain and it to be of value to investigate the contribution that those aspects make.

The missionaries had ‘a distaste especially for traditional religious values and culture, which were considered inferior and primitive. African converts were expected to adopt a new identity based on the Western Christian order’ (Dube 1996:112). This study’s use of CBS and its wider concern with Ndonga identity and culture seeks to tap into exactly what the missionary endeavour may have buried and what might be reclaimed. Of course, it is acknowledged that aspects of buried worldviews, whilst useful as lenses through which to conduct biblical study, may be seen by the community as taboo or inappropriate for the contemporary setting. This study offers the chance to remember, articulate and bring to the fore aspects of autochthonous culture – an endeavour that would fit into the wider scheme of African renaissance and preservation of culture, widely seen as a positive trend. However, whether the community seeks or desires a restoration of aspects of lost culture in what is now a Christian context remains to be seen and the issue must be dealt with sensitively.

Contextual Bible Study and the Work of Gerald O. West

Given the proximity of West’s CBS project and the community to be researched in this study, a focus on his scholarship is appropriate. It falls to investigate the merits of West’s use of CBS as a process of generating grassroots interpretations and to highlight the ways in which it features elements that are appropriate for the current study. Certain elements, however, are inapplicable to this study, as my commitments diverge from West’s at points. As a result, influence is also sought from the approach of other biblical scholars and ethnographic methodologies alongside CBS in order to realise the aims of this project. The overlap of this research with CBS and with other methodologies will not only enhance the effectiveness of the research but it will also align more

successfully with this researcher's own context, perspective and agenda. In addition, it will mitigate some of the criticisms of CBS.

At this point, a brief outline of West's approach is necessary. CBS, in West's formulation and as undertaken by the Ujamaa Centre at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, rests on two explicit assumptions: firstly, he affirms the fact that trained biblical scholars have much to offer the community of ordinary¹⁷ readers in their attempts to interpret the Bible. Secondly, and less conventionally, West affirms the value of the ordinary readers' interpretations as contributions to the community and academy's search for appropriate interpretations of biblical texts. As the name 'Ujamaa' suggests (cooperation for collective advancement), the centre and its methodology is oriented toward biblically grounded social development initiatives.

The above two assumptions are followed by West's statement of four commitments which form the cornerstones of the contextual process. These four commitments come from the original mission statement of the Institute for the Study of the Bible (ISB). This was established in Pietermaritzburg in 1990 and aimed to counteract the apartheid authorities' uses and abuses of scripture by generating liberating readings from interfaces between scholars and local communities. West states them as follows:

1. A commitment to read the Bible from the perspective of the South African context, particularly from the perspective of the poor and oppressed.
2. A commitment to read the Bible in community with others, particularly with those from contexts different from our own.
3. A commitment to read the Bible critically.
4. A commitment to individual and social transformation through contextual Bible study.

West (1993:12)

Before the above commitments are critiqued, it is important that my own context is made explicit. I am a middle-class, white, British female engaged in doctoral research. With an undergraduate degree in Theology and a Masters in Biblical Studies, I expect West would place me in the 'trained reader' category.

¹⁷ West's work particularly focuses on partnership between 'socially engaged biblical scholars' and 'ordinary readers', the latter being (in a general sense) pre-critical, untrained readers who (in a particular sense) come from poor, oppressed and marginalised sections of society. West's context work usually focuses on poor, black communities in South Africa and often on women as a subset within those communities.

However, there are various reasons why my perspective and agenda would not align with his, not least my non-confessional stance. These divergences will become clear by analysing the ways in which my research relates to the four commitments:

Firstly (regarding commitment no. 1), the geographical context of this research is different. However, that fact does not fundamentally alter the methodological approach. There are many ways in which the Ondonga context may be compared to South Africa. Namibia is adjacent to South Africa, sharing aspects of culture and experience. Like South Africa, Namibia's peoples have suffered enormously as a result of imperialism, colonialism, missionisation and apartheid. So, I am committed to reading the Bible in a similar context to West. The area in which the research will take place is certainly a context of poverty and oppression, given its relatively remote location, the people's experience of subsistence living and associated issues of limited educational and employment opportunities. However, the poverty or wealth of the participants in the Ndonga context, relative or otherwise, is not what has initiated this research. That is not to say, however, that I lack a sense of social justice or am not 'socially engaged' (2003:94-109). I am committed to social justice for the poor and oppressed, but not because I share the commitment of the ISB that 'the Bible is a significant text which is meaningful, powerful *and true* for the "readers" who read together' (2003:107; my italics). This statement may be true for those in pursuit of a theology of liberation (as is West). However, for me, the Bible is not an objectively 'true' document. I do, however, recognise its meaning, power and truth for those with whom I might 'read' it in an Ndonga setting. Hence, the CBS process remains relevant. Of course, if I place myself into a contextual Bible study, I have invalidated the above commitment by being one of the 'readers'. However, having been reassured by West that my lack of a faith perspective is not an obstacle to this project, I remain committed to this approach.¹⁸ John S. Pobee expresses the need to 'pass over from the language of Euro-centred and Euro-constructed theology to an African-centred and African-constructed theology so as to speak effectively to Africans'. He, too, explicitly locates that endeavour in faith, so it is not clear what he would make of this study

¹⁸ Private conversation with Professor Gerald West, University of KwaZulu Natal, 12th April, 2012.

(1996:176). I affirm Anum's distinction that biblical interpretation serves a different purpose for an ordinary reader than it may do for a scholarly reader: for the former it is primarily for 'practical use', whereas for the latter it is 'to contribute to the academic progress in scholarly biblical interpretation' (2007:13). This distinction certainly applies here.

If commitment no. 1 were restated for a Namibian (or Ndonga) context, it would seem that my perspective might align with West's. However, a very important distinction must be made: when West states that his commitment is 'to read the Bible from the South African context...', he means to read as a committed Christian. With this comes the associated desire to derive spiritual sustenance and practical advice from the text – that is, for 'liberation and life' (2003:125). West is answering the call of the Kairos document to find the relevant message in the Bible for post-apartheid South Africa. From West's point of view, it is not enough to know or work towards what the text meant – to find out what it means for today is also an imperative (2003:126). Here my own agenda is markedly different: my commitment is 'to read the Bible from the Ndonga context...' but for academic purposes, not sharing his religious commitment. The readings generated in the Ndonga context will, I hope, be of practical and/or spiritual use to those with whom I read, but the reason I am committed to reading the Bible in context is because I believe that those readings will contribute (specifically) to this study of Ndonga worldviews and practices and (more generally) to academic biblical study. I hope to be engaged in CBS in the sense that I am committed to studying the Bible *in* a context (Ndonga) to learn *about* contexts (Ndonga and the Bible itself) but not, as a Christian might, *for* context (Ndonga or otherwise).

This point leads me into commitment no. 2. Again, West's statement here contains an unspoken understanding that he is reading as a Christian and that he goes out to (at the least, majority) Christian communities in which to read. The intention in this study is to read in community with others and in a context that differs from my own in almost every way for academic reasons. It is my contention that reading in this community can only enhance my understanding of biblical texts, the Ndonga community, identities and worldviews. This research is founded upon the idea of uncovering 'Bible[s] within the Bible'

(Pobee 1996:168) and unusual interpretations by Ndonga Christians and, as such, 'reading in community with others' must be a part of the research undertaken.

My interest in biblical texts is less theological than it is socio-historical. Why bother, then, with a contextual project? One could argue that using a variety of contexts from contemporary society to interpret the text we may get closer to what was originally meant. Pobee argues that there are plenty of touchstones between a traditional African worldview and, further, that culture should be a hermeneutic for reading scripture (1996:166-67). This leads to the conclusion that whilst my 21st century British context may give me one perspective on what was meant by the text, a 21st century Ndonga context should add to my knowledge by giving me a different lens through which to view the text. An anthropological approach, as well as CBS, will offer a valuable contribution. In addition, this project is not only concerned with what contextual readings and an anthropological approach might tell us about the world behind the text and the meaning in the text. It is also concerned with the relationship between autochthonous worldviews and Christianity in the Ndonga context and the formation of Ndonga identities. This avenue for investigation is also well-served by engaging in CBS in the community alongside anthropological approaches to both biblical interpretation and ethnographic study of the community.

In commitment no. 3, West states that the Bible should be read critically. In his explanation of this point with reference to reading with 'ordinary readers', he is keen to stress that the interpretations of ordinary readers should not be accepted uncritically or with credulity. That is to say, he is not attempting to generate contextual readings for their own sake. The readings generated are then cross-referenced with the readings of trained readers (West included) to see if the ordinary readings might be supported. As he himself acknowledges, the final reading in its published form is ultimately West's own (2003:127). One might argue, then, that West is selective about which 'ordinary' readings he accepts to the extent that he can, if his ideological commitments would be upset otherwise, reject a/the 'hidden transcript' of which he has enabled a 'structured articulation' (1996:31). Perhaps one could even go so far as to say he actually engineers the outcome by only searching for a contextual, liberating or

legitimate reading and by being critical (selective?) in which community readings he allows to go forward to his published research. The aim of this piece of research is different and it seeks to avoid this pitfall.

It is clear that I am committed to a close and analytical reading of the texts in order to determine what is being said (and not said) *in* the text and what that says about the socio-historical context *of* the text. West also advocates a close, slow and analytical reading of the text, and I therefore share his argument that a critical reading is necessary. I am not, however, attempting to adjudicate between legitimate and illegitimate readings *as they serve today's Christian agenda*. My ideological framework means that I do not feel it is for me to judge what is a correct, incorrect, or even 'appropriate' interpretation of the text. I aim to proffer the lihongo interpretations (and my own layer of interpretation *of* those interpretations) as possibilities. With Daniel Patte, I would argue that a reorientation of critical practices is appropriate in order to acknowledge the 'legitimacy of a plurality of interpretations' (1995:27). The question of the validity of each of those interpretations (or whether they are, indeed, liberating) remains problematic, resting as it does on value judgments. At least, as Patte acknowledges, this should be a shared endeavour (1995:125-129). Potentially, all readings will hold my interest in respect of this study, whether it is because they offer some insight into Ndonga beliefs and identities (however 'illegitimate' those expressions might seem to Christian biblical scholars), or because they offer a novel reading of a text or an insight into the socio-historical world of the text that conventional biblical scholarship might accept.

Having explored the first three commitments, it becomes clear when we arrive at commitment no. 4 that there is a notable divergence between West's perspective and my own. The fourth commitment makes clear that CBS, as process or methodology, was conceived within a confessional framework. However, in the spirit of CBS I ought, perhaps, to read from my own context. It is not inconceivable that, even as an atheist, I might have 'a commitment to individual and social transformation through contextual Bible study'. Admittedly, the individual referred to would not be transformed in any kind of religious sense where it applied to me as one of the readers. However, and firstly, the Bible is a pivotal symbol and resource in the northern Namibian Christian

community. Just because religious or social transformation might not be facilitated in me, that is not to say that I reject the transformation of others within their tradition. Secondly, I might support the idea of individual and social empowerment through CBS on a secular level (including that of myself), in that it allows groups within the community to focus on relevant themes of human experience and their contemporary context and address areas of difficulty. Furthermore, in line with the search for an expression of Ndonga identities and beliefs, CBS might be a starting point for the community to reclaim aspects of their traditional culture and heritage that missionary activity and the actions and ideologies of the colonial powers aimed to eradicate. These aspects notwithstanding, in whichever way I might interpret West's expression of commitment 4, our perspectives are divergent.

Critiques of Contextual Bible Study

Maluleke has levelled at West's work the accusation that the resulting work is nothing but 'academic rhetoric', remaining as it does removed from the arena of grassroots theology (2000:94). Whilst this seems appropriate on one level (the readings generated are West's own and published to the Academy, not the community), West notes that the communities in which he has worked do not express particular interest in reading the results of their cooperative studies (2007a:3). A related concern is the aftermath of the project. It must be an ethical consideration that the outcomes of the research remain in some way relevant to the community, if there is to have been an element of parity in the transaction (the community should not have sacrificed time and energy, if only to serve my academic project). It is true that the community may not have an interest in the document resulting from the research, but that does not render the study useless to them. Not only might they gain critical skills and ownership of the text (as West argues) but there is also scope for the recovery of heritage.¹⁹

¹⁹ Reflecting on the fieldwork: In the lihongo context, the women and men who participated expressed appreciation for having Bible study sessions provided to them and enjoyed the critical interaction. It would seem that they also felt the occasions to be of educational benefit to their children and grandchildren, as attendance was high at those sessions, which would not have been possible without the express approval of the adults and elders.

Maluleke also critiques West's choice of categories: the 'trained' and 'ordinary' reader. Maluleke would foreground divisions of gender, race and socio-economic status, as opposed to trained versus untrained readers, the former categories being the foundations for the establishment of the latter (2000:93-4). It is those foundations that need to be exposed, he argues, given that they were the means that the apartheid regime used to manipulate society, resulting in the distinction between the trained and untrained. John Riches further highlights problems with West's categories, stressing that the clear division West maintains may not be so clear after all: academics remain 'members of a community of readers' and non-academics 'are not wholly untutored in readerly skills' (1996:186). Additionally, Patte notes that all critical readings originate in ordinary, 'intuitive' readings but uses this point to stress the non-hierarchical ideal of recognising readings on both sides to be legitimate (1995:102-5).

A further critique of CBS is that the presence of the researcher (and church officials) may lead to a 'conformist' interpretation alone being offered. However, this is acknowledged by West *et al.* (1996:36) and it should be mitigated by the length of time spent in the field in this study (and the deliberate exclusion of the lihongo pastor from CBS groups). The varied elements of the researcher's profile will have an influence on the group being read with, be it race, gender or level of education: 'my very presence as a university researcher affected their interpretations', notes Dube, offering another acknowledgment that, if in doubt, the group may return conformist interpretations (1996:115). This study engages particular sections of the community at a time, dividing the participants into women's, men's, and children's groups (*Oomeme*, *Ootate*, and *Aanona*, respectively). By developing trust between each group and the researcher, the aim is to bring to the fore the particular interpretive slant of each group and the unique voices within. As West notes, with trust comes 'a more ambiguous and polysemic expression' than the conformist interpretations that arise initially (2003:96).

The criticism that the agenda of the researcher may to some extent determine the interpretations generated seems to me to be a very real concern. Jonathan A. Draper mentions 'asking leading questions' (1996:63), while Dube acknowledges that 'to some extent [they] predetermined [their] findings' due to

the question selection (1996:120). West also acknowledges that the interpretation published at the end of his research is very much his own and only informed by the community interpretations (2003:127). This research is subject to that criticism in the sense that it will be particularly interested in finding points of contact with autochthonous culture. Extreme care must be taken not to engineer links where there are none or read references into interpretations when they are not meant or do not exist. A distinction is to be drawn, however, between having a particular interest in evidence of 'traditional' worldviews in contemporary interpretations of the Bible and taking a position of advocacy in conducting CBS. The latter would seem to be more prone to engineering its findings and can be criticised for not being adequately reflective about the effect of its agenda on the outcome of the study.

In addition, concerning this study's overt interest in autochthonous Ndonga culture, I would argue that if a researcher seeks to uncover the worldviews often trampled by missionary activity, the process is better undertaken by one without a vested interest in generating 'appropriate' or *necessarily* liberating interpretations. Biblical texts reflect the various oppressive structures of their context and, from the position of this researcher, no search for liberating readings will (or should?) alter that fact. However, reading in an Ndonga context with Ndonga culture at the forefront may enable the community to see those oppressive structures for what they are and seek recourse to their own culture and context, if they so choose (and, indeed, if it offers a less oppressive ethic), in order to negotiate a way between the two. This avoids the pitfall of attempting to find a liberating reading in every text, which one might argue is an uncritical approach in itself. As Maluleke argues, 'Black and African theologies must redraft and problematise their relationship with the Bible as well as its place in African Christianity.' The latter half of the point emphasised the need to take greater account of the richness of African traditional culture and religion in formulating Christianity (or, -ies?) and theologies appropriate for Africans today (1996:12).

It is undeniably problematic being such an outsider and some would argue that it is, in fact, ethically wrong to undertake such a study. Gloria K. Plaatjie cites Fernando Segovia (2000) in arguing that West's work 'risks being seen as

anthropological, or as a white male doing what other white males have always done – namely, writing about and becoming an authority on black people’ (Plaatjie 2001:118). Although a white, middle-class Westerner going to reside and research in a rural black African community may seem like an overly anthropological enterprise, one could argue (as has Said) that the arena of post-colonial criticism belongs to both the colonising and colonised societies, it having profoundly influenced both (Said 1993:43-61 cited in Dube 1996:122). As Dube states, ‘a decolonizing reader strives to arrest the violence of an imperializing text by exposing its effect and seeking ways of perceiving and promoting difference’ (1996:123). It is precisely this difference that the colonial enterprise sought to suppress and which this study seeks to go some way to uncovering.

A further problematic issue to be borne in mind is the time it would take for the community to trust me. As a white European academic researcher, I would arrive a stranger to most. It is well-documented that a group engaged in CBS may return conformist readings in the early stages, until complete trust is established between members of the group and between the group (assuming it is of fixed composition) and the researcher. ‘The hidden transcript does not come out that easily’; it remains hidden for a reason and can be very difficult to uncover (Anum 2007:17). However, it is hoped that the length of time dedicated to fieldwork in the community, alongside residence in the village itself during that time, will build trust more quickly and, to an extent, assist in generating interest in the project amongst the community members.

Draper notes that one of the pitfalls of using a reader-response theory is that it assumes that the readers ‘have internalized textuality’ (1996:59). This may not be the case in a Southern African setting, he reminds us, wherein most people live in an oral or oral residual culture in which ‘text plays a minimal role’ (1996:60). ‘It is possible’, Draper suggests, ‘to work in complementary fashion with residual oral culture in a way which respects and recovers its insights and yet contributes the analytical and transformative insights of textual culture also.’ Such a contribution, however, ‘requires humility and sensitivity’ on the part of the biblical scholar (Draper 1996:76).

The role and status of the Bible may mean that it is viewed as sacred in a 'symbolic and not literary' sense – members of the community Draper encountered in Sobantu had great reverence for the Bible but 'this did not mean that they wished to read it' (1996:65). Pobe also touches on this point when he states that 'in Africa the Bible is not just a holy book ... it contains power' and it is 'the symbol of the presence of God' (1996:161). As a result, the researcher may encounter 'hesitation and even resistance' from members of the community when they are confronted with a process of deconstructing, analysing and probing the text for the purposes of interpretation – 'an alien and suspicious idiom'. Interpretation of the text, he notes, is seen by some as the realm of experts alone, whether clergy or scholars (Draper 1996:65). Draper also questions whether 'the text is the same text ... for those whose thought processes are shaped by literacy as for those still living in a residually oral culture' (1996:61).

Conclusion

In conclusion, CBS has much to offer the current study. It privileges African perspectives and their contributions to biblical understanding. This is crucial because these perspectives are heard less frequently on the international stage. In contrast to applications of African perspectives to texts *by biblical scholars*, CBS attempts to document marginal voices and their interpretations of biblical texts *first hand*. However, in attempting to investigate worldviews and practices in Owamboland, the pure examination of textual interpretation is not sufficient to establish nuances. This is particularly true due to the residual oral nature of the context, as discussed above. A better understanding of the context will be gained by examination of the performative context alongside the textual. To do justice to this element – the lived experience – it falls to combine an anthropological approach with CBS. A summary of the complementarity of the two follows in the conclusion to this section of the study.

Conclusion to Part I: Methodology

Fieldwork Aims

The overall aim of the period of fieldwork is to develop an understanding of the interactions between autochthonous worldviews and Christianity. In that regard, the fieldwork seeks to investigate whether the general consensus on radical discontinuity (that Christianity [*uukristi*] has displaced traditional ‘religion’ [local culture: *omuthigululwakalo*]) in broad scope studies has overstated the case. There are hints in specialised studies that aspects of pre-Christian culture are still influential in the identities and beliefs of Owambo communities today. Anthropological study was chosen to partner Contextual Bible Study (CBS) in order to investigate the extent of a two-way interaction between the so-called ‘traditional’ worldview and the Christian worldview, both of which tend to be viewed as singular, bounded entities. The problematisation of such simplifications is an explicit aim of this research.

Research Question	Primary MA	Additional MA(s)
RQ1 To what extent do Ndonga worldviews and practices (Ndonga ATR) persist in lihongo?	MA1 Ethnographic Literature; Researcher Participant-Observation.	MA2
RQ2 To what extent do Ndonga worldviews and practices (Ndonga ATR) influence lihongo interpretations of a selection of New Testament texts?	MA2 Contextual Bible Study.	MA1
RQ3 How might grassroots interpretations from lihongo inform, challenge, or nuance professional New Testament scholarship?	MA3 Researcher Engages Professional New Testament Scholarship.	MA1, MA2

Figure 10: Relationship between RQs and MAs (MA1, MA2)

Part I has set out and justified the methodological approaches to be pursued in the exploration of the first two of the study’s research questions (See Figure

10). It has also given an overview of the literature in each of the disciplinary terrains. It falls now to distil for the reader the complementarity of the two methodologies.

As has been noted in the preceding two chapters, this study aims to bring together text and performance and thereby avoid an overly textocentric investigation into identities and beliefs in the village of Iihongo. Both ethnography and CBS have here been critiqued for focusing too readily on text:

- a. Historically, ethnography has been overly textual in its output, often with a single authorial voice and describing a fixed 'Culture' (itself a text, or script).
- b. CBS usually focuses on textual interpretation, even amongst people who do not ordinarily engage with the Bible in such a way.

These are ethnocentric approaches, which do not cater for a residually oral culture (Draper 1996:61) such as Iihongo. A consideration of continuity and discontinuity between autochthonous culture and Christianity in this context must take account of not only the community's interpretations of text, but also their performances (agency and lived experience) of aspects of culture, identity and belief.

Likewise, to focus only on the church environment or explicit acts of worship would be to uphold the false dichotomy propagated in the western academy of the bounded spheres of the 'religious' and the 'non-religious'. Rather, this study seeks to gain a holistic understanding of the relationship between *uukristi* and *omuthigululwakalo* by interacting with the mundane, the domestic, as well as community celebrations and the explicitly religious activities within the church and village. Not only will this approach allow for consideration of beliefs and practices in a wide variety of spheres, but it also acknowledges that the performance of one's identity and beliefs may vary in different contexts. Indeed, it acknowledges the fluidity and multiplicity of identities that an individual may have, be ascribed or employ.

The ensuing discussion explores the context in and methods through which this research aims to deliver a polyvocal, democratic and ethical output. It is argued that the simultaneous use of two methodologies will give me the best chance of giving voice to original, challenging interpretations of a selection of New Testament texts. It will do justice to the multiplicity of interpretations in the community and take into account not only those interactions and discussions in a 'religious' sphere, but also performances of identities and beliefs in the mundane environment.

Contextual Bible Study and Anthropological Research: Complementarity

CBS as a process or methodology has been selected to assess the relationship between traditional worldviews and biblical interpretations in this context for particular reasons – it is judged to be a suitable way to 'read a community' and reflect on 'collective identity' (Lawrence 2009:38) and it answers the call 'to observe and analyse the manner in which African Christians "read" and view the Bible' (Maluleke 1996:15).

Given that the focus of this study is to uncover hidden transcripts and construct a platform for the marginal and muted voices of the lihongo community, CBS is particularly appropriate to serve these ends; it is focused on the participants and their interpretations (thereby avoiding generalisations and precipitating a particular, local study). It minimises the direction and input of the researcher, who takes a facilitating (and not dominating) role. As Lawrence states, CBS is a suitable tool for 'liberating the personal and collective stories of readers' (2009:133). It focuses on the creation of a safe space in which a close reading takes place and all interpretations are valued and relevant. In addition, it is expressly focused on conversation (ideal for an residual oral context) and encouraging the participants to move backwards and forwards between texts and contexts, which is, in a nutshell, the focus of my study. As Lees has shown, this methodology works well in the absence of textual literacy (2007a, 2007b). By engaging in dialogue about the lihongo context and relating that to the biblical text (and *vice versa*), it is hoped that the extent to which members of the community still relate to traditional worldviews will begin to emerge.

Usefully, CBS does not rely on a 'moment' of interpretation (as might an interview) but rather a process over time in which 'subjugated and incipient readings' (West 1996:33) are explored and carved out by 'reviving the strangeness'²⁰ of the text. It anticipates the gradual development of a trusting relationship between all parties, which facilitates the similarly gradual revelation and exploration of non-normative interpretations. Such interpretations may challenge the dominant interpretations in the Academy and stimulate fruitful discourse. After all, dominant traditions are not right, just by virtue of being dominant. Lastly, CBS makes sense in this particular context because it is well-established in Southern Africa and is widely used by 'socially engaged biblical scholars' in proximate countries: particularly, South Africa and Botswana.

A central concern of this study is to consider muted voices and alternative (including subaltern) interpretations of biblical texts, which CBS is dedicated to. However, not wishing to fall into the trap of imposing an agenda on the final outcome (of which I have accused West and Dube's studies), it will be imperative to listen to and record all contributions (as is insisted upon in the CBS process). How I present my findings will need to be in such a way that reflects *not only* the 'more ambiguous and polysemic expression[s]' (West 2003:96) but *also* expressions which might not suit a liberationist agenda. Historically, 'people engaged with *uukristi* in widely divergent ways' (McKittrick 2002:13). One would expect, then, that the community today would offer 'widely divergent' interpretations and reflections on traditional ways of life. My ideological framework means that I do not feel it is for me to judge what is a correct, incorrect, or even 'appropriate' interpretation of the text. With Patte, I would argue that a reorientation of critical practices is appropriate in order to acknowledge the 'legitimacy of a plurality of interpretations' (1995:27). The question of the validity of each of those interpretations remains problematic, resting as it does on value judgments. At least, as Patte acknowledges, this should be a shared endeavour (1995:125-129). This is intrinsically linked to a desire to follow the example of recent anthropology in the pursuit of dialogical and polyphonic approaches, in order to address somewhat the imbalance of power between scholar and community. What is aimed for, ultimately, is a

²⁰ Gerald O. West: <http://www.trinitywallstreet.org/webcasts/videos/conferences-classes/interviews/a-focus-on-the-details> (accessed 25/10/2012 13:15).

democratic and collaborative output, which derives from an atmosphere of 'dispersed authority' (Marcus & Cushman 1982:43).

However, CBS is not sufficient to explore fully the lives and worldviews of the participants, and certainly not to trace aspects of continuity with pre-Christian worldviews. Being *in situ* in the community for an extended period of time is essential to appreciate its nature, and for that reason, I have rejected the option merely to visit the community in order to undertake CBS sessions, or to rely only on extant literature in coming to an understanding of the cultural landscape therein. Like CBS, this should focus on the lives and views of the living community, in partnership with examination of historical and contemporary socio-historical and ethnographic literature. For that, my own participant-observation is required, alongside book-based research.

There is considerable complementarity between the two methodologies; like CBS, anthropological research will privilege polyphony, democratisation and dialogue, so as to elevate the voices in a localised and particular setting into a position of primacy. And, just as I hope the interpretations returned from the CBS sessions will allow me to reflect on my own understandings of the biblical passages (and those of the academic community), so I hope, too, that participant-observation in the community will allow for a reflexive approach to the ethnographic endeavour.

Fieldwork Output

It is difficult to imagine that the final form of this study could be anything but textual, perhaps because I have 'internalized textuality' (Draper 1996:59). In an ideal world, I would be able to include audio-visual materials as, at least, appendices to the write-up. However, ethical concerns dictate that such materials are destroyed at the conclusion of the analysis in order to protect contributions from being used for unintended ends in the future. What remains the case, however, is that performance and polyvocality are central to the ethos of the project. Polyvocality will be represented in the text with the presentation of unsanitised CBS transcript material representing the variety of voices and interpretations heard in the sessions. Performance, unfortunately (and rather

ironically), will only be communicated through the medium of descriptive text and reported speech (and photographic stills), most often mediated through translation.

More recent approaches in anthropology stress not only the influence and interpretation of the ethnographer but also the creative and reflective input of the host community and the polyphonic voices therein, democratising the process and shifting the emphasis from what was (traditionally) sole power residing in the hands of the literate scholar. This study seeks to avoid hierarchical representation on the basis of literacy and rather to privilege oral sources in the community. The works of Nampala (2006), Shigwedha (2006), McKittrick (2002) and Brasche (2009) are exemplary in this regard, as they expressly aim to harness oral knowledge and authority. Koppe, too, locates the authoritative voice on her topic *in* the community, not in her interpretation or as against Western norms (1995:iv). Here, then, a democratic and collaborative output is sought with regard to CBS and discussions of 'culture' and identity, which involves the participation of many voices in the community (lone voices, dissenting voices, conformist voices), my own included (as a sojourner in the community).

This research seeks to branch out from the traditional mould of ethnographic work and standard CBS by considering life in lihongo in as holistic a way as possible. The ethnographic element of the study will extend into religious identity as expressed in the household, performance, clothing and the habitual, for example. The 'religious' may extend into artistic and performed aspects of faith, as well as oral literature and traditional healing. It is noted once again that in an Owambo setting it may be that 'religious' worldviews are in evidence in the commonplace and domestic, as well as within the religious settings that a Westerner might ordinarily consider. Historical time is also a factor, with the example set by the previous works on the Owambo peoples stressing the value of oral histories, proverbs and riddles, oral traditions and reports from early missionaries and the colonial authorities. The extensive nature of these sources and their level of detail and value to this study is clear from McKittrick's description and use of them (2002:18, 78-9). In essence, it is hoped that these many methods of diversification will draw the study away from the perils of

'objective' ethnographic study and agenda-led CBS and deliver a community-focused, polyvocal output.

Part II: Fieldwork

Introduction to Part II: Reflections on the Fieldwork Experience

Whilst Part I dealt with the conceptual backdrop to the study, Part II focuses on the practical: the fieldwork process and results. Part II delivers an analysis of the interpretations returned in the seven CBS meetings conducted: six text-based sessions and one summary discussion across three groups (women, men and children), between March and August 2014 (that is, a total of twenty-one meetings, after 4 months of ethnographic participant-observation).

By way of introduction, I offer here an overview of the following:

- (i) Fieldwork Challenges and Resulting Limitations of the Study
- (ii) Text Selection and Themes
- (iii) lihongo CBS in Practice
- (iv) Group Composition
- (v) Chapter Structure and Content
- (vi) Parameters of Textual Analysis

(i) Fieldwork Challenges and Resulting Limitations of the Study

In advance of analysing the contextual interpretations, it is appropriate to discuss some of the challenging aspects of this particular fieldwork endeavour, as well as to detail the limitations that these engender for the resulting analysis. It is my intention here, then, to set out the most significant factors to be borne in mind when considering both the content of Chapters 4 to 8 and the conclusions delivered at the end of the study.

Conducting fieldwork is undoubtedly a 'messy' and 'unruly' experience (McCarthy 1992:639 and Clifford 1983:120, respectively). I faced significant difficulties over the course of the year, several of which have placed limitations on the resulting study. These largely relate to the relative remoteness and non-industrialised nature of the location, and my 'otherness', being a visitor to the community.



Figure 11: Author's Accommodation in the Homestead

Having overcome significant and unforeseeable visa issues, I arrived at the village two weeks late. I lived there from mid-November 2013 until mid-September 2014, occupying a concrete block building (the construction of which I had financed) on the edge of a family homestead with which I had prior connections. The homestead was approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ kilometre from lihongo village centre, where the church, school and local bars (shebeens or 'cuca shops': *uundingosho*) were situated. The village itself was roughly 4 kilometres from the tar road, on which one could make a 22-kilometre journey to the nearest town, Ondangwa. The distance only proved to be problematic when my vehicle was broken (roughly two-thirds of the time). Much more significant was the lack of electricity in the homestead (or workable internet access outside of Ondangwa), which challenged my study habits, not being able to charge my laptop or conduct research online. As a result, I focused for the first four months on writing a journal whilst the environment was new to me (noting, in particular, aspects of the way of life that were culturally unfamiliar). At times, however, it was difficult to get away from the sense that I wasn't 'doing' enough.



Figure 12: Teaching Block, Iihongo Combined School

In order to keep busy, integrate better into the community and tackle the burning issue of my language skills, I attended school for three months with the junior school children. This allowed me to become more familiar with *Oshindonga*, which I had been teaching myself whilst delayed in the capital. I certainly found that the greatest struggle was communication with my hosts, which I wanted to improve, not only to integrate further into the family but also to be able to talk to them about their lives, worldviews, experiences and so on. Unfortunately, three months at school and self-study for the remainder did not elevate my proficiency from functional to meaningful conversation, leaving a lingering sense of remoteness, isolation, and cementing my otherness. However, the experience of living in and with the family was invaluable. In particular, my time with the children greatly enhanced my *Oshindonga*. They also had more time available for my questions, as the adults were (understandably) often very busy with more pressing matters.

Quite apart from language issues, there remained ethical and theoretical issues with fully integrating into the family. For example, I could not expect them to cater for me without paying my way. However, in so doing I would have compromised further the way of life that I was there to observe, by changing the way in which they catered for themselves by introducing either my money or my presence and preferences (or both/all). Whilst observations were only ever going to be of the family with me *in situ*, I decided to maintain a level of distance.

My occasional isolation, however, was more than made up for with the family's efforts to familiarise me with every aspect of their lives, seasons, and community interactions. I was privileged to be invited to events held at the homestead and community level, as well as celebratory occasions in other homesteads, all of which allowed me to understand the CBS discussions better.

(ii) Text Selection and Themes

Three themes act as lenses through which I have analysed the ethnographic literature, selected texts and to which the lihongo interpretations speak: 'Bodies', 'Spirits', and 'Landscapes'. The themes index three areas in which, having investigated the ethnographic literature (MA1), I felt the autochthonous might endure (affecting, potentially, both worldview and practice). These themes were broad enough to allow me to focus adequately on the material *and* spiritual, 'religious' *and* 'non-religious', text *and* performance (avoiding the textocentric approach that the early missionaries adopted). I selected Gospel texts for CBS that had a focus on one or more of these themes, and which I felt might stimulate interesting discussions of Ndonga beliefs and practices (MA2). For example, in the consideration of 'Bodies', I wanted to explore whether the local community remained committed to the institution of traditional healing. Therefore, exploring how participants' attitudes (positive or negative) might influence biblical interpretation, I chose to use Mark 5:21-43 for its reference to healing through touch and command, and the haemorrhaging woman having lost all of her money on doctors (5:26). This text would also facilitate discussions of bodies, illness and healing more generally, with mentions of healing through the laying on of hands, curing bleeding disorders, being healed through touching the clothing of a healer, and healing through voice command. The points of interest that I had identified prior to embarking on fieldwork (i.e. my reasons for choosing each text, with precise questions developed once in lihongo) can be seen below:

Text	Theme	Bodies	Spirits	Landscapes
John 9:1-12 Healing the Man Born Blind (Practice Text)		Sins → Illness Spit Vision Healing		Temple healing Man of unknown origin
Matthew 22:1-14 & Luke 14:7-11 Parable of the Wedding Banquet		Wedding food Clothing Oxen:Person		Social/community space Hierarchical place Household space
Mark 5:21-43 Jairus and the Haemorrhaging Woman		Doctors Sleep/death Blood Touch		Approaches to Jesus (social landscape)
Luke 8:26-29 Gerasene Demoniac		Wild mind Nakedness Strength Wild movements vs. controlled body	Spirits (possession)	Wild space Burial space
Mark 4:35-41 & 'Nature Miracles'				Wild space Water
Mark 6:45-52 'Nature Miracles'		Body on Water	Spirits (disciples fear Jesus is a ghost)	Wild space Water
Luke 24 Resurrection Appearances		Nature of a risen body Post-mortem consumption of food	Spirits (ancestors)	Various locations

Figure 13: Text Selection Process Prior to Fieldwork

Not wishing to be led unduly by the interpretive foci of professional (particularly Western) scholars, I refrained from conducting a survey of academic scholarship on these texts in advance of conducting the CBS sessions. Although the interpretation of the text would be led by my questions, these focused first on the Ndonga context and then requested that the participants consider the text in relation to their context (indicating whether they felt there was a comparison to be drawn or not). In short, I wanted to be 'led' by local culture (*omuthigululwakalo*) and to try to avoid steering the interpretations.

In that regard, it is notable that certain texts brought forth greater fruit for a theme other than that with which they had originally been aligned. For example, whilst I had identified the Legion narrative primarily as a text that would prove

interesting for its focus on 'Bodies', the CBS interpretations gave primacy to 'Landscapes' and that theme was itself intrinsically linked to 'Spirits'. The Wedding Banquet texts, having been identified for primarily for their 'Landscapes' links, resulted in at least as much interpretation focused on materiality and food ('Bodies'). The second point highlighted by this table is the frequency of spirit-related interpretations or discussions (Matthew 22:1-14 & Luke 14:7-11; Luke 8:26-29; Mark 4:35-41; Mark 6:45-52; Luke 24), in contrast to those I had expected (Luke 8:26-29; Mark 6:45-52; Luke 24). These points are noted not least for their importance in rejecting the potential criticism that my choices of texts, and questions thereon, overly affected or even dictated the resulting interpretations.

In the final thesis, focus on 'Bodies' arises in the exploration of interpersonal relationships through food sharing and rituals, as well as perceptions of personhood, illness and healing, clothing and adornment, death and burial. That interpretations often concerned 'Spirits' has engendered discussions of Ndonga cosmology and echoes or endurances of traditions concerning witchcraft, the living dead, nature/weather spirits and ancestors. Finally, the 'Landscapes' discussed have included domestic and social landscapes, agricultural terrain, water- and weatherscapes, as well as wild spaces. Together, then, these themes are specifically aimed at coming to an understanding of 'people in place', encouraging a consideration of geographical and metaphorical occupation of place (spatial and hierarchical). Specifically, discussions of each text engaged with the themes of 'Bodies', 'Spirits', and 'Landscapes' in the following way (reproduced from the overall introduction):

Chapter 4: The Parable of the Wedding Banquet (Matt. 22:1-14 & Luke 14:7-11)

Bodies: Feasting, Adorned, Initiated.

Spirits: Ancestral.

Landscapes: Domestic, Social.

Chapter 5: The Haemorrhaging Woman (Mark 5:21-43)

Bodies: Bleeding, Gendered, Healing.

Landscapes: Social.

Chapter 6: Legion (Luke 8:26-39)

Bodies: Out of Place, Possessed, Naked, Buried.

Spirits: Restless, Evil, Ancestral.

Landscapes: Domestic, Burial, Agricultural, Wild.

Chapter 7: Nature Miracles (Mark 4:35-41 & 6:45-52)

Spirits: Restless, Nature, Ancestral.

Landscapes: Weatherscapes, Waterscapes, Homestead.

Chapter 8: Resurrection Appearances (Luke 24)

Spirits: Restless, Ancestral.

Landscapes: Domestic, Burial, Agricultural, Social.

(iii) lihongo CBS in Practice



Figure 14: lihongo Church Interior

The first issue to be addressed was where and when the CBS sessions might be held in lihongo. I decided on the church, it being the community hub and the geographical centre of the (much dispersed) village. It was also the only large space to offer seating and shelter (other than the school, which was otherwise occupied). With the permission of the pastor, I was able to hold all of the meetings therein, and it proved to be an accessible location for all.²¹ It is acknowledged, however, that the church is by no means neutral territory and, were that to have become a problem, workable space in the school would have

²¹ In order to be able to conduct the study at all I had sought the permission of the pastor and the village headman on a reconnaissance visit to the village ten months ahead of fieldwork.

been sought. All CBS meetings were held mid-afternoon on a Wednesday, a day of the week and time that the pastor felt would be appropriate. It was important that the CBS sessions were private, such that the participants felt absolutely assured that their contributions would remain 'safe' within the group. In reference to this privacy, it was necessary to ask the lihongo pastor not to attend CBS sessions because the presence of (their most significant member of?) church 'authority' may otherwise have signalled that unorthodox contributions were not welcome. The pastor also had significantly higher levels of biblical literacy than the 'ordinary readers' in the groups, being theologically trained. This, as a form of power, may have dissuaded others from offering contributions.

Whilst I did not wish to offer incentives to take part in the project, I did provide refreshments for the volunteers (always sourced from a village shebeen, so as to invest further into the local economy). There was a chance to relax and have a (soft) drink and biscuits as we waited for the participants to convene. It was also important to make time for extended greetings, essential in this context. In addition, it was necessary to deal with consent forms – these were available in *Oshindonga* and were read out as well as presented in hardcopy to sign (or signal assent to, with signature offered on behalf of the participant). Meetings were recorded on a Dictaphone, with a written record also taken of the translator's words, in case of technological failure.

Sessions began with an opening statement that expressed my desire to learn from the local community and which stressed the participants' roles as the experts in the discussions. I wished to communicate to those gathered that I was not there to tell them what the texts meant. Rather, I wanted them feel sufficiently comfortable to convey their own interpretations and, to that end, I said the following:

My project involves finding out about how people in the lihongo community interpret biblical texts. I am interested in your understanding of the text and how your life experience and culture relates to the text. Please feel comfortable to offer any contribution you would like to. There is no right answer and no wrong answer. All of your thoughts will be much appreciated. I hope we can have an open discussion. You are the experts here and I hope that together we can arrive at an lihongo-centred understanding of the texts we look at.

The texts being studied were supplied in *Oshindonga* and read aloud prior to all discussions. Sessions then began with an introductory question: ‘what are your initial reflections on the text?’ However, this rarely yielded results. In fact, on more than one occasion, it was expressly stated that a group preferred not to answer this but to face specific questions from me. In the main, the ensuing questions focused initially on the local context (for example, addressing understandings and experiences of spirits in lihongo) before focusing on the text (addressing the ways, if any, that understandings and experiences of spirits in lihongo mapped onto understandings and experiences suggested by a text, e.g. the narrative of Legion). This format was used across three groups – men, women, and children – and applied to a total of eight texts (Chapters 4 and 7 concern sessions that used two texts each).

A practice round enabled each group (and me) to get comfortable with the process and to become familiar with one another. I wished to iron out any teething problems, establish a relationship with my translator, and make some progress toward the participants feeling comfortable with this element of the project. As indicated in Part I, I expected participants to be hesitant, initially, which meant that the first text would likely return less in the way of free-flowing discussion (indeed it did, and thus does not merit its own chapter, although I have used extracts from the John 9:1-12 transcripts in other chapters). Having progressed through the other five rounds of CBS, a summary session explicitly addressed the relationship between autochthonous and Christian worldviews and practices. This offered the participants the opportunity to talk more freely about their own conceptions of contemporary Ndonga identities.

(iv) Group Composition

Contrary to my expectations, there were no existing Bible study groups for me to engage with, so this study results purely from the participation in groups convened expressly for this purpose. To that end, volunteers were invited through announcements made at church. One of the children in the homestead assisted me in the writing of a short *Oshindonga* speech to deliver in the church to explain my project and invite participation. Thereafter, the details of each group meeting were announced at the Sunday service. Knowing the complexity

of the demands on the potential volunteers (agricultural, domestic, employment, etc.), I did not ask them to commit to the whole project, but rather to attend as and when they felt inclined or were able.

The groups were also self-selecting in terms of children and adults. Where to draw the line between younger and older participants and what childhood and adulthood mean are always relative to context. Whilst a participant who is under eighteen would require parental (or guardian) consent to participate, it may be that an under-eighteen participant (who is perhaps fifteen, sixteen or seventeen) is not regarded as a child for one reason or another. Likewise, an adult may retain 'youth' status until they marry/have children/set up a homestead of their own. Determining who fits into which group, therefore, is not straightforward. However, contextual determinants of status became clearer to me as time went on and it became apparent that these groups would be self-selecting. The children's group consisted of school pupils who were approximately 6 to 16 years old (pupils go to schools further afield for their education from 16 to 18), although there were few contributions from those under ten. The adult group was populated by over-18s, although they were all well-established adults. On another occasion, I might attempt to convene a group of young adults (16-25), as they may not feel comfortable taking part in the same groups as senior adults, and especially the elders (*aakulupe*).

Levels of attendance varied, with the children’s attendance being the highest and the men’s the lowest:

Attendance Group	Minimum (Single Session)	Maximum (Single Session)	Individuals Attending One Session or More
Women	2	9	25
Men	1	2	3 (+ translator)
Children	10	53	78 (approx.) ²²
Total	/	/	107 (approx.)

Figure 15: CBS Attendance Figures

Attendance & Active Participation Group	Individuals Attending One Session or More	Attendees Offering Verbal Contribution (in One Session or More)
Women	25	24
Men	3 (+1)	3 (+1)
Children	78 (approx.)	48
Total	107 (approx.)	76

Figure 16: CBS Verbal Contribution Figures

Overall, I did feel very much a part of the community and was pleased with the level of support shown for my project. However, it is necessary to acknowledge the imbalance in number and profile of participants: the group composition is skewed towards female participation, with 25 women and only 3 men. Of the 48 children who offered verbal contributions, 35 were girls and 13 were boys. These statistics may, of course, reflect my own profile as a female researcher (and the fact that, having attended school, the children were more familiar with me than the adults).

²² This number is approximate due to the number of children who attended at least one session but did not offer verbal contributions. In one session alone (Luke 8:26-29), 31 children attended but did not contribute (although some of these may have contributed in other sessions). Furthermore, children would frequently leave sessions early, join late, or leave and rejoin sessions. This became even more complicated during school holidays, when children who spent term time elsewhere would join, whilst regular attendees would have gone elsewhere. It was not possible to monitor who was visiting the area, who was joining late or rejoining, at the same time as focusing on the content of the session, so I cannot pin down exact numbers of attendees in the children’s groups. I have estimated that, across all of the sessions, 30 extra children attended over and above those who contributed. Numbers of children who offered verbal contributions, on the other hand, are precise.

Of the women, over half (14/25) of them were of senior status. All three men were of senior status; there is no representation of younger, lower- or mid-status adult males. The fact that one or (maximum) two men attended any given CBS session indicates that the discussion cannot be deemed in any way representative and nor does it deliver extensively on polyvocality. However, the sessions with fewer participants offered the opportunity to go into greater detail and, thus, I had extensive discussions with the adult groups that were not possible with the children. Other sessions (across the groups) were disrupted because the participants had more pressing issues to attend to (the harvest, pension collection, and village administration for the adults, or school tests for the children). Luckily, the fourth week in each month was left blank (with the women's, men's and children's groups meeting in weeks 1-3) to absorb such disruptions and to allow for the preparation of the next text and questions.

Further limitations on the conclusions that can be drawn from contributions to CBS sessions include the extent to which any given participant supported my attempts to probe the autochthonous worldviews, especially in connection with understandings of the Bible. It seemed to me that some participants were more comfortable than others in discussing 'traditional' or 'local' matters. This is entirely understandable when faced with the (potentially intrusive) questions of an outsider, some of which may have touched on *iidhila* (taboos) (Aarni 1982:65). Certainly, there were some points in the discussions when no one in a group felt the desire to offer a response and I did not pursue my line of questioning on those occasions. Furthermore, the extent to which historical (and current) attempts to marginalise (or even demonise) the 'old ways' or 'old beliefs' have been internalised by the community will affect the responses in the study. It was interesting, in this regard, that the younger participants were rarely inhibited and often more forthcoming than adult groups. However, the children often discussed the experiences, instructions or stories of their elders, which were perhaps easier to reveal than first-hand experiences.

(v) Chapter Structure and Content

Research Question	Primary MA	Additional MA(s)
RQ1 To what extent do Ndonga worldviews and practices (Ndonga ATR) persist in lihongo?	MA1 Ethnographic Literature; Researcher Participant-Observation.	MA2
RQ2 To what extent do Ndonga worldviews and practices (Ndonga ATR) influence lihongo interpretations of a selection of New Testament texts?	MA2 Contextual Bible Study.	MA1
RQ3 How might grassroots interpretations from lihongo inform, challenge, or nuance professional New Testament scholarship?	MA3 Researcher Engages Professional New Testament Scholarship.	MA1, MA2

Figure 17: Relationship between RQs and MAs (MA1, MA2, MA3)

A key aspect of this study is the privileging of local voices and it is this commitment that led to the decision to place the results of the CBS sessions at the start of each chapter (investigating RQ1 and RQ2), after an explanation of why I chose to include each text in the first place. Whilst it has always been my intention to present the polyphonic contextual voices, a measure of selection was always inevitable if the study was to meet the constraints of a word limit. In the hope of satisfying both requirements, I have identified prominent points of discussion – salient themes – that arose in each round (i.e. per text, across the three groups). The transcripts reflect the actual translation given to me and have not been ‘tidied up’; extracts are given as they appear in the transcripts.

Acknowledging my own interpretive hand in selecting the areas of focus from the transcripts, I have moved back and forth between prominent themes in the lihongo interpretations and trends in contemporary biblical scholarship in order to bring to the fore those themes that present a challenge both to my own assumptions and dominant academic interpretations, or trends therein.

The type of biblical scholarship I engaged with in each case (whether 'Traditional, historical-critical', 'Social-scientific' or 'African') was also determined by this to-ing and fro-ing. Put simply, I attempted to find a body of academic scholarship with which the stand-out features of each CBS round seemed to strike up the most interesting and fruitful dialogue (investigating RQ3). It is this factor that dictated which biblical text is married with which body of academic criticism. I am highly conscious of the extent to which this is a creative and selective process, in much the same way that the crisis of representation in anthropology (Chapter 2) reminds us that ethnographic writing is a form of *poesis* (Clifford & Marcus 1986b:2, 26). My reflection here is perhaps a feature of the 'acute self-consciousness' that Thomas McCarthy speaks of (1992:636).

Interwoven into the chapters, too, are brief investigations into key terminological aspects of each biblical text (focusing on appropriation from pre-missionary Owambo cosmology), my own ethnographic observations and experiences, cross-references with ethnographic literature, as well as pertinent contributions raised across the full range of CBS meetings. Each chapter, then, presents the CBS findings, the prominent themes set in their ethnographic context, followed by a section in which the ethnographically-contextualised interpretations are brought into conversation with biblical scholarship.

In a further effort to be explicit about my own interpretive influence, I attempt (wherever possible) to evidence my claims about lihongo interpretations with extracts from the CBS transcripts. I recognise that I still have the power of 'editorship' (McCarthy 1992:644) and it is therefore my intention that the reader (or original participant) should see the contributions first hand and thereby be able critique my conclusions appropriately. In my judgment, the primacy of presenting the muted voices overrides any concern for the flow of the text or more visually appealing formatting.

The CBS sessions in this study were undertaken cooperatively with an Ndonga translator (Reverend Thomas Uushona), whose input formed an integral part of the study both as cultural guide and co-facilitator. He relayed to me in English the *Oshindonga* contributions of the participants. Clearly, this adds another

layer of interpretation. Reverend Thomas Uushona²³ was, from the outset, absolutely empathetic in his approach to and appreciation of the aims of the project. I am indebted to him for his encouragement and cooperation in facilitating the discussions out of which flowed valuable interpretations of the biblical texts. Such is his understanding of the context in which we were working that he probed areas of understanding and pursued lines of questioning that would not have occurred to me. From his questions arose answers that I alone could not have hoped to extract from the groups. However, whilst the responses recorded in the transcripts are verbatim, un-‘tidied’ records of his translations they must be acknowledged to be exactly that – records of translations. At times, with my rudimentary knowledge of *Oshindonga*, I was aware that these were paraphrases of the actual comments offered by the respondents. I have collected, then, records of translated comments and paraphrased comments, mediated through a translator. The contributions will surely have been altered in both their translation and, if applicable, in their truncation. Finally, in relation to the transcripts, most comments are attributed to a *named* participant; as I speculated in the conclusion to Part I, it was indeed the case that the vast majority of individuals taking part wanted to be named in the study. Appropriate titles of seniority are used alongside full names for elders (Memekulu [f.]/Tatekulu [m.]), adults (Meme [f.]/Tate [m.]), whilst the children are referred to using their full names alone.

(vi) Parameters of Textual Analysis

In each chapter, the majority of the space is devoted to presenting (in some detail) the discussions held in an Ndonga context. Having privileged these voices, it has not been possible to conduct an exhaustive survey of all literature available on every biblical text treated. Whilst the focus, having considered the persistence of autochthonous worldviews, is on bringing the lihongo interpretations into conversation with scholarly interpretations, the conclusions drawn at the end of each chapter are not intended to demonstrate that the body of scholarship challenged therein is *wrong*. Rather, I have attempted to

²³ Reverend Thomas Uushona is not the pastor for the village of lihongo, wherein the CBS was conducted, although he knows the community well and is much respected there. He visited from elsewhere to translate for our sessions. I felt it appropriate to have a relative outsider assist me with the groups so as not to interfere with everyday community dynamics.

demonstrate the way in which these contextual, grassroots readings might broaden the scope of academic biblical scholarship, or encourage us to consider a hitherto neglected aspect of the text. That is, I hope that the results of the lihongo CBS sessions might offer further *possibilities* for interpretation, in the spirit of diversification and democratisation of interpretation.

My suggestion that this study presents valuable, *possible* interpretations is further bolstered by the claim that comparisons might be drawn between some contemporary African contexts and biblical contexts: 'It has long been noted that there are similarities between the biblical world and the African world' (LeMarquand 2005:31). Whilst this is often framed in essentialist terms (as above), it remains plausible that a context such as lihongo has much to offer us in understanding New Testament contexts (being a so-called 'traditional' community: largely non-industrialised, agrarian/agro-pastoralist, collectivist, having a pre-missionary worldview involving ancestors, spirits and witchcraft). These are interpretive voices that should be heard, quite apart from any cross-cultural study that an interdisciplinary scholar might undertake.

Summary

This study seeks to explore the enduring influence of autochthonous worldviews on contemporary Christian worldviews only *at the moment of interpretation*, as evidenced in the CBS sessions. To make claims to have surveyed anything more, or for anyone other than those who participated in any given round of the study, would be disingenuous. My own ethnographic participant-observations of enduring practices, it should be noted, do not constitute a programmatic, overarching ethnographic study into the life (or any aspect of the lives) of anyone in lihongo. I am not a trained anthropologist. It is through social historians' and anthropologists' use of missionary documents that I am able to access the attempts by missionaries to document the autochthonous worldviews they found in Owambo communities they lived amongst. I have attempted clearly to make apparent references to my own experiences in lihongo and wider Owamboland, in order to further distinguish them from information found in ethnographic literature. And, crucially, my observations were made in full knowledge of all the pitfalls of the ethnographic pursuit

discussed in Chapter 2. However, this study provides a sample investigation into the interactions, interpenetrations and interdependences between two (by no means static, monolithic) worldviews in a particular context and does demonstrate that for some members of the lihongo community, at least, pre-missionary worldviews have a continuing influence on their lives.

In terms of a cross-cultural biblical study, the subsequent chapters have two notable features: firstly, the interpretations move beyond a theoretical or 'arm-chair' ethnographic approach (the researcher moved beyond the library and into the setting itself in order to use the cultural context as a lens through which to view biblical texts). Secondly, and most importantly, people originating in that comparative setting (the lihongo community) were asked for their interpretations of the texts as well as their reflections on both their context and some of the interpretive points raised in the Academy. The lihongo interpretations and my analysis of them, it is hoped, offer the opportunity to reconsider the biblical texts examined and to bring new voices into the conversation at the same time.

Chapter 4 **'The Food is Wasting': Material Interpretations of Wedding Parables (Matthew 22:1-14 and Luke 14:7-11)**

McKittrick's study of Owamboland (2002) suggests that the introduction of Christianity fundamentally altered the interpersonal networks by challenging inter-generational relationships. It was also perceived by some to be a disruption to traditional authorities. Using the Wedding Banquet texts, I wished to explore these social 'Landscapes' through the institution of *ohango* (the wedding) in lihongo. I intended to invite discussion about the associated rituals and the relation of the contemporary wedding to the pre-Christian *ohango*. Unexpectedly, the CBS discussions also generated considerable interest in the 'Bodies' theme, with a particular focus on food-consumption.

Questions in CBS sessions requested contextual reflections on the nature of a wedding: issues of attendance, special guests, food preparation and consumption, the formation and development of social relations, enactment and transitions of statuses, as well as the role, partition, and uses of domestic space in an Ndonga *ohango*. Reflecting specifically on the text, the participants were asked to consider what they thought would be involved in the King's wedding preparations, why guests refused the invitation, how the King would feel about such refusals, the role of 'wedding clothes', and what their perceptions were of the 'best' and 'lowest' place in Luke 14:7-11.

In the ensuing discussion, I outline the material focus of the CBS interpretations. Contextualising these interpretations using ethnographic literature on Ndonga weddings enables me to trace aspects of continuity with pre-Christian *ohango* rituals. Those perspectives are then brought into conversation with social-scientific New Testament scholarship. In particular, the focus here is on the distinction between ceremony and ritual used by Jerome H. Neyrey (and adopted by others in the Context Group), who places meals firmly in the former category (1991a). Working with the contextualised interpretations from lihongo, it became clear that such a clear distinction could not easily be drawn in the case of the *ohango*, which itself may suggest that interpreting the wedding parables with ritual meals in mind (as opposed to quotidian meals) may be a more appropriate approach.

Matthew 22:1-14 & Luke 14:7-11 in lihongo CBS and its Ethnographic Context



Figure 18: Wedding Table (Wedding A)

lihongo Perspectives on Food at the Ohango

In considering parables of wedding banquets with members of the lihongo community, interpretations largely focused on material provisions and the potential wastage of resources if the guests did not attend what is a large-scale, community event. In Matthew 22:4 (GNT English), the King says ‘my bullocks and prize calves have been butchered, and everything is ready.’ This struck a chord with many of the participants, who wished to stress the importance of the material aspects of *ohango*, with particular focus on animal slaughter and food preparation for communal feasting:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Wilbartina Teofelus: | [The wedding in the text is] almost the same because both in the story and our community they prepare food. |
| Ester Nicodemus: | <i>Ohango</i> [the wedding] is the feast whereby you have to invite people and prepare food for them and then you eat together.
----- |
| Memekulu Hileni Nendongo: | When there is <i>ohango</i> you have to prepare the <i>egumbo</i> to make it at its best. Then you slaughter a cow so that the guests have meat. |
| Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: | One head of cattle and one goat go directly to the house of the fiancée from the fiancé. Those beasts should go there to the girl's house and be killed for the wedding. And they slaughter a head of cattle then the |

foreleg from each animal goes to the fiancée's *ombushe* [namesake]. Other meat you cook. The ribs [*omapeta*] you take to your *ohogona* ['second father']. The same applies at the man's house.

The significance of persons in particular relational status to the *aafuko* (couple) is materially highlighted by their privileged position in the food service (after the church service), as well as in the prescribed cuts of the slaughtered animals that are reserved for them to take away from the *ohango*. Food, therefore, acts as a status-indicator: 'there is an order' (Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo). Firstly, of significant status in this setting is an individual's *ohogona* ('second' or 'small father'). This is often the brother of the natural father. Participants reported that *oohogona* (pl.) are fed second only to the bride and groom at the feast. In addition, they are given prescribed cuts of the slaughtered animals to take away with them from the *ohango* (in this case, the *omapeta*, ribs). Secondly, it is customary for an individual to have an *ombushe* (namesake), whose attentions keep them from harm (Nampala 2006:72, 94). The *oombushe* (pl.) of the *aafuko* (couple) are particularly special guests at an *ohango*, and receive food after the couple and the *oohogona* (Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo). They are given the foreleg of each slaughtered animal to take away. These figures are sufficiently significant that they are the first to be informed (after the parents of the fiancés) of the upcoming *ohango* (Memekulu Maria Kondo).

Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo also focused on the material aspects of *ohango*, saying: 'when you invite the guests to the wedding and they respond you become happy and prepare to serve them.' He stated that 'there is a lot of food at *ohango* because the cattle are slaughtered. There is goat, chicken, salad, rice, and all kinds of food.' Further, he raised the particular importance of certain 'traditional' foods in the occasion:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Author: | Which foods do you think of as 'traditional' and which as 'new' to <i>ohango</i> ? |
| Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo: | Traditional food we have a lot. We have porridge [<i>oshimbombo</i>], dried vegetable [<i>omakaka</i> – disks of dried wild spinach; sing. <i>ekaka</i>], marula oil and traditional beer [<i>omalovu giilya</i>]. But <i>ekaka</i> is very important in <i>ohango</i> . Because it is what the <i>aafuko</i> [couple] must eat before they eat another food. |
| Translator: | <i>Ohogona</i> serves <i>omalovu giilya</i> to the bride and groom at wedding feast table. |

Author:	Why is that?
Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo:	<i>Ekaka</i> is the food which is more important in traditional culture than other foods. The meaning is that a woman makes <i>ekaka</i> by pressing together [the boiled wild spinach] in the palms of her hands. This symbolises the couple being bound together.
Translator:	We have a saying: ' <i>Iya evada u vandalale</i> ' [<i>Oshikwanyama</i> , rather than <i>Oshindonga</i>]: 'If you eat <i>ekaka</i> , you remain around your wife' – i.e. you don't stray into unfaithfulness.

This was echoed by Wilbartina Teofelus: '*Ekaka* and *oshimbombo* [are important]. Before the couple goes to the church they must eat *ekaka* and *oshimbombo* to give them luck.' Elizabeth Imbondi reported on the importance of *ondjuhwa* (chicken, locally reared and prepared): 'It is important because the *aafuko* [couple] and *ohegona* ['second father'] and *ombushe* [namesake], they have to eat *ondjuhwa*.'

That *ohango* is recognised as food-oriented raised an interesting concern with the potential wastage of food the King faced in the biblical text. Tatekulu Theophelus felt that the wedding in the story 'would not be good because the guests turned down the invitation.' Whilst this might seem obvious, he qualified his response by adding that 'the main aim was to eat the food he had prepared', hence the King's willingness 'to find any guests'. A concern with the material implications was echoed in this response:

Memekulu Julia Iyambo:	The king was slaughtering and there was a lot of food in the house. And if the guests didn't come the food is wasting so he sent them to get people to come.
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A material interpretation, then, comes with concerns for material wastage. This brings into relief the magnitude of the economic commitment entailed in staging the *ohango*.

Iihongo Perspectives on Domestic Space at the Ohango

At feasts, many of the important social categories such as age, rank, and gender are redefined and given continuing community significance.

Crowther (2013:156)

The material interpretation of the participants extended to the spatial aspects of the wedding feast and, therein, were heavily influenced by the mental map of the Ndonga *egumbo* (homestead). For, just as food acts as a status-indicator at an *ohango*, so, too, does domestic space. There was much discussion about who the 'invited guests' (Matthew 22:3) might be and it was explained that those of particularly significant status are recognised spatially through seating areas (Ester Nicodemus). This is not, then, an exclusive event: there are both 'special' and 'ordinary' guests, and it is a communal event. Particular areas of the *egumbo* (or extra enclosures and tents specifically set up for the occasion) are designated for the use of particularly important individuals and groups (e.g. *aakulupe* [elders], suggested Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo). The *oohegona* and *oombushe*, for example, are seated in the *oshinyanga shondjugo* (yard outside the women's sleeping area). The significance of these roles was underlined by Memekulu Maria Kondo, who stated that the *ohegona* and the *ombushe* are the first to learn about the impending wedding, once the couple have told their parents. Lastly, the *aafalikongulu* (lit. 'carriers to the building') are significant guests, being those who brought the individuals to the church to be baptised as babies. They now accompany the couple to the church for their marriage (Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo).



Figure 19: An *Elugo* (Outside Kitchen)

One aspect of the texts that provoked particularly interesting responses was the question of the ‘best’ and ‘lowest’ places (*iipundi ya simana* and *ehala lyokonima*, respectively), referred to in Luke 14:7-11. My reading of ‘best’ would be ‘*hypothetically* most desirable according to guest preference’ (no doubt, influenced by Western individualism!) but it quickly became clear that in an lihongo context that reading was not the dominant understanding – what one might desire in terms of seating is beside the point. Rather, seating at a wedding is ‘already arranged’ (Memekulu Frieda Namugongo), according to one’s status at the event, and (in that sense) ‘best’ was understood as ‘in accordance’ with that arrangement, in the ‘designated’ and, therefore, ‘most appropriate’ location. However, further discussion did reveal that there were areas reserved for esteemed guests (as might be more common in the sense of a ‘top table’ seat at a Western wedding). ‘Best’ (14:8) and ‘lowest’ places (14:9) could be conceived of spatially and in reference to one’s place in the community or gathering, and with reference, once again, to the layout of the *egumbo*. These important zones include the *iinyanga* (yards by men’s and women’s sleeping areas), the *etsali* (‘traditional’ tent made of materials from the bush), marquees or other tents, and the *elugo* (outdoor kitchen area: see Figure 19). The participants were unanimous in their understanding that the text meant the *ehale* (open ‘reception’ area just inside the gate [*omweelo/omiyelo*] to the *egumbo*, where visitors wait) when it spoke of the ‘lowest place’. As Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo states:

Tatekele Theophelus Iyambo:	In Ndonga we have the <i>egumbo</i> [homestead] and whenever you come to <i>ohango</i> , don’t just go inside the <i>egumbo</i> and the buildings, just wait at the <i>ehale</i> [entrance] for the people to come and take you into the <i>egumbo</i> .
Author:	What is the ‘lowest place’?
Tatekele Theophelus Iyambo:	At the <i>ehale</i> .
Translator:	This is where the uninvited wait hopefully!



Figure 20: An *Ehale* (Entrance Area)

Memekulu Hileni Nendongo's statement about the 'best' place is suggestive of 'most appropriate' and indicates that it is the hosts who should control seating: 'don't sit there until someone directs you.' Memekulu Frieda Namugongo (with no dispute from her fellow participants) echoes this interpretation: 'the lowest place in the wedding it is only when you go there but you stay at the *ehale* [as an uninvited guest].' Hilma Ikukutu expressed the children's agreement with this reading, stating that the lowest place was 'the *ehale*', where 'young men stand'. Hileni Iiyambo added that 'it is also the place where dogs eat the bones.' Wilbartina added another zone of the *egumbo* which might be considered a 'low' place: 'it is also when you are told to sit somewhere in the house like *omikala* [passageways].' That one is sent to the corridor (a liminal space or transitional thoroughfare), rather than given access to a designated place (e.g. the women's area or the room for the elders) may be a clue to the lowly status of the *omikala*.

The enthusiasm of lihongo community members for *ohango* (and consequent occupation of the *ehale*) meant the participants were surprised by the guests' refusal of the invitation in the narrative (v.3: 'they did not want to come' plus vv.5, 6):

Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: The difference here is that in the story the invited guests did not yet come but in our community if you are invited, you go.

Memekulu Julia Iyambo:	If you are invited, you go to fulfill the invitation. -----
Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo:	In our community people like to attend <i>ohango</i> . Even if he or she is not invited, they just come! -----
Hileni Iyambo:	In our tradition the invited guests would not turn down the invitation unless they could not find a good time to attend [at least part of the <i>ohango</i> , which might span three days].

The fact that the guests in the text turned down the invitation meant that ‘there was no joy’ (Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo); this required genuine explanation. Given the positive draw of *ohango*, a negative reason for non-attendance seemed more likely: ‘maybe they are dishonest or are being disrespectful’, or ‘maybe it is because they are a parent and their children have not got married [a malicious/envious response?]’ (both Hileni Iyambo). The *ombala* (Royal Palace) also featured as a lens through which this aspect of the parables were interpreted:

Ester Nicodemus:	Long, long ago, stories say that former kings killed people. Maybe those people who turned down the invitation were afraid to go there [to the Royal Palace] because they think they might be killed.
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Ester’s contribution (and the reflections of the children’s group in response) was particularly interesting, referring as she did to historical, despotic Owambo kings, whose activities have been well-documented by, *inter alia*, Märta Salokoski (2006). The *ombala* is a grander version of the ordinary *egumbo*. In reference to Matthew 22:2, the translator noted that ‘we refer to the Royal Palace as the Kingdom’, Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo having stated that the guests do not feel ‘good enough’ to enter. The term *oshilongo* is used in the text (meaning ‘kingdom’), with which the link to the Royal Palace was made. As a result, even the Kingdom of God reference in the Oshindonga text has conceptual links to material place.

The connection made with the royal/ordinary *egumbo* also informed the later understanding of a guest being thrown out of the feast (Matthew 22:11-13) for not having been invited, and of occupying the ‘lowest place’ (Luke 14:9). The

fact that the man was not wearing *oonguyo yoshituthi* (feasting clothes)²⁴ in 22:11 led Hilma Ikukutu to suggest that his clothing indicated that 'he was not invited'. Both Hileni Iiyambo and Frieda Shilemba made the point that if an invited guest arrived at a wedding but was not wearing the requisite attire, they would not be turned away. Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo felt that 'his behaviour is different from other guests. He is not the same as other guests.' When I asked whether he meant it was more about the man's attitude than his clothing, Tatekulu Theophelus felt it did.

Overall, the interpretations gained from the three CBS sessions were notable for their focus on the material and spatial aspects of the text. Materially, comparisons were drawn between the joint foci of the weddings (in the text and in lihongo) on food preparation, contextualised within household space. With this came a concern for the food wastage to be incurred if guests turned down the invitation. Turning down the invitation and the wastage that would ensue would be considered highly irregular in the current context. *Ohango* in lihongo is extremely popular, according to the participants, not least because 'we eat delicious/nice food' (Loide Elago, Saara Maria Msati), and 'when you get home you don't have to cook' (Elizabeth Imbondi). *Ohango* is seen as a 'privilege' (Hileni Iiyambo).

Concern with spatial aspects led the participants to consider 'best' and 'lowest' places through the lens of the Ndonga *egumbo* (homestead). The *ehale* (entrance area) was deemed almost unanimously to be the 'lowest place' given in the text, being the appropriate zone for the uninvited guests and dogs. It was also potentially a threshold across which the 'invited guests' were not willing to cross, whether because it is the entrance into the palace of a violent king (Ester Nicodemus), or of a Royal Palace into which the invitee did not feel worthy of going (Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo). The 'highest places' were also conceived of mostly in spatial terms; zones of the *egumbo* provide the 'best' (interpreted as 'designated') place for different groups or for people of particular status, for example the *oombushe* (namesakes) and *oohegona* (second fathers).

²⁴ One might have expected the translation to be *oonguyo yohango* (wedding clothes). It is unclear why the latter was avoided but it may relate to the pre-missionary meaning of *ohango* and the disapproval surrounding the initiation and wedding ox practices.

It seems fair to conclude that the texts concerned were interpreted by a great many of the participants through the lens of the *egumbo* (homestead). This is perhaps unsurprising, since that is the focus and location of the Ndonga *ohango* (wedding). The bride and groom process across its threshold, into the homestead comes the cattle as payment for the bride and food for the feast, and seating areas are zoned and highly prescribed. Finally, and crucially, it is the threshold of the *ehale* that the uninvited may not traverse unless beckoned in by the hosts. This collectivist, material interpretation stresses the place of the least as marginal to the *ohango* community. Spatial location, clothing and comestibles index their status: they inhabit the liminal *ehale*, they are not in the attire of the wedding party, and will necessarily get fed last, if at all. It was food, however, which was the most prominent feature of the lihongo interpretative concern. The commitment to animal slaughter to provide for the *ohango* celebration – and the ensuing wastage (with its associated lack of joy) if the guests turned down the invitation (or did not attend) – was a pressing concern for the lihongo interpreters.

Summary and Ethnographic Context

Moving forward to ethnographic contextualisation and engagement with scholarship, I particularly want to focus on the material aspects of the above interpretations. As I see it, these are focused on the following:

- i. *The animals given and slaughtered for the wedding feast, wider food preparation, and concerns for poor attendance against a background of economic-material implications.*
- ii. *The spatial mapping of the egumbo as an indicator (along with allocation of food) of one's place at the ohango and in the wider community, i.e. one's place in a complex map of consanguineous, affinal and fictive kinship.*

That the participants interpreted the story largely through a materialist lens (focusing on food and the spatial context of the *egumbo*) coheres with *ohango* as it is presented in ethnographic studies. Given the specificity and relevance of her study, I focus primarily on Maija Tuupainen's 1970 diachronic study of marriage in Ondonga in an effort to present an outline of the pre-Christian *ohango*, with which I might then find aspects of continuity in the contemporary *ohango*.

In a pre-missionary context, Ndonga marriage was understood and enacted through material media. An examination of its three stages (preparatory initiation, engagement and the wedding feast) will demonstrate that it is through materiality – in the form of places, objects (gift and exchange), food and clothing – that a wedding is planned and realised, as well as validated (by the living community) and sanctioned (by the dead community). One's place (whether one of the couple, kin or wider community) is reaffirmed by a most material set of rituals, which involve the society in its broadest sense (including the departed). Thus, what appears to be solely a materialist reading may, upon closer analysis, be connected to cosmological concerns, as well.

Ohango Yiitsali

The preparatory phase of a historical wedding in Ondonga was the initiation (for males, circumcision; for females, the *ohango yiitsali* ceremony). Initiation for both groups took place at designated sites: circumcision took place at a forest site established by Nembungu, one of the founding kings of the Ondonga territory (Williams 1991:117), whilst female initiation took place at burial sites of circumcised chiefs (Tuupainen 1970:46). These sites indicate the liminal phase the initiands were entering and the corresponding withdrawal from homestead and community. However, this was not withdrawal from the entire community: burial sites of chiefs, in particular, connect the living community with ancestral spirits, with those of chiefs understood to be mediators of rain and fertility for the living Aandonga (Hiltunen 1993:78; Miettinen 2005:65-6).

Historically, male circumcision was absent from some sectors in the Ndonga demographic and by the 1920s, McKittrick argues, it was vanishing altogether. Female initiation, on the other hand, was 'an area of indigenous Ovambo religion that remained unusually vibrant' (McKittrick 2002:213), and which Tuupainen reports as current during her fieldwork in 1966 (1970:101). The *ohango yiitsali* – so-called due to the bush tents (*iitsali*, *iihalala*)²⁵ constructed for it – was a 'virtually universal' phenomenon across Owambo, she reported.

²⁵ The plural *iitsali* (syn. *iihalala*) refers to 'brushwood huts in the initiation ceremony' (Tirronen 1986:60). Its singular would be *oshitsali*. A related word, *etsali* is defined as 'Bushman hut, shelter' (Tirronen 1986:432). Its plural would be *omatsali*.

This is striking given the vehemence with which the church denounced *ohango* and tried to prevent this ‘pillar of heathenism’: participation entailed excommunication (sometimes permanently) and expulsion from school (Miettinen 2005:320, 314-5). The *ohango yiitsali* ritual – characterised by physical endurance tests (dancing, physical labour, standing naked in the sun) – proved a girl was not pregnant and demonstrated that she was ready for the transition into adulthood. This is a transition Sayumi Yamakawa suggests is similarly enacted through today’s *ohango* (2009:8). Kari Miettinen explains that, historically, passing through the *ohango yiitsali* allowed the girl to marry and have ‘socially acceptable children’ (2005:316). The Kwanyama equivalent, the *efundula*, still takes place, or does so in a revised form (Nampala 2006:44).

The significance of materiality within the rite (and, therefore, the interaction between the material and spiritual, religious and mundane) becomes apparent when one considers how integral to its performance were the following aspects (Tuupainen 1970:46-52):

- I. The rite was conducted at ritually potent burial sites in order to involve the ancestors;
- II. The site held temporary huts constructed from bush materials (*iitsali*);
- III. A black ox was ceremonially killed: its blood was sprinkled on the grave and flesh thrown between the grave enclosure’s palisades;
- IV. Preparations for feasting were undertaken by the family;
- V. Lasting one to three months, a central occupation of the girls during the initiation was dancing, often stopping only for meals;
- VI. Girls’ bodies were adorned with apotropaic amulets and *olukula* (red ochre paste);
- VII. Diviner-healers (*oonganga*) prepared both protective and fertility-inducing medicines and foods for the initiands;
- VIII. The promotion of fertility was also pursued through the chewing of certain grains;
- IX. Bodily adornment signified that a girl had passed the initiation tests: she was sprinkled with corn flour²⁶ and wore only leather and palm clothing with a string of ostrich egg beads for richness.
- X. Initiated women underwent a fire and water rite on arrival home.

Whilst Tuupainen suggests that certain modifications had taken place from the ‘old marriage customs’ to initiation as informants reported it in the 1960s (1970:41ff.), her work testifies that the institution survived, just in the ‘abbreviated form’ known as the *efukaleko pashipagani* (pagan initiation).²⁷ This altered rite, which lifted the virginity taboo and enabled the girl to move forward (socially- and cosmologically-sanctioned) into a sexual and procreative union,

²⁶ Elsewhere, in reference to diviners, adorning the body in white in this way is said to mean that the person ‘is possessed by spirits’ (Hiltunen 1993:41).

²⁷ Nampala suggests that the last Ondonga initiation was in 1947 (2006:41).

was relevant also to those who had undertaken a church wedding (1970:101). Tuupainen suggests that 'it is likely that the ancestors' spirits do not receive much attention on the part of the witchdoctor.' However, given the frequent reference made to the presence and lived experience of *aathithi* (ancestral spirits) by the participants in this study,²⁸ Tuupainen may have been hasty in concluding that the ceremony only survived at that point as 'a mere custom' (1970:100). Loide Elago, in discussion about what defines *omundonga* (an Ondonga person), referred to the couple preparing for marriage and suggested that 'they go to the *ohogona* [second father/father's brother] to get some ointment' (*Aanona*, Summary Session). Erroneously, I did not follow up this comment but wonder if it relates to any of points VI, VII or IX, above. Today, there is considerable controversy across Owamboland about the reintroduction of initiation ceremonies that has taken place (reintroduction has not taken place in Ondonga, to my knowledge), with both endorsement and rejection from different church authorities, and very public support from past presidents and senior officials (Immanuel Shinovene, *The Namibian*, 22nd and 28th August 2012).

Okugonda

The second element of the historical marriage (not always sequentially so) was the giving by the man (so long as his parents consented) of his *iigondo* (gifts), signifying intent to marry. A mediator would be sent to visit the *egumbo* where the girl resided to secure her consent and that of her parents. Contingent upon a positive response, he would go with the mediator to share a meal with her and her family. He would offer gifts, usually clothing and adornments: this engagement would therefore be endorsed in a particular domestic space and via the offering of gifts and a communal meal. As Tuupainen says of one of the traditional gifts, the '*oshimona* [a leather necklace] joins the girl with the ancestor's [*sic*] spirits of the boy's clan (as it is made of ox cord and the cattle is the chain between the living and deceased generations) and thus protects her from evil spirits' (1970:55). Once again, then, the link between the material

²⁸ *Aanona*, CBS Luke 24; *Ootate*, CBS Luke 24; *Oomeme*, CBS Mark 4:35-41 & 6:45-52; Reverend Thomas Uushona: Interview, 23.06.2015, ELCIN Headquarters, Oniipa.

aspects of the ritual and the ancestral spirits is apparent, albeit historical in this case, on account of the type of gift offered.

Ohango yokutselela



Figure 21: Church Ceremony (Wedding B)

The historical marriage 'proper' was the *ohango yokutselela* – the marriage feast (*okutsela* = to kill an ox with a spear). Again, now that the initiated girl was returned to domestic space (after a temporary withdrawal into the liminal wilds for *ohango yiitsali*), it is here that this phase of the marriage ritual was concentrated, although the church ceremony now precedes the feast (Figure 21).

Having gained further consent from the girl's family, 'he sent notice to the girl's home that he would send an ox' (Tuupainen 1970:56). This was the *ongombe yohango* (the wedding ox). If a positive response followed, feasting preparations got underway (where she resided) and he would send the ox when prompted. Various rituals using the blood of the ox would secure fertility for the union, some of which Tuupainen suggests were still current among traditionalists in the 1960s (1970:57). Participants in lihongo reported that the giving and dividing the carcass of the ox was contemporary practice. Previously, the division may have been 'all according to the magic meaning of the various parts of the animal', although Tuupainen suggests that this, too, was 'a custom without religious significance' by the 1960s, perhaps because of the extreme opposition

the missionary authorities exhibited toward the 'heathen' aspects of the *ongombe yohango* ritual (1970:57,104; cf. Miettinen 2005:323-333). However, at least some Christians 'ignored' the missionary bans on this and the initiation ritual (Miettinen 2005:348).

It is the *ongombe yohango* that actually ratifies the marriage: 'a very important act within the marriage alliance is the giving and slaughtering of the beast. It is believed that the shedding of blood completes the marriage tie.' This is borne out by one of Tuupainen's participant's contributions: "there is no marriage without *ongombe yohango*" (1970:73, 62). It forms the beginning of a 'special hospitality between the kin groups' (Tuupainen 1970:64). Whatever else its function (to offer thanks to the mother of the bride, to form strong social ties between kin groups, or to introduce the bride to the husband's ancestors: Tuupainen 1970:73, 64, 63), it is through this very material medium that the marriage is sealed. The *egumbo*-based communal feast that the slaughtered ox provides for engenders community recognition that the kinship alliance has been formed. The blood of the ox, like the blood of the young men in circumcision, forms a line of communication to both land and ancestors (Aarni 1982:39). Despite claims that the *ongombe yohango* is not payment for the bride (Tuupainen 1970:58ff.), some of the participants in the present study had the following to say of it:

- Translator: At the wedding, you must give the cattle to slaughter. If you do not then the family will not let the girl marry. If I visit and you slaughter even a chicken, I feel respected.
- Memekulu Rauha Andreas: When it came to the wedding event the men used to give the cattle to the family of the girl so that they can exchange for the girl. The blood of the cattle pays for the girl.
- Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: In our tradition, as from our forefathers, the girl should be exchanged with the cattle. The price for the woman is cattle. When the day of marriage comes, people meet the cattle [being delivered] by shouting '*ipindi ya landa*' ['we get what we bought'].



Figure 22: Celebrations in Church Wedding Ceremony (Wedding B)

Having attended several weddings whilst conducting fieldwork for this study, I was struck by how much each wedding (referred to simply as an *ohango*) centred on the *egumbo* (of course, I acknowledge that one could say the same of a British church wedding with a reception at a non-religious location but the ratio in terms of time would not be as notable). Whilst many attended the church, some did not, even if they were immediate relatives of the *aafuko* (couple). Of this phenomenon, Tuupainen notes the following:

That the Christian wedding ceremony, which always precedes the home feast, is not yet much valued in the minds of all Christian Ovambos, is seen in that not all of the wedding guests gathered at a girl's kraal were present at it (Lahtonen D 1967).

Tuupainen (1970:103)

However, given the extensive material demands of preparing a communal feast (and a homestead) for a large event that may last several days, coupled with the primacy of hospitality,²⁹ the absence of close family members is understandable. In addition, the industry required to prepare the feast may well draw in people who will later be guests at the wedding (predominantly women, as noted by Michael Dietler & Brian Hayden 2001:11). Lastly, the emphasis on acting as a witness to the wedding and being a part of the body that approves the union is culturally situated in the *egumbo*-based rituals (Ester Nicodemus

²⁹ One of the driving forces for marriage is for men (Tuupainen genders this desire) to have their own kitchen (*elugo*) in order to be able to show hospitality to friends and relatives (1970:78). Tatekulu Theophilus Iyambo referred to this change of status, too: 'after marriage, you have your own kitchen.'

expressly stated that being a witness was one of the core reasons for attending *ohango*). As Yamakawa noted in a comparison of traditional and contemporary Ndonga marriages, the 'traditional' elements are required as well as the church ceremony for the wedding to be deemed 'proper' (2008:190 in Fairweather 2010:181).



Figure 23: Gift Procession around the *Egumbo* (Wedding B)

That the wedding is seen as an alliance between kin groups might be gathered by exchange of gift and hospitality (*ongombe yohango*, bridal clothing), as well as by the physical movement between *omagumbo* (homesteads) during the wedding rituals. Today, there are feasts at both homesteads with, for example, the father of the bride exiting the *egumbo* to head the procession of the marital couple across his homestead threshold after the church ceremony. In order to ensure an auspicious marriage for the couple, all those in attendance are expected to put aside quarrels and bad feelings for the duration of the celebrations. This is testament to a focus on positive interpersonal relationships and community harmony, wherein a metaphysical 'atmosphere' (persons extending their influence through sentiments) is understood to impact (positively

or negatively) upon lived experience.³⁰ A feast, here, is serving to ‘cement’ existing social relationships (Crowther 2013:152) and actually generate positive new relationships.

Summary: Continuity and Discontinuity with Pre-Christian Ohango

Various aspects of the wedding make reference to ‘tradition’ (some of which are no doubt evolved, constructed, and/or reintroduced), whilst there have been clear departures from local customs elsewhere (marriages often take place on Saturday nowadays, whereas there was previously a tradition of marrying on Thursdays [Tuupainen 1970:103]). Fairweather discusses the ‘performance’ of tradition at Ndonga weddings but I hesitate to affirm his conclusion that this is ‘showing off’ and that all of the participants are involved in ‘the process of constructing a meaningful category that they call the “traditional” in opposition to the “modern”’ (2003:280). Whilst the weddings I attended *were* very much a *mélange* of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’, ‘local’ and ‘Western’, ‘then’ and ‘now’, to reduce such a complex set of rituals involving scores of people to the level of a homogeneous performance does not do it justice. Some in attendance were certainly visiting from a cosmopolitan life in the city but, for others, encounters with ‘tradition’ (largely mediated through rural existence) are not mere ‘visits’. Some have not experienced the break with tradition that migrant labour or permanent relocation to the city entails.

³⁰ This perception of the agency of sentiments is also found contextually with regard to witchcraft.



Figure 24: Father of the Bride with Knobkerrie³¹ and Rifle (Wedding B)

A general point of continuity with tradition is found in forms of dress and adornment: an older man may carry a spear, bow or gun (Figure 24), whilst a woman carries an ox tail (*omushila gwoongombe*) (Figures 22 & 23). Many guests wear 'traditional' dress (on its hybridity, see Shigwedha 2006:198, 234). Johannes Ikukutu noted in the summary session that 'the Ndonga women wear the traditional clothes in red', which connects to the use of bloodwood roots (*Pterocarpus*; Tirronen 1986:150) mixed with fat and used on bodies and leather in pre-missionary times (Shigwedha 2006:224): nowadays, there is a preponderance for a red and pink striped fabric (Figure 23). However, the children also noted that the 'traditional dress' Johannes had spoken of was not allowed in church.³² This was a point at which the differences between church and *egumbo*-based wedding became apparent:

Elisabeth limbondi:

In traditional wedding people are exalting and dancing but in Christianity we are more singing and praying.

³¹ A knot-ended club or cane, hand-carved for use in hunting and/or against enemies.

³² This point is disputed by Reverend Thomas Uushona's contribution, below, but perhaps remembered as forbidden by the missionaries, as suggested in socio-historical studies (Shigwedha 2006:176).

Wilbartina Teofelus:	Even the traditional dress; it is not allowed to come wearing it in the church.
Translator:	The red two-piece (top and bottom) and sometimes animal skins.
Author:	When <i>would</i> people wear that?
Wilbartina Teofelus:	Like in <i>ohango</i> [wedding feast].

They were not referring to the women's 'traditional' dresses (*oohema dhoontulo* [pl.]), which are welcome in church (see Figure 26 for women in *oohema dhoontulo*). There is then a further set of clothing that is representative of 'tradition', too (see Figure 25). A description of the difference is as follows:

Ohema yontulo [sing.] and traditional dress are totally different. *Ohema yontulo* can be in any colour according to your own choice and you can wear it anywhere. But traditional dress can be made from only cloth that is pink with black, red and white stripes and you apply a pink dye colour to sharpen the colour. This colour is for both genders. To this dress they attach the skin of wild animals, and wear a necklace made from snails that come from the sea [cowries?]. At a wedding, women wear the *oohema dhoontulo* [pl.] when they accompany the *aafuko* [couple] to the church. But after church they wear traditional dress. This dress they wear only at weddings or traditional or cultural events. The church does not decide for anyone what to wear on a wedding day; if you want to wear *ohema yontulo* you can, but it is their common sense not to wear the traditional one. *Ohema yontulo* is more likely to be worn by an adult rather than by a young one. It may indicate maturity.

Reverend Thomas Uushona
Private communication, 21.08.2015



Figure 25: Gift Procession: Lead Woman in Dyed Animal Hide Apron (Wedding A)

Considering points of continuity with pre-Christian wedding institutions (*ohango yiitsali*, *okugonda*, *ohango yokutselela*), Fairweather suggests that ‘Aandonga would strongly reject the idea that contemporary wedding ceremonies are merely adaptations of the heathen girls’ initiation ceremonies’ (2010:182). Setting aside the use of the pejorative term ‘heathen’, I am sure he is right in this regard. In a contemporary wedding, (at least) one area referred to as an *etsali* is constructed from bush materials and is occupied by particularly esteemed guests or ‘guests from afar’ (Elisabeth Imbondi). *Etsali* has, at least etymologically, links with (*ohango*) *yiitsali* but otherwise the initiation ceremony would appear to have been abandoned.



Figure 26: Gift Procession (Wedding A)

There was no mention in *lihongo*, either, of the autochthonous institution of *okugonda* (gift-giving by the fiancé), although it was widely reported that he is responsible for furnishing his bride-to-be with her material wedding needs, such as her dress. The community members bring gifts to the wedding; the majority of these were (or at least were presented in) local basketry and pottery (Figures 25, 26). Such gifts might include ‘*mahangu* or *sorghum* flour’ (Ester Nicodemus), or wares to assist the couple in establishing their own home(stead).

However, there are many examples of continuity with the *ohango yokutselela* ritual – the part of ‘traditional wedding’ involving the wedding ox feast. The term

ohango (now meaning simply 'wedding') used to be used to refer to the initiation and the feast, with terms of qualification for each (*yiitsali* ['of the bush-tents'] / *yokutselela* ['of the ox slaughter']). Only the former remained totally and permanently off-limits (for the missionary authorities). This may explain why there is little continuity today with *ohango yiitsali*, whilst elements of *ohango yokutselela* endure.

Domestic space acts as the primary material stage for the contemporary *ohango* (aside from church ceremonies), just as it did historically for the *ohango yokutselela*. On that stage, it is particularly through the delivery of a communal feast that social sanction of the union is facilitated and friendly relations with the bridegroom/bride's family are developed and demonstrated, mirroring the situation prior to the introduction of Christianity. Foods considered 'traditional' are conspicuous throughout the wedding: a large gourd of traditional beer may be set in front of the bride and groom's table (Figure 27), and local specialities (*omakaka* [spinach] and *ondjuhwa* [chicken]) are served to particular people at particular times. The killing of the wedding ox not only validates the marriage in the eyes of the ancestors (including introducing the bride to the groom's ancestors) but also provides the food (along with other animals) by which crucial hospitality is shown, place in the community affirmed, and envy and witchcraft averted. After all, 'if [someone] is inhospitable he is afraid of witchcraft' (Tuupainen 1970:131).

Notably, it is an ox – the wedding ox (*ongombe yohango*) – that acts as the link *between* the married couple and acted (in the past and perhaps in contemporary times) as the means of communication to the ancestors (*aathithi*), called to sanction the initiation (in which blood and ox flesh was historically placed on the royal graves) and the wedding. It also provides the material cohesion between members of the community in general, through the wedding feast (*ohango yokutselela*): 'The giving of *ongombe yohango* seems to have been, and still is, a very important factor in supporting of continual friendly relations between the kins and clans concerned' (Tuupainen 1970:64). Whether or not the religious significance of the material aspects of the wedding rituals remains the same (and it may well do, given the continued significance of the ancestors: see Chapters 6-8), Tuupainen is correct when she suggests that

there may be 'unconscious significance of the old magic beliefs' (1970:79). Either way, and as the lihongo interpreters made clear, the giving and slaughter of the wedding ox remains the central feature of the marriage alliance and celebration, and particular parts of the animal are still distributed to significant figures according to customary rules deriving from *ohango yokutselela*. Many features of this autochthonous institution (rather than *ohango yiitsali* or *okugonda*) endure in the contemporary *ohango* and, therefore, informed the CBS interpretations of the wedding parables.



Figure 27: Gourd of Traditional Beer (*Omalovu Giilya*) and Gift of an Axe (Wedding A)

In summary, materiality would appear to be key, historically and contemporaneously, to preparing for and enacting the Ndonga wedding. This involves issues of ritual performance, as well as hospitality. Material places impart cosmological significance to initiation rituals (now obsolete in Ondonga), performed as they were at sites of ancestral potency. These were sites chosen by deceased kings or those at which they were buried: both of these would be imbued with *oonkondo* (power), either by their dedication by the king's ritual specialists, or by the presence of the king's body and ancestral spirit, having joined the *aathithi*. Hiltunen suggests of the ancestors: 'if they are taken into

account at the time of the most important activities (e.g. moving house in the field, fetching salt, eating new grain), and they are attended to, they let their descendants live in peace and succeed' (1993:36). It seems fair to suggest that the initiation and wedding rituals would count amongst those 'most important activities'.

To refuse an invite to such as wedding, then, would be to turn down hospitality, to suggest bad feelings toward the host (potentially interpreted as envy or a veiled threat of witchcraft), and to turn one's back on being part of the communal witnessing and sanctioning of the marriage. With no community sanction, the children from the union would not be socially acceptable, either. This would upset the 'reverse kinship' system whereby the non-kin pair have married (been unified through the slaughter of the *ongombe yohango*) and then further ratify their marriage by having children, which would, in turn, augment their social status and prestige (Tuupainen 1970:73, 156, 78). Refusals to attend the *ohango* have dire consequences in many arenas: hospitality and material wastage, kin and community relations (envy and witchcraft), a lack of community sanction and upsetting of the kinship system. It is understandable that there would be 'no joy' with such refusals.

lihongo Interpretations of Matthew 22:1-14 and Luke 14:7-11 in Dialogue with Social-Scientific New Testament scholarship

Materiality at the Wedding Banquet

What the lihongo interpretations highlight is the extent to which the preparations for a wedding banquet constitute a material sacrifice, contextualised by a backdrop of subsistence agro-pastoralism. Weddings involve the preparation of vast quantities and varieties of foods, not least meat(s), which are rarely eaten. Such an occasion, as the children stressed, was notable for the fact that they got to consume foods that were both delicious and in plenty – a far cry from daily existence and quotidian meals. Dennis E. Smith, too, highlights the association of feasts or banquets with luxury (1987:623) and Malina and Rohrbaugh note the 'extraordinary and singular significance' of events wherein animal slaughter is involved (2003:354). As we see in the text, the king has

slaughtered his 'oxen' and 'fat calves' (NRSV)/'steers and prize calves' (GNT English). The GNT Oshindonga renders this 'bullocks and fattened cattle'; whether the cattle are thereby implied to be female (compromising the reproductive capacity of the herd) or simply the product of fattening 'investment' further highlights the economic implications of feast preparation and non-attendance of guests.

The lihongo *ohango* and interpretations of the text also illustrate that the focus of scholarship on food and meals need not be polarised into studies of the material *or* the social and ritual aspects. The slaughter of the *ongombe yohango* forms a series of connections with wider social networks (alliances between families, prompting social sanction of the union and making connections with ancestral spirits). In this regard, the material, social and cosmological aspects are not easily disentangled. The *ongombe yohango* is not purely material (nutritional) but nor is it purely symbolic (providing a link with deceased community). A material focus certainly draws us back to the lived experience of communal feasting and its connections to the wider cosmological framework.

Status at the Wedding Banquet

Food is a social substance and a currency. What one is able (and chooses) to serve expresses one's own position and helps to define one's relationship to others. What you, the guest, are offered, is a measure of your standing in the eyes of society and your host.

Pervo (1985:311)

Further to the material considerations involved in wedding feast, there are also issues of status and reputation within the community. The host gains from his material sacrifice the recognition and honour of having provided lavishly for the guests (either in quantity or quality, or both). This conforms to Neyrey's assessment of the institution of patronage (1991a:373, something he links with meals in his *Reader's Guide*: 4.3.5). Indeed, in a setting of 'limited good' and the invidious gaze (see Elliott 1991a, 1992, 1994),³³ such an occasion is surely

³³ The evil eye (motivated by envy) is culturally contextualised by the notion of 'limited good' (e.g. Malina 2001a:81-107), and the 'pan-human phenomenon' of envy (Foster *et al.* 1972:165). That is, in a context where all goods are understood to be finite, one person's gain is another's loss, thus generating envious feelings. Anselm C. Hagedorn and Jerome H. Neyrey refer to John 3:3 as an example of this worldview: 'He must increase, I must decrease' (1998:21).

one in which to perform one's status whilst avoiding envy for the luxury on display (by generously sharing that luxury). In Iihongo, a wedding feast is an opportunity to host a wide spectrum of guests and to overtly demonstrate one's hospitality and generosity to those present.³⁴ This may be for the reputational gain that ensues (along the lines of the 'honour' model of the Context Group) but is more likely index-linked to the valuation of hospitality as a core value in that setting. Ingesting the 'shared substance' binds the community and promotes positive relationships, for their own sake (Sutton 2001:50-53, 160).

Looking to the four strategies for averting the evil eye that Foster identifies (symbolic sharing, true sharing, denial, concealment: 1972:175-82), it seems that in a wedding setting, sharing is the only option open. However, if one shares with the 'have nots', whose envy John H. Elliott *et al.* identify as the source of the evil eye (e.g. Elliott 1991a:149), then one is not adhering to the 'like eats with like' aspect of the meal model that Neyrey expounds for New Testament settings (*Reader's Guide*). Perhaps he might argue that concealment would therefore be the tactic for erecting a barrier to the evil eye. On this basis, however, a wedding feast would have to be an entirely private affair (inherently contradictory, perhaps), not matching the description of a luxurious meal eaten by the elite ('haves') but prepared and served by slaves ('have nots') (Neyrey 1991a:364). Nancy Evans offers evidence, too, of 'rowdy [public] processions' after 'private' feasts (2012:151), which might provoke the envy of the wider community. Would there not be occasions upon which the wealthy landowners would exhibit marked generosity to those beneath their status to diffuse such tensions?

Tactics for warding off the envy of others include *concealment* of wealth (goods, livestock, women, children), *denial* of good fortune, the "*sop*" (symbolic sharing), and *true sharing* (Foster's categories: 1972:175-82). That Owamboland is a context concerned with 'limited good' and envy is suggested in oral literature. For example, limited resources include butter and frogs, with the former used symbolically in a Kwanyama rain song: 'Her {the rain's} butter is the frog' (Estermann 1976:172). Proverbs indicate envy to be a concern: '*Nefukutu nopiikulya nge tayi liwa*. Envious at mealtime, while eating. (A covetous person is never satisfied)' (Kuusi 1970:26; see also 1970:31, 50, 237-9).

³⁴ If within an exclusive feasting group, this would be termed 'redistribution'. However, the fact that guests bring contributions offsets the competitive edge of this transaction and it may therefore combine with elements of balanced reciprocity (Crowther 2013:159-60). Still, there is an element of 'gastro-politics' involved (Appadurai 1981). Crowther acknowledges that the feasting typology is not fixed (2013:174).

Meals in antiquity were what anthropologists call “ceremonies.” Unlike “rituals,” which confirm a change of status, ceremonies are regular and predictable events in which roles and statuses in a community are affirmed or legitimated. In other words, the microcosm of the meal is parallel to the macrocosm of everyday social relations.

Malina & Rohrbaugh (2003:381)

Reflecting on the quotation above, the texts under consideration in this chapter – and set against the backdrop of an Ndonga wedding – present an interesting interplay between ceremony and ritual. As elucidated in the foregoing section, the Ndonga wedding feast (a meal, of course) performs the function of both ritual *and* ceremony. It is not, as with a British Christian wedding, limited to the *celebration and recognition* of the status transformation of the couple that has earlier occurred in church. The feast is the partner element to the ritual slaughter of the wedding ox (*ongombe yohango*); neither fulfills the ritual element without the other because that particular animal must be (i) given, (ii) slaughtered, and (iii) consumed at its associated wedding feast. Via their very attendance (and co-efficient sanction of the union), community members are participating in the ritual through which the status of the marital couple (*aafuko*) is transformed. However, in the descriptions of the *ohango* by the participants, the meal (and the associated interpretations of the feasts in Matthew 22 and Luke 14) also presents a setting in which the food service and spatial organisation of guests serve to affirm their (unchanging) statuses. In this sense, it does what Mary Douglas argues all meals do: they constantly reference other meals (1972).

Is it necessary to conclude (with Neyrey 1991a) that meals in antiquity were always and only ‘ceremonies’ in which statuses were affirmed, cases of ‘like eats with like’ (Neyrey: *Reader’s Guide*: 4.2, 4.3.2)? Is it not possible, too, that a *request* to sit next to the ‘right hand’ (Mark 10:37) and an *invitation* by a host to ‘move up higher’ (Luke 14:10) signal the potential for status transformation *through* participation in a meal? Whilst I do not seek here to ascertain the nature of meals in an early Christian setting, the issue is pertinent to the interpretation of the parables, as the metaphorical narrative must speak to the parable audience’s lived experience. Smith’s treatment of table fellowship as a Lukan literary motif certainly notes that placing and status at meals was ‘an ever-present reality’ but also a topic of dispute (Smith 1987:620, 635). The host, it would seem, was ordinarily the one in the position to signal an augmented (or,

indeed, demoted: Luke 14:9) status to those attending a feast. The possibility that (even within an elite event) attendees come from various strata of the community is evidenced in Plutarch's *Table Talk* 616E-F (Smith 1987:635), in which both 'rich' and 'meaner' folk are at same event.

Feasting (Not Just Eating) at the Wedding Banquet

...thinking about feasts can, and should, provide an important point of departure for understanding culture and social life in both past and present societies.

Dietler & Hayden (2001:1)

Social Scientific NT scholarship on meals and table fellowship has focused often on Douglas's 'deciphering' of the meal (1972; e.g. Neyrey 1991a and *Reader's Guide*) and thereby ties itself in to discussions of habitual meals, in which like no doubt did eat with like. The fact that people were served different quantity or quality of food has been acknowledged (Theissen 1982:145-74), suggesting that, at least to some extent, there were contexts in which 'un-like' ate with 'un-like'. Furthermore, Neyrey himself has acknowledged that 'most people ate [meat] only on feast days or holidays' (*Reader's Guide*: 3.1), which might point toward the need for a different set of criteria for examining the non-quotidian meals of the non-elite. At this point, it should be noted, too, that the bulk of Neyrey's work is founded upon data concerning elite meals: the symposium (1991a:364-5), a festive Jewish meal (1991a:367), and written descriptions in general; the last will (of course) tend toward urban, elite concerns.

When we turn to the anthropology of feasting, the horizon expands somewhat: there is considerably more 'social drama' to take into account when examining these occasions, as well as different political dynamics, or 'gastro-politics' (Crowther 2013:164-5). It would seem that feasting studies might be an appropriate avenue to pursue, given that the parables in Matthew 22 and Luke 14 focus on wedding feasts/banquets, as opposed to quotidian meals. After all, a 'like eats with like' model of meals as the lens through which one understands the 'inclusive table-fellowship' ethic of the gospels seems rather contradictory. Better suited might be a feasting model, which lends itself well to the aspiration for inclusivity. Gillian Crowther suggests that 'we can think of meals as part of a

ritualized continuum of eating that moves from the everyday meal to the feast, distinguished by the level of social drama displayed at each context of eating' (2013:155), with feasts being recognised as a 'cultural universal' (2013:165) and the avenue via which we 'display our success' (Hayden 2001:27). So, what of rural, non-elites? Did they, too, get to feast and to what extent would a wedding parable resonate with their experiences? Might the fissures in Neyrey's meal model be explained by an investigation into rural, non-elite wedding feasting?

A feast such as the *ohango* in lihongo has the ritual elements identified by Victor Turner: initiands, ritual elders, and ritual symbols (McVann 1991:336-7). That is partly because it is a marriage (functioning as ritual like the bygone *ohango yiitsali* initiation), but also because it is a marriage *feast*, as opposed to an ordinary meal. It fits the definition of 'a special meal shared by two or more people for an occasion of marked significance' (Crowther 2013:165). Crowther presents the characteristics of a feast as follows (here, paraphrased):

1. **Food:** Surplus and distinct (quality and/or quantity) from everyday meals, perhaps incorporating alcohol.
2. **Size:** Usually larger than everyday meals.
3. **Participants:** Social groups (individuals, couples, families, lineages, clans, neighbourhoods, communities, ethnic groups, regional groups, representatives of nation states).
4. **Time:** Designated time and lengthy duration so as to 'digest' the significance of the event, make and remake reputations, and remember for future occasions.
5. **Display:** Use of elaborate or oversized vessels, special spatial contexts, and display of cultural capital or changed status by hosts.
6. **Drama:** Accentuated sense of ritual and public performance. Dramatisation of the social order, perhaps through differential seating, a distinct serving order, stories and speeches to impress significance. Emotionally charged and memorable context.

Crowther (2013:166)

Feasts are rituals and function differently from everyday meals (Dietler & Hayden 2001:3), whilst sharing certain concerns. They may be more inclusive (transgressing social inequalities; contra Neyrey 1991a:385), incorporate status transformation (e.g. wedding rituals) but also demonstrate status affirmation in who is fed what, is seated where, and with whom (increased tendency in societies of strong social stratification [Crowther 2013:167]). And it is in this element that the anthropology of feasting might serve to nuance and elucidate the lack of clarity encountered between the meal analogy and the parable(s) of the wedding banquet: the meal analogy functions well for modeling idealised in-

group relations, but less well for expansive, inclusive, boundary-crossing relations. An agrarian, community feast in antiquity, on the other hand, might provide a powerful and resonant example of inclusivity, hospitality, generosity in a way that the elite banquet or ordinary, non-elite meal does not. Such open commensality would avoid the criticisms made of the wealthy and exclusivist elite (Smith 1987:624). In this way, table fellowship in the form of an exclusive-turned-inclusive (royal/elite-turned-community?) wedding feast, such as that imaged in Matthew 22 might comfortably function 'as a symbol for community fellowship' (Smith 1987:633). However, this claim rests on the supposition that the idea of an inclusive feast would resonate with the audiences of the parable.

In the context of a communal feast, participants enjoy the rich fruits of a particular point in the agricultural calendar, or quantities, qualities and types of food not ordinarily accessible outside of a ritual event. Bonds within the community may be affirmed and enhanced through reciprocal contribution to the staging of the feast (labour or goods), while differentials in social status are maintained in distinct seating areas and order of food service. Such a social event provided all strata opportunities to 'network' within the community to forge alliances that might lead to later benefits (marriages, etc.), or opportunities for dominant strata to demonstrate their generosity in redistributive giving. Such extraordinary events also formed a break from the daily toil and routine of subsistence living.

Spatiality at the Wedding Banquet

Further engaging that lived experience, it is important to reflect on the spatial references in the texts, locating the events as they do in domestic space – the locus of food preparation and place 'at table'. It was this aspect (alongside the material concerns) that really prompted comparisons for the lihongo audiences. The texts concern household space and elicited a tradition-centred hue. This coheres with the suggestion that the *egumbo* is the seat of traditional values (Shigwedha 2006:215; *Oomeme* Summary Session) and illustrates one of the ways in which cultural context informs biblical interpretation. The setting of the text, interestingly, seems to override the setting in which the CBS sessions were taking place (the village church).

It is interesting in this regard, too, that the revitalised initiation ritual in some parts of Owamboland is undertaken in a designated *egumbo* and is sometimes (or by some people) kept secret from the church – the potential or actual conflict between Christianity and ‘traditional’ practices and beliefs is therefore still apparent (Shinovene 2012). The maintenance or performance of certain aspects of identities takes place through the occupation of ‘traditional’ domestic spaces and, in this case, some will risk rejection by the church and/or school in order to achieve this end. This leads me to the possible linking of identities with spaces in the gospels. Elliott refers to the ‘deliberate contrast’ made between Temple and household institutions by the author of Luke-Acts (Elliott 1991b:212). He argues that the author presents the values of gospel as embodied in the household institution, and in ‘irremediable conflict’ with the Temple institution (1991b:220). Of particular significance is the inclusive nature of the household as opposed to the exclusive purity system of the Temple. Certainly, the values exemplified in an lihongo homestead, particularly seen through the *ohango* lens, illustrate the solidarity, hospitality, generosity, inclusivity and cooperation that Elliott points us towards (1991b:224ff.). However, it is a stratified community, of which the household and wedding feast is a microcosm; inclusivity and sharing does not necessarily mean equality. As Elliott suggests, there is ‘spatial demarcation of degrees of intimacy’ in households, indicating clearly the relative status of those who visit and occupy those spaces; this is very apparent in the layout of an Ndonga *egumbo* and in its use in the *ohango*.



Figure 28: Designated Visitor Area (Enclosure) in an Ndonga *Egumbo*

Conclusion

Thus today the wedding feast of Christians imitates in many respects that of the traditionalists. It is very difficult to guess to what extent they are in reality “purified” from the remnants of the ancestral cult and magic.

Tuupainen (1970:103)

The citation above encapsulates a Twentieth Century missionary-ethnographic perspective on the autochthonous wedding practices of the Aandonga. The wedding rituals (*ohango*) presented the earliest mission stations with a considerable and enduring problem due to their connections with wider local cosmology, within which the ancestral spirits played a significant part. Having banned the *ohango yiitsali* (female initiation) entirely, church officials finally relented on the issue of *ohango yokustelela* – the slaughter of the wedding ox for the wedding feast – so long as the slaughter was ‘cleansed’ of its so-called ‘magical’ aspects. That they relented, I suggest, may have contributed to the enduring importance of the *ongombe yohango* (wedding ox) to the *ohango* as a current institution. However, that must also be understood alongside the centrality of local agency in dictating cultural change and the local perception of a ‘proper’ *ohango* as one that necessarily incorporates the giving, slaughter and

distribution of the *ongombe yohango*. It is that ox, after all, that is the primary material provision for the wedding feast, at which and through which the local community sanctions the union.

Sutton has demonstrated that ‘the transitory and repetitive act of eating [is] a medium for the more enduring act of remembering’ (2001:2). In this way, the wedding feasting in lihongo serves as part of a complex ritual that serves to remember the traditions of old. Here, food contributes to a sense of present identity, bound up with remembrances of the (perhaps idealised) past. Whilst the Ondonga community no longer enacts the *ohango yiitsali*, it incorporates aspects of the *ohango yokustelega* into the contemporary *ohango* ritual and celebration. In particular, those aspects focus on the material, be they location-, food-, or clothing-based.

As Crowther says of feasts, they ‘are about reinforcing existing social bonds between the participants, and they provide an opportunity to reflect on past occasions and create new shared memories as part of cultural renewal’ (2013:168). That the contemporary *ohango* is an important part of Ndonga identities is undeniable; after all, one cannot be ‘properly’ married without having had one’s community recognise a union through an *ohango*, with all of its ‘echoes’ of past practices and beliefs: some aspects of continuity, some reintroductions and some reconstructions (and some that are all of the above).

Having considered how contemporary enactments of the *ohango* express aspects of continuity with pre-Christian marriage, I moved on to consider how the lihongo interpretations engaged with social-scientific biblical scholarship on meals. In this regard, New Testament scholarship on food and table fellowship (including wedding banquets), has largely focused on Douglas’s investigation into the ‘degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries’ at *quotidian meals* (1972:61). The models of envy and limited good seem to have fallen out of focus. Meals have most often been presented in polarity as occasions for exclusive interactions of the bounded in-group, with Jesus’ calls for open commensality as counter-cultural. However, as shown here, the meal as a ceremony and as an exclusive event does not seem to fit the wedding banquet, which is not a meal but a *feast*, not a

ceremony but a *ritual*. Whilst the parables criticise the exclusivity of royal feasting (and perhaps the symposia of the elite), they appeal to the open commensality found in less lofty feasting contexts, as opposed to ordinary meals, which Neyrey (via Douglas) has shown to be predominantly in-group events.

When one considers the luxurious setting of a wedding banquet (and takes into account the anthropology of feasting, as well as the evil eye and limited good conceptual cluster), the need for demonstrations of generosity and inclusive hospitality becomes all the more apparent. Perhaps this is why the feasting setting (as opposed to quotidian meals) makes for such pointed parables on the inclusivity of the gospel. The Jesus-followers are to adopt a community feasting approach (based on the assumption that civilian feasts were more inclusive than the royal one described) as opposed to a royal or symposium model. This chapter concurs with Neyrey, then, in his argument that the image of meals and table fellowship may provide an 'ideal' for community relations in the early Christian communities. However, it is clear that the exclusivity of ordinary meals problematises the simple 'table fellowship=ideal hospitality' equation. A more appropriate ideal might be the community feast, in which inclusive relationships are developed and hospitality extended to those who cannot repay the favour (Luke 14:12-14). As a result of the consideration of Matthew 22:1-14 and Luke 14:7-11 alongside an Ndonga *ohango*, I would suggest that investigation into the anthropology of feasting (as opposed to the anthropology of meals) provides fertile ground on which to interpret New Testament texts on wedding banquets. These require separate treatment from general meals and table fellowship, for which Douglas's deciphering of the quotidian meal (1972) provides a suitable conceptual backdrop. To do so is necessary in order to determine the extent to which one might form a rounded picture of a non-elite wedding feast and distinguish it from the royal wedding banquet. It may be possible, thereafter, to establish an agrarian, communal wedding feast as a further idealised, inclusive form of commensality that would help us to unpack the relevant wedding banquet texts further. The current study has only been able to moot a point of interest rather than 'dish up' fully considered conclusions.

Interpreting the wedding banquet texts through the lens of *ohango* has brought into relief the extent to which we might consider the feast as ritual, as cementing a network of status relationships, as an inclusive event that might be a model for inclusive commensality (whilst incorporating aspects of status differentiation). It has highlighted the difficulty with imposing fixed labels or models onto aspects of the cultural landscapes of the New Testament (here, 'meals', or 'meals as ceremonies'). It has also pointed toward the materiality and embodied reality of feasting, drawing back from the Western preoccupation with the 'deeper meaning', the symbolic: for example, in lihongo, discussion of the Kingdom of God centred on the physical household of the King and experiences thereof.

On a related note, this chapter has suggested that landscapes (in text and lived experience, spatial and social) impact upon the resulting textual interpretation; in an Ndonga context, wedding feasts are conducted in the *egumbo*, the homestead. Some of the participants in this study have suggested that the *egumbo* is more closely aligned with things 'traditional', whereas the church building is the realm of the Christian. With this in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that the focus of our discussions tended to be on the material aspects of the wedding and the lived experience of wedding as tradition-oriented ritual. It is notable, in this regard, that at no point in the CBS sessions on Matthew 22 and Luke 14 did Eucharistic interpretations surface.

Rather, it was the physical place through which the participants understood the parable, and the concern for material wastage that they empathised with. That place, it would seem, is instrumental in determining whether the interpretations returned are Christian- or tradition-centred. That the contemporary *ohango* concentrates on the *egumbo* as a location both references aspects of continuity with the historical *ohango yokutselela* (wedding feast) and informs interpretations of the parable. It was through this lens that the participants explained concerns with the material wastage that the King might incur, and mapped the spatial and hierarchical organisation of the wedding banquet – the social landscape – in the text.

Chapter 5 You Play with My Shadow, Would You Hasten My Death? Blood, Clothing, and Shadows: Extending Notions of the Person in the Stories of Jairus and the Haemorrhaging Woman (Mark 5:21-43)

Mark 5:21-43 was chosen for its focus on 'Bodies'; ethnographic literature suggests that the Aandonga historically conceived of the body and person as comprising more than merely their physical form, and I wanted to explore how blood, clothing, and the shadow (amongst other aspects) related to the physical person in a contemporary context. In particular, I wanted to probe the notion of the 'mystical extension' (the expanded self, described by Aarni [1982:65]) and establish the extent to which that resonated with the participants (thereby offering evidence of the persistence of 'traditional' understandings of the person). Particularly, this was enabled by the question of whether the person of Jesus was accessible through his clothing (Mark 5:27). Additionally, this text presented discussion materials for issues of illness and healing, such as the access to and efficacy of diviner-healers (*oonganga*) in Ondonga. Further, such issues as purity, gender, and status arose in the consideration of Jairus and the haemorrhaging woman's approach to Jesus, the conditions of the female characters, and the status the woman might have in her community (also, therefore, touching upon how she might negotiate social landscapes).

The lihongo interpretations are brought into dialogue with Feminist New Testament criticism in order to engage with the discussion surrounding the focus of the narrative: is the focus the bleeding woman's purity or her health? Additionally, this chapter questions whether Western scholars are correct to highlight the 'magical' aspects of healings such as this, using the expanded sense of personhood to offer a fresh perspective.

Mark 5:21-43 in lihongo CBS and its Ethnographic Context

The discussions of Mark 5 in lihongo were particularly notable for the way in which they revealed that blood, clothing and shadows were understood to be extensions of (and in some cases intrinsic to) the physical person. Blood was

deemed by many to be a source of power and life force, clothing as intimately connected to the person (at least when *on* the person), and the shadow as representative of it. In this context, the bleeding woman is losing power and life force and is understood as accessing the power of Jesus' person through the touching of his garment, which is equivalent to touching him. The groups dwelt neither on gender issues in the text nor on connections between Jairus' daughter and the haemorrhaging woman through the 'twelve year' motif. That this discussion focuses largely on the woman and not on Jairus' daughter is a function of the fluidity and unpredictability of CBS sessions; that is simply where the discussion took us.

Iihongo Perspectives on Blood

The women's group explained to me the significance of blood within their worldviews. Blood, as has been seen in reference to the wedding ox, is of importance not just in relation to humans but also to animals (and especially cattle, those being the most highly prized animals within the animal husbandry system in Owambo cultures). It is through the blood of cattle that the living populations connect(ed) with the ancestors, with whom they sanctioned marital unions and mourned the recently deceased. In the case of a wedding, the blood of an ox pays for the bride:

Memekulu Rauha Andreas: When it came to the wedding event the men used to give the cattle to the family of the girl so that they can exchange for the girl. The blood of the cattle pays for the girl.

Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: In our tradition, as from our forefathers, the girl should be exchanged with the cattle. The price for the woman is cattle. When the day of marriage comes, people meet the cattle [being delivered] by shouting '*ipindi ya landa*' ['we get what we bought'].

The sense that the blood of an ox is in some way equivalent to, or representative of, the life of a human being (and therefore imbued with a high degree of significance and potency) continued when the women explained traditional procedures to deal with cases of murder or manslaughter:

Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: In Ndonga culture, if someone kills a person, that killer or the family of the killer should take a cattle to the

Royal Palace [*ombala kwaniilwa*]. Then that cattle is slaughtered and the blood is run through without catching it [normally it would be caught in a container for consumption]. This is an indication that you wash out your sin. This cattle is called *onkomba mbinzi* ['to wipe out the blood']. It is killed before the burial [of the victim].

The reason why they give that cattle it is the sign to apologise to the family of the deceased and it is to prevent the killer from getting bad luck.

Author: So, the blood goes into the land?

Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: And even the meat, it is given to everyone around.

Author: Is it important that the blood goes into the land?

Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: It is because you kill it before the burial. That blood must go into the ground before the victim.

Prior to this session, my translator had told me that 'blood is expensive', in the sense that spilling it is grave. Comments from one of the children affirmed this claim:

Albertina Nicodemus: Blood is important because, for example, if you are fighting and you make someone bleed, you have to pay for it. The traditional leaders will charge you.

Author: What would they charge you?

Albertina Nicodemus: It depends on the blood. If it is too much you pay a cattle. But if it is just small, you pay some money.

Reverend Thomas Uushona had also noted that should blood be spilled on the road at the site of a fatal car accident it will be collected and later buried with the body of the victim. The above examples would seem to confirm that there is an important connection to be made between blood and notions of the person, and through blood to the land (and the ancestors who inhabit that land). In the above case, the killer and his/her family sacrifice a head of cattle (in the sense of forgoing the ongoing benefits of) perhaps to 'pay' for the life taken, if that is what is meant by washing away the killer's sin. Certainly, they aim to 'apologise' to the deceased's family, and it seems reasonable to assume that that would include the *aathithi* of the deceased: their ancestral spirits, who are widely deemed to be active in a contemporary setting (see Chapters 6-8). Lastly, it is their intention 'to prevent the killer from getting bad luck'. This raises the question of where that bad luck would come from – from the deceased's

aathithi? From the deceased's living kin? From unknown cosmological forces? Because Memekulu Frieda Namugongo stressed that the blood must run into the land, I would suggest that the land-based, ancestral spirits might be the source of the 'bad luck', particularly if it is indeed they who might be appeased by the blood.

That blood has agency was further highlighted by the explanation that blood consumption can be problematic for children (Memekulu Maria Kondo, Tatekulu Laban Iyambo), although precisely why this was the case remained unclear, other than the fact it would cause them stomach pain. Tatekulu Laban Iyambo was clear in his statement that there was no power to be acquired by the consumption of animal blood: 'we just eat it as we eat ordinary food.' Much more clear was the connection between a person's blood and their vitality:

- Author: Is a person's soul or life-force in the blood? What is in the blood?
- Meme Maria Kashowa: Yes, because if the blood is out then that is the end of your life.
- Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: There is cooperation between the blood and the soul.

- Author: What are the characteristics of human blood? Is it safe, dangerous, dirty, clean, polluting, etc.?
- Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: Blood contains danger. You cannot just go and touch somebody's blood.
- Author: What danger?
- Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: You could be affected by illness, viruses, or bacteria.³⁵
- Author: Reverend Thomas [translator] was telling me about burying a victim's blood with their body if they die in a car accident. You have to collect it. Is there anything similar to this you can tell me about?
- Memekulu Rauha Andreas: Yes, it is normal to bury someone with his blood. You cannot just leave the blood for the dogs.

There was consensus in the women's group that blood constituted or contained power. As Memekulu Frieda Namugongo explained, that sense has implications for the haemorrhaging woman in Mark 5:

³⁵ Unaid.org (accessed 30.08.2015) reports that in 2014 the prevalence of HIV infection amongst Namibian adults aged 15-49 was approximately 16.0%. Hileni Iyambo, in the children's session, also noted that blood 'contains some diseases,' perhaps connected to a high level of concern for the prevention of transmission of HIV/AIDS.

Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: That woman is very lucky because she was bleeding for many years but she is alive. Her life is in bad condition because sometimes we get power from our blood. So she can become weak day by day. So she suffered.

Tatekulu Laban Iyambo echoed the sentiment that the woman must have suffered a great deal, as well as pointing out how one's existence would be 'complicated' if bleeding for twelve years, with the woman's life steadily 'going to an end' because 'blood is life'. That life ends when blood is lost was contextualised by Martha Nangolo: 'Blood, it is important because it is the life. For example, if you slaughter a goat, when the blood stops, then the goat also dies.'

Iihongo Perspectives on Touch and Clothing

We also discussed how touch was operating in the case of the healing of Jairus' daughter. I was interested to know if the participants were familiar with healing through touch, drawing on their own contexts:

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|-------------------------|--|
| Author: | How do you think the power of touch is working in the text? |
| Memekulu Rauha Andreas: | The power Jesus used through touching is a heavenly power because every time Jesus did something like healing he faced upwards to ask the power from God. |
| Author: | We have not found many examples of the power of touch in Ndonga culture. Is it true to say that the power of touch is not so important in your culture? |
| Meme Maria Kashowa: | Yes, we do have that power because a long time ago when people got ill there were not even hospitals but our forefathers would ask the ancestors for the power to heal people and then that person would get well. |
| Author: | And would they use touch? |
| Meme Maria Kashowa: | Yes, sometimes you heal through touching and sometimes by using herbs and applying them to the skin through touching. ³⁶ |
| Memekulu Rauha Andreas: | We heard from our parents that long ago people were healed that way but we don't experience it. |

³⁶ Hileni Iyambo also referred to this process: 'The *onganga* can use water mixed with herbs and apply this to your body' (*Aanona*, CBS John 9:1-12).

Tatekulu Laban Iyambo, by contrast, did not find links between Ndonga culture and the power of touch (or command) to heal, saying, 'we don't have that power in our culture. There is no such touching or commanding to heal.' In the children's session, Hileni Iiyambo stated that she was 'surprised' to hear that the woman was made well through touch alone. Whilst Wilbartina Teofelus mentioned that 'the revival church, they heal through touching', all bar one in the children's group felt that the power of touch was not a significant element of Ndonga culture. It would seem that the historical methods to which the women referred have fallen out of use, to the extent that many children are not aware of such practices at all.

We went on to consider how touch might operate in the case of the haemorrhaging woman grasping Jesus' garment:

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|-------------------------|--|
| Author: | The woman is healed by touching Jesus' clothing. Is something of a person contained in their clothing? |
| Memekulu Rauha Andreas: | There is not anything in the clothes but the woman is just healed by her faith. She believes that if she just touches Jesus' dress she will get well. For example, when I am sick I ask the pastor to come and pray for me. I choose her and not another person. And when she comes and prays for me I feel comfortable and I get what I expect. |
| Author: | Do others agree that there is nothing in the clothing? |
| Meme Paulina Inane: | There is nothing in the clothes but only the spirit of Jesus heals. |

However, when my translator – Reverend Thomas Uushona – introduced a contextual example, the views of the women were tested:

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| Translator: | People don't feel I am truly empowered if I don't come in the pastor's robes. How would you feel if I come without the proper robes to a Sunday service? |
| Memekulu Rauha Andreas: | We get worried. |
| Translator: | But why? There is nothing in the gowns. |
| Memekulu Rauha Andreas: | They are blessed. The clothes for Jesus are also blessed. |
| Author: | In the story, do you think the woman thinks that Jesus' clothing is an extension of him? |

- Meme Maria Kashowa: The clothes are an extension of Jesus because if Jesus was not there then the clothes would not be there. So when the woman touches the dress she touches part of Jesus.
- Author: Do all agree?
- Memekulu Rauha Andreas: We agree.
- Author: What if Jesus had left his coat on the floor and gone away. Would she be healed through touching his discarded coat?
- Meme Maria Kashowa: Yes, she would get well because the clothes are for Jesus. He is the owner. He just forgot it.
- Author: But earlier you said there was nothing in the clothes. Do you feel differently now?
- Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: I don't agree with Meme Maria because the clothes only have the power when on the body. Jesus felt the power go when the clothing was on his body.

Tatekulu Laban Iyambo's comments on clothing echo Meme Maria Kashowa's understanding of clothing as personal extension. He suggested that 'Jesus has power everywhere – physically and also in materials.' He connected that to the Ndonga context, saying, 'we have a connection with our material. For example, if the clothes are mine, they are *mine*. Therefore, if I don't know where are my clothes, I feel bad, I feel pain. I don't know where is a part of me.' He suggested that one would perceive the extraordinary nature of Jesus' clothing: 'if you wear those clothes of Jesus you feel it is different. You feel it is the holy one. His clothes are like his word. Both have power.' To disrespect one's clothing, explained Tatekulu Laban, is to disrupt the intimate connection he felt existed between person and possessions, a sense of who one *is* in relation to what one *has*:

- Tatekulu Laban Iyambo: On the case of shadow or land, I said you cannot harm me because nothing happen[s]. But in the case of clothing, when you come and you want to make it dirty or tear it, I have to react because you want to reshape my clothes.

This perspective on clothing as an extension contextualises his suggestion that there had been a *direct* power transfer from Jesus to the woman. I note that he comments that Jesus (and not his clothing) has been touched, perhaps because he sees such a strong connection between the individual and material extensions:

Tatekulu Laban Iyambo: When Jesus is touched by the woman he feels power going from him and looks to the woman. The same for the woman – she feels power come in. That is why the bleeding stops.

Whilst at least some of the adults argued that clothing is an extension of the person and may even have agency without the presence of that individual, the children were less certain. Loide Elago expressed the idea that Jesus' clothes had healing power commensurate with his role as a healer but that 'the power of Jesus is only in the clothes when they are on his body. If they are just there, nothing will happen.' Investigating this further, and delving into their own context, the children gave me the impression that they did not share (for example) Tatekulu Laban Iyambo's understanding of such a strong link between person and possessions:

Author: If I harm your clothing, am I harming you?

Ester Nicodemus: No, only when it is on my body.

Loide Elago: If you cut my clothes you harm my heart.

Author: So I will hurt your feelings, but will I physically hurt you?

Loide Elago: You will not harm me physically.

Elizabeth Imbondi: If you even leave my clothes in the sun, you harm my feelings.

Author: Why?

Elizabeth Imbondi: You harm me because sometimes that clothes is the only one I have. And if you destroy it, I won't have anything.

Author: Will I get someone's characteristics by wearing their clothing?

Anna Ikukutu: No. [all agree]



Figure 29: Young Woman Wearing Yellow Beads (*Omagwe*)

However, the children's contributions do not altogether reject the idea of material agency. They went on to discuss the apotropaic power of beads (*omagwe*), a belt and a rope against the threat of witchcraft:

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| Author: | Is there power in the beads you might wear around your waist? |
| Wilbartina Teofelus: | Yes, because if you are [be]witched by someone but you are not wearing it, you will never be cured but if you are wearing it, nothing will happen.

[All are agreed] |
| Selma Kwedhi: | If [a woman is] is pregnant, she may even remove the beads and replace them with anything else like a belt. |
| Hileni liyambo: | The pregnant woman is in danger [from witchcraft] but even the child she will bear could get sick or die. Yes, she is in very big danger. Normally the woman cannot wear beads on the abdomen. You need even just a small rope around you. |

Iihongo Perspectives on the Shadow

Having read about extensions of the person in ethnographic works, I wondered if the idea of the shadow as extension resonated with the participants, especially as the haemorrhaging woman approached Jesus 'in his shadow', as it were.

- Tatekulu Laban Iyambo: In my shadow, or in the land where my *egumbo* is located, that is mine, my property. I feel proud for that. The land where I am, I am proud of the fields I plough because I work the land and it gives me food. The shadow is like the reflection. I feel proud to see my reflection and my shadow.
- Author: If I stamp on your land or your shadow, do I harm you? Will you feel it?
- Tatekulu Laban Iyambo: The shadow, no. To me, it doesn't harm me. If you step on my shadow, I just move away.

At first glance, it seems that Tatekulu Laban Iyambo's perspective is that to step on someone's shadow constitutes a physically innocuous act. Upon closer inspection, however, it is interesting that he mentioned moving away: the need to move away suggests that having someone step on your shadow is, at the very least, undesirable. After all, there would be no need to move away were there absolutely no ramifications. Admittedly, in translation there is a degree of ambiguity: it is not clear whether he means he *could* move away or that he *would* move away. Much stronger was the reaction of the women to the idea of assaulting someone's shadow:

- Author: If I touch or attack your shadow, is it the same as touching you?
- Memekulu Rauha Andreas: The shadow is *mine*. You cannot try to beat my shadow. It would show there is hatred between us.
- Author: Would you suffer if I beat your shadow?
- Memekulu Rauha Andreas: No, it is not good to step on my shadow deliberately. I will feel you harm me.
- Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: It is not good. We are human beings. If someone stands there and steps on your shadow you will think there is something they want to do to you.
- Author: Just to clarify, can you feel it physically if someone attacks your shadow?

Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: The shadow we regard it as a sign of your death following you. Therefore, if you play with my shadow I think maybe you want to rush my death.

Translator: How do you feel if your shadow crosses fire or thorn bushes?

Consensus: That is different because it is an accident.

As with clothing, the children did not feel that physical harm could be visited upon a person through their shadow (and were not familiar with the idea of the shadow as a sign of one's death) but they did suggest that there was a threat to their feelings, or sense of well-being:

Author: What if I stamp on your shadow?

Selma Kwedhi: You feel not anything.

Hileni liyambo: I would feel bad because you try to harm my shape.

Author: Does anyone think I can harm them through their shadow?

Hileni liyambo,
Ester Nicodemus,
Martha Nangolo: You cause spiritual pain. [*komwenyo* – to the spirit]

Author: Have you heard the idea that your shadow is your death following you around?

Ester Nicodemus: No, but I agree for that because when you die, your shadow also disappears.

Conversation about shadows also engaged the issue of the haemorrhaging woman approaching Jesus from behind, in contrast to Jairus' (presumably) frontal approach:

Author: Does anyone think there is something unusual about how the woman approaches Jesus? What do you think of the way she approaches?

Memekulu Maria Kondo: The way the woman approaches Jesus is not a proper way because in our culture we approach the person face-to-face.

Memekulu Rauha Andreas: The way the woman approaches Jesus was not a good way because she approached from behind, but she did it because she did not have a good way to approach.

Meme Beata Mbinga: In Ndonga culture it is unusual to approach the person from behind.

Author: Why is it unusual?

- Meme Beata Mbinga: In Ndonga culture you have to respect a person and Jesus was one of the persons who should be respected in the society. So the woman behind is showing disrespect.
- Memekulu Rauha Andreas: I agree that is an indication of disrespect. No one should be allowed to approach a prominent person like this.
- Author: Do you see any connection between the status of Jairus/the woman and the way in which they approach Jesus?
- Memekulu Rauha Andreas: Jairus was a prominent person. Always the well-known person they are always respected. Maybe when Jairus came, they made a way for Jairus to come through. And the woman is just a poor person so people didn't respect her and make a way for her. So she approach from behind and try by all means to touch Jesus and hope to be healed.
- Ester Nicodemus -----
In our area, when you want to talk to someone, you stand at the front and talk to them.

For Tatekulu Laban Iyambo, the woman's approach was explained by the presence of the crowd (a point also made by Ester Nicodemus), which he felt must not have been there when Jairus approached. He noted that to cross behind someone would lead to anticipation of theft. However, he also added that in an Ndonga context, 'you cannot walk behind someone's back. You must walk across the front', where the person can see you. This led Reverend Thomas Uushona to suggest that I ask another question, the answer to which prompted an interesting aside later on in the session:

- Author: What if someone is blind? Can I walk behind them?
- Tatekulu Iyambo: The person is just a person, therefore even if he is blind, just walk on the front. Animals are another thing. You can walk behind.
- [When Tatekulu Laban Iyambo had left the room during a break, Reverend Uushona explained that he thought Tatekulu Laban Iyambo wanted to say more on this but was embarrassed. Reverend Uushona suggests that Tatekulu Laban had in mind the point that 'appropriate' sexual activity between human beings should take place face-to-face, whereas in animal species, the male often mounts the female from behind. He suggests that this influences Tatekulu Laban's understanding that it is appropriate to approach someone from the front, or pass in front of them.]

Contributions from the children's session (e.g. Loide Elago) suggested that Jesus' mercy outweighed what Ester Nicodemus felt was disrespectful

behaviour. Meme Beata Mbinga commented that ‘Jesus was not angry but in our culture and you touch me the same way I will ask with an angry voice, “who touched me?”’ The contributions across the groups were united in this understanding that Jesus’ response was not an angry one. It was widely expressed that that it was the woman’s faith in Jesus that had enabled the healing (Memekulu Rauha Andreas, Tatekulu Laban Iyambo) and overrode the disrespectful nature of her approach.

Implications for Jairus’ Daughter and the Haemorrhaging Woman

What, then, are the implications of the above discussions for the narrative? The situation of the haemorrhaging woman was deemed to be ‘critical’ (Elizabeth Imbondi), with concern focused on the fact that she was near-death (Elizabeth Imbondi, Hileni Iyambo, Ester Nicodemus), as opposed to unclean or stigmatised.³⁷ In considering the nature of the woman’s condition, Tatekulu Laban Iyambo saw parallels ‘in our community’ and suggested that her bleeding was connected to pregnancy or a postpartum condition, which could only be cured through hospital attention: ‘the bleeding disease can affect every woman who is about to give birth or just after birth.’ He rejected possible connections between the girl and the woman based on repeated use of the number twelve, feeling that to be coincidence, as the girl ‘was still not mature.’ This sentiment was echoed in the session with the children (Albertina Nicodemus, Ester Nicodemus).

³⁷ There was potential for the woman to be interpreted as a stigmatised figure, with witchcraft and divine punishment being in causal relationship with illness and disability: ‘disability can be seen in three ways. It is seen as misfortune. It is seen as the result of being bewitched (in a traditional way). It is seen as a gift from God (in a Christian way). Some people may hide disabled people. People used to kill disabled newborns. There is sometimes shame associated with a disabled member of the family. It may be seen as punishment from *Kalunga*.’ Reverend Thomas Uushona (Interview, 23.06.2015).



Figure 30: Monica Pounding Mahangu

When we considered how the haemorrhaging woman's community might respond to her, Memekulu Frieda Namugongo suggested that 'some might avoid her but some would have pity for her', whilst Ester Nicodemus suggested the woman would be viewed as entirely 'helpless'. Considering how his community might respond to someone with such a condition, Tatekulu Laban Iyambo suggested that 'they are approaching and assisting in a friendly way, even by washing the clothes.' The theme of helplessness also arose in relation to Jairus; had he lost his daughter, Jairus would become 'helpless in his old age' because 'the child was his future' (Wilbartina Teofelus). Another of the children expanded on this point:

Albertina Nicodemus:

The young generation are the active one. Because you can even send her somewhere quick and come back. But if she is dead then that household becomes helpless. Sometimes, the young ones are looking for firewood, cooking, pounding [the grain]. So that young one was a key bone in that house.

Regarding the woman's economic situation, Hileni Iyambo made the insightful remark that 'according to the text, the woman lost much money to pay the witchdoctors. That is an indication that she had something. She was not poor. She became poor by looking for help. She may have a family but they lost hope because she has suffer for many years.' Klaudia Ashikuti suggested that the scenario could be explained by family support: 'maybe her father was a rich person.' There was also sympathy from Tatekulu Laban Iyambo that the woman 'went to *oonganga* [diviner-healers (pl.)] to find the herbs but she only lose a lot of money without getting any help.' He repeated later that there was a notable 'wasting of economy' in the woman's situation due to the lack of success found through *oonganga*.

I thought initially that this was a relatively rare instance of Tatekulu Laban being comfortable referencing the realm of the 'traditional' (*oonganga*) – ordinarily, he demonstrated a very high level of Christian religiosity and a tendency to avoid discussing pre-missionary beliefs and practices. However, the text itself uses the Oshindonga term *oonganga* (5:26), which provides a ready explanation. It is perhaps also significant that he was referring to past activities (drawing a link between a biblical setting and the dominant healing arena prior to the arrival of mission hospitals). The fact that the *oonganga* are expressly stated to have *failed* to secure the woman any relief may also have aligned with his worldview and encouraged him to contextualise the woman's situation (with reference to 'herbs'). For some of the women and children, however, the cleavage from past practice was less clear-cut and *oonganga* were still of significance in their own context and experience:

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Ester Nicodemus: | We learn in the story that the woman went to the witchdoctor [<i>onganga</i>] but did not find any help. The same for our people – they go to the witchdoctors but are not cured. They are wasting their money. |
| Author: | Are you saying the <i>onganga</i> doesn't have any power? |
| Ester Nicodemus: | There are some witchdoctors cure them but the others they are false witchdoctors. |
| Meme Beata Mbinga: | -----
Also in our culture, we get ill and you go everywhere looking for help, even to witchdoctors and you pay them but you will not find the solution. You just become poor at the end. |

Memekulu Rauha Andreas: Sometimes you get sick and your neighbours or family come to you and mislead you, saying 'your sickness is only cure when you go to the witchdoctor, this is not for the hospital.'

Investigation of the text has, in this instance, revealed a decrease in confidence in the capacities of *oonganga*, whilst simultaneously suggesting that traditional healers do still operate and that people do still visit them on occasion. This ambivalence speaks to the resilience of indigenous medicine, which was one of the main target areas of missionary suspicion:

Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: The culture and Christianity on the one hand are travelling on one way [are aligned]. On the other hand there are two ways [sometimes they disagree]. That is why the Christianity chased away the [parts of] culture which is not good, which is misleading the nation, like witchdoctors. There is a contradiction between [them].

Meme Beata Mbinga: Sometimes we have traditional dancing somewhere and you are not disobeying [Christianity] if you go, but Christianity does not allow you to go to the witchdoctor. Even the abortion. In the tradition, people were allowed to have abortion but the Christianity disagree with that.

Oomeme, Summary Session

"The church was the only obstacle when it came to our traditional practices. If one visited a traditional healer, he or she will be regarded as one who trespassed against God's commandments. You will then be told to stand in front of the congregation for forgiveness. Even today the church is absolutely against those practices. But nowadays civilisation has gone a step further and people have come to realise what is good and what is wrong. Even myself, I do not like some of these traditional healers because they cheat people. But in some cases they really cure people well."

Alina Heita (Interview, 11.10.89) in Hayes 1992:2.126

Traditional healers and healing formed one area deemed to be in particular contravention of missionary Christian norms. Hospitals and spiritual healing via Christ was emphasised, and the reality of local demonology was downplayed. Tuupainen brings to the fore the extent to which different places were endowed with different magico-religious qualities, along 'traditional' and Christian lines: the *egumbo*, participants tell her, was 'the sphere of witchcraft and magic', whilst the *Aandongga* were 'relieved' of those influences in European hospitals (1970:77). A participant in the current study also aligned Christianity with the medical field:

Memekulu Rauha Andreas: For example, in early age our forefathers were more depend on the witchdoctor [*onganga*]. But on the other

hand the witchdoctor are helpless in our life. So we drop them and in Christianity the first missionaries brought hospitals, so we go there and the witchdoctors are down.

Author: Do you associate hospitals with Christianity, then?

Memekulu Rauha Andreas: Yes, the hospital and Christianity are associated like brother and sister.

Oomeme, Summary Session

Summary and Ethnographic Context

The following points may be summarised from the discussions above and then set in their ethnographic context, in order to identify resonances with autochthonous worldviews and practices:

- i. Blood is understood as the life force of the human being and/or the source of one's power. So precious and integral is it to the person that, if spilled by another, traditional authorities will order compensation, and if spilled at death it should be collected and buried with the body. The potency and agency of blood is further emphasised by the ritual use of animal blood.*
- ii. A person's clothing is understood by some to be an extension of the person. That person may be 'accessed' (harmed, offended, understood) via their clothing.*
- iii. For some, the shadow represents and is integral to the person's life. To attack a shadow is to attack the person.*
- iv. The main point of significance of the narrative was seen to be the woman's faith; her positive mindset enabled the healing and overrode what might otherwise be seen as a deviant or disrespectful approach (from behind Jesus, in his shadow).*

Ethnographic Contextualisation: Blood

The Ovambos regarded blood as a communication link to the invisible world. (The blood of the sacrificial animal was the animal's 'soul', 'nourishment' for the spirits, the essence of the sacrifices both to ancestors and other spirits.) By the same token, after circumcision, blood became the communication link that tied the initiates both to the land of the tribe (being an inheritance from the ancestors) and to the ancestors themselves.

Aarni (1982:39)

As the above citation indicates, references to blood (*ombinzi*) in the ethnographic literature are multivalent, focusing on animal as well as human blood. A survey of this literature also indicates ambivalence regarding the positive and negative characteristics of blood, and it is in the context of this

ambivalence that I wish to situate the groups' reluctance to focus on the woman's haemorrhage as a polluting condition.

With regard to blood as life, Aarni states that the blood of a sacrificial animal was seen to be the 'seat of the animal's life' (1982:65). He argues that this does not mean that a human being's 'soul' is understood as contained within *their* blood. However, Hiltunen's work nuances this claim and (at the very least) suggests that the blood was seen to contain the life-force of the person. She contends repeatedly that 'blood symbolizes life' (e.g. 1993:41) and suggests that animal blood was used to represent the blood (life) of a person: for example, a diviner-healer (*onganga*) might use the blood (and liver) of an antelope in a ritual to destroy a witch (Hiltunen 1986:119-124) and thereby promote cosmological and social harmony. Therein, the 'blood and liver stand for the spirit, for life itself. If they are destroyed, [the witch's] life has really been lost' (1986:123; cf. Davies 1994 ch.2:43: the liver is 'the repository of the soul'). In the *etikilo* (cursing) ritual, it is the pouring into water and stabbing of the blood, and/or the cooking of the blood (and liver) of the animal that effects the destruction of the witch. This is in direct response to the power of blood being deliberately directed to malevolent ends: Hiltunen reports a case where traces of blood found in a homestead were deemed to be evidence of the practice of witchcraft (1986:34). Here, just as in the CBS examples of animal blood 'paying' for the bride and for a murder/manslaughter victim, animal blood may indeed symbolise human blood and life. The equation of blood with life is also suggested by the 'the general belief that the baby develops out of menstrual blood', although this is in the context of an unhelpful generalisation about 'Bantus' (Tuupainen 1970:44).

The potency and agency of human blood is highlighted by the historic circumcision rite, in which men formally joined the ranks of the Aawambo (through the spilling of their own blood) and were thereby placed – spatially and hierarchically – within an ancestral community.³⁸ Citing a poem about the ancestors by Okot p'Bitek, Aarni explains that animal blood (chicken; goat; dog; ox) is also offered as food to those ancestors, with the community urging them,

³⁸ That those in important offices had to be old, circumcised men may be significant in this regard (e.g. Hiltunen 1993:79); they were deeply embedded in the community of the living and dead by virtue of their seniority and circumcision (a blood-tie).

in response, to treat the living well, ensure safety in childbirth, stave off illness and death, and to keep enemies away (1982:46-7); the 'bloody *ohula*' (blood-sacrifice) enabled the Aawambo to 'find peace with the spirits' (Aarni 1982:73). Similarly, Hiltunen reports that a spirit causing illness by inhabiting a living relative was sometimes deemed to 'want' blood, which it was fed through the sick individual (1986:75). In these cases, blood acts as a form of appeasement, gift, hospitality and tribute, offered for both preventative and curative purposes. Contextually, animal blood is seen as 'nourishment' for people and spirits: it feeds and sustains, and is of interest to the dead in a way that animal flesh is not. In fact, Aarni argues, cattle blood actually contained the 'essence of life' of the ancestors (Aarni 1982:63). Quite apart from the question of whether the seat of human life or spirit is *in the blood*, this gives foundation to the CBS focus on the haemorrhaging woman slowly losing her life.

Beyond tackling witchcraft and nourishing the spirits, there are several other arenas in which blood has a positive, purifying or cleansing function in Owambo contexts. The first of these is as the major part of rain offerings (Hiltunen 1993:81), with blood therefore being associated with agriculture, food and nourishment in general. It arose in the CBS sessions on John 9:1-12 that blood from cuts (*oonsha*) made in the upper cheeks (see Figure 6) or eyebrows is used in *lihongo* a cleanser-purifier for eye pain. Perhaps the blood-healing association is unsurprising when juxtaposed with the practice of initiating second-tier *oonganga* (diviner-healers). This is a *blood* initiation and this is the class of diviner able to *heal* illness and not just diagnose it (the latter is all an ash-diviner is able to do: Hiltunen 1993:40-1). Davies details examples of cattle blood being used to treat spirit-affliction, which further emphasises the connections between cattle, the living and the deceased (1994 ch.2:31). Ox blood was also used by *oonganga* to purify a homestead afflicted by twin births (which were taboo, *oshidhila*; cf. Douglas 1970[1966]:52): blood would be sprinkled on the homestead's doorposts and passageways (Hiltunen 1993:202). In addition, Hiltunen makes reference to 'an ox-offering rite in which washing with bloody water, medicine plants (*iimbondi*) and fire are important media' in counteracting or lifting magical curses (1986:29; cf. 148-9).

In the *ohango*, too, positive connotations of blood are evident (see Chapter 4), with ox blood actually ratifying the marriage (Tuupainen 1970:73). Its 'magic power' has wider implications, though: brides crawled through a bloody carcass for purification and drank the *ongombe yohango* (wedding ox) blood mixed with beer for fertility (these two actions may also take place when *ohula* [blood-sacrifice to the ancestors] is used to cure illness: Tuupainen 1970:152). However, the use of blood was subject to taboo (*oshidhila*) in some circumstances: a pregnant wife must not drink the beer-blood mixture as it could cause miscarriage (Tuupainen 1970:57), lending ambivalence to its agency. All of this should be understood in pastoral and cosmological context: cattle provide the link between the living and the dead (Tuupainen 1970:55) and therefore their blood acts on the drought, illness, fertility and marital unions that they have a bearing on.

Whilst the ethnographic literature cited above depicts blood as predominantly positive (and may thereby explain why the interpretations returned did not image the haemorrhaging woman as in an impure condition), there is one situation in which blood is seen to be a catastrophic pollutant: the case of spilling the blood of another (blood guilt: *uutoni*), to which Memekulu Frieda Namugongo referred. Hiltunen explains the purification rites that must be undergone to cleanse the killer of the 'defilement' of blood-lust, lest it become a contagion (1993:218). The blood of the victim, she reports, 'called for revenge' (1993:220) and exerts a power on the killer. In this case, water, herbs and spells enabled a diviner to purify the contaminated person, who is 'intoxicated with blood (*a kolwa ombinzi*)' (1993:219). This contrasts with the ritual spilling of the blood of an ox at the royal palace that Memekulu Frieda detailed, perhaps because Hiltunen's example is from a resident of the Ombandja region. That blood sometimes acts as a contaminant should be understood within wider Owambo illness aetiology; Davies suggests it is (at least partially) founded upon notions of contagion that existed 'prior to European influence' (1994 ch.2:47). There was, for example, a sense that starvation was contagious and thus victims of famine would not be buried (McKittrick 2002:77-8). Within this conceptual framework, albeit not specific to the Ondonga area, Davies explains that where there is a haemorrhaging condition, 'there is something impure and disruptive within the body using the blood as a vehicle', which would be tackled

with blood-letting as a means of release (1994 ch.2:36). This coheres with menstruation, which Davies suggests is perceived to be 'depurative' (1994 ch.2:9). It is doubly notable, contextualised thus, that the groups did not focus on the haemorrhaging woman as polluted.

Finally, and of particular note regarding the agency of human blood, Tuupainen briefly discusses the explanations given by male informants of choosing a wife. She reports that some said 'our blood(s) "want" together; our blood(s) understood each other' (1970:102). Whilst Tuupainen understands this as meaning there was 'fitness to each other, harmony, in a word true love', one might also venture that it is suggestive of the very agency of blood. The cultural context – one in which blood has purifying, fertility-enhancing but also danger-inducing capabilities – lends support to the interpretation that someone's blood could draw them to another.

Ethnographic Contextualisation: Clothing, the Shadow, and Extensions of the Person

Social anthropologists use the term 'law of the contact' [*sic*], which means that the active force (or power) of an object or of a living being is hidden away in a part of that object or being. For instance, one has power to injure another person by the help of his saliva or sand taken from his footprints. According to this 'law' the objects and beings which once have been in contact with each another [*sic*] are also later on in a constant reciprocal relation: what happens to one part also happens to the other.

Hiltunen (1986:129)

It is also important to contextualise blood within a complex of bodily parts and fluids, as well as concepts surrounding the body. The individual is described in ethnographic literature as being comprised of the physical body (*oluto*), the body-soul (*omwenyo*) and the free-soul (*ombepo*) (Davies 1994 ch.3:2-3). The *omwenyo* is the physical body's animating force, whilst the *ombepo* is the 'element of the person ... able to wander freely from the physical body, especially when dreaming or in a faint' and which may engage with *ombepo* of the deceased (Davies 1994 ch.3:2). In addition, there is the seat of emotions (heart: *omutima*) and the shadow (*omuzizimba*), with the latter incorporating aspects of the 'mystical extension' (Aarni 1982:65-70). These include, for example, the spit, semen, excreta, imprints (footprints, 'seatprint'), reflection, shadow, name, clothing, and other belongings. All are intrinsic to the self. As

such, each heightens vulnerability by providing access to the person with whom they are associated.

A brief discussion of a few examples will suffice before focusing on clothing and the shadow as aspects arising in the CBS discussions. It is widely reported that saliva was deemed an extension of the person (Aarni 1982:69) and as containing their 'power' (*oonkondo*),³⁹ such that spitting was the first act in any sacrificial rite (Aarni 1982:64). Estermann notes that 'ritual spit' accompanied prayers to Kalunga offered on the occasion of a wedding and during the delivery of a baby (1976:183). It played a prominent role in offerings made to the spirits of the East and West, too, with the owner of the house spitting on morsels of porridge from the first harvest and throwing them in each direction (Estermann 1976:191).

As an extension, saliva could operate outwardly for good, such as in blessing and sacrifice, but was *also* considered vulnerable to inward attack from sorcery if one carelessly spat on the ground in dubious company, for example (Hiltunen 1986:130; cf. Douglas 1996[1970]:112). Hiltunen discusses its positive use (sending out a part of oneself) in 'the most common type of offering... a spittle offering [*esaage/o*] that is believed to bring a blessing' (1993:35; cf. Aarni 1982:46), as well as offerings for rain in which blood is taken into the mouth and then spat out (1993:75). Whether outwardly or inwardly, then, saliva is a strong conductor of positive or negative power, extending one's reach *and* vulnerability. Tatekulu Laban Iyambo suggested that 'the power of Jesus is everywhere, even in his spit' in reference to John 9:1-12. However, he did not connect this to an Ndonga worldview, saying he had 'no idea' how spit functioned traditionally in Ondonga (*Ootate*, CBS John 9:1-12). In fact, reference to the ritual use of spit was conspicuous in its absence across the CBS sessions.

Davies comments on the use of the name in acts of sorcery (1994 ch.2:43), which corresponds with the importance of knowing the 'correct name' for the effective execution of rituals to identify and counter those using witchcraft, itself

³⁹ This is the power also associated with kings' graves, spirits and ancestors, *oonganga* (traditional healers) and amulets (Aarni 1982:64).

acquired through breastmilk (Tönjes 1996[1911]:192), or through transference from person to materials such as comestibles (Hiltunen 1986:67-8; cf. Prov. 23:6-8).⁴⁰ Just as the name might be used in witchcraft and sorcery, there was concern, too, that excreta might be used for 'nefarious purposes' (Davies 1994 ch.2:9). Referring to a story of storing a skull in a corn bin for increased yield, Hiltunen also speculates that 'soul power' may have been believed to increase in density toward the 'the ends of the body, in the hair and nails' (1993:118).

The above examples of spit, the name, excreta and the fringes of the body suggest that historical Owambo understandings of the person considerably extend my own notion of a person: one bounded in a singular embodied state at a fixed point in space and time. It is this expanded frame of reference that illuminates some of the comments about clothing in the CBS sessions; some of the lihongo interpretations of Mark 5:21-43 seem to be directly influenced by pre-Christian conceptions of the person, which is suggestive of the persistence of autochthonous worldviews. At least some of the participants understood there to be material agency in clothing (that of Jesus or a pastor) and adornments (beads), with which one might trace direct links with worldviews described in ethnographic records.

In a historical Ndonga setting, clothing was understood as a reservoir of power and/or essence as part of its intimate connection with the clothed or recently-clothed person. This is exemplified by an example Hiltunen provides: Chief Kambonde was unwilling to hand over his clothes to Chief Nehale because his clothing could be used in an *etikilo* (cursing) ritual (1986:129). Aarni, too, mentions the touching of the clothing and possessions of the dead as part of a family's 'last fare-well to the deceased' (1982:42). However, Nampala's description of a Kwanyama funeral suggests that touching the clothes of the dead had to be carefully managed: the person leading the distribution of the belongings threw the clothes to those inheriting them because 'it was a taboo to hand it over, as it was believed that death could be passed on to the one receiving a cloth' (2006:63).

⁴⁰ I was advised that one does not pour drinks for others as that allows the pourer to bewitch (through the liquid, perhaps through touch?) the recipient. If sharing food and drink, the one offering a homemade comestible will taste it first (thereby affirming it to be *nawa*, good) before allowing each to serve him/herself, or allow the one consuming a bought item to take or pour of it for themselves.

Aasindilo provide another example of material objects being imbued with personal power (*oonkondo*): these power sticks were imbued with apotropaic power by an *onganga* (diviner-healer) and worn specifically to ward off *uulodhi* (witchcraft), with a particular type for children, who may also wear 'the bones of the mountain eagle' and 'the nails of the vulture' to avoid sickness, danger and death (Hiltunen 1993:195-6). Comments from the children's group about beads (*omagwe*), offer continuity with observations by Martti Rautanen (one of the earliest missionaries to Ondonga): "a mother hangs amulets around the neck, on arms, around the waist and ankles of her new-born baby to guard him from the destruction of *aalodhi* [witches]" (Manuscript 1902, 45)' (Hiltunen 1986:68). In particular, it suggests that notions of the agency and power of material objects is of contemporary relevance.

It is the *omuzizimba* that Aarni describes as "the shadow" or "shadow picture" of man, but it could stand for the "essence" of the individual, outside of his physical body' (1982:66). Not only would that include the shadow (as arose in our discussions) but it would also extend to include the reflection (which Tatekulu Laban Iyambo mentioned) and to one's presence in dreams as 'part of reality' (Aarni 1982:69). This may be cross-referenced with the *etikilo* ritual referred to above: 'the idea of killing by stabbing a reflected image is founded on the belief that in the reflected image as well as in the shadow there exists the soul-element of a person' (Hiltunen 1986:122). This was key in the ritual detection of witches and sorcerers: in autochthonous medicine, their malevolent influence is identified through water ceremonies, in which the *image* of the agent is stabbed on the water's surface (Estermann 1976:198). This idea, or echoes of it, would seem to be in operation still in promises of healings and wealth (*inter alia*) to be attained through image and water rituals: contemporary ritualists offer the opportunity to see one's enemy in a mirror (or even on the television set), which appear to be developments of the earlier version, although water rituals are still advertised:



Figure 31: Classified Ads, Namibian Sun, 14.02.2014

An assault on the shadow (person), contextualised thus, would certainly equate to an assault on the physical (person). It is culturally inappropriate, as the participants mentioned, to approach from behind. Added to this is the fact that you should not 'pass food or drinks behind someone's back',⁴¹ further emphasising the need for transparency of activity and a desire to avoid anyone tampering with one's person, out of sight. As Klaus Nürnberger explains, 'words, names, greetings, expressions and gestures are loaded with power and may have beneficial or detrimental consequences' (2007:22), so to approach and greet in the accepted, formal manner would be (and still is) an imperative.

Further to the shadow and reflection (*ethano*), there is the sense that by one's imprint upon the land one leaves something of oneself: Hiltunen explains that an *omundonga* (Ndonga person) would never sit where the chief has sat because if the chief became ill, the person might be deemed responsible (1986:130). This resonates with the idea that the place (*eha*) one occupies contains something of the self (Aarni 1982:68), which leads to a residual presence there.⁴² So, whilst the shadow is an extension by way of its connection to the physical self, other forms of one's extended self extend beyond one's spatial and temporal presence. In particular, that death may be viewed as a '*change of conditions*' as opposed to an 'annihilation' (Aarni

⁴¹ Peace Corp Handbook: 'Te ti! – A Beginner's Guide to Oshindonga', page 24. Available at: <https://wingolog.org/pub/te-ti/te-ti.pdf> (accessed 18.09.2015).

⁴² The (pre-Christian and) contemporary belief that spirit presences reside where the bodies of the dead have been buried or discarded may be a related concept: see Chapter 6.

1982:71, italics original) immediately expands the notion of the person and the extent of their interactive, interpersonal reach. Of course, extended persons are also *reached* and *acted upon* more readily, for they are, in their extended state, more accessible.

Summary

In the sense that animal blood is deemed to be representative of human life (it may be regarded as a vessel housing the spirit or life-force of the individual), blood is often described as being acted upon in the ethnographic literature. Sometimes, that is for positive ends: countering witchcraft, purifying and healing living persons and the homestead. However, it has negative connotations, too, most significantly in the pollution by blood-guilt (*uutoni*) that follows murder or manslaughter. And, whilst an *onganga* (diviner-healer) could use blood to counter witchcraft and/or sorcery, so the witch (*omulodhi*) could use it to effect their foul play. It may be a negative influence if coopted by spirits, too, in the case of haemorrhage. That blood is an active agent in Ndonga tradition is also notable: it ratifies the marriage, initiates healers and performs a connective tie to ancestral land and spirits. The agency and potency of blood as described above has been situated within an ethnographic context in which understandings of the person are much expanded when set alongside my own Western framework. The individual is constituted by the *oluto* (body), *omwenyo* (body-soul), *ombepo* (free-soul), *omutima* (heart) and *omuzizimba* (shadow). This physical-metaphysical whole includes multiple 'extensions' to the person (I should note, these would probably not sensibly be termed *extensions* when considered from within Ndonga worldviews), of which the clothing and shadow are but two examples. Within this conceptual framework, personal power (*oonkondo*), as well as vulnerability, is innately linked to all extensions of the person.

With the CBS discussions of the shadow and clothing contextualised in an ethnographic investigation into extensions of the person, it becomes clear the idea of 'self' has been (historically) and remains (at least, for some) greatly expanded within Ndonga worldviews. An individual is not limited to their physical embodiment in any one place, at any one time and, in this regard,

contemporary beliefs demonstrate the persistence of pre-Christian worldviews. The notion of a 'person' also includes physical extensions of their being (bodily fluids, hair, nails, possessions), which may or may not be in the same location as the bodily individual. The person includes, in addition, the non-material and metaphysical 'extensions', such as the free-soul (in dreams and post-mortem), shadow, imprints and reflection; again, some of these may be accessed even without the spatial and temporal presence of that individual. Through all of these aspects they are vulnerable and can be acted upon: their reach, but also that of others, is extended. Both the *self* and the *other* (living or dead) can be accessed in a multitude of ways not conceived of in a materialist, Western mindset – through a footprint, an item of clothing, or in a dream-encounter. Thus, an expanded notion of the person necessarily entails an expanded capacity for interaction with – and action upon – others. Through notions of an extended self (especially blood, clothing and the shadow), participants in the CBS sessions demonstrated continuity between current understandings and pre-Christian worldviews.

lihongo Interpretations of Mark 5:21-43 in Dialogue with Feminist New Testament Scholarship

This section brings the ethnographically-contextualised CBS interpretations into conversation with feminist biblical criticism and considers the debate over whether the woman's 'flow of blood' (5:25) takes its place in the narrative primarily as a health problem or, alternatively, as a purity concern. The discussion that follows suggests that the lihongo interpretations of 'extension[s] of the person' (Haber 2003:182, n.33) encourage a reflection of the limitations of the term 'person' in an unreflective, Western context. A more holistic definition, it is argued, might nuance that concept better to fit New Testament contexts.

The Issue of Blood

Whether or not the narrative has as its primary concern the woman's purity status is a bone of contention within feminist interpretations and beyond (see Haber 2003). Of crucial importance in that regard is how one regards her 'flow

of blood' (or 'fountain of blood') in verses 25 and 29. She would not appear to be a menstruant (Haber 2003:174; *contra* Thurston 1998:71): she is described in terms that align her with the Levitical category of the *zavah* (15:25) having a flow of 12 years. Certain interpreters argue that the woman's condition, when set within her cultural context, would place a high level of importance on this aspect of her status. The 'blood taboo' is one of four elements of the woman's identity that Bonnie Thurston suggests would marginalise her; the others are her womanhood, lack of male relatives and lack of financial resources (1998:71). Supported by echoes of the Levitical laws on genital bleeding (Lev. 15:25), scholars such as Marla Selvidge (1984, 1990) are convinced of the centrality of purity concerns in Mark 5:21-43. In light of the above, it is argued, the text advances a critique of the Jewish purity code delimited in Leviticus 15. However, noting that Levitical laws are not explicitly mentioned and that neither Jesus nor the crowd are depicted as concerned by the haemorrhaging woman's presence in open space (Levine 2000:424), others dismiss the relevance of the purity code entirely (D'Angelo, 1999). Susan Haber, however, takes a middle ground and argues for the narrative primacy of the health condition (noting that the language is focused on healing and not purity), whilst suggesting that the significance of her resulting impurity cannot be ignored: 'her illness is explicit; her impurity is implicit' (2003:173).

The lihongo interpretations suggest that a purity *context* does not necessitate a purity-based *interpretation* and thus align with Charlotte Fonrobert's reminder that there is surely diversity in the 'Jewish' context of the 'Jewish' woman in the text (1997:129). Just because 'the belief that blood contains life (see Lev. 17:10-14; Deut. 12:23)' is strongly held (Marcus 2000:358), as it is in lihongo, it does not follow that there is unequivocal 'fear' of blood in all situations (Haber notes that the evidence for exclusion of impure persons is contradictory: 2003:177). I have illustrated above that there are several examples from the Ndonga context of blood acting as a polluting or dangerous force on an individual. These examples came both from the CBS discussions (blood-guilt) and ethnographic literature (use of blood in marriage rites inducing miscarriage, blood-letting for haemorrhage). However (and as is also relevant in the contexts of the Jesus movement and evangelists), ambiguous approaches to blood are apparent, with associations with life, nourishment and cleansing also arising in

our discussions. The Ndonga setting, therefore, may legitimately be presented as a purity context, although in a seemingly less pervasive form than that of Jesus or the Evangelists. There was no mention, for example, of menstrual blood as polluting.⁴³ In addition, whether or not a bride would still crawl through an ox carcass and whether or not blood-letting would still be undertaken in the case of haemorrhage, I cannot determine. The positive associations of blood may outweigh its polluting force in lihongo worldviews today and thus marginalise purity-based interpretations of the text.

Nonetheless, this remains a context in which blood can cause impurity and, as such, it was notable that the lihongo interpreters did not suggest that the woman with a flow of blood would be considered impure and nor that she would be isolated or ostracised (*contra* Joel Marcus 2000:366). Rather (and providing an interesting indirect link with Leviticus 12), Tatekulu Laban Iyambo suggested that she might be suffering from late pregnancy or postpartum bleeding: health (not purity) concerns. There was particular resonance with autochthonous, positive connotations of blood in contemporary worldviews and practice (blood from cattle slaughter as curative of blood-guilt, use of blood as an eye-cleanser). This, combined with the fact that certain practices involving blood as pollutant may have ceased, possibly contributed to the sense that the woman was primarily being healed of an illness and not of a condition of impurity.

That the woman with the flow of blood's approach to Jesus was 'surreptitious' (Marcus 2000:366) or 'furtive' (Joynes 2012:120) has most often been connected to her ritual impurity (Marcus 2000:357; Haber 2003:183). It would therefore be seen as a move that might compromise Jesus, were the impurity to be contagious via such a touch. However, others have noted that certain factors may counter this argument: the woman does the touching, which does not transfer the impurity of the *zavah* (Fonrobert 1997:130), and, even if Jesus were contaminated, such a problem is 'easily remedied' (Haber 2003:179). Of greater significance in Ndonga culture (according to the interpreters in lihongo), was deemed to be the importance of not approaching from behind. This had nothing

⁴³ However, I note that this absence could just as easily be explained by a lack of inclination to volunteer sensitive information about such matters and/or my own failure to enquire of it directly, as it could by menstruation being thought of, at least historically, as positively 'depurative' (Davies 1994 ch.2:9).

to do with concerns for purity. Rather, one should approach from the front lest someone perceives you to be acting against their best interests (i.e. not transparently, in front of them).

Several points have coalesced in this section to challenge the heavily gendered nature of the scholarly discussion on the woman's condition. The lihongo contributions, in the first instance, were *not* gendered: the fact that discussions of blood in the CBS sessions did not focus specifically on vaginal or, indeed, *women's* blood, was unexpected. In fact, human *and* animal blood came to the fore and, where *human* blood was specified, it was the blood of the person (the un-gendered blood of a murder victim, for example) that was considered, not the blood of a woman. This highlights the contextual nature of the binary female-male interpretations in Western academic circles, wherein gender issues are high on the agenda.

Further, the association of the woman with the flow of blood with a woman who is pregnant or who has just given birth (Tatekulu Laban Iyambo) detracts from frequent scholarly focus on the infertility of the woman in the narrative. For Tatekulu Laban, her condition is evidence of her very fertility, not infertility. Comments from the children about the value of Jairus' daughter to the productivity and well-being of the household unit – she was a 'key bone' in the household – were also indicative of positive valuation of the female characters in the story: they highlighted the importance of a female child. This might suggest that it was not all that unusual for Jairus to be so insistent (including forsaking his status by falling at the feet of Jesus) that his daughter be healed.

Ndonga society is matrilineal (whilst increasingly patriarchal) and may be expected to champion the status of women. However, ethnographies on the region suggest that gender dynamics challenge, once again, the binary oppositions so apparent in Western scholarship. For example, the notion of a 'third gender' (*omasenge*: homosexual males who assume women's roles; Davies 1994), suggests that in this traditional, agrarian context, the man-woman binary is not a given. Perhaps chiming with the complications presented to biblical scholarship regarding conceptions of biological sex and gender (e.g.

Thatcher 2011), the understanding of a transitional or third gender into Owambo worldviews is indicative of a more fluid conception of gender.

Touching Jesus' Clothing: Extensions of the Person and Magical Healings.

Our discussions of Mark 5:21-43 incorporated extensive exploration of the issue of what exactly constituted a 'person', particularly in reference to the woman touching Jesus' garment. Healing through touch (and especially the touch of a garment) is potentially problematic, leading as it does to performances of what (from a skeptical or materialist, Western viewpoint) look like 'magical' behaviours. However, the woman in Mark 5:21-43 is not the only person who demonstrates such attitudes to the clothing of charismatic persons: the people of Gennesaret 'begged' to 'touch even the fringe of his cloak' when Jesus was in their region, and 'all who touched it were healed' (NRSV Mark 6:56), and the 'handkerchiefs or aprons' that Paul had been in contact with healed the sick and spirit-possessed (NRSV Acts 19:12). This is a long-standing tradition: in 1 Samuel 24, David cuts off a corner of Saul's cloak in what is seemingly a display of aggression, a preamble (albeit not seen through) to a physical assault. Haber remarks that the cloak would have been considered 'an extension of the person and his authority' (2003:182).

In the texts under consideration, healings enacted through touching garments (5:27) and the utterance of 'exotic foreign words' (Marcus 2000:363) – that is, 'foreign' to the audience (5:41) – are suggestive of worldviews and medical anthropologies far removed from those of the majority of the Academy today. Vernon K. Robbins suggests that the 'traditional language and motifs' used in the story would allow for ready association with healing for a non-Christian hearer (1987:504). It is argued, however, that a concern to suppress 'Mark's "magical" tendency' (LeMarquand 2004:55) prompted the Matthean and Lukan authors to eliminate these elements altogether (e.g. Love 2002:96). However, it is interesting to note that a so-called 'magical' encounter (touching the garment and the power flowing out of Jesus) resonated so much as to be frequently featured on early Christian amulets (Joynes 2012:120). I would suggest that it is ethnocentric to claim that such interpretations may have 'tainted' the understanding of Jesus' behaviours (Witherington III 1984:72) or that Mark

5:21-43 demonstrates that certain culturally-bound understandings of (i) the person and, (ii) healing methods might be termed 'human sham' (Marcus 2000:367).

The interpretations put forward in lihongo, combined with a consideration of the ethnographic literature on the area, suggest that conceptions of the person are broader and more holistic than the physical form that I consider to be my own person. Leaving aside for the moment the issue of what remains of me post-mortem, my person as understood in an Ndonga context (how one both *interacts* with me and *knows* me) would include my name, shadow, imprints, clothing, treasured personal items, image or reflection, and even my words, alongside my physical presence and bodily fluids. Furthermore, I am not limited to one presence, being understood to have a wandering 'dream-soul' (*ombepo*) that may encounter others beyond the location of my body. As the person persists beyond death – in the form of an *oshiluli* (restless spirit) or presence amongst the *aathithi* (ancestors), both living within the community – notions of the person are extended still further (see Chapters 6-8). Within this conception of the person, culturally constructed, I do not have 'extensions'. Rather, the *whole notion* of the person is extended to include all of the aspects above. This is apparent in the Levitical code, too: the prescribed actions for having interacted with an impure person (to wash one's clothes, bathe in water, and remain unclean until the evening) are the same whether encountering their body (e.g. 15:7) or their 'extensions' (e.g. spit: 15:8, bed: 15:5, imprint 15:6, 9-10, etc.). Marcus claims that impurity through contact with clothing is less serious than that through contact with the body (2000:359, relying on Milgrom). However, it is debatable that this distinction is in evidence in the text, given the above. The only distinction drawn is the duration of impurity for the male who contracts a menstruant's seven-day impurity through sexual intercourse.

Notions of the extended person in the New Testament are not just limited to the haemorrhaging woman's interaction with Jesus. It is important to refer directly at this point to Acts 5:15, within which the potency of Peter's extended person is commented upon: 'they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he came by' (NRSV). The lihongo discussions of the shadow as a visible extension

give a contemporary cross-cultural example of accessing the person through their non-physical being. In lihongo, the deliberate interactions with shadows discussed were malicious (and accidental interactions, innocuous). In Acts, however, there is an example of positive potency in the shadow of a charismatic.

In light of the above, references to 'extensions to/of the person' betray the culturally constructed notion of the (bounded) 'person' to which the speaker refers by relegating the 'additional' aspects to another category. Working with an expanded notion of the person, the woman with the flow of blood really does *know* Jesus through touching his garment – a part of him, not an extension – and that is set within a textual unit that, as Marcus notes, is pervaded by the language of perception (2000:365). It is not just the woman whose person extends beyond her body (in her case, by virtue of her bleeding). As Candida R. Moss argues – and in line with the idea of an extended (but simultaneously more accessible and vulnerable) person – the bodies of *both* Jesus and the woman 'are porous and leak uncontrollably' (2010:508).⁴⁴ Whilst Marcus suggests that her blood-impurity could have negated Jesus' power to heal (2000:358, 366), in this case that does not happen, adding further to the sense that in a purity context purity concerns need not override all else. And, within such a complex notion of the person, when culturally situated, Stuart Love's analysis (albeit focusing on the Matthean account) holds ground:

Yet the woman's behavior parallels popular beliefs about magic in agrarian societies; that is, she believes the healer's clothing has healing power, a notion repeated in 14:36 (see Acts 5:15, 19:12). If an aura of magic remains in the story it could fit either the period of the evangelist, the time of Jesus, or both.

Love (2002:96)

⁴⁴ Moss suggests that the 'traditional association' is between 'porosity and weakness' (2010:508). However, if the extended person notion is extrapolated, *all* persons become more accessible and therefore vulnerable. Conversely, and with regard to acting upon others, they *also* become more powerful (because everyone else is more vulnerable, too). Perhaps Jesus leaking power and the woman leaking blood are just extreme, unusual examples of how *accessible and vulnerable* all people (inclusive of their extensions) are. Is the fact that Jesus leaks power an example of that 'traditional association' being *reversed* or just an example of the compromise of the person via their 'extension'? If other remedies involved touch/power-transfer techniques, then are they not also examples of what one might call positive porosity?

Conclusion

A detailed consideration of the CBS transcripts, contextually situated using ethnographic materials, reveals a context within which blood (*ombinzi*) has an ambivalent nature. It is a positively valued substance, having curative, nourishing and bonding capacities. Notable contemporary examples were the making of cuts (*oonsha*) on the eyebrows or cheekbones to release blood to soothe eye pain, and the use of ox blood to cement marital unions and cure blood-guilt (*uutoni*). However, blood is simultaneously perceived as dangerous, with disease-bearing and polluting qualities. It is this sense of blood's agency, clearly apparent in the ethnographic literature on autochthonous worldviews, which is apparent in the CBS discussions. The use of ox blood in various ritual contexts in the historical and contemporary wedding (*ohango*), as well as to redress blood-guilt (on the orders of traditional judicial authorities), demonstrates its powerful agency and role today in the maintenance of connections between living and deceased community members. Importantly, this is within an agricultural context that prizes cattle above all other livestock as the inheritance from the ancestors, and it is their blood that often takes centre stage in rituals (historic and contemporary). Most significantly for the interpretation of the narratives at hand, human blood was understood to contain the life-force of the person, with the flow of blood (*uuva wetiko lyombinzi oomvula omulongo nambali*; lit.: 'sickness of flow of blood of twelve years') meaning that the woman is in a critical state and is losing her life, perhaps suffering from a post-partum complication.

Having discussed 'extensions of the person' with the groups, and situated their explanations within the ethnographic background, it became clear that blood has sat, historically, alongside other bodily fluids, imprints, the shadow and possessions within holistic local conceptions of the person (it must, for example, be buried with the deceased). For the senior participants, autochthonous understandings of intrinsic links between the self and the shadow, as well as material possessions, was a contemporary reality. The children, whilst not recognising all autochthonous ideas (for example, that the shadow was representative of one's death or that the clothing was part of the person), did subscribe to the fundamental premise of material agency, referring to

apotropaic beads (*omagwe*) to ward off witchcraft. However, their partial unfamiliarity with notions of an extended person suggests that this may be a concept that is receding over time to the extent that some no longer recognise it (although they expressed conviction elsewhere that the person at least extends beyond their physical boundary and into the dream world and spirit realm [Aanona, CBS Luke 24]).

The lack of recognition noted above cannot also be said of witchcraft (*uulodhi*): in this round of CBS sessions (as elsewhere) the children were vocal about the threat of *uulodhi* to their well-being (*contra* Hiltunen 1986:157). Perhaps it is the persistent concern for witchcraft (which Groop acknowledges: 2010:161) and its associated, enduring sense of insecurity (McKittrick 2002:2) that prompts the continuing use of traditional diviner-healers (*oonganga*). The participants were explicit in their references to the use of such healers in a contemporary setting, despite clear reservations about their efficacy: some were ‘false’ *oonganga*, and offered no relief from affliction but only the impoverished future that the woman with the flow of blood had experienced.

Considering a witchcraft context, the Western notion of the person appears inadequate when seeking to express how individuals might interact with each other. The (extended) self, I have argued, as well as the other, is more accessible than s/he whose person is confined to her/his physical body. Within a witchcraft context, then, a person is considerably more vulnerable if their enemies can access them through spit, footprints, clothing, reflection, and the like. This also provides a contextual lens through which to consider the woman’s touching of Jesus’ garment.

William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison suggest that the idea that divine power goes from healer to clothing ‘seems to presuppose that there is some sort of energy which can be stored in physical objects and subsequently drained’ (2001:129). The lihongo interpretations, however, require not that ‘some sort of energy’ be stored, but that clothing simply be recognised as an ‘extension’ of the person. ‘A wider world of personhood’ (Fowler 2004:19) – including the ‘dividual’, ‘partible’, or ‘permeable’ person – is to be found particularly in

ethnographic literature on India, Melanesia and Australasia, with which the lihongo interpretations chime:⁴⁵

...the aspects of persons in Yolngu ethnography that are of interest here are not so much internal divisions and external connections as the *extension* of the person in space and time beyond somatic boundaries and the normal life-span. Both ancestral and sorcery doctrines in northeast Arnhem Land, I suggest, represent the extension of the boundaries of the person in space and time beyond the boundaries of sensations and everyday perception and beyond the temporal zone between conception and death.

Keen (2006:516)

However, part of what I have tried to argue here is that those 'extensions' are, more likely, integral. The term 'extension of the person' is, itself, framed in contemporary, Western terms, and suggests (via categorisation) that the extensions are somehow lesser, secondary aspects. This may not be the case in local conception. We require, perhaps, a wholly different way of conceiving of the person fully to understand interactions between bodies (including bodily fluids), shadows, and clothing, as represented in New Testament contexts.

Engaging with Feminist treatments of Mark 5:21-43, I have illustrated that a context in which blood is connected with pollution does not necessitate a pollution-oriented interpretation of the text. It may be as a result of the ambivalent attitudes to blood that the participants did not ascribe a polluted or ostracised status to the woman; the lihongo interpreters might, for example, have suggested that she was beset by spirit forces (referencing cultural traditions of blood-letting in the treatment of haemorrhage). However, the lihongo interpretations go beyond simply *not* associating the woman's bleeding with impurity. Discussions of blood were wider ranging than vaginal, female, or even human blood. Furthermore, the lihongo interpretations were distinctly feminist in their approach, perhaps linked to the matrilineal context: the woman was, rather strikingly in one case, figured as a *fertile* woman (with postpartum

⁴⁵ I have not engaged with theories of the dividual, partible, and permeable person (summarised by Chris Fowler 2004:23-52) to any great degree because they do not precisely encapsulate notions of personhood as presented to me in lihongo CBS sessions or those presented in the ethnographic literature on the area (they have proved very useful thinking partners, however). These constructs are located in understandings of gift-giving and other transactions, which do not concern me here. Ian Keen's description here, however, moves away from those 'external connections' and focuses on the person beyond the 'somatic boundaries', which was what I wished to explore. Having struggled to locate discussions of personhood that treat Sub-Saharan African contexts and perspectives, it has become clear that this is an area meriting further research.

bleeding) and not as an infertile woman, as is ordinarily suggested in Western scholarship.

In summary, at least some of the participants across each group expressed views of aspects of the person (blood, body, shadow, clothing, possessions) that echo or demonstrate continuity with elements of pre-Christian, autochthonous beliefs and/or practices. A survey of the CBS transcripts and the ethnographic context demonstrates, in this case, that there is dynamic interaction at play at the interface between pre-Christian and Christian worldviews, and between text and context. This interaction, particularly with regard to an extended notion of the person, has given rise to a fresh lens through which to examine the touching of Jesus' garment by the woman with the flow of blood.

Chapter 6 The Graves and Groves of Restless Spirits: Noctambulant Legion and the *Living Landscape* (Luke 8:26-39)

Focusing on the theme of 'Landscapes', Luke 8:26-39 offered an opportunity to explore contemporary Ndonga understandings of the nature of various aspects of the land(scape),⁴⁶ with Legion rejecting household space and instead occupying burial and wilderness sites. In addition, discussion of this text would facilitate a greater appreciation of the 'Spirits' theme, focusing on participants' understandings of Legion's demons. This text also offered related insights into the 'Bodies' theme, with bodies being the link, in the final analysis, between 'Spirits' and 'Landscapes'.

It was to the spirits that we turned first, exploring what they were and how, if at all, such spirits might be experienced in lihongo. Having established their characteristics, I turned to the issue of why the narrative focused on particular places in the landscape. We moved from lihongo perceptions of domestic, 'bush', and burial sites in an Ndonga context to how they were functioning in the text.

In this chapter, contemporary depictions of domestic (including agricultural), burial and wild spaces are cross-referenced with ethnographic literature in order to illustrate points of continuity with pre-missionary, autochthonous understandings of the landscape. The same is attempted with participants' discussions of spirits. The participants' interpretations are then brought into dialogue with professional biblical scholarship; here, given the broad focus (spirits/demons, domestic space, wild space), I touch on various areas of study in the academy. For example, I engage with Halvor Moxnes' work on place, particularly because he suggests that the 'spatial dimension of Jesus' activities' has been neglected (2003:2). Additionally, I engage with postcolonial interpretations of Legion's demons (Ched Myers 1988; Richard A. Horsley

⁴⁶ As Tim Cresswell notes, 'we do not live in landscapes – we look at them' (2015:18). Conceptually, the 'landscape' differs from the 'land'. In our CBS sessions, we were discussing places; that is, occupied sites in the land. However, as the spatial locations in the Legion narrative are visualised in the interpreters' imaginations at the moment of interpretation, I have opted for the term 'landscape' in this treatment.

2001), these having been very influential in the interpretation of possession narratives. However, in terms of dialogue with scholarship my scope is necessarily broad, led as it is by the discussion foci: 'Spirits' and 'Landscapes'. Finally, I explore how the lihongo perceptions of a *living landscape* offers an alternative lens through which we might interpret the stage upon which Legion's story plays out.

Luke 8:26-39 and the *Living Landscape* in lihongo CBS and its Ethnographic Context

Combined with ethnographic data on Owamboland, the participants' observations reveal that association may be drawn between spirits and four geographical locations: domestic gravesites, royal gravesites, ancestral burial grounds and wilderness groves. Having not anticipated the alternative view of landscape that was revealed, I attempted to gather more detail on the topic in other CBS sessions thereafter. As a result, the discussion below draws on the wider transcript corpus and follows that with contextualisation (via ethnographic literature) to illustrate the prominence of pre-Christian perspectives in contemporary interpretations. But, first, what kind of spirits are we talking about?

Spirits in lihongo CBS and Owambo Ethnographies

As this discussion attempts to explore the intimate link between land and spirits, it is difficult to determine which should be given priority. However, it seems appropriate first to outline the ways in which participants understood Legion's spirits or demons before commenting on their relationship to the land: What was their origin? Why was he afflicted? Was the description of Legion's behaviour recognisable in an lihongo context? As Michael W. Newheart remarks, the demons 'charge into the foreground' by giving their name and pleading with Jesus not to be sent out of the region (Mark) or into the abyss (Luke) (2004:44-5). They come to the fore here and now, too.

In the Ndonga text, two terms are used to refer to the spirits encountered within the narrative. Where the English translation (GNT) uses 'demon(s)' (8:27, 29b,

30, 31, 32, 35, 38), the Oshindonga translation has *oompwidhuli* (sing: *ompwidhuli*). Where the English translation refers to ‘unclean spirit(s)’ (8:29a), the Oshindonga offers *ombepo dha nyata* (sing: *ombepo ya nyata*). The participants saw these two terms as synonymous. In a fairly comprehensive dictionary, the entry *ompwidhuli* is given as ‘evil spirit’ (Tirronen 1986:235). It is perhaps worth noting, however, that *oompwidhuli* has connotations of wildness and insanity. The root *-pwidhi* is defined as ‘wild, crazy, insane’ (Viljoen, Amakali & Namuandi 2012:45), whilst *-pwidhi* is the only term given under those English entries (2012:108, 71, 83). This may explain the association with *onkwenya*:

Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: The other name for *ompwidhuli* is *onkwenya*, which is a disease that ... disturbs the mind.

Ombepo (breath, wind, spirit) *ya nyata*, on the other hand, is associated with dirt, chaos and bad behaviour. *Nyata* is defined as ‘become dirty, pinch’ (Viljoen, Amakali & Namuandi 2012:39). There are two further connected terms for spirits: *iiluli* (sing: *oshiluli*) and *aathithi* (collective noun). Respectively, these terms refer to the restless, returned spirits of the recently (named) deceased, and the unnamed ancestral spirits. The significance of these in reference to burial grounds is discussed below. For now, it is important to note that the latter was not mentioned in the CBS discussions on Legion (nor does it appear in the text), whereas the former played a significant role, even though the term itself is not found in the Oshindonga version of the narrative. It should be borne in mind that *oshiluli* (pl. *iiluli*) has pejorative connotations. As Aarni explains:

It was thought that after the death [*sic*] the “witch”, *omulodhi*, changed into *oshiluli*. Also, all non-buried persons, e.g. murderers, women who died in childbirth, people who died from starvation, or those who have been killed by *omulodhi*, all these persons’ souls were transformed into *iiluli* after their death.

Aarni (1982:17)

These spirits are the ‘restless, bitter dead’ who Davies suggests are one of the groups that form the capricious ‘spirits of the west’ (1994 ch.3:12, 30). These spirits wandered the land after death. Whilst *iiluli* does not appear as a term in this text, the Oshindonga Bible uses the term where the English (GNT) has ‘ghost’ in Matthew 14:26, Mark 6:49, Luke 24:37 and 39. The disciples think

Jesus is an *oshiluli* when he walks on water, as well as when they experience him resurrected amongst them.

When asked what an *ompwidhuli* was, the children had various answers; Imanuel Amagulu replied that it was *onkwenya*, madness. Another suggestion was that it was an evil spirit (*ombepo ya nyata*) (Sipora Simon), concurring with Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo (the only participant in the men's group). It could also be 'something sent by Satan to come into your body and will make you do bad things' (Timoteus Pinehas). Reference to the *oompwidhuli*'s satanic origins was also made by Memekulu Rauha Andreas. She explained that 'the demon is the power of Satan and occurs in the man's body and disturbs the spirit.' Meme Diina Itila referred to the spirits as 'the power of darkness', connecting them with the bush as a place of 'darkness'. Finally, in the children's session, Christa Iyambo described the *ompwidhuli* as 'a person that is not nice in the head', perhaps echoing the *onkwenya* idea offered earlier.

The general consensus, then, seemed to be that *oompwidhuli* were evil spirits and/or madness. They are very much a contemporary phenomenon and the participants easily related to the *oompwidhuli* experienced by Legion in the text. There was less of a consensus, however, when it came to the origin or residence of the *oompwidhuli*. Mention was made twice of the potential satanic origin, but my initial question was more concerned with the location in which *oompwidhuli* were thought to reside (if, indeed, they can be thought of as occupying space). Perhaps reflecting an understanding of the world as an insecure place (cf. McKittrick 2002), Meme Diina Itila suggested that the demons are 'everywhere in the world'. Meme Elizabeth Ekandjo put forward the idea that the *oompwidhuli* resided in the sky, although Memekulu Rauha Andreas later said that this was not a certainty but a guess. However, this idea was echoed in the response from Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo, who stated that being in the sky, 'anywhere you go, the *ompwidhuli* can follow'. Evil spirits with the lexical connection to the wilderness, then, are perhaps not always tied down to location.

Also raised was the idea that you could bring an affliction such as *oompwidhuli* on yourself, by making yourself susceptible: 'for example, if you have a

problem, you worry over solving the problem and create the conditions for the *oompwidhuli*. For example, you talk out loud to yourself' (Meme Diina Itila). This rather suggests that *oompwidhuli* are opportunistic and will seize upon those who are, or allow themselves to become, vulnerable.



Figure 32: The lihongo Cemetery

The response from the children concerning the location or origin of the *oompwidhuli* was varied and notable for its independence of thought from the adults' ideas. Possible origins were 'hell' (Okanona ANON9), 'the brain' (Frieda Shilemba) and 'the graveyard' (Ananias limbondi). Two children expressed the idea that *oompwidhuli* 'come from someone', each giving their own example: 'If you steal something from someone then that person will send you *oompwidhuli*' (Okanona ANON6) and 'if you are excellent in school then another will disturb your mind with evil spirits' because that person 'is against you' (Loide Petrus). How the children conceived of the *oompwidhuli* existing prior to being sent into a person (for those who understood this to be the causal chain) was unclear. Amongst their suggestions of how the individual might protect him/herself against such a threat (hospital, reading the Bible, prayer, avoiding touching others' belongings) was to visit a diviner-healer (*onganga*).

Luke 8:27b details some of the behaviours Legion exhibits and which the participants of this study considered: '*For a long time this man had gone without*

clothes and would not stay at home, but spent his time in the burial caves'. Verse 29b adds further information regarding the destructive strength Legion possesses and his movement away from inhabited areas and into the wilderness. The greatest emphasis put forward by the participants concerning the behaviour of Legion was that he was not in control of his own actions. The phrase used frequently was that he was not acting 'according to his own will'. The will and power of the *oompwidhuli* were seen to completely overrun Legion. The antisocial behaviour that was argued to be characteristic of *omunampwidhuli* (one with *oompwidhuli*), then, is the responsibility of the spirit(s) and not the person. The effects of such affliction are considerable and are perceived in the community today; as the participants stated, those affected by *oompwidhuli* are not 'normal' and their behaviour tells the story – they behave in contravention of social norms (being naked in public, running away, beating others, destroying property, killing, etc.). The CBS discussions revolved around six types of anti-social behaviour exhibited by those afflicted by *oompwidhuli*, with possible examples. At least some of these apply to Legion's (potentially nocturnal) relocation to the gravesite:

Spatial:	Night-walking; the spirits 'make you run away' (Wilbartina Teofelus); Spirits are associated with the 'wild' (<i>-pwidhi</i>).
Temporal:	Singing in the night; Spirits are associated with nighttime (<i>iiuli</i>).
Economic:	Destruction of homes, goods, and stocks in bars.
Physical:	Aggressive, murderous behaviour.
Verbal:	Shouting; <i>Oompwidhuli</i> 'have their own language'.
Normative:	Nakedness: unveiling <i>epenge</i> (genitals); inflicting witchcraft.

Meme Elizabeth Ekandjo reported that an *omunampwidhuli*'s behaviour and demeanour will be unpredictable – one minute quiet and the next aggressive. She also suggested that '*oompwidhuli* have their own language' and that the person will hallucinate. Memekulu Maria Kondo stressed destructive aspects of their behaviour: 'they throw stones through windows, beat people, they are careless. They destroy everything.' Tatekulu Theophilus Iyambo noted that the behaviour of an *omunampwidhuli* induces fear in those they encounter. Whilst he did not give specific examples of how the person might behave, he stressed that 'when you have *oompwidhuli*, that means you are ill, you are sick, not normal.'



Figure 33: A Cuca Shop (Shebeen) Near Ondangwa

Whilst the adults gave relatively few examples of such behaviour between them, the children were vocal in their assessment of the social ills connected to the will of the *oompwidhuli*. Their behaviour disturbs others:

Ananias Imbondi:	Bad behaviour. They sing during nighttime.
Loide Petrus:	They go to public places like a cuca shop [shebeen] and remove all their clothes.
Christa Iyambo:	They might come to your house and break in.
Fieda Shilemba:	They can beat you.
Monica Emvula:	He can beat you.
Immanuel Amagulu:	He can bite you.
Tangeni Fillemon:	He can drink alcohol and kill someone – even the wife.
Ananias Imbondi:	He can burn the house.
Okanona ANON6:	He can kill even his mother.
Elizabeth limbondi:	He can go to the cuca shop and take all of the liquor and pour it out.

With a strong association being drawn by many between *oompwidhuli* (evil/wild spirits) and *oombepo dha nyata* (unclean spirits), it is perhaps unsurprising that the behaviour of the afflicted is what was focused on – the social ills that ensued. I note, however, that the social ills arise as a result of the presence of the spirits and not the other way around. That is, the possession is understood

as the cause (not the effect) of social strife. As was mentioned earlier, *nyata*, when referring to a person's actions, connotes distinctly bad behaviour. Indeed, it is through such behaviour that the presence of *oompwidhuli* is noted. The behaviours above, too, reflect remarkably similar concerns that the children reported regarding *iiluli* (restless spirits; sing. *oshiluli*) in another session:

Author:	Why would they be scared of an <i>oshiluli</i> ? What could an <i>oshiluli</i> do to them?
Erastus Kuutondokwa:	<i>Oshiluli</i> can strangle.
Hilma Ikukutu:	<i>Oshiluli</i> can beat you.
Ananias Imbondi:	<i>Oshiluli</i> can eat all the food wherever he finds it.
Elisabeth Imbondi:	<i>Oshiluli</i> can destroy.
Anna Ikukutu:	<i>Oshiluli</i> can go through the locked room.

Aanona, CBS Mark 4:35-41 & 6:45-52

Some considered it possible that Legion's *oompwidhuli* could have been directed at him by a human agent, via witchcraft (*uulodhi*). This highlights the complexity of the links between the living, departed and otherworldly forces, all of which are at play in the Ndonga worldviews returned in the sessions. Consideration of Legion's demons, or evil spirits (*oompwidhuli*), actually generated a much wider discussion on restless spirits (*iiluli*), witchcraft (*uulodhi*) and madness (*onkwenya*). It was notable, however, that none of the participants vocalised a connection between Legion's experience of spirits/demons and the local experience of colonial or missionary presence. This provides fertile ground for dialogue with postcolonial criticism. In advance of that, I wish to consider the spaces and places in the narrative and then go on to examine the extent to which these interpretations reflect the autochthonous understandings presented in ethnographic literature.



Figure 34: The 'Stoneless' Landscape

Before commencing an examination of how the groups understood Legion's presence in the gravesite, a note on terminology is needed. Where the English translation uses 'burial caves' (8:27), the Oshindgona text reads *oombila dhomomakololo*. *Ombila* (pl. *oombila*) is a grave and would normally be associated with burial in or on the ground. This region of Namibia, which is a 'stoneless, flat land' (Aarni 1982:22), is devoid of caves. *Dhomomakololo* could be translated as 'of the cavity-type' (giving 'cavity graves'), as the verb *okukolola* is to hollow out, *okukola* is to hollow out or juice *marula* fruits, and *omakololo* are cavities or hollows. However, when an understanding of the term *oombila dhomomakololo* was requested from an Ndonga friend, she returned the following explanation: 'graves deep in the ground'.⁴⁷ In this geographical and cultural context, to hollow out something for burial purposes is likely to connote underground graves, as opposed to caves. Secondly, the English text refers to the 'abyss' that the demons do not want to be sent into (8:31). The

⁴⁷ Lucia Namushinga's translations in correspondence (02.11.2014)

Oshindonga term *olumbogo lwomuule* could also link the spirits and the land. An *ombogo* is a small hole in the ground (made by digging insects), with the prefix *olu-* (noun class 6) indicating a long, thin, or diminutive version. *Lwomuule*, with its suffix *-le*, gives us the meaning 'deep'. The translation offered to me was 'deep hole', by the same friend as above. I would argue that these terminological issues could have had a significant bearing on the interpretations offered.

When considering why Legion was in the tombs at all, all groups voiced the opinion that he would not be in the gravesite of his own volition, pressing the point that the man is not responsible for his own behaviour. Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo stated that people today fear gravesites, contrasting Legion's perception of this place 'because it is according to the will of the demon.' He explained that people fear the mortality they are confronted with here, cemeteries being places 'of deceased persons, not for the living.' He also noted (with laughter) that some people suggest there are ghosts (*iiluli*: restless spirits of the recently deceased) in cemeteries.

The invisible world presses hard on the visible: one speaks of the other, and African peoples "see" that invisible universe when they look at, hear or feel the visible and tangible world.

Mbiti (1990[1969]:56)

What was a pointed out with humour in the above case was presented altogether seriously elsewhere. In fact, the existence of troubling *iiluli* arose frequently in our group sessions and thus became a focus of interest in my study. Tatekulu Laban Iyambo described their connection with the graveyard:

Tatekulu Laban Iyambo:	<i>iiluli</i> [pl.] sometimes like to wander near the graveyard or in the bush.
Author:	Why those two places?
Tatekulu Laban Iyambo:	That is the proper place for them to live.
Author:	Why?
Tatekulu Laban Iyambo:	<i>Omayendo</i> [graveyards] is where the bodies live. It is their home area. They just wander in the bush and come back to their home area of <i>omayendo</i> .
Author:	Their home area wouldn't be an <i>egumbo</i> ?

Tatekulu Laban Iyambo: No, it's where the body is living.

Ootate, CBS Luke 24

Tatekulu Laban highlights for us the strong connection between the spirit of the dead and the corpse's physical location. That is, corpse, spirit and land are bound together. It is unsurprising, then, that Legion encounters troublesome spirits in the gravesite, judging by the comments about domestic burial and burial in cemeteries. However, whether he can be said to be experiencing *iiluli* as opposed to *oompwidhuli* is another matter. Both are associated with disturbance, although *oompwidhuli* may be more closely associated with wild land, as opposed to domestic or cemetery space. The women's group stressed that Legion would not be in the burial site of his own will; thereby, they implied that to occupy such a site would be undesirable. An example will suffice:

Memekulu Rauha Andreas: The man in his mind is unable to recognise the good and the bad. He is just staying wherever he finds a place to stay.

The children, however, had a contrasting view. Both Klaudia Ashikuti and Loide Petrus referred to a burial site as 'a good place', with Loide also comparing it to a house: 'it is the house for the deceased person – a quiet house'. Others added that Legion was there because either he (Martha Nangolo) or the *oompwidhuli* (Eli Awala, Frieda Shilemba, Monica Emvula) sought his death and drove him to what was therefore an appropriate location. It is a location, too, where he is perceived to be out of help's reach, according to Okanona ANON6: 'there is nobody there to assist the man.' It is at once, then, a restful place for the dead and a threatening place for the living. It was generally thought of as an undesirable location for Legion (or any living human being) and one in which there could be spirit-presences.



Figure 35: Agricultural Land around a Homestead (*Egumbo*)

Whilst discussing Ancestor Christology with the groups later on in the CBS programme, further information about the agency of the land arose. I include mention of that here in order to fill out the developing notion of the *living landscape*. Ancestral graves, or *aathithi* fields, arose in discussions of the Resurrection (see Chapter 8). A transcript extract from the children's group demonstrates further links between bodies, land and spirit agency:

Hileni liyambo:

They are our forefathers who died long ago but their spirit is good, not like the *iiluli* who disturb you. According to the story from our grandmother, *aathithi* are spirits of the deceased, staying in some areas. For example, if you drive the car where the *aathithi* are staying you have to make a hoot. If you do not hoot, then your car will get stuck. And for the woman, if you carry something like a clay pot of *omalovu giilya* [traditional beer], then you stop and pour some out on the ground. If you do not do that the pot would fall and break. But you cannot go into the field of *aathithi* and build your house. Then they will deal with you.

Aanona, CBS Luke 24

There were said to be areas of the village, or particular areas of an individual homestead (the home and surrounding farming land), which house the graves of village or family ancestors (their identities were a point of uncertainty, in contrast to *iiluli* who are the remembered, named deceased). The influence of these ancestral spirits was felt to be positive, and was placed in opposition to the meddling and disturbing influence of the *iiluli*. However, the *aathithi* are not

to be trifled with – several people reported making requests to pass through the fields in question, and making libations. The usually benevolent influence of the *aathithi* (the exception being if one built on ‘their’ land) would suggest that this was not the kind of interaction envisaged for Legion. The burial sites associated with malevolent spirits providing better grounds for comparison were the local cemetery where *iiluli* might reside (discussed above), or the bush, wherein *oompwidhuli* (wild spirits/demons), *iiluli* (restless spirits) and *oombepo dha nyata* (evil spirits) might roam. I now move to examine the bush, or wilderness, in order to develop a fuller picture of the *living landscape* and the potent sites of spirit activity therein.

The Living Landscape: Wilderness Groves



Figure 36: The Bush (*Ombuga*)

A place responds to violations (to forbidden presences or incorrect comportments) by causing physical danger such as potential illness or death to the violator.

Munn (2003:95)

Having considered the tombs as a place Legion inhabits, we also discussed his being driven into the wilderness. The bush, or *ombuga*⁴⁸ (8:29), was a location that the participants were ambivalent about in our discussions. However, it was definitely not just ‘space’, ‘out there’. It was recognised to be rich in resources (food for animals, firewood, house-building materials) but it also signaled threats to community members. These threats came not only in the shape of wild animals (snakes) and dangerous people (thieves, murderers), but also from the wild land itself. This is perhaps because it was not cleaned, or tamed, by habitation and agriculture, or because it was a ‘dark’ place with its own character and spirit-presences. What – to the unreflective, Western eye – might look like (unoccupied) ‘space’ between (occupied) ‘places’ (with Tuan) was described very much as its own place, reflecting the culturally-bound ‘sense of place’ (Cresswell 2015:16).

For example, Tatekulu Theophilus Iyambo described the *ombuga* into which Legion is drawn as a ‘dirty’ place and added that ‘the spirit itself is dirty’. Meme Diina Itila’s explanation of Legion’s occupation of this location was equally negative:

Meme Diina Itula:	The demon is the power of darkness, therefore they took the man to the bush.
Author:	What is the connection between the power of darkness and the bush?
Meme Diina Itula:	The demon takes you wherever they want. Open space is compared with light. The bush you compare with darkness.

All groups acknowledged the existence of spirit ‘groves’, which were seen as highly dangerous sites, wherein one might encounter mysterious feelings, dangerous animals, poisoned food, or disappearances, all caused by the agency of malevolent spirits:

Loide Petrus:	There is an area of bush called Shambulumbulu. When you go there, if you are two people, one of you will disappear.
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⁴⁸ This term could be translated desert (Viljoen, Amakali & Namuandi 2012:29), wilderness, or bush. The participants seemed to contrast it with the village location and my translator rendered it ‘bush,’ so I proceed with that term.

- Elizabeth Imbondi: There is a certain area where the elders will tell you not to move around there because there is a mysterious spirit. This is Oshilulu. There are a lot of Marula trees and snakes. And it is a dangerous place.
- Christa Iyambo: There is an area called Okuti where a person will call you and give you food but it will be poisonous and you will die.

- Memekulu Hilma Lugambo: There is a certain place called Okadhulu. It is a dangerous place. If you go there you will see something like *oompwidhuli*. If you don't see something you will feel it.

- Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo: When I was young, at Onankandi village you could see the light of fire during the night [in the distance] but when you approached there is just warmth and you feel a mysterious feeling in your body. And if you look further, you see the fire is there [i.e. has moved further away].⁴⁹

It is not only the graveyard, then, which has the potential to bring the *omundonga* (Ndonga person) into contact with the spirit world. The *living landscape* as a whole provides potent sites in which the community might interact with the spirits, albeit unwelcome ones. One might encounter spirits at home (or in communal life, generally), at the cemetery and in the bush (all groups sharing knowledge of pockets of spirit-inhabited landscape in the region).

The Living Landscape: Legion Nightwalking

Before reflecting on whether the above understandings of a *living landscape* indicate the persistence of autochthonous worldviews, I wish to highlight one example of that *living landscape* acting as a lens for the interpretation of Legion's experience. Lawrence's citation of Hannah Lewis's *Deaf Liberation Theology* (2007) is helpful in seeking to appreciate how such a text might be appropriated. Lawrence (2013:28) asks us to consider that 'oral and performative cultures also often appropriate a text to a cultural context shared by others: "Sometimes the story is framed in a new context, or the ending changed, or variants suggested alongside the original story" (Lewis 2007:120).'

⁴⁹ Tatekulu Theophelus's description of this phenomenon has echoes of that of Davies (1994 ch.3:25), who explains that *ounikifa* spirits (*Oshikwanyama*) were believed to be half human-half canine, visible around twilight, live in the bush and build small fires. They were the spirits of magicians (*Oshikwanyama: ehmule*).

One such appropriation was put forward from within the men's CBS group on the Legion narrative. In particular, the participant focused on Legion's relocation from homesite to gravesite (Luke 8:27), understanding it to have happened at night. The following 'reframing' was offered by Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo, who reported local instances of nocturnal relocation of community members to graveyards (*omayendo*):

Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo: We are nearby the graveyard (looks towards cemetery). For example, my house is nearby the graveyard and I am the pastor in the congregation. I go to sleep in my house but when I wake up I am not in my house but in the graveyard. *But why do we have to wonder why this man stays in the graveyard if this happens also in our community?* [italics added]

Author: Has this happened to you?

Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo: I am referring to the situation. And yes, it can happen, so they say.

Author: Has anyone told you that that it has happened to them (obviously, I am not asking for names)?

Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo: I have not heard from a particular person but I have heard reports. Sometimes a pastor transfers to another congregation and the reason for that is that they sleep in the graveyard.

Tatekulu Theophelus is not the pastor but was reporting events that he had heard of in the locality. The extent to which he saw parallels between occupation of a gravesite in the text and his own community was striking. He appeared comfortably to equate Legion's habitation of the tombs 'according to the will of the demon' with the nocturnal movement to a gravesite in Ndonga communities. Seen in the context of an inhabited landscape, alive with the spirits generated through burial procedures or corpse disposal, one can better appreciate this retelling or reframing interpretation of the narrative. A nocturnal relocation to a graveyard brings together ideas of the heightened level of spirit activity in both *wild land* and *gravesites* (and depictions of those as 'dark' and 'dirty' sites), as well as the potential for communication between spirits of the living and dead at *nighttime* and in *dreams* (the latter being more closely associated with reality than in a contemporary Western milieu [Aarni 1982:69, 74]). Nighttime is considered to be very dangerous, especially given the heightened activity of spirits at night. Furthermore, night is when the hazards that are more easily perceived during daylight hours (dangerous people and

animals, potentially harmful bits of terrain) become largely invisible. In addition, it is notable that the *resolution* to the problem of sleeping in the graveyard (a place-based spirit encounter) is itself spatially oriented; in order to overcome this undesirable, spirit-driven nightwalking, the pastor must *relocate* and take on another parish.

If the spirits originate in the gravesite (as suggested by Ananias limbondi), perhaps this explains the 'seizing' (v.29 [*Oshindonga: kwata*]) that takes place (seemingly from a household location), with the spirits then taking him back to their place of origin, *kombuga* (to the bush/wilderness. GNT English: 'desert'). Should one assume that this refers to the wilderness location *of* the burial tombs? Perhaps, although the CBS sessions suggested Legion's interaction with the spirit world might not just be limited to his connection with the graveyard (8:27). He might also encounter spirits in the (wider) wilderness (8:29, perhaps), were he to enter a spirit grove, for example. It is possible, then, that Legion may be understood as being drawn *from* the graveyard out into the bush, where he might encounter wandering spirits or happen upon sites of spiritual potency. Further tapping into the interpretations of the children, perhaps Legion's experience is explained by an encounter with spirits sent by a malicious agent: either a contemporary who wishes him harm or, conceivably, a witch who is operating from beyond the grave.

Summary and Ethnographic Context

Drawing together the salient themes from the CBS discussions, I will now contextualise them with reference to ethnographic works. Simultaneously, this contextualisation will serve to illustrate the resonances with pre-Christian worldviews. The following two key points from the CBS discussions will be taken forward into the ethnographic contextualisation:

- i. Legion's possession by spirits was understood as intimately connected to his location in the cemetery. This (as a gravesite) was deemed to be the 'home area' of spirits because it is where the bodies are located. In this way, an extended notion of community (including multiple spirit-types) extends the network of meaningful, occupied places in the domestic landscape.*

- ii. *Participants (in the vast majority) were aware of locations in the wild landscape that are sites of intense spirit activity (wilderness groves).*

Offering a brief treatment of grave and wilderness sites, and moving outwards from the domestic centre of the homestead, I seek to substantiate my notion of a *living landscape*. In contextualising the *living landscape*, four types of gravesite arise in ethnographic materials relevant to the lihongo area: domestic graves, ancestral graves, royal graves, and corpse-disposal in the bush.

If the above description of Legion's *living landscape* is a fair representation, we might expect references in ethnographic works to spirit presences in connection with the *egumbo* (homestead). Indeed, that is the case (e.g. McKittrick 2002:33). That the palisade fence provided protection against spirits in autochthonous perceptions is attested by Davies, who likens it to the perimeter of the *oshilongo* (the Ndonga kingdom), with no man's land beyond (1994 ch.1:5). This is further emphasised by the fact that making breaks in the fence was taboo (*oshidhila*; Estermann 1976:86), and that the *egumbo* has 'labyrinthine passages', which J. S. Malan argues 'weave in and out to confuse a stranger or an evil spirit' (1995:22). Hiltunen points to missionary accounts of witch detection rituals that took place in the *egumbo*, protective magic when relocating it, as well as the 'closing' of homestead spaces to spirits or witches (Hiltunen 1986:72, 146f, 69), with Davies also mentioning the protection of sleeping huts with charms (1994 ch.3:2). The CBS discussion above demonstrates a continuing preoccupation with witchcraft and evil spirits drawing, it would seem, on pre-Christian understandings of transitions from death to post-mortem existence and interaction thereafter with the living community.

Members of the *egumbo* used, under normal circumstances, to be buried within the homestead or on its perimeter. Different sites would be appropriate for different members of the household: a household head would be buried in the cattle enclosure, whilst a child might be buried on the *egumbo* perimeter (Tönjes 1996[1911]:142) or in the calf enclosure, and a woman in the pounding area (Aarni 1982:42). With regard to burial within or around the *egumbo*, CBS reports suggested that those persons might return and disturb the household, if

the burial instructions of the deceased have not been followed (Aarni, too, notes the importance of the deceased being 'satisfied with their burial' in an Owambo context [1982:72; cf. Mbiti 1990[1969]:83, Green 1983:9-10]):

Okanona ANON3: Such persons in order to die and not come back sometimes they may instruct the family: If I am dead, bury me in the *egumbo* [homestead] or at the *ehale* [entrance] and if this is ignored they may come back.

Loide Petrus: And sometimes people may instruct to cut off the tip of the tongue or the nose and if you don't do that they are angry and they come back.

Translator (Rev. Uushona): Because he knows he is a witch and that is how you stop him coming back, to reduce his power.

Aanona, CBS Luke 24

The Kwanyama made it a practice to separate the legs and arms from the trunk and cut out the tongue [to prevent the witch's return as a malicious spirit].

Estermann (1976:190)

Aarni (1982:42) argues that mutilation stops passage to Kingdom of Death, which is the 'greatest shame'. Mutilation in response to witchcraft is also mentioned by McKittrick (2002:74) and Hermann Tönjes (1996[1911]:182), with the latter, at least (albeit in reference to the Kwanyama), reporting it acting as a curtailment of powers. Nürnberger is not specific about African 'rituals' that 'are designed to prevent the deceased from returning, or getting into the hands of witches' (2007:24). Contributions in the CBS sessions, then, seem to echo autochthonous notions of 'proper' burial and prevention of the return of spirits (especially of witches).

According to the lihongo groups, there is a clearly prescribed remedy for a person's post-mortem return to the homestead:

Elizabeth Imbondi: One person was dead but came back as an *oshiluli* and he came back to their own house [homestead: *egumbo*]. A family member decided to cook *oshimbombo* [porridge] and a whole chicken [*ondjuhwa*] with enough oil [*omahooli/omagadhi*]. They put it at the *ehale* [entrance] to the *egumbo*. Then the *oshiluli* came and ate it and then they were not seen again.

Aanona, CBS Luke 24

Such encounters were said to occur only at night (*'iluli* cannot be seen during the day.' Memekulu Julia Iiyambo: *Oomeme*, CBS Mark 4:35-41 & 6:45-52), perhaps echoing Davies's description of *iiluli* as 'typical' bad spirits of the West, the direction of the sunset (Davies 1994 ch.3:12). Return of restless spirits was widely reported in CBS sessions (as well as in discussions with church leaders), as was the solution: 'Even nowadays. That is the only method to say goodbye. After he has eaten he is gone forever' (Memekulu Maria Kondo: *Oomeme*, CBS Luke 24). To some extent, it would seem, the boundaries of the community reflect those in a pre-Christian setting: the dead engage with the living, sometimes in a troublesome but transient way (*iiluli*), for which there is a prescribed farewell.

The *aathithi*, too, demonstrate the continuing influence of spirits deriving from domestic burial sites. The use of the plural – sing: *omuthithi* – as a collective noun is indicative of the existence of the spirits *in community*, in direct reflection (or continuation) of the living community (Aarni 1982:71). These might be specific burial grounds reserved over time for the burial of a household or kin-group's dead. They could conceivably also be sites of burial previously enclosed within an *egumbo* boundary, which (following relocation of an *egumbo* after the householder's death) would later fall outside of that fence. However, in our discussions the former seemed to be suggested.

Spirit agencies were said to require libations and act on the living community if their place in the landscape was visited or violated. The closeness of the *aathithi* to the community and their engagement with it is also noted by Aarni, who contrasts their proximity with the remoteness of *Kalunga* (the Owambo deity, predating Christianity; also the term used in Christianity for God) (Aarni 1982:64). That there are specific sites identified with the *aathithi* nuances Nürnberger's statement that 'in *traditionalism* ancestors are ... not subject to time and space. They are everywhere all the time' (2007:14). They may not be limited by time and space but, in *lihongo* (at least), they are *placed*. Despite missionary attempts to rid communities of their connections to the ancestors, it would seem that concern with the *aathithi* persists, even to the extent that certain tracts of land are off-limits for building, and libations are offered when traversing or passing *aathithi* fields. This would appear to be a clear example of

the enduring importance of (at least, aspects of) autochthonous worldviews and practices.

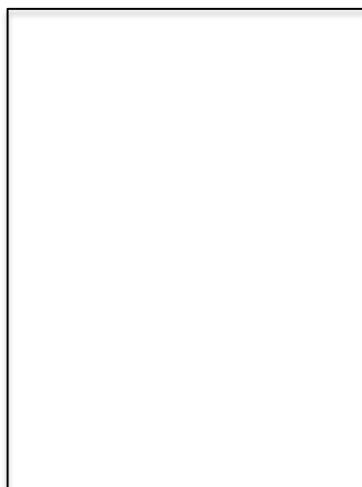


Figure 37: Removed for Copyright Reasons

Owambo ethnographies also introduce royal graves (*ompampa*) (Tönjes 1996 [1911]:142-3), which were ritually potent sites connected to – or representative of – the ‘power’ of the ancestors (Aarni 1982:64; see also Salokoski 2006:25). Unlike other members of the Ndonga tribe (who were buried in a hole dug by the men with the body facing East: Tönjes 1996[1911] in Aarni 1982:42), the King’s body was wrapped in a pure black ox hide and set upon the ground of his cattle kraal, supported in a sitting position. The black ox, the best of oxen, was slaughtered when the king died (Hiltunen 1993:77). Aarni explains that the body was then sheltered under a ‘pyramid’ of Mopane tree stakes.⁵⁰ Alternatively, this could have been a stake enclosure, several rings deep (Hiltunen 1993:78). The *ompampa* (sing.) also acted as a sanctuary to subjects and even criminals or foreigners fleeing attack (see also McKittrick 2002:35). Although he generalises about ‘Ovambo’ religion and worldviews, Aarni may be correct when he states that ‘the *ompampa* became the meeting place for the living and the dead’ (1982:82). The living may interact with the dead king through requests for rainmaking and offerings of food, at least some of which may be for (ancestral) spirits present in the gravesite (Hiltunen 1993:78). This is a link also made by McKittrick in her research – guns became the tool used to drive away the spirit of the dead (and other spirits) from the gravesite (2002:62).

⁵⁰ In some areas of Owamboland, in a historical context, it was *only* the King’s body that was buried below ground (Aarni 1982:42).

Spirit presences would seem, indeed, to be intimately connected to the location of the body in or on the land. Whilst there was no discussion of royal graves in my study, the overarching notion of a potent landscape was apparent and would appear to have its roots in the cluster of ideas of which the potent royal grave is one.

The bush was seen by participants as far from an inert landscape. Rather, it was heavily characterised, being 'dark', 'dirty', and 'dangerous'. Looking to wider ethnographic scholarship on the region, it seems that this is a depiction we might expect in this context. Of characterisation of space within an African, 'traditionalist life-world', Nürnberger suggests that 'as one approaches the core [of the homestead], the necessity of respect increases. This is where the most essential deposit of power is located. As one approaches the periphery the world becomes more dangerous. There are clear demarcations between inside and outside. They can take the form of walls or fences, or they can be invisible for a stranger, but they always have the force of ritual markings' (2007:23). Moving outside of the homestead was deemed to be particularly perilous, with Estermann reporting that Kwanyama spirits (*ounikifa*) – 'the spirits of possessors of magic power' – 'are thought to take special pleasure in persecuting whoever happens to go away from the house at night' (1976:190).

Aarni's ethnography on the Ndonga states that the bodies of those who perpetrated anti-social behaviours (murder, witchcraft) were denied burial (which would have been within the *egumbo*) and therefore entry into the Kingdom of Death 'under the ground' (1982:74). Instead, their corpses were cast out into wild space to be eaten by wild animals (1982:66, 70); 'unburied persons', he notes, 'were restless' (1982:72). The same is true of victims of starvation, whose corpses would have been viewed as sources of starvation-contagion (Hayes 1992.1:205-6). Perhaps these add to the 'wandering' spirit presence in the bush, as Aarni argues, or even concentrations of spirit activity at the site of corpse-disposal. These persons would, without proper burial, become 'homeless spirit[s]' (Nürnberger 2007:25). It is possible that there is a connection between the (historical) casting out of the bodies of undesirables and the (contemporary) notion of spirit-inhabited groves in the landscape.

However, this is not the only autochthonous practice that might have given rise to such beliefs, whether then or now.

McKittrick (citing Warneck 1910) reports that protection was required for journeys through bush land: “the wanderer in the wilderness expects his amulet to make him invisible before his enemies and protect him from spirits” (2002:35-6). As she makes clear, there was a sense of ‘vengeful otherworldly forces’ at play in this context (2002:36). The kings, sometimes through local priests, designated sanctuaries in the landscape and, thus, ‘imbued’ the landscape ‘with extraordinary power’ (2002:35). McKittrick relates that the bad behaviour of kings on a site or the ritual designations mentioned above could lead to the creation of magical groves in the wilderness; these were pockets of spirit-presence and power, sometimes malevolent (as referred to in our CBS sessions) and sometimes ‘places of refuge’ (2002:34-5). As some of the CBS responses suggested, entering these areas can threaten one’s security and even life. Here, the persistence of autochthonous worldviews seems apparent: the landscape is still potent, still ‘alive’.

The phenomenon of spirits groves or sites is not unique to this context – it is mentioned in scholarship on other African cosmologies (e.g. Mbiti 1990[1969]:51 and 1971:92), as well as that on the Middle East (Abu-Rabia 2005:247). In the Owambo context, sacred groves seem to be particularly prevalent in Kwanyama ethnographies (Estermann 1976:189; Tönjes 1996[1911]:184). Estermann also describes the ritual of ‘putting the forest to sleep’ (1976:149), furthering the sense of the *living landscape*. Adding yet another dimension to the ‘very densely populated’ spiritual-physical landscape (Mbiti 1990[1969]:74), Hiltunen describes the initiation of novice diviners, using termite mounds. A termite stack is, she suggests, ‘regarded as a residence of spirits’ and ‘that the old diviner here talks to the termite stack, shows that he believes a spirit to reside in it’ (1993:42-3); a further example, then, of a historical *living landscape*, of which we might discern traces today in the CBS discussions.

Summary

Overall, the lihongo (and wider Ndonga) landscape is seen to have spirit-filled character: it has gravesites (with active, rooted spirits) and bushland (a site of wandering for restless spirits). The CBS responses agree with John S. Mbiti's point that 'the living-dead may be considered to dwell in the area of the graves, some of which are in the former houses of the departed' (1990[1969]:83). However, as we move away from the fenced domestic space of the homestead, and even more so as we move beyond the homestead's cultivated space, the landscape would appear to become more and more threatening, with associated spirits being more dangerous. Wild spirits or spirits of 'undesirables' – witches, murderers and the like – whose corpses (historically) were cast out on wild land made for potent sites in the bush, itself already negatively conceived of (perhaps connected to sacred groves established by kings' ritualists).

The CBS groups characterised this peripheral landscape as 'dark', 'dirty' and 'dangerous', all qualities they associated with wild and restless spirits. For the lihongo interpreters, Legion is negotiating a characterful landscape, having been driven from the relative safety of domestic space (occupied by the living with occasional visitations from the recently deceased). Legion has been moved by the spirits to their 'home area' – here a collective burial site – and is encouraged by them to wander in the bush, where still further (and more dangerous) presences might be encountered in spirit groves. The key to spirit presences at particular sites in the landscape would appear to be the interment or disposal of corpses and, in this regard, the autochthonous and contemporary conceptions coalesce. Is this because in 'the African approach', 'the human being does not **have** a body, but *is* a body' (Nürnberger 2007:27, emphases original)? It would be impossible to verify such a generalised statement, but it points to the issue of worldview permeating this study. Hiltunen suggests that 'with a few exceptions old African religion does not know demons. Thus they are also lacking in Ovambo witchcraft' (1993:34). And yet, there is no shortage of malevolent spirit presences to provide the lihongo participants with a fertile context for interpretation of Legion narrative. Spirits, witches and a *living landscape* – all key features of the worldviews documented by the missionaries

and subsequent ethnographers – are seen here to persist in contemporary worldviews in lihongo.

lihongo Interpretations of Luke 8:26-39 in Dialogue with ‘Western Worldview’ Scholarship

Consider the relationship between the sea and land along the coast between Seattle and Vancouver. In his book *Passage to Juneau* (1999) the travel writer Jonathan Raban tells of his trip by boat along that shore. Alongside his travel narrative he tells of the voyage of the explorer Captain Vancouver in his ship the HMS Discovery in 1792. Vancouver’s task was to map the coast and name it as he went – making it a place of empire. Naming is one of the ways space can be given meaning and become place. Vancouver’s journal reports the seemingly nonsensical movements of natives in their canoes in the sea around them. Rather than taking a direct line from point A to point B the natives would take complicated routes that had no apparent logic. To the native canoeists their movements made perfect sense as they read the sea as a set of places associated with particular spirits and particular dangers. While the colonialists looked at the sea and saw blank space, the natives saw place.

Cresswell (2015:15)

The Landscape in ‘Western Worldview’ Scholarship:

The depictions of the tombs and the wild land in the lihongo interpretations of Luke 8:26-39 are markedly different to those found in Western scholarship, where it may be described as unreflexive. Examining the narrative through the lens of Western ‘rationalism’, there is a tendency to favour metaphorical interpretations of the demons/spirits in the narrative, rendering them secondary to the living human characters. This demythologised reading, highlighted when considered alongside the lihongo interpretations, also marginalises the agency of the land.

Moxnes argues for a consideration of possession ‘in place’; however, his argument is primarily vested in the spatial location as a domain of contested power. Moxnes focuses on ‘space described as Kingdom’ (2003:134); place as context for possession and exorcism is then viewed as an imagined blanket laid over the ‘obvious, visible’ (2003:128) terrain: ‘the realms of Satan and of God are, so to speak, laid on the world that Jesus and his hearers inhabit. They are figures of speech or “spaces of representation” that give to experiences of being possessed and to exorcisms a spatial dimension’ (2003:136). Power and leadership over the contested space (Kingdom of God versus Kingdom of

Satan) is played out in possession and exorcism experiences, which exhibit 'the deeper meaning of the land', 'governed' as it is 'by spiritual powers' (2003:128). Whilst this acknowledges that the significance of the land goes beyond the visible, it would appear to preclude a physical connection between the spirits/demons, the land and Legion as a possessed character. The spiritual realm in Iihongo is, after all, far from a 'figure of speech': it is a lived reality. Here Moxnes' treatment gives in to the tendency in unreflexive Western scholarship to personify or present as metaphorical biblical references to spirit forces.

Contemporary scholarship often focuses on the fact that the narrative may take place in Gentile territory. From a Westernised worldview, this would seem to be adequate characterisation of the land for the purposes of interpreting its role in the story (Franklin 2007:938; Evans 1990:383; Lieu 1997:66). François Bovon has even gone so far as to outline how the author would have understood the terrain: 'as a Greek, Luke would understand geographical space as a system of cities with the hinterland that belongs to them' (2002:326). These points, however, direct us toward the human occupation of the land, whilst sidelining the character of the land itself. In other words, they focus on what is *on* the land, not what is *in* or *of* the land. The idea of power is central to notions of place (Cresswell 2015:19); however, when defined by a Westernised worldview, this focuses exclusively on the living human community. The power of place in the Ndonga territory may, in contrast, be defined by the spirit presences in the land itself – the power of the dead to define space as meaningful place.

The tombs are one of the clearly defined places of importance in this narrative, in that Legion is described as occupying them, perhaps being restrained in them (if not restrained in the house/city and absconding to them), and moving between tombs and wilderness. Many Western scholars remark that the tombs function as an indicator of the unclean condition in which we find Legion, along with the presence of unclean animals and unclean spirits (Green 1997:335, 337; Lieu 1997:65). Robert C. Tannehill suggests that he is 'dehumanized, living like a beast', partly linked to his abode in the tombs, and that he is 'beyond human control' (1996:146). The tombs, then, serve as a marker to the uncleanness of the man, as well as his social separation from his community.

The tombs are also defined by Western scholars as the natural abode of demons, or unclean spirits. Luke T. Johnson notes that the Lukan author (for stylistic reasons) has not placed quite as much emphasis on the tombs as did the author of Mark (1991:137, 139), who repeated the term in three verses (5:2, 3, 5), explicitly juxtaposing the tombs with the unclean spirit in 5:2. Johnson does not, however, offer explanation for the extent of the emphasis placed by the Markan author. Judith Lieu designates the tombs as 'traditionally ... the habitat of demonic spirits' and as Legion's 'home' but does not develop this point or offer an explanation as to precisely why this is the case (1997:65). Likewise, for I. Howard Marshall, tombs would be 'an obvious place to expect to find demons' (1978:337). For C. F. Evans, this is also true of the desert: 'the special abode of demons' (1990:384).

The lihongo interpretations now give us a platform from which it is possible to reposition the landscape in the narrative (bearing in mind that the dead were also considered unclean in Owambo thinking: Aarni 1982:42). For example, if we consider the links between the interment of a corpse and the resulting spirit presence in the land in lihongo worldviews, quite why the tombs might be marked out as an undesirable place to reside becomes quite clear. Spirits of the dead are linked to the tombs by the land in which the bodies are buried. It is the land that holds the memory and houses the spirit of that individual. The gravesite Legion occupies might be thought of as teeming with spirit life. The fact that Legion is *not* in a house of the living or residing with his community tells only half the story: of equal (or even greater) significance is that he is *actively* in the 'home area' of those spirits, whether that is the peaceful place some of the children described, or the fearful place others felt it to be.

Having considered a variety of Western sources on the Legion narrative with respect to the tombs (8:27), we are left with some unanswered questions with regard to the wilderness (8:29). For example, should we regard these as one (interchangeably termed) location in the narrative (the tombs *in* the wilderness, as Newheart suggests of the tombs 'in' the mountains in the Markan narrative [2004:43]), or could we interpret the tombs to be conceived of as a *separate* category, albeit within the wider scope of the wilderness? Little is made of the

desert or wilderness in its own right in the scholarship on this narrative, whereas the lihongo interpretations considered the bush as quite a separate entity with its own characteristics. It is not clear, either, whether the man is restrained from leaving his community to *go to* the tombs or from *leaving* the tombs themselves – a question which Newheart points us towards (2004:94).

It seems that the lihongo interpreters would agree with the Western claims that the wilderness would be the ‘natural’ abode of spirits and they offer reasons why – these are some of the locations in which bodies might be discarded and in which spirit presences are therefore generated. Further associations may be drawn when we consider ‘sacred groves’ established by ritual specialists on royal command, and the free movement of wild spirits (*oompwidhuli*), potentially originating in (or travelling through) the sky. Such a strong connection between spirit and wilderness is reinforced by the equation made between their characteristics: they share a dark, dirty and dangerous nature. Legion being driven into the wilderness might be seen either as him being driven (from a house) to the ‘home area’ of the spirits (the tombs) or from the tombs to the wilderness, as graveyard-based spirits are reported to do. Alternatively, he might encounter spirits in sacred groves in the wilderness as he negotiates a landscape peppered by such spirit presences (including at the sites of disposal of witches’ corpses). Such interpretations resonate with Mary E. Mills’s claim that the wilderness is ‘the place in popular folklore of evil forces’ (1990:102).

Conflicting reports are given about the abyss (uniquely Lukan: Marshall 1978:335), too – is it a ‘place of origin’ (Johnson 1991:137)? ‘That prison reserved for the punishment of demons’ (Green 1997:340)? Or a place of ‘annihilation’ (Lieu 1997:65)? For Lieu, at least, the demons seem to be both active in the sea in the preceding story (Luke 8:22-25) and to dread banishment to ‘*the abyss*, the depths of the sea’ in the Legion narrative, which seems rather contradictory. Likewise, the abyss and the lake; the scholars referred to offer various responses to the issue of whether the ‘abyss’ (8:31) and the ‘lake’ (8:33) might be equated (perhaps in the sense that seas were seen to be connected to the watery underworld: Marshall 1978:339), or are entirely different things. There is divergence when it comes to the demons ‘returning to’ the abyss (lake) (e.g. Franklin 2007:938), or heading into the alternative

destination that is the lake (Green 1997:340), having feared 'being dismissed to what we must understand as their place of origin' (Johnson 1991:137). For Joel B. Green, the entry of the demons into the lake signals their 'death' (cf. Newheart 2004:45), a journey he argues was mirrored in the translocation of the demoniac from life in a vital community to 'non' existence amongst the tombs (1997:340).

Using the lihongo interpretations as a lens, the tombs and wilderness would appear to be conceived of as two very distinct sites, being characterised very differently as areas in the landscape. The land on which the graves are housed (notably dug, not housed in caves) may be the 'home area' of the dead buried there and bring with it associated spirit activity. The bush, on the other hand, is the wandering place of spirits, but also has within it spirit groves or heightened spirit activity. In the Oshindonga translation, the abyss is clearly a depth within the ground, seemingly without any connotations of a watery deep. Whilst the request the demons make not to be sent out of the region in the Markan narrative makes sense given the rootedness some of the spirits are perceived to have in lihongo worldviews, the plea to avoid the abyss might make sense for evil spirits wishing to avoid an encounter with *Kalunga* in the Kingdom of Death, which was (in an autochthonous sense) understood to be an underworld, again connecting the land with spirits and the dead.

Legion's Spirits in Postcolonial Scholarship

And what of the demons (or spirits) themselves – how has Western scholarship treated them? That Lieu references 'supernatural forces and almost magical elements' in the narrative (1997:66) is rather suggestive of the distance of the western scholar from the (imagined?) terrain of the story. Lieu is quite clear in her description of them as 'the forces of chaos' (1997:64), which she links with 'the violence of the sea' (65), having grouped the Legion narrative with the stilling of the storm in 8:22-25 (Evans also highlights the juxtaposition of the two passages [1990:383]). Marshall finds the demonology in the story problematic, stating that it 'is so similar to that attested in popular superstitions of the time that it is difficult to believe that it corresponds to objective fact.' This is indicative of a trend in unreflexive Western scholarship to question what the demons

represent, rather than viewing them as potential realities in the hearers' worldviews. This moves Marshall to attribute a psychological motive to Jesus' allowing the swine to be destroyed 'in order to convince [the former demoniac] that he was really free from the demons' (1978:336).

One solution for Western scholars has been to figure the demons as responses to Roman occupation:

Demon possession, for example, of the manically violent man among the Gerasenes, can be understood as a combination of the effect of Roman imperial violence, a displaced protest against it, and a self-protection against a suicidal counterattack against the Romans. ... The demoniac became the repository of the community's resentment of the violent effects of Roman domination'

Horsley (2001:145)

Postcolonial interpretations of the Legion narrative, expounded by scholars such as Myers (1988) and Horsley (2001), view the spirits and demons (and their exorcisms) as symbolic. Myers locates the narrative firmly within the context of 'reconstruction' (1988:186; cf. Horsley, below, on the renewal of Israel motif) and suggests that the exorcism is a '*public* symbolic action' that points to ridding the society of its possession, its 'collective anxiety', and challenges the narrative or mindset of subjugation by a foreign power (1988:193, emphasis original; contra Hollenbach [1981], who argues that colonial oppression leads to private neurosis in the demoniac). Myers summarises his argument in the following way:

This exorcism is thus another key episode in the Jesus-the-stronger-one's struggle to "bind the strong man." In the synagogue he was identified with the scribal class, now with Caesar's armies.

Myers (1988:194)

Myers states that 'nowhere else in [Mark's] Gospel does Jesus converse directly with a demonic opponent except in the two "inaugural exorcisms" of 1:21ff. and 5:1ff.' (1988:192). Admittedly, the storm in 4:35-41 does not actually address Jesus, as do the unclean spirits in the 'inaugural exorcisms'. However, noting that alternative worldviews understand storms to be unclean spirits or demonic forces (see Chapter 7), the linguistic parallels between the exorcisms and the Calming of the Storm jump to the fore. In both 1:25 and 4:39, Jesus rebukes

(*epitiman*) his opponent, telling both the unclean spirit and the storm to be silent (*phimoō*). In all other appearances in the New Testament, *phimoō* is only used in reference to interpersonal interactions (with humans or demons), therefore suggesting a sense of agency behind the storm in 4:35-41. This is compounded by the fact that, as Myers himself notes, the elements obey (4:41; 1988:196). A further parallel is apparent in the astonishment/fear of the audiences (1:27-8; 4:40-1; 5:15, 17, 20). Similarities between the Calming of the Storm and exorcisms, once recognised, expand the category of Jesus' opponents beyond the political; Jesus also challenges natural phenomena in a passage that has no political allusions other than to reference 'the other side' (4:35). Meagre substantive evidence notwithstanding, Myers concludes that 'these harrowing sea stories intend to dramatize the difficulties facing the kingdom community as it tries to overcome the institutionalized social divisions between Jew and gentile'. Again, he reduces the narratives (despite clear reference to 'Semitic mythic personification of cosmic forces'), just as he did with Legion, to the level of (potentially, 'annoyingly allegorical') 'metaphorical action' (1988:197).

Whilst this consideration of the Calming of the Storm has necessitated a brief diversion from Legion, I hoped to illustrate here the limitations of this political reading. Myers's assessment of exorcism as symbolic political action seems stretched when forced to apply to the Calming of the Storm, which has exorcistic undertones. Not only does that narrative have little in the way of political allusion but it may also offer a window onto a worldview in which natural phenomena are perceived as having genuine spirit agency. If that perception is indeed behind the Gospel of Mark (notable for its 'magical tendency': LeMarquand 2004:55) then a simpler explanation of the Legion narrative (as well as the synagogue exorcism and the Calming of the Storm) is that possession was understood (first and foremost) as possession, and exorcisms (first and foremost) as exorcisms. It is possible, I suggest, that Myers has over-engineered his treatment of Legion (and other spirit-related narratives). Whilst he has expressly sought to focus on the context and avoid the privileging of theological truths (1988:9), it may be that Myers has inadvertently overlooked the contextual reality of spirit-engagements in his pursuit of political symbolism.

Drawing on Frantz Fanon, Horsley similarly interprets the demons as manifestations of colonial anxiety; they are 'superhuman evil forces' to be blamed for misfortune, so that the people might avoid blaming God for sufferings and avoid focusing on 'the "real" political-economic forces affecting them' (2001:145). Whilst the argument for terminological associations with and allusions to the Roman army is persuasive, to limit interpretation of the narrative to the symbolic-political (and implicitly present spirits and demons as the polarised 'unreal' element) seems to me a reductionist approach. Horsley acknowledges the 'concrete experiences' of possession in the Gospels (2001:146), and yet explains possession as a symptom of colonial oppression. It remains unclear why possessions, such as that of Legion, cannot be interpreted (at least initially) as lived realities explicable within alternative worldviews and without suggesting that Jesus has unique insight into the 'real' meaning of possession and exorcism. The communities in which Jesus operated were in some way primitive or ignorant, Horsley seems to suggest, for it is only through the exorcism of Legion that the 'demystification of (the belief in) demons and demon possession' takes place (2001:147).

The Gospels recount multiple incidences of Jesus rebuking/subduing (*epitiman*) unclean spirits and casting out (*ekballein*) demons. These relate to illness, possession, and even forces of nature (the last, in the Calming of the Storm, also using the language of exorcism: *epitiman*). Seemingly, they are suggestive of worldviews that incorporate spirit agencies and hierarchies (cf. the Beelzebul controversy), not just symbolic forces. Horsley, by contrast, argues that the driving out and destruction of the demons (the Roman army) should be understood only in the context of the renewal of Israel, with political oppression being sufficient explanation of spirit 'activity': thereby, Horsley minimises the reality and agency of spirits.

If Horsley's assessment is pursued to its conclusion, it is the very lens through which the audience understands the event that is to be shattered by that event: the symbolic possession illustrates that possession is not 'real'; it is the political situation that is 'real'. However, not all gospel exorcisms have the political or military allusions that have been identified in the Legion narrative. In Iihongo, too, lived experience took precedence over the postcolonial context as an

interpretive lens: spirit-experiences were explained as spirit-experiences, not performances of the anxieties of colonised individuals or communities. With that in mind, I would argue that underlying worldviews - those which support the lived reality of spirit experiences - ought not to be minimised in interpretations of exorcism narratives or masked by (overly) symbolic or political readings.

What is notable is that this socio-political reading distances the demons from the places in which they are found. That is, it disrupts what the lihongo interpretations suggest is as an organic link between the evil spirits and sites within the landscape – the tombs and the wilderness. The possession of Legion was understood in lihongo as literal occupation of land and person, not metaphorically in relation to a colonial or postcolonial setting, despite its history. Namibia is a postcolonial context, having suffered under successive occupations by Germany, Britain (administered by South Africa) and, most recently, under South Africa's Apartheid regime. The independence of Namibia was formally recognised in 1990, drawing to a close the period that had begun with Germany's colonisation of the land in 1884, as a part of the Scramble for Africa. However, it was possession that caused the social ills the contributors detailed as associated with *oompwidhuli*. It was not, as with postcolonial interpretation, a socio-political situation being 'acted out' in possession. Indeed, in not one of the CBS sessions conducted did any participant refer to Owamboland or Namibia's colonial/postcolonial setting. Rather, and as has been illustrated, encounters with (and possession by) spirits is feature of contemporary, lived experience in lihongo. The participants saw no need to read as metaphorical Legion's spirits/demons precisely because the spirits *literally* occupy the land.

This chimes with David Frankfurter's claim (generalisation aside) that in the "lived religion" of the ancient Mediterranean world ... local cultures lived in familiarity with a great range of ancestral and landscape spirits' (2010:28). In lihongo, they are understood not only to exist across (and permeate) the landscape, but also to be encountered and quite literally felt by the living community. As Mbiti says, 'it is an empirical experience' (1990[1969]:57). For example, restless spirits disturb the household they have left behind if burial requests are not met. Ancestral spirits cause havoc if their territory is built upon,

and individuals sense the presence of wild spirits in (and report harm to people who transgress into) particular locations in the bush. Additionally, it is common for people to wake up feeling themselves being strangled by *iiluli*, as attested by both by participants in the CBS sessions⁵¹ and the church authorities to whom such experiences are reported (for example, Reverend Dr. Nambala [Presiding Bishop of ELCIN]).⁵²

Summary

In summary, engaging the lihongo interpretations of the landscape has revealed the contextual ('rationalist') nature of many Western interpretations. The landscape in the latter is usually discounted as an agent in the narrative and often figured simply as the stage for human action. This contrasts with the spirit-imbued landscape as understood in lihongo. The lihongo interpretations of the spirits afflicting Legion present an alternative to unreflexive Western scholarship's view of demons as symbolic, and to the depiction of Legion's demons as a metaphor for Roman occupation and oppression (applicable to the author's setting, not that of Jesus, as noted by Anna Runesson [2011:95]), or a performance of the colonised's anxiety. Rather, in lihongo terms, affliction by spirits is a reality. Restless spirits (*iiluli*) might revisit the homestead and physically endanger the inhabitants. There were also areas of correspondence: *oompwidhuli* might afflict the person and manifest in *onkwenya* (madness) – this connection between spirit possession and socially unacceptable behaviour was found in both postcolonial scholarship and in the lihongo interpretations. However, the causal chain was reversed: whilst in postcolonial interpretations society's social ills might be interpreted as being 'acted out' by the demoniac in his possessed state, in lihongo interpretations the affliction by spirits 'acts out' in socially unacceptable behaviours.

⁵¹ 'Even when sleeping you might feel something strangling you. That is *oshiluli*' (Memekulu Maria Kondo: *Oomeme*, CBS Luke 24).

⁵² 'There are stories. People even come to us for counselling because something is strangling them at night. Sometimes we can see marks, so you can see something was really happening. So, we cannot deny that there are ghosts' (Reverend Dr. Shekutaamba V V Nambala, Interview: 23.06.2015, ELCIN Headquarters, Oniipa).

Conclusion

The spiritual universe is a unit with the physical, and that these two intermingle and dovetail into each other so much that it is not easy, or even necessary, at times to draw the distinction or separate them.

Mbiti 1990[1969]:74

The lihongo interpretations of this passage offer a vision of Legion's *living landscape* as populated beyond living human occupation. Our discussions revealed understandings of an Ndonga landscape alive with links to the departed, inhabited by spirits and ancestors. Both positive and negative forces were seen to emanate from the landscape – particularly from sites of corpse burial – and impact upon members of the community. The reflexive nature of this study allowed me to realise that my own perception of a landscape (arising from a Western, materialist worldview) was that of an inert stage, barring flora and fauna, which provided context for a character-driven narrative – what Moxnes calls the ‘obvious, visible’ landscape (2003:128). The Ndonga landscape, by contrast, was a *living landscape*. It was, in itself, a character. What might look to me like ‘undifferentiated space’ was, in fact, meaningful place (Tuan 1997:6, in Cresswell 2015:15), albeit occupied and characterised by deceased rather than living members of the community.

Borrowing a phrase from Nancy D. Munn, ‘the potency of the landscape’ was readily apparent (2003:102). I went on to trace points of continuity with historical beliefs and practices connected with this landscape (as presented in ethnographies). This allowed me to suggest that contemporary perceptions of the *living landscape*, and its associated Owambo spirit network, owes much to autochthonous worldviews. Having considered burial (or corpse-disposal methods), as well as historical perceptions of the bush and sacred sites therein, various claims may be made about the enduring significance of pre-Christian worldviews concerning land and spirits. *Autochthonous* worldviews and interpretations – those indigenous to a locality – have proven to offer just that: land-based, ‘chthonic’ interpretation, which has encouraged me (reflexively) to engage with and nuance my own understanding of the land.



Figure 38: Homestead: A 'Maze' of Huts and Passageways

The homestead was (historically) the site of domestic (civilian) burial and the restless dead might revisit the homestead. It was, at least to a certain extent, safe space, protected by a maze of passageways (and perhaps the use of apotropaic spells and amulets). Nonetheless, its symbolic boundary might be penetrated by witches or spirits. This sense of 'safe' domestic space versus 'dark' and 'dangerous' wild space persists: it arose in CBS sessions and is physically manifested in homestead construction and orientation. I was, for example, reminded daily to close the western gate (Figure 39; the direction of the problematic 'Spirits of the West': Davies 1994), and perhaps not for mundane security (the eastern *ehale* entrance was much wider and always entirely open). Concern also endures regarding witchcraft: even amongst the children, there was familiarity with corpse-mutilation as a local practice to prevent the return of a witch. So, too, the belief that the restless dead might revisit the homestead: many participants reported visitations by, and procedures to say farewell to, spirits. This supports Groop's argument that the idea of *oilulu* (in *Oshindonga: iiluli*, restless spirits) has survived the introduction of Christianity and that such spirits are seen to be influential in a contemporary setting (2010:156). Indeed, the spirit attacks in 2004 and 2007 caused hysteria, disorientation and collapse amongst pupils and were explained locally with reference to evil spirits, witchcraft and *iiluli*.



Figure 39: The Western Gate

Discussion of Christian cemeteries and ancestral burial sites furthered the sense that autochthonous beliefs about placed spirits persist. Nowadays, as most people are Christian and would therefore be buried in the cemetery, the location of restless spirits was deemed by some to be the cemetery itself, the location of the corpses. This may relate to the pre-Christian belief that the burial site is where the living-dead person was said to remain after burial and before proceeding to the Underworld (Aarni 1982:74). The *aathithi* (ancestors), too, reside at their burial site and today, as historically, they should be addressed (and honoured with libations) when one wishes to traverse their land. This echoed the ethnographic reports of royal graves as sites of communication between living and dead members of the community (particularly the royal *aathithi*).

Finally, numerous reports of spirit-inhabited pockets of the landscape are also suggestive of an enduring autochthonous perception of the landscape. Whilst mentioning neither kings making sacred such sites, nor the casting out of the corpses of undesirables, the participants' characterisations of potent sites seem directly related to the spirit groves or sanctuaries mentioned in ethnographies. Furthermore, it is possible – given the strong connection between the place of

corpse and spirit – that corpse disposal (of witches, starvation-victims, etc.) directly influenced and perhaps continues to influence notions of spirit-imbued wilderness sites. It is no coincidence, I suggest, that spirits are often associated with dirt (wild land), darkness (untamed bushland and night), and danger.

At the point of encounter with the text, then, we find points of encounter between Christianity and pre-Christian worldviews. These enduring influences cooperatively inform the sense of a *living landscape*. The landscape is one peppered with sites of intense spirit activity, as well as being the terrain upon which wandering spirits roam. Considering Legion's situation – appropriated into this *living landscape* – enabled me to critique certain interpretations of Legion's landscape and spirits in professional biblical scholarship. Notably, this engagement demonstrated tendencies in 'Western worldview' scholarship (that dominated by a 'rationalist' perspective) to sideline the agency of the land, divorce spirits from place, and reduce spirits to the symbolic, metaphorical, or political. Spirits as a genuine feature of lived experience is rarely taken seriously.

For me, the lihongo interpretation of Legion wandering through a living landscape particularly highlights the perception of Legion as *in community* with the dead, and therefore even further removed from the living community in the house and city. The *agency* of the demons in dictating the demoniac's location (gravesites, wilderness), compounded by the agency of Jesus in the healed man's location (in community with Jesus and the disciples, heading back to the city and the house) is key to understanding the role of *place* in the story, and *vice versa*. The figure himself, both when possessed and once healed, has little agency in this story vis-à-vis his place (geographically, metaphorically). The demons choose where he goes initially, and Jesus chooses where he ends up. The spirits/demons dictate the man's comportment, clothing, place of wandering, and abode. They are in charge – they take him to their 'home area'. Their 'resistance' and 'defensive posture' (Green 1997:338) might be seen in the context of Jesus challenging them on home turf – in the wilderness and nearby gravesite. Likewise, they beg not to be sent out of the country (Mark) or not to be sent into the abyss (Luke). As Green quite rightly points out, the character introduced in 8:27 and 29 is (passively) 'displaced', as a 'man'

(1997:341). However, as a *demoniac*, he is very much 'in place', (actively, through spirit agency) occupying burial and wilderness sites.

And what of the land? Newheart says of the Markan passage: 'this is unclean territory, perfect for an unclean spirit' (2004:45). However, the lihongo interpretations suggest that a *wild landscape* is perfect for spirits, full stop. It has been interpreted in lihongo as a landscape that includes *graves* and wild spaces or *groves*, both 'home areas' of spirits. I do not mean to suggest that the uncleanness is to be understated or is irrelevant. Rather, it is perhaps best considered a separate point. Understood through the lens of the lihongo interpretations, the Markan phrase is not 'rather vague' (Marshall 1978:339) but comprehensible. The demons wish, in lihongo terms, to be let alone to reside in their 'home area', whether in the man or in the herd of swine and hence settle for this 'concession' (Evans 1990:386). As Bas M. F. van Iersel suggests, 'demons, just as deities, are bound to a particular place' and hence they beg not to be ejected in the Markan narrative (1998:199). They beg to stay 'in place'. Jesus, on the other hand, is begged to leave because it is him (not the spirit, contra Newheart 2004:94) who is considered 'out of place', when we consider the landscape.

This biblical spirit encounter may be interpreted in a framework of locations in which spirits would be expected to reside or wander – groves, the bush, graveyards. Where Green says 'having just seen Jesus display mastery over the monstrous forces of nature (8:22-25), we are equally convinced of Jesus' power and ability to save', we could also propose a two-fold demonstration of power on Jesus' part over spiritual forces associated with the sea (8:22-25) and spiritual forces associated with the (wild) landscape (8:26-39). That the ensuing passage (8:40-56) deals with Jesus' power in a domestic setting might also contribute to the highlighting of place in these narratives of healing. To call these forces simply those 'of nature' (Green 1997:338; Evans 1990:383) is, perhaps, to underplay the role of the land in the narrative, particularly (for the participants in lihongo) in generating evil spirits through burial (or non-burial) of a corpse.

Legion as a figure is presented here as involved in a multi-cultural encounter. The interpretations of Legion's journey across the Ndonga landscape, one inhabited by restless and ancestral spirits, speak of the lihongo community's historical encounter with Christianity. Local culture and Christianity are at times enmeshed, at times distinct systems. With regard to the notions of spirit beings, autochthonous beliefs (and associated practices) have not been displaced: Legion is understood variously as 'nightwalking' through the landscape (highlighting the predominance of spirit activity in the dark, at night, and in dreams),⁵³ as a victim of witchcraft, as inhabiting the 'home area' of restless spirits. It is notable, too, that the participants did not raise postcolonial interpretations or draw comparisons in any way with the European colonial and religious missions to Owamboland. In this regard, this chapter has attempted to offer an alternative to postcolonial interpretations, drawing on the lived experience of a 'possessed' landscape. In lihongo, land *and* Legion are possessed – spirits overwhelm both.

As one moves further away from the domestic centre, the land is argued to be darker, dirtier, and more dangerous. A domestic grave (whether in the homestead or in the graveyard) is the home area of the deceased's spirit. *Aathithi* fields are areas of continued spiritual power, not to be built upon. There are potent pockets in the bush in which spirit presences are concentrated and within which people are poisoned, killed, or see and feel strange things. The voices from lihongo suggest that Legion is not just wandering through an inert landscape; he is wandering through heavily populated terrain. As a man, a member of the living community, he is indeed out of place in the burial site and wandering in the wilderness. As a demoniac (as he is introduced), however, he is very much *in place* and *at home* in such landscapes. He is a pawn at the mercy of spiritual beings, for whom grave-sites and the bush are 'home' and a place of 'wandering' – Legion is negotiating the *living landscape* of the dead community. For the participants in my study, at least, the land acts on the people, rather than the other way around. In this context, Legion's possession is inextricably linked to 'possessed' terrain because the spirits are *in* and *of* the land.

⁵³ Encounters with spirits of the dead usually take place at night, in the dark and even in dreams (a point raised by Tatekulu Laban Iyambo in our CBS on Luke 24; cf. Aarni 1982:74).

**Chapter 7 Commanding the Whirlwinds, Calming the Storm:
Interactions with Nature ‘in culture’ and ‘in Christianity’
(Mark 4:35-41 and 6:45-52)**

The choice of the Calming of the Storm (4:35-41) and Walking on the Sea (6:45-52) narratives was based on the opportunity they presented to focus on the theme of *Landscapes*, here in the form of ‘weatherscapes’ and ‘waterscapes’. Given that the region’s pre-Christian worldviews are influenced by a mixture of animistic and dynamistic thought (Nürnberg 2007:9), I wished to explore whether or not such beliefs with regard to the natural environment persisted. Because the disciples fear they see an *oshiluli* (restless spirit; GNT English: ‘ghost’) in 6:45-52, the sessions also afforded us time to reflect on the nature and capacities of *Spirits*.

Initially, then, I sought to understand how the participants perceived watery environments in their own contexts and in the narratives: were they safe, dangerous or neutral locations? We also discussed whether it was significant that both events occurred at night, whether there was an agent causing the storm, and by what means (and in what capacity) Jesus was able to subdue the storm and walk on the sea. I also took the opportunity to ask whether people in lihongo (or Ondonga, more generally) demonstrate control over aspects of nature in a similar manner to that of Jesus in either narrative. Specifically, I wanted to know if *oonganga* (diviner-healers) would be deemed to have (or have had) such powers, and whether the participants might draw comparisons between Jesus and *oonganga*.

In the discussion below, the engagement with traditional historical-critical studies of these texts demonstrates the challenges these contextual interpretations bring to a field heavily influenced by Enlightenment Rationalism. Thereafter, a conversation is struck up particularly with (mostly Western) social-scientific interpretations of these narratives, which attempts to overcome the ‘rationalist’ bias and encourage in biblical scholarship greater sensitivity to cross-cultural particularities.

Mark 4:35-41 and 6:45-52 in Iihongo CBS and its Ethnographic Context

A prominent feature of the contextual discussions was the spirit agency involved in the narratives. The understanding of unclean spirits as causative forces behind weather phenomena influenced interpretations of both the wind and waves as aspects of stormy conditions. In addition, Jesus' interactions with the wind and waves in 4:35-41, as well as his walking across the water in 6:45-52, were interpreted through a spirit-tinted lens. The section below seeks both to unpack these interpretations and to contextualise them in relation to ethnographic works.

Iihongo Perspectives on 'The Elements'

It is worth noting from the outset that in the *Oshindonga* translations of both of the texts at hand the language used to describe the stormy conditions is wind-centred. The conditions described in 4:37, *oshikungulu oshidhigu shombepo*, could be literally translated as 'a storm heavy of wind' or, more smoothly, 'a strong wind storm'. In 6:48 the text refers to *ombepo yoshikungulu*, which is literally 'the wind of the storm', or the windstorm. *Ombepo* may be understood here as wind (in common usage one would refer to *ombepo ombwanawa*, 'a pleasant breeze') but it is elsewhere used to designate spirit, or air (ELCIN 1996:270, 7). *Oombepo dha nyata*, for example, are unclean spirits (Luke 8:29a). The linguistic association between wind and spirits, then, should be clear from the outset.

As a result, it is perhaps unsurprising that many of the participants expressed the conviction that windstorms *are* spirits. A clear example demonstrated the point: a whirlwind may be understood as an unclean spirit (*ombepo ya nyata*) or restless spirit (*oshiluli*). Notably, there was a widespread understanding of methods by which one might control and redirect whirlwinds away from the homestead (*egumbo*), through formulaic verbal address:

Memekulu Julia Iiyambo:

According to my experience, while I was young, I was told by my parents, if you see a whirlwind near the house you run out and clap your hands and call out 'we have *omwaali* [in the *egumbo*]'. And that whirlwind will make a turn and go away.

- [*omwaali* is a woman who has very recently given birth]
- Author: What is the connection between the whirlwind and the *omwaali*?
- Memekulu Julia Iiyambo: The whirlwind is *ombepo ya nyata* [an unclean spirit]. The connection is that if that spirit destroyed that room [hut], the *omwaali* is not able to run away with that infant. Therefore, you say you have a special person in that house so the unclean spirit must not put harm on that house.
- Loide Petrus: -----
One day we were at home. Suddenly we saw a whirlwind coming straight to our house. One of my parents said, 'please, we have *omwaali* here!' Suddenly the whirlwind turned away.
- [5 or 6 of the children have experienced this]
- Ananias Imbondi: One day we were in our house and the whirlwind came. One of our parents said, '*oshiluli* [restless spirit] *pita po!*' [*Oshiluli*, go away!]. Then the whirlwind went away.
- Author: So, is a whirlwind an *oshiluli*?
- Ananias Imbondi: Yes, maybe. I just heard what my parents said to the whirlwind.

Only one participant voiced the opinion that the whirlwind having changed course, apparently as the result of the shouts about the *omwaali*, was merely a matter of chance (Tatekulu Laban Iyambo). The children expressed the majority view when they explained that people redirecting the whirlwind did so through 'the power of the traditional culture' (Ndonga culture: *omuthigululwakalo gwaaNdonga*) or 'through their own power':

- Frieda Shilemba: Jesus calms the strong wind.
- Author: How do you think he does that, Frieda?
- Frieda Shilemba: Jesus commands the wind to stop.
- Author: Like people might command a whirlwind to go away?
- Frieda Shilemba: No.
- Eliaser Uushona: He commands this wind by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Author: And in your context, what power are you using to order the whirlwind away?
- Eliaser Uushona: They command the whirlwind through the power of the traditional culture.

Loide Elago: They command it through their own power.

Freida Shilemba: I agree with Eliaser [that the power of traditional culture is used to alter the course of a whirlwind].

Erastus Kuutondokwa: I agree with Eliaser.

Author: Please would you put your hand up if you think that traditional culture [*omuthigululwakalo*] is still powerful?
[circa 18 agree]

This was not the only example of commanding nature through shouts, or of a distinction being made between the power of traditional culture (*omuthigululwakalo*) and Christianity (*uukristi*) (suggestive of parallelism rather than hybridity of worldviews, in this instance). Tatekulu Herman Iiyambo detailed an example of exorcising⁵⁴ a land-based spirit through traditional culture:

Translator: Have you heard about people commanding aspects of nature through shouts?

Tatekulu Herman Iiyambo: In our culture (*omuthigululwakalo*) or in Christianity (*uukristi*)?

Author: Either.

Tatekulu Herman Iiyambo: In the culture I recall the field where I am staying now [i.e. where his *egumbo* is located]. There was an evil spirit. And there is a person known as Kambonde Kalugodhi who stopped it. He was a headman and he was the previous owner of the field.

Author: How did he stop the evil spirit?

Tatekulu Herman Iiyambo: He stopped it by calling the name of *Kalunga kaNangombe* that please help me the power to stop this evil spirit and then the evil spirit stopped.

Translator: Before the missionaries came in Namibia, people believed in *Kalunga kaNangombe* [god of Nangombe].

Author: Who is Nangombe?

Tatekulu Herman Iiyambo: The Ndonga people they were from *evi Iyomatale* [the place of lakes]. And Nangombe was the person who brought the people to the present area. Therefore people start to honour him and it is the god who was leading him.

⁵⁴ This description fulfills the qualities of exorcism as put forward in *Encyclopedia of Religion* (cited by Witmer 2012:26).

Other examples of verbal interactions with what a Western eye might designate as purely natural phenomena were commands to quell thunderstorms and verbal formulae to encourage rain:

- Loide Elago: There is another, for example thunderstorms. When there is lightning and thunder you have to use the words '*nayi lye, ihe inayi kwata*' [let it rain, but without any danger].
- Martha Nangolo: When there is rain, the parents used to say '*vula loka*' [please rain/give us water] so that we do not go and steal.⁵⁵



Figure 40: A Storm Brewing over the Homestead

Lastly, Maria Johannes commented that you can calm a lightning storm by putting salt on the fire, suggesting that 'maybe there is a secret in the salt. Because when you put it in the fire you hear the sound of it burning (tock, tock, tock).' People regularly interact with natural phenomena, then, be they whirlwinds, thunderstorms, lightning, or rain. Those interactions were usually presented as verbal engagements, but could also take the form of practical measures designed to protect or prevent. These local experiences allowed the participants, in the vast majority, to relate easily to Jesus' interactions with the stormy conditions in both texts. Both accounts included verbal address and a

⁵⁵ This particular request is echoed in a rainmaker's prayer to *Kalunga KaNangombe* that both an Owambo (from Uukwaludhi) and a missionary source (from Uukwambi) reported (Hiltunen 1993:83). A Kwanyama song to the rain also includes such a plea (Estermann 1976:171-2).

reaction from the natural element, suggesting there might be fruitful grounds for comparison: just because the Markan text is not explicit about connecting natural phenomena with spirits, the similarities seem undeniable. The contrast should be noted, however, between the sources of power drawn on by Jesus (the power of the Holy Spirit), on the one hand, and members of the local community (the power of traditional culture), on the other.

There were a variety of understandings as to why there was a storm at all in the narratives. Some of the participants suggested such events ‘just happen’ (twenty children rejected the idea that there was deliberate agency behind the storm), or that the storm was sent by the devil (Ester Nicodemus). Eliaser Uushona suggested that the high winds in 4:35-41 might be the result of human-spiritual agency: ‘These people were in the lake. Maybe there was someone behind them who was a witch (*omulodhi*) and who was against them. Maybe the *omulodhi* sent the storm to destroy them. And Jesus prevented it.’ Several participants felt that the windstorm could be the work of *Kalunga* (God) or nature as controlled by *Kalunga* (Klaudia Ashikuti, Elizabeth Imbondi, Wilbartina Teofelus, Hileni Iiyambo, Tatekulu Laban Iiyambo). In lihongo, whirlwinds might be seen as a dry season punishment from *Kalunga* (Meme Maria Kashowa). The severe implications of unclean spirits rampaging across the land, whatever their origin, was noted: ‘If it is rainy season the *mahangu* can be flattened and it is by unclean spirits [*oombepo dha nyata*]’ (Memekulu Julia Iiyambo). Therefore, whilst stormy conditions are readily associated with unclean spirits (and/or spirits of the restless dead), the storm as a whole (and presumably the spirits therein) is not necessarily understood as *sent* by someone or something. Spirits, and their associated wind/rainstorms, can ‘just happen’. Spirit dwellings and presences permeate the landscape (see Chapter 6) but also nature more generally, here illustrated by perceptions of weather phenomena.

That the storms in Mark both took place at night also made sense to the lihongo interpreters: they experience the majority of storms in the later afternoon, evening, and through into the night (Memekulu Hileni Nendongo, Memekulu Hilya Johannes, Eliaser Uushona). In addition, they felt that Jesus would be busy in the day and therefore not available to demonstrate his commanding

force over the spirits of the wind (Loide Elago, Ester Nicodemus, Tatekulu Laban Iyambo, Tatekulu Herman Iyambo). Chapter 6 highlighted that spirit activity is deemed to be heightened at night. This contextualises the nocturnal storm in 4:35-41, if it is understood as spirit-driven. In addition, the clustering of potentially spirit-focused concepts in 6:45-52 becomes clear as we consider the lihongo interpretations, with its mention of both wind and a ghost sighting in a nocturnal setting.

Thus far, the discussion has been focused on wind and has centred on the Calming of the Storm. Before moving on to examine Jesus Walking on the Sea (and to consider water more generally), I should summarise the points gleaned thus far. It was expressed explicitly by the entirety of the women's group that the winds Jesus faced in 4:35-41 were unclean spirits. The majority of the children's group made the connections between commanding a whirlwind in lihongo and Jesus commanding a storm. However, they stressed the differing sources of power. With regard to the power of local culture, the examples given were mostly of interactions with nature through verbal command. A variety of agencies (and none) were identified as having sent the spirits/winds and waves, including *Kalunga*, Satan, and witches. Conflicting views in the men's group contributed the added dimension of verbal address to land-based spirits, as well as the view that diversion of whirlwinds was down to chance, not 'traditional culture' (*omuthigululwakalo*). The lihongo interpretations (as well as the example of commanding the whirlwinds, land spirits, and other natural phenomena) encourage us to consider the possibility that it is a spirit (and not the wind itself) that Jesus 'scolded' or 'frightened away' in 4:39 (*ganda*: Tirronen 1986:45).



Figure 41: Oshana (Rainwater Lake)

And so, to the water, which is presented as a 'lake' (*etale*, pl. *oma-*) in 4:35, whereas the term 'sea' (*efuta*, pl. *oma-*) is used in 6:45. Bodies of water such as these were conceived of as dangerous places, given the risk of drowning (Memekulu Maria Nangolo, Hileni liyambo). However, lakes were noted to be vital water resources for humans and animals (Tatekulu Laban Iyambo, Hileni liyambo). Furthermore, local rainwater lakes (*oshana*, pl. *iishana*) provide much needed wild foods such as fish and frogs (see Figure 42, below). However, these seasonal pools form along wide (ordinarily dry) riverbeds, and were conceived of differently than the lake/sea setting of the narratives. Tatekulu Laban Iyambo, for example, noted the lack of lakes in the Ondonga kingdom and the women explained that you would not put a boat on an *oshana*.

Following the interpretation of the wind as harbouring or being unclean spirits, rainstorms, too, were interpreted as wet season punishments from *Kalunga* (Memekulu Hileni Nendongo). Furthermore, the waves (*omakuthikuthi*) Jesus faces were also stated to be unclean spirits (Memekulu Julia liyambo). It follows that in 4:39, through verbal command, it is to a spirit (or several) that Jesus says '*mwena!*' (defined as 'stop talking, keep silent, do nothing' by Tirronen 1986:240) and not to the waters themselves.



Figure 42: A Haul of Frogs (*Omafuma*)

Jesus' ability to walk on the water found comparison in the local context with spirit beings traversing bodies of water. As *iiluli* are 'just wind' (Loide Petrus) or 'just spirit' they are 'weightless' and can walk on water (Hileni Iiyambo) but one would see no footprints (Memekulu Julia Iiyambo). That is, *iiluli* are said to walk *above* the surface of the water (consensus amongst the women's group, thirteen of sixteen in the children's group, contra Tatekulu Laban Iiyambo and Tatekulu Herman Iiyambo, who felt he would walk *on* the surface of the water, although in spiritual form). Just as the restless spirit⁵⁶ the disciples thought they

⁵⁶ The Oshindonga text has *oshiluli* at 6:49, whereas the GNT English has 'ghost'. Conceptually, these are different. An *oshiluli* is the restless spirit of a dead person (perhaps similar to a ghost). However, it originates in the 'unsatisfactory' method of disposal of a corpse, perhaps because that person was a murderer, victim of starvation, or a witch, whose burial requests (to prevent them returning) had been ignored. '*Oshiluli*', as a concept, is heavily entrenched in the autochthonous culture of the region.

saw⁵⁷ would traverse the body of water in its non-material form, so Jesus would walk on (or above) the water ‘spiritually’ (Memekulu Hileni Nendongo, Memekulu Julia Iiyambo, Meme Monika Shipa, all of the children bar Albertina Nicodemus). However, whether one would expect to see (or experience in another way) an *oshiluli*, a restless spirit, walking on water at all was a point of contention:

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Author: | Do <i>iiluli</i> walk on lakes? |
| Memekulu Julia Iiyambo: | Yes, sometimes in the water you hear the sound of footsteps on the water but you look back and cannot see anything on surface of the water. This is in the night. And you can even see the bush moving but there is nothing in the bush.
----- |
| Author: | Would you expect to see an <i>oshiluli</i> on the surface of a lake? On water? |
| Tatekulu Laban Iiyambo: | No, I am not anticipating to see <i>iiluli</i> walking on the water. |
| Tatekulu Herman Iiyambo: | Yes, according to the story from those who have seen it.
----- |
| Author: | Do <i>iiluli</i> walk on lakes? |
| Loide Petrus: | Yes, because they are just wind [<i>ombepo</i>]. It is the dead person who has come back. |
| Hilene Iiyambo: | <i>Oshiluli</i> is weightless. It is just a spirit. It can walk on the water. |

Associated with this idea of a *non-material* walking *above* the surface of the water was the idea that Jesus was able to change his state from physical to spiritual at will. It was suggested that ‘naturally [Jesus] is a spirit’ (Tatekulu Laban Iiyambo) and he walks in the form of the Holy Spirit (*Ombepo Ondjapuki*) (Loide Petrus, contra Albertina Nicodemus), which served to explain his transition in 6:45-52. It was made clear, however, that this was Jesus in spiritual form, and not the restless spirit of Jesus or a dream of Jesus that the disciples were encountering. As with his interaction with the wind, Jesus’ mastery over

⁵⁷ It should be noted that there is a level of ambiguity across the CBS transcripts as to whether one would be able to see an *oshiluli* at all. At points, certainly, that idea has been categorically rejected. However, the women’s group suggested in this round that an *oshiluli* looks physical but is not (Memekulu Maria Kondo) and can only be seen at night (Memekulu Julia Iiyambo, perhaps referring to movement rather than materiality). Tatekulu Herman Iiyambo also suggested that you could see *iiluli*: ‘When you see *oshiluli* you can ask yourself: what is this? Is this a person or what?’

the water (or his ability to transition to spiritual form) was put down to the power of the Almighty (Tatekulu Herman Iyambo, Tatekulu Laban Iyambo).

Ihongo Perspectives on the Figure of Jesus

The CBS sessions undertaken on Mark 4:35-41 and 6:45-52 present Jesus as, in many ways, a unique figure in Ihongo conceptions but in some ways as sharing qualities that the participants associated with spiritual beings in their contemporary experiences. In addition, in his abilities to interact with nature, Jesus appears to share in the ability of some or all of Ihongo's residents to engage with malevolent spiritual forces in weather phenomena. In those regards, we see the interpenetration of worldviews (autochthonous and Christian) and the joint influence of both on the participants' interpretations. Overall, it was the reality of the spiritual realm and the influence of spiritual beings on the material lives of the community that seemed to influence most the interpretation of these two narratives.

Jesus was presented as uniquely or sacredly 'other' in his interactions with the winds and the waters. Ihongo residents might challenge the unclean spirits of a whirlwind 'through culture', and Jesus was seen to share in this process – both challenge (verbal address) and adversary (spirits). However, the power engaged (securing the successful result) was seen to be different: Jesus accessed divine power (as opposed to traditional culture [*omuthigululwakalo*]). He may be understood to walk on water in the form of and through the power of the Holy Spirit, achieving the same end as the culturally-bound *oshiluli*, but through different means. 'Naturally', it was suggested, Jesus is a spiritual figure with the unique ability to metamorphose between physical and spiritual states (e.g. Frieda Shilemba, Hileni Iyambo, Maria Johannes). Whilst there was some reticence to discuss the extent to which diviner-healers (*oonganga*) interacted with nature, the responses that were forthcoming from the children suggested that neither *oonganga* nor *aalodhi* (witches) had power over nature and where *oonganga* did claim power over disease their claims were disingenuous and their treatments ineffective (Tatekulu Laban Iyambo), perhaps suggesting that the influence of autochthonous healing methods is on the decline. Jesus was not in any way conceived of like an Ndonga ritualist.

In summary, then, Jesus may be seen as a 'sacred other' in the lihongo context in that he commands the unclean spirits 'with the Almighty power' (Memekulu Hileni Nendongo), with 'the power of the Heavenly Father' (Tatekulu Laban Iyambo), through Holy Spirit (Maria Johannes), and as Son of God (Ester Nicodemus, Loide Petrus). There was, however, a great deal of resonance between the commanding of whirlwinds (and other spirits-in-nature) in lihongo and Jesus' mastery of the spirit presences in the weather phenomena in the narratives. This suggests that autochthonous notions of agency in weather phenomena have influenced the interpretations. In addition, there were several ways in which the figure of Jesus was appropriated for the lihongo context and understood through a spirit-tinted lens: his walking on water, in particular, was understood in terms of the qualities he might share with an *oshiluli*, a restless spirit, rendering Jesus at once not-so-unique.

Perhaps informed by the nighttime setting of the text, autochthonous understandings of a 'flimsy' division between material and spiritual realms, and ambivalence of such terms as *ombepo* and *oshiluli*, the spirits were highly influential when interpreting Jesus as a figure in these narratives. When operating in a spiritual form, the interpreters felt he would take on the qualities of an *oshiluli* (restless spirit). However, that he was operating in spiritual form at all was actually *dictated* by what an *oshiluli* (versus a human) could achieve in the first place. He was walking above the water *because* that is what *iiluli* do, as evidenced by the lack of footprints on the water's surface. As, Loide Petrus said: 'he is a spirit so he cannot touch it. It is like an *oshiluli*.' The restless spirit, then, provided the lens through which the activity of Jesus was understood. The goal, however, was deemed by Tatekulu Laban Iyambo to be to test the disciples and to illustrate that he was precisely *not* an *oshiluli* but was a unique being of the Almighty. In the end, then, for all of the similarities with *iiluli*, Jesus is ultimately a 'sacred other'.

Summary and Ethnographic Context

The fact that spirits are part of lived experience in the cultural context of the participants seems to have engendered clear appreciation of Jesus challenging spiritual forces manifesting in weather systems (or simply natural phenomena,

depending on your worldview). Spirits were central to their understanding of the narratives and they easily related them to aspects of their own experience in the community. The idea that spirits would *only* be engaged in dream and trance states was roundly rejected in other sessions (Wilbartina Teofelus, Maria Johannes, Memekulu Victoria Mvula, Tatekulu Laban Iyambo: CBS Luke 24). That said, Jesus' interactions with the wind and the water were seen to be very different from interactions with spirits in lihongo, largely based on the idea that Jesus derived his power to engage the spirits from God, whereas a resident of lihongo might engage a spirit through the power of traditional culture (*omuthigululwakalo*). To that extent, Jesus was identified as a 'sacred other'. Nevertheless, the influence of local experiences on the participants' understandings of the texts is clear.

Moving forward to engage historical-critical and social-scientific scholarship in conversation, the following prominent themes will be significant:

- i. *Ready association of natural phenomena with unclean spirits (oombepo dha nyata) and restless spirits (iiluli).*
- ii. *Tradition of addressing spirits in the landscape and nature through formulaic, personal, verbal command.*
- iii. *Jesus' calming of the storm was 'othered' in the sense that his power to engage the spirits in the wind and waves derived from the Almighty – he is presented as a sacred other.*
- iv. *Jesus' actions (walking above the water) and very person (traversing the water in spiritual form) were interpreted through a spirit-tinted lens.*

These are themes that are themselves contextualised within ethnographic materials on the Ondonga (and wider Owambo) populations, allowing me to discern whether they may be connected to autochthonous worldviews and practices.

There are abundant examples to illustrate the autochthonous origin of beliefs in spirit agency behind natural phenomena relating to (amongst other things) rain, flora, landscape, and minerals. Hiltunen, drawing on early missionary sources, explains that a rainmaker (*onganga yomvula*) was expected to 'take the rain spirit captive' in a palm basket covered with hide, transporting it from its residence 'in a doorless and roofed hut' in one of the Northern Kingdoms, back

to Ondonga (1993:79). Hiltunen associates this rain spirit with the ancestral spirits (*aathithi*), particularly around the graves (*oompampa*) of deceased kings (1993:81; cf. McKittrick 2002:34-5). This is unsurprising given her earlier comment: '[the spirits] are thought to stay in the vicinity of their homes, in fields, woods, trees, termite stacks, mole-holes, but in particular around graves and holy things (*iimenka, iinenge*)' (1993:35). McKittrick notes that – the Aawambo having acquired arms from the colonists and missionaries – shots were fired at burials to drive away the spirits of the deceased from the gravesite (2002:62). Upsetting these ancestral spirits – the mediators of the rain, which is ultimately 'of God' (Hiltunen 1993:83) – might lead them to prevent the onset of the wet season (1993:74). Whilst Hiltunen also points to the existence of 'natural spirits' (1993:36), her treatment of these is not expansive. Further, she notes separately the existence of 'spirits of the salt valley', who also required offerings as part of the salt gathering expeditions, 'so that they would not come with the salt [from the Etosha Pan] to the kingdom and produce destruction' (1993:91). Overall, Hiltunen's treatment draws most interactions with spirits back to ancestral spirits (*aathithi*), whilst the lihongo participants contrasted these quite starkly with other spirits (e.g. *iluli* and *oombepo dha nyata*). She suggests that the *aathithi* 'are on the move especially at sunset and in the dead of the night' (1993:36; cf. Malan 1995:28). This point very much resonates with the lihongo interpretations.



Figure 43: Termite Stack

In terms of the verbal address of spirits, I am unaware of ethnographic literature on Owamboland that mentions addressing winds, waves, or storms. The overall power of words in African spirituality is noted by Nürnberger ('words ... carry dynamistic power' [2007:31]), who suggests that whirlwinds may be one of the ways in which ancestors may be understood to communicate with the living (2007:38). Hiltunen discusses informal prayers accompanying offerings to both the benevolent spirits of the East and the capricious spirits of the West (see also Malan 1995:28) and notes that 'some magic rites also include an address, which is more a spell than a prayer' (1993:36). Verbal address was made by salt-collectors to the spirit 'Grandmother' (dwelling in a small hill beside the saltpan) to ensure trouble-free salt-collecting expeditions (1993:97), as well as by a diviner greeting the resident spirit of a termite stack (1993:42-3). Other examples of talking to the spirits whilst making offerings are connected to bringing rain (McKittrick 2002:30-2), first harvest (1993:107) and purifying the homestead (Malan 1995:29). It is not just (household heads and) ritual specialists who could interact with the spirits, then, as might explain the lihongo reports of the general population interacting on an ordinary level with spirits in whirlwinds:

Even ordinary citizens could disturb the spirits of the clouds and prevent rain. The prohibition of field labour (*ongondji*) was clear proof of this. When awaiting rain it was not proper to hoe dry fields, because rising dust might disturb the ancestral spirits preventing rain.

Hiltunen (1993:74)

A homestead's labyrinthine passages may weave in and out to confuse a stranger or an evil spirit.

Malan (1995:22)

The lihongo interpretations also suggested that Jesus was a 'sacred other'. He did not derive his power to control the spirits from traditional culture, but from God. Whilst it would be easy to assume that this is due to the influence of Christianity, there is suggestion that the more remote *Kalunga kaNangombe* is also in a position of power over the spirits:

As Creator, [*Kalunga*] is endowed with the highest authority and power over the whole of creation, including the spiritual beings in the supernatural realm. However, the involvement of Kalunga with the everyday lives of human beings is believed to be very

restricted, consequently no active worship is directed at him. He is seen as a vague and far-off being, who is only referred to during very unnatural circumstances.

Malan (1995:28)

However, the clear indication in the title *kaNangombe* (that is, *of Nangombe*), as well as Tatekulu Herman Iiyambo's identification of the field exorcism (by appeal to *Kalunga kaNangombe*) happening 'in culture', suggests that not all of the participants would equate the power originating in the Christian God and power originating in the Supreme Being of pre-missionary Owamboland.

Does the ethnographic material give us a broader context for understanding the lihongo interpretations of Jesus' actions and person as 'spirited'? Certainly, the encounter described between the disciples and what they thought was an *oshiluli* (Mark 6:49) was understood to be particularly terrifying, coming as that *oshiluli* would from the 'fearful abode of spirits' to the West (Hiltunen 1993:36) and operating under the cover of darkness, particularly associated with spirits and witchcraft (Hiltunen 1986:54. Particularly notable is the negative connotations of both nighttime and the prefix *oshi-*: 1986:59). However, Jesus' 'otherness' meant he was positively interpreted as having spirit *capacities* but as upending the notion of a dangerous, threatening *oshiluli*. A complex and dynamic relationship between Christianity and pre-Christian worldviews is suggested by the fact that, at points, interpretations 'borrow' from or are clearly informed by autochthonous understandings, or demonstrate some form of hybridity (the wind and waves *being iiluli*, Jesus walking in spiritual form *with some qualities resembling those of an oshiluli*). At other points, however, participants were reluctant to appropriate Jesus into the lihongo context (Jesus was *not* operating '*in culture*' to challenge the storm, he was *not an oshiluli*). This illustrates the complexity of cultural evolution as a process: 'autochthonous worldviews' and 'Christianity' are not monolithic or bounded cultural-religious systems; rather, 'culture' in lihongo (as anywhere) is dynamic and evolving, drawing on both (as well as other) influences. Nonetheless, pre-Christian influences are visible in understandings of natural systems and spirit-agency therein, verbal address of spirits, and persistent and pervasive concern about spirit beings. A resistance to the inculturation of Christianity is demonstrated by desires not to assimilate Jesus into the spirit-network (here, as an *oshiluli*, elsewhere into the *aathithi* community: see Chapter 8). An element of

discontinuity or waning influence of the 'traditional' appears in the diminishing valuation of *oonganga* (diviner-healers). It now falls to bring these interpretations into conversation with professional biblical scholarship.

lihongo Interpretations of Mark 4:35-41 and 6:45-52 in dialogue with Traditional Historical-Critical New Testament Scholarship

'The Elements'

When set against the lihongo interpretations, it becomes apparent that historical-critical scholars tend to talk of the winds and waves in meteorological terms, illustrative of a cultural framework in which natural phenomena are not usually understood to be infused with any form of agency. This is in stark contrast to the conviction that natural phenomena might be (or house) spirits. Some scholars do suggest that the wind (or the restless sea) might have been associated with, for example, 'forces of chaos' (Lieu 1997:64; however, Lieu refers to the 'processes of nature' on the same page). Adela Yarbro Collins, too, notes that Jesus' command in 4:39 for the sea to be 'muzzled' (2007:261), is reminiscent of God commanding the waters to be held back behind gates in Job 38:8-11, and is suggestive of a competing, personal force. However, such issues are sidelined in the final interpretations, which show preference for naturalistic descriptions of the elements, deeming the 'supernatural' unhistorical and 'other'. If not viewed naturalistically, still other depictions of winds and waves are put forward. It is suggested, for example, that the waters may perform only an instrumental function in 6:45-52, enabling the disciples to witness an epiphany (Yarbro Collins 2007:334). As Pieter Craffert argues, historical-critical interpretations are borne out of a Western, ethnocentric, ontologically monist worldview (2012:55); that the lihongo participants did not describe natural phenomena in the same way has made this all the more apparent.

That the lihongo groups made links between 4:35-41 and verbal command of spirits in their context, not least in the whirlwind and field exorcism examples mentioned above, lends weight to the 'influential interpretation' of this narrative as 'a sort of exorcism' (Beavis 2011:92, referring to e.g. Twelftree 2007:116-7).

These commands may echo the 'shouts' that Graham H. Twelftree suggests add to a sense of 'battle' in personal exorcisms (2007:115). Other scholars have attempted to bring to the fore 'magical' aspects of biblical worldviews (Mills 1990; Klutz 2003, 2004). Mills certainly highlights the significance of verbal command and the power of names but does not explicitly link 'ἐπιτιμᾶσθαι' [here discussing Mark 1:25], a technical word for control of spirits in this period' with 4:39 (where the verb is used again), or focus on spirits in nature or the landscape with reference to New Testament texts (Mills 1990:97). In the commentaries surveyed, the lexical similarities with exorcisms are noted, but once again sidelined (e.g. Hooker 1991:139). Many scholars suggest that the language of rebuke is merely symbolic (Mann 1986:274; Hooker 1991:139; Marcus 2000:337-8; Yarbrow Collins 2007:261). It may also be significant that the co-textual partner in Mark is the narrative of the Gerasene Demoniac (Marcus 2000:336, Funk 1998:77), although, if a 'prelude', Mary Ann Beavis queries why their exorcistic vocabularies do not harmonise (2011:92).

Interestingly, Mills references the capture of a wind demon in a skin and its transport back to Jerusalem as described in the *Testament of Solomon* (1990:57), which is striking in its similarity to the Owambo rainmaking ritual described above. She also cites exorcism formulae to drive away demons from the household in Aramaic and Mandaean bowl texts (1990:29; see also Marcus 2000:338-9). Otherworldly agency behind whirlwinds has also been suggested (Marshall 1978:333; Yarbrow Collins 2007:259). Elsewhere, holding evil spirits 'responsible for inclement weather' is mentioned (e.g. Yarbrow Collins 2007:261) but this is one step removed from actually understanding winds and waves *to be* evil spirits. 4:35-41 as a whole, then, has not been interpreted through a spirit-focused lens. I suggest on the basis of the above evidence that there is merit in so doing.

The Figure of Jesus

Within the historical-critical tradition, and examined through a Western, 'rationalist' lens, the miracles, including the so-called 'nature miracles', become problematic. How can stories involving a person overcoming natural forces (the storm) and then walking on water (the sea) be deemed 'historical' or 'real'

(notably, loaded terms)? Salvaging 'reality' necessitates the suggestion that God directly intervened in the world, temporarily suspending the laws of nature. Otherwise, and as would appear to be common, the conclusion is that the Calming of the Storm is a 'symbolic' narrative alluding to the stormy conditions in which the early church found itself, attributable to early church tradition: it is 'the fictional product of the believing community' (Funk 1998:77). Jesus 'defied the law of gravity' by walking on the water (Marcus 2000:428), so perhaps, suggest Western historical-critical scholars, the narrative originated as an epiphany (Funk 1998:93) or this may be a displaced resurrection appearance (Madden 1996:138-9, cited in Malina 2002:352). It may indicate docetic qualities (Hooker 1991:168-9), align Jesus with God as the opponent and conqueror of the sea (Yarbro Collins 2007:328; Marcus 2000:337,340),⁵⁸ or place Jesus in the category of the gods, more generally (Funk 1998:76). Overall, then, some historical-critical interpretations struggle to affirm that 'real' events might lie behind the narratives of 4:35-41 and 6:45-52 in that they depict ultra-high Christology.

In lihongo, by contrast, the narratives were not problematic at all. This produced the interesting result that the miraculous element of 4:35-41 shifted – rather than it being extraordinary that Jesus overpowered the storm, in lihongo the extraordinary element was seen to be the source of the power by which he was able to do so. This resonates with Mills's suggestion that Jesus' 'inner dynamism' or 'indwelling divine energy' is what sets him apart (1990:98, 101). Likewise, she argues, the apostles may be distinguished because 'the source of their power is different' (1990:118). However, the negativity that Mills highlights as attached to other practitioners, aligning them with Satan (e.g. Acts 8:4-13), is not evidenced in the lihongo interpretations. In 6:45-52, the miraculous feature was not that Jesus walked on the water but that he was unique in his ability to metamorphose from physical to spiritual and *vice versa*. It was in his spiritual form that the majority understood him to have walked on the water.

⁵⁸ God is depicted several times as walking on water in the Hebrew Bible (Job 9:8, 38:16, Sir. 24:5).

Summary

Given its own cultural context, Western scholarship often packages these narratives as ‘problematic’ texts with the ‘natural elements’ (Yarbro Collins 2007:262)⁵⁹ or ‘inanimate powers’ (Marcus 2000:340) best interpreted metaphorically or as personifications (Marcus 2000:339), rather than as actually animated. In discussing ‘the menace of the elements’ (Bultmann 1972:216), Western scholars have not often paused to explore their own culturally-rooted constructs of the natural world. For Eric Eve, the problem is not just that the narratives pose difficulties for contemporary Western science: they are also ‘no doubt’ problematic from the viewpoint of ‘ancient common sense’ (2002:383) and have a ‘highly symbolic character’. It is unclear how Eve determines the boundaries of ‘ancient common sense’, or indeed why spirit beings might not feature within a reality perceived by that ‘common sense’. Furthermore, and rather contradicting his conviction that they are merely ‘symbolic’, he notes that the Calming of the Storm ‘has elements of an exorcism story’ (2009:115, 116).

The lihongo perspectives support the interpretation of 4:35-41 as an exorcism. They also highlight the marginalisation by the post-Rationalist perspectives of many Western interpreters of attempts to appreciate the reality of spirits in certain worldviews or lived experiences. In spite of the fact that contemporary Christian worldviews actually incorporate their own forms of spiritual experiences, scholars are resistant to the notion that spirit-engagements might be depicted in biblical texts. Biblical spirit encounters (explicit or implicit), or those encountered in lived experience in other cultural contexts, tend to be depicted as ‘other’, ‘magical’, or ‘problematic’. They simply do not conform to Western (and, perhaps, confessionally-derived) scholarship’s understanding of a ‘spiritual’ experience. This is amply evidenced by Marcus’s comments about 6:45-52: he suggests that it is Mark’s concern to refute the charge that the disciples experienced ‘a hallucination’ (2000:428). However, his perspective dictates that the disciples see *either* Jesus *or* a hallucination, and not that they (albeit not in this narrative setting) might have experienced a *real spirit presence*.

⁵⁹ This is particularly disappointing given Yarbro Collins’s extensive survey of Jewish, Greek and Roman understandings of non-material agencies behind wind in her 2007 commentary.

Conventionally, historical-critical Western scholarship focuses on the world 'behind' the text, asking questions of historicity and attempting to discern strata of tradition in the gospel accounts, with the eventual aim of identifying the earliest layer of any given text (thereby indexing age with historical accuracy). In this way, it attempts to establish which gospel narratives depict 'real' events in the life of Jesus, and which are products of the evangelists or early church communities. However, this relies on the assumption that earlier texts can (or must) be equated with a higher degree of originality, less embellishment, *and therefore greater historical precision*. This, however, is a textocentric perspective (see Part I).

In addition, the particular construct of 'reality' that informs this approach is not often acknowledged. Attempts to establish what is 'real' and the standards against which one might judge 'reality' are grounded in worldview. Even seeking to answer the question of 'what *actually* happened', then, would be to adopt a culturally imperialist approach (see Craffert 2012 on the ontologically monist bias of Western scholarship), entrenched as that question is in Western, apparently 'rationalist' discourse. Determinants of rationality are culturally located, thereby filtering 'reality' through a contextual lens: whether one should verbally address a whirlwind and how one explains its subsequent diversion away from the homestead will vary according to one's worldview (and there were different perspectives on this, even amongst the lihongo participants). It follows that it is inappropriate to apply contemporary Western 'scientist' measures of reality to events described through the lens of other worldviews. That would include, for example, Jesus addressing and calming a storm, with which the lihongo example of addressing and diverting a whirlwind would seem to correspond; it would clearly be unfair to judge the 'reality' of (a text narrating) the lihongo spirit-whirlwind by the empirical standards of contemporary Western science. The same can be said for (texts narrating) Jesus' calming of a storm.

Failing to acknowledge 'reality' as a construction and/or the highly contextual nature of their own interpretive location, it is perhaps unsurprising that traditional historical-critical scholars have struggled to appreciate fully the reality of spirit experiences in other cultural contexts, including (potentially)

communities from within which gospel traditions emerged. Social-scientific biblical criticism (and particularly cross-cultural anthropological approaches) brings alternative cultural realities to the fore. It is to that field that I now turn.

lihongo Interpretations of Mark 4:35-41 and 6:45-52 in Dialogue with Social-Scientific New Testament Scholarship

The trends in historical-critical scholarship outlined above (which fail adequately to acknowledge the reality of the spirit world), do not – or should not – have the final word. A brief discussion of a selection of interdisciplinary studies on Jesus' activities and person will illustrate the alternative voices in Western scholarship that may deliver diverse readings of Jesus' interactions with the wind and the waters.

Social-scientific interpreters of biblical texts correctly encourage us to widen our horizons and reevaluate what might be deemed 'real' or 'historical'. If we acknowledge that reality is a fluid concept, being 'socially interpreted' (Malina 2002:355), it follows that the naturalistic pursuit of 'reality' or the 'historical' is not going to deliver its only form. We may widen our interpretive field (beyond Western 'scientist' perspectives) to incorporate worldviews in which a complex of spirits may be active in the material existence of individuals and communities and thereby be a consideration when examining the natural phenomena and the activities and person of Jesus in 4:35-41 and 6:45-52. Indeed, biblical scholars engaged in social-scientific approaches frequently point out (i) the reality of spirits in 'the ancient world' as a 'traditional' society (Witmer 2012:10, 13, 33; Borg 1991:71; Craffert 2008:85), (ii) that a considerable majority of the world's population experience 'Alternate States of Consciousness' and spirit possession (Pilch 1998:53; Malina 2002:354; Witmer 2012:23f.) and, (iii) the potential similarities between contemporary, agrarian, collectivistic societies and biblical societies (Craffert 2008:28, 90-1, 105, 112; Witmer 2012:15, 203). The fieldwork embarked upon in the current cross-cultural study was situated in such an agrarian community for whom spirits were very much a lived experience, just as ASCs are more widely, according to John J. Pilch (1993:233, cited by Malina 2002:355). We might, then, expect resonance between the lihongo understandings of spirits as part of the community's lived

reality and those studies that use a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary lens through which to view Jesus and his activities. Alongside resonance, however, certain trends in the social-scientific resources surveyed (acknowledged not to be an exhaustive list) are in stark contrast with the lihongo interpretations.

'The Elements'

Firstly, whilst social-scientific approaches have moved beyond the naturalistic designations of natural phenomena that pervade traditional Western scholarship, certain treatments attempting to present an alternative, cross-cultural approach have some of the same weaknesses as the traditional scholarship considered above. Marcus J. Borg's 'new vision' of Jesus is notable for its effort to take into consideration the reality of spirits. Ultimately, however, it fails to incorporate spirits (rather than just the Spirit) satisfactorily into the overall picture. There is little consideration of spirit agencies functioning in the natural world and landscape. Borg notes the Hebrew connection between the sea and 'a threatening force opposed to God' but explains it away via literary 'language and imagery', rather than reality (1991:68). For him, 'symbolic elements abound in these narratives' (1991:67), such that the Calming of the Storm cannot be 'historical' (1991:69). It would seem, then, that he does not truly affirm the cultural reality of spirits in the 'primordial tradition', preferring to judge the events from within his own cultural framework (discounting the spirit-world – just what he has accused the academy of: 1991:33). The spirits, in this case, are acknowledged and then largely ignored and the default 'symbolic' approach is adopted.

Considering treatments of 4:35-41 overall, discussion of ordinary experience of spirits in relation to the winds, waves and storms is limited. Given how vocal the Context Group are about the insights of cross-cultural studies, it is surprising that Malina and Rohrbaugh's *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* offers but a paragraph on 4:35-41, from which I quote: 'The wind and sea were uncontrollable by humans. In Israel they were believed to be controlled by spirits or demons, while non-Israelites personified them as deities who manifested themselves in the action of winds and seas' (2003:164. See also 350). Malina considers 'the wind and sea' to be actors in the Walking on

the Sea narrative, which is 'indicative of a society in which one might expect to find persons with ASC abilities.' Winds and seasons, he says, might be 'personified, or attributed to non-visible, person-like cosmic forces or powers' (2002:358-9). In addition, the sea (as opposed to water) was considered 'a being' and was 'identified' with a 'deity' (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:173).

There is little indication, however, of how Jesus or the disciples are interacting with these spirit beings and this would seem to be because the ASC pattern (for Walsh's model see Malina 2002:360-362) does not fit with this encounter. An encounter with nature-based spirits (intrinsically personal in an Iihongo setting because all spirit forces are individuals to be addressed: ancestors, unclean/evil spirits, restless spirits) is not deemed to be personal in a Western sense and therefore does not fit the model, in which a spirit 'figure' would be involved (Malina 2002:356-7). However, Pilch explicitly states: 'alternate or non-ordinary reality includes those dimensions of reality in which God and the spirits are to be found' (2004:17) suggesting that ASCs *would* be necessary to engage with the spirits of natural phenomena. Alternatively, and whilst ASCs would be 'normal' for the setting (Pilch 2004:5), if interacting with natural spirits does not require them, why is such a model used to discuss 'personal' spirit interactions? Having taken on board Pilch's point that those from alternate reality 'can and do visit ordinary reality' (2004:18), i.e. without the trance journeys of those in ordinary reality, the situation only becomes more complicated.

The Iihongo interpretations challenge both the dwelling location of spirits (an alternate reality) and the access route to those spirits (an alternate state of consciousness) as suggested by the Context Group. For Pilch and Malina, those spirits are real only inasmuch as they may be experienced in – or visit from – an alternative reality. The Iihongo interpretations provide a stark contrast: one may experience spirits in the wind or the land in *ordinary* reality and such beings 'belong' in ordinary reality.⁶⁰ Craffert offers a strong argument for rejecting the tendency to place the two realms in opposition, or parallel, noting that 'traditional worldviews' are 'unitary or interconnected' and that the idea of the 'material world' in such a context will be wholly different than that

⁶⁰ Perhaps Pilch *et al.* would challenge this on the basis that the Iihongo cultural context might be one in which ASCs are *not* a feature. Hiltunen, however, draws attention to one report of diviners falling into trance states (1993:41).

advanced by a 'scientific' worldview (2010:172). I wonder, too: is there a difference between understanding the elements to be controlled by spirits and personification of natural phenomena, as opposed to actually *equating* natural phenomena with spirits? It is clear, anyway, that the lihongo interpretations provide an alternative to the claim that the wind was uncontrollable by humans.

Thirdly, and closely connected to the second observation, the focus in the lihongo discussions on verbal command made apparent the possibility that 4:35-41 might be interpreted as an exorcism narrative (lihongo interpreters connecting verbal address to spirits of both wind and land). At the very least, for the CBS groups, that this was a spirit narrative (exorcistic or not) was made clear by the inclusion of a verbal address to the wind and waves. Malina and Rohrbaugh do suggest a link with 'Demons/Demon possession' but fail to elaborate further, dedicating but a short paragraph to the narrative as a whole (2003:164). Amanda Witmer, whose monograph is dedicated to understanding Jesus as an exorcist, does not deem the Calming of the Storm to be exorcistic, despite noting the lexical similarities in the command in 4:39 with personal exorcisms (2012:157-8). Perhaps due to the perspectival limitations of Western scholarship, the spirits are limited to personal manifestations, with a resulting lack of consideration for the land and elements.

The Figure of Jesus

With regard to the personage of Jesus, social-scientific treatments have attempted to establish which social 'type' he might have fitted into within his cultural milieu. As Craffert has noted, which social type or role a scholar settles on is largely governed by which facet of the text they have deemed most 'authentic': sage (sayings); folk healer (healings); exorcist (exorcisms/healings); holy man/shaman (otherworldly behaviours) (2012:70-1). However, the most popular of these in social-scientific biblical circles, or that which has come to the fore of late, is that of the holy man or shaman. This designation has found favour with Pilch, Malina, and Craffert, amongst others.

In reference to these narratives, the importance of this designation is that a shaman is argued to be one who, in 'ASC cultures', has particularly ready

access to the spirit realm. A shaman is identified, initiated, and trained, and then goes on 'sky journeys' on behalf of the wider population: he is the 'mediator to the divine world' (Craffert 2010:71). He holds an important place 'in the hierarchy of cosmic powers', indicated by his walking on the sea and calming the wind, suggest Malina and Rohrbaugh (2003:173). In addition, a holy man or shaman may perform extraordinary feats whilst in ASCs, which, in contemporary contexts have been documented on film (Malina 2002:354). However, Malina's point here is rather confusing – he does not appear to be claiming that one could theoretically capture on film Jesus' walking on water – and is arguably rendered irrelevant by Pilch's clear conclusion that 'such an activity [walking on water] is simply not possible' in the material world (2011:117; see also Craffert 2010:86).

The designation of Jesus as a shaman by the above scholars would appear to elevate him to an extraordinary position in both narratives and, once again, serves to alienate spirit encounters from the ordinary lived experience of the rest of the community. As understood by the participants in lihongo, this was not the way spirit encounters happen. Not only this, but the suggestion that spirit encounters take place in induced ASCs (whether the shaman's ASC experience or a collective ASC experience in which a figure is envisioned) would appear to 'other' the spirit encounter. That is, it *relegates* the spirits to an alternate reality and *denies* their participation in the wider community, understood in a collectivist setting as most definitely incorporating the living dead and ancestors.

Furthermore, the designation of Jesus as shaman is problematic in itself. The shaman, as presented to us in a cross-cultural model of a social type, is one who communicates with spirits in ASC experiences. However, those ASC experiences are much stressed to be experiences had by most of the world's population (quite a different claim from stating that most global populations have shamans):

Erika Bourguignon has demonstrated that visionary, trance-state experiences and other forms of ASCs exist in institutionalized form among most societies comprising world's population [*sic*].

Malina (2002:354)

Ninety percent of these societies [488 examined by Bourguignon] reported one or more institutionalized, culturally patterned forms of ASC. Eighty percent of circum-Mediterranean societies shared the same experience.

Pilch (1998a) cited by Malina (2002:354)

In that, then, Jesus is not special, if most of the population would expect to experience spirits as, indeed, they do in lihongo. If, alternatively, by 'institutionalized' forms of ASCs the authors above mean by way of a ritual practitioner, then Jesus' uniqueness as a shaman facilitating spirit encounters through ASCs loses its explanatory power: if one accepts that the social model of the shaman is a cross-cultural phenomena, it is unclear how one might still argue for Jesus' uniqueness (if that is desired). Malina affirms Pilch's claim that 'Jesus is regularly described in the Gospels as a "shamanistic holy man," to use an etic designation (see Pilch 1998a; also 1996)' (Malina 2002:356). However, based on the above, Jesus would be but *a shaman amongst shamans*. Indeed, Pilch notes the 'sky (or spirit) journeys' experienced by Paul, thus framing him in shamanistic terms, too (Pilch 2004:4; 2005:106). Otherwise, one must argue that Jesus is *a shaman above all other shamans*, a claim I am not aware to have been made by those promoting the shamanic idea in the first place. If they did so claim, this would require another level of justification (perhaps the source of Jesus' power – a divine source) that would actually render the shamanic aspect superfluous in the effort to explain Jesus' personage and interactions with spirits.

Summary

By way of summary, I now look to look back to the key points distilled from the CBS sessions and summarise how those have been brought into conversation with elements of social-scientific scholarship. Whilst not an exhaustive treatment, the use of these points as touchstones has allowed me to highlight aspects of comparison and contrast with some social-scientific treatments of these narratives.

Many of the lihongo participants (in fact, the vast majority) drew explicit links between spirits and natural phenomena. Such strong links brought to my attention the sidelining of such discussion in both traditional historical-critical

analysis as well as social-scientific biblical criticism. The majority position seemed to be to default to a symbolic analysis (even where commitments to cross-cultural sensitivity have been voiced, e.g. Borg 1991), or to present natural phenomena as 'personified' but to offer minimal treatment of the narratives themselves (e.g. Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003). This is particularly surprising given the explicit endorsement of spirits as part of the 'lived experience' of New Testament communities (Pilch 1993:233).

In addition, one might have expected suggestions of stronger links between the verbal commands issued by Jesus in 4:39 and those in personal exorcism narratives, or at least for those to be developed into a consideration of the Calming of the Storm as a potential 'natural' exorcism (with Twelftree 2007). Neither was the case. Entirely separately, the lihongo interpretations raise the question of why 4:35-41 is not treated as an example of ASC interaction with natural spirits. Whilst alternate reality is where 'the spirits are to be found' (Pilch 2004:17), the ASC model was not applied here.

Lastly, Jesus was presented as a 'sacred other' by the lihongo groups because his power over the spirits was deemed to come from a different source than 'traditional culture' (*omuthigululwakalo*). This is the point I would least have expected to find any resonance with social-scientific scholarship, attempting as that scholarship does to *situate* Jesus culturally, and not to other him. Whilst it is evident that the Context Group acknowledge the reality of spirits for a (usually singular) New Testament context, it is evident that experiences with spirits are not seen to be ordinary, and might only happen in a non-ordinary reality. Jesus walking on water (rather than calming the storm) fitted the depiction of Jesus as a shamanic figure (an abstract model), interacting with spirits in Alternate States of Consciousness (again, a model).

This is not to deny the 'explanation-rich category of altered (or alternate) states of consciousness' (Malina 2002:354), but rather to sound a note of caution as to the level of explanation it can offer. The contextual interpretations offered here suggest that interaction with spirits need not be viewed as exclusively 'other' (alternate) and that recognition of the important place of the spirits in the 'lived experience' of the community (in ordinary states of consciousness) might be

necessary. After all, even if every single community on the planet had institutional forms of ASCs, it would not be logical to conclude that every spirit interaction would fall under the ASC category. Further, the spirits themselves should not be othered: an lihongo sense of community incorporates these spirits and ancestors into the very fabric of society, hence their accessibility.

Likewise, the shamanic model: certainly, it allows us to understand more fully the role of ritual specialists in non-Western cultures. But it remains a model and is admitted to be an 'etic designation' (Malina 2002:356). It does not go so far as to position Jesus as shaman above shamans, thereby failing to explain what precisely was unique about Jesus as a ritual specialist. Under the same category would fall Ezekiel, John the Baptist and Paul, amongst others (Pilch 2004).

Importantly, the lihongo interpretations (where they drew on autochthonous worldviews) did not offer a resolution to the question of the uniqueness of Jesus, either. On the one hand, the participants drew on autochthonous understandings of spirits (*iluli*) to explain his activity in the narratives. On the other, however, they resisted inculturation: he was not actually an *oshiluli* and was not likened to an *onganga* (which would cooperate with the shamanic model). It is possible that as a non-*omundonga*, he could not possibly draw on 'traditional culture' (to engage with spirits in nature), an idea that recurs in Chapter 8. To make a 'sacred other' of Jesus is perhaps suggestive of hybridity in worldviews in lihongo today, thereby revealing the flaws in models of static, bounded cultural contexts as suggested by some social-scientific interpreters. Quite possibly, Jesus' 'uniqueness' is explained best by his *not* being an *omundonga* (Ndonga person). In lihongo, Jesus is necessarily 'other'.

Finally, then, social-scientific interpretations (such as those of the Context Group) remain limited by their reliance on constructed 'cultures' and abstracted 'social types' to the extent that generalisations overtake particularities in cross-cultural comparison. For example, directly placing 'Mediterranean believers' (unqualified) in opposition to the 'scientifically sophisticated Western believer' is, at best, alarming (Pilch 2004:3). Despite much being made of the similarities between the contemporary, homogenised, 'circum-Mediterranean culture' (Pilch

1999:164) and 'the New Testament world' (of which there is surely not just one) identified by Malina (2001a), real communities in that apparently analogous context (or any other) are not asked for their reflections on either the texts themselves or the interpretations returned by the Academy. Further, dialogue in lihongo suggests that discussion of Altered (or Alternate) States of Consciousness (ASCs), much a feature of Pilch's work, may be yet another tool to 'other' experiences of spiritual beings. After all, it suggests that spirits are experienced only in an 'other' state, not in everyday, ordinary reality, but in a parallel, or alternate reality. So, whilst cross-cultural approaches such as these may have attempted to throw off naturalism's 'ethnocentrism' (Craffert 2010:55), the lihongo interpretations have demonstrated the extent to which social-scientific interpretations still 'other' the biblical contexts. They suggest that the forms of consciousness in which spirits might be encountered are non-normative ('other') and the spirits themselves must exist in an 'other' realm. In addition, the modelled 'cultures' and 'social types' upon which these arguments rest sacrifice particularity for generalisations (exoticised, 'other' settings/roles).

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the participants drew on autochthonous worldviews and practices in their interpretations of the Markan 'nature miracles'. Specifically, pre-Christian notions of spiritual agency (that of *iiluli* and *oombepo dha nyata*) in natural phenomena would appear to be influential in a contemporary context. This included, additionally, the idea of witchcraft as a cause of the storm in 4:35-41 and the belief that *Kalunga* would deliver destructive weather patterns as punishment. Participants referenced the verbal address of whirlwinds, and the engagement of forces behind thunderstorms, lightning and rain as contemporary practices; these are echoed in the verbal address of nature-based spirit forces noted in ethnographic literature.

Foundationally, this has demonstrated (in concert with Chapter 6) the enduring concern with autochthonous understandings of a complex of spirits coexisting with the living community in lihongo. Interactions with spirit beings were depicted as ordinary, and not the exclusive remit of ritual specialists. The children, however, presented these engagements as those they had observed

in their parents, as opposed to their own actions, perhaps suggesting that these 'traditional' behaviours are to be enacted by senior members of the household. Whether the children themselves expected to go on to engage spirits in a similar way was not determined. Either way, whilst 'nature spirits are rare in Southern Africa' (Nürnberg 2007:271, n.105), they do exist (and endure) here.

Furthermore, when I enquired about verbal commands over nature, I was asked whether I meant 'in culture' (*omuthigululwakalo*) or 'in Christianity' (*uukristi*). There must be a perception, then, of two parallel systems or sources of power (as also suggested by the fact that Jesus was not commanding the storm 'through the power of traditional culture'). Again, this gives grounds to conclude that Christianity has not entirely usurped autochthonous worldviews and practices (or power sources) in contemporary belief or practice. Nonetheless, there were aspects of discontinuity that arose in this round of meetings: *oonganga* were described as ineffectual and even disingenuous, suggesting a waning regard for traditional medicine (this point, and the equation of Christianity with hospitals, has been noted elsewhere – see Chapter 8).

Having established that the lihongo participants readily associated natural phenomena with the spirits (with whom they coexist in the material world), the extent to which traditional historical criticism has sidelined spirits became apparent. Certain individual works in the broader context of the study of the Gospels encourage us to fully acknowledge the spirit or 'magical' dimension of the New Testament context (Mills 1990; Klutz 2004). However, in the case of Mills, there is a marked gap in the treatment of the landscape and nature, the author focusing on the possession/illness result of spirit activity (e.g. 97, 117). This is somewhat in line with the dominant trend, which is to acknowledge but then sideline the spirits of the natural world (thereby denying their agency in the worldviews behind the narratives) and to default to naturalistic (or 'personified') descriptions of weather phenomena and a symbolic interpretation of these narratives.

Given the extent to which social-scientific (and particularly anthropological) approaches promote a focus on the worldviews other than those dominating the Western academy (predominantly naturalist), it was striking that the studies

consulted in that sector did not satisfactorily incorporate the spirits into their presentation of the ordinary worlds that form the settings for the narratives. Whilst moving beyond naturalistic designations of the wind and the sea, for example, many social-scientific approaches focused on spirits but relegated them to another realm by suggesting that they were to be experienced in ASCs (and even then they are persons alone, not persons as spirits in/of natural phenomena). ASCs (and therefore spirits) were deemed part of the 'lived experience' of biblical communities (Pilch 1993:233) but, crucially, this does not deal with personal spirits in natural phenomena as fully a part of the material experience of the natural world. This, perhaps, serves to explain why 6:45-52 becomes a significant focus for the attentions of the Context Group (being 'a classic example of an ASC experience' [Pilch 2011:116]), with 4:35-41 falling short – ASCs did not provide a 'fit'.

Another point of interpretation from lihongo focused on the tradition of addressing spirits in nature and the landscape through formulaic, personal, verbal command, in connection with 4:35-41. Direct links were made with commanding whirlwinds and exorcisms of land when discussing the Calming of the Storm. I suggested that the lihongo example of addressing and diverting a whirlwind might provide a fruitful comparison with Jesus' addressing and calming of the storm. This supports Twelftree's conclusion that it might be a natural exorcism and challenges those works that put such an interpretation to one side in favour of a symbolic reading. Again, links were made with exorcism in social-scientific criticism; for example, the tag 'Demons/Demon possession' was attached to both of these narratives (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:164, 173). However, the personal aspect of spirits in nature has not been the focus of much discussion of 4:35-41 overall.

It also became clear that Jesus' calming of the storm was 'othered' by the lihongo participants: his power to engage the spirits in the wind and waves derived from the Almighty and *not* from traditional culture, thereby refiguring the miraculous element, casting the spotlight on power source rather than action. Jesus was understood to be a *sacred other* (possibly because he was not an *omundonga*). Interestingly, despite positioning Jesus as a shaman or holy man (which would make Jesus unique in the context of Western materialism but

merely one among many such persons in a culturally appropriate setting), at least some social-scientific scholars concurrently argue for Jesus' unique position in the 'hierarchy of cosmic powers' when referencing both of these narratives (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:164, 173). I have suggested that they do not justify this step from *shaman* to *uniqueness* (and nor does the designation shaman equate to this uniqueness) but note that it resonates with the sacred othering of Jesus on the basis of power source found in the lihongo dialogues. The twin-influenced interpretive stance of the participants (drawing on autochthonous and Christian perspectives) may serve to challenge the desire of social-scientific critics to position Jesus (or the gospel traditions about him) within a singular, static, cultural context. As the lihongo discussions illustrate, Jesus' actions or the traditions about him would derive from heterogeneous contexts, within which his personage/actions would not fit a singular model.

Finally, I presented the oft-repeated conviction from the lihongo participants that Jesus' activity (walking *above* and not *on* the water) and very person (traversing the water in spiritual form) should be interpreted through a spirit-tinted lens. Jesus was presented, after all, as one who could transition from physical to spiritual at will, thereby relocating the miraculous element from the walking on water to his voluntary metamorphosis. Traditional historical criticism, however, with its commitment to the ethnocentric, ontologically monist worldview (Craffert 2012), cannot affirm such an interpretation. Another, more 'historical' explanation is sought. Interestingly, social-scientific criticism also struggles to affirm the 'reality' of such an experience, resorting to 'othering' tactics. Interactions with spirits happen, according to many social-scientific scholars, through the medium of ASCs. Of particular focus were interactions through and of shamanic persons or with 'someone from the realm of God' (Jesus) (Pilch 2004:3). That is, person-centred spirit encounters (envisioning shamanic Jesus or envisioning post-Easter Jesus) drew more attention and discussion than interaction with 'natural' spirits. Indeed, the model of ASCs does not 'fit' with the spirit engagement in the Calming of the Storm. Indicators of such an engagement with those persons are deemed to fit a pattern (outlined and applied to Jesus' walking on the sea by Malina 2002:360-69), whilst the Storm narrative was little touched by the Context Group. The spirits in an 'other' reality are accessed through a figure (shamanic or otherwise) who is 'other', and

access is gained through an 'other' state of consciousness. They themselves are 'nonvisible' (Malina & Rohrbaugh 2003:173), formless (Malina 2002:367), 'other'. All of the aforementioned draws away from Pilch's designation of spirits (through ASCs) as part of the 'lived experience'.

Examining natural phenomena with CBS groups has illustrated persistent concerns with spirit presences in everyday life in lihongo; it has also highlighted how *far from ordinary* a spirit encounter is rendered by mainstream Western scholarship. It has also challenged the extent to which social-scientific approaches *genuinely* accommodate alternative worldviews rather than impose culturally imperialist models and constructed cultural settings with which to deal with 'problematic' texts and generate yet another (Western) version of 'historicity'.

Chapter 8: Jesus as spirit, Jesus in the Spirit: Interpreting the Risen Jesus with Restless Spirits and Ancestors (Luke 24:1-49)

The post-resurrection appearances in Luke 24 offered me the opportunity to investigate with the groups the theme of *Spirits* (and post-mortem existence in general). This has been highlighted by Groop (2010) as an area of ‘traditional’ culture (*omuthigululwakalo*) to which there remain strong ties post-Christianisation, and to which some turn to explain troublesome events. In a similar vein to Chapter 5, and related to the issue of *Spirits*, I felt that the topic of the Resurrection would add to my understanding of contemporary perceptions of the person (and the legacy of pre-Christian understandings thereof), here including the person extended beyond the human lifespan. The text stimulated discussions about understandings of the self and the body, with specific reference to death rituals and post-mortem existence. We discussed responses to deaths in lihongo (both in the homestead and community-wide). I attempted to elicit information about whether – and how (in a trance state, perhaps?) – people could be experienced or communicated with after their death. Furthermore, if one sensed a post-mortem being, how would they be recognised? Ultimately, I wished to know whether any connections might be made between the post-resurrection experiences of Jesus and experiences of post-mortem persons in lihongo: would the lihongo participants anticipate experiencing their deceased in such a way as is represented in the text?

Having engaged the lihongo participants in discussions about post-mortem existence and the person of Jesus, Luke 24 also offered the chance to explore Ancestor Christology. I wanted to introduce the fact that eminent African scholars have suggested various constructions of Jesus as an ancestor, and to establish whether these grassroots groups deemed an inculturating analogy such as this appropriate and useful. Notable scholarly presentations include those of Jesus as ‘Greatest Ancestor’ (Pobee 1979), ‘Brother Ancestor’ (Nyamiti 1984), ‘Supreme Ancestor’ (Bediako 1995), and ‘Proto-Ancestor’ (Bujo 2006[1986]). Contextualised by the participants’ understandings of the *living landscape* (see Chapter 6), discussions of spirits and ancestors also involved

references to various locations in the landscape (domestic, agricultural, burial), as well as the interpersonal networks of which ancestral spirits form a part (the social landscape).

Luke 24:1-49 in lihongo CBS and its Ethnographic Context

Post-mortem experiences in the form of restless spirits (*iluli*; sing. *oshiluli*) became the focus of our discussion about the Resurrection, and the participants' understandings of the behaviours and qualities of an *oshiluli* informed their interpretations of Jesus' appearances. However, whilst the participants used this as a lens and drew comparisons with Jesus *as a spirit*, it was made very clear that the resurrected Jesus was not precisely like an *oshiluli*. Rather, his return was to be understood as 'in the Spirit'. As we saw in Chapter 7, then, the theme of the 'sacred othering' of Jesus comes to the fore.

The second way in which that theme manifested itself was in the reactions of the participants to the commonly-articulated scholarly suggestion that Jesus might (in an African setting) be understood as an ancestor, or even the definitive Ancestor. It was interesting that this suggestion was roundly rejected in lihongo. Why exactly that was the case was again down to the participants' notions of the nature and capacities of spiritual or ancestral members of their community. Whilst Jesus was experienced after his death in a visual (and some said physical) way and during the day, the lihongo interpreters would not expect to experience their ancestors (*aathithi*) visually or physically and nor would they anticipate a daytime encounter.

lihongo Perspectives: Jesus as spirit, Jesus in the Spirit

In the English translation, the qualification 'Holy' both adds to an understanding of 'Spirit' and ties the Holy Spirit to the notion of spirits more generally. When Jesus appears to the disciples, they 'thought that they were seeing a ghost' (24:37); in that the terms 'Holy Spirit' and 'Holy Ghost' are sometimes used interchangeably in English (with ghost meaning immaterial being or soul), the association here between spirit and ghost is clear. In the *Oshindonga*, however, the terminology has quite a different effect. The *Ombepo Ondjapuki* (Holy Spirit)

is a spirit, certainly (*ombepo* means spirit, wind or air), but is clearly distinguished from an *oshiluli* (restless spirit). The *oshiluli* of traditional culture has been imported into the biblical tradition but, significantly, is not interchangeable with *ombepo*. To my knowledge (and confirmed by Meme Lucia Namushinga), one would not speak of the *Oshiluli Oshiyapuki*. It is specifically an *oshiluli*, a (negative) spirit of the restless dead that the disciples fear they see in 24:37. This will clearly have a bearing on the interpretation of the passage.

In our consideration of the Resurrection and the associated appearances, the groups were asked to consider whether interaction with the dead was possible and/or expected in their own context and whether this translated into their understandings of the narrative in Luke. Firstly, and as the extracts demonstrate, the notion of someone returning post-mortem to their homestead, community, or locale sits quite comfortably with autochthonous worldviews. The comments indicate that the majority of participants would anticipate experiencing the deceased in spiritual form, as an *oshiluli* (or positively, in a dream). That is, waking experience of spirits is expected to be negative, as *iiluli* are troublesome, threatening presences. Secondly, as soon as the deceased's spirit has been recognised by a waking person, many participants stated that the spirit would immediately vanish from sight.

Firstly, then, to the ways in which the deceased were reported to be experienced in lihongo: most participants, even if they initially expressed the opinion that they would not expect to communicate with deceased members of the community, had their own experiences or knew traditions of deceased people returning (often to the homestead). Positive encounters and communications with the deceased, as they arose in our discussions, were limited to dream experiences, which were discussed across all CBS groups:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Memekulu Maria Kondo: | In dreams sometimes you can dream the deceased, them being in the house, visiting you, sitting with you.
----- |
| Martha Nangolo: | Yes. When, for example, your mother dies and you miss her you see her in your dreams. |
| Author: | Is it really her? |

- Martha Nangolo: Yes, it is really her. You hear the voice and even see her wearing the same dress she used to like.

- Tatekuku Laban Iyambo: But in the dream you can communicate with him, talk with him, even walk with him and laugh together but it is a dream.
- Author: So was it real or not actually an experience of that person?
- Tatekulu Laban Iyambo: You are sleeping, you do not open your eyes. But your spirit sees that person. So your spirit and the spirit of the dead are connected together by God. They are experiencing each other.

However, the suggestion that we were dealing with a dream or trance state in the experiences of the risen Jesus in Luke 24 was rejected: the disciples were said to be 'in a natural state', 'normal', seeing 'with their own eyes' and 'not even sleeping', and seeing Jesus 'with their own senses' (Memekulu Victoria Mvula, Tatekulu Laban Iyambo, Wilbartina Teofelus, Maria Johannes, respectively). We focused, instead, on waking experiences. A returning member of the community whose immediate presence is sensed by the living whilst awake (indicated to occur via various sensory media) is known as an *oshiluli*, a restless spirit, whose presence has negative connotations:

- Maria Johannes: Communication is sometimes there because one person died and came back as an *oshiluli*.
- Okanona ANON12: One person was raised from death and came to the house and beat all the people in the house. [Okanona ANON12 expressed the view that this person returned from death in a physical capacity.]

- Memekulu Victoria Mvula: Long, long ago we heard about our foremothers that some people died but came back as *iiluli*.
- Memekulu Victoria Mvula: Sometimes the person is dead but he is seen by other people.

- Tatekulu Laban Iyambo: *Oshiluli* is a dead person. You used to bury a dead person but if you meet that person you buried you call that one an *oshiluli*.
[They are] not physical and some people after death we believe people go to heaven. If that person does not believe then God turns them back to go to Earth and repent. So that person wanders on the Earth. But in spiritual form, not physically. You never see a believer come back. You will not see him again.

Such a spirit might be expected to be experienced wandering amongst the community, or in the homestead. Tatekulu Laban Iyambo suggested that they

often wander the bush or the graveyards, noting that 'where the bodies live' is 'their home area'. When asked why the *iiluli* are still active at all, Memekulu Maria Kondo suggested that 'he or she is in his or her own area. They have a right to be there', again suggesting the strong links between deceased and place in Ndonga worldviews (see Chapter 6).

The above autochthonous understandings of post-mortem existence and communication with the living (in dreams and as *iiluli*) would appear to impact upon the interpretations of Jesus' post-mortem appearance by confirming his 'spiritual' appearance to the disciples (Tatekulu Laban Iyambo, Hileni Iyambo, Maria Johannes). The extent of the links between the community and the deceased (or the 'living' and the 'living-dead') is furthered when one takes into account the ancestral spirits (*aathithi*) dwelling in the locality. However, the discussions focused largely on *iiluli*, given that it is a 'ghost', an *oshiluli*, that the disciples think they see in 24:37.

The feeling that such an experience engenders was noted by several contributors (Ester Nicodemus, Memekulu Maria Kondo, Memekulu Victoria Mvula), and was neatly summed up by Tatekulu Laban Iyambo: 'you get afraid and shocked'. This is associated perhaps not only with the unusual nature of the encounter but also the threat *iiluli* pose (arising in several CBS sessions), given that they were said to strangle (Erastus Kuutondokwa, Memekulu Maria Kondo) and beat people (Hilma Ikukutu), to 'eat all the food' (Ananias Imbondi), and 'destroy' property (Elizabeth Imbondi). In the context of lihongo (where *iiluli* are a current concern), for the disciples to (i) think they see an *oshiluli* when a dead person is encountered and, (ii) to experience fear because of it, is entirely understandable.

Secondly, many remarks suggested that *iiluli* can only be seen fleetingly. This, too, found resonance in the interpretation of this passage. It was explained that when one 'sees' the *oshiluli*, the moment of recognition of the deceased is swiftly followed by their disappearance. Recognition actually engenders disappearance of the *oshiluli*. It was suggested that this process could be mapped onto the narrative at hand, explaining why (on the road to Emmaus) Jesus vanished having been recognised (24:31):

Memekulu Maria Kondo:	The person, when you see him, he disappears very quickly.
Author:	Jesus is with the people in the story but then he disappears. Is this the same as the local experience you describe?
Memekulu Victoria Mvula:	Yes.
Memekulu Maria Kondo:	Yes, it is just the same – the local person disappears when you recognise him.
Tatekulu Laban Iyambo:	----- [Responding to a query about the length of time an <i>oshiluli</i> experience lasts, not about who is able to see them.] Even in the same area, when you go there you can be told by others that you should not go through a certain area of bush because there is <i>oshiluli</i> . You can go there with a friend and maybe you can't see anything but your friend will say, 'look, <i>oshiluli</i> !'

I have suggested so far that the lihongo interpretations of Luke 24 offer us a vision of Jesus as in some ways akin to the local spirits: he has returned from death (only expected in the case of *oshiluli*), is understood to be in spiritual form at least some of the time (cohering with autochthonous understandings of *iiluli*, *aathithi*, *oombepo* and *oompwidhuli*), and disappears upon recognition by his companions on the road to Emmaus (said to be 'just the same' as the local experience of rapidly-vanishing *iiluli*).

However, whilst clear links are made between the nature and capacity of an *oshiluli* and those of the risen Jesus, several factors were also highlighted in the discussions that distinguish him and stress the lihongo interpretations of his being 'in the Spirit', rather than 'as spirit'. For example, at no point was conversation with an *oshiluli* mentioned in our discussions. Overall, the very fact that Jesus' companions could see (albeit not recognise) and converse with Jesus as a material being (24:16f., 37f.), perhaps touch him (24:40), and that he was able to eat as a material being (24:42-3), means he could not be an *oshiluli*, which had been indicated (at points) to be 'just' or 'like' a spirit and therefore invisible:

Ester Nicodemus:	The person, the physical body, you can recognise him during the day. But an <i>oshiluli</i> you can only find him during the night.
Author:	Do they have a shape?

Ester Nicodemus: No, they are not a shape. You can just maybe hear the voice.

Loide Petrus: *Oshiluli* is something like a spirit. You can even hear the voice but you will never see anything. But a living person you will see around with a body.

Descriptions from the previous chapter also suggest the immateriality and/or invisibility of an *oshiluli*:

Memekulu Julia Iyambo: Yes, sometimes in the water you hear the sound of footsteps on the water but you look back and cannot see anything on surface of the water. This is in the night. And you can even see the bush moving but there is nothing in the bush.

Loide Petrus: ...they are just wind [*ombepo*].

Hileni Iyambo: *Oshiluli* is weightless. It is just a spirit.

For some, the eating of the fish proved to be a key factor in the interpretations for discerning that this was Jesus in physical form (even if he initially came to the disciples in spiritual form) and not an *oshiluli*:

Tatekulu Laban Iyambo: Jesus asked them to provide him with food to eat because he wants the disciples to get more understanding about his presence. That will confirm that this is truly [the] Jesus that they know.

Frieda Shilemba: He wanted to demonstrate that he was not *oshiluli* but the person they knew before.

Okanona ANON3,
Loide Petrus, Martha Nangolo: [All agree].

However, it is clear that such distinctions are not as clear-cut as they might first appear: at various points in our discussions, some participants stated that *iiiluli* can be seen, touch living people and objects, and receive and/or eat food offerings (sensory perception/engagement):

Tatekulu Laban Iyambo: Not all the people can experience or see people who are dead. Only some. I have heard about it that some people have seen. Sometimes you feel a mysterious feeling in you. But I have not seen someone who is dead.

Meme Maria Kashowa: But if you see someone who looks physical [but is not], that is only *oshiluli*.

Memekulu Maria Kondo: Even when sleeping you might feel something strangling you. That is *oshiluli*.

Elizabeth Imbondi:

One person was dead but came back as an *oshiluli* and he came back to their own house [homestead: *egumbo*]. A family member decided to cook *oshimbombo* [porridge] and a whole chicken with enough oil. They put it at the *ehale* [entrance] to the *egumbo*. Then the *oshiluli* came and ate it and then they were not seen again.

Whilst Jesus' disappearance shortly after being recognised on the road to Emmaus (24:31) was understood in light of the rapid disappearance of an *oshiluli* who has been recognised, clear distinctions were made between the narrative and the lihongo context, again cementing Jesus' status as a 'sacred other':

Author:

You said that when people see someone who has died walking around the locality, they recognise the person who died very shortly before the deceased disappears. What is the difference here?

Memekulu Maria Kondo:

Because this is a true resurrection.

Author:

So this is different from experiencing someone else after death?

Memekulu Maria Kondo:

Jesus' presence was long in the walk with the disciples whereas in our community [the experience] is something else [brief presence before the deceased disappears].

This sense was furthered in the understanding that Jesus entered the room where the disciples were gathering (24:36) by spiritual means but then appeared physically. This was one of the unique traits the participants perceived Jesus to have – the ability to metamorphose at will between non-material and material states (and *vice versa*):

Maria Johannes:

He came there through the power of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, Jesus *is* the Holy Spirit. He came there spiritually and became flesh in the room.

Hileni Iiyambo:

I agree he can change because he appeared [physically] to the disciples in the room [having got there spiritually]. (CBS session Mark 6:45-52).

Tatekulu Laban Iyambo:

Jesus is the almighty and he is also a spirit so it is easier for him to come amongst his disciples.

Author:

Do you mean that he is not limited by being a physical being?

Tatekulu Laban Iyambo:

Yes, exactly. He can go wherever he wants.

Author: Is he physical or spiritual?
 Tatekulu Laban Iyambo: He comes there spiritually.

The above comments would seem to suggest that there were indeed similarities between the behaviours of *iiluli* and the risen Jesus. In order to carve out a distinction between the two, justifications were offered, notably with regard to the food:

Memekulu Victoria Mvula: He was familiar with them so can ask for food from them.
 Memekulu Maria Kondo: He had been three days in the tomb. He is hungry.
 Author: Is this the same as feeding someone who keeps returning home as an *oshiluli* after their death?
 Memekulu Victoria Mvula: No. Jesus is a different person. He is not the same as the people in our community.

A further way in which the participants elaborated on our discussion of *iiluli* and distanced Jesus from association with their traits was in reference to diviner-healers and witchcraft. One participant suggested that communication with the dead was possible when witchcraft (*uulodhi*) was involved:

Author: Who can communicate with their deceased?
 Memekulu Victoria Mvula: Some people have it as a gift but others go somewhere to learn from someone. They learn from an expert. We call [the experts] *oonganga* and *oompulile*.
 Translator: *Oonganga* are witchdoctors. *Oompulile*: I am not really familiar with this term but it is connected to the verb *pula*, 'ask'. You ask something of these people.
 [omupulile (variant: ompule): 'clairvoyant diviner', 'a person who enquires from spirits' (Hiltunen 1993:132, 116); 'the highest ... oonganga in the Ovambo hierarchy' (Aarni 1982:16).]

 Loide Petrus: There is a story of one child who was studying and if that student somehow did not understand the lesson in class she prayed to her [dead] grandmother who was an *omulodhi* [witch] and the grandmother gave answers to her granddaughter. It is a story from Onankali [30km East].

Indeed, why it is that a person returns to disturb the living community could be directly connected to their status as a witch (*omulodhi*; pl. *aalodhi*) and dissatisfaction with their burial, distribution of possessions, or corpse-mutilation

(the latter being a preventative measure against the return of a witch's spirit). Several people revealed preventative measures against the return of a witch's spirit, as well as prescribed actions for an *oshiluli*'s appearance:

- Memekulu Maria Kondo: Sometimes before a person died they might tell you to cut off their foot or hand [when they die] and if you don't do it you will see them again.
- [A discussion followed between Kuku Maria, the translator and myself, in which it was established that cutting off the corpse's feet would prevent the spirit from walking the Earth as an *oshiluli*].
- Okanona ANON3: Such persons in order to die and [not] come back sometimes they may instruct the family: If I am dead, bury me in the *egumbo* or at the *ehale* [entrance] and if this is ignored they may come back.
- Loide Petrus: And sometimes people may instruct to cut off the tip of the tongue or the nose and if you don't do that they are angry and they come back.
- Author: Why would someone want the tip of their nose or tongue cut off?
- Loide Elago: It is because he knows himself that if you don't do that he will come back.
- Translator: Because he knows he is a witch and that is how you stop him coming back, to reduce his power.
- Memekulu Victoria Mvula: When the person sees the deceased one and the parents [of the deceased] find out, the parents [translator adds: or family] have a way to take the person out of the community.
- Author: How would they do that?
- Memekulu Victoria Mvula: They have their own way to say goodbye to him.
- Memekulu Maria Kondo: If [the deceased] used to come into the home, they slaughter a chicken and make *oshimbombo* [porridge] and they put that food at the place he liked to be during the evening, and in the morning you find nothing left.
- Author: Is this today or in the past?
- Memekulu Maria Kondo: Even nowadays. That is the only method to say goodbye. After he has eaten he is gone forever.
- Elizabeth Imbondi: That *oshiluli* just came back to the *egumbo*, sometimes disturbing the things. The family member was instructed by someone to cook the food to stop them coming back. If the person eats the food [and it is] well-cooked, he thanks and goes. [Elizabeth says it is not hunger that brings the spirit back.]
- Author: Who instructed them to cook the food?
- Elizabeth Imbondi: They were instructed by an *onganga* [diviner-healer].

This may explain comments about the fact that Jesus' companions on the road to Emmaus did not recognise him, as well as the disciples in vv.36f. disbelieving his presence: they did not expect Jesus back. For a person to return after death to 'wander the Earth' in the context of *lihongo* is to be conceived of negatively, and often in connection with witchcraft (*uulodhi*). Given that the participants do not associate Jesus with *uulodhi*, it follows that they would be surprised if the disciples anticipated Jesus' return from death, as an *oshiluli* or otherwise:

Tatekulu Laban Iyambo:	Not physical and some people after death we believe people go to heaven. If that person does not believe then God turns them back to go to earth and repent. So that person wanders on the earth. But in a spiritual form, not physically. You never see a believer come back. You will not see him again.
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In summary, the participants also felt Jesus was better understood 'in the Spirit' rather than 'as spirit', thus distinguishing him from local spirits and emphasising his status (also seen in the previous chapter) as a 'sacred other'. It was easy to distinguish him from an *oshiluli*, given that Jesus was viewed positively and *iiluli* negatively. Further, that he is not associated with witchcraft would mean he would not be expected to return, and must, therefore, be returning in a capacity unlike that of an *oshiluli*. His spiritual form, contrasting with that of autochthonous spiritual beings, was explained by his unique ability to metamorphose from spiritual to material state at will, again reiterated from the previous chapter. Overall, then, the participants distanced local spirits from Jesus 'in the Spirit'.

lihongo Perspectives: Jesus as an Ancestor

In order to investigate another area of the autochthonous spirit complex in *lihongo*, I initiated discussions with the participants on the topic of ancestors (*aathithi*). The purpose was to discover more about local understandings of, attitudes to, and practices surrounding the *aathithi* but also to raise the suggestion put forward in contemporary African biblical scholarship that Jesus might be conceived of as an – or *the ultimate* – ancestor.

Before considering whether Jesus might be thought of as an ancestor, I seek here to present the discussions from the CBS sessions on the nature, role and

significance of the *aathithi*. Views were divergent, with some arguing that belief in ancestors was not part of the tradition, whilst others described clear beliefs in ancestral spirits and such practices as pouring libations for the *aathithi*. For Tatekulu Laban Iyambo, the oral traditions of the forefathers was important, but it was to this that he confined ‘belief’ in ancestors. For the women and children, on the other hand, the ancestors seemed to be of greater significance:

- Tatekulu Laban Iyambo: He influences the community for example before he/she died he/she may instruct the people either to do good behaviour, to cooperate with one another, to love one another, and to help one another. Then, after the death, people like to turn back to his/her ideas. If they experience some people doing bad behaviour they like to turn back to the ideas of that [deceased] person by reminding others that that person told us not to do that. But other than that after death there is no influence.
- Author: Do people still think of ancestors as powerful forces in the community?
- Tatekulu Laban Iyambo: We do not believe in ancestors but we believe in what our forefathers told us. For example, they told our fathers or forefathers about how we have to live and gave us a code of conduct on how to live with each other so we only refer to that and not to the ancestors.

- Okanona ANON10: Some families have their own private graveyard where they put their first forefather [*aathithi*] within their land.
- Hileni Iyambo: They are our forefathers who died long ago but their spirit is good, not like the *iluli* who disturb you. *Aathithi* do not disturb you.
- Author: What do they do?
- Translator: I have heard that some may go to the graves of forefathers to ask for wisdom.

[Children not aware of this phenomenon.]
- Author: What do you know about *aathithi*?
- Hileni Iyambo: According to the story from our grandmother, *aathithi* are spirits of the deceased, staying in some areas. For example, if you drive the car where the *aathithi* are staying you have to make a hoot. If you do not hoot, then your car will get stuck. If you remember, maybe your car will then start. And for the woman, if you carry something like a clay pot of *omalovu giilya* [traditional beer], then you stop and pour some out on the ground. If you do not do that the pot would fall and break. This is long ago, not now.
- Author: Are they active now?
- Hileni Iyambo: Not disturbing anyone. They do not enter into the house. They just stay where they are. For example, in

the field. But you cannot go into the field of *aathithi* and build your house. Then they will deal with you. But *iiluli* are cruel and will disturb you.

Author: Do you know an *aathithi* field?

Hileni liyambo: Yes, even at our village [*ombuma* village, in the lihongo district], they are there.

[9 children in the group know an *aathithi* area.]

However, when faced with the idea that Jesus might be considered an ancestor, the women and children rejected the idea totally, emphasising Jesus' special nature:

Author: What do you think of the idea that Jesus could be thought of as an ancestor? Is Jesus an ancestor?

Children: [Unified 'no', with a degree of disbelief to boot.]

Author: Why not?

Frieda Shilemba: Jesus is just the Son of God.

Ester Nicodemus: Because Jesus after death was raised from death and was seen by his disciples during the day but *aathithi* cannot be seen during the day.

Hileni liyambo: Because Jesus was dead by the power of God so that people may know the way of death and resurrection.

Memekulu Hileni Nendongo: No, Jesus is not an ancestor.

Memekulu Maria Kondo: No, he is not an ancestor.

Author: Why not?

Memekulu Maria Kondo: Where the *aathithi* are staying you do not pass by without stopping to ask if you can pass or if you are in a car you press the hooter. If you are not do that the car will get stuck.

Memekulu Hileni Nendongo: Jesus is the Holy Spirit.

With regard to ancestors, it is unfortunate that I failed to ask Tatekulu Laban lymabo directly the question of whether Jesus might be thought of as an ancestor. However, given his response (above) to enquiries about ancestors in general, perhaps it is possible to speculate that he might affirm the Jesus traditions as a moral guide as he does ancestral oral traditions but not Jesus as an ancestor. For the women and children, that Jesus is not to be regarded as an ancestor may be summarised in the following factors: Jesus' origin and power source ('Son of God'/'Holy Spirit') sets him apart from the lihongo

community; Jesus was raised from death, which the *aathithi* are not; Jesus was seen during the day, which *aathithi* cannot be; particular rituals are associated with *aathithi* (libations), which are not associated with Jesus; finally, the purpose of Jesus' life was seen to be divinely ordained.

Summary and Ethnographic Context

Having given an overview of the key discussion points in the CBS sessions, I now take forward the salient themes into conversation with African scholarship on Ancestor Christologies, after a brief ethnographic contextualisation to determine the extent to which these discussions point toward the enduring significance of autochthonous worldviews and practices. The key points are as follows:

- i. Experiences of post-mortem persons (iiluli) are a current reality in dream and wakefulness, with the social world of the lihongo residents expanded to include the deceased.*
- ii. Overall, Jesus has iiluli-like attributes but was ultimately presented as a 'sacred other', whose post-mortem existence was unique. Iiluli, having association with uulodhi (witchcraft), are negative and therefore distanced from Jesus.*
- iii. Aathithi (ancestors) are a current reality, with even the youngest participants being aware of their existence and enduring location: both geographically and socially, they are 'in place'.*
- iv. Jesus should not be understood as an ancestor, despite positive connotations of the latter.*

Both the nature and role of spirits (*iiluli, oombepo dha nyata, oompwidhuli*) have been dealt with extensively in the previous two chapters, so I will not revisit covered ground here. In summary, autochthonous understandings of spirits are well-documented in ethnographic literature on the area (e.g. Aarni 1982; Davies 1994) and are noted to be present in the contemporary worldview of local populations (e.g. Groop 2010). The discussions in this round of CBS support Mbiti's assessment when related to lihongo context:

The invisible world presses hard on the visible: one speaks of the other, and African peoples "see" that invisible universe when they look at, hear or feel the visible and tangible world.

The spiritual universe is a unit with the physical, and that these two intermingle and dovetail into each other so much that it is not easy, or even necessary, at times to draw the distinction or separate them.

Mbiti (1990[1969]:56, 74)

What I focus on here is ancestral spirits (*aathithi*), given the notable resistance of the CBS groups to figuring Jesus as an ancestor (or to the current presence of ancestors at all, in the case of Tatekulu Laban Iyambo). Ethnographic literature on Ndonga (and wider 'African') worldviews indicate that the *aathithi* (*Oshikwanyama: ovakwamungu*) are the restful dead of the community. I use the terms living-dead and *aathithi* to indicate two stages of post-mortem existence: (i) that of the named, remembered, familial deceased, existing in personal immortality (Mbiti 1990[1969]:82), and (ii) unnamed 'generic' ancestral spirits (Hayes 1992.1:62), what Mbiti calls 'full spirits' existing in 'collective immortality' (1990[1969]:83, 160).

Aarni makes a distinction between the named living-dead, or *oohe nooyina*⁶¹ (lit. 'those of the fathers and mothers'), and the nameless *aathithi* ('spirits'/'shades') in his concise treatment of the Ndonga ancestors (1982:60-4). Although his use of terminology is somewhat inconsistent, the CBS discussions support this distinction in that participants talked about 'the ancestors' as unnamed but significant figures from amongst the ranks of the deceased; after all, they will not all remain named and known forever. Aarni thus makes an effort to convey the process by which the named, familial dead cease to be remembered over time and therefore experience a 'second death' into nameless *aathithi* status (1982:63, 43). As Ronaldo M. Green explains, in continued progression through the gerontological structure, a person assumes a place of enhanced authority and power in the community during elderhood, and then to an even greater degree post-mortem (1983:7). Although they no longer have a physical body, as living-dead they are still very much a person and their invisible presence is very real and close, being "everywhere around us" (Aarni 1982:64). This chimes with Rodney L. Reed and Gift Mtukwa's suggestion that 'the cult of the ancestors in the African context is the extension of community to the members of the community who have physically died' (2010:7).

⁶¹ I do not use this phrase because (a) it has arisen neither during my time in Iihongo nor in any written context without reference to Aarni, and (b) he coined it himself (Davies 1994 ch.3:13).

By contrast, Davies stresses the 'ancestor' group as a subset of the *aathithi*, arguing that not every deceased person achieves ancestor status. Whilst they can achieve *aathithi* ('immortal parent') status by virtue having descendants, not being a witch/sorcerer, having a reasonably long life and proper burial rites, to become an ancestor is more difficult. Davies argues that the criteria are as follows:

Ancestors can be said to be the dead who: (a) have received proper burial, (b) are named, (c) held politico-jural status whilst alive, (d) were (are) morally upright, and (e) have descendants or successors.

Davies (1994 ch.3:14)

However, her treatment is ultimately found wanting in that it assumes all matrilineal systems must have the same conception of ancestorhood (1994 ch.3:14-16) and it does not offer any sense of distinction between the recently and long-term deceased of the *aathithi* class. There is at least one other term available to distinguish 'ancestor' from 'ancestral spirit': *aakulu yonale* (ELCIN 1996:9; lit. 'the elders from earlier') particularly refers to the status of those individuals within the community, touching on Davies's points (c) and (e), and speaks to their physical rather than spiritual existence. However, this implies nothing of naming and does not deal with the transition between named and unnamed *aathithi*.

The ongoing connection the deceased have to the living community is as fundamental part of the social world (hence the term 'living-dead' or, indeed, *aakulu yonale*), within which the distinction between living and dead persons is not as stark as is it within Western conceptions. Tellingly, Igor Kopytoff describes the existence of African ancestors as 'mundane', pointing toward the ordinariness of their existence in the social world as 'above all[,] elders' (1971:140, 138). Their existence has a further dimension, however, in that they have greater access 'to the spirit world and to the non-human powers' than do the living (Aarni 1982:61). Diviner-healers, in turn, have better access to the ancestors overall, perhaps even being able to see them (Aarni 1982:47). The living community, for its part, has inherited from the living-dead their biological life force, land and cattle, the last being 'a means to get in touch with the

ancestors' (Aarni 1982:63). In return, the living sustain the living-dead both in memory and through libations. The living desire the continued benevolence of their familial *aathithi*, who may intervene in their lives as 'helpers, protectors and guides' (Aarni 1982:62) whilst the chief's ancestral spirits may bring rain (Tönjes 1996[1911]:180). Meme Maria Kashowa suggested a connection with healing, too: 'our forefathers would ask the ancestors for the power to heal people' (*Oomeme*, CBS Mark 5:21-43). Estermann (on the Kwanyama) also notes that the ancestors were said to play a collaborative role in specific 'supernatural' pursuits, such as blacksmithing, hunting, and warfare (1976:144-5, 127). However, they may also create significant misfortune if sent by a witch and may even penetrate the body of a living person (Hiltunen 1986:61). Ambiguity about the intentions of the *aathithi* is also touched upon by Davies, who suggests that the *ovakwamungu* (= *aathithi*) of others 'may cause harm, behaving like spirits of the west even though they are spirits of the east to their own lineage descendants.' If one's own *aathithi* cause harm, they are – unlike the 'outsider' *aathithi* – acting 'purposefully and logically' (1994 ch.3:25). Overall, then, the ancestors play 'a functional role in the world of the living, specifically in the life of their living kinsmen' (Kopytoff 1971:129), with the living-dead being the immediate point of contact and communion for the living.

Mbiti suggests that the living-dead may make 'disturbing frequent appearances' to their kingroup, should they be 'offended before they died' or 'improperly buried' (1990[1969]:83). That burial practice might influence a person's return, or lack thereof, was verbalised in the CBS session. However, whilst Aarni affirms this for the Ndonga setting (1982:72), the participants in this study have only spoken of appearances of *iiluli*, not *aathithi*, elaborating with reference to *iiluli* as spirits of deceased witches (*aalodhi*). Even then, there has been a degree of ambiguity in response to the issue of 'seeing' an *oshiluli* (perhaps due to working through a translator). Nevertheless, reports from Kwanayama ethnographies discuss sorcerers (*Oshikwanyama: ehmule*) whose corpses require dismemberment in order to prevent the return of their malevolent spirits (*ounikifa*), and who are visible during twilight hours (Tönjes 1996[1911]:182; Loeb 1955a:39; Estermann 1976:190). Whilst this resonates with CBS reports of *iiluli* and corpse-mutilation in lihongo, it is notable that the equivalent term for *iiluli* in the Kwanyama dialect is, in fact, *oilulu* and not *ounikifa* (Davies 1994

ch.3:24). Nonetheless, in the final analysis, the idea of visually encountering ancestral spirits (which are neither *iiluli/oilulu* nor *ounikifa*) was rejected. This is understandable given that people are only understood to have one physical existence ('*omwenyo lumwe*' = 'one life': Kuusi 1970:212), but does not hint at autochthonous foundations for fleeting glimpses of *iiluli*. Encounters in dreams, however, were acknowledged and are documented in ethnographies (Davies 1994 ch.2:47) and wider literature: 'where ancestors "appear", say in dreams, they appear in their full bodily form, exactly as they have been known to exist. They are not "spirits", but "presences" – the continuing presence of the past persons' (Nürnberger 2007:27; see also Afeke & Verster 2004:49, Reed & Mtukwa 2010:12 on appearances in dreams).

There is, as well as the lasting community connection, a resilient bond with the land. As noted in many of the CBS sessions, the dead are understood to have a 'home area' (Tatekulu Laban Iyambo) connected to their burial site. This tallies with Mbiti's claim that 'the living-dead may be considered to dwell in the area of the graves' (1990[1969]:83). The deceased were historically buried in or around the *omagumbo* (homesteads) and an *egumbo* would be relocated upon the death of the head of a family, again indicating the placedness of the *aathithi* and their role in the *living landscape*, albeit sometimes in the wild, liminal space beyond the *egumbo* perimeter (Davies notes the negative associations here: 1994 ch.2:41). That such an idea is rooted in autochthonous worldviews is reinforced by the special status of the king's grave, as well as its attendant ancestral spirits (Aarni 1982:82; McKittrick 2002:35).

The *aathithi* are territorial in defence of their burial sites, causing disturbances to those amongst the living who overlook them and proceed to build on such areas (Hileni Iyambo). Their benevolence may also be tested by a failure to acknowledge their presence (and offer the appropriate libations), perhaps not incorporating the living-dead in community events, or allowing social unrest to prevail amongst the living. Memekulu Frieda Namugongo hinted at measures undertaken to restore such unrest, here in the case of a murder or manslaughter. Her example seems suggestive of appeasing the family of the deceased (presumably including ancestors) through the medium of blood:

Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: In Ndonga culture, if someone kills a person, that killer or the family of the killer should take a cattle to the Royal Palace [*ombala kwaniilwa*]. Then that cattle is slaughtered and the blood is run through without catching it [often it is caught for consumption]. This is an indication that you wash out your sin. This cattle is called *onkomba mbinzi* ['to wipe out the blood']. It is killed before the burial [of the victim].

The reason why they give that cattle it is the sign to apologise to the family of the deceased and it is to prevent the killer from getting bad luck.

Author: Is it important that the blood goes into the land?

Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: It is because you kill it before the burial. That blood must go into the ground before the victim [and his/her blood, presumably].

Furthermore, participants reported the shedding of cattle blood at *ohango* (wedding), which, according to Tuupainen, ratifies the marriage and seeks the blessings of the *aathithi* on the union (1970:62-3, 156), such is 'the magic power of blood' (1970:57):

Translator: At the wedding, you must give the cattle to slaughter. If you do not then the family will not let the girl marry. If I visit and you slaughter even a chicken, I feel respected. [The implication is that blood is valuable and, if spilled, shows that an important transaction has taken place, or status has been recognised.]

Memekulu Rauha Andreas: When it came to the wedding event the men used to [always do] give the cattle to the family of the girl so that they can exchange for the girl. The blood of the cattle pays for the girl.

Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: In our tradition, as from our forefathers, the girl should be exchanged with the cattle. The price for the woman is cattle. When the day of marriage comes, people meet the cattle [being delivered] by shouting '*ipindi ya landa*' ['we get what we bought'].

The continuation of the individual after bodily death is the natural progression of an elder of the community into a place of higher status within a rigid hierarchy. Their status as living-dead is at once 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary': ordinary in the sense that they are part of the social order, are very *present* and *close*, with strong links with the community through land and cattle, but extraordinary in that they have moved into a position of heightened authority and power, with closer ties to the rest of the spirit world. They 'represent the archetype of moral conduct' because they 'no longer have faults' (Hiltunen 1986:57) and are even more 'respected for their seniority and wisdom' than before (Aarni 1982:61).

As has been demonstrated, the *aathithi* are very much 'in place', forming part of a complex web of relationships between kinsfolk, land and animals. The living kin and their animals, the living-dead, *aathithi* and other spirits are all intimately connected to the land – together they form the *living landscape*. Physical bodies (animate or in the form of corpses) anchor persons to locations, and blood (amongst other libations) forms 'a communication link to the invisible world' (Aarni 1982:39; see also 47). In the finality of the 'second death', however, most living-dead may be forgotten and transition into the nameless class of *aathithi*. Very few members of the community will be remembered several generations after their death, and perhaps only headmen, chiefs, kings and remarkable persons will survive to lasting historical memory. However, even those figures survive 'in place', be it in lihongo, Ondonga, or in wider Owamboland. I turn now to examine how these ideas of ancestors 'in place' engage with and nuance interpretations of the person and role of Jesus in African scholarship.

Luke 24:1-49 in African New Testament Scholarship

African theologians have sought to carve out inculturation Christologies⁶² in an effort to find an expression of Christianity and the person of Jesus that truly resonates with African Christians in their cultural setting. To say that there is 'growing influence and acceptance' of these approaches is perhaps an understatement (Ezigbo 2014:50). Amongst the most significant contributions to this effort have been those of John Pobee (Protestant, Ghanaian), Charles Nyamiti (Catholic, Tanzanian), Bénézet Bujo (Catholic, Congolese) and Kwame Bediako (Presbyterian, Ghanaian), all of whom have developed theologies associating Jesus (in various sophisticated and nuanced ways) with ancestral traditions in African worldviews.

Those African scholars who advocate an inculturation approach would see Christianity contextualised for an African audience, arguing that such titles as Messiah, Christ and Lord are themselves culturally-bound⁶³ and not appropriate for the depiction of Jesus in African settings (Pobee 1979:81-2; Masega

⁶² I focus here on inculturation approaches and leave aside liberation, or Black, Christologies.

⁶³ Cf. also the mainstream Western (contextual) interpretation of spirits (as symbolic): Chapters 6 & 7.

2010:75). They are mindful of syncretism and perceived 'dangers' of an overly positive valuation of traditionalism (including associated ancestor traditions), whilst stressing the unhealthy experience of 'dual religious consciousness' (e.g. Masega 2010:73f.). However, these scholars argue that Christianity's relevance – and the abandonment of elements of traditional worldviews they consider anti-Christian – actually depend on the development of an African, ancestor-based Christology, through which African Christians might better understand Christianity and the post-mortem existence of Jesus (and even the traditional ancestors themselves).

This section of my study aims to give a very brief overview of those Christologies, whilst not being drawn into a lengthy description of the individual theologies, for this has been done elsewhere (Schreiter 1992; Küster 2001; Stinton 2004). Of greater significance, here, is the extent to which the lihongo interpretations and discussion differ from the Christologies of the above scholars. Further, I seek connections with other studies (from the realm of African scholarship) that have raised objections to the notion of 'Jesus the Ancestor' (e.g. Nürnberger 2007; Palmer 2008; Afeke & Verster 2004; Reed & Mtukwa 2010).

Jesus as Ancestor

He must be talked about in the local language, called by indigenous names and painted in local features, so that he is no longer a stranger but "one of us." ... it is the language about Jesus that needs to be brought down to earth.

Masega (2010:75)

Mention of a few inculturation Christologies will serve to introduce the variety and nuance of approaches to Jesus as an ancestral figure. Pobee refers to Jesus as *Nana Yesu*, the 'Greatest Ancestor', stressing his superiority and 'chiefdom' over all other ancestors by virtue of his closeness to God and his nature as God (Pobee 1979:94). Jesus should be understood as set apart; he is 'Ancestor Par Excellence' and 'Proto-Ancestor' (Bujo 2006[1986]:79-83), similar to local ancestors, who function as 'a source of life for the next generation' (Reed & Mtukwa 2010:15). However, the status of Proto-Ancestor for Bujo means having not genealogically primacy but status as model ancestor over the

African ancestors as 'forerunners' (Stinton 2004:120). This is not altogether dissimilar to Bediako's notion of Jesus as 'Supreme Ancestor' (1995:217), with a prominent theme being the use of the *analogy* of an ancestor whilst simultaneously limiting the status of the human ancestors: Jesus is 'Lord among the ancestors' (1995:228). For Bediako, the key feature of Jesus as ancestor is as a giver of life (Reed & Mtukwa 2010:14) and as one through whom communities might better understand their human ancestors (notably, as myth). As Laurenti Masega adds, the 'main focus of prayer' is Jesus, not ordinary ancestors (Masega 2010:76).

In the above, Christ as Ancestor is clearly placed in a hierarchical relationship to the 'natural ancestors', there remaining a 'qualitative distinction' (Bediako 1995:218). Significantly, some 'see continuity between the cult of ancestors in African traditions and the doctrine of the communion of the saints held by some Christian churches' (Ezigbo 2014:50), thereby challenging criticisms of idolatry in reference to the continued 'worship' of ancestors (e.g. Oduyoye 1986:9, cited in Ezigbo 2014:148). In *Christ as Our Ancestor*, Nyamiti suggests that Jesus may be conceived of as 'Brother Ancestor', with God as Father Ancestor at the top of the hierarchy (1984:64, 84), presenting a different figuration of the sacred realm. He stresses five aspects of ancestor status in his treatment: 'kinship' (consanguineous or non-) with the living, 'superhuman sacred status', 'mediation' between God and the living, the right to 'regular sacred communication' with the living through oblations, and 'exemplarity, as models of good behaviour' (cited in Reed & Mtukwa 2010:12). These he relates to Jesus' life and status (with a kinship link drawn back to Adam), but stresses that the relationship to Christ supercedes 'all clanic, tribal, racial or sexual distinctions' (Reed & Mtukwa 2010:19).

In searching for resonance between these theologies and the lihongo interpretations, it is not easy to locate points of contact, perhaps because of the brevity (and other limitations) of the CBS discussions. Drawing from ethnographies and the CBS sessions, it would be possible to detail the facets of an Ndonga ancestor that would align with Jesus as inculturated by Nyamiti *et al.* However, this was not the way the participants articulated their Christologies. In consideration of the moral qualities, though, and picking up on Nyamiti's fifth

aspect, Tatekulu Laban Iyambo's comments seem to suggest that he feels *aathithi* would be best understood as moral guides, leaving authoritative oral teachings – an 'enduringly positive legacy' (Reed & Mtukwa 2010:9) – upon which members of the living community may later reflect.

Objections to 'Jesus as Ancestor'

Diane B. Stinton's study argues that 'Jesus as ancestor is a controversial image' (2004:123). Timothy Palmer's article, 'Jesus Christ: Our Ancestor?' certainly suggests as much, giving an interesting insight into the objections levelled as well as the potential distinction between the heavily theorised notion of those in 'ivory towers' over and against grassroots understandings (2008:73; cf. Stinton 2004:245). Palmer suggests that 'at the grassroots there is still significant resistance to such a concept' (2008:65). Having tasked some eighty students with writing two pages on 'the usefulness of calling Jesus their ancestor in the context of their own ethnic group', Palmer relates the findings. Of the cross-section of Nigerian Protestant Christians,⁶⁴ he says: 'one is struck by the almost universal rejection of the concept of Christ as an ancestor', with 96% being 'negative or cautious' about accepting the idea (2008:69).

The reasons for rejecting or being hesitant about calling Christ an ancestor are illuminating, and resonate with the lihongo context:

- (i) Jesus did not meet the criteria for ancestorhood: dying in old age, dying naturally, being married and having children.
- (ii) Jesus is not an ancestor because he has no connections with each student's clan (blood relationship) and land.
- (iii) Jesus is not an ancestor because that would be a limited view of Jesus's role/existence.
- (iv) Jesus is a healer. However, as well as healing, ancestors have the capacity to inflict harm or illness.
Ancestors are dead ('albeit living dead') but Jesus is risen and living. Ancestors do not resurrect.
Ancestors are merely human, whilst Jesus is divine.
- (v) Calling Christ an ancestor 'would be to endorse the cult of the ancestors', contrary to biblical teachings.

Palmer (2008:69-72)

⁶⁴ In Stinton's study, 'Catholics were more favourably inclined toward the image' of Jesus as ancestor. A higher level of theological education also engendered more positive responses, as well as accounting for all instances where interviewees brought up the issue of their own volition (2004:124-5).

The lihongo interpretations drew on similar arguments to suggest the unsuitability of the ancestor analogy. Notably Memekulu Victoria Mvula suggested that Jesus is other, 'not the same as the people in our community', perhaps echoing the sentiment that one must be an 'insider' to qualify for (inherently) in-group ancestorhood (point ii). Both the women and the children also explicitly linked the ancestors to the land (point ii). Memekulu Maria Kondo, picking up on point iv, stressed that Jesus would *not* act negatively on the living (the *aathithi* might do: for example, making cars get stuck when the living fail to offer the appropriate libations). The children's group echoed the danger of limiting Jesus' status by reducing him to ancestorhood (point iii) and that he resurrected, which would not be expected of *aathithi* (point iv). Tatekulu Laban lyambo suggested that ancestor belief and practice has subsided, except for their oral/moral legacy, an idea echoed by the translator when asking the children if they knew of consulting the *aathithi* in search of wisdom. Regarding Tatekulu Laban's point, and connecting with point v, I speculate that the devout nature of his faith, combined with the area's long history of anti-'traditionalism', may fuel an inclination against notions of inculturation. The CBS discussions did not resist the 'Jesus as Ancestor' motif based on status-indicators that Jesus lacked (point i: age/status, a natural death, descendants), although ethnographic contextualisation has highlighted the fact that this might be a background concern (Davies 1994 ch.3:14).

To draw analogies with Jesus, for Palmer's students (and echoed in the responses in lihongo), would appear to limit him to a state of death, within a particular kin group (or clan, or tribe), and within a particular location, not to mention whether he could even be deemed to have qualified for ancestor status at all (see Stinton 2004:130f.). These challenges, then, reject Wanamaker's claim that 'Christ's death and afterlife are assumed to be of the same character as that of all the other ancestors', with the resurrection appearances being equivalent to 'visionary visitations of an ancestor' (Afeke & Verster 2004:53). For Palmer's students, just as for the lihongo interpreters, the equation of Jesus with ancestor just does not fit.

Summary

As Robert J. Schreiter argues, 'we need to know more about what ordinary Christians believe and confess about Jesus Christ' (2004:xi). This chapter has demonstrated that the Christologies developed by erudite figures in African scholarship are somewhat removed from the (albeit brief) grassroots responses of the lihongo participants. Whilst the likes of Pobee, Nyamiti, Bujo and Bediako have found appreciative academic audiences for their inculturated depictions of Jesus as Ancestor, there is evidence of 'significant resistance' to such theologies amongst grassroots interpreters (Palmer 2008:65), lihongo residents amongst them.

The above cases rest on drawing analogies between the qualities of Jesus and those of the ancestors, as well as drawing on comparisons with the relationships between God, ancestors and the living. Jesus is conceived of in ancestral terms in that he lived an immaculately moral life, sustains the community, and acts as a mediator between humanity and God. Here we find resonance with the depiction of ancestors in Davies' study of the Aawambo (1994 ch.3:14). In addition, Tatekulu Laban Iyambo's observations about the *aathithi* find resonance with the African scholarship – he noted that the oral traditions the ancestors leave behind are of enormous value to the contemporary community (echoed by Hiltunen 1986:57: they 'represent the archetype of moral conduct'). He was resistant, however, to the notion of 'believing in' ancestors as spiritual beings, a stance shared by those who wish to distance Christianity from ancestor reverence.

Not all African scholars join Nyamiti *et al.* in their quest to find an ancestral model for Jesus, with opponents finding problematic continued interaction with, or consideration of, mediating ancestors (e.g. Sanneh and Turaki, cited in Afeke & Verster 2004:55-56). Critics have pointed out that Jesus was not married, had no children, and died at a relatively young age, making his status as potential ancestor questionable (Palmer 2008). Further, the intrinsic placedness and clan-centred notion of ancestors leads to questions as to whether the notion of Jesus as an ancestor is, in fact, an ethnocentric one (Reed & Mtukwa 2010). The *aathithi*, significantly, are linked to both people and place in lihongo: 'they are our forefathers' staying in 'the field of *aathithi*' and 'they do not enter the house' (Hileni Iyambo). In many ways, the descriptions from across the CBS

sessions support claims that ancestors may be seen as 'the owners of the land' (Gehman in Afeke & Verster 2004:50; see also Reed & Mtukwa 2010:25).

As has been demonstrated above, interpreters in lihongo raised various objections to the 'Jesus as ancestor' metaphor. There were the titles ascribed to Jesus that were not suggestive of an equivalence: 'Son of God', 'Holy Spirit' (Frieda Shilemba, Memekulu Hileni Nendongo). Furthermore, the fact that the *aathithi* were 'in place' in lihongo was implicitly contrasted with Jesus (this also highlights the capacity of the ancestors to actively chastise the living community): 'where the *aathithi* are staying you do not pass by without stopping to ask if you can pass or if you are in a car you press the hooter. If you do not then the car will get stuck' (Memekulu Maria Kondo). The appearances of the risen Jesus also contradicted autochthonous understandings of post-mortem existence: 'Jesus after death was raised from death and was seen by his disciples during the day but *aathithi* cannot be seen during the day' (Ester Nicodemus). Finally, the case was made that some do not believe in the post-mortem existence of ancestors, although their wisdom was to be respected (Tatekulu Laban Iyambo). The lihongo discussions, then, raised terminological, spatial (and implicit moral), physiological and ontological issues in their rejection of the central tenet ('Jesus as ancestor') of African inculturation Christologies.

Conclusion

The discussions of Luke 24 have generated clear examples of the persistence of autochthonous worldviews and practices. In particular, these relate to practices surrounding death: mention was made of moving huts, kitchens, homesteads, or homestead entrances, as well as slaughter and consumption of a homestead-head's animals by residents of their homestead. Similarly, burial rituals are indicative of pre-Christian concerns and practices (corpse-mutilation, private graveyards: '*aathithi* fields'). Inheritance practices, too, pointed towards the traditional or matrilineal descent and inheritance system (for example, clothing to matrilineal relatives, sticks to namesakes), rather than the patrilineal system encouraged by the missionaries (Yamakawa 2009:120; Haugh 2014:188-192). Lastly, this chapter has echoed the findings of those previous (6 & 7), which argued that autochthonous beliefs in post-mortem existence (*iiluli*,

aathithi) remain foundational to the Christian participants in lihongo. In this chapter, that came to the fore in descriptions of practical measures taken to deal with the return of restless, deceased (but still 'placed') members of the community (the laying out of a prescribed meal, upon the instruction of an *oonganga*), as well as discussions of the nature and role of ancestors (*aathithi*) and witches (*aalodhi*). The overview I presented suggests that ancestors remain, as they were in life, very much 'in place': their social ties with the community continue (as evidenced in the CBS discussions through, *inter alia*, the libations they receive) and they remain anchored to the land in *aathithi* fields. As with *iiluli*, they are a part of what I have referred to as the *living landscape*.

Despite the fact that those autochthonous worldviews and practices mentioned above remain current (or, in some cases, in current consciousness, at the very least), others are declining in significance. For example, Elisabeth Imbondi mentioned the instructions of *oonganga* to prepare a set meal for a returning spirit, but noted that this was a story related by her grandmother, rather than part of Elisabeth's own experience. There was no recognition from the children, either, of the practice of consulting the *aathithi* to gain wisdom. The discussions also suggested that Christian practice dominates mourning rituals (prayers, hymns, expressing hope of resurrection); there was little suggestion of pre-Christian funereal ritual, although I note that both Tatekulu Laban Iyambo and Maria Johannes stated that an ox would be slaughtered at the *egumbo* of the deceased. This may have autochthonous ritual significance, as did the ox-slaughter in the wedding (*ohango*).

It was experience of post-mortem beings – or 'presences', if Nürnberger's contention is accepted (2007:27) – that particularly informed lihongo understandings of Luke 24. In this regard, Jesus shared something in common with *iiluli*, to whom he was likened (perhaps partly because he existed in a liminal spiritual-physical state post-mortem, but certainly) because he vanished when his companions finally recognised him on the road to Emmaus (24:31). However, there were also clear differences. Jesus was experienced for a protracted period of time (24:15-30), which was not expected of Ndonga post-mortem beings: no sooner would they be recognised than they would vanish

(Memekulu Maria Kondo). With regard to ancestors, that the risen Jesus had been seen during the day served to distinguish him from *aathithi* (Ester Nicodemus; cf. Palmer 2008:71; Wannamaker in Afeke & Verster 2004:58). And, given that experiences of *iiluli* as restless and disturbing spirits can only be negative (Memekulu Victoria Mvula), the resistance to association of Jesus with ancestorhood was highlighted all the more.

Just as they had done with the 'nature miracles', the lihongo women and children's groups sought (with the aforementioned critics) to distance Jesus from the local setting; they argued that he was different – he was a 'sacred other'. They were distinctly uncomfortable with aligning him with the 'mundane' ancestors (Kopytoff 1971:140). In the previous chapter, the power Jesus drew upon to control the wind and waves was from God, not from traditional culture. In this case, Jesus' titles were invoked as examples of precisely why he was neither *an* ancestor, nor *the* ancestor: he was 'Son of God' (Frieda Shilemba), not *aathithi*. In both cases, Jesus seems to be elevated over and against the 'traditional', the autochthonous. This directly challenges Bujo's stress on a 'Christology from below' (see Stinton 2004:118-123), in which he would bring to the fore Jesus' human and earthly ministry. The lihongo participants preferred to stress his unique and sacred qualities.

Overall, Memekulu Maria Kondo summed up the sacred otherness of Jesus by saying, 'this is a true resurrection.' In an Ndonga setting, post-mortem experiences of the deceased (*aathithi* or otherwise) are not understood in terms of resurrection. There was resistance, then, to association of Jesus with the *aathithi*, who are presences in the locality and landscape, but are not resurrected – they are 'only' spiritual presences. The presence of pernicious *iiluli* is more keenly felt, certainly in a physical sense, but neither are they resurrected. And, ultimately, *aathithi* and *iiluli* are post-mortem spirits/presences of humans, not of human-sacred beings. As was the feeling with Palmer's group, 'there are too many fundamental differences between Christ and the ancestor' (2008:73). Whilst Emmanuel Martey is convinced that the metaphor 'fits' (cited in Stinton 2004:138), this was not the case in lihongo.

It is also important to consider why there might be such a gulf in perception between Jesus Christ and the *aathithi*. I offer two central suggestions. The first, with Victor I. Ezigbo, is that 'the missionaries succeeded in creating an impassable chasm between Christianity and the indigenous cultures of Africa, producing Christians who saw the indigenous religious traditions of Africa as anti-Christian, or viewed Christianity as the great defeater of African indigenous cultures' (2014:46; cf. 2014:44-5 for his discussion of Byang Kato's work). Certainly, that has historically been the case on the ground in Ondonga, with the missionaries vociferously denigrating and decrying the beliefs and activities of *uupagani* ('paganism') whilst positioning *uukristi* (Christianity) at the polar opposite (McKittrick 2002:9-10). Such marginalisation may have taken root in the collective consciousness such that it now underpins resistance to inculturation in this instance. Perhaps that is why there is still a pronounced perception of parallel (rather than totally integrated) systems: Christianity (*uukristi*) and Ndonga culture (*omuthigululwakalo gwaaNdonga*) are 'brother and sister'. In reference to this, I recall West's reference to Wimbush's claim (albeit contextually different) that 'the early encounters with the Bible among African Americans are foundational for all subsequent biblical interpretation' (2007b:31).

It is notable, too, that Christianity was most closely associated with the church building in lihongo, as well as local hospitals:

Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: We are more focused on Christianity at the church centre.

Memekulu Rauha Andreas: The hospital and Christianity are associated like brother and sister.

Local culture came to the fore with the realm of the *egumbo* (homestead): 'culture is more at home but only the culture that is good [goes] to church' (Memekulu Frieda Namugongo). The children also reported sleeping 'traditionally', rather than 'by Christianity'. It is arguable that the *aathithi*, too, would fall within the non-church realm, engaging with ideas of *egumbo*, *aathithi* fields, pre-missionary culture and oral wisdom. Perhaps this might further the distinction between the *egumbo*-based *aathithi* and the church-based Jesus.

However, the response of the lihongo groups might be otherwise explained, which gives rise to my second suggestion. The category of ancestors – *aathithi* – is simply not analogous with the depiction of the post-mortem appearances of Jesus. That Jesus was present in body and made physical contact, entered the house, ate, was seen in the day and experienced more than momentarily meant that he did not correspond to the autochthonous understandings of post-mortem presences of *iiluli* or, more importantly, *aathithi*. The sense of his otherness is highlighted further when one takes into account the critiques of the inculturation approach. Some have argued (with the lihongo contributors), that ‘Christ is totally different from all the others and does not fit in with the idea of a primal ancestor’ (Afeke & Verster 2004:58). To others, the whole concept of Jesus as ancestor may be an ethnocentric one, given that ancestors are linked to family and land (Reed & Mtukwa 2010).

For the lihongo participants to accept Jesus as *aathithi* would be to claim him as an *omundonga* (an Ndonga person), both rendering him a tribe member and denying his unique sacredness, as well as disassociating from the missionary influence that is, I imagine, still of significant influence in the collective memory and oral tradition. The dynamics of power and agency at work in such a situation are complex: are the participants protecting Jesus’ identity within a Christian framework, or protecting autochthonous conceptual and social matrices from Christianisation? Alternatively, is the ‘Jesus as ancestor’ concept simply a failed analogy? It may be that the inculturation Christologies are not universally applicable; certainly, the ‘Jesus as ancestor’ metaphor does not fit understandings of ancestors particular to lihongo. Reverend Dr. Nambala offered an explanation as to why that might be the case:

Nyamiti, Pobee, Mbiti and others, they are from heavily cultural, African cultural contexts – it is unlike ours. In our own contexts, ancestors did not play that great a role. So, that’s why the group rejected it, because they never thought of calling their ancestors to assist. It is unlike in other African contexts: South Africa, Kenya, and so on. There, the ancestral spirit is quite, quite strong. Of course, even here, you can maybe read through their behaviours and see that they are calling their ancestors but it is not that strong. So, that’s why they rejected it.

Nambala: Interview, 23.06.2015

Any particular location (such as lihongo), has an incomparable set of variables that uniquely coalesce (autochthonous culture; experience of mission;

encounter, interpenetration and hybridisation of cultures) and therefore demands a particular Christology to be developed for it to be a successful articulation, appropriate to the local cultural-conceptual sphere. The results of Palmer's and Stinton's studies, too, indicate that it would have to be actively taught; such ideas do not grow organically from the ground up (that assumes, of course, that at a grassroots level the nature of Jesus is not understood – that did not appear to be the case in lihongo). The development of such Christologies is also deeply engaged in a sensitive debate about the status of local traditions and it is not always entirely clear what is the driving force: are inculturation Christologies required because 'Africans need help to understand the person of Jesus' (a deeply patronising argument), or, in the first instance, as a way to incorporate positively valued, local traditions surrounding (in this case) ancestors?

Perhaps, in the end, the inculturation Christologies are too abstract and theoretical for this context, within which experiences of the deceased are a current, lived reality. As in many contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa, in lihongo there is a 'strong emphasis on community', with the ancestors playing an 'essential role' in that social body (Reed & Mtukwa 2010:13). Contra Dymond (1950:150), belief in ancestors has been demonstrated to be anything but 'futile' in this Owambo context. However, into that milieu, Jesus as a member of the *necessarily local* deceased simply does not fit: 'he is not the same as the people in our community' (Memekulu Victoria Mvula).

That Jesus is *not* an ancestor is indicative of the clear demarcation drawn by the participants between things 'cultural' and things 'Christian'. Regarding certain topics, 'traditional culture' (*omuthigululwakalo*) and Christianity (*uukristi*) are 'like brother and sister', mutually supportive (although, that description is predicated upon distinction). For example, children are often known by their Owambo names within the environs of the *egumbo* but by biblical or Western names in church (*omambo*) and school (*osikola*). Contextual discussions of local naming traditions (enacted in the homestead) alongside church baptism also draw attention to links made between particular settings, or spatial contexts, and autochthonous and Christian traditions. That is, naming rites (involving the giving of beads) take place in the homestead but the infant may

then be taken to the church to undergo baptism (*omashasho*). Therefore, despite the suggestion that the institutions are mutually supportive, there is clear spatial demarcation. The traditional-*egumbo* association (versus a Christianity-church association) was echoed by the women's group in our summary session at the end of my stay:

- Meme Beata Mbinga: Christianity and culture is brother and sister for example in naming. You give the name at home but you bring the child to church to bless the name in baptism.
- Author: What would you do in the home for naming?
- Memekulu Rauha Andreas: In tradition, when you are naming the child for an unmarried couple, the father sends his representative to the house where the child is staying. They [the representative] take a container of *omalovu giilya* [traditional beer] and put *onyoka* [string of ostrich-shell beads] around the baby's neck and say the name. And you send someone to tell the *ombushe* [namesake] that someone insulted or cursed them [i.e. their name is being used].
- Translator: You take the *onyoka* [beads] and the *onthikwa* [cloth baby-carrier] when you go to name the child. And why you say *ombushe* is insulted is mostly you will mention bad or unusual words to that child.
- Author: Overall, would you say that local culture and Christianity mostly mix, co-exist happily, or conflict?
- Memekulu Frieda Namugongo: The local culture and Christianity sometimes we put together, for example *ohango* [marriage]. Culture and Christianity are there. But sometimes they stand on their own leg.

Oomeme, Summary Session

So, concerning other matters, they are at odds, and the distinction the participants made between the worldviews (and associated practices, with associated spatial realms) becomes starker. Jesus cannot be an ancestor; he (and, on this point, Christianity itself) is incompatible with autochthonous worldviews about *aathithi*: with Palmer, 'Jesus does *not* fit "perfectly into the African understanding of ancestor"' (2008:73, citing E. Milingo 1984:78). Whilst this might be explained on the 'practical' level of ancestors being (by their very nature) locally situated (requiring blood, clan, or land-based links to an African location), I also suggested that the historical context of missionary denigration of Owambo culture (and its potential internalisation by the community thereafter), may have had a part to play in generating aspects of resistance to

inculturation hermeneutics. Further investigation is required to investigate whether there is indeed more at play here than merely the failure of the ancestor analogy at a grassroots level.

Part III:

Conclusions

This study has sought to explore the tension between the conclusions of macro-scale studies on Owamboland (which argue that autochthonous belief systems have been entirely or almost entirely eroded) and those of micro-scale studies (which often demonstrate the persistence of such beliefs, focusing on a smaller area of the region or on a particular facet of Owambo life) (RQ1:MA1). Contextual Bible Study – using a selection of biblical texts on the themes of *Bodies*, *Spirits*, and *Landscapes* – was selected as a means by which I might investigate the continuing influence of pre-missionary beliefs and practices on biblical interpretation in a particular location (RQ2:MA2). This process offered the participants the chance to interpret a selection of New Testament texts (to engage their Christian identities and perspectives) whilst also reflecting on their context (thereby engaging aspects of autochthonous worldviews that were of current concern). These ‘contextual’ interpretations were then brought into dialogue with professional biblical scholarship, both to add to the diversity of voices in the scholarly realm and to highlight the equally contextual nature of the (predominantly Western) professional scholarship. It was hoped that the interpretations from Iihongo might offer fresh insights into the biblical texts and thereby inform, nuance, or challenge New Testament scholarship (RQ3:MA3).

I analysed the CBS sessions and summary meetings alongside ethnographic and socio-historical literature on the region, and engaged with the context through my own period of participant-observation in the village (MA1 and MA2). Cooperatively, these elements enabled me to trace aspects of continuity between the worldviews and practices reported to have been *in situ* prior to the arrival of Christianity (or outside of its sphere of influence, once present) and contemporary worldviews and practices. This has provided a considerable corpus of evidence to suggest that autochthonous worldviews and practices survive – whether in intact, evolved, negotiated, or revived forms – and are far from ‘obsolete’ (Hiltunen 1993:10).

Here, I summarise only the most prominent examples arising from this study and whilst doing so, I am conscious that not every participant recognised or

related to every aspect. In some cases, an interpretation was presented and might be assented to by some participants and yet vehemently denied by others. One such example was adornment with strings of beads (*omagwe*): whilst many people reported to me that these served an apotropaic, anti-witchcraft function (the children, in particular), others forcefully rejected such an interpretation and instead suggested that *omagwe* around the waist of a young girl distinguished her from a male child (the women's group). At other points, the adult groups related aspects of 'traditional' beliefs and/or practices that the children were not familiar with (for example, the women spoke of the shadow as part of the person, which the children had not encountered). There was disagreement, too, over *oonganga* (diviner-healers) and traditional healing methods: Tatekulu Laban Iyambo was not familiar with healing through touch, and suggested that *oonganga* were no longer existent in contemporary Ondonga. However, at least some of the women and children did know of touch-centred healing methods and the operation of *oonganga* (Meme Maria Kashowa, Meme Beata Mbinga, Ester Nicodemus); additionally, Memekulu Rauha Andreas reported that neighbours might suggest, in the case of particular conditions, that visiting an *onganga* is the only way to achieve relief. Overall, the children's groups were often much more forthcoming with information about matters 'traditional', the discussion of which I feared might be taboo (*oshidhila*).

I have attempted throughout the project to demonstrate the diversity of responses returned during my fieldwork in an effort to avoid homogenising the lihongo residents. Nevertheless, certain themes deserve mention due to the fact that they would seem to be particularly prevalent and prominent in the worldviews and/or practices of the majority of the participants. Together, these challenge the claim made by McKittrick (with which I opened my study) that 'from the perspective of the 1990s, ... virtually all indigenous religious practice, from male initiation to rainmaking to offering sacrifices to ancestors, had vanished' (2002:1).

The Persistence of Autochthonous Worldviews and Practices: Bodies

The CBS discussions, especially those concerning healing and Ndonga weddings, demonstrate that bodies (including what they consume) index persistent elements of autochthonous worldviews and practices. Chapter 5 involved an exploration of connotations, agency and uses of blood; among the latter, it became clear that autochthonous healing practices were still in use, such as the use of blood from cuts (*oonsha*) made to the eyebrows or upper cheeks to salve eye pain, although there was no mention of blood-letting, which had been a treatment in the autochthonous healing tradition. This chapter also explored enduring autochthonous perspectives on the body as but one part of the 'extended person', with some believing that the individual was also present in their shadow, clothing, image and imprint (the latter influencing, for example, the relocation of the *ehale* upon the death of a household head). Overall, there were several references made to healing bodies using *oonganga*, whose continuing significance was suggested by Koppe (1995), Isaak (1997:9), and de Jongh (1998). However, references to 'fake' *oonganga* and the duping of customers were suggestive of a decline in people's confidence in traditional medicine. Nowadays, most rely on biomedical treatment, and it is with Christianity that many associated hospitals.

The body's vulnerability to spirits and witchcraft – evidence of which is considerable in ethnographic literature, reports of strangulation by *iiluli*, and in perceptions of disability and sickness today (e.g. Uushona: Interview, 23.06.2015) – means that it is the body that is the site for the apotropaic materials (*omagwe* beads) that might protect it (Chapter 5). It was also the body that proved to be the link between the physical and spiritual person: the corpse's location designated the 'home area' of the person post-mortem, whilst their continued existence in a restful or restless state was contingent upon satisfactory treatment of the corpse (including corpse-mutilation) (Chapter 6). The body has been a site of resistance and reclamation, too, with contemporary hybrid forms of clothing speaking to the pre-Christian past: whether in the form of today's 'traditional' women's dresses (*oohema dhontulo*, Shigwedha 2006:181-2), 'traditional' dance clothing (Waugh 2014:202-5) and 'traditional' clothing at weddings (Chapter 4).



Figure 44: Owambo Basket (*Ontungwa*) Containing Wild Spinach (Used to Make *Omakaka*)

The wedding, a significant point in the life-cycle, was also one of the key rituals at which autochthonous worldviews and practices regarding the (feasting) body came to the fore (Chapter 4). There was the symbolic eating of *omakaka* (disks of wild spinach) by the groom, the necessity of certain figures having 'local chicken' to eat, the correct order for people to be served their food (food acting here as a status indicator) and the consumption of the slaughtered ox by the wedding guests. The perception was that there must be both 'traditional' and 'modern' foods at the feast: *omakaka* (disks of spinach), chicken, *oshimbombo* (millet porridge), *omalovu giilya* (millet beer), and ox meat fulfill the requirement for the 'traditional', whilst bottled beer, bottled soft drinks, pasta and potato salads all point to the 'modern'.

Our discussions of the wedding – in particular, the spilling of the ox-blood – also led to the explanation of the relationship between animal bodies and human bodies (people and cattle), with cattle being used to 'pay' for the bride at the wedding. The slaughter of cattle as payment also arose in the context of remedying blood-guilt (*uutoni*), again in some way demonstrating equivalence between the value of an ox and the value of a human being (notably, enforceable by traditional authorities). The spilling of cattle blood into the land was perhaps suggestive of the continuing maintenance of ancestral ties, as the

animals are 'a means to get in touch with the ancestors' (Aarni 1982:63). There is also an interpersonal connection demonstrated by the division of the carcass into symbolic sections at the wedding, with predetermined cuts being set aside to give to persons of significance – the namesakes (*oombushe*), the 'second fathers' (*oohegona*). Whilst these may not have the magic symbolism that they once did, it is safe to say that the continued division of the carcass serves as a reminder that autochthonous understandings of place – familial and intra-community relationships – still hold considerable sway.

The Persistence of Autochthonous Worldviews and Practices: Spirits

It was with regard to the spirit complex, or community, that this study revealed very strong connections with autochthonous beliefs and practices. Understandings of this aspect influenced, both historically and contemporaneously, constructions of the individual's relation to the group – a person's place in the community. This study has illustrated quite clearly the contemporary prominence of belief in spirits, ancestors, and witches as part of people's lived experience in lihongo (*iiluli*: named, recently-deceased; *aathithi*: unnamed, long-deceased; *aalodhi*: witches) (Chapters 6, 7, 8). This counters Hiltunen's claim that 'the belief in [witchcraft and sorcery] has vanished' (1986:157). Groop (2010) related that episodes of mass hysteria and collapse in school pupils found explanations in autochthonous spirits; this accords with the findings of the current study: such spirits are of continuing significance. I have also demonstrated that practices accompany current beliefs in spirit beings, such as the wearing of amulets against witchcraft, symbolically closing the homestead against spirit penetration, advertising for and (potential) visits to diviner-healers (*oonganga*), or pouring libations to ancestors.

Oshimbombo used to be used to make offerings to the ancestors or the spirits of East and West, for example at first harvest. However, such practices were not reported in this study; they may have fallen out of practice. Nonetheless, to make offerings of comestibles has not entirely disappeared from contemporary practice in lihongo. Despite the ancestors falling into the category autochthonous belief 'not compatible with Christianity' (Waugh 2014:180), their significance endures, demonstrated through the making of (local beer) libations

in order to traverse *aathithi* burial grounds without hindrance (Chapter 6 & 8; contra MicKittrick's claim, above). Further demonstration of the persistence of food-related beliefs in connection with *Spirits* was the instruction not to pour drinks (or serve food) to others lest witchcraft be transmitted through those substances.

The Persistence of Autochthonous Worldview: Landscapes

The community would appear to extend beyond just its living members (an extended social landscape, just as would have been the case in pre-Christian times). The persistence of the autochthonous in this regard is further illustrated by the descriptions participants gave of the nature of the physical landscape (Chapter 6). This I described as a *living landscape*, wishing to convey the extent to which spirits and ancestors were understood (as reported in the ethnographic literature) and continue to be understood as rooted, placed beings. Participants across the age-range recognised the notion of 'spirit groves' that ethnographic studies describe, and could identify particular examples of possessed places. Furthermore, the spirit complex still extends into understandings of natural phenomena, with the identification of storms with spirit forces being prevalent (Chapter 7).

Autochthonous understandings of landscapes also informed interpretations of the Parable of the Wedding Banquet (Chapter 4). The extent to which the contemporary *ohango* (wedding) is dependent upon one of its forerunners, the *ohango yokutselela* (wedding of the ox), became apparent (the church ceremony is, in terms of time, a distinctly brief part of the community celebration). The largely homestead-based festivities lasted over a week (from the announcement of the wedding and associated celebrations one weekend to the marriage ceremony and feasting the following weekend). There were also echoes the tradition of gift-giving by the groom to the bride (*iigonda*) and of the *ohango yiitsali* (wedding of the tents; the initiation rite) with the erection of the *etsali* (bush tent) at the homestead for special wedding guests.

lihongo Interpretations in Dialogue with the Academy

The second focus of my chapters was to bring the lihongo interpretations into dialogue with professional biblical scholarship (RQ3:MA3), seeking alternative interpretations and allowing the 'contextual' nature of the CBS contributions to speak to the similarly contextual nature of certain streams of (mainly) Western scholarship.

Chapter 4 considered models of table-fellowship in conjunction with the wedding banquet texts, the participants' interpretations of which had returned material readings. I suggested in this chapter that the feast aspect of the Matthean and Lukan narratives might be fruitfully developed (informed by the descriptions and experiences of Ndonga community-focused wedding celebrations), which would provide for a more comfortable fit in the open-commensality analogy.

Chapter 5 noted that traditional historical-critical Western scholars have often highlighted the 'magical' aspects of Mark 5:21-43 and other Markan narratives, in part because of the way in which the haemorrhaging woman touches Jesus' cloak. However, the lihongo interpretations suggested that blood, clothing and the shadow might be considered *part* of the person – here, I engaged with alternative anthropological constructs of personhood. This demonstrated that certain Western scholars' 'magical' designation may illustrate more about their contextual location than is acknowledged. It was notable, too, that the lihongo interpreters did not dwell on issues of purity; in this case, a context which has concerns with purity did necessitate purity interpretations. The understandings of personhood that the CBS sessions revealed also offer alternative paths of interpretation to those often pursued in professional biblical criticism.

Notions of the *living landscape* informed understandings of Legion's possession and the spaces he occupied, as well as highlighting the land as a neglected aspect in professional biblical scholarship (Chapter 6). Considering spirit beings to be or cause natural phenomena influenced interpretations of the Markan 'nature miracles' and allowed me to support the case for interpreting the Calming of the Storm as an exorcism (Chapter 7). Both of the aforementioned

chapters illustrated the extent to which mainstream Western scholarship is often unreflective about its own contextual setting, which has engendered a trend to relegate spirit-beings to the 'symbolic'. This contrasted with worldviews in lihongo, within which spirits are part of the lived reality of the community.

In terms of post-mortem existence and interaction, *iiluli* (restless spirits) are reported to be very real and experienced in waking and dream states. They have often been described by participants as invisible and 'merely' spiritual, although visual and physical engagement has been noted. There is, I have suggested, a level of ambiguity in this area. *Aathithi* (restful, ancestral spirits), on the other hand, whilst widely known, are less frequently experienced. That the *aathithi* were both placed (in kin and clan, as well as in the landscape) and restful (never to return) had significant bearing for the lihongo interpreters' understandings of how Jesus related to ancestors (Chapter 8). They rejected Ancestor Christology and, I would argue, notions of place were central to the fact that the metaphor failed to fit: the *aathithi* are necessarily local and they, as members of their Ndonga community, are buried in Ndonga land, from which they will not reemerge.

The Persistence or Absence of the 'Traditional'

What links many of the above aspects together is the issue of language and translation. In terms of cosmology, it seems highly likely that the 'grafting' of the immanent, personal, Christian God onto the remote and impersonal, indigenous *Kalunga* cannot have assisted in the divorce from autochthonous worldviews that the early missionaries sought. It may also be that the appropriation of autochthonous terms for use in the vernacular Bible has contributed to the persistence of belief in witchcraft (*uulodhi*; e.g. Num. 23:23), ancestors (*aathithi*; e.g. Deut. 18:11), and restless spirits (*oshiluli*; e.g. Luke 24:37), despite the vehemence of the missionaries that those elements must be eliminated. Likewise, the fact that the contemporary wedding is called an *ohango* suggests that it shares qualities with the pre-Christian *ohango*. The continued use of the word (the missionaries wished to eliminate the *ohango yiitsali* initiation but did not prevent the *ohango yokutselela* from continuing) actually enabled the

maintenance of autochthonous practice and the symbolic world of the feast and rituals in the first place.

It is suggested that we understand our experience of the world through the language we use to describe it. If that is the case, the extent to which Christian concepts have been described in terms borrowed from autochthonous worldviews must have contributed to current conceptual frameworks. Quite simply, autochthonous, pre-Christian concepts (manifesting in beliefs and practices) remain influential in the shaping of the contemporary Christian because the former has been imported into the latter's consciousness in the form of terminology, which makes for enduring conceptual reference to pre-Christian realities (with Christian perspectives going on to influence reflections on 'local culture', as well). The autochthonous informs the Christian, then, whether one is talking about language, worldview or practice, as has been shown in this study.

There were, of course, aspects of the worldviews and practices described in ethnographic literature that did not seem to have a place in lihongo in 2014 and these were often expressly stated to have been determined by Christianity to be inappropriate (from issues of abortion and initiation to not keeping certain non-alcoholic drinks on church property and not wearing 'traditional' clothing in church). A complex combination of other factors would have aligned to determine Christianity's level of success in displacing autochthonous worldviews and practices. For example, the extent to which the missionaries approved or disapproved of each belief or practice affected its survival, as did the spatial sphere within which any given belief or practice was situated (was it operational in a sphere in which the Church got involved?).

There was a sense amongst the participants that the homestead was more 'traditional' (with Shigwedha 2006:215) and that they paid more attention to Christian matters when physically at church services. Whilst this might seem obvious – one focuses on 'religious' things whilst in a religious service – it may also point towards the fact that mission and church buildings functioned, in the early days, as physical sanctuaries (the security the religion and their buildings provided is argued to be part of the original appeal of Christianity in the area

[McKittrick 2002]). The association between things Christian and a physical Christian space may have endured. Meanwhile, the missionaries must have focused less on household and wild spaces, concerned as they were with teaching and learning at mission stations. Furthermore, autochthonous beliefs and practices do not (a) separate religious and mundane aspects of life and, (b) have never been located in a physical building – there was/is no Ndonga or Owambo place of worship (Nambala: Interview, 23.06.2015). Rather, the autochthonous might be everywhere *but* designated Christian spaces.

However, it is important to note that differences in gender and age intersect with varying levels of Christian religiosity and result in heterogeneous understandings of the role of local culture. A woman's role as the primary manager of the homestead (the 'nucleus of traditional values' [Shigwedha 2006:215]) will undoubtedly distinguish her experience of the interaction between Christianity and autochthonous worldviews and practices. A man's focus on his livestock and the landscape will influence his. The religiosity of either will influence their relative responses to issues of 'tradition'. Increased age may carry with it vestiges of the polarising attitudes of the missionaries to autochthonous worldviews and practices; certainly, the adults mentioned on several occasions that certain practices had been disallowed by the missionaries or 'the church' (abortion, *ohango yiitsali*, etc.), and the women often seemed hesitant regarding the discussion of traditional matters when in bigger groups. Younger participants were often more vocal about sensitive topics (e.g. witchcraft), but sometimes had no knowledge of autochthonous understandings that older participants had mentioned (a person being accessible through their shadow): their experience is undoubtedly affected by the Western-influenced education systems that they are embedded in. In sum, disunity of experience and opinion is to be expected and illustrates that there is no uniform cultural 'text' to which we might refer.

Perhaps the most unifying areas, however, were the landscape and the spirit community. In contemporary lihongo, this provided the most obvious illustration of pre-Christian understandings being brought to bear on the contemporary Christian environment through the interpretation of New Testament texts. Community and landscape cannot be divorced from autochthonous notions of

the living-and-dead community, together inhabiting a *living landscape*. This landscape, physical and spiritual, is the stage for the interaction of autochthonous and Christian worldviews as has been demonstrated here through a series of contextual interpretations; the *autochthonous* (indigenous) has surfaced most clearly in consideration of matters *chthonic* (those of the spirit-inhabit land).

That any one of the above beliefs and practices was discussed in the CBS sessions does not necessarily mean that it was operational in contemporary Iihongo. Certainly, there may have been issues in translation: 'x was believed/practiced' could have been rendered 'x is believed/practiced'. Certainly, it was sometimes unclear to me whether we were discussing events contributors had experienced themselves or had heard reported. At least sometimes, though, definitive testimony was given that autochthonous beliefs and practices endured. Nevertheless, when any given belief or practice is mentioned, the very least that can be ascertained is that it is a feature of current consciousness, whether reflectively reviewed as past belief/practice, passed on in oral testimony and then related in discussion, or a feature of contemporary belief/practice.

In my experience, people were not 'unwilling to disclose any knowledge of [autochthonous worldviews] to an outsider' (Aarni 1982:9-10) and the results of this study illustrate, amongst other things, the very opposite of Hiltunen's claim: that 'the belief in [witchcraft and sorcery] has vanished' (1986:157). Furthermore, the contemporary reality of and concern with spirits, fear of bewitching, reported use of diviner-healers, and the wearing of apotropaic beads clearly demonstrates that another grand claim is false: 'good and bad magic has been made obsolete' because of the introduction of Christianity (Hiltunen 1993:10). Rather, and with Groop (2010:156), belief in 'witchcraft and ancestor spirits' endures, despite disapproval (2010:161), and worldviews 'intertwine' (2010:166; cf. Koppe 1995:12).

In Chapter 1, I cited Meredith McKittrick's statement that there 'initially was not a rigorous separation between "Christian" and "pagan" but rather an intermingling, as people partook of the feasts, rituals, and beliefs of both'

(2002:117). Given how extensively autochthonous worldviews persist, and the way in which the systems interact, I would argue the same could be said now: the participants in lihongo felt the significance of 'culture' (*omuthigululwakalo*) keenly, just as they did that of Christianity (*uukristi*). Nürnberger's rather generalising argument appears to apply to this particular context: 'the basic assumptions of the original African view of reality are not left behind when people convert to Christianity' (2007:16).

What was quite notable, however, was that a conceptual division has been maintained between what is 'cultural' and what is 'Christian'. Participants may have seen the systems as parallel or mutually supportive ('like brother and sister') but they were nonetheless differentiated: that an individual might have two names (*Oshindonga* and Christian/Western) or sleep (or dress, or address natural phenomena) 'in culture' rather than 'in Christianity', for example, makes clear the distinction between the autochthonous realm and the Christian realm. There are, therefore, multiple ways in which the Ndonga and Christian worldviews and practices relate: distinction, parallelism, interpenetration, and hybridity. The socio-cultural and religious landscape is, above all, dynamic.

*Bodies, Spirits, and the Living Landscape:
Interpreting the Bible in Owamboland,
Namibia*

Volume 2 of 2

Submitted by Helen Catherine John to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Theology
in February 2016

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Signature:

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Appendix I: Ethical Considerations

There were several important ethical considerations to bear in mind when conducting this study and when living in the lihongo community. One of the limitations of the investigation into Ndonga worldviews and practices was the extent to which I was able to engage individual community members in dialogue, being dependent upon the services of a translator (to whom I had limited access). In terms of interviewing, then, the research focused on information that members of the community wished to share in 'free-form' discussions (McKittrick 2002:16), as opposed to a researcher-led, multiple- and direct-questioning technique. In this way, the CBS sessions became the arena for explicit questioning about the lihongo Ndonga cultural context. However, this brought its own difficulties; there are potential ethical complications with asking people to reveal (insider, possibly *oshidhila* [taboo]) information in a public forum.

It is important to remember that historically there existed a certain taboo surrounding the revelation of tribal secrets. According to Hiltunen, 'a person who revealed secret matters to outsiders drew a deadly peril upon him' (1993:16). However, Hiltunen also notes that once someone has left the 'old religion', that taboo no longer applies. Nevertheless, I remained concerned; I was less worried about the taboo surrounding revelation of information than I was about community members not wishing to be seen to affirm 'traditional' beliefs in what is now a Christian context with a high level of religiosity. It is asking a great deal to request of community members that they make public such affiliations and practices. The weight of responsibility rested with me, the researcher, to make participants feel comfortable and to assure them that they ought not feel to pressured to proffer contributions. Encouraging reflections on the context rather than personal revelation was one way I tried to achieve this. The worst possible outcome would have been for an lihongo resident to be stigmatised or have their status in the community compromised as a result of my investigations.

One possible means of mitigating this difficulty might have been the automatic imposition of anonymity on all transcripts. This comes with its own difficulties, however. In some contexts, it is not culturally appropriate to divest someone of their name – that may be an indicator of a devaluation of their contribution. It is notable that all of the socio-historical and ethnographic works on Owambo communities that I was able to source have lists of contributors/participants as appendices. Most people are listed by name, not by pseudonym (Aarni 1982:166; McKittrick 2002:290-292; Miettinen 2005:352-353; Nampala 2006:106; Shigwedha 2006:267-268; Brasche 2009:271-2, 276). This is also the case in missionary collections (e.g. the Emil Liljeblad Collection in Hiltunen 1993:226-229). Indeed, having asked all of the contributors, the vast majority requested that their real names be used.

A parallel concern regarding levels of revelation was how much I, as the researcher, should reveal about myself and the aim of the study. Given the high level of religiosity in lihongo and the way in which (historically) *uukristi* and *uupagani* have been polarised, it was likely that the 'old beliefs' would not be held (at least, openly) in the highest esteem. Would the community withhold information and talk less openly if they knew that I was looking for the continued influence of traditional culture on their contemporary society and worldviews? If so, would it have been ethical to conceal the true direction of my study in order to facilitate the most open dialogue? I concluded that it was not ethical to conceal the actual focus of the study and nor did I wish to live in the lihongo community under false pretences. I made it plain to the community that I was concerned with the interaction between traditional culture and contemporary worldviews and practices, although I did not highlight traditional 'beliefs' or 'religion' as a focus. This is because, as suggested in this study, such a binary opposition between religious and non-religious is a peculiarly Western preoccupation and one that is not appropriate for this context. 'Traditional culture,' suggested Gerald West (private conversation, 12th April 2012), would be a more appropriate frame of reference.

And what of revelations about myself? 'Deciding the right type and amount of self-revelation and getting it in the right places requires juggling scholarly, aesthetic, and moral agendas, something that can never be done formulaically'

(Brown 2002:133). In previous visits, I have already explained that I am not a Christian and my friend has explained to those who have requested information about my studies that my interest in things religious is an academic one. As with answering other queries, I would argue that to answer honestly is a necessity, both because it is ethically correct and because that is what I hope the lihongo participants would do if and when they got involved in the study.

Finally, there is the question of what this study (and researcher) does and should contribute towards the well-being of the community itself. With regard to compensation for participation in interviews and CBS sessions, nothing other than refreshments was offered because the results might otherwise be skewed. However, it is understood that a financial payment or donation is expected in certain circumstances (when seeking an audience with authority figures) and that traditional authority must be respected in terms of 'the method in which participants are contacted, the place of the interview, appropriate respect in conduct and questioning, and remuneration' (Brasche 2009:274). Brasche suggests that this is the case if one secures an audience with the Ndonga King (King Kauluma), for example. She delivered the appropriate donation, but only after the interview had taken place, so as not to appear to be offering some form of coercive payment (2009:273). Aside from ordinary economic investment in the local economy and my own investment in friendships with community members, this study's primary contribution was to the literacy, educational enrichment, and empowerment of those who participated in the group meetings.

Appendix II: Index of Participants

Unless otherwise indicated (e.g. 'interview' or 'correspondence'), all participants engaged in CBS sessions as permanent or part-time residents of the village of lihongo, near Ondangwa. Only those who made verbal contributions in the sessions they attended (and therefore appear in the transcripts) are listed. 76 people made contributions out of a total attendance of approximately 107.

Titles: Meme = 'Mother' [Respectful title for a woman]
Memekulu = 'Grandmother' [Respectful title for senior woman]
Tate = 'Father' [Respectful title for man]
Tatekulu = 'Grandfather' [Respectful title for senior man]

Oomeme [Women] (Total: 25)

Meme ANON1	Meme Hannah Mbeeli
Memekulu Rauha Andreas	Meme Beata Mbinga
Meme Elizabeth Shoopala Ekandjo	Memekulu Viktoria Mvula
Memekulu Selma Iikwiyu	Meme Frieda Nahambo
Memekulu Julia Iiyambo	Reverend Aluhe Nahango
Meme Paulina Inane	Memekulu Frieda Namugongo
Meme Diina Itila	Meme Lucia Namushinga (correspondence)
Memekulu Marta Iyambo	Memekulu Maria Nangolo
Memekulu Hilya Johannes	Meme Selma Nangombe
Memekulu Marta Kaluapa	Memekulu Hileni Nendongo
Meme Maria Kashowa	Meme Monika Shipa
Memekulu Maria Kondo	Memekulu Selma Tomas
Memekulu Hilma Lugambo	

Ootate [Men] (Total: 5)

Tatekulu Herman Iyambo
Tatekulu Laban Iyambo
Tatekulu Theophilus Iyambo
Reverend Dr. Shekutaamba V. V. Nambala

- Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN).
- Private Interview 23.06.2015, ELCIN Headquarters, Oniipa.

Reverend Thomas Uushona

- Pastor, ELCIN, and Editor of ELCIN Newspaper.
- Translator and co-facilitator for all CBS sessions.
- Private Interview 23.06.2015, ELCIN Headquarters, Oniipa.
- Contributor through private correspondence.

Aanona [Children] (Total: 48)

Okanona ANON1	Tangeni Fillemon
Okanona ANON2	Hileni Iyambo
Okanona ANON3	Anna Ikukutu
Okanona ANON4	Hilma Ikukutu
Okanona ANON5	Johannes Ikukutu
Okanona ANON6	Silas Ikukutu
Okanona ANON7	Ananias Imbondi
Okanona ANON8	Elizabeth Imbondi
Okanona ANON9	Christa Iyambo
Okanona ANON10	Merjam Iyambo
Okanona ANON11	Kristofina Johannes
Okanona ANON12	Maria Johannes
Okanona ANON13	Selma Kwedhi
Simon Abner	Erastus Kuutondokwa
Immanuel Amagulu	Saara Maria Msati
Frieda Ananias	Martha Nangolo
Rubeni Ananias	Albertina Nicodemus
Eli Awala	Ester Nicodemus
Klaudia Ashikuti	Loide Petrus
Beata David	Lemisia Pinihas
Loide Elago	Timoteus Pinihas
Monica Emvula	Ruben Pinihas
Frieda Shilemba	Sipora Simon
Wilbartina Teofelus	Eliaser Uushona

Appendix III: CBS Transcripts in Chapter Order (Women, Men, Children)

The following notes describe the procedure for every CBS session in lihongo.

Facilitator (HCJ): Helen C. John
Translator: Reverend Thomas Uushona (Based at ELCIN Headquarters, Oniipa). From Onyaanya (about 15km away). Editor of ELCIN newspaper.

Practical Introduction:

HCJ explained that she would be conducting the session in English because her *Oshindonga* is not good enough, but that Reverend Thomas would be translating for her and for the participants.

HCJ offered explanation of desire to use contributions in written work and that these contributions could be made anonymous if desired. Additionally, whether named or anonymous contributions were to be preferred, participants can change their mind about anonymity at any point. She stressed that she cannot use the contributions of anyone who does not demonstrate consent by formally giving their consent (or that of parent/guardian to show that they agree that the child is allowed to take part).

HCJ explained that voice-recording devices were being used to enable her to write up the discussion. However, the audio recordings themselves would not be retained long-term.

HCJ gave some photocopies of the text to the group but encouraged any who preferred to listen to the story to do so, rather than be too concerned about following the text.

Opening statement:

'My project involves finding out about how people in the lihongo community interpret biblical texts. I am interested in your understanding of the text and how your life experience and culture relates to the text. Please feel comfortable to offer any contribution you would like to. There is no right answer and no wrong answer. All of your thoughts will be much appreciated. I hope we can have an open discussion. You are the experts here and I hope that together we can arrive at an lihongo-centred understanding of the texts we look at.'

HCJ asked Translator to read out the passage to the group. The text is taken from the GNT *Oshindonga*.

CBS 0a: OoMemekulu (Elder women), OoMeme (Women)

Date: 12.03.2014

Text: John 9:1-12 (Practice Text)

Participants (Transcript Reference):

1. Memekulu Frieda Namugongo (Kuku Frieda)
2. Memekulu Julia Iyambo (Kuku Julia)
3. Memekulu Marta Iyambo (Kuku Marta I.)
4. Meme Selma Nangombe (Meme Selma)
5. Memekulu Maria Kondo (Kuku Maria)
6. Meme ANON1 (Meme ANON1)
7. Memekulu Marta Kaluapa (Kuku Marta K.) (late arrival)
8. Meme Maria Kashowa (Meme Maria) (late arrival)
9. Reverend Aluhe Nahango (Silent observer for last half-hour)

3:30pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

4:00pm – discussion

Discussion:

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

Q1: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

Kuku Julia: The story emphasizes the power of Jesus as he heals the man.

Kuku Marta I.: (Points us to v.2) The disciples want feedback on why the man is blind. This is a key part of the text.

Kuku Frieda: (Points us to v.3) The blindness could have been to do with punishment but Jesus is clear that no, the blind man is so because of the power of God.

Kuku Maria: (Points us to v.3) This shows that the power of Jesus is to be revealed in his action.

Meme ANON1: Can we ask questions? [HCJ: yes, please do]
v.1: Where is Jesus going?
v.7: With whom is he going to the pool? How can he get there alone?

HCJ: Does anybody have any responses to Meme ANON1's questions?

- Kuku Julia: He can get to the pool through the power of Jesus' words alone or perhaps through familiarity as he would probably have been there before with other people.
- Translator: May I offer a contribution? [HCJ: yes, please do]
I think that maybe the man has sight through the mud. It is the spit and earth that heals him. He is sent to the pool just to wash off the mud.
- Meme ANON1: I want to ask again where Jesus is going (v.1).
- HCJ: At this point in the text he is based in Jerusalem. The text is not specific but I think we have to assume that he is walking in the Jerusalem area. However, we cannot pinpoint the destination.
- Q2: In this story, Jesus heals the blind man by making mud, using spittle and earth, and putting it on the blind man's eyes. After washing his face in the pool, the man can see. Are you aware of this form of healing, or anything similar, happening in your context?
- Kuku Marta I.: There is something similar. This might happen if you have a child with sickness in the eyes. People make cuts in the upper cheeks (below eyes) and put the blood that is released into the eyes. This is for eye pain, specifically.
- Kuku Julia: For eye pain there was a herb (*okandombo*) that was used in the eyes. [Someone reports that this is Aloe Vera]. This is not for blindness, though.
- Q3: Why do you think Jesus uses (i) spit, (ii) earth, and (iii) the pool as tools of healing? What is the role and importance of each?
- Re SPIT:
- Kuku Julia: The spit and the mud/earth (check?) and the pool combine the power of God. It's like baptism – water combined with the power of God.
- Kuku Frieda: (Indicates that she was going to say the same)
- Meme ANON1: (Indicates that she was going to say the same)
- HCJ: But why do you think he used these things, exactly?
Couldn't he just have touched the man or something else?
Why did he use spit, earth and the pool?
- Meme ANON1: Jesus is under God's power. God directed him to use these tools. She adds that v.4 emphasises that 'we are doing God's work'.

- Kuku Frieda: On the other hand, he is testing the blind man as he must go to the pool to be healed.
- Meme Maria: The three tools stand for the Trinity. The man is healed by the Trinity.
- HCJ: In an Ndonga context, is there any significance to spit, earth or water?
- Meme ANON1: Water can heal.
- Kuku Marta I.: Spit can also heal. For example, it can heal wounds, if there are wounds anywhere on the body.
- Kuku Maria: Water can also heal because if there is any wound on the body you get up early in the morning and put water in your mouth and then spit it onto the wound.
- Meme Selma: (Emphasises the significance of water) If a child is sick or 'paining in the eyes' you must take water and wash the eyes early in the morning. It must be cold water.
- Kuku Frieda: If you wash your face with cold water it will heal the eyes.
- Translator: What about hot water?
- Kuku Frieda: Hot water can be used on any swelling on the body.
- HCJ: Why must cold water be applied in the early morning?
- Kuku Maria: Because the sickness will be seen in the early morning when the person/child gets up, so you do it then.
- Kuku Frieda: You can heal with mud, too. If you boil earth with water you can put it on the place where the pain is. (Translator explains that you can put earth/mud in a plastic bag and then heat it in water and apply to the pain). If someone has back pain they should lie down on their front and then you put earth/mud in a [traditional *ontungwa*] basket and place it on the base of their back.
- Q4: What are the implications of blind eyes in your context? How are the man's eyes changed in the story? What significance would such a change have in your context?
- Meme Selma: To be blind is to be disabled.
- HCJ: What are you unable to do, exactly?
- Meme ANON1: To be blind is a pity. Nowadays, no one can heal them.

- Meme Selma: That person cannot assist himself to go anywhere.
- Kuku Frieda: The person you are thinking of: were they born blind or did they get ill and become blind? (She is thinking about what might have caused the blindness). Perhaps the mother was sick.
- Meme ANON1: She means maybe the mother was sick with an STD.
- HCJ: How are the blind man's eyes changed?
- Kuku Frieda: The blind man could not see and now he can. He changed from blindness to vision.
- Meme ANON1: The change happens as a result of faith. Faith is the key for his healing. Without faith, the power of God cannot do anything in you.
- Kuku Julia: (Emphasising faith aspect). Faith is the main key for the healing. He is sent by Jesus to the pool. The man believes and so goes to the pool. He goes and comes back as a different person.
- HCJ: What would be the significance of such a change in your context?
- Meme Maria: This person, in order to get vision, did they go to the hospital?
- HCJ: I'm really thinking about the *effects* of the change.
- Kuku Marta I.: It would be wonderful for them.
- Kuku Julia: Where did the assistance come from?
- HCJ: (Asked to clarify the question by Translator). How might life be different with vision rather than blindness in your context?
- (Asked to clarify again). For example, for me as someone who studies a lot, to be blind would mean that I could not read. Being given vision would allow me to read, which is important to me. What would be important in your context?
- Meme ANON1: With vision you can read the Bible, you can move around and go to places, you can sing (from the hymn book), you can work in the field and you can drive to Windhoek or Ondangwa.
- Kuku Marta K.: To have eyes is very important because you are safe. You can avoid any dangers like water [HCJ note: we are experiencing heavy rains and there are many lakes around

now] or fire. You can avoid places of danger like thorny ground.

HCJ: Perhaps we could have a second reading of the text and then see if there are any concluding thoughts?

Translator: Reads text again.

HCJ: Following our discussion, do you have any final thoughts about this text?

Kuku Marta K.: Do they know of him in this place?

HCJ: [I explained that Jesus would have been known of in this context by some but that this was not where he was from]. Why?

Kuku Marta K.: Maybe it was the first time to know him or hear about him.

HCJ: [I should have asked her to expand on this point and explain the significance.]

There were no more concluding thoughts so we brought the discussion to a close with thanks from me. I also explained that this was the first time I had done this and knew it wasn't perfect. I asked for any feedback or suggestions. There weren't really any, although the Memes expressed the fact that they had enjoyed the session. It had lasted 1hr 30 approx, after 30mins of chat, drinks and biscuits. Meme Selma asked when we were going to do the next session. I stated 2/4/2014. Translator asked if it was just this invited group or could the Memes invite others. I explained that I had not specifically invited this group – anyone who would like to is welcome and that, yes, they should spread the word. Kuku Julia asked if she could keep the photocopy. I need them for the next group but will get more done next time so that people can keep them if they wish to. I note that not everyone who would like one has a Bible.

END. Closed with thanks.

CBS 0b: OoTatekulu (Older Men), OoTate (Men)

Date: 14.08.2014

Text: John 9:1-12 (Practice Text)

Participants (Transcript Reference):

1. Tatekulu Laban Iyambo (LI)
2. Tatekulu Herman Iyambo (HI) (late arrival)

12:30pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

12:35pm – discussion

Discussion:

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

Q1: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

LI: I am interested to hear about the healing of the man born blind. I have never heard of someone born blind and cured.

Q2: In this story, Jesus heals the blind man by making mud, using spittle and earth, and putting it on the blind man's eyes. After washing his face in the pool, the man can see. Are you aware of this form of healing, or anything similar, happening in your context?

LI: I am very much interested to the story. Because in my life I have never heard about such healing in our community or tradition. So to hear about this person born blind it is surprising so the one who did it is a true healer.

HCJ: Are you familiar with anything similar from your context? So, for example, we were told about the use of blood to wash out and heal the eyes – have you heard of this?

LI: Yes, I heard about the method our people use to heal the eyes by cutting the eyebrows and using drops of blood to heal but that is a minor thing. To heal someone born blind is different. It is a major thing.

- Q3a: Why do you think Jesus uses SPIT to heal the man's eyes? What is special about SPIT?
- LI: Jesus is the different person. On the other hand he is a creator. He was at the beginning of the creation of the world. He is God. He uses the power given by God.
- HCJ: So, does his spit have special qualities?
- LI: Exactly.
- HCJ: Which special qualities?
- LI: The value of Jesus' spit, we cannot compare it. He is a human being and a spirit. He is a strong one. He can tell something to happen and it happens by command.
- HCJ: Is his spit an extension of him?
- LI: The power of Jesus is everywhere, even in his spit.
- HCJ: How is spit used in an Ndonga context? Perhaps in the past, or the present, by others, that you have heard of?
- LI: No idea.
- Q3b: Why do you think Jesus uses EARTH to heal the man's eyes? What is special about EARTH?
- LI: Jesus uses the mud plus spit to combine the power but the main power is from him.
- HCJ: He could choose lots of materials – leaves, plants, grass, etc – why does he choose earth?
- LI: He chooses the ground where they are standing or sitting and the ground is just like soap. You put it in the water and you use to make yourself clean. He uses the ground as a tool of healing. Jesus could use anything.
- Q3c: Why do you think Jesus uses WATER to heal the man's eyes? What is special about WATER?
- LI: There is not something in the water but he is sent there to wash away the mud.
- HCJ: So are you saying that the healing is complete before he goes to the pool?
- LI: I understand that the healing was complete.

- HCJ: Can he see through the mud then?
- LI: I think there was a difference. He can see through the mud but not clearly. He needs to wash it off to see clearly.
- HCJ: Are you familiar with any local methods of healing using mud or water?
- LI: I have never heard it before.
- [Confirmed with translator that one or more of the ladies yesterday described vision operating like a torch]
- HCJ: How do you think vision works? Is it more like a torch with light/vision coming out or does light/vision come into the eyes?
- LI: The light/vision is from the eyes outwards like a torch. For example, if you have a blind person, their eyes look normal from the outside but there is no light/vision coming out. They cannot see.
- Q4: What do you think about the man's situation being blind? What would his life be like?
- LI: He was in a very difficult condition. Because to stay without vision, not to see anything, is in the dark. It is a life in darkness.
- HCJ: What difficulties do you think he would face?
- LI: Many difficulties. For example, you want to go even to the toilet, you need someone to take you there. If you want something to eat, you need someone to prepare it for you. Whatever you need, you depend on someone.
- HCJ: We value our eyes and vision a great deal; what do you value your eyes for most?
- LI: The eyes play a major role in the human being. If I have no teeth but I have eyes, I am fine.
- Translator: We have a traditional proverb that suggests the eyes are the most important: *'kulupa nomeho mayego ndi ku taasnine'* [Grow old with your eyes. Your teeth – we will chew for you.]
- HCJ: You, personally, what do you need your eyes for, in particular?
- LI: I need my eyes throughout my life because it is the light of my body. If I want to do anything, I do it. Even to differentiate between bad and good, it is the eyes that see it and report to my mind: 'this is the good thing.'

Q5: Do you have any other thoughts about the story or anything that you think would help me to understand the text better?

LI: I am only learn through the story that to have Jesus you are protected because he can do the wonderful miracles for you. Like he healed the blind man. That is the indication to us that he can do the things that no one else can do. We have to trust in him throughout our lives.

END. Closed with thanks.

CBS 0c: Aanona (Children; s. *okanona*)

Date: 26.03.2014

Text: John 9:1-12 (Practice Text)

Participants (Transcript Reference):

- | | |
|------------------------|-------|
| 1. Eliaser Uushona | (EU) |
| 2. Wilbartina Teofelus | (WT) |
| 3. Hileni liyambo | (Hli) |
| 4. Ester Nicodemus | (EN) |
| 5. Maria Johannes | (MJ) |
| 6. Loide Elago | (LE) |
| 7. Okanona ANON3 | (O3) |
| 8. Selma Kwedhi | (SK) |
| 9. Kristofina Johannes | (KJ) |
| 10. Okanona ANON5 | (O5) |
| 11. Imanuel Amagulu | (IA) |
| 12. Loide Petrus | (LP) |
| 13. Martha Nangolo | (MN) |
| 14. Okanona ANON7 | (O7) |
| 15. Okanona ANON9 | (O9) |
| 16. Hilma Ikukutu | (HIK) |
| 17. Elizabeth Imbondi | (Elm) |
| 18. Anna Ikukutu | (Alk) |
| 19. Okanona ANON4 | (O4) |
| 20. Ananias Imbondi | (Alm) |
| 21. Okanona ANON12 | (O12) |
| 22. Okanona ANON13 | (O13) |
| 23. Okanona ANON1 | (O1) |

A further 22 (approx.) children attended but did not give contributions. They are therefore not named in the transcript.

3:30pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

4:00pm – discussion

Discussion (Questions have been reworded from the adult questions):

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

Q1: What are your first thoughts about this story? Which parts are particularly interesting or important in your view?

EU: I am interested in hearing about spitting on the ground and putting mud on the eyes. According to his understanding, God is the only one who is powerful and who can do such things.

- WF: I am interested in hearing that the person was blind but now he can see.
- Hli: To be a blind man does not mean that the parents were sinners but it was because God wanted to reveal his power through him.
- Q2: In this story, Jesus heals the blind man using mud made of spit and earth, and putting it on the blind man's eyes. The man must then go and wash his face in the pool. Afterwards he can see. Does this sound like any kind of healing that you know of?
- EU: No.
- EN: Yes. [HCJ: Please explain] If anybody is sick they are taken to hospital and they recover.
- Hli: Yes, because any person can be sick and if you take them to the traditional healer [*onganga*] they will recover. [HCJ: Would a traditional healer do anything similar to this?] The traditional healer can do meetings, something that can help you to heal. [HCJ: What would they do exactly?] The traditional healer can use water mixed with herbs and apply this to your body. [This was emphasized as generalized healing, not specific to the eyes]
- MJ: You can feel unwell and you can have a visit from the pastor and prayers will assist in healing.
- Q3a: Why does Jesus use spit to heal the man's eyes? What is special about spit?
- EN: In the spit there is the power of the Holy Spirit. [HCJ: Do you mean in the spit in the story, or in spit generally?] I mean in the story.
- LE: Because Jesus wants the man to get well.
- O3: Jesus uses the spit because he is the only one who knows the method to heal through spit.
- LE: I have only experienced a person with a wound going to the traditional healer [*onganga*] or the hospital.
- SK: I have only experienced if someone is coughing and they use herbs then they can become well.
- Hli: Anybody who is sick and the pastor comes and prays, they will become well.

- KJ: Yes, someone can become well. Spit can heal. [HCJ encouraged her to elaborate but nothing was forthcoming]
- O5: I have heard of spit healing. If you have a wound and a dog comes to lick the wound the wound can heal. This is a story I heard.
- IA: I have experienced general healing but if you do not see well in the night [oshiwiliwili, translator unable to offer English for this] then you take earthworms and put them on your eyes to see.
- LP: If you have any wound you apply salt water to the wound to become better.
- MN: If you have a runny nose then you take elephant dung to make it better. [Note: no access to elephant in this area. Old remedy? Dung brought into the area?]
- O7: Sometimes spit is dangerous like when some snakes spit and it can make you blind.
- EU: The spit can heal because spit dries on a wound and stops it bleeding.
- Q3b: Why does Jesus use earth to heal the man's eyes? What is special about earth?
- MJ: In the ground there is healing because man is made from the ground.
- Hli: He is healed with the ground because in the ground there is the power of God.
- O9: Energy.
- Q3c: Why does Jesus use water to heal the man's eyes? What is special about water?
- WF: In the water there is the power of God. [In all water?] In that water, not all water.
- LE: In the water there is the power of the Holy Spirit of God.
- EU: You can use water and put some herbs and put that water on wounds to heal.
- Q4:
a) What do you think the man's life would be like being blind?

- O7: Life would be very difficult because he cannot see. If you cannot see, you cannot see what is happening.
- Hlk: Their life is very difficult because they cannot go anywhere alone.
- O6: Life is difficult because you cannot move anywhere. You have to stay in one place.
- Alk: He cannot cook for himself.
- O3: Life is difficult because he cannot avoid dangers. [HCJ: What kind of dangers?] For example, he cannot get away if the house is burning.
- O4: He cannot cook for himself and he might get burned by the [cooking] fire.
- LP: He cannot go looking for a job to get money to help himself.
- EN: In the story it tells us that the man just sits in one place and begs from others. [HCJ: Why don't his parents and community support him?] Because he has nothing to do or offer tomorrow. [i.e. in return, in future]
- Al: If anyone wants to kill him he cannot see them.
- EU: Sometimes he will be walking barefoot and he won't see the ground or plants that will hurt him.
- O12: His life was difficult because he wouldn't know if it's day or night.
- SK: He can't see when his clothes need washing.
- LP: If he gets money and people want to steal it he can't see them.
- WF: Since he was born, he has never seen the world.
- Hli: He has never seen people's faces.

b) What do we do with our eyes? What can the eyes do?

- O13: We use our eyes to see, to see others.
- O1: To see animals and plants.
- Al: We use our eyes to see things happening and movement.
- EN: To read the Bible.

- LE: We use our eyes when we wash our clothes.
- O6: When you are writing you must use your eyes.
- EU: Your eyes can also be used to tell if it's day or night.
- Hli: To prevent ourselves from danger and harm.
- LE: The eyes are our light to show us where is the danger as we walk around. [HCJ: Do you mean that the eyes give out light?] Yes, the eyes give out light.
- Al: *Osho* (it is so). [LP and JA concur]

[HCJ asks for a show of hands of who agrees that this is how the eyes work – they give out light to enable us to see. About 22 children raise their hands. These are mostly those who are actively engaged in the discussion. At this point there are 40 children in the room.]

- HCJ: We are going to have a second reading of the story, so sit back and listen. Then we will see if anyone has any final comments.
- Translator: Reads text again.
- HCJ: Would you like to make any other comments about the story after hearing it again? Perhaps tell me anything you have found particularly interesting or that you think is particularly important.
- EN: I was interested by the story of Jesus healing the man to fulfill the power of God.
- O4: Jesus did that so that the community may know that Jesus is truly powerful.
- WF: I want to emphasise that the point of the story is that Jesus is the light of the world and that he is powerful.
- LE: Jesus is powerful and is the healer of all sicknesses.
- Hli: What does it mean to do our work while there is day? [HCJ explained that in the text Jesus refers to himself as the light of the world and that therefore God's works such as this healing needed to be done whilst he was in the world. Translator said the participant was happy with this explanation and that he had nothing to add.]

END. Closed with thanks.

CBS 4a: OoMemekulu (Elder women), OoMeme (Women)

Date: 07.05.2014

Texts: Matthew 22:1-14 & Luke 14:7-11

Participants (Transcript Reference):

1. Memekulu Frieda Namugongo (Kuku Frieda)
2. Memekulu Maria Kondo (Kuku Maria)
3. Meme Hannah Mbeeli (Meme Hannah)
4. Memekulu Julia Iiyambo (Kuku Julia)
5. Memekulu Selma Iikwiyu (Kuku Selma)
6. Memekulu Hileni Nendongo (Kuku Hileni)
7. Reverend Aluhe Nahango (Rev Aluhe)

3:30pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

4:00pm – discussion

Discussion:

Matthew 22:1-14 Wedding Banquets

Q1: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

No responses.

Weddings

Q2: What happens at a wedding in your community? For example:

a) What is the course of events?

Kuku Julia: First and foremost the fiancé and fiancée make an agreement to get married. After that they inform the parents on both sides and the parents also agree and both parents on both sides come together and make an agreement. Then in it is the beginning of the wedding arrangements.

b) Who is invited?

Kuku Frieda: To the *ohango* itself, the couple invites their friends and their parents invite the extended family and their friends, too.

- Kuku Maria: When the fiancés have told their mother and father, the parents tell the *ohogona* ('second father,' father's brother) and the *ombushe* (namesake, could be same person as *ohogona*).
- c) How is the seating arranged?
- Kuku Hileni: When there is *ohango* you have to prepare the *egumbo* to make it at its best. Then you slaughter a cow so that the guests have meat.
- Rev Aluhe: There are some particular places where people sit like the owners of the wedding, the father's family, the neighbours, the children. Special respect is shown to these groups. And a place is made for the pastor.
- d) Who does what in preparation for the *ohango*? And who does what during the event? Do people have special roles to play?
- Kuku Frieda: All the people involved in such a wedding should prepare, either the fiancés, the family, parents and others.
- Rev Aluhe: Nowadays people should come together and make a decision. The aim is to give each other responsibilities. Jobs are shared between all involved.
- Kuku Selma: There is a lot to do for an *ohango*. Parents they play a role on wedding events. The fiancé and fiancée they just inform their parents and then the parents start arranging the wedding. They go to look for *ohogona* (small father/second father) and all the people in the family and inform them about the *ohango*. And also they go to the pastor at church to inform him/her of the *ohango* date. The pastor also makes arrangements. And, particularly, the fiancé does a lot for the fiancée because he is the one who buys everything for his fiancée.
- e) What is consumed at the *ohango*?
- Kuku Frieda: One head of cattle and one goat go directly to the house of the fiancée from the fiancé. Those beasts should go there to the girl's house and be killed for the wedding. And they [fiancée's household] slaughter a head of cattle then the [one] foreleg from each animal goes to the fiancée's *ombushe* [namesake]. Other meat you cook. The ribs [*omapeta*] you take to your *ohogona*. The same applies at the man's house.
- f) Do people wear special clothing? Do they carry anything special?

- Kuku Frieda: The fiancée should carry a flower. So do the small boy and girl at the front of the procession [between homestead and church, church and homestead, homestead to homestead].
- Rev Aluhe: Guests carry ox tails or horse tails.
- Q3: Is that how you imagine the wedding feast in the text would be? If not, what might be different? Who would the king's guests be?
- Kuku Frieda: The difference here is that in the story the invited guests did not yet come but in our community if you are invited, you go.
- HCJ: Why? Must you go?
- Kuku Julia: If you are invited, you go to fulfill the invitation.
- HCJ: In the text, the *ohango* is being held by a king. How would that make it different?
- Kuku Hileni: This invitation is the comparison to the heavenly kingdom. We are invited to go to heaven but we are not believe to the invitation.
- Q4: At the end of the story, the king orders his servants to throw out a man who is not wearing 'wedding clothes' [n.b. *Oshindonga* has festival/feast clothes, not ohango/wedding clothes]. What do you understand by 'wedding clothes' and why does the king throw out this man?
- Kuku Selma: That the man has no wedding clothes while others are having. This means that even the idea is not similar.
- Q5: Why did he send 'other' servants when the people didn't come?
- Kuku Julia: The king was slaughtering and there was a lot of food in the house. And if the guests didn't come the food is wasting so he sent them to get people to come.
- HCJ: But why 'other' servants and not the same ones?
- Kuku Selma: The man is a king and he knows his people. He knows who wants to be sent away and those who don't want to. So he sent those who had the will to be sent.

Read Luke 14:7-11 Highest and Lowest Places

- Q6: In this passage, wedding feasts are also discussed. Jesus says you should not sit in the best place but go to the lowest place.
- a)
- Kuku Frieda: In the wedding feast all the places to sit are already arranged for the guests.
- HCJ: So what does Jesus mean?
- Kuku Frieda: Jesus means don't honour yourself. Be humble so that others will honour you.
- HCJ: What would be the 'best place' at an lihongo wedding?
- Kuku Hileni: In the wedding always there is a seat to sit on. And wherever you find the best seat, don't sit there until someone directs you to sit there unless you sit on the lowest chair.
- HCJ: Who would be important guests at an lihongo wedding?
- Meme Hannah: The very honoured guests are the bride and groom.
- Kuku Maria: The traditional leader [e.g. village headman], also, they are an important guest.
- Kuku Selma: The important guests in the wedding are the bride and groom, their *oombushe* [namesakes], the parents and the *oohegona* [pl. second father].
- b)
- Kuku Frieda: The lowest place in the wedding it is only when you go there but you stay at the entrance.
- Q7: Does a person's status in the community change once they are married?
- Kuku Selma: Status does change after marriage but only for the woman. Her surname changes to the same as her husband.
- Kuku Frieda: The change of status just means that that particular woman is married to that man and now they become one family.

END. Closed with thanks.

CBS 4b: OoTatekulu (Elder men), OoTate (men)

Date: 14.05.2014

Texts: Matthew 22:1-14 & Luke 14:7-11

Participants (Transcript Reference):

1. Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo (TI)

2:30pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

3:00pm – discussion

Discussion:

Matthew 22:1-14 Wedding Banquets

Q1: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

TI: In the story there is a parable of the king preparing the wedding banquet. [The term used in the text is *ohango*, which is the term used both in pre-Christian and Christian times in the region for the wedding and marriage feast.]

HCJ: Can you describe for me what you think that wedding banquet would be like?

TI: It was very difficult for the king to invite the guests but [and] the guests won't respond.

HCJ: Why do you think they won't respond?

TI: We can regard it as the guests were hard in their heart.

HCJ: What would the king have prepared for the wedding banquet? What would it be like?

TI: When you invite the guests to the wedding and they respond you become happy and prepare to serve them. But according to this there was no joy because they did not respond.

HCJ: Whom do you think the king would invite to a wedding for his son?

TI: According to the story, the guests invited avoided to come to the *ohango*.

HCJ: Who are those guests?

- TI: [Would like to read again and mull over. Time allowed]
According to the story the invitation is to the Kingdom of God. But the invited guests feel that they are not good enough to go into the Kingdom.
- Translator: We refer to the Royal Palace [of the Ndonga community] as the Kingdom.
- Q2: What are the important features of a wedding (*ohango*) in your community?
- TI: In our community, people like to attend *ohango*, even if he or she is not invited, they just come!
- HCJ: Who is invited, for example, if you are having an *ohango* for your son?
- TI: The father of the bridegroom and the bridegroom, they choose the guests.
- HCJ: Is there anyone who *must* be invited?
- TI: Yes, of course, all your friends, relatives, neighbours.
- HCJ: Anyone you would think of as 'important guests'?
- TI: The best man and best woman. And we have also the *aafali kongulu* ['carriers to the building'] who take the couple to the church. [The translator notes that these are the same people who would have delivered the individuals to baptism at the church]. The headman is not very important when it comes to *ohango* but the *ombushe* [namesake] and *ohegona* ['small father'/2nd father/father's brother] are more important.
- HCJ: Is there a special place for elders [*aakulupe*] at the *ohango*?
- TI: Yes, there is a special place for *aakulupe* in *ohango*. You isolate them. Either you take them to the *elugo* [outdoor kitchen area]. There is also a place for neighbours and also a place for family.
- HCJ: What about children?
- TI: The children are also very important in *ohango* because two of them they are one of the best man or woman. And the other children come together in the same place in *ohango* and are given food.

- HCJ: What food is served?
- TI: There is a lot of food at *ohango* because the cattle are slaughtered. There is goat, chicken, salad, rice and all kinds of food.
- HCJ: Which foods do you think of as 'traditional' and which as 'new' to *ohango*?
- TI: Traditional food we have a lot. We have porridge [*oshimbombo*], dried vegetable [*ekaka* – disks of dried wild spinach], marula oil and traditional beer [*omalovu gulya* – non-alcoholic]. But *ekaka* is very important in *ohango*. Because it is what the *aafuko* [bridal couple] must eat [at the *ohango*] before they eat another food.
- [Translator: Ohegona serves *omalovu gulya* to bride & groom at wedding feast table]
- HCJ: Why is that? [that *ekaka* must be what the couple eats first]
- TI: *Ekaka* is the food which is more important in traditional culture than other foods. The meaning is that a woman makes *ekaka* by pressing together [the boiled wild spinach] in the palms of her hands. This symbolises the couple being bound together.
- Translator: We have a saying: '*lya evada u vandale*' [Kwanyama, rather than Ndonga]: 'If you eat *ekaka*, you remain around your wife' – i.e. you don't stray into unfaithfulness.
- HCJ: Is there an order to how people are served food?
- TI: Yes, there is an order.
- HCJ: Who is served first?
- TI: The bride and groom are first to receive. Then the *ohegona* ['second fathers']. Then the *oombushe* [namesakes]. Then all invited guests.
- HCJ: Who does what in preparation for a wedding? What roles do particular people have during the event?
- TI: The parents are the ones who play a major role in the wedding preparation.
- HCJ: What is their major role?
- TI: The major role is that they should inform their families to do the preparation. The preparations include to find out where is the cattle to slaughter and to find out also whether the

owner of the wedding [the bride's father] has the cattle or not and to take care for the fiancée because she also receives cattle from the man's house.

HCJ: When the cattle are slaughtered, is all the meat eaten [at the *ohango*]?

TI: When you slaughter a cattle there is a certain part of the animal you must give to the *ohogona* ['second father'] and the other meat is eaten. And the remainder you allow to dry [as strips in the sun]. [dried meat: *ondhingu*]

HCJ: All that we have talked about, is that how you imagine the *ohango* in the story to be?

TI: As I said earlier, the wedding in the story would not be good because the invited guests turned down the invitation.

HCJ: The king did get some guests eventually; would this make up for it?

TI: These people from the streets they are a mix. Some are good and some are bad. And the idea of the king was to find any guests. The main aim was to eat the food he had prepared.

HCJ: Do you mean that he doesn't want to waste the food?

TI: Yes.

HCJ: Is it acceptable to turn down an invitation to *ohango*?

TI: It is not easy to turn down an offer to go to *ohango* but there are some things which can prevent us to accept the invitation. For example, death. If someone died somewhere, you go to mourn with others. Or other problems may find you.

HCJ: Do you think the reasons in the story were good reasons to turn down the invitation?

TI: Their reasons in the story were meaningless. Even the story itself [says so] in verse 5.

HCJ: Do you have any thoughts about verses 11-13?

[A man gets thrown out because he is not wearing 'wedding clothes'. In the *Oshindonga* translation, the term used is *oonguyo yoshituthi*, with *oshituthi* meaning feast. It is unclear why they used 'feast clothes' and not 'wedding clothes,' which would be *oonguyo yohango*.]

- TI: This verse is very difficult to think [about], because the king saw the man without wearing wedding clothes. It is hard to know because I don't know what the wedding dress was for that wedding.
- HCJ: Do people wear special clothing for weddings in your community?
- TI: When you compare with weddings in our community, the best man and best woman wear special dress. Also the women and men they wear special dress and that is a sign that they are the invited guests.
- HCJ: What would that special dress be?
- TI: They used to choose the cotton and that cotton should make the wedding outfits [dresses, shirts] for the family members.
- HCJ: Does anyone carry anything special?
- TI: Some people carry cooldrinks [soft drinks] as a contribution. And there is also a time for giving the gift. The guest may come with a gift and give it to *aafuko* [the couple]. Also, the father's brother [*ohogona*] comes to the *ohango* with a bow and arrows and a stick. The women carry *omushila gwoongombe* [ox tails].
- HCJ: Can you summarise what the man in the story is not wearing, or what he is wearing?
- TI: This means that without the wedding dress it means his behaviour is different from other guests. He is not the same as other guests.
- HCJ: Do you mean that it is more about his attitude?
- TI: Yes, yes.
- HCJ: What do you understand the meaning of the parable to be?
- TI: This parable teaches us to have a strong in faith.
- HCJ: Why do you think it uses the wedding idea?
- TI: He uses this parable of *ohango* because it is a way people can understand. For example, last Sunday [just passed], people were invited to come here today and they all said we are coming but finally, only one came.
- HCJ: Are there any other important messages in the story?

- TI: Verse 14 is very important.
- HCJ: What does it mean?
- TI: If you invite people, they come in large numbers, but when it comes to faith, only a few among those have faith.
- Luke 14:7-11 Highest and Lowest Places
- HCJ: What is the 'best place' to sit at an Ndonga wedding?
[translator uses *iipundi iisimana* – most important chairs]
- TI: In Ndonga we have the house [*egumbo*] and whenever you come to *ohango*, don't just go inside the house and the buildings, just wait at the entrance for the people to take you into the house.
- HCJ: Where would they take you to?
- TI: They take you to the place where they have prepared for you to sit there.
- HCJ: So, is there a 'best place' to sit at an Ndonga *ohango*?
- TI: Yes, there is a special place for the guest. For example, nowadays we have tents [marquees]. So, you do not come through [to] the tent you wait for someone to take you.
- Translator: The best chair can be compared with the seating area in the tent.

[in other words, the 'best' place for you to sit is in the designated area, the 'most appropriate' area. This is opposed to understanding 'best place' as the 'preferred' or 'most desirable' place.]
- HCJ: What is the 'lowest place'?
- TI: At the entrance [*ehale*].
- Translator: This is where the uninvited wait hopefully!
- HCJ: Is this what is meant in the text?
- TI: Yes, exactly.
- HCJ: Does someone's status change when they get married?
- TI: Yes, of course.
- HCJ: What changes?

- TI: Before marriage you were under the care of your mother. For example, your mother had the kitchen before you were married. After marriage, you have your own kitchen to feed yourself. After the wedding, the parents on both sides assist you with *mahangu* [staple grain], cattle, or whatever you need so that you can depend on yourself. And to have a child, that is God's gift.
- HCJ: Does that (having a child) changes someone's status?
- TI: There is a big joy when the young couple get married and have a baby. The community are happy for that. But if you stay a long time without producing a baby, you disappoint them.
- HCJ: Are children for the community then?
- TI: It is just like respect. The child itself is not for the community but the community respect you because of that child. [They will then call you *Meme* or *Tate*, terms of respect for those with children]
- HCJ: Many people have asked me whether I am a first-, middle- or last-born child. Why do people often ask this and thereafter call me *ontowele* [middle-born; as opposed to *osheeli* (first-born) or *onkelo* (last-born)]?
- TI: To call someone first-/middle-/last-born that is just a word of respect. It shows they know more about you. People say last-born children need more attention.

END. Closed with thanks.

CBS 4c: Aanona (Children)

Date: 23.05.2014

Texts: Matthew 22:1-14 & Luke 14:7-11

Participants (Transcript Reference):

- | | |
|------------------------|--------|
| 1. Ester Nicodemus | (EN) |
| 2. Klaudia Ashikuti | (KAsh) |
| 3. Hileni liyambo | (Hli) |
| 4. Hilma Ikukutu | (HIk) |
| 5. Wilbartina Teofelus | (WT) |
| 6. Loide Elago | (LE) |
| 7. Albertina Nicodemus | (AN) |
| 8. Okanona ANON12 | (O12) |
| 9. Elizabeth Imbondi | (Elm) |
| 10. Okanona ANON2 | (O2) |
| 11. Ruben Pinihas | (RP) |
| 12. Anna Ikukutu | (AIk) |
| 13. Frieda Shilemba | (FS) |
| 14. Saara Maria Msati | (SMM) |

3:00pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

3:30pm – discussion

Discussion:

Matthew 22:1-14 Wedding Banquets

Q1: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

EN: This parable of *ohango* is a comparison to the people of this world. If they do not follow the word of God they will be thrown away from the Kingdom of God as the other man was caught and thrown away from *ohango*.

KAsh: The king prepared all kinds of food for *ohango*.

Hli: Most people were invited to *ohango* but they turned away and went their own way. This is a comparison for the people of the world that they are here in this world to do the will of God but they turn away from it.

Weddings

Q2: What happens at a wedding in your community? What is *ohango* like for you?

- Hli: *Ohango* is the wedding feast for the two people as they become one person through marriage. They invite people to join them as they unit and join together for their new life.
- Hlk: The *ohango* is the wedding feast whereby a man and woman join together through God's will and this is done in the church.
- HCJ: What is the experience like for you?
- EN: *Ohango* is the feast whereby you have to invite people and prepare food for them and then you eat together.
- HCJ: What do you eat?
- WT: Rice, macaroni, salad, cooldrinks, chicken, meat.
- Hlk: There is also *ekaka* [disks of dried wild spinach] and *iimbombo* [s.: *oshi-*, traditional porridge staple]. And there is *omaluvu giilya* [traditional non-alcoholic beer].
- LE: There are also potatoes.
- KAsh: There is also a wedding cake.
- Hli: There is a lot of kinds of food at *ohango* as well as lots of kinds of drinks.
- AN: There is also fruit like apples and bananas and sweets, too.
- HCJ: Are any foods more important than others at *ohango*?
- O12: Meat is more important.
- HCJ: Why?
- O12: Because it is so tasty!
- WT: *Ekaka* and *oshimbombo* [*ji-*]. Before the couple goes to the church they must eat *ekaka* and *oshimbombo* to give them luck.
- Elm: *Ondjuhwa* [Owambo chicken].
- HCJ: Why is *ondjuhwa* particularly important?
- Elm: It is important because the *aafuko* [couple] and *ohogona* ['second father,' father's brother] and *ombushe* [namesake,

could be same person as *ohegona*] they have to eat *ondjuhwa*.

HCJ: Why?

Elm: It is also part of Ndonga tradition.

HCJ: Where do you sit at *ohango*?

O2: People sit on chairs or on the ground.

HCJ: Where?

RP: In the house.

HCJ: Is there a special place for children to sit at *ohango*?

Alk: No. No special place for children.

Elm: Yes. The young girls sit in the *elugo* [outdoor kitchen area] while the boys sit in the *oshinyanga* [men's yard, where fire is always going].

HCJ: Are there any people who you would say are very special guests at the *ohango*?

FS: The parents of the couple and the owner of the *ohango*. [The translator explained that the fiancé is regarded as the 'owner' of the *ohango* because he proposes it in the first place. A great deal of the responsibility for the *ohango*, then, lies with him.]

O12: The *oombushe* and the *oohegona* [namesakes and 'second fathers'].

HCJ: Is the experience of *ohango* different for children than it is for adults and elders?

EN: Yes, the parents go and greet the *oohegona* and *oombushe* whereas the children only go to eat food.

HCJ: Do you like *ohango*?

LE: Yes, because we eat delicious food.

HIk: And the fiancé and fiancée are looking good.

- SMM: We eat nice food.
- Elm: It is because if you go to *ohango* you eat food there and when you get home you don't have to cook. You just light the fire and go to bed.
- Hli: Yes, because not all families have weddings and *ohango*. It is a privilege.
- EN: We go there to be a witness and to learn the example.
- HCJ: Tell me about being a witness.
- EN: It is our culture.
- HCJ: What is the purpose of acting as a witness?
- EN: It is because if they divorce we are sure they got married.
- WT: There is also very good dancing (at *ohango*).
- Elm: And there are good songs and singing.
- FS: All the people in *ohango* are happy and exalting.
- HCJ: Do people wear special clothing? Do they carry anything special?
- EN: They wear traditional dress and they carry *ontungwa* [Owambo basketware] on their heads where there is *mahangu* or *sorghum* flour.
- AN: The *omufuko* [fiancée] wears a long white dress and holds a flower in her hands.
- KAsh: The *aafuko* [fiancés] wear rings on their fingers.
- FS: The man wears a special suit, which is black or white.
- Hli: The best man and woman of the couple wear special dress and carry gifts and also the parents wear special dress and also come with a gift to assist the new couple to buy their own house.
- Q3: Is that how you imagine the wedding feast in the text would be?
- Hli: No because in our tradition the invited guests would not turn down the invitation unless they could not find a good time to attend [at least some part of the *ohango*, which

might last 3 days]. But on the other hand, you don't kill the one who comes to invite you to *ohango*.

- HCJ: Would it make any difference that it's a king?
- WT: Yes because the couple are the ones who prepare the *ohango* and the parents only assist them [i.e. it is surprising that the only the king himself is mentioned as preparing the *ohango*].
- HCJ: Why did they turn down the invitation from the king?
- Hli: Maybe they are dishonest or are being disrespectful.
- O12: Maybe they are against the invitation.
- Hli: Maybe it is because they are a parent and their children have not got married [envy?].
- HCJ: Why does the king throw out the man without *oonguyo yoshituthi*? [At the end of the story, the king orders his servants to throw out a man who is not wearing 'wedding clothes' n.b. *Oshindonga* has festival/feast clothes, not *ohango*/wedding clothes].
- Hlk: Maybe that person was not wearing the wedding dress and he was not invited.
- HCJ: What are wedding clothes/feasting clothes?
- Hlk: He was not invited.
- HCJ: What is the meaning of this parable?
- Hli: The parable means that we have to prepare ourselves in time because on the last day if we are not prepared we will be thrown away [out].
- EN: It is just like the Lord put us on Earth and later he calls us to come back to him but others deny the call and then the Lord will make the decision to throw such persons out.
- Hli: This parable is just like God sent his Apostles on Earth to preach the good news of Salvation. They deny to receive the word of Salvation. Then later God will throw those people into hell.
- Q4: Why is the *ohango* idea important here?

- EN: To give us more attraction to find out the meaning.
- Elm: Because the proverb is a good way of talking in a way that people can understand.
- Q5: What is this *ohango* like? Is it the same as you have experienced or different?
- Hli: In our community, if you come to *ohango* with no wedding clothes, no one will turn you away.
- FS: (Agrees with Hli).
- WT: Almost the same because both in the story and our community they prepare food.
- EN: Different because in the story the king is the one inviting the guests but in our culture the couple sends out the invitation cards.
- Hli: There is a difference because if you are invited but do not go, you do not kill the one who comes to invite you.
- HCJ: So why do they kill him/them?
- FS: Maybe they dislike him.
- EN: Long, long ago, stories say that former [Ndonga/Owambo] kings killed people. Maybe those people who turned down the invitation were afraid to go there because they think they might be killed.
- KAsh: They killed those people because they thought they were telling them lies.

Luke 14:7-11 Highest and Lowest Places

- Q6: In this passage, wedding feasts are also discussed. Jesus says you should not sit in the best place but go to the lowest place.
- a) What is the 'best place' at an Ndonga wedding? Why is it the best place?
- EN: The best chair is where the new couple sit.
- Elm: It is in the tent [marquee] or the *etsali* [traditional tent, constructed from bush materials].

- HCJ: How many tents are there?
- Elm: Many.
- HCJ: So, is it better to sit in a tent than not?
- Elm: The invited guests go in the tents or the *etsali* and the children stay behind to sit in the *elugo* [kitchen area] or in the house. Those people sitting in the *etsali* are guests from afar. Local guests sit somewhere in the house.
- EN: The best place is in the *iinyanga* [yards, sing: *oshi*-].
- [The translator explained that EN means the yard area outside the women's sleeping area (*oshinyanga shoonjugo*, *onjugo* being the women's sleeping area). This is where the *oohegona* and *oombushe* would go. The men's yard (*oshinyanga*) would have a fire going all the time and is where the local men would gather to discuss 'traditional things'. Young boys might be allowed there too, by all accounts.]
- b) What is the 'lowest' place?
- Hlk: The *ehale* [entrance to *egumbo*, the homestead].
- HCJ: Why, who stays there?
- Hlk: Young men stand there. [Translator explains they are then free to socialize with those on the fringe as well]
- Hli: *Ehale* is the place for uninvited guests. It is also the place where dogs eat the bones. No one chases away the dogs from there but they would be chased away from *etsali* [traditional tent].
- WT: It is also when you are told to sit somewhere in the house like *omikala* [passageways].
- HCJ: So, you all agreed that the lowest place at *ohango* was the *ehale*. Is that what the text means?
- Everyone: Yes.
- Q7: What is the difference in being married? How do things change?
- O12: You receive a ring. You are more respected.

- Hli: Because before you are married you go where you want. You are free. After marriage you have to change and stay at home. You must cook for your husband. People would be surprised if you stayed out [at the *cuca* shops].
- FS: On the other hand, especially the woman, you have to change your dress code.
- HCJ: What changes?
- FS: You have to *zala nawa* [dress well]. Otherwise you will not receive respect.
- HCJ: What does a married woman wear?
- WT: Long skirts.
- EN: *oohema dhontulo*. ['traditional' women's dresses, chest (*ontulo*) to shin]
- Elm: The men should wear clothes covering the whole body and strong shoes.
- SMM: They [women and men] must wear proper, long dress.
- Hli: And the woman must cover her navel.
- HCJ: Why?
- Hli: Because she must be different from normal girls [i.e. cover up more].
- Elm: Even skirts should be big enough [not tight]. The married man cannot wear shorts.
- Alk: The *omukulukadhi* [married woman] should not wear trousers.
- Elm: Women should not decorate/adorn their hair. Men should have short hair (not let it grow on top, but have it evenly shaved all over).
- HCJ: What will change when *you* get married?
- O12: The ring on the finger.
- Hlk: (same)
- Elm: Women will stay at home.
- EN: The dress code.

Hli: Friends will change to those who are also married.
Elm: Change from wearing short skirts.
FS: I will change from spending time in cuca shops.
Hli: I change the standard of living to stay in my home looking after my children.

END. Closed with thanks.

CBS 5a: OoMemekulu (Older Women), OoMeme (Women)

Date: 23.07.2014

Text: Mark 5:21-43

Participants (Transcript Reference):

1. Memekulu Frieda Namugongo (Kuku Frieda)
2. Memekulu Maria Kondo (Kuku Maria)
3. Memekulu Rauha Andreas (Kuku Rauha)
4. Meme Maria Kashowa (Meme Maria)
5. Meme Frieda Nahambo (Meme Frieda)
6. Meme Paulina Inane (Meme Paulina)

12:00pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

12:15pm – discussion

Discussion:

Mark 5:21-43

Intro Q: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

Kuku Rauha: I prefer to answer your questions.

Jairus' Daughter and the Woman who Touched Jesus' Cloak

Q1: In this story, Jesus heals the girl by touching her hand and telling her to get up. In your experience, can people be healed by touch and/or command?

Kuku Rauha: I have experienced that whenever someone gets sick they used to [i.e. they habitually do] call even the pastor to pray for that person. And sometimes the pastor will come and pray and lay on the hands and they will get well. And sometimes the prayer of the holy/sinless person can make someone well.

Meme Frieda: I have experienced one person who was ill and who was told by someone 'in the name of Jesus, get well' and they got well.

HCJ: Aside from prayer, is touch very powerful?

- Kuku Frieda: By touching there is a power of God. For example, if you fall down and you suddenly have pain in the head [swelling], you can rub it and the swelling will go down.
- HCJ: How do you think the power of touch is working in the text?
- Kuku Rauha: The power Jesus used through touching is a heavenly power because every time Jesus did something like healing he faced upwards to ask the power from God.
- HCJ: We have not found many examples of the power of touch in Ndonga culture. Is it true to say that the power of touch is not so important in your culture?
- Meme Maria: Yes, we do have that power because a long time ago when people got ill there were not even hospitals but our forefathers would ask the ancestors for the power to heal people and then that person would get well.
- HCJ: And would they use touch?
- Meme Maria: Yes, sometimes you heal through touching and sometimes by using herbs and applying them to the skin through touching.
- Kuku Rauha: We heard from our parents that long ago people were healed that way but we don't experience it.
- Q2: The woman is healed by touching Jesus' clothing. Is something of a person contained in their clothing?
- Kuku Rauha: There is not anything in the clothes but the woman is just healed by her faith. She believes that if she just touches Jesus' dress she will get well. For example, when I am sick I ask the pastor to come and pray for me. I choose her and not another person. And when she comes and prays for me I feel comfortable and I get what I expect.
- HCJ: Do others agree that there is nothing in the clothing?
- Meme Paulina: There is nothing in the clothes but only the spirit of Jesus heals.
- Translator: [Who is a pastor.] People don't feel I am truly empowered if I don't come in the pastor's robes.
- Translator: [To the participants:] How would you feel if I come without the proper robes to a Sunday service?
- Kuku Rauha: We get worried.
- Translator: But why? There is nothing in the gowns.

Kuku Rauha: They are blessed. The clothes for Jesus are also blessed.

Q2b: Is something of a person contained in their possessions, shadow, reflection?

Meme Maria: What about Samson in the Bible? He was a powerful man and his power was in the hair.

Kuku Frieda: Clothes and hair are very important in our culture because through wearing clothes you look good and if you go somewhere without clothes people will worry about you. And if you do not keep your clothes and hair clean people will worry about you as well.

HCJ: From what I have read, I understood that there were Ndonga beliefs about the possessions, shadow and reflection of a person being extensions of the self. What do you think of the idea that the woman touches Jesus' cloak because she sees it as an extension of him, i.e. it is equivalent to touching Jesus?

HCJ: If I touch or attack your shadow, is it the same as touching you?

Kuku Rauha: The shadow is mine. You cannot try to beat my shadow. It would show there is hatred between us.

HCJ: Would you suffer if I beat your shadow?

Kuku Rauha: No, it is not good to step on my shadow deliberately. I will feel you harm me.

Kuku Frieda: It is not good. We are human beings. If someone stands there and steps on your shadow you will think there is something they want to do to you.

HCJ: Will you suffer if I rip your clothing?

Kuku Frieda: I am suffer because that is my dress and I start thinking why did he do it?

HCJ: Just to clarify, can you feel it physically if someone attacks your shadow?

Kuku Frieda: The shadow we regard it as a sign of your death following you. Therefore, if you play with my shadow I think maybe you want to rush [hasten] my death.

Translator: How do you feel if your shadow crosses fire or thorn bushes?

- Consensus: That is different because it is an accident.
- HCJ: In the story, do you think the woman thinks that Jesus' clothing is an extension of him?
- Meme Maria: The clothes are an extension of Jesus because if Jesus was not there then the clothes would not be there. So when the woman touches the dress she touches part of Jesus.
- HCJ: Do all agree?
- Kuku Rauha: We agree.
- HCJ: What if Jesus had left his coat on the floor and gone away. Would she be healed through touching his discarded coat?
- Meme Maria: Yes, she would get well because the clothes are for Jesus. He is the owner. He just forgot it.
- HCJ: But earlier you said there was nothing in the clothes. Do you feel differently now?
- Kuku Frieda: I don't agree with Meme Maria because the clothes only have the power when on the body. Jesus felt the power go when the clothing was on his body.
- Q3: What does blood mean in your context, whether animal or human?
- [silence]
- HCJ: Let's think about animal blood first. Since I have been here, I have been given cooked animal blood to eat but I was told that this blood is not given to children. Why is this?
- Kuku Maria: The children they are not allowed to eat blood due to the illness in the stomach.
- HCJ: Does the blood carry the illness in it?
- Kuku Maria: There is not illness in the blood but it makes pain.
- HCJ: Is it too strong or too rich, perhaps?
- [no answer]
- Kuku Frieda: In Ndonga culture, if someone kills a person, that killer or the family of the killer should take a cattle to the Royal Palace [Kingdom/Dwelling of the Chief, *ombala kwaniilwa*]. Then that cattle is slaughtered and the blood is run through without catching it [normally it would be caught in a container for consumption]. This is an indication that you wash out your sin. This cattle is called *onkomba mbinzi* ['to

wipe out the blood’]. It is killed before the burial [of the victim].

The reason why they give that cattle it is the sign to apologise to the family of the deceased and it is to prevent the killer from getting bad luck.

HCJ: So, the blood goes into the land?

Kuku Frieda: And even the meat, it is given to everyone around.

HCJ: Is it important that the blood goes into the land?

Kuku Frieda: It is because you kill it before the burial. That blood must go into the ground before the victim [and his/her blood, presumably].

[Note: Translator told me before the session that ‘blood is expensive,’ in the sense that spilling it is grave. He also noted that should blood be spilled on the road at the site of a fatal car accident it will be collected, to be buried with the body of the victim.]

HCJ: Is a person’s soul or life-force in the blood? What is in the blood?

Meme Maria: Yes, because if the blood is out then that is the end of your life.

Kuku Frieda: There is cooperation between the blood and the soul.

HCJ: Does it matter if you spill your own blood?

Meme Paulina: You must take care of yourself.

Translator: At the wedding, you must give the cattle to slaughter. If you do not then the family will not let the girl marry. If I visit and you slaughter even a chicken, I feel respected. [The implication is that blood is valuable and, if spilled, shows that an important transaction has taken place, or status has been recognised].

Kuku Rauha: When it came to the wedding event the men used to [always do] give the cattle to the family of the girl so that they can exchange for the girl. The blood of the cattle pays for the girl.

Kuku Frieda: In our tradition, as from our forefathers, the girl should be exchanged with the cattle. The price for the woman is cattle. When the day of marriage comes, people meet the cattle [being delivered] by shouting ‘*ipindi ya landa*’ [‘we get what we bought’].

- Kuku Rauha: For the bushman people, if they want a wife, they find a [wild animal similar to a cow – translator unsure of species] and give it to the family.
- HCJ: What are the characteristics of human blood? Is it safe, dangerous, dirty, clean, polluting, etc.?
- Kuku Frieda: Blood contains danger. You cannot just go and touch somebody's blood.
- HCJ: What danger?
- Kuku Frieda: You could be affected by illness, viruses, or bacteria.
- HCJ: Reverend Thomas [translator] was telling me about burying a victim's blood with their body if they die in a car accident. You have to collect it. Is there anything similar to this you can tell me about?
- Kuku Rauha: Yes, it is normal to bury someone with his blood. You cannot just leave the blood for the dogs.
- Q4: The woman in the story has been bleeding for many years. What do you think is wrong with her and how would she be affected by this bleeding? Tell me about her situation.
- Kuku Frieda: That woman is very lucky because she was bleeding for many years but she is alive. Her life is in bad condition because sometimes we get power from our blood. So she can become weak day by day. So she suffered.
- HCJ: So blood is power?
- Consensus: Yes.
- HCJ: Do you think she would be seen as dangerous? Would her community push her away?
- Kuku Frieda: I think there was a different idea among the community. Some might avoid her but some would have pity for her.
- Q5: Do you have any other thoughts to help me understand this text? You could refer to any aspects of your culture that seem similar to the story.

[At this point, we were out of time and the women indicated that they wished to finish up. Simultaneously, Kuku Maria and I were called away to an emergency at our homestead. We may revisit this text in the final summary session. Need to investigate blood as power alongside power transfer from Jesus to the haemorrhaging woman.]

CBS 5b: OoTatekulu (Elder men), OoTate (Men)

Date: 30.07.2014

Text: Mark 5:21-43

Participants (Transcript Reference):

1. Tatekulu Laban Iyambo (LI)
2. Tatekulu Herman Iyambo (HI)

12:20pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

12:30pm – discussion

Discussion:

Mark 5:21-43

Intro Q: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

LI: I have nothing to say but I have listened carefully and I understand the way in which Jesus is working.

Jairus' Daughter and the Woman who Touched Jesus' Cloak

Q1: In this story, Jesus heals the girl by touching her hand and telling her to get up. In your experience, can people be healed by touch and/or command?

LI: When Jesus came to the world he came with a mission that everyone be healed. With regard to the question: no [people in our context cannot be healed by touch or command].

HCJ: Would you say that the power of touch is not very important in Ndonga culture?

LI: We don't have that power in our culture. There is no such touching or commanding to heal.

Q2: The woman is healed by touching Jesus' clothing. Is something of a person contained in their clothing?

LI: According to the story, this woman went to witchdoctors/traditional doctors [*oonganga*] to find the herbs but she only lose a lot of money without getting any help. Therefore she turned to Jesus. She heard about

Jesus and what he had done and so she went to him with the faith that he will cure her.

- HCJ: Is Jesus' power in his clothing as well as in him?
- LI: Jesus has power everywhere – physically and also in materials.
- HCJ: In your context, do people think of clothing as having part of the person in them? If I have your coat or your stick, do I have part of you with me?
- LI: Yes, we have a connection with our material. For examples, if the clothes are mine, they are mine. Therefore, if I don't know where are my clothes, I feel bad, I feel pain. I don't know where is a part of me.
- HCJ: Does it surprise you or does it seem normal that Jesus' power goes through his clothing? Does that seem similar to how you feel about your clothing?
- LI: The power of Jesus is everywhere – either in him or in his clothes. Everywhere. And if you wear those clothes of Jesus you feel it is different. You feel it is the holy one. His clothes are like his word. Both have power.
- Q2b: Is something of a person contained in their possessions, shadow, reflection?
- LI: In my shadow, or in the land where my *egumbo* is located, that is mine, my property. I feel proud for that. The land where I am, I am proud of the fields I plough because I work the land and it gives me food. The shadow is like the reflection. I feel proud to see my reflection and my shadow.
- HCJ: If I stamp on your land or your shadow, do I harm you? Will you feel it?
- LI: The shadow, no. To me, it doesn't harm me. If you step on my shadow, I just move away.
- HCJ: So I cannot harm you through your shadow or land? Can I harm you through your clothing?
- LI: On the case of shadow or land, I said you cannot harm me because nothing happened [happens]. But in the case of clothing, when you come and you want to make it dirty or tear it, I have to react because you want to reshape my clothes.
- HCJ: Is the power transfer through the clothing to the woman normal or special (i.e. just because it is Jesus)?

- LI: The power of Jesus is still exist but it is there through the Word. Because for example if anybody gets sick, you go there and say to him the Word of God. Therefore, through that Word, the power of Jesus is also working. The power is working within the word of Jesus.
- Q3: What status in the COMMUNITY and FAMILY do Jairus and the bleeding woman have?
- LI: About the woman, I am not understand the status she is in in the community. But Jairus, I heard he was the elder or chief for the synagogue.
- HCJ: Is Jairus' status important in the story?
- LI: To be the chief of the synagogue is very important in a community.
- HCJ: What would be his position in a family setting?
- LI: I hope Jairus in the family he was a good advisor and one who liked order.
- HCJ: Do you think he is the head of a family?
- LI: I hope so that he was the head of the house.
- HCJ: What would be the effect of losing a member of his household, his daughter?
- LI: Jairus was a man who was filled with the Spirit of God. He was a man who trusts in Jesus. He wanted to live with a healthy family. That is why, when his daughter gets sick, he know where the help came from. He go to Jesus so that Jesus will change the daughter from bad [health] to good [health].
- Jairus and the family members they were afraid that their daughter would pass away. That is why he went to Jesus with the intention that Jesus come to prevent the death.
- HCJ: What about the woman? What is her status and position? Does she have a family? Children? Does she live alone because others don't want to be near someone who is bleeding like this?
- LI: The text did not say more about the living of that woman but, according to my thinking, that woman was in a critical condition because to be bleeding for twelve years is very complicated. And she was also suffered a lot by bleeding and by wasting of economy because she went to the *onganga* [traditional doctor] but they did not help her.

- Q4: What does blood mean in your context, whether animal or human?
- LI: Blood is life. If you do have blood you are having the life.
- HCJ: So is the woman losing her life?
- LI: Yes, the life was going to an end.
- HCJ: Does blood have some kind of power in it?
- LI: In blood there is power.
- HCJ: What kind of power?
- LI: The power of life.
- HCJ: Is the woman losing power?
- LI: That is it exactly.
- HCJ: Does Jesus' power replace the power she has lost/is losing?
- LI: When Jesus is touched by the woman he feels power going from him and looks to the woman. The same for the woman – she feels power come in. That is why the bleeding stops.
- HCJ: Can you tell me about animal blood? You said at home once that you wouldn't allow children to eat animal blood. Why is that?
- LI: According to the biblical text, there are verses in the Old Testament that say no one should eat the blood of animals. That is why I recommend that the blood should not be eaten. For example, the adults may eat but the children will get pain in the stomach.
- HCJ: Can you get strength from the blood of an animal?
- LI: There is no power from the blood of an animal. We just eat it as we eat ordinary food.
- Q5: The woman in the story has been bleeding for 12 years. How do you think her life is affected and what is her future like if she cannot be healed?
- LI: [largely covered elsewhere and Kuku Laban is short of time]

- Q6: Jairus' daughter is 12 years old. What would be the effect on Jairus and his family if she was not healed.
- LI: [covered elsewhere]
- Q6b: Why does the story focus on the number 12 – the age of the girl and the number of years the woman has been bleeding?
- LI: To mention 12 on both sides it is not just mentioned deliberately but it is just the coincidence.
- HCJ: Is the girl about to reach fertility/womanhood?
- LI: The girl was still not mature.
- HCJ: What do you think about the idea that the story has some undertones of fertility – bleeding and potentially not reaching marriage/womanhood?
- LI: According to my understanding, the bleeding disease can affect every woman who is about to give birth or just after birth.
- Q7: Why does Jairus approach DIRECTLY whereas the woman comes to Jesus from BEHIND, in the crowd?
- LI: According to the story, the woman was not able to come to Jesus directly because of the crowd and she was also afraid of Jesus. Then she believe that ok, no matter that I am not go to him direct, he will cure me if I touch. No matter if he does not see my face. But when Jairus approached Jesus there was not a crowd.
- HCJ: Is it a bad thing to approach someone like that from behind?
- LI: It is bad to me because I think maybe you want to take something from me.
- HCJ: Can you connect this to Ndonga culture and the way you don't pass things behind someone's back or walk behind someone's back?
- LI: In Ndonga culture you cannot walk behind someone's back. You must walk across the front.
- HCJ: Why is that?
- LI: The right answer is only that you must walk on the front where the face is. He can also see you.

Translator suggests a question:

HCJ: What if someone is blind? Can I walk behind them?

LI: The person is just a person, therefore even if he is blind, just walk on the front. Animals are another thing. You can walk behind.

[At a later point, when LI has left the room during a break, the translator explains that he thinks LI wanted to say more on this but was embarrassed. He suggests that LI had in mind the point that 'appropriate' sexual activity between human beings should take place face-to-face, whereas in animal species, the male often mounts the female from behind. He suggests that this influences LI's understanding that it is appropriate to approach someone from the front, or pass in front of them.]

HCJ: Is the woman being disrespectful by approaching Jesus from behind?

LI: The woman was respect Jesus. The problem in her is only that she was afraid to approach Jesus directly because of the condition she is. She wanted not to be seen.

HCJ: Are you saying it was disrespectful but she does it with the right intention?

LI: Yes.

HCJ: Does the high status of Jairus and the lower status of the woman affect how they approach Jesus?

LI: Jesus values all the people, either Jairus or the woman. Because to Jesus all the people are equal. Whether you are rich or poor, you are in the same category before God. Even in Jesus' teaching the word is the same to everyone. The Word is the same for rich and poor. The salvation is for all the people.

Q8: Do you have any other thoughts to help me understand this text? You could refer to any aspects of your culture that seem similar to the story.

LI: I am experiencing the bleeding. It happened in our community. According to the treatment, no one was cured according to the method Jesus was using.

HCJ: Would they bleed for a very long time like this woman?

LI: It is possible if someone doesn't get special treatment.

- HCJ: How would you try to cure it?
- LI: Only going to a doctor at hospital. And if they are not cured she may die.
- HCJ: How does the community respond to people like that?
- LI: The community cannot lend assistance, just taking them to the hospital.
- HCJ: So people don't avoid that person?
- LI: No, they are approaching and assisting in a friendly way, even by washing the clothes.

[At this point we had a second reading, because Kuku Herman Iyambo (HI) had arrived. After the second reading, I ran through what we had discussed and repeated Q8 for Kuku Herman's benefit.]

- HCJ: Why doesn't the daughter of Jairus have a name in the text? Why doesn't the woman have a name?
- HI: Jesus is not concerned who you are, what is your name. But his concern is for the person to get what he needs.
- LI: Even Jairus does not mention the name of his daughter. He just mentioned 'my daughter' to Jesus. And the other woman, she is not intending to introduce herself, just to touch Jesus and be cured.
- Q8: [repeated]
- HI: The power of Jesus is different from the power we have because no one on the Earth can take someone who has died and raise them. Jesus is a different person. We have to trust in his power. It was indicated during his death.
- LI: The biblical texts tell us to believe even if we are not see but we are lucky enough that we did not see but we heard through the biblical words. We have to be strong in faith. The Jews were the lucky ones – many of them they saw the wonderful works of Jesus but they did not believe in him.

END. Closed with thanks.

EN: Yes, I am negative to that because I experienced people healed through touch by prayer. [i.e. it IS important]

[The rest of the group feel that the power of touch is not important in Ndonga culture, contra EN]

HCJ: Is the Bible ever used as an object of power to touch in, for example, healings?

KAsh, LE: No.

Q2: The woman is healed by touching Jesus' clothing. Is something of a person contained in their clothing?

LE: Jesus is a healer. In his clothes is connected to him. So the power of healing is also in his clothes.

HCJ: Would his clothes have this power if they were on the ground, if he was not wearing them?

LE: The power of Jesus is only in the clothes when they are on his body. If they are just there, nothing will happen.

HCJ: If I harm your clothing, am I harming you?

EN: No, only when it is on my body.

LE: If you cut my clothes you harm my heart.

HCJ: So I will hurt your feelings, but will I physically hurt you?

LE: You will not harm me physically.

Elm: If you even leave my clothes in the sun, you harm my feelings.

HCJ: Why?

Elm: You harm me because sometimes that clothes is the only one I have. And if you destroy it, I won't have anything.

HCJ: Will I get someone's characteristics by wearing their clothing?

Alk: No. [all agree]

Q2b: Is something of a person contained in their possessions, shadow, reflection?

EN: The shadow just connects to you the same as clothes you have.

HCJ: What is the shadow? What does it mean?

LE: The shadow is just a part of me because wherever I am going, we are together.

HCJ: What if I stamp on your shadow?

SKw: You feel not anything.

Hli: I would feel bad because you try to harm my shape.

HCJ: Does anyone think I can harm them through their shadow?

Hli, EN, MN: You cause spiritual pain. [*komwenyo* – to the spirit]

HCJ: Have you heard the idea that your shadow is your death following you around?

EN: No, but I agree for that because when you die, your shadow also disappears.

HCJ: If there is nothing of someone in their clothing, how does the woman manage to get healed by touching Jesus' clothing?

EN: Jesus is the Almighty one. The [his] power to do miracles is everywhere, even in his own clothing.

Hli: We, the human beings, we don't have such power to heal.

HCJ: Is there power in the beads you might wear around your waist?

WT: Yes, because if you are [be]witched by someone but you are not wearing it, you will never be cured but if you are wearing it, nothing will happen.

[All are agreed]

HCJ: Is a woman not in danger of being bewitched while she is pregnant?

AN: She is in danger.

EN: Yes, she can be [be]witched because she doesn't have it on.

HCJ: Why doesn't she wear a longer string of beads?

AN: She can make it large unless there is no string.

SKw: If she is pregnant, she may even remove the beads and replace them with anything else like a belt.

HCJ: Is a pregnant woman in *more* danger than other people? Do pregnant women normally wear something around their waist?

Hli: The pregnant woman is in danger but even the child she will bear could get sick or die. Yes, she is in very big danger. Normally the woman cannot wear beads on the abdomen. You need even just a small rope around you.

HCJ: How will you know if you have been bewitched?

EN: You cannot see it but you will feel the pain.

HCJ: What kind of pain?

EN: Just continuous sickness.

Q3: What status in the COMMUNITY and FAMILY do Jairus and the bleeding woman have?

MN: Both in their community they would only realise their help is from the Lord Jesus.

EN: To the woman, I think people of their community they regard that woman as helpless and she will never find any help. And to Jairus, people will think when he goes to Jesus to ask for help it will be meaningless.

HCJ: What would the woman's situation be? Would she have a family? Children? Would she be shunned?

Hli: According to the text, the woman lost much money to pay the witchdoctors. That is an indication that she had something. She was not poor. She became poor by looking for help. She may have a family but they lost hope because she has suffer for many years.

KAsh: Maybe her father was a rich person.

HCJ: So did that money come from her father?

KAsh: Yes.

HCJ: Do you imagine her having children?

EN: She has suffered for 12 years, therefore I hope that she is childless.

HCJ: Do you hope that or think that?

EN: I think that.

HCJ: Is it the bleeding that you think would stop her having children?

EN: Yes.

Q4: What does blood mean in your context, whether animal or human?

MN: Blood, it is important because it is the life. For example, if you slaughter a goat, when the blood stops, then the goat also dies.

AN: Blood is important because for example if you are fighting and you make someone bleed, you have to pay for it. The traditional leaders will charge you.

HCJ: What would they charge you?

AN: It depends on the blood. If it is too much you pay a cattle. But if it is just small, you pay some money.

EN: Blood is just liquid which is in the body which assists you to have movement or to living.

Hli: Blood is a liquid which is in the body and it also contains some diseases.

Q5: The woman in the story has been bleeding for 12 years. How do you think her life is affected and what is her future like if she cannot be healed?

Elm: The woman has been in the critical condition because if she was not healed otherwise she may die.

Hli: She was in a very bad situation because to be sick for twelve years it is the indication that she suffered for a long time. Even the blood may become empty.

EN: Maybe she was very thin and had almost died.

Q6: Jairus' daughter is 12 years old. What would be the effect on Jairus and his family if she was not healed.

EN: Otherwise they just take the daughter to the burial site.

HCJ: How is Jairus affected if she dies?

EN: Jairus would feel disappointed.

WT: He would be disappointed because the child was his future. She will help him in the future. Otherwise Jairus will become helpless in his old age.

HCJ: Are there any other effects on his family life? What about marriage?

AN: The young generation are the active one. Because you can even send her somewhere quick and come back. But if she is dead then that household becomes helpless. Sometimes, the young ones are looking for firewood, cooking, pounding [the grain]. So that young one was a key bone in that house.

Q6b: Why does the story focus on the number 12 – the age of the girl and the number of years the woman has been bleeding?

EN: Twelve years of the daughter of Jairus depends on the age. On the other woman it is depend on the period she has been sick.

AN: That is the indication that maybe the time that child was born, it is also the time that the woman got sick.

HCJ: What stage of life is a 12-year-old girl at?

EN: She is not a mature one.

HCJ: Is she still a child?

EN: Not really.

HCJ: Is she a woman?

EN: Yes.

HCJ: Is she ready to have children?

EN: No.

HCJ: Too young?

EN: Yes.

HCJ: Do you think this story has anything to do with fertility?

AN: No.

- Q7: Why does Jairus approach DIRECTLY whereas the woman comes to Jesus from BEHIND, in the crowd?
- AN: The woman on the back side of Jesus, she thought maybe Jesus will not cure her as soon as possible. That is why she just touch the clothing at the back.
- HCJ: Why might she think that?
- AN: It is because she was think that Jesus is very busy so she will not get a chance to approach directly.
- EN: There was a crowd of people therefore there is no other way to come direct to Jesus. She only believe that whenever I touch his clothes I will be made well.
- HCJ: Is it respectful to approach like that?
- EN: No, the woman was not respect Jesus.
- HCJ: Would he be angry? Is his response angry?
- LE: No.
- HCJ: Why not?
- LE: Jesus just mercy for that person and he heal her.
- [Translator reads out the verse wherein Jesus responds – ‘who touched my clothes?’]
- HCJ: Who agrees [that Jesus is not angry]?
- Consensus: Jesus is not angry.
- HCJ: Jairus is the synagogue leader, whereas the woman is sick and maybe lower in status as a result. Could this be why they approach differently?
- EN: Maybe yes.
- AN: No.
- Q8: Do you have any other thoughts to help me understand this text? You could refer to any aspects of your culture that seem similar to the story.
- EN: In our area, when you want to talk to someone, you stand at the front and talk to them.

Hli: In our context, when someone has died, people start crying. The bleeding in our context is also there but only takes a few days, not years.

EN: We learn in the story that the woman went to the witchdoctor but did not find any help. The same for our people – they go to the witchdoctors but are not cured. They are wasting their money.

HCJ: Are you saying the *onganga* doesn't have any power?

EN: There are some witchdoctors cure them but the others they are false witchdoctors.

END. Closed with thanks.

CBS 6a: OoMemekulu (Elder women), OoMeme (Women)

Date: 02.04.2014

Text: Luke 8:26-39

Participants (Transcript Reference):

1. Memekulu Frieda Namugongo (Kuku Frieda)
2. Memekulu Rauha Andreas (Kuku Rauha)
3. Meme Elizabeth Ekandjo (Meme Elizabeth)
4. Memekulu Maria Kondo (Kuku Maria)
5. Meme Diina Itila (Meme Diina)
6. Memekulu Hilma Lugambo (Kuku Hilma) (late arrival)
7. Meme Maria Kashowa (Meme Maria) (late arrival)
8. Memekulu Lahia Kambonde (Kuku Lahia) (late arrival)
9. Reverend Aluhe Nahango (Silent observer occasional periods)

3:30pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

4:00pm – discussion

Discussion:

Luke 8:26-39

Q1: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

No responses.

The Demon(s)

Q2: What is a demon? (Reverend Uushona translated this as *ompwidhuli*, the word used in the text)

Kuku Rauha: The demon is the power of Satan and occurs in the man's body and disturbs the spirit.

Q2: Where do demons come from? Where do they 'live'?

Meme Diina: The demons are everywhere in the world.

Q3: Do they exist in any special places?

Kuku Frieda: The other name for *ompwidhuli* is *onkwenya*, which is a disease that occurs in people's minds and disturbs the mind.

- HCJ: Today?
- Kuku Frieda: Yes, of course. It happens in our lifetimes because we have those people with disturbed minds.
- HCJ: How would you recognize someone with *onkwenya*?
- Meme Elizabeth: To recognize a person is through behaviour. Sometimes the person will be quiet, sometimes aggressive. You see the reaction. The *oompwidthuli* have their own language. The person might see things on the wall but there is nothing there.
- Kuku Maria: They don't care. They throw stones through windows, beat people, they are careless. They destroy everything.
- HCJ: Where are the *oompwidthuli*?
- Meme Elizabeth: They come from the sky.
- Kuku Rauha: There is a man in Onandjokwe hospital who has been there for a long time with *oompwidthuli*.
- HCJ: How did he come to have *oompwidthuli*?
- Kuku Rauha: There is no right answer that the *oompwidthuli* are from the sky. We are just guessing.
- HCJ: What made it/them go into him?
- Meme Elizabeth: In the story it is not clear on how the demons attacks the man.
- HCJ: True. What if it was today?
- Meme Diina: There are many causes. For example, if you have a problem, you worry over solving the problem and create the conditions for the *oompwidthuli*. For example, you talk out loud to yourself.
- HCJ: Can *oompwidthuli* be without a body?
- Kuku Frieda: The *oompwidthuli* are in the body, either in people or in animals.
- Q4: Why does the demon take the man into the desert/bush/wilderness? (in the *Oshindonga* translation, the term used is that used to refer to the 'bush', i.e. the wild land around and between villages)
- Kuku Rauha: The demon power can overcome the body and use the body for any purpose.

- Meme Diina: The demon is the power of darkness, therefore they took the man to the bush.
- HCJ: What is the connection between the power of darkness and the bush?
- Meme Diina: The demon takes you wherever they want. Open space is compared with light. The bush you compare with darkness.
- The Man HCJ gives a summary of his state
- Q5: Can you explain to me why he is naked?
- Kuku Rauha: The man has lost his character. He doesn't know who he is. He is like an animal – they don't wear anything. He has given himself a name that is a group.
[note to self: refer back to Dictaphone to check]
- Meme Diina: [Anxiety over being asked questions without having been able to go away and study the text. Rev. Uushona and I explained that we are asking for thoughts on the story as they occur, not studied responses]
- To be naked the man himself doesn't know what situation he is in.
- HCJ: In your context, what does it mean to be naked?
- Meme Elizabeth: When you find a naked person it is already clear that something is wrong in the mind.
- Kuku Rauha: When you find such people in public that means something is wrong in the mind.
- Kuku Hilma: At times, people may appear in public naked for another reason. For example, they may have been showering and have been terrified by something.
- HCJ: Are there any other things that nakedness could mean?
- No responses.
- Q6: Why does the man throw himself at the feet of Jesus?
- Meme Maria: He bowed down to look for help.
- HCJ: Why did he have to make himself lower to do that?
- Meme Elizabeth: He is humbling himself for Jesus.

- Kuku Hilma: He is surrendering himself to the Almighty. He is giving his character to Jesus.
- HCJ: In an lihongo context, what does it mean to lower yourself in front of someone?
- Kuku Rauha: Always to lower yourself to someone is to give your respect to that person.
- HCJ: Can you give examples? I know that I should genuflect when I greet a senior person, but are there other examples?
- Kuku Hilma: Here in this community, women lower themselves [genuflect] but men nod their heads. Receiving something from an elder you have to support your hand [with the other hand] in taking the item.
- HCJ: What do I do if the person I am greeting is sitting? Should I lower myself to below their seated level?
- Kuku Lahia: The same applies: you lower yourself [genuflect].
- Q7: The man is a prisoner and is bound in chains but he breaks free. Why is he so strong?
- Kuku Rauha: The man tries by all means to get out of the prison by doing anything he can.
- Kuku Hilma: The man is powerless but in him there is something that is more powerful. The demon is the one who is strong.

Places

- Q8: What qualities do burial sites have and why would the man be staying in a burial site?
- Kuku Rauha: The man in his mind is unable to recognise the good and the bad. He is just staying wherever he finds a place to stay.
- Meme Maria: Whenever you have the demon spirit they can use you in any abnormal condition.
- HCJ: What kind of place is a burial site?
- Kuku Rauha: The man's mind is abnormal. He does not do things on his own but by the *ompwidhuli*, which is more powerful.
- HCJ: Why doesn't he stay in town?

- Meme Diina: The demons take the man wherever they want. They want him to be in the burial caves.
- Kuku Hilma: The demons are the driver of the life of the man. They want to keep the man in jail forever. The demons don't want him to be released but he is assisted by Jesus, who frees him.
- Q9: Can you tell me about the bush. What is it like?
- Kuku Hilma: There is a certain place called Okadhulu [about 70km away]. It is a dangerous place. If you go there you will see something like *oompwidhuli*. If you don't see something you will feel it.
- HCJ: Do people today see things there?
- Kuku Hilma: Nowadays people don't see anything but they did in the olden days. Now you just feel something. It is a strip of land from East to North-East.
- There is also a place nearby [near lihongo] called Oshilulu. But others can tell you because they grew up here and know better.
- No one was willing to add to this information or comment further on the existence of a spirit-dwelling/sacred grove.
- Translator: [Second reading of text.]
- HCJ: Are there any final comments on the text?
- Kuku Hilma: By reading this text we gain an understanding that Jesus is powerful and he can change the man to be a new person.

END. Closed with thanks.

CBS 6b: OoTatekulu (Elder men), OoTate (men)

Date: 23.04.2014

Text: Luke 8:26-39

Participants (Transcript Reference):

1. Tatekulu Theophelus Iyambo (TI)

3:30pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

4:00pm – discussion

Discussion:

Luke 8:26-39 Jesus Heals a Man with Demons

Q1: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

TI: I am impressed by the mysterious power that the man has despite suffering from demons.

HCJ: Where does that power come from?

TI: According to the scripture, the man has a demon and this demon was so many because it had combined with other demons to make a big demon. It was not one demon but a group of demons.

The Demon(s)

Q2: What is a demon? (Reverend Uushona translated this as *ompwidhuli*, the word used in the text)

TI: An *ompwidhuli* is an evil spirit.

HCJ: Do people experience *oompwidhuli* (oo- = plural form) today?

TI: Yes, *oompwidhuli* are amongst society.

Q2: Where do demons come from? Where do they 'live'?

TI: Some evil spirits come from alcohol.

Q3: Do they exist in any special places?

TI: The evil spirits are in the sky.

HCJ: If the evil spirits are in the sky, how did they come to be in the man?

TI: There are holy places in the world and evil places in the world. So, if you go to evil places you can meet evil spirits and they enter into your life.

HCJ: When people have *oompwidhuli*, how do they behave?

TI: Mostly, people with evil spirits don't behave normally. So, other people recognise it and stay away from them, because (those people) are afraid.

HCJ: Can you give examples of this abnormal behavior?

TI: When you have *ompwidhuli*, that means you are ill, you are sick, not normal. That's why Jesus chases away the demons.

HCJ: Is there anything you can do to protect yourself from *oompwidhuli*?

TI: Yes.

HCJ: What would you do in an lihongo context?

TI: The demon is in the sky. Anywhere you go, the demon can follow. Any day it can come and catch you. Prayer is the main protector.

HCJ: Can one person make *oompwidhuli* go into another person?

TI: Unbelievers might believe that someone can send an *ompwidhuli* into you but I, as a believer, just believe that the *ompwidhuli* is in the sky, not sent by someone.

HCJ: Do you have an idea of where in the body the *ompwidhuli* is?

TI: In the brain.

HCJ: Does the *ompwidhuli* need a body (either human or animal) or can it exist on its own?

TI: The *oompwidhuli* also occupy animals like cattle and dogs.

HCJ: Do they *need* a body?

TI: They come to the body unfair, uninvited.

- Q4: Why does the demon take the man into the desert/bush/wilderness? (in the *Oshindonga* translation, the term used is that used to refer to the 'bush', i.e. the wild land around and between villages)
- TI: Because the demon disturbs the man's mind.
- HCJ: But why the bush/wilderness?
- TI: Because the demon is more powerful than the man.
- HCJ: (repeats Q)
- TI: The man went there in the bush according to the will of the demon, not his own will.
- HCJ: And why did the demon choose that place?
- TI: The demon chose the bush because it wanted to take the man to a dirty place, because the demon itself is also dirty.
- The Man HCJ gives a summary of his state
- Q5: Can you explain to me why he is naked?
- TI: Because the man is not according to his own will but according to the demon's will.
- HCJ: And why would the demon want him to be naked?
- TI: The man is a slave to the demon.
- HCJ: What does nakedness mean in your context?
- TI: When you see a man naked you have mercy on that person and you try to get them and help them.
- HCJ: So, what does nakedness *mean*?
- TI: It is wonderful to see the person naked.
- HCJ: Why?
- TI: It is wonderful because people wear clothes but that one is wearing nothing. But it is also to be feared. [HCJ clarified that he did mean 'wonderful' as in 'to be celebrated']
- Q6: Why does the man throw himself at the feet of Jesus?
- TI: He thanks Jesus for what Jesus did for him and he thinks Jesus is more powerful than the demon.

- HCJ: In an lihongo context, what does it mean to lower yourself in front of someone?
- TI: Upon the ground, there is no one you have to kneel to, only Jesus.
- HCJ: Would you not kneel for the Ndonga King?
- TI: From the beginning we did that. To kneel down is to give respect to that person and I hope people still give respect to the King.
- HCJ: I know that I should genuflect when I greet a senior person, but are there other examples?
- TI: Another way to show respect is to remove your hat before greeting elders.
- HCJ: [asked after Q7, below] After he is cured, the man is clothed and sits at Jesus' feet. His body and actions have changed. What do these changes mean?
- TI: When a man is in the hospital he is sick and when he gets well his situation gets better. The man has become well and is healed. He looks good, he is clothed and he sits near Jesus because now he is in a normal condition.
- Q7: The man is a prisoner and is bound in chains but he breaks free. Why is he so strong?
- TI: The power the man has is extra power from the demon.

Places

- Q8: (a) What qualities do burial sites have and (b) why would the man be staying in a burial site?
- (a)
- TI: The evil spirit is the one who is controlling the man and taking him wherever it wants him to be. So, the man has no fear of being in the burial cave because it is according to the will of the demon.
- HCJ: Would people normally have fear of grave sites?
- TI: We are nearby the graveyard (looks South towards cemetery). For example, my house is nearby the graveyard and I am the pastor in the congregation. I go to sleep in my house but when I wake up I am not in my house but in the graveyard. But why do we have to wonder why this man

stays in the graveyard if this happens also in our community?

HCJ: Has this happened to you?

TI: I am referring to the situation. And yes, it can happen, so they say. [i.e. it has not happened to him personally. He is not the pastor, for example.]

HCJ: Has anyone told you that that it has happened to them (obviously, I am not asking for names)?

TI: I have not heard from a particular person but I have heard reports. Sometimes a pastor transfers to another congregation and the reason for that is that they sleep in the graveyard.

HCJ: Is there anything to be scared of in a gravesite?

TI: We are scared because we do not believe that we are going to die. Some people say that there are ghosts [laughs].

(b) Why would the man in the story be staying in a burial site?

TI: According to Jesus, he asks the man: 'what is your name?' and it replied: 'we are group', so they are many. So they take him to a place where people fear to go.

HCJ: Why do people fear to go there?

TI: The graveyard is a place of deceased persons, not for the living. Therefore, living people fear to go there because the people there are dead. You are with the dead.

HCJ: Why can't the man stay in the town?

TI: The man is a slave to the demon so he is under the power of the demon.

Q9: What comes to mind when you think about the bush. What is it like?

TI: According to the understanding of the wilderness there is only wild animals and if we compare it to our nature conservation area at Okashana, there is bush with wild animals.

HCJ: What about when you think about the bush around here [lihongo]?

TI: Yes, there is bush, but it differs from other areas.

- HCJ: How is it different?
- TI: The difference is that it is nearby the people. Sometimes people destroy the bush.
- HCJ: Is the bush a safe, dangerous or neutral place to be?
- TI: The area of bush is safe for animals because [check Dictaphone]. The cattle far in the bush are looking good but those close to lihongo are struggling.
- HCJ: And for people?
- TI: The bush is safe for people because when there is a lot of bush you get more rain than areas with no bush.
- HCJ: I have been told of places in the landscape that have a spirit presence. Are you aware of this?
- TI: That is true. When I was young, at Onakandi village you could see the light of fire during the night [in the distance] but when you approached there is just warmth and you feel a mysterious feeling in your body. And if you look further, you see the fire is there [i.e. has moved further away].
- HCJ: Finally, the demons go into the pigs and into the lake. What would happen to them there?
- TI: When you are talking about water, here in the text we refer to the sea. The sea is a dangerous place. So, if you fall into the sea you will never come back. The significance of the water is that there are fish.
- HCJ: Why is it important that there are fish?
- TI: Fish is a food. Because we eat fish here in Namibia and abroad.

END. Closed with thanks.

CBS 6c: Aanona (Children)

Date: 30.04.2014

Text: Luke 8:26-39

Participants (Transcript Reference):

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------|
| 1. Imanuel Amagulu | (IA) |
| 2. Sipora Simon | (SS) |
| 3. Timoteus Pinihas | (TP) |
| 4. Christa Iyambo | (CI) |
| 5. Ananias Imbondi | (Alm) |
| 6. Okanona ANON6 | (O6) |
| 7. Loide Petrus | (LP) |
| 8. Merjam Iyambo | (MI) |
| 9. Okanona ANON9 | (O9) |
| 10. Frieda Shilemba | (FS) |
| 11. Klaudia Ashikuti | (KA) |
| 12. Saara Maria Msati | (SMM) |
| 13. Monica Emvula | (ME) |
| 14. Elizabeth Imbondi | (Elm) |
| 15. Okanona ANON11 | (O11) |
| 16. Anna Ikukutu | (Alk) |
| 17. Martha Nangolo | (MN) |
| 18. Okanona ANON12 | (O12) |
| 19. Hilma Ikukutu | (HIk) |
| 20. Wilbartina Teofelus | (WT) |
| 21. Eli Awala | (EA) |
| 22. Tangeni Fillemon | (TF) |

3:30pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

4:00pm – discussion

Discussion:

Luke 8:26-39 Jesus Heals a Man with Demons

Q1: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

WT: I am interested by hearing that the man was having a demon and that Jesus healed him.

The Demon(s)

Q2: What is a demon? (Reverend Uushona translated this as *ompwidhuli*, the word used in the text)

IA: Madness.

- SS: An evil spirit.
- TP: Something that is sent by satan to come into your body and will make you do bad things.
- CI: A person that is not nice in the head.
- Q2: Where do demons come from? Where do they 'live'?
- Alm: It lives in the graveyard.
- O6: The *oompwidhuli* come from someone. If you steal something from someone then that person will send you *oompwidhuli*.
- LP: *Oompwidhuli* come from someone who is against you. For example, if you are excellent in school then another will disturb your mind with evil spirits.
- MI: If the man is having the evil spirit and you greet him, he or she will beat you.
- O9: The evil spirit is from hell.
- FS: It is from the brain.
- HCJ: Can you protect yourself against people sending *oompwidhuli* to you?
- LP: No.
- CI: I agree.
- HCJ: [Asks for a show of hands from those who disagree. 38 people disagree, including LP]
- HCJ: How can you protect yourself?
- MN: For example, you go to the hospital and you receive some medicine for protection.
- O6: You go to the witchdoctor and you inform him and he helps you.
- TP: By having much faith in God and by praying and reading your Bible every day.
- MI: If you are affected by *oompwidhuli* you should read your Bible and pray.
- KA: If you want to protect yourself, don't touch someone's things without their permission.

SMM: You go to someone to pray for you.

HCJ: Do people experience *oompwidhuli* today? [20 answered YES]

HCJ: How do such people behave?

Alm: Bad behavior. They sing during night time.

LP: They go to public places like a *cuca* shop and remove all their clothes.

CI: They might come to your house and break in.

O6: The *oompwidhuli* man can attack you.

FS: They can beat you.

ME: He can beat you.

IA: He can bite you.

TF: He can drink alcohol and kill someone – even the wife.

Alm: He can burn the house.

O6: He can kill even his mother.

Elm: He can go to the *cuca* shop and take all of the liquor and pour it out.

HCJ: Where in the body is the *ompwidhuli*?

O11: In the brain.

Alk: In the head.

MN: In the entire body.

O12: In the head.

O6: In the eyes. You can see the problem in the person's eyes.

CI: In the throat.

Elm: It starts in the brain and goes through the heart.

SMM: In the mouth.

- Q3: Why does the demon take the man into the desert/bush/wilderness? (in the *Oshindonga* translation, the term used is that used to refer to the 'bush', i.e. the wild land around and between villages)
- O6: The man with *oompwidhuli* doesn't know what he is doing.
- HI: Because the man doesn't know what he is doing.
- TP: For spiritual incantation. He took him there to worship the devil.
- O6: Because the demon wants to destroy the man's body.
- HCJ: Why and how?
- O6: Because there is nobody there to assist the man [when the demon tries to destroy him].
- HCJ: Why does the demon choose the bush, rather than anywhere else?
- O6: Because somewhere else there would be help for the man.

The Man

- Q4: What does it mean to be naked in your context?
- Alm: It is bad because you may shock or surprise people.
- LP: It is bad. When other people watch him they will run away because they see that something is wrong.
- Elm: It is bad because there is a secret part of the body that should be covered. [HCJ checks with translator that she means the genital area]
- WT: It is not good to meet a naked person. It is bad to be without clothes because some people may even laugh at him.
- ME: To be naked it means you are abnormal. It is a sign.
- Q5: Can you explain to me why he is naked?
- FS: Because he is not good in the mind.
- MN: The man is not according to his own will but it is because of the power of the demon.
- LP: Because he doesn't know what he is doing.

Elm: The man, what he is doing is not according to his own will.

Q6: Why does the man throw himself at Jesus' feet?

EA: He is looking for help from Jesus.

O12: It is a prayer.

LP: The man wants Jesus to heal him, to chase away the evil spirit.

FS: He wanted Jesus to help him so that the evil spirit will leave his body.

Places

Q7: What are burial sites like? What qualities do they have?

KA: A burial place is a good place.

LP: A burial place is a good place because it is the house for the deceased person – a quiet house.

Q8: Why would the man with demons be staying in a burial site?

MN: Because the man wants to die so that he could be there.

Cl: Because he doesn't know what he is doing.

EA: The demons' power, they want the man to die so they take him to the graveyard.

FS: [agrees with EA]

ME: What the demon wants is that the person will die.

Q9: What comes to mind when you think about the bush. What is it like?

WT: *Ewanawa* [good].

Cl: There are thorns that can hurt you.

FS: There are snakes in the bush.

WT: It is a good place because all the people who want a house take some bush to make their *egumbo*.

Elm: It is a good place because you can get shade.

- ME: It is a bad place because thieves can steal something and hide it in the bush.
- MN: It is bad because animals may disappear.
- HCJ: Disappear?
- MN: The small goats may get lost.
- SMM: It is good for grazing.
- WT: It is bad because killers also stay there in the bush.
- Elm: It is a good place to find trees to make rooms in the house.
- EA: It is good because we find firewood there.
- KA: It is good because the bush can make the house.
- Elm: Some bush may make fence poles.
- ME: It is bad because if animals are bitten by snakes they may die.
- HCJ: I have been told of places in the landscape that have a spirit presence. Are you aware of this?
- 18 say YES (about 25 are present at this point)
- LP: There is an area of bush called Shambulumbulu. When you go there, if you are 2 people, one of you will disappear.
- Elm: There is a certain area where the elders will tell you not to move around there because there is a mysterious spirit. This is Oshilulu. There are a lot of Marula trees and snakes. And it is a dangerous place.
- Cl: There is an area called Okuti where a person will call you and give you food but it will be poisonous and you will die.

END. Closed with thanks.

CBS 7a: OoMemekulu (Elder Women), OoMeme (Women)

Date: 18.06.2014

Texts: Mark 4:35-41 & Mark 6:45-52

Participants (Transcript Reference):

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Memekulu Maria Nangolo | (Kuku Maria N) |
| 2. Memekulu Maria Kondo | (Kuku Maria K) |
| 3. Meme Maria Kashowa | (Meme Maria) |
| 4. Meme Monika Shipa | (Meme Monika) |
| 5. Memekulu Hilya Johannes | (Kuku Hilya) |
| 6. Memekulu Julia Iiyambo | (Kuku Julia) |
| 7. Memekulu Hileni Nendongo | (Kuku Hileni) |
| 8. Memekulu Selma Tomas | (Kuku Selma) |

2:30pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

3:00pm – discussion

Discussion:

Jesus Calms a Storm (Mark 4:35-41) & Jesus Walks on the Water (Mark 6:45-52)

Intro Q: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

Meme Maria: I am interested in the calm of the storm.

HCJ: Why is that particular interesting for you?

Meme Maria: It was apparently the boat was under water and Jesus calmed the storm and the storm obeyed his command.

HCJ: How do you think he did that?

Meme Maria: That is an indication of the Almighty power.

Meme Monika: I am interested by the statement that Jesus was behind the boat sleeping while the event took place. And they woke him up.

HCJ: Why was he asleep?

Meme Monika: The disciples knew that Jesus is helpful to them therefore they have trust in him to wake him up to calm the storm.

Jesus Calms a Storm

Q1: This is a story about events on a lake. What kind of a place is a lake?

Kuku Julia: The lake is a kind of dam but it is different from [an] *oshana* [temporary lake, which collects in the watercourses in the rainy season]. *Oshana* is open space where the water gathered for a long time. But it is not a lake.

HCJ: Is the event in the story happening on a lake or on an *oshana*?

Kuku Julia: The event took place on a lake because there is a lot of water and the boat can be there. But you cannot put a boat on *oshana*.

HCJ: What kind of place would this lake be? A place of danger? Safety? Leisure? Work?

Kuku Maria N: A lake is a dangerous place because if you drown there you will die.

HCJ: Are there any other risks?

Kuku Maria N: Yes, a lake is a very risky place for anybody who goes there.

Q2: The events in the story happen at night. What difference would that make?

Kuku Hileni: According to the experience about the storm, most storms happen during the night here.

HCJ: Is nighttime more dangerous, then?

Meme Hilya: Nighttime is dangerous. The storms mostly happen during the late afternoon.

HCJ: Is it an unusual storm because it is happening at night?

Meme Hilya: It is not surprising because most storms appear even while people are sleeping, even at midnight.

Q3: Is there a force that makes this storm happen deliberately?

Kuku Maria K: That is *Kalunga's* [God's] power.

HCJ: Is it always *Kalunga* who causes storms, or just in this story?

- Kuku Maria K: *Kalunga* causes storms in general [the other participants agree]. You find even very big trees fallen down because of storms.
- HCJ: Why did *Kalunga* cause the storm in the story?
- Kuku Hileni: Sometimes *Kalunga* caused the storm as a punishment.
- HCJ: Is that true today?
- Kuku Hileni: Only during the rainy season.
- HCJ: How would *Kalunga* send a punishment in the dry season?
- Meme Maria: Sometimes *Kalunga* sends something like whirlwinds, which can destroy everything, even rooms, just taking everything and then going.
- Q4: Do some people in your community have power over aspects of nature?
- Kuku Julia: According to my experience, while I was young, I was told by my parents, if you see a whirlwind near the house you run out and clap your hands and call out 'we have *omwaali* [in the *egumbo*]'. And that whirlwind will make a turn and go away.
- [*omwaali* is a woman who has just recently given birth, say in the last 2 or 3 days]
- HCJ: What is the connection between the whirlwind and the *omwaali*?
- Kuku Julia: The whirlwind is *ombepo ya nyata* [an unclean spirit]. The connection is that if that spirit destroyed that room [hut], the *omwaali* is not able to run away with that infant. Therefore, you say you have a special person in that house so the unclean spirit must not put harm on that house.
- Meme Maria: There are some people in the area who can foresee. They can see the danger in your area. So, they can tell you: '*shikukutu moluha shinegune mompolo*' [Translator explained that this translates as 'the difficult should pass by while the easy you face,' meaning *let the danger pass you by and the good come to you*. It is said as a blessing.]
- HCJ: What do you call such a person?
- Kuku Maria N: If the person can see what will happen we can say they see very far like an eagle. We say that they have eaten the eyes of an eagle.

- HCJ: Is this meant metaphorically or literally?
- Translator: Literally; some believe they actually have eaten the eyes of an eagle.
- HCJ: Are there any other people with special powers in the community? Good powers? Bad powers?
- [silence]
- Some people, while I have been here, have talked to me about those who bewitch others, and about traditional healers, for example.
- [silence]
- Q5: Can you explain to me how Jesus manages to control the wind and the waves?
- Kuku Hileni: Jesus is the Almighty and he controls the storm and waves with the Almighty power.
- Kuku Julia: Jesus is sent by *Kalunga* among the people or disciples, with power from Heaven. Therefore he did everything was possible to do healing because he was even open the eyes, make the disabled to move and to calm the storm.
- HCJ: Is Jesus facing unclean spirits in the wind and the waves?
- Kuku Julia: Always the storm is not a good thing because it is always to destroy. And the disciples on the boat they saw it was very dangerous so they should report it to the Almighty so that it can make a difference. It can be compared to a storm we had in lihongo this year which was worse than in other years.
- HCJ: Are the winds and the waves unclean spirits?
- Kuku Julia: They know about the storm, that the storm is not always for goodness. Therefore we call it unclean spirits and they report it to Jesus.
- [all agree it is unclean spirits]
- If it is rainy season the *mahangu* can be flattened and it is by unclean spirits [*oombepo dha nyata*].
- HCJ: Would you be surprised if someone in this community said they had calmed a storm?
- Kuku Julia: Yes.

Meme Monika: Yes. Where would someone get that power?

HCJ: So, you would not expect someone to have such power over nature?

General response: No.

Mark 6:45-52

Intro Q: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

Meme Maria: What does verse 52 mean?

HCJ: Perhaps that the disciples had not fully appreciated Jesus' power to perform miracles (Feeding 5000) and that they were similarly surprised when this event took place (Walking on Water)?

Jesus Walks on the Water

Q6: Why does Jesus choose a hill/mountain to pray on?

Kuku Hileni: On the top of the hill it is a quiet place rather than on the ground. There are not too many people.

Meme Maria: Jesus used to pray in secret, not in public. That is why he even taught his disciples to go into the room, shut the door, lock the room and pray. But the Father can hear your prayer.

HCJ: Is there any significance to the height of the mountain? Do you think it is a sensible interpretation to suggest that he goes up high to be closer to God?

Kuku Julia: No. Jesus went up the hill to signify that he is on top of everyone on Earth. Therefore he prays for everyone below him.

HCJ: Where is *Kalunga*?

Meme Monika: *Kalunga* is close to us. *Kalunga* is in and amongst the community.

HCJ: Is *Kalunga* in the land?

Meme Monika: Yes.

- Kuku Hileni: I am saying that *Kalunga* is everywhere. Wherever you go, *Kalunga* is there.
- Q7: How is Jesus able to walk on the water?
- Kuku Hileni: Jesus walks on the sea through the Spirit which is in him. Or the Spirit makes him walk on the sea.
- HCJ: Is he a spiritual or physical being when he walks on the water?
- Kuku Hileni: He walks as a spirit but he is seen physically by others. That is why they call him *oshiluli*.
- Kuku Julia: [agrees]
- Meme Monika: [agrees]
- HCJ: Are you saying that he does not physically walk on the water but walks on the water as a spiritual being?
- Group: Yes [Meme Maria, Meme Monika, Kuku Julia]
- HCJ: Can other people change from being in one state to the other, physical to spiritual?
- Group: No.
- HCJ: So, only Jesus has ever done that?
- Group: Yes.
- Meme Maria: But if you see someone who looks physical [but is not], that is only *oshiluli*.
- HCJ: Why is an *oshiluli* still active after death?
- Kuku Maria: The *oshiluli* is there because some people can die but the spirit is still being.
- Q8: Why was he planning to pass by the disciples?
- Kuku Julia: Jesus wanted to pass by but when they saw him they called him *oshiluli* so he came back so that they could recognise that he is not *oshiluli* but he [himself].
- Kuku Maria K: He did not want the disciples to see him. [No explanation when asked why]
- HCJ: Is it trying to say that he was planning to walk across the whole width of the lake?

- Meme Maria: The disciples were facing a strong wind. They were not even able to move. He was planning to help them but when he arrive he realised they no longer needed his help and planned to pass by. Then they saw him.
- Q9: Again, these events happen at night. Is this important?
- Kuku Julia: These things happen during the night. That is why they call Jesus *oshiluli*. If it was happening during the day they would not call him that because *iiluli* cannot be seen during the day.
- HCJ: What would they have said to him during the day?
- Meme Maria: They would recognise him as Jesus.
- [At this point a lively discussion started up to one side about whether Jesus was walking in, on, or above the water]
- HCJ: What do you think? Was he actually walking on the surface of the water?
- Kuku Julia: He was walking above the water. [She indicated a foot or so above the surface]
- HCJ: Why do you think that? Why not actually *on* the water?
- Kuku Julia: His feet do not touch the water. Because if you go somewhere where someone saw *oshiluli* you do not see footprints. [so, spiritual beings do not touch the surface, otherwise you would see ground/water disturbance].
- HCJ: Do you agree? [to the rest of the group]
- Consensus: Yes.
- Q10: Why would they be scared of an '*oshiluli*'? What could an *oshiluli* do to them?
- Meme Monika: *Oshiluli* is something which is shocking.
- Meme Hilya: It only shocks you.
- Meme Maria: It can strangle you, or throw earth or water at you.
- HCJ: So, it can do physical harm as well as shock?
- Group: Yes.
- Q11: Do *iiluli* walk on lakes?

Kuku Julia: Yes, sometimes in the water you hear the sound of footsteps on the water but you look back and cannot see anything on surface of the water. This is in the night. And you can even see the bush moving but there is nothing in the bush.

HCJ: Are *iiluli* (restless spirits) and *aathithi* (ancestor spirits) related?

Meme Hilya: *Aathithi* is another thing. *iiluli* is another thing. *Aathithi* is ancestors, those who even come in your house and go to the pounding area and start pounding. But when you go there, hearing the sound, but there is no one there. Or you can hear the voice somewhere saying 'do not disturb our children' but you cannot see them.

HCJ: So, they are active today?

Meme Hilya: [No, then] Yes.

Meme Maria: Yes.

HCJ: Where do they stay?

Kuku Hileni: They stay in *oshiheke* [the bush, in an area/place called] *Oshilulu*.

HCJ: The word *Oshilulu* sounds like *oshiluli*. Do the *iiluli* stay there, too?

Kuku Hileni: No.

HCJ: Whose *aathithi* stay there? Only the lihongo community?

Kuku Hileni: I have no idea but it's the story we heard from our ancestors.

HCJ: What do you think of the idea that Jesus could be thought of as an ancestor? Is Jesus an ancestor?

Kuku Hileni: No, Jesus is not an ancestor.

Kuku Maria K: No, he is not an ancestor.

HCJ: Why not?

Kuku Maria K: Where the *aathithi* are staying you do not pass by without stopping to ask if you can pass or if you are in a car you press the hooter. If you are not do that the car will get stuck.

Kuku Hileni: Jesus is the Holy Spirit.

Q12: When Jesus got into the boat, the wind calmed down.
Why?

Kuku Hileni: Jesus has the Almighty power of *Kalunga* therefore he entered there to calm the storm.

[The participants were tired and wished to bring the meeting to a close at this point.]

END. Closed with thanks.

CBS 7b: OoTatekulu (Elder Men), OoTate (Men)

Date: 25.06.2014

Texts: Mark 4:35-41 & Mark 6:45-52

Participants (Transcript Reference):

1. Tatekulu Herman Iyambo (HI)
2. Tatekulu Laban Iyambo (LI)

2:30pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

3:00pm – discussion

Discussion:

Jesus Calms a Storm (Mark 4:35-41) & Jesus Walks on the Water (Mark 6:45-52)

Intro Q: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

LI: The whole story is very interesting.

Jesus Calms a Storm

Q1: This is a story about events on a lake. What kind of a place is a lake?

LI: The lake, we don't have it here but on the Western side of Namibia we have it but it looks like a river or a valley.

HCJ: A place where water gathers, is it a good place, a bad place, a safe place, a dangerous place?

LI: It is not a dangerous place because it is a place where there is water and people used to drink such water, and animals.

Q2: The events in the story happen at night. What difference would that make?

LI: Night is not good because of the darkness. You cannot see clearly what is coming. Every thing just coming suddenly. But daytime is good because everything is clear to see.

HCJ: What might surprise you like that in the night?

- LI: The night is not safe because you cannot see clear. You even step your foot on a snake and it bite you. But you avoid it during the day.
- Q3: Is there a force that makes this storm happen deliberately?
- LI: According to my understanding the storm is nature.
- HCJ: So it is not *Kalunga* making the storm happen?
- LI: Both. It is the work of *Kalunga*, the owner of the creation.
- Q4: Do some people in your community have power over aspects of nature?
- LI: No one.
- Translator: [Directed at LI] People say about whirlwinds and shouting to them to stay away because we have *omwaali* in the house. Have you heard of this?
- LI: The whirlwind just turns away but not because of the person's command but because it was going to turn [anyway].
- HCJ: How about people who can see into the future?
- LI: I heard about those people long, long ago but in our present age there is no one.
- [Kuku Herman liyambo arrives. His wife had recommended the sessions to him. He is usually tending his herd, but now that the cattle are roaming free (crops harvested) he is able to attend. Text read out again. Q4 posed to HI, too.]
- HI: We have a belief in our community. For example, when I have sickness, the pastor is coming to me and pray for me and then my illness goes away. Or I have many difficulties in my life and I can discuss it with pastors and they help me and I feel comfortable.
- Translator: Have you heard about people commanding aspects of nature through shouts?
- HI: In our culture or in Christianity?
- HCJ: Either.
- HI: In the culture I recall the field where I am staying now [i.e. where his *egumbo* is located]. There was an evil spirit. And there is a person known as Kambonde Kalugodhi who

stopped it. He was a headman and he was the previous owner of the field.

- HCJ: How did he stop the evil spirit?
- HI: He stopped it by calling the name of *Kalunga kaNangombe* that please help me the power to stop this evil spirit and then the evil spirit stopped.
- Translator: Before the missionaries came in Namibia, people believed in *Kalunga kaNangombe* [god of Nangombe].
- HCJ: Who is Nangombe?
- HI: The Ndonga people they were from *evi lyomatale* [the place of lakes]. And Nangombe was the person who brought the people to the present area. Therefore people start to honour him and it is the god who was leading him.
- HCJ: When did it happen that you got rid of the evil spirit from the land?
- HI: I can't remember the years but I remember it was the time of the reign of King Shepo Shanamene.
- HCJ: Do you see local culture and Christianity as very separate?
- HI: The culture and Christianity are just like brother and sister. They are the same.
- HCJ: Is *Kalunga kaNangombe* the same as *Kalunga* in the Bible?
- HI: When we talk about *Kalunga kaNangombe* we talk only about the creator. Before the missionaries we did not know how to explain God.
- HCJ: Kuku Laban [LI], do you agree?
- LI: God is one. *Kalunga kaNangombe* is the same as we have now. Long ago people were only believing in *Kalunga kaNangombe* but they were in faith in God. They realised that the God they were believing in is the same God as we are talking about now.
- HCJ: And do you agree that local culture and Christianity are brother and sister?
- LI: There is a difference because in culture there is a certain issue [I think 'certain issues' was meant, rather than one specific issue] which is not relevant to the Christianity.
- HCJ: Which issue(s)?

- LI: For example, we have *ohango yiitsali* [pre-missionary wedding, lit. 'wedding feast of the tents'].
- Translator: People go to the headman and they do something not good for Christianity to give the couple a traditional marriage. They do not go to the church for a blessing.
- HI: You cannot live with a woman you are not married to. You cannot eat food cooked by a woman you are not married to. After the *ohango yiitsali* she is ready to cook for you. This is culture.
- LI: But in Christianity you must be married in the church, then you start living together.
- HCJ: In *ohango* in church, the blessing or ceremony makes the people married. In *ohango yiitsali*, what do they do to make the marriage?
- LI: In *ohango yiitsali* only the women go there for marriage. They stay there. These women have done *ohango yiitsali*. When they have done traditional rites in the *etsali* [tent/hut/enclosure made of materials from the bush].
- HI: When the girls declare they have done *ohango yiitsali* the men are authorised to go and choose a girl.
- HCJ: What traditional rites happen in the *etsali*?
- HI: The man who solemnises the *ohango yiitsali* called *namuganga* [connected to *onganga* – traditional healer/witchdoctor – one with power]. He gathers all girls and stands them in front of the people and if there is a pregnant girl amongst them he can see it. And he call you down: 'you go, you are pregnant.' And then, those who are not yet pregnant, *namuganga* takes some ointment and apply it to the face or to the body for those girls. And after that he declare you are now got marriage.
- HCJ: Does anybody get married like this now?
- HI: No longer *ohango yiitsali* in our time. Now the man has a power to bring a girl to the church to get married.
- Q5: Can you explain to me how Jesus manages to control the wind and the waves?
- LI: Jesus used the power of the Heavenly Father.
- HI: By stopping the wind and calm, this just to indicate that behind Jesus there is another one, the Almighty. Therefore

Jesus uses this power to show the disciples that he is sent by Almighty God so they must believe in him.

- HCJ: Would you be surprised if someone in this community came in and said they had calmed the wind or a storm?
- LI: I am not surprised but I wouldn't believe him.
- HCJ: Why would you not be surprised?
- LI: If that person did it in my presence I would be surprised and would believe him.
- HCJ: Do people make such claims about control over nature in this community?
- HI: For example, if someone came and told me he had cured HIV or cancer, I can't believe it. Because even the doctors they try by all means but they are not succeed.
- HCJ: Do you know of people who make those claims?
- HI: We have such people, they call themselves doctors [implied: but they are not].
- LI: Not the medical doctor but the traditional doctors [*oonganga*] they claim that.
- HCJ: Maybe not HIV or cancer, but do they have the power to heal other things?
- HI: I cannot confirm that.
- HCJ: Are *oonganga* helpful?
- LI: Yes, by nature before the Christianity or before medical doctors we have traditional healers [*oonganga*], they used to heal people. If you were bitten by a dog or a snake they can lend assistance and you will get well. But now, we go to hospital and not to those people.
- HCJ: But they still exist?
- LI: Not at all. [This contradicts the reports of other groups and the fact that I have seen adverts in the newspaper for such healers. However, they may not exist in this particular community.]

Mark 6:45-52

- Intro Q: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

LI: The content of this text we listened is just to give us on how the life of Jesus was when he approached either his disciples. And this text is only to give us hope and trust in Jesus who can making the wonderful things.

HI: It is clear. Let us just go ahead and remember that is there for us to believe in him.

Jesus Walks on the Water

Q6: Why does Jesus choose a hill/mountain to pray on?

HI: To go on top of a mountain, it is not easy to get there, therefore Jesus go there by all means to show the others that he is able to go there or to overcome all the trouble and he goes there to pray for his nation.

LI: The other meaning is that the nation was so many on the mountain so he goes on top so everyone can see him and he can see them.

HCJ: What do you think of the idea that he goes to the top to be closer to *Kalunga*?

LI: It is not to go closer to *Kalunga*. No.

HI: Even if he was on the top, he is still on Earth among the people [implied: so is no closer to God].

HCJ: Where is *Kalunga*?

HI: *Kalunga* is everywhere. We are in his house now so we are with *Kalunga*.

LI: The answer from Kuku Herman is correct, but on the other hand all the faithful are closer to *Kalunga*. The unfaithful are far from *Kalunga*.

HCJ: Is *Kalunga* in the sky?

HI: According to the scripture, *Kalunga* created Heaven and Earth. This means that *Kalunga* is in with His creation.

HCJ: So is he in the land? In everything?

Both: Yes. He is wherever his creation is.

Q7: How is Jesus able to walk on the water?

LI: The responsibility of Jesus on Earth is to make people faithful to him and to *Kalunga*. Therefore, he did this

miracle to make people have faith. Yes, he can even walk on water. He is given the power so that his followers can see that this is the power of the Almighty and believe.

HI: To walk on water... I recall his birth. According to the Jews' belief, they know that Jesus was a son of Joseph and Maria. They regard as a son of a human being, not of *Kalunga*. Therefore *Kalunga* worked through Jesus so that people may believe that this person is not truly a human being but on the other hand he is also a god.

HCJ: Do you think he walked on the surface or above the water?

LI: He was walking like on the ground [i.e. on the surface].

HI: I confirm this answer. Because even the disciples were confirm and they said maybe this is *oshiluli*.

HCJ: So, do *iiluli* walk on the ground?

HI: *Oshiluli* is something else. When you see *oshiluli* you can ask yourself: 'what is this? Is this a person or what?'

HCJ: Would you expect to see an *oshiluli* on the surface of a lake? On water?

LI: No, I am not anticipating to see *iiluli* walking on the water.

HI: Yes, according to the story from those who have seen it.

HI: According to the story, or if *oshiluli* is coming to your house and you put an open Bible or a bottle of water at the entrance of the room or the place it comes to, it will not come [in], because *iiluli* are against the Bible and water.

HCJ: Why are they against water?

HI: *Oshiluli* is just like a wind and the reason why it is against the Bible is that the Bible is the Word of God and water is one of the liquids created by God. And so the *oshiluli* shy to approach the Bible and water because they are for God [God's].

LI: On the other hand, *oshiluli* is against mirrors, and also in water you can see yourself. So the *oshiluli* does not want to see itself.

HCJ: What would happen if it saw itself?

HI: To me, the Bible and the water they have the power of God, so that is why the *oshiluli* will turn away.

- LI: When it comes to the mirror or water, it may get a shock and run away. [shock from itself seeing an *oshiluli*? Many have stressed that the major effect of seeing an *oshiluli* is shock].
- Translator: Maybe it thinks it is another *oshiluli* and gets scared, like a dog seeing its reflection and thinking it is another dog.
- HCJ: Is the Bible as a physical object a source of power?
- LI: Yes, that is a powerful, almighty book.
- HI: Yes, this is the holy book also.
- HCJ: Are there other ways that the book, as an object of power, is used in this community?
- HI: For example, if I am feel pain, then the counselling [counsellor?] came or the pastor came and tell me one word or verse from the Bible. For example, the man who was sick for 38 years at Bethsaida. Therefore, if anyone came to me and tell me such verses that this man was healed by Jesus, I am also get faith that I can be healed by Jesus like my former brother [the man in the Bible].
- LI: Yes, that book is a holy book and a different one. For example, if your wife or child has passed, those who come to you read verses, they help to give you faith.
- HCJ: Do you use the book as a physical object, perhaps in healing the body or parts of the body?
- LI: The book itself cannot change you but the Word of God which is in the book can help you when you hear it.
- HCJ: So there are no other examples, other than using it as a barrier to *iiluli*?
- HI: Only the word that was written by the holy people of God. Because if you are in doubt you can open it and read one verse and become strong. I recall the accident which happened at Onethindi last week [a fatal car crash, 15km away]. The parents of the person who was driving were suddenly told that 'your son is dead in a car accident' but in order to accept the situation the counsellor used verses from the Bible and the parents became strong. I was there at the funeral. And he [they, parents] was even asked by the police officer if he could come to the mortuary to identify the body and how it was burned out. And they agree and know that this person is no longer on Earth. And this is because of the Bible.

- LI: No, only the words because in the Bible there is the Word of God through the prophets. The Word can change the life. But only when I have faith. But if there is no faith, nothing happened in my life.
- Q8: Why was he planning to pass by the disciples?
- HI: Jesus wanted to show the power of God through him. Therefore he went direct to them and later to pass them by with the intention that if they see him and think he is *oshiluli*, he will reveal to them to show them he is not *oshiluli* but Jesus.
- HCJ: So, if they had realised it was Jesus straightaway, he would have walked on by?
- LI: Jesus was demonstrating his power, that is why he walked. He walked on the water deliberately to test them.
- HCJ: So, if they had said: 'it is Jesus,' he would have walked on?
- HI: It was good if they realise it is Jesus but these people were not realise so he came back to them to show them it was not *oshiluli* but really Jesus. And to walk on the sea it was one of the miracles that he did to give the disciples more understanding that he is the son of the Almighty.
- Q9: Again, these events happen at night. Is this important?
- HI: Jesus was very busy during the day and this happened during the night. The intention is only that during the day he was busy and the right time to come to them was at night.
- LI: He is right. He was busy during the day during the day so the event only happened on that night.
- HCJ: If these events had happened in the day, what would be different?
- LI: No difference at all, he was even able to walk even during the day.
- HI: Jesus is not limited. He could do whatever he wants even during the day or night.
- HCJ: Is he walking on the water physically or spiritually?
- LI: Jesus is on the other hand a spirit and so he is able to walk spiritually.

- HI: Jesus is a spirit; that is why we can even pray to him through the Spirit. Because the scripture even tells us he was there before the world.
- HCJ: If he is walking spiritually, do you think that is why they think he is *oshiluli*?
- LI: The disciples were the men of flesh and blood. It was there first time to see someone walk on water so they are shocked and that is why they think he is *oshiluli*.
- HCJ: Can he change from a physical to a spiritual body when he chooses?
- HI: When Jesus came in this world he came in through the flesh but he has the power to change into spirit, therefore he does the miracles through Almighty God and change everything. For example, the Jews were test him. When they saw him coming they put one old woman and the granddaughter in a certain room without a window. They said to Jesus: 'you say you are the Son of God and can see in secret.' They asked him what was in the room. He said that inside was a pig and a piglet. They laughed. They opened the room and out comes a pig and piglet. And they were shocked.
- HCJ: Why is he not walking on the water physically?
- LI: Jesus came into the world physically but naturally he is a spirit. Therefore he does the miracles only to put a strong faith in his disciples only to understand him. He is a different person, from the Almighty and he can do anything.
- Q10: Why would they be scared of an '*oshiluli*'? What could an *oshiluli* do to them?
- LI: *liluli* make or shocking the person.
- HCJ: Can they do any physical harm?
- HI: *Oshiluli* is not approach you. You just shock by seeing a mysterious sign like seeing a fire or feeling warm and then your heart trembles.
- Q11: Do *iluli* walk on lakes? [Already answered.]
- Q12: When Jesus got into the boat, the wind calmed down. Why?
- [Getting too late – brought session to an end.]

END. Closed with thanks.

CBS 7c: Aanona (Children)

Date: 16.07.2014

Texts: Mark 4:35-41 & Mark 6:45-52

Participants (Transcript Reference):

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------|
| 1. Eli Awala | (EA) |
| 2. Selma Kwedhi | (SK) |
| 3. Anna Ikukutu | (AIk) |
| 4. Hilma Ikukutu | (HIk) |
| 5. Loide Elago | (LE) |
| 6. Loide Petrus | (LP) |
| 7. Frieda Shilemba | (FS) |
| 8. Erastus Kuutondokwa | (EKuu) |
| 9. Silas Ikukutu | (SIk) |
| 10. Ananias Imbondi | (AIIm) |
| 11. Maria Johannes | (MJ) |
| 12. Hileni Iiyambo | (HIi) |
| 13. Klaudia Ashikuti | (KA) |
| 14. Wilbartina Teofelus | (WT) |
| 15. Albertina Nicodemus | (AN) |
| 16. Ester Nicodemus | (EN) |
| 17. Martha Nangolo | (MN) |
| 18. Elizabeth Imbondi | (EIIm) |
| 19. Eliaser Uushona | (EUu) |
| 20. Okanona ANON9 | (O9) |

3:00pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

3:20pm – discussion

Discussion:

Jesus Calms a Storm (Mark 4:35-41)

Intro Q: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

EN: I am interested in the way Jesus stopped the storm. He says keep quiet and the storm keeps quiet.

Jesus Calms a Storm

Q1: This is a story about events on a lake. What kind of a place is a lake?

FS: It is a place where the waters are contained.

- HCJ: Is it a safe place? A dangerous place? Good or bad?
- Hli: *Eta* [lake, pl. *oma*-] is a dangerous area but on the other hand it is a good area. In the case of the goodness, there is lots of water you can take and use. But if you fall down in *eta* you will even die.
- HCJ: Does anyone have any other impressions? What do you think of when you think of a lake?
- [no responses]
- Q2: The events in the story happen at night. What difference would that make?
- LE: They take place at night because if it happened during the day it cannot stop.
- HCJ: Why could it not stop?
- LE: Because Jesus was sleeping during the night. [I think the implication here is that Jesus would be busy doing other things in the day/would be elsewhere so would not be available to calm the storm.]
- EN: Jesus when he was on Earth, he did his mystery work by healing people. So, in this case, he was travelling to another place to evangelise. [So was at the right place at the right time?]
- EUu: Always during the day the weather conditions are different [calmer] from the weather conditions during the night [stormy]. So this happened due to the weather conditions during the night.
- Q3: Is there a force that makes this storm happen deliberately?
- WT: No.
- [20 children agree]
- HCJ: Does anyone have a different view that they would like to explain to us?
- EN: Yes. Satan is also powerful. He can make things happen deliberately.
- HCJ: Did Satan make this storm happen?
- EN: Yes.

- EUu: Yes. These people were in the lake. Maybe there was someone behind them who was a witch (*omulodhi*) and who was against them. Maybe the *omulodhi* sent the storm to destroy them. And Jesus prevented it.
- Q4: Do some people in your community have power over aspects of nature?
- Elm: No.
[c.18 agree]
- HCJ: Can anyone give me examples to disagree with Elizabeth?
- EKuu: No.
- KAsh: There is nobody can stop the nature beyond *Kalunga*.
- EUu: There is nobody who is [more] powerful than *Kalunga*.
- Elm: *Kalunga* is the controller of all nature.
- WT: When *Kalunga* sent the rain, it will rain without anybody to stop it.
- Hli: No one can stop nature.
- HCJ: Is it possible for *oonganga* [traditional healers] or *omulodhi* [witches] to control aspects of nature?
- Alm: No.
- FS: No.
- EKuu: No.
- LP: No.
- SKw: No.
- KAsh: No.
- Hlk: No.
[18 say 'no']
- Q5: Can you explain to me how Jesus manages to control the wind and the waves?
- EUu: The God is the beginning of that event and he also has the power to end it.

- MJ: Jesus has the power to prevent or calming the storm because he has the power of the Holy Spirit.
- EN: Jesus is the Son of God and he is there to represent God. Therefore he has the authority to calm or stop the storm.
- LP: Jesus is the Son of God. He is sent by God on Earth. Therefore he calms the storm through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- HCJ: Are you familiar with the idea of people commanding whirlwinds to avoid a house? Put your hand up if you believe you can order a whirlwind to change course.
- [c.13, but children are in and out of the room and a few new ones have joined]
- HCJ: How does it work?
- LP: One day we were at home. Suddenly we saw a whirlwind coming straight to our house. One of my parents said, 'please, we have *omwaali* [woman who has recently given birth] here!' Suddenly the whirlwind turned away.
- [5/6 people have experienced this]
- Alm: One day we were in our house and the whirlwind came. One of our parents said, '*oshiluli pita po!* [*Oshiluli*, go away!]. Then the whirlwind went away.
- HCJ: So, is a whirlwind an *oshiluli*?
- Alm: Yes, maybe. I just heard what my parents said to the whirlwind.
- EKuu: One day I was grazing my animals then the whirlwind came straight to me. Then I used that word 'there is *omwaali*' and then it turned away.
- LE: There is another, for example thunderstorms. When there is lightning and thunder you have to use the words '*nayi lye, ihe inayi kwata*' [let it rain, but without any danger].
- FS: If the rain is coming and you realise this is danger because of thunder or lightning, you have to put salt on the fire and then you calm the storm.
- HCJ: Why salt?
- MJ: You have to put salt on the fire only when there is *ombadhi* [lightning].

- HCJ: What special property does salt have?
- MJ: Maybe there is a secret in the salt. Because when you put it in the fire you hear the sound of it burning (tock, tock, tock).
- MN: When there is rain, the parents used to say '*vula loka*' (please rain/give us water) so that we do not go and steal.
- EA: Other people used to exalt when it is raining so that the crops grow fast.

Mark 6:45-52

- Intro Q: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?
- FS: Jesus calms the strong wind.
- HCJ: How do you think he does that, Frieda?
- FS: Jesus commands the wind to stop.
- HCJ: Like people might command a whirlwind to go away?
- FS: No.
- EUu: He commands this wind by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- HCJ: And in your context, what power are you using to order the whirlwind away?
- EUu: They command the whirlwind through the power of the traditional culture.
- LE: They command it through their own power.
- FS: I agree with Eliaser [that the power of traditional culture is used to alter the course of a whirlwind].
- EKuu: I agree with Eliaser.
- HCJ: Please would you put your hand up if you think that traditional culture is still powerful?
- [c.18 agree]
- HCJ: Does traditional culture affect your lives very much?
- Alm: Yes.
- Hlk: We are influenced by our tradition because it was the first before Christianity.

- HCJ: Can you give me one example of how it influences your life?
- Hlk: I do traditional dancing.
- EN: I like the traditional because our parents taught us that whenever you greet someone you must greet with respect by bending down, so I am used to greeting through culture.
- EUu: Even our parents taught us that whenever an old aged person makes a mistake please don't laugh otherwise they may curse you. So we don't laugh at them in case they curse us.
- Elm: Even the culture you cannot walk behind the elder person. You have to walk in front.
- HCJ: Please explain to me what you mean and why.
- Elm: You must not walk to the back if they are seated, for example. I don't know why.
- HCJ: Does anyone know?
- [no responses]
- MJ: There is also another traditional food. [i.e. traditional food is another way in which their lives are influenced by local culture]
- Hli: We also have traditional material like clay pots and baskets which you can sell and make more money.

Jesus Walks on the Water

- Q6: Why does Jesus choose a hill/mountain to pray on?
- MJ: Because he was afraid that the people would kill him.
- WT: He wanted to be seen by everybody.
- Alk: He go there to get the power to be able to walk on the sea.
- HCJ: Are high places powerful places?
- Alk: No.
- HCJ: So, why do you think he was getting power there?
- Alk: [unsure]

HCJ: Do you think Jesus might be going up high to get closer to God?

KAsh: It is true.

HCJ: Where is *Kalunga*? Up high?

Hlk: *Kalunga* is everywhere on Earth, even here.

LP: *Kalunga* is on highest and he can protect everybody.

Elm: *Kalunga* is everywhere.

SKw: *Kalunga* is everywhere.

Q7: How is Jesus able to walk on the water?

EA: He walked on the water through the Holy Spirit.

LP: Jesus is the Holy Spirit therefore he walked on the sea in the form of the Holy Spirit.

AN: He walked on the sea the same as he walks on the Earth, in a physical way.

HCJ: Hands up for spiritual walking: [14]

HCJ: Hands up for physical walking: [1] [Albertina Nicodemus]

HCJ: Can he choose to change from a physical to a spiritual state when he wants?

FS: God is choosing when he changes.

Hli: I agree he can change because he appeared [physically] to the disciples in the room [having got there spiritually].

MJ: Yes, Jesus can be in spirit because in the Bible we read that Jesus is a spirit.

Q8: Why was he planning to pass by the disciples?

Elm: Because he was not realise [that it was] them.

WT: Jesus think that maybe if he go there straight to them the disciples will be shocked so he plans to go past them.

Q9: Again, these events happen at night. Is this important?
[out of time]

- Q10: Why would they be scared of an 'oshiluli'? What could an *oshiluli* do to them?
- EKuu: *Oshiluli* can strangle.
- Hlk: *Oshiluli* can beat you.
- Alm: *Oshiluli* can eat all the food wherever he finds it.
- Elm: *Oshiluli* can destroy.
- Alk: *Oshiluli* can go through the locked room.
- Q11: Do *iiluli* walk on lakes?
- LP: Yes, because they are just wind [*ombepo*]. It is the dead person who has come back.
- Hli: *Oshiluli* is weightless. It is just a spirit. It can walk on the water.
- HCJ: Did Jesus walk on the water or above the water?
- O9: He walked on the water.
- LP: He walked but he did not touch the water.
- EKuu: He walked above.
- [13 out of 16 present agree with the last statement]
- HCJ: Why above?
- LP: Because even he is a spirit so he cannot touch it. It is like an *oshiluli*.
- Hli: Because if he walked physically he would drown.
- Q12: When Jesus got into the boat, the wind calmed down. Why?
- [out of time]

END. Closed with thanks.

CBS 8a: OoMemekulu (Elder women), OoMeme (Women)

Date: 28.05.2014

Text: Luke 24:1-49

Participants (Transcript Reference):

1. Memekulu Maria Kondo (Kuku Maria)
2. Memekulu Victoria Mvula (Kuku Victoria)

3:00pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

3:30pm – discussion

Discussion:

Luke 24:1-49

Q1: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

Kuku Victoria: The words spoken in the text are true.

Death and Experiences of the Deceased in the lihongo Community

Q2: What happens when someone dies in your community? You could think about that with regard to their *egumbo* (house) or the community as a whole.

Kuku Victoria: When somebody dies in the local area, the family, neighbours and friends get involved to assist the bereaved family to do the funeral preparations.

HCJ: How exactly do they assist?

Kuku Maria: They try to assist one another by providing the coffin and to look for food so that all of the people who come to the funeral or come to offer comfort have something to eat.

HCJ: So you might take food to a nearby *egumbo*?

Kuku Maria: Yes, you take everything.

Q3: What changes when that person dies? For example, what changes in the *egumbo*? Who takes over their responsibilities and possessions?

Kuku Victoria: In our local area, when a husband dies then everything he had is taken from the widow [by his family]. The cattle, car

and all moveable property [except clothes] are taken by the family of the husband and they may even chase away the widow. However, this no longer happens.

[Translator: the traditional authorities would now be involved to make sure the widow and her household are protected, by stressing that what has been acquired has been achieved through joint endeavor and their life together.]

- HCJ: Does the *egumbo* move?
- Kuku Maria: The *egumbo* should move, after a while.
- HCJ: After how long?
- Kuku Maria: To move the house was a custom but nowadays that does not happen because of the concrete buildings [that the *egumbo* now contains]. It is not so important to move the *egumbo*.
- HCJ: Kuku Maria, would you move the *egumbo* if you were in that situation?
- Kuku Maria: I would not move the house but I would change the location of the *ehale* [entrance]. Because that is where the husband used to walk in.
- HCJ: Does the inside layout change?
- Kuku Victoria: No.
- Kuku Maria: No.
- HCJ: Who takes over the responsibilities of the deceased?
- Kuku Maria: The elder one will take the responsibility.
- HCJ: Could a woman then become the main cattle herder in the household if the husband died?
- TA: Yes.
- Kuku Victoria: If the husband died then the widow will take the responsibilities and she might also talk with the family of the husband.
- Q4: Can you experience and/or communicate with people after their death? If so, how?
- Kuku Victoria: There is no way to communicate with a dead person. [This comment is explicitly contradicted later on.]

Kuku Maria: He is not there, so how can you communicate with him or her?

HCJ: Some people might say that you can experience the deceased as ghosts or spiritually but perhaps not physically any more.

Kuku Victoria: I have never heard that.

Kuku Maria: In dreams sometimes you can dream the deceased, them being in the house, visiting you, sitting with you.

HCJ: Did people think you could experience the dead in the past, but not any more?

Kuku Victoria: Long, long ago we heard about our foremothers that some people died but came back as ghosts [iiluli].

Q5: Do people continue to have an influence on the life of the community after they have died? If so, how?

Kuku Maria: Yes, sometimes in this area you can find someone who looks like the deceased or even behaves like them.

HCJ: And what is the connection between the person and the deceased?

Kuku Victoria: Sometimes they are not related to one another but their behaviour looks similar or even the shape [physical appearance] is similar.

HCJ: So is there a connection?

Kuku Maria: No, just the same way of behaviour.

HCJ: Is there any other influence that someone who has died will have?

Kuku Victoria: But yes because sometimes the person is dead but he is seen by other people.

HCJ: Not in a dream?

TA: Not in a dream.

Kuku Victoria: You see that person again.

HCJ: Can you communicate with that person?

Kuku Victoria: No.

- Kuku Maria: The person, when you see him, he disappears very quickly.
- HCJ: Is that the only way you can experience a dead person and does that happen often?
- Kuku Maria: It is the only way.
- HCJ: Does it happen often?
- Kuku Victoria: When the person sees the deceased one and the parents [of the deceased] find out, the parents have a way to take the dead person out of the community.
- Translator: Or the family [if the parents are also deceased].
- HCJ: How would they do that?
- Kuku Victoria: They have their own way to say goodbye to him.
- Kuku Maria: If he used to come into the home [the deceased, that is], they slaughter a chicken and make oshimbombo [porridge] and they put that food at the place he liked to be during the evening, and in the morning you find nothing left.
- HCJ: Is this today or in the past?
- Kuku Maria: Even nowadays. That is the only method to say goodbye. After he has eaten he is gone forever.
- Q6: In the text, it was the women who first found out about the Resurrection of Jesus. In the other Gospels, it was women who first experienced the risen Jesus. Why do you think the women found out/experienced first?
- Kuku Maria: The women went there in the early morning because they wanted to know whether Jesus was there in the tomb.
- HCJ: Did the men not want to know?
- Kuku Victoria: The men are always behind whereas the women always want to be a witness.
- Q7: [Read out 24:16: 'they saw him, but somehow did not recognize him'] Why did the disciples not recognise Jesus on the road to Emmaus?
- Kuku Maria: They didn't recognise Jesus because maybe there is a change in Jesus.
- HCJ: If he has changed, how is he still Jesus?

Kuku Victoria: They worried because they believed Jesus is dead and maybe this is someone only with the same character as Jesus.

HCJ: Do you mean the similarities like we spoke about earlier?

Kuku Victoria: Yes, they worry about Jesus because even when someone is dead their shape [physical appearance] changes. When you look at the deceased [corpse] they have changed and sometimes they don't look the same.

HCJ: You said that when people see someone who has died walking around the locality, they recognise the person who died very shortly before the deceased disappears. What is the difference here?

Kuku Maria: Because this is a true resurrection.

HCJ: So this is different from experiencing someone else after death?

Kuku Maria: Jesus' presence was long in the walk with the disciples whereas in our community that [the experiences] is something else [brief presence before the deceased disappears].

Kuku Victoria: [Agrees]

Q8: [Read out 24:31] What does this verse mean when it says: 'Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight'?

Kuku Maria: He doesn't want to be recognised.

HCJ: Why not?

Kuku Maria: [Unsure]

HCJ: Is this the same as the local experiences you described or different?

Kuku Victoria: Yes, of course he or she doesn't want to be recognised because they don't want you to tell lots of people that you have seen them.

HCJ: Why? Is it bad to be talked about like that?

Kuku Victoria: Because he doesn't want to be seen because he is dead.

HCJ: Why are they still in the community?

- Kuku Victoria: He or she doesn't want to be seen. It is not his or her will to be seen.
- HCJ: Why are they still active?
- Kuku Maria: He or she is in his or her own area. They have a right to be there.
- Translator: What happened to the dead person that means you still see them?
- Kuku Maria: Sometimes before a person died they might tell you to cut off their foot or hand [when they die] and if you don't do it you will see them again.
- HCJ: Why cut something off?
- Kuku Maria: Because the feet have the will to walk.
- HCJ: Is the desire to walk contained within the feet?
- Kuku Maria: The feet mean a person is able to walk around. If you cut a foot off you won't be able to walk.
- HCJ: Where in the body is the desire to walk? The feet, the heart, the head, somewhere else?
- Kuku Maria: Even if you want to move in the mind without your feet you cannot walk.
- HCJ: Jesus is with the people in the story but then he disappears. Is this the same as the local experience you describe?
- Kuku Victoria: Yes.
- Kuku Maria: Yes, it is just the same – the local person disappears when you recognise him [like in the text].
- [Running out of time as we had started late]
- Q9: How exactly did Jesus come to be amongst the disciples in 24:36?
- Kuku Maria: Jesus wanted the disciples to see him officially. He appeared to them suddenly. They were not expecting him.
- Q10: What is an *oshiluli* (24:37) and why would the disciples think they were seeing one?
- Kuku Victoria: The sudden shock mean they say they think it is an *oshiluli*.

Kuku Maria: You would call the local experience [seeing a dead member of the community walking around] an *oshiluli*.

HCJ: Are *iiluli* and experiences of them good or bad?

Kuku Victoria: Bad.

Kuku Maria: Bad. Even when sleeping you might feel something strangling you. That is *oshiluli*.

HCJ: Can you have a *good* experience of someone who has died?

Kuku Victoria: There is no such thing but there are some people who can communicate with their deceased [family members].

HCJ: Who can communicate with their deceased?

Kuku Victoria: God created different people. Some can meet with their deceased.

HCJ: Is that an individual gift or are groups more skilled at doing this, such as men, women, the elderly, children etc.?

Kuku Victoria: Some people have it as a gift but others go somewhere to learn from someone. They learn from an expert. We call them [experts] *oonganga* and *oompulile*.

Translator: *Oonganga* are witchdoctors. *Oompulile*: I am not really familiar with this term but it is connected to the verb *pula*, 'ask'. You ask something of these people.

Q11: Why did Jesus eat in the presence of the disciples (24:42-3)?

Kuku Victoria: He was familiar with them so can ask for food from them.

Kuku Maria: He had been three days in the tomb. He is hungry.

HCJ: Is this the same as feeding someone who keeps returning home as an *oshiluli* after their death?

Kuku Victoria: No. Jesus is a different person. He is not the same as the people in our community.

Q12: Were the disciples in a special state in order to experience Jesus after his death (e.g. dreaming, in trance, other)?

Kuku Victoria: They have a feeling that Jesus is raised from death. The disciples truly know that Jesus is with them and has been raised from death.

HCJ: Is there something they have done to experience Jesus after his death?

Kuku Victoria: This is a revelation and this revelation is that Jesus was dead and is the one who is alive. They are in a natural state and experience him physically.

END. Closed with thanks.

CBS 8b: OoTatekulu (Elder men), OoTate (Men)

Date: 04.06.2014

Text: Luke 24:1-49

Participants (Transcript Reference):

1. Tatekulu Laban Iyambo (LI)

3:00pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

3:30pm – discussion

Discussion:

Luke 24:1-49

Q1: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

LI: The text we read, I used to read it and I like it and I also believe in what the scripture said.

Death and Experiences of the Deceased in the lihongo Community

Q2: What happens when someone dies in your community? You could think about that with regard to their *egumbo* (house) or the community as a whole.

LI: When someone dies in our community first of all people feel sympathy or mourning. Most people are crying.

HCJ: What does the community do in response to the death of that community member?

LI: People in the community are coming to comfort the bereaved family by singing, comforting through words and prayer.

HCJ: Where does that take place?

LI: When the death happens in the particular family, those who come to comfort come to that house.

HCJ: Is there any special food which would be involved at that time?

LI: Food and drinks are available because those who come to comfort they come along with something to drink. And that

particular house they slaughter a cattle so that the visitors have something to eat. But most of the food and drink it is brought by mourners.

- HCJ: What happens to the body when someone dies?
- LI: In our community, when someone dies the body is taken to the mortuary while the funeral is arranged. Then the coffin is arranged. The body is cleaned and new clothes are put on.
- Q3: What changes when that person dies? For example, what changes in the *egumbo*? Who takes over their responsibilities and possessions?
- LI: When the husband dies then the wife becomes the head of the house and takes all of the responsibilities.
- HCJ: And the possessions?
- LI: Nowadays the possessions are for the wife and the children.
- HCJ: What happened in the past?
- LI: In the past when the husband died those possessions would become for the husband's family.
- HCJ: Does anything change with regard to the physical layout of the *egumbo*?
- LI: The entrance of the house is changed. You close that one and make a new one. The layout may change but not if it is made from [concrete] walls.
- HCJ: Does it matter which direction the entrance faces?
- LI: In Ondonga the entrance is always face on the East.
- HCJ: Why?
- LI: That is the culture of the Ndonga tradition but I do not know why. I have always found it like that.
- Q4: Can you experience and/or communicate with people after their death? If so, how?
- LI: No. But in the dream you can communicate with him [the deceased], talk with him, even walk with him and laugh together but it is a dream.
- HCJ: So was it real or not actually an experience of that person?

- LI: You are sleeping, you do not open your eyes. But your spirit sees that person. So your spirit and the spirit of the dead are connected together by God. They are experiencing each other.
- HCJ: Would you expect to feel, see or hear a dead person when you are awake?
- LI: Not all the people can experience or see people who are dead. Only some. I have heard about it that some people have seen. Sometimes you feel a mysterious feeling in you. But I have not seen someone who is dead.
- HCJ: Who are those people who can experience the deceased? Are they specially trained? Are they the old, the young, men, women?
- LI: Not very young ones but the middle aged and the elders. Some of them are gifted to see those [deceased] people.
- HCJ: Can they just see them or can they communicate with them?
- LI: You get afraid to talk to him. You get afraid to talk to him and even you might run away.
- HCJ: The deceased person these people see – are they a physical being?
- LI: Not physical and some people after death we believe people go to heaven. If that person does not believe then God turns them back to go to earth and repent. So that person wanders on the earth. But in a spiritual form, not physically. You never see a believer come back. You will not see him again.
- Q5: Do people continue to have an influence on the life of the community after they have died? If so, how?
- LI: He influences the community for example before he/she died he/she may instruct the people either to do good behaviour, to cooperate with one another, to love one another, and to help one another. Then, after the death, people like to turn back to his/her ideas. If they experience some people doing bad behaviour they like to turn back to the ideas of that [deceased] person by reminding others that that person told us not to do that. But other than that after death there is no influence.
- HCJ: Do people still think of ancestors as powerful forces in the community?

- LI: We do not believe in ancestors but we believe in what our forefathers told us. For example, they told our fathers or forefathers about how we have to live and gave us a code of conduct on how to live with each other so we only refer to that and not to the ancestors.
- Q6: In the text, it was the women who first found out about the Resurrection of Jesus. In the other Gospels, it was women who first experienced the risen Jesus. Why do you think the women found out/experienced first?
- LI: The women are believe in Jesus and they love Jesus therefore they go to the tomb to see his body.
- HCJ: Didn't his male disciples also believe in and love him?
- LI: The women's faith was much higher whereas the faith of the men was lower. They believe but their faith is not so strong.
- HCJ: Is that a general thing or just in this story?
- LI: It is exactly that, even nowadays. The women are strong in faith but the men are slow.
- HCJ: Why did the others not believe what the women said?
- LI: The men always are not believing in the women. They regard the women as children. So if they hear something from the women they do research before believing it.
- HCJ: And is that the same today?
- LI: It is true today.
- HCJ: Why do you think that women's faith is stronger than men's faith?
- LI: I said this because this is the situation we are living in now.
- HCJ: Is there a reason for it?
- LI: Women have courage to encourage the men. For example, women can say let's go to church but the men can deny, even if he is doing nothing at home. The men's decision is slow. The women do what they do openly. For example, there is HIV testing for free. People are told to go for testing. The women rushed to go. The men refused to go. So the deaths for men today are very high. Much higher than for the women. The men are faithless.

- Q7: [Read out 24:16: 'they saw him, but somehow did not recognize him'] Why did the disciples not recognise Jesus on the road to Emmaus?
- LI: Jesus is God. And he has the power to close their eyes so that they do not recognise him.
- HCJ: To literally or metaphorically close his eyes?
- LI: Jesus does not literally close their eyes. Their eyes see him but spiritually their eyes are closed. He wants them to talk about what has happened about the death of Jesus. He wants to test them and he can only do that if they don't recognise him.
- HCJ: So, the change is in them, not in Jesus?
- LI: Jesus did not change but he changed them.
- Q8: [Read out 24:31] What does this verse mean when it says: 'Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight'?
- LI: Jesus now opened their eyes then now that they recognise him he disappeared because he doesn't want to continue to talk with them, because he wants them to discuss with others about his resurrection.
- HCJ: So he reverses the process on their eyes from earlier?
- LI: Jesus wants these disciples to have faith because now they can see him they will believe it.
- HCJ: Do you have to see something to believe it?
- LI: Yes, people of today like to see what had happened so that they can believe it.
- Q9: How exactly did Jesus come to be amongst the disciples in 24:36?
- LI: Jesus is the almighty and he is also a spirit so it is easier for him to come amongst his disciples.
- HCJ: Do you mean that he is not limited by being a physical being?
- LI: Yes, exactly. He can go wherever he wants.
- HCJ: Is he physical or spiritual?

- LI: He comes there spiritually.
- Q10: What is an *oshiluli* (24:37) and why would the disciples think they were seeing one?
- LI: *Oshiluli* is a dead person. You used to bury a dead person but if you meet that person you buried you call that one an *oshiluli*.
- HCJ: Is the *oshiluli* the dead person or something else?
- LI: It is the person who died and his spirit has come back. It is the faithless person. But the flesh is still in the ground.
- HCJ: What happens when you see an *oshiluli*?
- LI: You get afraid and shocked.
- HCJ: Does the *oshiluli* see you?
- LI: Yes, they can also see you.
- HCJ: Where would the *oshiluli* wander?
- LI: *liluli* [pl.] sometimes like to wander near the graveyard or in the bush.
- HCJ: Why those two places?
- LI: That is the proper place for them to live.
- HCJ: Why?
- LI: *Omayendo* [graveyards] is where the bodies live. It is their home area. They just wander in the bush and come back to their home area of *omayendo*.
- HCJ: Their home area wouldn't be an *egumbo*?
- LI: No, it's where the body is living.
- HCJ: If you see an *oshiluli*, how long does that experience last?
- LI: Even in the same area, when you go there you can be told by others that you should not do through a certain area of bush because there is *oshiluli*. You can go there with a friend and maybe you can't see anything but your friend will say: 'look, *oshiluli*!'
- HCJ: Why do you think the disciples thought they were seeing an *oshiluli*?

- LI: It is because the disciples were faithless. When Jesus told them he will die and after three days he will come back from death [they didn't believe him].
- HCJ: Whose *oshiluli* did they think they were seeing?
- LI: They thought it was Jesus' *oshiluli*. They thought Jesus was *oshiluli* because they didn't believe the scripture or what Jesus told them before his death.
- HCJ: So, did the disciples think that Jesus was faithless and had been sent back by God from full and final death?
- LI: They know that Jesus is God and that Jesus did many wonderful things in their presence. He even healed the sick people and healed the blind person and many other things. But the disciples lack the faith in what Jesus said about his death and resurrection.
- HCJ: But if an *oshiluli* is one sent back to earth by God for being faithless, wouldn't they think that of Jesus?
- LI: They are shocked when Jesus appeared to them and they first thought it is either truly Jesus or *oshiluli*. They weren't thinking clearly.
- Q11: Why did Jesus eat in the presence of the disciples (24:42-3)?
- LI: Jesus asked them to provide him with food to eat because he wants the disciples to get more understanding about his presence. That will confirm that this is truly [the] Jesus that they know. While he is eating, he explains why he is not *oshiluli*. He invites them to touch him.
- HCJ: So, does he eat to show he has flesh and bones?
- LI: Yes, I agree on that.
- HCJ: Is there any other purpose for eating with them?
- LI: He only wanted them to get more understanding about the scripture and about what he taught them before.
- Q12: Were the disciples in a special state in order to experience Jesus after his death (e.g. dreaming, in trance, other)?
- LI: Jesus when he revealed himself in the room where the disciples were, he opened their eyes [and] they experienced him physically not spiritually and saw physically not spiritually.

HCJ: And the state of the disciples?

LI: They were not even sleeping, they were normal. It was only the shock that prevented them seeing him straightaway.

END. Closed with thanks.

CBS 8c: Aanona (Children)

Date: 11.06.2014

Text: Luke 24:1-49

Participants (Transcript Reference):

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------|
| 1. Eli Awala | (EA) |
| 2. Selma Kwedhi | (SK) |
| 3. Anna Ikukutu | (Alk) |
| 4. Loide Elago | (LE) |
| 5. Loide Petrus | (LP) |
| 6. Okanona ANON10 | (O10) |
| 7. Rubeni Ananias | (RA) |
| 8. Frieda Shilemba | (FS) |
| 9. Erastus Kuutondokwa | (EKuu) |
| 10. Silas Ikukutu | (Slk) |
| 11. Ananias Imbondi | (Alm) |
| 12. Maria Johannes | (MJ) |
| 13. Lemisia Pinihas | (LPi) |
| 14. Hileni Iiyambo | (Hli) |
| 15. Klaudia Ashikuti | (KA) |
| 16. Wilbartina Teofelus | (WT) |
| 17. Albertina Nicodemus | (AN) |
| 18. Ester Nicodemus | (EN) |
| 19. Martha Nangolo | (MN) |
| 20. Okanona ANON12 | (O12) |
| 21. Elizabeth Imbondi | (Elm) |
| 22. Okanona ANON3 | (O3) |
| 23. Okanona ANON1 | (O1) |

2:30pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

3:00pm – discussion

Discussion:

Luke 24:1-49

Intro Q: What are your first impressions of this text? What are your first thoughts about this text?

LE: I am interested in hearing that Jesus is resurrected from the dead.

HCJ: Why is that particular interesting for you?

LE: Because never in my life have I heard about someone raised from death.

Death and Experiences of the Deceased in the lihongo Community

- Q1: What happens when someone dies in your community? You could think about that with regard to their *egumbo* (house) or the community as a whole.
- EN: The people of that particular community, they come to the *egumbo* where the dead person was [living] so that they can cry and comfort the mourners. And after that they bury the deceased.
- MJ: People of that community, they come singing and giving words of hope of resurrection and later they bury that person.
- KA: When the owner of the house is the one who is dead the entrance [*ehale*] of the house is changed. They change the position.
- HCJ: How much does it change?
- KA: Just a little bit, not far.
- Hli: The friends and family and the entire community come to the house where the dead person is [was living] and they stay there. We do not bury the person that day. The body should stay while we make the funeral arrangements. They bring the food to eat.
- HCJ: Does the body stay in the *egumbo*?
- Hli: No, the body is taken to the mortuary.
- HCJ: Why isn't it buried that day?
- Hli: Because some family members stay very far [away] so you have to wait while they are informed and you have to apply for a death certificate.
- HCJ: How long do visitors stay in the *egumbo* [of the deceased]?
- Hli: Some people, they come to visit and then they go back. Others stay there, particularly the family members.
- HCJ: Do children go?
- Hli: The children who are relatives would go.

- Q2: What changes when that person dies? For example, what changes in the *egumbo*? Who takes over their responsibilities and possessions?
- EKuu: The possessions of the dead person are inherited by family members.
- HCJ: Which family members?
- EKuu: The extended family.
- HCJ: Who inherits the *egumbo*, the cows, etc.?
- Elm: If the owner of the house is dead, the brothers of that person they inherit those possessions or they divide the possessions with the wife of the deceased.
- MJ: If the owner of the house is dead [has died], the dog(s) and the cockerel(s) are killed. And also one bull. And all those people [the visitors] eat.
- HCJ: Would all these animals be eaten – dogs, cockerels and the bull?
- MJ: Yes.
- HCJ: Must that meat be eaten then or can it be kept for later?
- MJ: They are killed after the funeral and only the residents of that *egumbo* and [visiting] family who are there should eat it.
- Elm: If the owner of the house is dead (if he is a man), the brothers ask the widow about the possessions. If there is something like cattle, she is asked if she contributed when the cattle were bought. If not, they take it. If she did, they divide it/them.
- O3: When the owner of the house is dead, the last-born is given the *egumbo*.
- HCJ: Why the last-born?
- O3: Because the others they are mature and can go anywhere but this one will stay and take care of the *egumbo*.
- HCJ: Could that be a girl?
- O3: No, always a man.
- LP: The house's layout is changed.

HCJ: How is it changed?

LP: It moves forward a bit.

HCJ: Why?

LP: Because the owner is not there anymore.

HCJ: But why move it?

LP: That is the culture.

HCJ: But why?

LP: [no answer]

Elm: On the other hand, when the owner is dead the hut where he was sleeping is removed or changed. [hut for senior man = *omutala*, hut for senior woman = *ondjugo*]

HCJ: Is this the same if the deceased is a woman?

Elm: Yes.

HCJ: Why are the huts taken away or changed?

Elm: The aim is just to disturb the mind. Because if it is there you still think about the person and how they arranged their hut. The picture is still fresh in your mind.

HCJ: What about their clothing or stick, etc.?

EN: Their clothes are taken by the brothers or sisters.

Hli: The blankets are washed and used by the family members in the house.

Alm: The [man's] stick is taken by his namesake [*ombushe*].

HCJ: What about if it is a woman who dies?

O10: According to the death of the woman, the one who inherits from her is her sister.

Elm: If it is a woman, the clothes, headdresses and shoes are given to the sisters or to the namesake.

HCJ: [Confirmed with translator that an individual only has one namesake.]

EN: The *elugo* [kitchen area] is also changed.

- HCJ: Why?
- EN: It is just the culture.
- Q3: Can you experience and/or communicate with people after their death? If so, how?
- FS: No.
- EA: No.
- SKw: No.
- [16 of 25 responded 'no' when asked to raise hands, but many later had interesting things to report.]
- MJ: Communication is sometimes there because one person died and came back as an *oshiluli*.
- LP: There is a story of one child who was studying and if that student somehow did not understand the lesson in class she prayed to her [dead] grandmother who was an *omulodhi* [witch] and the grandmother gave answers to her granddaughter.
- HCJ: Is this in lihongo?
- LP: It is a story from Onankali [30km East].
- EKuu: One time he [speaker?] was told by his father to look after the cattle. If not, he will die.
- O12: One person was raised from death and came to the house and beat all the people in the house.
- HCJ: So they came back as a physical person?
- O12: Yes.
- Elm: One person was dead but came back as an *oshiluli* [bad or restless spirit/'ghost'] and he came back to their own house. A family member decided to cook *oshimbombo* [porridge] and a whole chicken with enough oil. They put it at the *ehale* [entrance] to the *egumbo*. Then the *oshiluli* came and ate it and then they were not seen again.
- HCJ: Did they come back because they were hungry?
- Elm: No.
- HCJ: Why, then?

- Elm: That *oshiluli* just came back to the house, sometimes disturbing the things. The family member was instructed by someone to cook the food to stop them coming back. If the person eats the food [and it is] well-cooked, he thanks and goes.
- HCJ: Who instructed them to cook the food?
- Elm: They were instructed by an *onganga* [witchdoctor].
- HCJ: Did this happen in your own house, or is it a report you have heard?
- Elm: It is a story from my grandmother.
- HCJ: Does anyone know why a person comes back as an *oshiluli*?
- O3: Such persons in order to die and come back sometimes they may instruct the family: If I am dead, bury me in the *egumbo* or at the *ehale* [entrance] and if this is ignored they may come back.
- HCJ: So they are unhappy because their instruction was not followed?
- O3: Yes.
- LP: And sometimes people may instruct to cut off the tip of the tongue or the nose and if you don't do that they are angry and they come back.
- HCJ: Are people still buried in or at the entrance to the *egumbo*?
- EN: No.
- O10: Yes.
- HCJ: Why are some people buried inside or at the entrance?
- O10: Some families have their own private graveyard where they put their first forefather [*aathithi*, ancestors] within their land.
- HCJ: Why would someone want the tip of their nose or tongue cut off?
- LE: It is because he knows himself that if you don't do that he will come back.
- Translator: Because he knows he is a witch and that is how you stop him coming back, to reduce his power.

HCJ: Can you experience dead people in dreams?

Alm: No.

MN: Yes. When, for example, your mother dies and you miss her you see her in your dreams.

HCJ: Is it really her?

MN: Yes, it is really her. You hear the voice and even see her wearing the same dress she used to like.

HCJ: Can you experience *aathithi* [ancestors]?

Elm: No.

HCJ: So, what exactly are *aathithi*?

Hli: They are our forefathers who died long ago but their spirit is good, not like the *iiluli* who disturb you. *Aathithi* do not disturb you.

HCJ: What do they do?

Translator: I have heard that some may go to the graves of forefathers to ask for wisdom [comment directed at children].
[children not aware of this phenomenon.]

HCJ: What do you know about *aathithi*?

Hli: According to the story from our grandmother, *aathithi* are spirits of the deceased, staying in some areas. For example, if you drive the car where the *aathithi* are staying you have to make a hoot [hoot the car horn]. If you do not hoot, then your car will get stuck. If you remember [after getting stuck], maybe your car will then start. And for the woman, if you carry something like a clay pot of *omalovu giilya* [traditional beer], then you stop and pour some out on the ground. If you do not do that the pot would fall and break. This is long ago, not now [car example?].

HCJ: Are they active now?

Hli: Not disturbing anyone. They do not enter into the house. They just stay where they are. For example, in the field. But you cannot go into the field of *aathithi* and build your house. Then they will deal with you. But *iiluli* [bad/restless spirits] are cruel and will disturb you.

HCJ: Do you know an *aathithi* field?

- Hli: Yes, even at our village [*ombuma* village, in the lihongo district], they are there.
- [9 participants were aware of an *aathithi* area]
- HCJ: Some African scholars of the Bible say that Jesus might be thought of as an *omuthithi*. Would you think like that?
- [There was a unified 'no' response to this, with a degree of disbelief to boot.]
- HCJ: Why not?
- FS: Jesus is just the Son of God.
- EN: Because Jesus after death was raised from death and was seen by his disciples during the day but *aathithi* cannot be seen during the day.
- Hli: Because Jesus was dead by the power of God so that people may know the way of death and resurrection.
- Q4: Do people continue to have an influence on the life of the community after they have died? If so, how?
- We did not directly address this question because it was getting late and I felt that much of this focus had already been covered.
- Q5: In the text, it was the women who first found out about the Resurrection of Jesus. In the other Gospels, it was women who first experienced the risen Jesus. Why do you think the women found out/experienced first?
- EN: Because one of the women was Maria the mother of Jesus. She wanted to go there to find out about the body of her son. On the other hand, the women are more concerned with taking care of others.
- O3: The women were patient with the death of Jesus because he was sinless.
- Simon Abner
[latecomer]: The women were even carrying the oil to apply it to the body of Jesus.

- Q6: [Read out 24:16: 'they saw him, but somehow did not recognize him'] Why did the disciples not recognise Jesus on the road to Emmaus?
- EN: They were unable to recognise him because they strongly believed that he was dead and would never come back.
- O3: They did not recognise him because they believed that no one comes back from death.
- HCJ: Did he look different?
- EN: No.
- HCJ: So, wouldn't they see that it was him?
- EN: He looked the same as usual. They only believe he is dead and they won't see him anymore.
- Q7: [Read out 24:31] What does this verse mean when it says: 'Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight'?
- [By this time the children are struggling somewhat and getting tired]
- O3: They recognise him only when Jesus gave them the bread to eat. The bread becomes the key for the disciples to understand.
- LE: He disappeared because he didn't want to communicate with them because he doesn't want to be recognised. [I did not succeed in getting to the bottom of what was becoming a circular argument.]
- Q8: How exactly did Jesus come to be amongst the disciples in 24:36?
- MJ: He came there through the power of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, Jesus *is* the Holy Spirit. He came there spiritually and became flesh in the room.
- Q9: What is an *oshiluli* (24:37) and why would the disciples think they were seeing one?
- WT: When the dead person is seen you call them *oshiluli*. They [disciples] know that Jesus is dead so they think it is Jesus' *oshiluli*.
- HCJ: Is an *oshiluli* the same as the dead person?

- WT: No.
- HCJ: What is the difference?
- WT: It is the person who is dead.
- HCJ: Would they look the same?
- EN: The person, the physical body, you can recognise him during the day. But an *oshiluli* you can only find him during the night.
- HCJ: Do they have a shape?
- EN: No, they are not a shape. You can just maybe hear the voice.
- LP: *Oshiluli* is something like a spirit. You can even hear the voice but you will never see anything. But a living person you will see around with a body.
- HCJ: So why did the disciples think they were seeing an *oshiluli*?
- O1: Because they did not recognise him and they were not aware that a person can die and come back.
- EN: Because he appeared to them suddenly. They were shocked and thought this couldn't really be Jesus.
- Q10: Why did Jesus eat in the presence of the disciples (24:42-3)?
- FS: He wanted to demonstrate that he was not *oshiluli* but the person they knew before.
- LP: [wanted to say the same]
- O3: He wanted to demonstrate to the disciples that they have seen Jesus and he also ate with them.
- MN: He knows that his disciples were worried about him so he ate so that they can recognise him through eating.
- Q11: Were the disciples in a special state in order to experience Jesus after his death (e.g. dreaming, in trance, other)?
- WT: They see Jesus with their own eyes.
- HCJ: Are they awake, dreaming, in a trance, specially trained?

WT: They were not even sleeping. They were sat down.

HCJ: Does it take special training or a gift, or can anyone have an experience like this?

MJ: They saw Jesus with their own senses.

END. Closed with thanks.

Summary 9a: OoMemekulu (Older Women), OoMeme (Women)

Date: 13.08.2014

Participants (Transcript Reference):

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Memekulu Frieda Namugongo | (Kuku Frieda) |
| 2. Memekulu Maria Kondo | (Kuku Maria) |
| 3. Memekulu Rauha Andreas | (Kuku Rauha) |
| 4. Meme Beata Mbinga | (Meme Beata) |

1:00pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

1:30pm – discussion

Discussion:

Mark 5:21-43 (Session had been cut short)

Jairus' Daughter and the Woman who Touched Jesus' Cloak

Q7: Why does Jairus approach Jesus directly whereas the woman comes to Jesus from behind, in the crowd?

[quiet]

HCJ: In your experience, how should you approach someone if you want to talk to someone or ask for help?

Kuku Rauha: I humble myself.

HCJ: How would you do that?

[no answer]

HCJ: I am trying to get us to think about the different ways in which Jairus and the woman approach Jesus.

Kuku Rauha: I humble myself and go direct to that person. I sometimes have to kneel down.

HCJ: Does anyone think there is something unusual about how the woman approaches Jesus? What do you think of the way she approaches?

Kuku Maria: The way the woman approaches Jesus is not a proper way because in our culture we approach the person face-to-face.

- Kuku Rauha: The way the woman approaches Jesus was not a good way because she approached from behind, but she did it because she did not have a good way to approach.
- Meme Beata: In Ndonga culture it is unusual to approach the person from behind.
- HCJ: Why is it unusual?
- Meme Beata: In Ndonga culture you have to respect a person and Jesus was one of the persons who should be respected in the society. So the woman behind is showing disrespect.
- Translator: Is there another meaning to standing behind someone? [I think he was alluding to the potential sexual reference – people should approach from the front, people should enjoy sexual relations face-to-face, unlike animals]
- [no answer]
- HCJ: Does everybody agree that she is being disrespectful by approaching Jesus from the back?
- Kuku Rauha: I agree that is an indication of disrespect. No one should be allowed to approach a prominent person like this.
- HCJ: Do you think Jesus is angry? Does his response sound angry to you?
- Kuku Rauha: Jesus was not angry because he is sent by God to render the service to the people.
- Kuku Frieda: He was not angry, he just ask in a good way because he realised he was touched by someone.
- Meme Beata: By Jesus he was not angry but in our culture and you touch me the same way I will ask with an angry voice, 'who touched me?'
- Kuku Maria: Yes, he was not angry.
- HCJ: Do you see any connection between the status of Jairus/the woman and the way in which they approach Jesus?
- Kuku Rauha: Jairus was a prominent person. Always the well-known person they are always respected. Maybe when Jairus came, they made a way for Jairus to come through. And the woman is just a poor person so people didn't respect her and make a way for her. So she approach from behind and try by all means to touch Jesus and hope to be healed.

- HCJ: Was the woman always poor? Because she paid a lot to *oonganga* [traditional healers]?
- Kuku Rauha: She is poor. She has nothing.
- Q8: Do you have any other thoughts to help me understand the story? You could refer to any aspects of your culture that you can link with something in the story.
- Meme Beata: Also in our culture, we get ill and you go everywhere looking for help, even to witchdoctors [*oonganga*] and you pay them but you will not find the solution. You just become poor at the end.
- HCJ: How do you choose when to go to an *onganga* and when to go to the clinic/hospital?
- Kuku Rauha: Sometimes you get sick and your neighbours or family come to you and mislead you, saying 'your sickness is only cure when you go to the witchdoctor, this is not for the hospital.'

Summary Questions

- Q1: What is the relationship between Ndonga culture and Christianity?
- Kuku Rauha: We have the culture but not everything. We have dropped other things in the culture because they are useless. We have replaced it with Christianity which answers our questions.
- HCJ: What has been abandoned [from culture] and what has come in?
- Kuku Rauha: For example, in early age our forefathers were more depend on the witchdoctor [*onganga*]. But on the other hand the witchdoctor are helpless in our life. So we drop them and in Christianity the first missionaries brought hospitals, so we go there and the witchdoctors are down.
- HCJ: Do you associate hospitals with Christianity then?
- Kuku Rauha: Yes, the hospital and Christianity are associated like brother and sister.
- Kuku Frieda: The culture and Christianity on the one hand are travelling on one way [are aligned]. On the other hand there are two ways [sometimes they disagree]. That is why the Christianity chased away the [parts of] culture which is not

good, which is misleading the nation, like witchdoctors. There is a contradiction between [them].

- HCJ: Are there any aspects of culture that you feel Christianity should not have chased away? For example, why is there no traditional dancing in church?
- Meme Beata: Sometimes we have traditional dancing somewhere and you are not disobeying [Christianity] if you go, but Christianity does not allow you to go to the witchdoctor. Even the abortion. In the tradition, people were allowed to have abortion but the Christianity disagree with that.
- Kuku Maria: The Christianity and the culture they are two things. They are not the same – they are different. There is *ohango yiitsali* [traditional marriage] and it is not allowed by the Christianity.
- Q2: Which situations/events/places seem to be most influenced by *Oshindonga* culture and which by 'Christianity,' or perhaps those divisions do not make much sense to you?
- Kuku Rauha: According to my understanding, the Ndonga culture is somehow down. Because now we are more depend on Christianity.
- HCJ: How is local culture down?
- Kuku Rauha: For example, the traditional marriage [*ohango yiitsali*]. I am not take my child to marry through culture. I only take her to marry through Christian norms.
- HCJ: When I went to *ohango*, it seemed to me that it was very 'cultural,' with only 45 minutes in the church. What do you think?
- Consensus: It is a mixture.
- HCJ: Are there other situations where it is mixed, or even very separate? How about naming?
- Meme Beata: Christianity and culture is brother and sister for example in naming. You give the name at home but you bring the child to church to bless the name in baptism.
- HCJ: What would you do in the home for naming?
- Kuku Rauha: In tradition, when you are naming the child for an unmarried couple, the father sends his representative to the house where the child is staying. They [the representative] take a container of *omalovu giilya* [traditional beer] and put onyoka

[string of ostrich-shell beads] around the baby's neck and say the name. And you send someone to tell the *ombushe* [namesake] that someone insulted or cursed them [i.e. their name is being used].

- Translator: You take the *onyoka* [beads] and the *onthikwa* [cloth baby-carrier] when you go to name the child. And why you say *ombushe* is insulted is mostly you will mention bad or unusual words to that child.
- HCJ: Overall, would you say that local culture and Christianity mostly mix, co-exist happily, or conflict?
- Kuku Frieda: The local culture and Christianity sometimes we put together, for example *ohango* [marriage]. Culture and Christianity are there. But sometimes they stand on their own leg.
- HCJ: What is an example of standing alone?
- Kuku Frieda: In baptism, there is time for both.
- HCJ: Does culture take precedence at home?
- Kuku Frieda: Culture is more at home but only the culture that is good to church. We are more focused on Christianity at the church centre.
- Translator: Traditional beer [*omalovu giilya*] is not allowed in the pastor's house [adjacent to the church] nor in the church.
- HCJ: Why is that?
- Translator: Because the beer is alcoholic when it stands for a long time.
- Q7: Why is there a fence around the *egumbo*?
- Kuku Frieda: *Ongandjo* [the fence] is for protection purpose. And *ongandjo*, traditionally, is also to show where is the entrance to the *egumbo*.
- Meme Beata: It protects the house because we have huts. The cattle will come and eat the [grass] roof of the huts.
- Q19: Why do people have *oonsha* [scars] on their faces and on their upper backs?
- Kuku Frieda: On the face this is for decoration, to make herself beautiful. And on the other hand it is to cure the eyes when they are paining. You cut here [upper cheek or eyebrow] and use the blood to cure the eyes.

- Translator: All the women here agree that this treatment works to cure the eyes.
- Kuku Frieda: On the back there was a disease called *eligalala* [translator doesn't know English word for this]. You cut the person back there and you put salt. That way you prevent them from getting that disease.
- HCJ: Is it only women who cut the cheeks for beauty?
- Kuku Rauha: Men also.
- Translator: This is something people in Uukwambi do [area to the West of Oshakati, c.75km away]. If you see it in Ondonga they are imitating Uukwambi people.
- Q22: I understand that girls wear beads around their waist to protect them against being bewitched. Does everyone have the power to bewitch people? If someone bewitches people, which part of the body do they use to do it?
- Kuku Frieda: It is not for preventing the witching. It is tradition.
- Kuku Maria: It is only to differentiate male and female.
- HCJ: So how does a witch bewitch someone?
- Kuku Frieda: Witching – no one can explain it. We just talk about it but no one knows how it is practised.
- Kuku Rauha: For example, sometimes I can say a word to someone. For example, 'you, I will deal with you.' After a few days, if they get sick they start to think it's me who started the sickness. But I agree that you can harm people in poisoning. But that is not witching.
- Meme Beata: I agree that when you are talking about a witch we use the word but we don't know how [it works]. But poisoning is there. A person can put something in there and you could die.
- HCJ: Why would people poison?
- Kuku Maria: Because he would want that person to die.
- HCJ: Why?
- Kuku Rauha: The person doesn't want to see them any more.
- [note: I was warned of the threat of poisoning/being deliberately given bad food earlier in the month. We were

going to a wedding with Kuku Frieda. Lucy told me only to eat the food that is served up buffet-style and to avoid any 'special' plates offered to us as individuals. She said that several people have died by accepting and eating such 'special' food.]

Q26: How does vision work – does light go into the eyes or does it come out of the eyes?

Kuku Frieda: Light/vision goes out.

Kuku Rauha: Light/vision goes out.

Kuku Maria: Light/vision goes out.

END. Closed with thanks.

Summary 9b: OoTatekulu (Older Men), OoTate (Men)

Date: 14.08.2014

Participants (Transcript Reference):

1. Tatekulu Laban Iyambo (LI)
2. Tatekulu Herman Iyambo (HI)

12:30pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

12:35pm – discussion

Discussion:

HCJ: In an earlier session, we discussed the relationship between local culture and Christianity. I wondered if you had any more thoughts about that. Specifically:

Q2: Which situations/events/places seem to be most influenced by *Oshindonga* culture and which by 'Christianity,' or perhaps those divisions do not make much sense to you?

LI: In our current situation, the Christianity is more powerful than Ndonga culture. And also, the Ndonga culture and Christianity they are singing one song because the traditional way children were ordered to respect their parents and all the elder persons. And they were using the method that don't laugh at the elder person otherwise your mouth will turn aside [get stuck in a sideways grimace]. Therefore the children would not even laugh at their parents because they were afraid of this. The Christianity they depend on the Ten Commandments of God – 'respect your father and mother' – so it is one idea.

HCJ: Do local culture and Christianity mix, co-exist happily, or conflict?

LI: There is no longer a division between Ndonga culture and Christianity as one hundred years ago because now people understand Christianity. At the early age there were traditional weddings. And such weddings were condemned by Christianity and it [*ohango yiitsali*] no longer exists anymore.

HCJ: Some scholarship on Oshiwambo cultures suggest that all old beliefs have gone. Is that true?

LI: It is not true. Only some, which is not good [i.e. those that are not good in the eyes of 'Christianity'] but we have some which are good and they stay.

HCJ: Could you give me some examples?

- LI: For example, we still have pounding *mahangu* on [for] our traditional meal. We make our traditional beer and also milk brew and *ombike* [palm gin].
- HCJ: So, if I say that the good aspects of culture are still alive, is that true?
- LI: Yes, we have it and we use it!
- HCJ: Has any good culture been lost?
- LI: We lost a good aspect in our culture by ourselves, not by Christianity. For example, before the sunset, in the main yard [*oshinyanga*] in the home, the fire should be on but it doesn't happen.
- Translator: The fire in the *elugo* [kitchen area] should be lit from the main fire.
- LI: And nowadays, some people don't pound [*mahangu*] in the traditional way. They use the machine at the *cuca* shops.
- Q7: Why is there a fence around the Ndonga *egumbo*?
- LI: It is because of culture. Culturally, the house should be fenced in.
- HCJ: Is this for protection?
- LI: It is a sign of protection.
- HCJ: Against what?
- LI: It protects the house against either animals, or wild animals, and also to give a clear direction of where to enter the house.
- [Kuku Herman arrives, Kuku Laban has to go]
- HCJ: Kuku Herman, do you think local culture and Christianity mix, co-exist happily, or conflict, or does it not make sense to talk about them separately like that?
- HI: According to my understanding, the Christianity and the culture they carry one another.
- HCJ: Do you feel that any aspects of local culture have been lost with the coming of Christianity?
- HI: We lost our traditional names because when the Christianity came they denied our traditional names. Like 'Hailulu'. They gave me instead 'Herman'. But currently, due to current understanding, our traditional names still exist. We still have it.
- HCJ: Why do children often have two names?

- HI: We have two names because before the child is baptised, shortly after the birth, it is given a traditional name. Sometimes that name refers to the conditions when the child is born. Like in wartime, the child might be called 'Ita' – it means war. And when you take it to Christianity, it is given a Christian name. That is an indication that Christianity and culture carry one another.
- Q11: Can you tell me anything about the structure of the community here in lihongo? How does it fit together – who is senior and who is junior?
- HI: The headman is on top of the structure. Then next is the vice-headman, and then the secretary of the headman. Then the management committee. Then the spiritual leader. Then church elders, parish elders.
- HCJ: Is there a gender division?
- HI: Gender is there. The headman is a man but in the management committee there is a gender balance.
- HCJ: Could the 'headman' (in theory) be a woman?
- HI: Definitely.
- HCJ: Who resolves community problems?
- HI: The management committee of the village come together with the headman as chairman and discuss and solve it.
- HCJ: Do you think that people believe in witchcraft in this area?
- HI: I am not agree to that.
- HCJ: I am not asking for your own beliefs, Kuku Herman, because that would be too personal. But I wondered whether you think the belief is present in the area?
- HI: In the area people believe there is witchcraft because they go to the witchdoctor and they say you are witched, but me myself I deny that.

END. Closed with thanks.

Summary 9c: Aanona (Children)

Date: 15.08.2014

Participants (Transcript Reference):

- | | |
|------------------------|--------|
| 1. Ananias Imbondi | (Alm) |
| 2. Ruben Pinihas | (RP) |
| 3. Loide Elago | (LE) |
| 4. Johannes Ikukutu | (Jlk) |
| 5. Silas Ikukutu | (Slk) |
| 6. Elizabeth Imbondi | (Elm) |
| 7. Okanona ANON8 | (O8) |
| 8. Hileni liyambo | (Hli) |
| 9. Wilbartina Teofelus | (WT) |
| 10. Klaudia Ashikuti | (KAsh) |
| 11. Beata David | (BD) |
| 12. Anna Ikukutu | (Alk) |
| 13. Martha Nangolo | (MN) |
| 14. Hilma Ikukutu | (Hlk) |

2:00pm – cooldrinks & biscuits

2:15pm – discussion

Discussion:

Intro Q: What does it mean to be an *omundonga* (Ndonga person)?

Alm: *Omundonga* is a person who talks *Oshindonga*.

LE: An Ndonga person is a person who depends to the culture.

HCJ: In what way?

LE: We depend to our culture.

HCJ: Can you give me any examples?

LE: According to the Ndonga culture, the young lady or young man who is going to marry, they go to the *ohogona* ['second father'/ father's brother] to get some ointment. And we used to wear [i.e. we habitually wear] the cultural clothes.

HCJ: Can you see that someone is *omundonga* from their appearance?

Jlk: The Ndonga women wear the traditional clothes in red.

Translator: Did you meet someone today wearing it?

Jlk: Only yesterday.

- Translator: It is dyed with *olukula* (red ointment).
- HCJ: Is it an important part of your identity that you are *aandongga* [Ndonga people]?
- Alm: No.
- HCJ: How would you describe your identity?
- Alm: [no answer]
- O8: Yes.
- Hli: I am not proud to be Ndonga because *Oshindonga* is not the official language.
- WT: The Ndonga ladies have a lot of responsibility in the home. I cook the food, look for firewood and clean the house.
- Q1: What is the relationship between *Oshindonga* culture and Christianity?
- Hli: The culture and the Christianity they are connected, because when you are born you take the baby to the church for the baptism and when you marry traditionally you go to the church for the blessing.
- Elm: There is a difference.
- HCJ: What's the difference?
- Elm: In traditional wedding people are exalting and dancing but in Christianity we are more singing and praying.
- WT: Even the traditional dress; it is not allowed to come wearing it in the church.
- Translator: The red two-piece (top and bottom) and sometimes animal skins.
- HCJ: When *would* people wear that?
- WT: Like in *ohango* [wedding feast].
- Translator: Do you have traditional burial?
- Consensus: No, only Christian burial.
- Q2: Which situations/events/places seem to be most influenced by *Oshindonga* culture and which by 'Christianity,' or perhaps those divisions do not make much sense to you?

[Focusing on Christianity]

Hlk: Baptism is very influenced by Christianity.

KAsh: Confirmation.

Jlk: *Ohango*.

KAsh: Funeral.

Translator: And by culture?

Hlk: Traditional dancing.

HCJ: Where does that happen?

Hlk: Whenever we come together and become joyful, we start dancing.
[N.B. they had done this in the church today whilst we had been waiting for the translator.]

HCJ: Is there such a thing as a traditional dancing event?

All: Yes.

HCJ: Where?

Hli: They used to organize the place where the event takes place.

Translator: Who organises it?

Hli: It is a community idea when we have free time, for example in marula juicing time. We come together and drink and dance.

Translator: This used to be a time when weapons were not allowed to be carried!

HCJ: Where would this event take place?

MN: At the area which is the mid-point between where the people [participating] live.

HCJ: Are there aspects of local culture in church?

O8: We have drama in church.

Translator: We kneel in church. Kneeling is from culture. When you go to the royal house you start walking on your knees. You approach the king on your knees.

HCJ: And *ohango* [wedding feast] – is it more influenced by Christianity or culture or both?

- Hli: The wedding is a combination of culture and Christianity.
- HCJ: Do you all agree?
- All: Yes.
- HCJ: What about being in the home? Is that more influenced by culture than school, or church, etc?
- Hli: Both.
- HCJ: Can you give me examples?
- Hli: It is the combination because when my house is visited by the guest I go to the guest, sit down there, greeting him or her correctly. I go down and take some food for him. But when I am eating, I pray before [I eat]. And when I go sleeping I pray and when I wake up I pray.
- Translator: And when you sleep, do you sleep by culture or Christianity?
- Consensus: Traditionally.
- HCJ: Physically or mentally?
- Several: Physically.
- Hli: Spiritually in Christianity.
- HCJ: How does a person physically sleep 'traditionally'?
- Hli: Traditionally, when you are sleeping, you lie on your bed. Your feet are on [towards] the East, your head is on the West. Because we have a proverb saying if you die: 'he/she kicked the East' [*athanga uuzilo*].
- Q6: What makes a one *egumbo* nicer or better than the next one?
- LE: To make the house better than the next is to care for your house.
- HCJ: What features does a nice house have?
- O8: You have to make *oondunda* [rooms/huts] from the corrugated iron sheets.
- Alm: You can build a boundary wall with bricks.
- KAsh: Good behaviour by the parents.
- Q7: Why is there a fence around the Ndonga *egumbo*? What is the difference between the space inside the fence and that outside?

- Hli: The fence on the home is to protect the residents and their property.
- HCJ: From what?
- Hli: The fence is to protect the people of the house against wild animals and also thieves.
- Q8: Is the *egumbo* threatened by anything non-physical? Do you do anything special to protect the *egumbo* or the huts within it?
- O8: Yes, dogs.
- HCJ: Do you have to protect the *egumbo* or *oondunda* from any spiritual forces?
- Alm: No.
- Q22: I understand that girls wear beads around their waist to protect them against being bewitched. Does everyone have the power to bewitch people? If someone bewitches people, which part of the body do they use to do it?
- [No ideas]
- Q21: Why do very young boys wear a belt next to their skin and under their clothes? When do they stop wearing this and why?
- Jlk: In order to control your stomach.
- [Translator explains that it controls the stomach and prevents the navel from protruding too much. They only wear it when very young.]
- Q14: Are there any foods you must not eat?
- Jlk: *Okayanga* [small plant like grass, poisonous to goats].
- HCJ: Are there any foods that children must not eat but that adults can?
- LE: Eggs.
- Translator: After the chicken lays and the eggs have hatched, any leftover eggs can only be eaten by parents.
- HCJ: Why?
- LE: I don't know, but it was forbidden by the parents.
- Alm: The animal tongue. Only the parents [can eat it].

- KAsh: We have *elambalamba* [small part attached to liver = ???]. That one is not allowed to be eaten by young girls.
- HCJ: Do you know why?
- KAsh: I heard that if you eat that you will just follow the boys.
- Q15: Which foods are very good for you, or make you very strong/clever and which are bad or make you weak/stupid?
- Slk: *Oshimbombo* [*mahangu* porridge] makes you strong.
- Jlk: Apples make you strong.
- LE: *Oshikundu* [non-alcoholic *mahangu* drink] make you strong.
- O8: Traditional bread [makes you strong].
- Alm: Milk [makes you strong].
- HCJ: Which foods make you clever or stupid?
- Jlk: The brain of the pig. If you eat that you will become abnormal.
- HCJ: Do any foods make you weak?
- BD: Tombo [traditional brew made from sorghum].
- Q16: When an animal is slaughtered, is any part of that animal particularly special or reserved for certain people?
- Jlk: When you slaughter a hen, the *oshindiba* [gizzard] is for the owner of the house.
- HCJ: And the animal tongue?
- Alm: It is eaten by the owner of the house.
- HCJ: Why?
- Translator: It is more sweet than other meat.
- Jlk: Because he is the owner of that house and the tongue is more special.
- HCJ: And liver?
- All: It is very good but shared with everyone.
- Q27: Are there any particular times when someone's body is vulnerable to attack from outside forces?

- Jlk: Yes, sometimes you feel tiredness. You don't want even to do anything. Only what you feel is to lie down and sleep. Only you feel powerless.
- HCJ: Most of the time, are you safe in your body or is your body under threat?
- RP: No idea.
- WT: For example, when I ride in the car I sometimes think maybe the car will turn over and I will get injured, so I feel not safe.
- O8: Even when I am driving the *okatemba* [donkey cart] I feel it could turn upside down.
- HCJ: Do you feel that being [be]witched is a real threat?
14 x 'yes,' 1 x 'no.'
- HCJ: Who would want to [be]witch you and why?
- Hli: Sometimes you are schooling and your classmate is a very sharp one and the witch is witching that person. From then on he is no longer a good performer and sometimes he is sick. So then I am become shy and do not study so hard because it would put me in danger of witchcraft.
- HCJ: Is everybody capable of [be]witching someone?
- Elm: Only some. [all agree]
- HCJ: Do you know how they do it?
- All: No.
- HCJ: How can you protect yourself?
- Jlk: To protect yourself against witchcraft you throw salt on the roof.
- HCJ: Of every room?
- Jlk: The room you sleep in.
- HCJ: Are there any other ways?
[no responses]

END. Closed with thanks.

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