# Locally Owned:

## How African Research Methodologies can be used in Scripture Engagement Research to Grow Local Ownership and Shape International SE Frameworks

by:

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# DECLARATION

This dissertation is the product of my own work. I declare also that the dissertation is available for photocopying, reference purposes and Inter-Library Loan.

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# ABSTRACT


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This dissertation seeks to provide an overview of Indigenous Research Methodologies in connection with how they can help shape the field of Scripture Engagement research. As SE highly values local ownership and community transformation, IRMs have a lot to contribute toward shaping SE research at a time when it has been highlighted as a great need.

IRMs and SE already share a few areas of overlap, but they both have complexities that need to be considered. Through a literature review, interviews and pulling from my own life experience, I have attempted to lay a foundation for the key components of IRMs and how these can enrich the field of SE. I hope this research will encourage future dialogue in elevating IRMs and utilizing them as an important framework for SE research and development.

While IRMs in different global contexts share themes, it is important to place these within a specific context. Because my SE experience has all been carried out in Africa, I aim to show how African Research Methodologies in particular can speak to building capacity within SE workers and growing local ownership within SE research here.

# PREFACE

*Placing myself*

As I have been studying Indigenous Research Methodologies, as well as engaging communities in my own work and life, I have begun to realise how important it is to place one's self in relationship to others considering one's social and cultural heritage as well as current lived realities. I will attempt to do that briefly here.

My name is Laura Beth Robison, and I am 36 years old. I was partially named after my great-grandmother on my father's side, Laura Lea Robison, whom I never met but have been told was a lovely person. I'm grateful for the inheritance of my name from a woman greatly loved by many. I am the daughter of Steve and Brenda, sister of Ryan and relative of many coming from both the Freed and Robison lines. I am originally from the Eastern United States.

I come from an evangelical Christian heritage. I put my faith in Jesus at a very young age and felt strongly about joining the field of missions at a fairly young age as well. When I was younger, I learned about the connection between colonialism and the Church as a thing of the past. While there are things the Church has changed and improved upon greatly, I now see more of the effects of that heritage still ongoingly today. The longer I live overseas and meet other believers in Christ from around the world, the more my knowledge of and appreciation for who God is grows and I see what parts of my faith were more cultural than biblical in the past.

I work for SIL, an international faith-based organisation working in the area of language development within local communities. I have been working in the field of Scripture Engagement and have recently become the South Sudan country director in that organisation as well. I have lived in South Sudan for ten years, and while I'll always be an outsider, I do consider it to be home. I recognise that as a white American woman, I do not know what it is like to be a member of an Indigenous community and all that entails. While I aim to faithfully represent the research as I have found it, I recognise that I may misunderstand context, values and approaches that are outside my cultural upbringing. I continue to count it a privilege to learn from and walk alongside my South Sudanese colleagues and friends as well as others who are teaching me about Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world. I hope I can be an ally and advocate for the promotion of Indigenous Research Methodologies within my area of work and study.

*Motivations*

My initial motivations for carrying out this research stemmed from seeing a disconnect between Western funders and practitioners and the South Sudanese communities I serve at times. A reoccurring motivation that surfaces in my conversations with communities in the beginning stages of doing Scripture Engagement research is that having the Bible in one's

language will help to preserve their cultures. On the other hand, in discussions with communities at the end of a Bible translation project, the reoccurring statement is that now they are like other communities in having a written Bible.

Often times, Western funders and SE practitioners don't see these as valid motivations for running a Bible translation project. They are desiring reports of impact and community transformation, not necessarily how the Bible has helped to preserve a community's culture or make them like many other cultures on earth. Because these conversations have been present in every community I've engaged with, I felt there might be something there to look into about the difference in the cultural view of impact and the importance of Scripture engagement. That has led into this deeper area of research in which I am just beginning to learn and grow. As I've continued to engage with the research and others in my field, I am more convinced that this is timely research to be involved in.

*Acknowledgements*

This is the largest academic feat I have ever undertaken, and there were many moments where I thought it would take a miracle to see it through. So many people had a hand in my achieving this goal through their encouragement and prayers. There are too many to list, but I do want to give special appreciation to a few.

A huge thanks to Tim, my supervisor for your patience and encouragement along the way. I didn't give you much to go on till the very end, but your support of me in my fumbling is greatly appreciated. Thanks as well to Loes who listened to my varying topic ideas and introduced me to the field of Indigenous research methodologies. You helped me to narrow in on this topic and your feedback on my efforts was very helpful.

Thanks to those within my organisation and also those in different contexts where I found myself in this process who entered into dialogue with me surrounding this research. As a verbal processor, those informal conversations over coffee and meals helped my thoughts take form. In this regard, I thank the "Sticky Toffee Pudding" crew, Evan, Ian and Josh, for letting me bounce ideas off of you and giving encouragement. I always leave our conversations feeling encouraged and ten times smarter just from being around you all, even if only digitally the last couple years.

Thanks to my South Sudanese colleagues and friends who have spoken into my life and work for the last ten years. So much of what I have learned in this process has come from you. Many times, what I was reading in the literature was confirmed in real time by our conversations and doing life together.

Thank you to those who offered me meals and treats or a place to work to lessen my load and keep me going: Jenny, Karyn, Kristi, Susanna and Tanya. Even if I sometimes buried myself in my work and didn't take you up on your offers, they were still appreciated.

Lastly, I want to thank those of you who were praying for me constantly through this process and letting me know: my family, home church and Juba Bible study group. I am convinced that's the only way I was able to finish.

# CONTENTS

# Chapter 1: Introduction

Within the area of academic research, Scripture Engagement (SE) and Indigenous Research Methodologies (IRMs) are both relatively new. In terms of practice, however, both have far-reaching roots that date back centuries on the side of SE (Gray, 2019, p. 1) and millennia for IRMs (Easby, 2016, pp. 4-5; Held, 2019, p. 4). While I have been working in the field of SE for a number of years now, IRMs have only recently been introduced to me as I was discussing the connection between community identities and SE with a friend. What I had heard of them initially stood out as an area of focus that I felt could enrich research within SE as well. SE is focused on working with communities to address their own needs and bring transformation in these identified areas through their engaging with the Bible. Because IRMs are also about working with communities and elevating their ways of knowing, I wondered if there would be any overlap between the two that could bring benefit to the field of SE.

## 1.1 Research Questions

With the above in mind, I first set out to understand what IRMs are. How they are defined, and what all they encompass. Then, I wanted to see if there were areas that SE research was already using IRMs without being labelled as such or if there were areas of overlap that could be investigated further. I also wanted to look at the process of SE research to see if Indigenous approaches are being used within some of them, such as data collection, while being left out of others, such as the analysis. Lastly, as I began to engage with the literature on IRMs, I started to wonder if research within SE could be seen as a form of SE itself, rather than just evaluating other types of SE approaches that had already been done. I hope to address each of these questions throughout this piece of research and hope it may spark further discussion on this topic.

## 1.2 Brief introduction to Scripture Engagement

While the scope of this dissertation is specifically focused on research and methodologies, a brief definition of SE in general is needed. As shown in my paper, 'Scripture Engagement in Context', where I looked more deeply into the field, there are a variety of definitions of SE that one can find from across the domain. For the sake of simplicity, I will use the definition I landed on in that paper here as well: "that individuals and communities engage with God and His Word through their linguistic, cultural and artistic contexts in a way that brings lasting transformation through Christ and discipleship through the Spirit (Robison, 2021, p. 3)."

The world of SE is quite heavily focused on praxis and transformation, but as the field grows and expands, research has been noted as greatly needed (Simons, 2021). There is also space within the call for this research to compare the research of "majority world researchers" with "those of Western researchers" taking into account the different epistemologies and methodologies used (DIU Systematic, 2022).

### 1.3 The need for SE research and types of methodologies currently in use

With SE officially being labelled as a field in 2000, it has now reached a point where many are realizing the great need to invest in research surrounding it (Gray, 2019, p. 1). SE practitioners have often done research at varying points within a Bible translation project, either to course correct if needed or to learn from the existing program in ways that could be duplicated elsewhere. As an interviewee explained, SE research needs to be ongoing throughout a project: "at the beginning…because that can then affect the way you plan a program", in the midst of a project for "monitoring and evaluation", and after a NT or Bible is produced, assessing what was done (Interview D). While these types of research projects have been present in the SE world for quite some time, there has also been a more recent push to collect and evaluate the varying bodies of research done so far.

In 2019, a working document called the Scripture Engagement Research Compendium (SERC) was developed in order to house any existing SE research from around the world in one location in order to see what had already been done, easily compare the existing research, and to offer a space for future research as the field continues to grow. This spreadsheet also gives some helpful quantifiable information on existing SE research and the methodologies used. Of the 49 works currently listed that specify, 14 were at least mostly qualitative in their approach, 8 were mostly quantitative, and a further 10 are stated to be an even mix between qualitative and quantitative. The varying research methods noted across them include interviews (both individual and group as well as structured and informal), case studies, observation, participation, questionnaires, desk-based research, statistical analysis, focus groups, participatory tools, recordings, and surveys (Carter J., 2019). While there is SE research that is not currently represented in this database, it does a good job of giving a broad view of the types of SE research that exist. One piece of information I feel is missing from the database, however, is whether the author of the research was from the researched community or not. My interviews with SE practitioners across Africa confirmed the use of these approaches as well. Some of the research these practitioners discussed are also represented on the SERC spreadsheet, while others were not published in any capacity. Among the four interviewees, the methods used were focus groups, interviews, participant observation, questionnaires, desk-based research and group discussions.

In early 2021, SIL International introduced its newly developed Corporate Research Agenda. In this agenda, three of the four highest priority problems slated as needing research had to do with SE: "Post-Publication Scripture Engagement", "Multilingual Scripture Use", and "Effectiveness of Oral Scriptures". The fourth priority was "Community Ownership", which was also the only high priority problem to be carried over from the 2019 agenda. A few of the further priorities in the 2021 agenda also related to SE, which gives some insight into how much emphasis is being placed on this area of research in recent years (Simons, 2021).

Just this year, 2022, Dallas International University also put together plans for a "Systematic Review of Scripture Engagement Research" in which a few researchers will collect multiple examples of research that has been done around the globe to help develop direction for the current thinking in the field. They have requested research representing multiple organisations, locations and languages, among other things. Two of the proposed research questions that caught my eye were, "How is "successful" Scripture engagement defined and measured?" and "How is transformation defined (DIU Systematic, 2022)?" I think these questions may begin to address the multiple values that different actors might place on Scripture and its impact within a community.

Much of the existing SE research relies heavily on a few frameworks and methods. Wayne Dye's 'Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement' remains a mainstay in determining the sociocultural features that need to be considered when evaluating the level of Scripture impact (Dye, 2009). In fact, the SERC spreadsheet even has a place to list which of the Eight Conditions are addressed by each contribution. Hill and Hill's Barriers to Scripture Engagement is another helpful and often utilised framework. In a way, this resource comes from the opposite approach to Dye's. While Dye looks at what factors must be present for good impact, Hill and Hill look at what barriers may exist hindering the impact of Scripture within a community (Hill & Hill,2005). Many participatory tools have also continued to be adapted and utilised across the board.

### 1.4 Brief introduction to Indigenous Research Methodologies

I will unpack Indigenous Research Methodologies (IRMs), the complexities surrounding them and some of their important components more below as we look into the existing literature, but I think it is important to give a brief definition and overview of IRMs at the start. A simple definition of IRMs could be that they are research methodologies that are carried out alongside Indigenous communities, for their benefit, using their own knowledge systems and methods.

According to Held, the first IRM recorded within academia is said to be the "Māori approach to research among the Māori in New Zealand", which took place in the 1990's (2019, p. 6). Many of the IRMs published and shared academically come from North America, Australia and New Zealand (Easby, 2016, p. 2). There is a growing field of research coming from Africa in recent years, however, especially out of South Africa (Muwanga-Zake, 2009, p. 416).

### 1.5 Growing interest in the wider use of Indigenous Research Methodologies

With knowledge about IRMs growing and more researchers successfully breaking through methodological barriers in wider academia, more institutions and governing bodies are slowly attempting to promote the use of IRMs within research (Themane, 2021, p. 64). We'll briefly look at two here.

In 2007, the United Nations passed its 'Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples'. Within this declaration, the UN recognised the need for respect of Indigenous knowledge systems and

the need to recognise the different contexts Indigenous peoples live in (United Nations, 2008, pp. 2-4). Articles 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 31 and 34 in particular, address Indigenous communities' rights to preserve and promote their cultural practices and knowledge systems as well as to protect their ownership of these and decide how information about them will be used (2008, pp. 6-8, 11-12).

SIL used the UN's declaration in addition to other guiding documents when it revised its own ethics around research in 2009. Four of these principles that are specifically of note for this topic are 'Respect for human dignity', 'Respect for free and informed consent', 'Respect for community context', and 'The value of long-term relations' (SIL Discover, 2022). These principles are not without their challenges. When it comes to human dignity, who is defining what that looks like? Also, does the idea of free and informed consent apply to the individual, a registered group, the whole community? While a Western framework allows the point of consent to be the individual, the Indigenous framework largely does not. The individual is only as the community is, so therefore, does not act independently (Ibhakewanlan & McGrath, 2015, p. 4). While these principles are a good start, some may need to be fleshed out a bit more to fully represent all communities. SIL also believes that "communities should be able to pursue their social, cultural, political, economic and spiritual goals without sacrificing their ethnolinguistic identity (SIL Discover, 2022)."

### 1.6 Describing the movement to localisation

One last area that I think is important to note as background before looking more deeply into IRMs and SE research is the area of localisation. Since the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, many international NGOs have made moves to localise their operations around the world (Gibbons, 2021). It isn't just humanitarian organisations doing this, but also developmental organisations too. In its 2021-2025 Global Plan, SIL has as one of its three operational priorities Locally Rooted, in which it discusses the balance of being firmly rooted within the communities where it is present, but also being connected to the global community as well (SIL, 2021). The complexities of this approach are to balance the good from the local context and the global context to make a way forward that is somehow neither yet both at the same time. Themane makes this same argument for research, stating that elevating IRMs to an equal status with Western research approaches does not mean that the Western approaches should be completely eliminated, but rather, they should both speak into each other, making stronger, more holistic research in the end (2021, p. 74).

# Chapter 2: Literature Review of Indigenous Research Methodologies

In this section, I will seek to interact with the literature that exists on IRMs. IRMs have mainly been used within the social science fields, education and health care to this point. There is not much available that speaks to both IRMs and SE within the literature, so my main focus in this section is to present and critique the existing research on IRMs. This will provide a good foundation as I then move forward into later sections bringing both IRMs and SE research together.

## 2.1 What are Indigenous Research Methodologies?

There are multiple definitions of IRMs in the existing literature. Some examples of this are as follows. Mirjam B. E. Held states, "Indigenous research is most commonly defined as research by Indigenous scholars on, for, and with Indigenous communities (2019, p. 6)." Evans et al note that Indigenous methodologies "can be defined as research by and for Indigenous peoples, using techniques and methods drawn from the traditions and knowledges of those peoples (Evans et al, as cited by Brayboy et al, 2012, p. 434)." Windchief et al define "Indigenous methodologies as "unique ways researchers use Indigenous positionality and perspective to perform research *with* and *within* Indigenous communities . . . [that] center and privilege the Indigenous community's voice(s) in an effort to contribute to the community" (Windchief et al, 2017, p. 533, as cited in Gone, 2019, p. 52)."

IRMs make up a specific type of methodology, not just the methods that are used to carry them out. They provide specific epistemologies which form various research approaches (Brayboy et al, 2012, p. 427). It is important to note that while qualitative research, participatory methods and community-based research all have some overlap with either IRMs or the methods used within them, they come from different foundations (Beveridge et al, 2021, p. 11). The first three often flow out of what are largely seen in academia as more traditional, Western research frameworks (Beveridge et al, 2021, p. 2). Participatory approaches within research became more popular near the end of the last century (Chatty, Baas & Fleig, 2003), and community-based research has also become more widely used (Ibhakewanlan & McGrath, 2015, p. 2), but that does not necessarily mean IRMs have been equally centred within research communities so far.

There is some debate within the literature as to whom can carry out Indigenous research. Some seem to think that anyone can use IRMs in their research, whether Indigenous themselves or not. What is important is properly carrying out the research according to the IRMs, not necessarily the researcher's insider or outsider identity. If the researcher is an outsider to the community, there would be specific challenges they would need to remain aware of, but this would not immediately eliminate them from carrying out the research (Smith, 2005, p. 98). Others are of the position that research done within an IRM framework is more often than not inappropriate for non-Indigenous people to carry out (Beveridge et al, 2021, p. 3). As is seen

generally within IRMs, this may be best decided by each Indigenous community within their own context, rather than a universal rule being employed.

One thing shown as important across all of the research is that in utilizing IRMs in research, the process is just as important as the end result. While the end result should be practical and bring benefit to the community, the process should also centre the community and build relationship into the core of the research. I will discuss this further below as I emphasise some of the core components of IRMs based on the literature. First, however, I do want to recognise both the complexities of IRMs and some challenges they have faced both historically and currently within academia.

### 2.2 Complexities of Indigenous Research Methodologies

IRMs have a complex history. As stated above, they have been around for a long time in practice. As tools and methods of researching and passing information within Indigenous communities, they have been around for centuries. As a formalised approach to research within modern academia, however, they are much more recent, first appearing as fringe methodologies in the late 1990s. It wasn't until the mid-2000s that they began to be more widely written about and accepted (Easby, 2016, pp. 4-5; Kwaymullina et al, 2013, p. 2).

One of the complexities of IRMs is in defining what qualifies as such. In the literature, I have seen different methodologies and titles used for similar approaches to research: Indigenous Research Methodologies, Decolonising Methodology (Keane, Khupe & Seehawer, 2017), Indigenous Knowledge Systems (Muwanga-Zake, 2009; Osman, 2009), Indigenous Local Research (Themane, 2021), etc. There are differences and nuances to each of these, but they have many similarities as well. One of the things they all seem to have in common is a non-traditional, in the Western sense, approach to research (Easby, 2016, p. 1). In order to have a wider base of literature and fuller scope of the field, I have included sources that engage with these different methods and drawn on them in the areas where they share similarities.

Another complexity noted by Weaver is that the term indigeneity is complex and not always easily defined. Noting that indigeneity, while a strongly held identity, is not always clear which identity it refers to: "race, ethnicity, cultural identity, tribal identity, acculturation, enculturation, bicultural identity, multicultural identity, or some other form of identity" (Weaver, 2001, p. 240). Smith confirms this thought by adding that the idea of identity for who and what is "native" and what that looks like is not always clear. This confusion in what defines the term can be found within Indigenous communities as well as among those outside. All communities are complex and varied, not having one specific point of view or reality. In addition to the identities referred to by Weaver, Smith adds that there are issues surrounding "gender, economic class, age, language, and religion" that come into play within this discussion as well (Smith, 2005, pp. 86-87). Within Africa, there is an added complexity to this idea of indigeneity. Ohenjo et al state that many Africans see themselves as Indigenous because of

colonialism. There were community dynamics that existed before colonialism took place, but once colonialism happened, the litmus for indigeneity was being African and not from a foreign, colonial power (Ohenjo et al, as cited by Keikelame & Swartz, 2019, p. 2). Because this idea of indigeneity cannot be captured completely by one definition or ideology, Indigenous research faces a similar challenge (Themane, 2021, p. 70).

Another challenge that IRMs face in breaking into what are considered acceptable research methodologies within the Western-dominated academia, is that it is not as easy to generalise their approaches and findings across communities and locations. (Easby, 2016, p. 1). Western academia is often based more around theory than practical approaches. Theoretical approaches are more easily generalised across contexts and therefore more easily seen by those in academia as universal truth, whereas the localised and adaptable nature of the practical can be seen as not broad or constant enough to apply universally within research (Themane, 2021, p. 65). Where the West sometimes wants to stay in theory, Indigenous communities often want this theory to move into the practical, impacting real issues on the ground (Higgs, 2010, p. 2416). Although IRMs are more context bound, we will see that there are themes and approaches that are similar across them which I feel can be learned from and then applied appropriately within specific contexts.

The last complexity I will note here is that of a strong reliance on Western institutions in carrying out and sharing research at an academic level. One such reliance is related to funding. According to Themane, “most African universities have, ever since the liberation of their countries from their former colonisers, depended on them (the colonisers) for their funding (2021, p. 72).” Whether it is in the area of university funding or funding to carry out a specific research program, the West often still holds the financial keys to the way forward. This can lead African and other Indigenous institutions to utilise Western methodologies instead of Indigenous ones in order to get the funding needed to do the research (Bob-Milliar, 2020, p. 2). With growing awareness and acceptance of IRMs, some funding boards and universities are encouraging researchers to utilise them more by providing funding specifically to research that incorporates these methodologies (Ibhakewanlan & McGrath, 2015, p. 2). While more funding options are now available, they still might not stretch to include the placement of the researcher within the geographical community for lengths of time adequate to build relationships (Bob-Milliar, 2020, p. 5). In a similar way to funding, the West still holds more control in academia through the use of language. Most universities still provide instruction largely in Western languages to accommodate a global connection and expect research to be done in such as well. As language is an important part of Indigenous ways of knowing, this can prove to be a challenge (Khupe & Keane, 2017, p. 26). This is beginning to be questioned more as a carry-over of colonialism, but change is slow (Themane, 2021, p. 65).

### 2.3 Historic blockages to Indigenous Research Methodologies

Some of these current complexities facing IRMs stem from historic experiences Indigenous communities have had within institutions. While discussing these could be a full paper within itself, I do want to acknowledge them briefly here. I also want to recognise, as Ezeanya-Esiobu points out, that the arguments I am making throughout this dissertation often set up Western knowledge as being the "norm" and Indigenous knowledge being an alternative to that (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019, p. 7). That is the system as I have learned it, which often does not hold these two systems as equal (Held, 2019, pp. 1-2). I recognise and value the vast and deep heritage that Indigenous knowledge systems have beyond my understanding and beyond what has often been attributed to them within academia, and I apologise for my limited abilities in appropriate representation.

Academia has largely been influenced and developed by thinking from the Enlightenment era, which is often entrenched in theory over praxis and elevates the researcher as the authority on finding knowledge and interpreting it (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008, pp. 6-7). Largely within academia, scientific methodologies are valued as the correct way to do research and the only way to maintain neutrality and objectivity when it comes to truth seeking (Brayboy et al, 2012, pp. 428-429). Of course, complete neutrality and objectivity are impossible, as each person brings his or her own biases and ways of interpreting the world. Indigenous knowledge systems can often get dismissed because they do not follow this same framework, which is seen as enlightened and correct compared to what is sometimes seen within the system as backwards and ill-informed (Keikelame & Swartz, 2019, p. 5; Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019, p. 7). Even when participatory approaches are used, they often still flow out of Western theory (Osman, 2009, p. 6). Indigenous communities often have a very negative view of research (Brayboy et al, 2012, p. 428). Understandably, it is difficult to separate the idea of research from the colonial oppression and institutions that brought it in its most widely used form (Smith, 2005, p. 87). While some Indigenous researchers seek liberation from Western research methodologies, Teichler and Yağci point out that colonialism has so undermined ways of knowing among many Indigenous communities that they see Western education as being the thing that will liberate them from their poor surroundings (2009, p. 134). Many Indigenous people who have grown up in Western education systems believe that wisdom, education and knowledge originated first from Europe and then America (Muwanga-Zake, 2010, p. 69). This belief is perpetuated by the narrative that Indigenous lands have no history beyond the European history of colonizing them (Ibhakewanlan & McGrath, 2015, p. 7). As mentioned above, it is also maintained through the use of language. Most institutions of higher learning within Africa, operate in European languages rather than the languages of the communities where they are located. Hountondji makes the argument that this is unique within the world, giving an example of a German scholar who wanted to produce research. He would first think about the research he wanted to produce for his context, develop the research in German and then soon after think about translating it into English and/or French for a wider readership. Hountondji goes on to say that

the opposite is often done in African universities, where a scholar will first think of what research would be interesting to an outside target audience, perform that research and then create it in English and/or French to reach a wider readership, possibly never translating it into his own language (Hountondji, 2009, p. 128). I have seen this to be true within the context of South Sudan as well. Often, people view education as synonymous with education in English, not that which takes place in the local languages.

Within academia, knowledge and research have often been seen as independent activities. The researcher is able to work alone to analyse the data once it has been collected and is also expected to present these findings in their own words as well (Wilson, 2001, pp. 176-177). International intellectual property rights are often given to a person, institution or registered organisation, not joint members of a community who do not have a recognised official registration (Saha & Bhattacharya, 2011). Because of this, it has sometimes been easy for outside researchers to "misrepresent and misuse" the Indigenous knowledge systems within their research or to take this knowledge as their own, rather than recognizing the ownership of the community itself and its right to use the research as it wants (Smith, 1999, p. 9; Battin & Mills, 2017, p. 10).

Abuses have often centred around appropriation, exploitation and dominance of power. Indigenous peoples have experience with they and their environments being objectified to for others to obtain outside research aims. This can be seen in the taking of resources and artifacts from communities in the name of anthropological research as well as the use of their bodies and natural flora for the cause of scientific and medical research (Brayboy et al, 2012, p. 428; Cannella & Manuelito, 2008, p. 6; Muwanga-Zake, 2010, p. 77). The Church and missionaries have been guilty of these abuses in the past and even sometimes still today. Near my hometown in Pennsylvania, the most famous boarding school for assimilating Indigenous children from across the country into "American" culture once existed: Carlisle Indian Industrial School. The founder, Richard Pratt, is known for saying, "Kill the Indian in him, save the man." While this school was run by the government and not the church, there were similar schools all over the country that were church-run (Waldmier, 2022). The premise of these schools was to erase the Indigenous culture from children and make them more Western in appearance, culture, language and belief. In discussions of restitution, I sometimes hear people from the majority community say things like, "That was a long time ago." or, "It was other people that did the wrong, so I am not the one that should have to apologise." This is very telling of the difference between Western thoughts surrounding place, time and relationship compared to that of Indigenous communities. As we will discuss below, Indigenous communities look at relationships in a more holistic way, not just involving living humans. Even if one thinks about relationships in a more disconnected way across time regarding these boarding schools, it was not until just last year that the bodies of children whom had died at the Carlisle school were repatriated back to their ancestral lands, so not a problem left to the distant past (Kunze, 2022).

While boarding schools created under the assimilation policies no longer exist, some of these same abuses and injustices happen within academia still today.

### 2.4 Components of Indigenous Research Methodologies

In the paragraphs below, I will give more detail about specific components that are central to IRMs. These are not the only components that exist, but they kept coming up in the literature as important. They all also interrelate with one another, but for sake of description and clarity, I have tried to separate them out in more detail. These components are relationality, ethics, language, style, contextualisation and holism.

*Relationality:*

One of the strongest components within IRMs is that of relationality. This is in respect not only to the relationship between researcher and researchees, but also among the community themselves and with the wider world. In IRMs placing one's self within relationship is integral to the research. It is not just a means to an end, but also part of the knowledge-making process. It is also what each of the different methods flow out of in order to achieve the research goals. In an Indigenous worldview, the relationship is seen as more important than reality (Wilson, 2001, p. 177).

Historically, distancing one's self from one's subjects was the expectation within scientific and anthropologic research. This was seen as the only way the researcher could remain "neutral" and "objective" (Brayboy et al, 2012, pp. 428-429; Muwanga-Zake, 2010, p. 74; Mbembe, 2015, p. 9). IRMs hold that this is completely the wrong approach. In order for research to be valid and useful within an IRM framework, the researcher must be in relationship with those they are researching, even to the point of immersing themselves in the community as much as possible (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013, pp. 2-3). If they are not, they will not get true knowledge because it must be jointly made. There is no such thing as objectivity or neutrality, and the researcher must recognise this within themselves, place themselves in relationship with others, and together seek to find the truth. Contrary to the Enlightenment thought of absolute truth that stands above context, Ibhakewanlan and McGrath argue that truth cannot exist outside of a community and context because there would be no one to relate to it or experience it (2015, p. 4).

In order to carry-out good research using IRMs, the researcher should include the relational "values of reciprocity, responsibility, and respect" (Beveridge et al, 2021, p. 2). For the researcher, this means they need to think about how their research will represent the community and how the results of their research will impact and benefit the community (Beveridge et al, 2021, p. 3; von Möllendorff, Kurgat & Speck, 2017, p. 95). This relationship is not just built and utilised for the data collection, but it is integral to the entire research process. From the beginning, the proposed research structure is a collaboration between the researcher and the community. Only in building trust between the researcher and community can truth be

realised together (Muwanga-Zake, 2009, p. 421). By centring Indigenous voices, the research will be sure to address the needs and concerns of the community in addition to the interest of the researcher themselves. As the community is actively participating in relational research, appropriate Indigenous methods of research, such as story, song and narrative, are more naturally used to create truth together (Keikelame & Swartz, 2019, p. 5; Beveridge et al, 2021, p. 3). Community members are then also an integral part of the analysis and interpretation of the research (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013, pp. 2-3).

When it comes to relationships, it is important in most Indigenous communities for the researcher to connect across time and space. The researcher is not simply relating to the living, human community, but the ancestors and all of nature are also seen to be involved in this relationship (Xiiem, Lee-Morgan & De Santolo, 2019, p. 22; Wilson, 2001, pp. 176-177). Different IRM researchers within the literature mentioned the importance of taking part in ceremonies that sought the approval and knowledges of the ancestors, spirits and natural world because of the interconnectedness of all (Beveridge et al, 2021, pp. 9-10; Chilisa et al, 2016, pp. 318-319; Kwaymullina et al, 2013, p. 7). Some describe the concept of Ubuntu as this interconnectedness. Not only is all life connected, but within Ubuntu people share and seek the good of all (Muwanga-Zake, 2009, p. 417).

One last thing I want to note about the relationality of IRMs is the recognition of research. While reading through the literature, I noticed over and over again a multi-researcher approach. Some of the research was attributed to one person, but much of it was jointly held, either as a collection in a book or as more than one contributor to an article. There is also much description of collective work and ownership across researchers and communities (Keikelame & Swartz, 2019, p. 5).

*Ethics:*

While ethics need to be considered and followed in every form of research, there are procedures unique to Indigenous research that is expected to be followed. Of course, ethics surrounding international human rights and seeking not to harm communities must be followed, but sometimes what may harm a community is not as easily defined as one might think. As we discussed in the relationality of IRMs, the idea of mutual benefit is an important one when thinking about ethics as well.

One aspect of doing no harm to a community is in the idea of communal ownership of knowledge-making. In most Indigenous communities, because relationships are so key, it would not be following proper procedures to ask an individual to make a decision or represent the community's thoughts without consulting anyone else (Beveridge et al, 2021, p. 10). While independent voice and perspective is acceptable and often valued within the Western academic framework, it can be distressing in the disconnect it causes within an Indigenous one. At the very least, the researcher may not get a true picture of the realities because the person

might be tempted to tell them what they want to hear as they don't have a chance to find the truth together in community. I have experienced this in my own research and engagement with communities in South Sudan. If there is a discussion even involving 5-10 community members, there will often still be decisions the group says cannot be discussed or the answer given until the whole community can be consulted. This is especially true if the group involved does not include any elders. As stated above, this communal decision-making and truth-finding often includes the ancestors in an Indigenous context (Beveridge et al, 2021, p. 10). This also flows over into the formal research process. If knowledge is communal, then it cannot be owned by one person, or even really by anyone. It is something created together, growing and adapting based on the relationship and context (Wilson, 2001, p. 177).

Another area of ethics that sometimes comes into conflict with a Western framework of ethics is the idea of giving gifts, sharing meals and even making payment (Beveridge et al, 2021, p. 10). Some researchers might see this as a way of paying for the information you want, rather than collecting truth from an impartial subject. Within IRMs this all stems back to the idea of mutual benefit and relationship building again. In IRMs, the researcher should not remain an anonymous outsider, but should enter into the community as much as possible, or at least introduce and place themselves in relationship to the community. In a way, they are entering into a relationship contract with the community, of which they will have certain responsibilities to benefit the relationship, not just the research (Wilson, 2001, p. 177). One of the SE practitioners I interviewed noted that when they were carrying out their research, the communities noted that other people have come to do research among them in the past. They came, collected their data, went away to get their degree, and the community never heard from them again nor saw any benefit (Interview C). I have heard similar remarks from communities here. This adds to the suspicion of research, not only wondering how the researcher will use the information outside but also why it should be given up in the first place if the community sees no benefit as a result.

*Language:*

Language is another integral part of IRMs. Because IRMs centre Indigenous voices, the use of Indigenous languages must be present throughout the entire research process. This is important when the researcher is initially engaging with the community to develop the framework of the research program. Conversations must happen in a way that allows full understanding by both parties.

Language is also important in the actual representation of the research itself. Throughout the Indigenous research I have interacted with, there were multiple places where the expression of knowledge was necessary in the Indigenous language (Smith, 2005, p. 98; Muwanga-Zake, 2009, p. 420; Muwanga-Zake, 2010, p. 74). A close translation was provided for those from outside the Indigenous community to capture a level of understanding, but these translations could not fully capture the meaning that needed to be expressed as the original language could.

While most research that is accepted at higher levels is required to be written in a language of former colonisation some changes are happening in that regard. As previously mentioned, more research is including words or whole passages in the Indigenous language with translation to carry more meaning, especially for Indigenous readers. There are some universities that are starting to encourage the publication of research fully in the Indigenous language of the author(s), but this is still not common. One of my interviewees stated that a seminary they attended within Africa required all students to publish their abstracts in their own language so the communities could at least understand the summary of the research. The remainder of the work was written in a European language, however (Interview D). Many times, if a researcher writes in a major language, they may translate their research into another major language to reach more people, but it might not go the full way to translating it into the language of the communities represented in the research itself due to lack of time, funding or ability.

*Style:*

When speaking about style, there are two areas to consider. The first is to consider what style or form the Indigenous knowledge itself takes. The second, is in which style or form the research should be represented to others.

Often when we think of research in a Western mindset, we think of formal language written in a prose style. There is a general bias in academia to value Western methods, knowledges and presentation styles over Indigenous ones (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013, p. 3). Indigenous knowledges can be represented in many different forms, however. Songs, stories and proverbs, among others, can all stand alone as vehicles of knowledge in an Indigenous context. In referencing Kovach, Beveridge et al state that knowledge can come from sources that are "multiple and multidimensional". Indigenous communities do not just view conversations between people in one place and time as knowledge-making, but dreams, interactions with the ancestors, and other things outside of time and space are considered equal (Beveridge et al, 2021, pp. 10-11). When collecting data from a community for research, it is not uncommon to be answered in a way that feels indirect and coded to a Western researcher. In many of the communities I've worked with to carry out research for our local context, my questions have been answered by a story, a proverb or even the entire group breaking out into song. With my Western background, this initially felt to me as going off topic or misunderstanding the question when in reality, I was the one misunderstanding the answer.

When speaking about the representation of the research, it is also important to think about the style the research will be presented in and how it is transferred to others. Some of the research I encountered was transcribed in a literary form for ease of inclusion in academic forums, but it was unaltered from its original oral state (Mbembe, 2015, p. 1; Osman, 2009, p. 1). Because knowledge-making specifically through story is a communal act and deeply embedded in language, to change the research from the oral style can change some of the meaning and truth that comes about from it being presented orally. Christian chose to try to combat this by using

long quotes within her research to try to maintain some of the context of the initial conversations (Christian, 2019, pp. 6, 12-13). Beveridge et al took great care to keep the story element of their research by weaving it throughout and including carefully drawn illustrations, but they also mention that the form and knowledge still ended up changing slightly by fitting it into a book form (2021, pp. 8-9).

Just as much of the research included words, phrases, and even whole stories in their original language with translation, some of the research included proverbs and stories as clear ways of carrying meaning as well (Xiiem, Lee-Morgan & De Santolo, 2019, p. 2; Davidson, 2019, p. 5). Sometimes these proverbs and stories were explained for those outside to understand the truth they carry within the research, but other times, they were left in their original state, carrying meaning just by being included. Chilisa et al note that proverbs often function to convey meaning, evaluate the research and grow local ownership within the process (2016, pp. 320-321). I think the same could be said of the other methods and styles used within Indigenous research.

*Contextualisation:*

An area that is contrary to Western research methodologies is that of contextualisation. As mentioned before, Western, scientific research is valued when it can be duplicated across other contexts. IRMs hold to the fact that they should be rooted in a context, rather than being held as universal methodologies to cross over all space and contexts. Owusu-Ansah and Mji state that, “Knowledge or science, and its methods of investigation, cannot be divorced from a people’s history, cultural context and worldview. Worldview shapes consciousness and forms the theoretical framework within which knowledge is sought, critiqued and or understood (2013, p. 1).”

*Holism:*

It is also important for Indigenous research to be holistic in its approach. The methods used cannot just be a means to an end, but the process should touch on all areas of life within the community: “spiritual, social, educational, agricultural, political and economic” (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013, p. 2). Knowing and considering the needs and ideologies of the community is an important part of framing the research and developing the methodologies used (Wilson, 2001, pp. 20-21, as cited in Brayboy et al, 2012, p. 426).

### 2.5 Specifics of African Research Methodologies

While much of the literature specific to Africa overlaps significantly with the themes of IRMs from other parts of the globe, there are a few points to note. In the rest of the paper, my interest in IRMs is mainly within the context of Africa, because that is where I live, work and have the most experience. As stated before, however, there is more literature coming from

other parts of the world regarding IRMs, so it is necessary to draw knowledge from those. Even while doing so, I will be applying those truths within the African context.

According to Higgs, what makes a framework 'African' is that it is looking at the worldview and is concerned about the issues facing African cultures (2010, p. 2415). While some say that it is impossible to speak of an African culture or an African ideology, Chilisa et al argue that generalisations can be made across Africa, just as they can be when speaking generically of a Western culture or ideology (2016, p. 317). It is important to locally root one's self into a context, but when looking at broader areas of research to pull from, one can speak more generally. Much of my own experience comes from living and working within South Sudan. When looking at those I interviewed, that adds four more country contexts: Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Mali and Nigeria. The literature further adds others in. All of that will be helpful to draw out some universal themes, however, we need to be careful to not keep universal themes "out there", but rather should connect them in practice to an Indigenous context.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Description of data collection

The main approach to this research has been qualitative desk-based research, which includes a literature review. It has also included semi-structured interviews and my own life and work experience.

### 3.2 Methodology of the literature review

In terms of the literature review, as well as the other desk-based aspects, I was fortunate to have a friend who has been involved with research programs in South Sudan tell me about IRMs and share some resources early on that got me started in the right direction. From there, using the respective bibliographies, as well as searchable terms I became familiar with, I was able to find a decent pool of resources. As mentioned above, much of the research is from areas outside of the region of my scope of research. While the body of work around IRMs in Africa is growing, I felt it was necessary to include resources from other parts of the world to more holistically define and understand the context.

As mentioned above, I heavily relied on the SERC database, as well as the Scripture Engagement website to find research specific to SE. In my searching for IRM research, I didn't find any that showed a direct overlap at all between SE and IRM specifically. In my searches of SE research, however, I did find a couple sources that stood out as either specifically stating their use and promotion of Indigenous knowledge systems (LEAD, 2016) or commenting more about working with Indigenous researchers to carry out and analyse the data (Gottschlich, 2013).

### 3.3 Structuring of interviews

Because I knew that this research would largely be desk-based and have a limited scope of time and travel ability, I aimed to carry-out five interviews of SE practitioners across Sub-Saharan Africa. In the end, I carried out four semi-structured interviews. These represented workers in the field living and working in fairly different contexts. The four countries of experience were Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Mali and Nigeria. Of the interviewees, three are men and one is a woman. Two are European, while the other two are Africans from the respective countries of their main research experience. I would have loved to have at least one more country represented and ideally have interviewed an African woman for the perspective she would have brought to the field, but I am still happy with the diversity in experience, location and perspective that I ended up with, especially considering the limitations. I chose to keep these interviews anonymous as not all of them were in a context that was as open.

Each interviewee was e-mailed ahead of time to ask about their willingness and interest in taking part in the research. I also sent the base questions for them to have a chance to prepare for the interview, but let them know I would ask other questions that came from their answers

if they were comfortable with that. The base questions used in each interview can be found in Appendix I below. A sample interview transcript can be found in Appendix II. Each interview was conducted over Zoom and was recorded so I could focus on the interview rather than taking copious notes but would then have a recording available for later transcription.

The use of Zoom, while appreciated due to the limitations mentioned above, also had its own limitations. Because relationships are integral to IRMs and have also been my own preference of research, in-person meetings would have been the much-preferred choice. Zoom already adds a layer of disconnect, but then due to our poor internet quality here, we had to have our videos off other than to give greetings at the very beginning for the majority of the interviews. This led to some interviewees answering the questions but possibly not going into as much depth as they would have if we had been in person. It also cut out the entire non-verbal side of communication, which is important in adding to and interpreting meaning.

### 3.4 Methodology of analysis

While reading the different sources I came across, I noticed different themes emerging. I then took notes, placing them in their respective categories so as to keep track of where the voices converged and where they carried different perspectives.

After each interview, I listened back and transcribed them in their entirety. In the transcriptions then, I noted themes that overlapped with those found in the literature as well as those that spanned across more than one interview.

Lastly, as the themes took shape, I was able to see overlap from my own life experiences and conversations with communities. All three of these have come together to shape this research.

### 3.5 Further Limitations

The difficulty of traveling and the limited time available for this research around my work schedule, meant there were significant limitations to my engaging with different communities within South Sudan as well. I was able to visit some that overlapped with travels for SE work as well, but this did not give much time or space to discuss IRMs or think through how to use them more within the dissertation itself. As I was unfamiliar with them before beginning this research, it was not until later in the process that I felt I had at least a better grasp of what they entail. There is the added limitation of this research being my dissertation for my MA degree. If I had better processed the information and had more time both with communities and to investigate doing a collaborative research for my degree, I think this dissertation would have been the better for it.

# Chapter 4: Can African Research Methodologies help shape SE research?

SE research spans across unpublished projects undertaken solely for use within a local SE context all the way to the most comprehensive SE research done to date, which is the Scripture Use Research and Ministry (van den Berg, 2020) project. SURAM took place in Papua New Guinea from 2014-2017. The official report was published in 2020 (van den Berg, 2020, p. iii). While it is fairly recent, the SURAM report has begun to influence the way SE research is done around the world (Carter, J. W, 2019). A research project following the same methodology as SURAM is being prepared within a West African context right now (Interview C). One major goal of SURAM that contrasts significantly with the components of IRMs is its desire for it to be easily replicable across language communities (Carter, J. W., 2019, p. 228).

Based on the literature, it is clear that there are some areas of overlap between IRMs and the field of SE. There are also definite areas of disconnect between the two. I do think, however, that IRMs can speak into SE research in new or underutilised ways. I will develop each of these further in this section.

### 4.1 Possible conflict between IRMs and current SE research

Before moving into places of overlap and areas of growth, I think it is important to note the two striking areas where I feel IRMs and SE research may be in conflict with one another. The first of these is on the topic of appropriation. The second is in looking at relationships, specifically with spirits, nature and the ancestors. I will address each of these in turn here.

A critique that secular linguists and anthropologists have often had of Christian researchers and missionaries is either that they are appropriating culture and research styles in order to push their own agenda or completely seeking to change the communities that they are living among and researching. In some ways this argument is hypocritical as it fails to address the areas in which secular linguists and anthropologists might also carry their own agendas into a community. This ties back into the Enlightenment mentality that a researcher can be completely neutral and disconnected. As we have seen above, this is not possible with any researcher whether they are Christian or secular. On the other hand, this critique is not baseless when looking at how interwoven Christian mission and empire were within colonialism. If a researcher is coming in with their own idea of what the outcome should be and using Indigenous approaches to make that more palatable, that is appropriation and a problem.

Again, this can be a problem with any research, not just within the area of SE or Christian mission, but this can be a specific area of concern within SE if Indigenous motivations, concerns and knowledges are not taken into account when shaping a Bible translation project or the SE that occurs alongside it. There are times that the motivations of these outside organisations can be held in higher regard than those of the Indigenous communities they are serving. Even when

community input is valued, the main goal of Bible translation and SE is to achieve successful transformation within the community, often as the outside organisations define success and transformation. There are values placed on which motivations are more valid than others. This has the added challenge of these projects being tied to external funding. If the one funding the work has specific thoughts about the best approaches and practices, this is often how the project has to be shaped in order to receive said funding. This again ties back into communities' suspicions regarding outside research. Rather than carrying out the research and work they see as most beneficial, they adapt their proposals to fit the framework of the funder in order to be able to accomplish something.

Practitioners of SE often have a very different ideology to that of secular researchers. This can be the cause of disconnect and misunderstanding between the two. While SE practitioners are often more interested in praxis and tangible results over theory, secular researchers see those in Christian mission or aide work as trying to change cultures to fit one, Christian culture. The goal of Christianity is not to see communities changing to look like one another, or to eventually have one, unified Christian culture. If missionaries and those in Christian ministry are not careful and self-reflective, however, they can start to promote their own cultural practices alongside biblical views as equal. Each community is ethnolinguistically and culturally different, and that should be valued and honoured (SIL Research, 2022). Indigenous knowledge systems no less promote and bring about transformation within communities as Western ones. They do not just maintain an unchanging, original culture as some might view it (Mbembe, 2015, p. 14). If Indigenous communities are centred in the discussion surrounding what transformation they would like to see and given ownership over how the process of research should go, SE research can be part of the community's process, rather than appropriating the methods or assimilating cultures.

An area that SE practitioners will have issue with IRMs is that of engaging with the ancestors and spirit world as part of the research process. This is also an area where balancing honour of Indigenous peoples while not just appropriating their systems and changing them to fit a Christian worldview is key. Within Africa in particular, this connection to the ancestors is very real and much a part of everyday life. Some of the literature on IRMs mentioned the importance of seeking the wisdom of the ancestors and presenting them with gifts. Western Christianity struggles with this as a form of idolatry or spirit worship. Is there something we could learn from a more Indigenous reading of the Bible that could impact our methodologies? I think there are two possible areas where SE could learn from and follow to a degree this important aspect of IRMs.

The first area is in the honouring of human ancestors. While I am not arguing for their worship or even to seek their guidance, I do think researchers and practitioners could incorporate the honouring of them into their research approaches. I will explain what I mean here. I believe the Bible is very clear about those who have died not still engaging with the living. An example of

this can be seen in Ecclesiastes 9:5-6. Here it is said that while living people know they will die, those who are dead do not know anything and they have no more connection with anything done under the sun. There are also passages within the Bible, however, that point to looking to the ancestors both in their lives and also after their death as an example and encouragement to the living. Hebrews 11 and 12, for example, point to ancestors within the faith who are to be revered for their faith and speaks of them still as a "great crowd of witnesses". James 5:10-11 also reminds believers to look to the prophets of long ago and give honour to those persevering through suffering. The example of Job is given in this passage as one to be highly honoured. While the next paragraph is more controversial and not applicable to all situations, I do feel the honouring of community ancestors could be done in every Indigenous research situation.

The other area is to engage with Christ as "Proto-Ancestor". I came across this term in the process of researching for this dissertation. While I am not yet completely familiar with the concept, I think it is worthy of note in this discussion. As Ola mentions, "The compartmentalisation of and distinction between the spiritual and the physical—as in post-Enlightenment Western thought—is foreign to African reasoning." While conceding that it is a controversial view, Ola goes on to reference a number of "Afro-Christologians" who contend that Christ can be seen as a Proto-Ancestor or ultimate ancestor (2019, pp. 2-3). It is one example coming out of Indigenous Christianity which can teach us about revitalisation and contextualisation through dialogue across cultures (Sigg, Pascal, Zurlo, 2016, p. 664). Ola argues that other descriptions of Jesus are not without limitations and difficulties, such as Jesus as teacher, son or king, but we still use these to describe him as the perfect and ultimate version of those, rather than what is known humanly with their faults. He argues the same approach could be taken to seeing Jesus as the ultimate ancestor (Ola, 2019, pp. 7, 9). According to Ola, the metaphor of Christ as ancestor has limitations and should not be the only view of Christ presented, but it reveals him to the Indigenous Christian as mediator and guide (2019, p. 10). This is the function of ancestors within Indigenous research, therefore, I think this argument is quite pertinent to the field. Where Indigenous communities seek to inquire of the ancestors within the research process, SE researchers and Indigenous Christians, I feel, could do the same of Christ in the function of the perfect ancestor without any feelings of compromising one's faith. Where this would not work, however, is when consulting community members who are not Christians. They would not see Christ in this role, nor would the Christian researcher feel comfortable inquiring of any other ancestors. This IRM pilar could only be done in this way with the Indigenous Church in a community, if that Church is also open to seeing Christ in this way.

### 4.2 Comparison of stated motivations

Another area that can cause friction that I touched on briefly above, is when Indigenous knowledges and motivations are misunderstood or seen in a different light by those outside the communities doing the research. I think this challenge is present in general with both Indigenous research and SE research. While I think there can be value in an outside perspective

when doing research in any context, it is important that the communities the researcher is working with are consulted and brought alongside throughout the research to speak into the final outcome. One methodology that has been used in anthropological research for a long time is that of ethnographies and case studies. While ethnographies were once the common research tool used among anthropologists and missionaries, they have become less popular as their biases and sometimes misinterpretations of matters have been discovered. While every researcher will have biases and blind spots, many of those doing ethnographic research in the past, felt they were telling the true side of another person's story without taking note of their own perspective influencing the reporting (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008, p. 5). As stated, ethnographies are not as popular in academic research as they once were, however, those doing more informal or biographical SE research still tend to use them more. There was recently a book written about one of the communities I work with here, where the outside author labelled the community as constantly begging. The general theme of the book was bringing the gospel and transformation to this community (Byler, 2021). When a few members of that community read the book, they were offended and felt misunderstood by these people whom had lived among them for a few years. This is not to say that using IRMs among communities will never bring misunderstanding or disagreements between two groups of people from vastly different cultures. I think it does point out an example of where walking alongside the community in research may have helped to preserve the relationship and given a richer view of the realities within the community at the same time, even while still noting problem areas. Sometimes an outside researcher's perspective can hold stereotypes they aren't aware of, which can impact the research and the wider thinking about a specific group of people. Sometimes these perspectives can also influence the way a community views itself too (Weaver, 2001, p. 247).

Communities and researchers will undoubtedly have differing perspectives and motivations for the research being done. As noted above, however, no community is homogenous and fully represented by one thought or approach. There will also be varying perspectives and motivations within the same community as well. Sometimes these present a dichotomy of motivations within communities themselves. As I have found in my engagement with people groups in South Sudan, many have stated that they want a Bible in their language in order to both maintain their culture, and seemingly contrarily, be like every other people group in the world at the same time. It is natural for there to be multiple motivations within a group of people. Where this can present a challenge to research though is when there might be distrust or uncertainty about how the information will be used and if it will benefit the community. A few of those I interviewed stated that it can be hard when interviewing people or asking questions of a focus group to get a true answer. Often people are trying to gauge what the researcher is intending to find out and base their answers on what they think they will want to hear, or what will give them the results they desire (Interviews B & D). I have come across this in some of my own research among communities. Sometimes I haven't spent enough time

introducing myself and building relationship, as my cultural upbringing is to just jump right into the research from the beginning. With communities' past experiences with other researchers that might be present and my not always working to build a relationship fully, they do not always know where to place me or what I intend to do with the information I seek.

Another valid motivation that can sometimes be present and provide disconnect between an Indigenous community and a researcher is research fatigue. The mistrust of researchers has historical roots in people coming to do research, taking what they need and then leaving. The community finds no benefit to their lives, and they may not even see the researcher again. While this response does not benefit the researcher in their project, it needs to be honoured as a valid response. It does not automatically mean the community is antagonistic to change or even the gospel in an SE context, it could just mean they are tired of being a part of the research process for outsiders without receiving benefit. I have heard people say, and have even sometimes thought myself, that the problem is that communities only see certain things as benefit. In the best scenarios, the researcher may feel they are adding benefit into the community in specific ways, but if the community has not been part of the discussion about what is actually beneficial, it is not truly mutually beneficial. At a recent leadership discussion with leaders in SIL surrounding the topic of diversity and inclusion, Reinhold Titus led the discussion bringing a valuable outside perspective. One thing he said in this session was, "Unless there is an organisational commitment to move forward with inclusion, don't even have the conversation. People are tired (Titus, 2022)." I think this applies within the research context as well.

### 4.3 Areas of overlap

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I will put forward some recommendations of how SE research could learn from and incorporate IRMs in other areas, but I do want to recognise that there already is some overlap between the two. Within my own SE research experience, as well as the experience I gathered from the interviews, it seems the main area of overlap between IRMs and SE research are that of methods used. There are also a few of the core components of IRMs that overlap with current SE values. As stated above, these areas of overlap, while visibly similar might stem from quite different motivations and ideologies.

In terms of methods used, SE research, whether formal or informal, values community participation and ownership. Much of the methods used, fall into a qualitative approach. While this approach often has Western research ideologies, the practical methods used can be the same as those used by researchers following an Indigenous research methodology. Focus groups or talking circles are a preferred method of SE researchers, as are one-on-one interviews. If one is specifically researching in the area of ethnoarts, the use of these arts in research can also occur. While it may not always carry the same weight of passing truth, it is coming from a place of valuing culture while seeking truth within an Indigenous context.

While SE practitioners obviously do not all work the same or use the same methodological approach, a number share values in common with some of the main components of IRMs as well. Across the range of SE research, what I have found to be consistently evident is the valuing of relationships and using a holistic approach. While these things are valued, however, the way they are shown may not always be in the way Indigenous communities define these areas and they may communicate different things than intended.

### 4.4 Suggestions for carrying out research

Within SE research, there will always be a place for informal or locally-used research alongside formal, publishable research. These can and will have differences in how they are shaped and how they are presented. Organisations and practitioners who work in the field of SE need to think about how inclusive the process is, what barriers are in the way, and how different voices can shape what it looks like moving forward. Context is also important. While lessons can be learned from a piece of research outside of one's context, it should not be taken holistically without consideration for how the local context differs with the research needing to adapt to those differences (Carter J. W., 2019, p. 28). I will give some lessons I feel the field of SE can learn from IRMs in the areas of framing, practically doing, analysing and reporting on research.

*Framing Research*

There are two sides to the framing of research. One is the actual forming of research questions based around what issues exist within a given context that need to be addressed. This could be considered the spark that ignites the desire for a research project to be carried out in the first place. The second side of framing research then is determining what research methodology to use and how the research will be carried out.

Sometimes, SE practitioners have already worked to build relationships within the community they do their research among, so they are not beginning that at the start of the research process. In my interviews, all four of the interviewees stated that their desire to do their research projects came from their own interests and questions relating to specific communities or areas of focus. They already had relationships with members of those communities, which led them to their research. Some of the research I've done has been requested by the funders of Bible translation projects or others within my organisation. I often had relationships within those communities, but the desire for specific research came from outside. In each of these cases, the research was either to find out the successes and failures of a community's engagement with the Bible connected to a Bible translation project or to give scope to how to shape such a project to begin with. Each of these examples is of an outside agent framing the scope of the research that is taking place in the sense that they have the initial interest and hypothesis to carry out said research.

What would it look like for Indigenous communities to be involved in and leading the discussion on what SE research should take place in their community at the start? While those outside of a

context can sometimes provide a welcome perspective that is different to the internal narrative, I think there would be much value in research projects that are initiated and developed by Indigenous communities themselves. This would have impact on the wider SE community's definitions of success and transformation. It would also add richness to the field of SE research in general by bringing new approaches and methods to light. In their theory of change document, SIL's LEAD-Asia Pacific community of practice noted that Indigenous communities can often be placed in a position of receiving rather than initiating change. This can have impact on outside and inside perspectives of the group and their agency. They go on to say that if Indigenous communities are encouraged to develop and use their own knowledge systems among other resources, this can change their position to one of leaders and owners of a project, rather than being the recipients of the work or research program (LEAD, 2016, p. 10).

In the other sense of framing, determining methodologies and praxis, some SE practitioners work with Indigenous communities at this point to jointly frame the way forward, while others frame the structure themselves based on their existing SE experience and Western methodologies. Margetts explains in his research that he used participatory approaches even as early as setting the research questions, in order to include Christians from the community throughout the research process (2013, p. 4). While he notes it provided some limitations in the breadth of the research, Woodward also included the communities involved in his research within the initial framing of the research structure was well (2014, pp. 31-32). Gottschlich specifically structured her research to be communal, bringing on three research assistants who came from the different regions within the research community. Together they planned their approach and took part in each subsequent step (2013, pp. 74-75).

Many SE practitioners regularly use participatory approaches to encourage communities to think about their views on transformation and how they would evaluate their success in reaching those goals, but it is often as part of an already existing research framework (Petersen, 2019). This is descriptive of what my SE research has looked like so far. The discussions and information that participatory approaches encourage, while helpful in doing *with* communities rather than *for*, does not often go as far as to ask the communities what they have set as a priority to research and evaluate in the first place. That can be a difficult conversation to have, as it goes back to the ideas of suspicion and negative connotations of the field of research within many Indigenous communities. One of the people I interviewed did not feel it fit to use the term research when discussing Indigenous knowledge systems, as he felt those were informal and naturally acquired, while research was something higher level and academically learned (Interview A). In order to give space to Indigenous communities to develop their own research frameworks and see them on an equal footing with those of a Western approach, we need to incorporate more community-led research projects beginning with the framing of what those will look like and what issues are important to investigate.

*Practical research*

IRMs and SE research probably have the most overlap in the actual methods used in carrying out research that leads to practical, tangible impact in a community. Like IRMs, the field of SE is also not interested in research in a solely theoretical sense, but in how it can be practically applied to benefit communities. As stated before, that often makes the data collection phase of SE research the place where these similarities are most evident. Methods are used to include and centre Indigenous voices in order to bring lasting benefit to the communities. One place where this can be a challenge, however, is where the definitions of success and transformation are different between the communities, the practitioners and the funders as stated above. This is a challenge facing IRMs across academic fields, and I do not claim to have the answers for how to address it.

One area that I think SE research could learn from IRMs in the actual research phase is in looking at what qualifies as a resource or body of research. Often, the Western framework values texts and first-person accounts as a higher authority than it would stories or a person themselves as the research. In a recent meeting with a language group we work with in Bible translation and language development in South Sudan, a member of the translation team said something that I thought was very telling of this different ideology. He stated that they do not write reports as a means to give feedback on impact and assessment of a project. Instead, they make that assessment visually. One can see the impact or "see the people who are the products of the work (Ayiel, D. A, personal communication, 29 August 2022)." Similarly, when I was attending a celebration of a local organisation here recently, the director was highlighting people in the room as well as those who were not present as the products of the work that was done, showing its impact. When reporting on an assessment of teachers that was done in his home area recently, another colleague shared a report of a proverb one of the teachers shared with him. He then gave an explanation of how that proverb was jointly the report and evaluation of the work going on. As mentioned before, I have also had communities answer my research questions with a story, proverb or song. In a traditional Western framework, these would be seen as anecdotal support of the research, not the actual research itself. We could not look at the life of a person and call that a resource for research because we have no way of quantifying it other than to explain the transformation we see. We accept these as testimonials, but they are not always given the same weight as other forms of research. Also, by recording it as a testimonial, something is lost from the holistic representation of that person's life as the resource itself.

While there are some methods already used within SE research to find similar information, such as Appreciative Inquiry (Petersen, 2019, p. 2), I think we can learn more from the methods used within Indigenous research as well. An area that falls outside of research, but is what many people in an organisational structure see, are progress reports. These reports can tell us something about how data collection is framed and carried out in an area that has some

overlap with SE research. They are written by project members for funders, mainly in a quantifiable way, although there are often some qualitative questions as well. Activities are listed and reported on whether or not they have been accomplished or not. Sometimes these can also bring up points of uncertainty from the one reporting, wondering what the recipient wants to hear and how they will use this information. Even in the case of in-person research, however, those challenges can occur or the questions asked might be more abstract rather than practical. If we are to learn from stories, art and people being research themselves, this can also influence the types of questions we ask. Instead of asking someone to tell us about the transformation within their community or the impact the Bible has had, we could ask for stories of the good things within the community. We could say things like, "Tell me a story about a good person in your community. What makes them good? How has their relationship with God shaped their life?" Much of this is already happening in the area of collecting research within SE, but there are still things we can learn from IRMs about their approaches that will grow the depth of SE research as well.

One last area of focus within the data-collection phase is that of language use. Because SE practitioners around the world are often working with more than one language community, they may not always know the language of the community they are researching. This is not unique to SE research, and having a translator is a good work around for this. As noted above, however, meaning, even if only a small amount, can be lost in translation. In her research, Gottschlich mentioned that she had three research assistants from the area of research help her and specifically sought to allow the interviews and focus groups to be conducted in whichever of five languages used within the research area people felt most comfortable using (2013, pp. 83-85). Margetts worked from a distance with someone on the ground carrying out the data collection process within the community then translating that information back to him afterwards (2013, p. 3). In fewer cases among the published research that I found, the researcher was either working within their own community or at least within a shared language the community and researcher both knew equally well (Luchivia, 2012).

*Analysing research*

Largely, within the examples of SE research that I have seen, my own experience of doing SE research, and the accounts reported to me in interviews, the analysis of SE research is largely an independent activity. Mahmood Mamdani likens a Western approach to analysis with an industrial machine. He states that Western research "relegate[s] Africa to providing raw materials ("data") to outside academics who process it and then re-export their theories back to Africa (Mamdani, as cited in Bob-Milliar, 2020, p. 2)." While I have seen more evidence of collaboration within the analysis phase of research in the SE field than the picture Mamdani paints of Western research in general, there are definitely areas the field needs to grow in.

The common practice across much of SE research seems to be that the main researcher analyses the data collected on their own and checks their interpretation with at least one

member of the community, if not more, to make sure they have evaluated things correctly. This is how I have handled all of the research I have done so far within SE. While it is good to run our views past members of the community to check for misunderstandings, this is not enough.

Just as the framing of a research project can benefit from centring Indigenous voices and ways of doing things, analysis can benefit richly in this way as well. Chilisa et al point out that things such as proverbs, songs, stories and artifacts can be helpful in developing Indigenous evaluation practices. They not only encourage participation and dialogue, but they also bring about ownership and buy-in throughout the entire process (2016, p. 320).

SE practitioners would definitely agree with Chilisa et al that buy-in is important, however, I think we need to be careful in what buy-in entails. If Scripture is to have lasting impact within a community, their ownership of the Bible translation project and subsequent SE work is key. We need to make sure that we are not structuring projects and research within an outsider framework and simply adding Indigenous methods to make them more palatable. While I think there is still a place for outside researchers within SE research, there needs to be strong collaboration between them and the Indigenous community in all parts of the research process. There also needs to be more encouragement of Indigenous people carrying out their own research within the field, which I will discuss further in the next chapter.

*Reporting research*

As with every other part of the research process, there are considerations to take into account with the reporting. These include who is actually doing the research, the form of the reporting, the language used, and how it is shared with others.

The body of research within SE, while smaller than other studies, seems to be dominated at this point by those researching communities that are not their own. While this is not a bad thing, and outside researchers have much they can offer, I think there should be a greater push to encourage and elevate SE research by members of the communities being researched. With the field still growing and greatly promoting research as a valuable part of SE, I think now is the time to think of how we can incorporate ways of doing research that are new to the field, hearing from voices who have not yet been listened to or given guidance to the process.

One area that the field of SE should consider is the form of the report. Within SE, there is an acceptance and promotion of making the Bible and biblical resources available in many different forms and media. The same does not yet seem to be true for research. While research can be presented orally in a forum, the expectation is that this presentation will first have come out of a paper. It is the formal, written research that holds the most weight and value. Other forms seem to be accommodated so that people can interact with the research, but not necessarily seen as the official research themselves. Even within written research, what structure is being followed? Is it following Western paradigms of what a formal research paper

should look like, or is there fluidity in the approach based on the epistemology of the community the research is coming from?

The language of reporting poses some complications. On one hand, it would be valuable for the Indigenous researcher to report within their language so all from their community can interact with and understand the information. On the other hand, in order for it to be held to the same status as other global research with current academic standards being what they are, it would then need to be translated. This would provide double the work for the Indigenous researcher than what they would have if they first presented the research in a more widely-used language within academia. Usually this means either English or French in the African context. This also presents the issue of who gets to determine what is valid research? If the way that research is promoted and accepted into academia is that Western scholars in the field understand it and can interact with it, why does the same not apply in the other direction? Within my interviews, two people mentioned either the desire to or at least the consideration of translating the English research into French for more people to have access to it (Interviews C & D). All four interviewees mentioned giving an oral summary of the report or having a discussion with the Indigenous community members surrounding the results in a language that could be understood. I think it is important to think through not only how a summary of the research can be given in an understandable form to the community, but also in what ways the actual research can be made available in the Indigenous language to have ongoing record and access.

The last area to consider in how research is reported is how the research is shared and with whom. This has overlap with language and form of course as these greatly speak into the how of sharing research as well. In a couple of the interviews I carried out, I asked the interviewees if the communities they were researching gave them any guidance or direction on how they would like the research shared with others. Both of them said that they of course got permission to use the information and the communities were aware of what it was for, but they did not give any guidance to the actual presenting of the information (Interviews A & C). With Indigenous communities often being quite interested in the practical outcomes of research and seeing benefit from it, this might not be a question that is necessary. I feel if communities are to have agency and ownership within SE research, however, this area can be no different. What would it look like for the SE researcher to work together with the researched communities to develop a plan for how the information will be shared and with whom? This may connect to the outcomes communities and researchers hope to achieve through producing the research to begin with.

# Chapter 5: Building research capacity in African SE workers

If SE research within Africa is going to centre African voices, priorities and concerns in a greater way, three things need to happen. African communities need to have a larger role in developing and shaping a research project from beginning to end, IRMs need to be incorporated in larger ways within the SE research framework, and more capacity needs to be given to develop more African SE researchers.

## 5.1 Hearing from African communities: what is needed?

Mkabela states that during colonial occupation in Africa "there was a tendency to see culture in terms of the coloniser's precepts and to assess educational needs in terms of the coloniser's agenda." Mkabela goes on to say that not much change has happened within the wider research community even today (2005, p. 178)." Hountondji's point mentioned earlier seems to confirm this is still often the case in a post-colonial world. Much of the research done in African universities is with a Western audience in mind. Rather than developing research that is actually of interest and use for his or her context, the African scholar often thinks about what is of use for Western academia (Hountondji, 2009, p. 128). This could happen because of the need to conform for funding opportunities, but it also could be because research and education are seen as Western functions as stated earlier. According to Ocholla, around "80% of the African population" continues to use Indigenous knowledge to address the issues they feel cannot be solved by "modern knowledge" (2021, 32).

Thinking back to the definition of SE given in the introduction, the field is interested in bringing "lasting transformation" to communities around the world through their interaction with the Bible (Robison, 2021, p. 3). If research is often seen as foreign within an Indigenous community, SE research that does not incorporate IRMs runs the risk of falling into the same category. While this of course does not apply to all, some Christian scholars as well as missionaries view traditional African cultures in opposition to development and modernising (Gifford, as cited in Wong, 2016, p. 49). This view brings with it a Western view of what those terms mean. If the concerns of African communities are not understood and they are not centred in the SE research process, they may conform for the sake of outside research but continue to use their Indigenous knowledge systems otherwise as Ochalla states. If the goal of SE research in Africa is to take into account how the Bible is impacting and being used within African communities, it makes sense to follow an Indigenous research process to arrive at the results that the communities are most interested in, not just those funders and practitioners would like to see.

Revisiting the comments made by the South Sudanese communities I have visited which initially piqued my interest in this research, how can we validate the motivations of African communities in receiving the Bible rather than writing them off as lesser motivations to those put forward by SE practitioners and Bible translation organisations? When a community says that they want the Bible to preserve their culture and also to be like other communities around

the world, what do they mean by this? As we looked at earlier, Indigenous communities preserve knowledge systems and cultural practices for a multitude of reasons. This does not mean that they stay stagnant in some past form of their community. Transformation is desired and still occurs within this structure as well. Indigenous communities often use songs, stories and proverbs to teach and correct behaviour. By maintaining these methods, one is preserving culture while also promoting transformation. Preserving one's culture through having the wisdom of the Bible could fit within this same context. While outsiders might see it as a misunderstanding of what the Bible can do, it could be the misunderstanding is coming from those outside. I have heard people say, and I have even said myself in the past, that the Bible will not preserve culture but might completely change it. Throughout the literature, it seemed as though many Indigenous communities have a view of culture in the ideal. It is not that they ignore or are blind to the problems that are there. They speak about bringing transformation to these. When speaking of their culture, it almost feels like a remembrance of what used to be, almost as Christians do looking back to the garden of Eden. We look to that time in the past at what was good and hope for it again in the future by the transformation God is bringing about through his kingdom. It does not mean we do not see the problems. We are very aware of them, but we still speak of and long for the ideal that was and will be again. If this is the view of culture that communities mean when they speak of the Bible preserving it, it seems to fit very well with this biblical worldview. Because an Indigenous worldview says we are connected to all things from all times in history, the former ideal is what the culture was and can be again. This then, relates to the second motivation of being like other communities in the world who already have the Bible speaking wisdom to them in their languages. I have not had a chance to discuss my interpretations of these motivations with any communities, but I hope to delve more deeply into the topic to learn and process my own misunderstandings of these in the past and possibly even still in the present.

### 5.2 Research as SE?

While SE research is often focused on what types of SE programs should be developed to bring about transformation or assessing the success of programs that have already occurred within a community, I think there is space for seeing the research process itself as a form of SE.

Along these lines, Amy West and Jo Shetler developed a workshop program in 2010 called Culture Meets Scripture. Within this workshop, facilitators work with local Christians within communities to look closely at their cultures in relation to Scripture. Participants are encouraged to think about a problem or issue within their culture that they want to address. Early on in the workshop a discussion on the root causes and motivations of behaviours is led. Participants are encouraged to think about the problem deeply and investigate what some of the root causes might be. Then, once the participants have a good understanding of this, they are asked to look in the Bible for passages that might speak to those root causes. Once the participants feel they have a good understanding of both the problems they want to address, its

root causes and what the Bible says about these things, they are to come up with a plan to address that problem within their culture in a culturally appropriate way. Much of this workshop requires the participants to do research, often calling other community members if the workshop is held out of their area or speaking with people in person if the workshop is running locally. They are asked to research, evaluate and apply practical solutions. This is an area where I see research and SE overlapping. The main focus of the workshop is research and application that brings about transformation, which is the goal of SE. The workshop not only encompasses a condensed research process, it also encourages the participants to take these principles and continue to use them in other areas they identify within their communities. They are also encouraged to do this communally, not as independent researchers.

One of those I interviewed also shared an example of research promotion she has started doing with members of the communities she is engaging and wants to develop more. In this process, she asks the question, "What is the gospel that people know?" The premise of this question is twofold. One, it seeks to understand from people their knowledge of the gospel as it is seen through their knowledge systems. Two, it seeks to find out if people know the message of the gospel as it spans from Genesis to Revelation in the Bible, while also covering the kingdom that God longs to see taking place in this world today, rather than only some future goodness. A lot of time in the discussions is spent on looking at how we are all created in God's image with our different cultures, languages, ideologies, etc. In this discussion, researcher and community really are creating truth together, finding their story in connection to the story unfolding in the Bible as well as understanding their part within the narrative. This has led those in these communities to come up with areas of their culture that they now want to research and discover God's truth in connection with their own. As a result of these organic research discussions, they would also practically come up with programs to bring about benefit to the community (Interview C). This interviewee along with all the others, mentioned how the results of their research were helpful to feed back into Bible translation programs to help shape what they looked like and what activities were done to bring future benefit back into the community.

These are two areas where I feel some within SE are already using the act of research as a form of SE. They almost open up the Bible as a research tool for Indigenous people to use alongside the research they are then going on to initiate themselves within their communities. The Bible and culture speak to each other symbiotically and this encourages the research to continue and the truth to develop through inquiry and relationship.

### 5.3 Growing a culture of research within SE in Africa

Research as SE is one way that a culture of research can be grown within the field in Africa. The two examples above were initiated by foreign researchers, but one thing they both had in common is the centring of the Indigenous person as the researcher. None of those facilitating either the workshops or discussions told people what research to do or what the outcomes should be. One area where I think this could be developed more, however, is if all SE

practitioners were made aware of IRMs and learned how to work with communities in research to incorporate their use. As others have mentioned, this need not be an either-or approach, but rather one of mixed methodologies (Muwanga-Zake, 2009) There has been much benefit given to the world of SE through the research methodologies used so far. By incorporating IRMs as well, the benefit will be that much richer. I hope this dissertation may play a small role in opening up the dialogue surrounding these methodologies and how they would enrich SE research in particular. While I think research as a form of SE is a good initiative going forward, I think we also need to be careful that it is not the only form of research we do within an Indigenous framework. IRMs have much to teach us across the board in SE research.

Another way to grow a culture of research is through training. Teichler and Yağci note that this is especially important for countries that have a "higher proportion of foreign academics" within them. There should be more focus given to collaborating "with or training of Indigenous scholars" (2009, p. 94). This is of course another reason that it is important for SE researchers to become familiar with and use IRMs. If foreign academics are the ones training Indigenous researchers and they only use Western research methodologies, this will duplicate many of the issues noted throughout this dissertation. Likewise, African SE researchers should be encouraged to use IRMs within their research and reporting without this being viewed as a lesser approach academically. Owusu-Ansah and Mji argue that African scholars, especially if "trained in Western-oriented methodologies, [should] reacquaint themselves with their own African knowledge systems (2013, p. 3)." While the field of SE research has some overlap with IRMs, it has largely used Western methodologies. There is also a growing number of people researching their own communities, but this research is still far fewer than that led by those coming from outside a community. Olsson and Mkandawire state that "regional and international collaboration" bring enrichment to research and academia, but "Indigenous research is essential". They also note that only when all partners have equal capacity can there be truly "mutually beneficial" collaboration (2009, p. 26).

In a similar vein as above, I think more can be done in the area of collaborative research in the field of SE. Of all of the SE research uploaded to the SERC database, none of them are attributed to more than one author. I recognise that this does not always negate the involvement of more than one researcher. As in the case of the SURAM report, there were many involved in carrying out the research even though the compiler is the only one named. Other resources are as is the case of this dissertation where the research was carried out to achieve a degree of higher education. In this way, the one working toward the degree is the main researcher and author of said research. I know of other cases of research carried out for the local SE work that are also only attributed to the main researcher. My own past SE research among communities has been this way. I have utilised a Western research framework and in that also seen parts of the research, such as evaluation and interpretation, as an independent responsibility. While I collaborated in the data collection and review phases, I did not view the entire research process collaboratively, and from much of the other SE research I have seen, I

know I am not alone. This is in stark contrast to much of the literature I engaged with regarding IRMs. Many of these were carried out by two or more authors. Because of how integral relationship and shared knowledge are among Indigenous communities and Indigenous research, I cannot help but think that the encouragement of collaborative research within SE would grow the library and practice of research across the field.

The last way I want to touch on that I feel those in the field of SE in Africa can grow a culture of research is by making sure there are avenues for Indigenous practitioners to engage in research whether within a local SE context or in global academia. It is important to not only train Indigenous SE researchers, but that Indigenous researchers are also training non-Indigenous SE researchers. There must also be platforms where Indigenous SE research can be shared more widely within academia. SE practitioners across Africa have provided trainings at the community level as well as held professorship roles within regional universities. This needs to continue while making sure to elevate Indigenous voices and knowledge. As the field of SE has realised the need for research and wants to get a sense for the direction SE is now headed, now is the time for avenues of research using IRMs to be opened up. This is important not only in the area of building capacity, but also in distributing funds. If scholarships or grants are made available, they should favour Indigenous researchers using their local knowledge systems. As we have seen, these methodologies have been shut out of Western academia far too often. If we are to value different voices and perspectives from what have largely been centred so far, we must elevate those using IRMs within their research.

# Chapter 6: Conclusion

The field of Scripture Engagement has a similar timeline within academia as Indigenous Research Methodologies. Both have existed practically for centuries but have not been official recognised until late into the twentieth century to the start of the twenty-first. As the field of SE continues to grow, the need to develop comprehensive research systems has been made known. Because of SE's interest in practical transformation within communities around the world, I think is has a lot it can learn by incorporating IRMs into its research approach. It is important not to appropriate IRMs to make SE research more acceptable, but to recognise that the field of SE can be greatly enriched by including these methodologies, and the results will bring deeper, more sustainable benefit to the communities being served.

While SE has some overlap with IRMs in the methods used and the valuing of relationships, SE research largely uses Western frameworks for the majority of the research processes. The centring of Indigenous communities through all levels of research from the framing all the way to the evaluation and reporting is necessary not only for community buy-in, but also for the benefit of all. Valuing IRMs as equal to other epistemologies of research recognises that there is not only one true approach to knowledge and by utilising multiple methodologies, a more holistic research can be accomplished.

Indigenous knowledge and research are much vaster than I could do justice to within the scope of this dissertation. Before I began this research, I was not even aware of IRMs as a framework for research. Through the process, I have learned a great deal about them, but I realise there is still so much more for me to learn. Throughout the course of my study, most of those I discussed my research with were also not aware of IRMs or what they were. My desire is that as knowledge of them grows within the field of SE, they will no longer be a fringe methodology, but greatly utilised within SE research and shaping what that looks like going forward. I also look forward to how this research will shape my own praxis in walking alongside communities collaboratively to develop knowledge, carry out research and find truth.

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# Appendix I: Base interview questions sent to SE workers

1. Have you led or been involved with any Scripture Engagement research, either in your context or another?
2. What methodologies did you use?
3. How do people in your context traditionally do research or pass down information?
4. Do you ever use any of these methods within SE research?
5. What parts of the research process, if any, do you involve local communities (ie: data collection, analysis, reporting, etc.)?
6. How do you share your research with those outside your context?
7. How do you share your research with those in the community that was researched?
8. Do you find research to be valuable within SE? Why or why not?

# Appendix II: Sample interview transcript

**A:**

L: I was just kind of curious about what types of SE research you've been part of, if any? I know you have been part of some and what that's been like?

A: I think for me most of the SE research that I've done have been one, to determine the needs of the communities that I was serving amongst. Number two, to determine how they were using Scripture, and that begins by saying, what do they consider as Scripture or as the Word of God. In that, anything that they would reference that would help them to understand God better and deeper. They would see it as something that is a learning point, and this could mean even just looking at the lives of the individuals. So how do the people in the community who are seen or referred to as Christian or spiritual leaders behave. So your own behaviors as a Christian can be looked at as something for them to learn more about God from. I've also done research on cultural events or activities to determine what are the good aspects of culture that can be kept and what would need to be modified, because as Andrew Walls would say, culture is the race on which people's lives run. So you cannot just tell them stop doing this. And there are certain things that they do that hinder them from understanding and truly living out the Christian life that they ought to be living. So I've done things to do with female circumcision, child naming, things to do with marriages or weddings, things to do with dowry and all that, I have done. And of course you know that in my doctoral research, I did a research on discovering how people determine which language to use for SE either in public or in private. Because I was intrigued to see how maybe MT speakers would be using English or in certain circumstances they are using their MT, in some they are not. So for me, those are some of the researches I have done. I have also done a library of research to determine what kind of researches have taken place in the area of SE. In most cases, one of the things that I discovered is that the people who have done much of that was Bible Societies, especially the Bible Society of America. For them, for example, what they consider Bible use, sometimes it is not even Bible use in my opinion. It is Bible distribution, so when they say in this last year 1 million NIV Bibles were sold and they categorise that as Bible use, the question that I ask myself is does it mean that the fact that the Bible was sold or bought, does it really mean that the Bible is being used? And how is it being used, how frequently is it being used, by how many people? Because for example in Africa you know that if you buy one Bible, it might be used by 5 or 10 members of the same family if at all they are using it. Or people might just buy it because it is good to show that I have a Bible or a book in my language in my house, so as long as they keep it in their house, that is fine for them. So it might be used, it might not be used. And if it is used, it might be used by more than one person, of which for the Bible Society within their records it will show that it is one Bible, but there might be 10 people who are using it. So those are the kind of researches I have done. I have also done research on just finding out what factors hinder people from using Scripture as well.

L: For each of those, and it might be different, who was the one who called for that research or started it? Was it you who wanted to do it or an organisation or a school or the community?

A: I think in all the research that I've done it was just my own desire to want to learn something as I observed what was happening, and I went out to say that I think I need to know more about this. So I wouldn't say that there was anybody who told me could you please go out and do this research and let us see what we learn from it, no. Maybe only one, the research that I did on finding out with SE research had been done out there. That one we talked about it as an organisation and I did that particular research. But then all the rest, it was just out of curiosity of wanting to know what is happening and what can I learn out of it. In fact, you'll be surprised that most of them, after I did that research, I got what I needed, I wrote my own notes, I never went beyond even to the level of publishing it. Because I felt I didn't have time to write the paper, cause I didn't have the time from the organisation to do it, and I needed to continue to focus on what I was doing. Because of that, I never pressed myself hard to ensure that the thing is written to be shared with the people out there.

L: And I guess it was across multiple communities the research, or were you sometimes looking at just one or two?

A: Some of them, for example when I did a cultural related research, I would just base it on one particular community, because I wanted to learn what was happening in that community and what they were doing in that area. Other than that, like the one of factors hindering Bible use, was across communities. The one of linguistic factors that would determine which languages people would use was across different communities and across denominations. The one how people use Scripture was across communities. So yes, there were a few that were across communities, but any that were on something that was on a given culture, it was always based on one community because I was interested. For example, if we talk about female circumcision, I was only doing it based on one culture/community because I had observed it and I felt like I needed to know more than what I was seeing on the surface.

L: This is probably many as well, but what types of research methodologies did you use to carry out the research?

A: In most cases I used focus groups. And out of those focus groups, after I got the themes that would stand out, I would go back and maybe do some interviews with individuals as I sought to get more clarity on some of the themes that were standing out. I've also used very active participant observation, where I've gone out and been in the groups. Some of them I've used questionnaires, but the challenge with the questionnaires, for me I have found that I have to give them some multiple choice answers because most of them were not able to write. But if for you I've written and given some indicators, whoever is helping them can be able to read them out one by one, then they choose what stands out for them, then the person can circle that. But I found that wasn't so, so helpful, so I left it out. But as I've said, it was focus groups,

interviews, and participant observation. Those are the main methods I've used. I've also done some ethnographic surveys in some cases.

L: Did you ever do that one inside your community, or was it always outside your community?

A: Both. I've done it, like my research I did 2 of the congregations I chose were from within my community from different denominations. One was Pentecostal and the other was a major big Catholic congregation. Although I would say for that one it was a mixture, because I did it in a major city, so there were people from other communities as well. But when I did the focus groups in the community, I did it with my community from that denomination. Then I did one on one interviews from people from other communities as well.

L: Thinking about the communities that you were researching in any of those situations, do you know any of the traditional research methodologies that people use to pass information or to bring transformation?

A: I think for me the research methods that would be used one, would be participant observation. You'd simply observe and then after you've observed, you could go away with some questions for the elderly people or the people who are considered wise within the community, and talk to them about what you are observing and find out from them what they think is happening. That for me would qualify as interviews. But then also, there is a lot of focus group discussion that goes on. I know up to now when people have something to talk about in the community, they would always sit and talk around the fire and people come and say what they think is right and what is wrong and they'd eventually agree on a way forward. So I would go with that, participant observation, focus groups and some interviews.

L: Do you ever notice any of the communities using art in any way as research, or if not research as a way of passing information?

A: I've not observed that, although the community has a lot of art that goes on, but I've not observed that. Because in most cases in these communities when you talk about art, it was one, as a way of entertainment. Not just entertainment, but also a way of teaching and passing information. Whether it was song and dance, whether it was poetry, whether it was some kind of drawing or artifacts in the home. It wasn't a way of research, but of passing information. I'm not even sure that they would think of it as a way of researching something. Because for them when you needed to find out something, you'd either go out and observe it, or you'd ask and talk about it.

L: One thing that has come up in some of my reading, is at what stage are people in the community involved in the research? Are they the ones that are doing the data collection or are we talking to them to get the information and then bringing it back? Or are they involved in setting the research structure, analysing it, reporting on it? So I was just curious if you've involved communities in different levels of research and which ones, if any?

A: Wow, for me, sorry for this, but I would say, if I were looking at the communities especially in Africa, in light of what you are saying, I would replace the word research process with information gathering process. Because research is more formal education, and that does not mean that the communities who did not do a lot of formal education did not have a way of wanting to find out something if there was anything happening in the community. For me, research sounds more scientific, yet when you look at information gathering, it is something that goes on in all human communities. If you agree with my view about that, information gathering has always gone on in communities. The way it happens, it can be very formal. Because something could be happening and people will come together, whether it is a village elders meeting, whether at the family level, or maybe it's within the community something is happening and people will come together and say, what do we do about what is happening? For example, animals are dying or girls are getting married early or girls are resisting marriage or there is a lot of fighting or suicide. They will come together. Nobody will go out with a paper and say I'm doing a research to find out, but people will come together and say there is a phenomenon that has started happening in our community and we need to find out, things have not been like this, we need to find out what is really happening with our community that these things happened. And people will sit there and talk about it, talk about it, talk about it. And from that talk, they will agree on what is the way forward and that is how they gather information, that's how they come up with new ideas, that's how they move forward. That's how they would collect the information, in the same gathering. They will analyse it as they are seated there. They might go and come back again, but then reporting actually even happens there because once they have said this is what we think is causing the problem, this is the solution, this is what we have agreed. When they go back home, everybody goes home and shares what has been agreed, that is part of reporting. So they are the ones now reporting which can be in the form of all of those things they did while sitting there. They are reporting on the data, how it was collected, what they agreed on as the problem for that and what they came up with as the solution. Once they go back to their communities, the process of reporting will cover all of the stages of what they have done up to where they reached to come up with that particular agreement.

L: When you did your research among these communities, did you see yourself incorporating those same systems? You talked a bit about data collection. What about analysis, reporting, framing the research question, did you use those things that way too?

A: I might have used them, but I must confess that it was not that clear to me. As I talk to you now, I might be able to say, yeah I used this here and there, but I was the one who came up with the idea that I needed to do this research. I went, I talked with the people. As someone who has been to school, I had paper and pen and I had my recorder like you are doing write now, so I recorded. I went back and analyzed it on my own and came out with themes. Then I went back to them and said, "This is what I seem to be hearing you people are saying, is this correct?" They affirmed some, they corrected some. In the normal, traditional way, it would be

affirmed or corrected in the same meeting. So after I had corrected what they had told me, I came back and wrote the report. Then I went back and shared the report with them. For example, I remember one of them, the Tharaka one on female circumcision, I shared with them and after I shared with them the report, they said, “We need to do something about this.” So they came up with their recommendations and the action plan themselves on what could stop that. So they invited me to go back and help them implement part of that action plan so we went back and we started running workshops which they called ‘Circumcised new with the Word, not with the knife’. So the girls would be brought together and they’d be trained. Actually, we’d divide the old women who had done the circumcisions and they’d teach them the good cultural aspects that they used to teach them while they were being circumcised, within that initiation period. Then, we would have Christian leaders who would teach these same girls how to live as mature women, as wives, as mothers in community with respect. So those are some of the things that the circulation [of the report] then got used to impact in their lives. So, I went back and I helped them. Now, when it came to my research, after I had done my first report, I went back for a second round of research and the idea was just to verify some of the things that I was getting. So I gathered the same people, I shared with them. We laughed together. They told me yeah this is right, this is not right, this is correct, please change this. I did that. Then, when I finished my dissertation actually for the four congregations, the four churches that had taken part in my research, I sent them a copy of my dissertation, and they were very happy. In fact, some people were not happy that I did not quote them. Or I did not cite them individually, and put there their names. But I cited the denomination, their church. They told me, “No, you should have put my name there!” But I was saying, “No. It is more than you. Yes you are part of this, but it was the whole congregation, so I would simply say, in this congregation.” They were telling me, “No. You should have put my name there.” So they were very happy to know that they were part and they were recognised as contributing to, according to them, this book.

L: You mentioned two ways that you shared with the community your research. The Tharaka one, how did you share your report with them? Did you read it to them, or give it to them in a print copy for them to have?

A: That was just a paper, so what we did was we just called them up for one of our committee meetings, we shared the report verbally. We did not give them anything written. We shared the report verbally because I mean that was the way of doing things anyway. They were happy about it and they asked us what should we do, so I already had some proposals. And the proposal was why don’t we have a workshop where we can bring these girls and we can bring the pastors as well. They said, “No, no, no, not just church leaders” They were the ones who came up with the title of the workshop, but then together we agreed on who should be the person from the churches to invite to teach. After they said that we need to have both church leaders and community women, they came up with the theme of the workshop. Then we discussed what passages do we give the church leaders. And the passages were actually

passages that talked about the virtues of a woman, a Christian woman in the community as in the Scriptures. So we went back to people like Sarah, we went back to what the Proverbs teach about a virtuous woman, we went back to where Paul talks about how the old women should teach the young women to live with their husbands and all of that. So we just gave them the Scriptures and then told them to go and think about what to teach, and that is what they did.

L: You mentioned that you didn't always share the research out with anyone because of not always having time to formally do anything, and I know your dissertation of course, but are there other ways that you shared the research outside of the community?

A: Those outside the community, in some of them of late, when I've done some papers at the BT conference I've shares some of those things. Some of those things, when I've taught at EMDC, we incorporated some of those things in it. Of course I don't tell them this is my research, I just take some of those things and see where do they fit in the presentation that I might be doing and I present them there. The others, I just share them with people the way I'm sharing with you right now and it ends there. I think personally, I have a weakness in spending time to sit down and write things.

L: Do you find research to be a valuable thing within SE? If so, why, if not, why not?

A: I would only go for yes, so let us leave the why not out. Basically because without doing research we will not know what is happening and what we might need to do to improve our work in the area of SE. For me, there are a lot of hinderances to SE, and for us to be able to address those hinderances, we need to be able to determine or have people understand what SE is and what the effect of SE is. And if we are to have that, transformative SE, what can we do to help people in the communities where we are serving to be able to use those Scriptures to see transformation. Now, if there are hinderances, what do we do about it? Because unless we do that, we will not be able to get their ?... have all these published Scriptures on shelves and they will not be used, and that's not the way we want to go. We want people's lives to be transformed, and we have to assist those on the ground with skills and techniques on how to help people within their communities to use the Scriptures. So some of those things are practical problems like people being able to access the translated word, maybe marketing issues, it might be cost issues some of them might be issues like cultures or spiritual issues like cultural barriers and the rest. We just have to keep on doing research, so yes, I must say that we must keep doing research because it's important.

L: Did the communities whom you were researching have any guidance or structuring for how you would share the research with those outside their community? Like in what format you would share it or with whom?

A: None of the communities had any kind of expectations. However, I had to disclose why I was doing the research and who I was going to share with. I told them I was using it to write my dissertation and they readily accepted. They were happy that they would contribute to a

research for higher learning. With this in mind, I think they knew I as going to share it in a written format.

# Appendix III: Sample field report from my SE work

*Report shared with those outside with permission.*

*Pictures removed for people's privacy*

## Bongo Scripture Engagement Assessment

**by:** Laura Robison

October 2021

**Locations:** Tonj, Aguka, Wau and Busure

**Summary Schedule:**

6-7 October: Arrived in Tonj. Discussed schedule and waited for the commissioner to be in his office to receive approval for meetings and travel

8 October: Meeting with representatives from elders, chiefs and intellectuals in Tonj; meeting with representatives from women in Tonj

9 October: Meeting with representatives from youth in Tonj; traveled to Aguka

10 October: Church and meeting in Aguka

11 October: Traveled to Wau; meeting with the Language Committee in Wau

12 October: Meeting with representatives from elders, women and youth in Wau

13 October: Meeting with church leaders in Wau; Jackie arrived in Wau

14 October: Meeting with representatives from church leaders with Jackie in Wau, meeting with representatives from elders, women and youth in Busure

**Overall takeaways and recommendations:**

Because this assessment covered multiple locations and meetings with many people, this report is quite lengthy with a lot of detail. To make the information easier to access, I am including a summary of some key themes and ideas that surfaced from across those meetings at the beginning. The meeting details from each day then follow.

It seems a main focus of the Bongo community is preserving their language and culture. They have felt robbed and oppressed from outsiders for a very long time (ie: the British, neighboring tribes, etc.) There is a mixture of pride in the history of their culture and values like keeping the peace and adapting to show hospitality but also fear and shame from how their culture is viewed by those outside. There also seems to be a lot of trauma within the community because of this reality. It seems to have led to some suspicion of outsiders and what they might want

from the community. There is a feeling of losing space and identity because of this oppression as well.

There seemed to be two main motivations for desiring a Bongo Bible. Some mentioned wanting the Bible to preserve their language and culture or to be like other communities (*I think this in some ways stems from that feeling of oppression too*). Others mentioned wanting the Bible because they know it will tell them the right way to live or the correct path to go on, but not knowing how it will actually do this or what it says.

There were different felt-needs that emerged. Literacy and self-preservation were mentioned often along with witchcraft, jealousy and disunity. Substance abuse was mentioned a fair amount by the youth in each location. There was some idea that the Bible might address these things, but not the awareness of how to find out what the Bible says or that it speaks to everyday life, not just for use within a church service.

There also seems to be a high expectation that outsiders have the answers to the community's problems or at least are initially needed to get the ball rolling. The community seems to feel stuck and like they don't have the capacity needed to move forward, but once that capacity is built, they will move forward with those skills/knowledge and begin to thrive.

*Recommendations:*

Literacy – making print materials (whether classified as literacy, SE, translation, etc.) that already exist more widely available and known. If any need updating, this could be done too, since they have many materials that have been created. Some are using the old spelling and there seems to be little awareness within the community of the existence of even the materials with the current spelling. (This updating might also need to include checking the materials before being published again, not just applying spelling rules.) Putting these together in conjunction with teacher training is needed so capacity is built for people to use them.

SE – trainings and supplementary (oral and/or print) materials addressing felt-needs: trauma healing, witchcraft, substance abuse, early marriage? (*this came up a little bit in my assessment, but not much. I know gender in-equality came up more in the June LC training*); training and programs to understand how the Bible speaks to everyday life: Culture meets Scripture, oral Bible storying, Bible study groups; printed Scripture should also be made available in audio form since many can't read and those in town and the diaspora have some access to smartphones and/or the internet. There is great interest to have materials in multiple languages so people can grow in their knowledge of written Bongo through the Arabic/English they already know and the Bongo audio as well.

**Things the community provided during the SE assessment** (*Just to note as well, that none of these things were requested by me, they were just done by the community/committee without asking for any compensation*)**:**

- Places to meet in each location: In Tonj, Mario offered his compound for three meetings. In Aguka, the school/church property was used. In Wau, we met at the compound of a Bongo community member who has provided space for the LC to regularly meet, a public school that was opened by a Bongo community member and the Vicar General's office. In Busure, mats and chairs were provided under a tree.
- Water and/or juice/soda for all meetings. Tea was also provided for everyone the second day of meetings in Tonj.
- Lunch for everyone on the second day of meetings in Tonj
- Two of the four motorbikes needed for traveling to and from Aguka (*This is one area where community members did ask. We traveled with four motorbikes. They said they could cover two and wondered if I could cover the other two. I was happy with the initiative they took in providing many things and also that they asked when they really didn't feel they could.*)
- My accommodation and meals in Aguka
- Honey was gifted to me from the church in Aguka, and then another community member wanted to send some back for Jackie as well.
- Tea at the bus park to send me off from Tonj
- All of the tuktuk (rickshaw) rides within Wau from my hotel to the different places of meeting
- The Bongo Catholic fathers provided the car and drove us to Busure.

For this report, I have tried to include what I was hearing from participants as well as my observations/interpretations of these things. My observations are often at the beginning of the section, with the feedback listed after questions I asked. If I had thoughts about something as it was said, I tried to put those in italics and brackets to set them apart from what was actually mentioned by community members.

**Arrival in Tonj:**

I landed in Tonj at around 9 am. on Wednesday, 6 October. Mario (a former Bongo translator) and Bona (the subcommittee chairperson in Tonj) were at the airstrip to meet me. A family from In Deed and Truth Ministries was flying out to Juba, so their colleagues gave us a ride into town, which was kind. Mario and Bona took me to the Lakana Hotel, which they had asked about space and pricing prior. Once we arrived at the hotel, a Bongo chief and an elder were there to meet with us to go over the schedule and details of the meetings. This is what the group would then take to present to the commissioner. The commissioner requires approval from his office to hold any meetings or do any travel, so we could not begin to meet until we got it. I was a little disappointed that they didn't seek this approval before I arrived, so we could begin right away since I needed to cover a lot of ground to meet with people. On Wednesday the commissioner was not in his office, so they were not able to see him. Then, on Thursday, the body of the late ambassador to India was brought to Tonj and a prayer service was held,

which the commissioner was attending, so he also could not be reached. Finally, on Friday morning, Bona was able to find him in the office and get the approval needed. While this delayed our meetings a bit, it was the only real hiccup in the schedule, for which I am thankful.

I did get some information in discussions with Bongo community members who came to visit me in those first two days. Aguka is seen as a purely Bongo place, while all other areas are regarded as towns where multiple language groups live. They think there might be around 5,000 people in Aguka. Other language groups that live with the Bongo are mainly Dinka, Belanda Viri, Belanda Bor, Gbaya, Luwo, Ndogo and Zande. The Bongo community as a whole is very open to marrying outside of their tribe. If the father is Bongo, but the mother is not, this can lead to the children not knowing how to speak Bongo well. They often can still understand it though. The Jesus Film does seem to be a good tool for this community. Many people mention its impact, and it reaches further than text seems to at this point with such low literacy. It hasn't been used too much in the home area yet since the projector was left in Juba for so long, but the times it has been shown have had good response.

**Tonj elders, chiefs and intellectuals meeting:**

There were twelve people that took part in this meeting, which also included Bona, Mario and Sister Mary (the Bongo missionary to Aguka). One of the chiefs in attendance was also the paramount chief. There was good engagement from the participants. I first asked them about things within the Bongo culture that they saw as good and things they saw as bad. Because this was a group discussion, sometimes people would say contradictory things. It also felt like those more involved in the church believe that most of the bad practices are now left behind because of the work of the church, while those not in the church, or at least not in leadership, felt they are still very much going on. I had asked to have a meeting with church leaders in Tonj as well, but they felt that they were mostly represented in this group. Sister Mary, Mario, Bona and Simon (one of the more recent Bible translators) seemed to be seen as the main church leaders/those actively involved in church things. Simon was the only one of those not at this meeting, but he did attend later meetings, so his voice was also heard. In the second discussion, we talked about how different types of information is shared within the Bongo community.

Below are the tables with the responses that people gave to the two discussions. Mario wrote all of these in Bongo on flipchart papers, and I had Bona read the list so everyone could hear and make sure everything they wanted stated was mentioned.

| Good things in Bongo Culture | Bad things in Bongo Culture |
|---|---|
| Bongo peers don't steal things from each other. | History of slavery has taken many people from the Bongo community (estimated 800,000 people) to South America. (*One of the intellectuals mentioned this. He also stated something that other community members on different days referred to as* |

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| | *well: the Bongo history as it has been told is that the Bongo community was once the fourth largest people group in Africa after Zulu, Hutu and Tutsi. It is from the slave trade, the fighting mentioned below and Bongo community members hiding among others that the Bongo community is seen to have shrunk so much*.) |
| If there is a problem, people come together to solve it. | Fighting (both internal and external) has displaced people all over: Western Bahr el Gazal, Abyei, other countries, etc. |
| Bongo are cooperative with themselves and others, not causing problems with neighboring groups. | The neighboring people bring and do the bad things. They are not originally among the Bongo people. These things influence and spoil the community. |
| Even before the word of God came, Bongo people worshipped God through water blessings, sacrifices and prayers. | Revenge fighting (*Many said the Bongo used to be known as a fighting people when they were a large people group, very aggressive and brave. Now that there are few Bongo, they no longer do this so much*.) |
| When Luke and Jesus Film came, Bongo agreed with one heart. | Secret killing through witchcraft still exists. |
| Bongo love everyone without jealousy | Inter-clan fighting and revenge killings through physical and witchcraft means. |
| Bongo people like to work with their hands and willingly accept good things that people bring to them. They get money from honey, their gardens and hunting. | Witchcraft is still being practiced (*this came up a number of times, either as a way of killing, specific practices of witchcraft being shared, etc. Some people said it has been stopped through the church, but the fact that it was mentioned so often shows it is still prevalent, even if done more secretly*.) |
| Bongo people advise their children to respect each other, including those who are not from their tribe. | Witchcraft is often connected to jealousy or selfishness. If someone doesn't want to share something or wants something that someone else has, then they will use witchcraft for this. |
| Bongo men love their wives. | Fighting within the Bongo tribe can be worse than fighting with the neighboring groups. |
| Bongo don't kill. | Colonization from outside also brought bad things. |
| Bongo teach their children the language (*While this was stated, it seemed through* | Slavery and displacement have taken human resources from the community (intellectuals, |

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|---|---|
| *other conversations that women teach their children Bongo, but if the father is Bongo and the mother not, this is less likely. The father might speak occasionally in Bongo so the children understand it, but they don't teach it as the language of the home.)* | possibility for community growth). Those people have been removed and won't come back or be replaced. |
| Bongo people are hospitable to visitors, slaughtering chicken for them. They also love and stay with visitors who come to them at home. | The people who came from Europe long ago were very curious about witchcraft, wanting to know where the power came from to reduce it. (*This was mentioned here as a bad thing, but then later someone else mentioned that the British stopping some of the witchcraft practices was a good thing. It seems to fit with this dual view of witchcraft in the community.*) |
| In the marriage process, brothers are responsible for the daughters of each other, looking after them. | Because the community is very scattered, they are unable to unite. This also leads to poverty, lack of development and affects the language being developed. (*They then added, "This is why we want you to stand and work with us, so our language won't die."*) |
| The Bongo were the first to discover metal in the ground here and it was melted and made into knives, spears and axes. | British people used the Bongo to slaughter elephants for ivory to take back with them. Many people died doing this, since it is dangerous work, but no compensation was ever given. |
| Arts/handicrafts: Bongo people use a certain tree, giel, to make pictures. Woodworking is common to make canes/walking sticks. Bongo women make clay pots for fetching water. Women also make plates and saucepans from clay. They also carve a certain calabash to keep water cool for a long journey. Had a traditional way to make clothing from bark and leaves (*With this, it was said, "Bongo people have never wanted to walk naked since God made them." I took this as a bit of a comparison to some neighboring groups, even though that wasn't explicitly said.*) | The British brought the idea of scarification to be able to tell different groups apart. This brought tribalism. |
| Bongo people were the first to know how to kill elephants in South Sudan. They were very brave killing elephants, leopards and lions. | Witchcraft is still there but more hidden because the church is now there telling |

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|---|---|
| | people that bad things lead to hell and good things lead to heaven. |
| Bongo people know the languages of their neighbors (Zande, Dinka, Jur, etc.) | Generational hurts and grudges are maintained because parents teach them to their children, so these bad things are remembered. |
| Men and women have different work and eat separately from each other, men with men and women with women. Throughout the day, the son stays with the father and the daughter with the mother to learn from them. Even though the work is different, people share the work equally. If a woman or man is sick or too tired, their husband or wife will take over their work too. | Clans would sing songs against certain people or other clans, which was very bad. (*For this one it was hard to tell if anyone was saying this still continued or if everyone was in agreement that it has stopped.*) |
| There is a clan for rain makers. An elder man from within this clan brings back the rain if it has stopped. | |
| When the word of God came (*I asked what they meant by this. They said Luke and the Jesus Film*), the Bongo left these traditional practices and came to God. | |

| **Types of Information** | **How it is Shared** | **Language(s) used** |
|---|---|---|
| Gathering for dancing | Drum (*For the following few, it is a different type of drum beat that everyone knows the meanings for.*) | *(The languages used seemed to depend more on place and motive rather than means of information being shared.)* In Aguka, almost always Bongo. In towns, often mixed with Arabic, English or neighboring languages. If the message is to be kept secret from others, Bongo. If the communication is long, Arabic and English will at least be mixed in, or the whole message will be shared in either language. |
| An animal has been killed in a hunt | Drum | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| A clan claiming the killing of a person | Drum | |
| Gathering for a funeral/to let people know someone has died | Drum, trumpet, radio, word of mouth | |
| Meeting to take place, visitors coming | Phone | |
| Event going to happen | Letter sent | |
| War | Radio | |
| Celebration | Phone, word of mouth, announcement on radio or recorded voice sent through phone | |
| Bibles arrived | Phone, announcement at church, word of mouth after meeting to receive them | |
| Correcting someone's behavior in a group | Non-verbal so as not to shame or disrupt group discussion | |
| A person is lost | They will make a certain noise amplified with their hands or knock a dried tree in a certain pattern until people find them. | |

**Meeting with women in Tonj:**

This meeting ended up being quite small because another NGO had hired day laborers to clear a road, so many of the women had gone to be part of that work. Four women came in addition to Sister Mary, Bona and Mario who stayed from the previous meeting. Stephen (another of the more recent Bible translators) had arrived from Kwajok by this point, so also came and Simon came from his work at the radio station at this time too.

Because those connected to former and recent project work or the church outnumbered women from the community, a lot of the answers seemed to come from them. At the beginning some of the women would answer, but then it became a discussion mainly among Sister Mary, Mario and Bona. After a time, I asked if we could hear more from the other women, but they didn't have a whole lot more to add.

The discussion I had with this group was to think about an ideal Bongo community in 10 years and what that would look like. This seemed to be somewhat difficult for people to think about. One person said, "We haven't been there yet, so how can we know what it will look like?" I

think this led to many of the answers falling back on what they know has already been done and how that type of work could continue and make a difference. Below are the answers that were given.

*What do you hope the Bongo community will look and be like in 10 years?*

- The Bongo language will still exist, continuing with future generations.
- Teaching centers will be created, teaching children Bongo literacy.
- Need help for teaching Bongo literacy in all Bongo areas, so the language doesn't die. Teachers also need to be trained.
- Women and children will be able to read and write Bongo. This will help to preserve Bongo but will also help to keep things secret from other communities, to not know what we are reading and writing.
- The Jesus Film will have either been seen or heard by many people and will have caused many good things and people leaving bad behaviors. (*Complaints were given about the projector remaining in Juba for so long and then only coming to Tonj right before COVID when people weren't able to gather anymore to watch. Sister Mary did mention that she has brought it on her phone and some others have that way too, so sometimes small groups gather around to watch/hear it on the phone, but this is very difficult to see.*)
- Luke came but many people cannot read and now Genesis and Exodus has come, but there aren't many copies. Sometimes people could do Bible sharing groups, but the copies are too few. (*It seemed through what the women said and further meetings with other groups that the main reason Bible sharing groups wouldn't happen would be because literacy is so low. Bona, however, maintained that literacy rates were high and it was the fact that copies were too few that kept these things from going forward.*)
- People will be able to do the whole church service in Bongo: prayers, service, Bible readings, etc.
- God's word will bring transformation.
- We would have rights and space in the areas where we live.
- We want to learn more about God's word to go ahead.
- It needs great discussion and thought about what we want going forward. So far, we've mainly thought and known about our language.
- Important to have books based for children to teach the Bible to them. (*Here I asked them about the Bible story big books and how they were used. The Christmas story seemed to be the only one remembered. It was said that it was brought and was useful, but no more information was given, nor did it seem they are still using it.*)
- Literacy program is what is most important. One woman shared her desire to go back to school so she can read and write since she sees good things in it. Her father didn't allow her to go to school so she would do the housework, so now she would like that opportunity.

- Desire to have the full Bible. (*Because there was a mix of answers in the last meeting about either still having bad practices within their culture or having completely left them all because of the parts of the Bible that have already come, I asked a bit more deeply about their motivations for the Bible here. Some mentioned that they wanted the Bible to change their lives, so I asked, "If you have left every bad thing within your culture already, why do you feel you need more?" Below are the more in-depth responses that were given to this discussion.*)
    - We need the full Bible to change our lives through it.
    - The Bible needs to be complete. The work has started, so it needs to be completed.
    - It is like water and food. We need it to guide us in life. Otherwise, we don't know what we are doing.
    - The best people in the world are those who know the word of God: the best teachers, the best leaders, etc. 100% of them know the word of God, so if we have a chance to have it completed, it will be good.
    - The Bible shows the good way. It leads your children to succeed in school and in other areas. A house where people know the word of God will have peace. South Sudan is mixing up now because people don't know the Bible. Our hope is that our Bible will be added to the others.

**Meeting with the youth in Tonj:**

There were about 35 people in attendance at this meeting. One chief was from the youth, four women came near the end (*it was said that the day labor work was going on this day too*), Stephen, Simon and Bona were also present. Bona did introductions before each meeting in Tonj and Aguka in Bongo without translation. I often saw a letter from Wes explaining the Bible translation project not going forward and heard him mention Luke and the Jesus Film. It was hard to know different times if he was giving explanations of why the project wasn't picked up and what should be said to counter this. I didn't feel like that affected answers with this group on this day, however. They seemed to not just focus on "project" language. Stephen did the translation for me in this meeting since his arrival and Simon did the scribing. Bona did the translation for the other meetings.

In the discussion with the youth I wanted to focus on challenges and possible solutions. This led to a lot of good discussion. Everyone seemed to be quite involved. The Tonj Youth Association chairperson was also present in this meeting. He mentioned the communication with the Egyptian missionaries and the Pentecostal pastor. When asked for more details about the denominations of those people, he said he didn't know all the details since he himself is Muslim, but he was interested in the desire to partner. He seemed like a good person to connect people within the community. Below are the answers from the discussion.

*What challenges are facing the youth of the Bongo community?*

1. We don't have support from anyone who will help raise us up.
2. Many drop out from school.
3. Killing of the youth by other tribes.
4. Lack of employment.
5. Early pregnancy of girls, which also leads to dropping out of school.
6. Lack of Bible teachers or catechists.
7. Lack of pastors
8. Jealousy
9. Lack of commitment
10. People don't understand the word of God
11. Lack of unity
12. Fear
13. Feeling shame from among others, so not wanting to talk (*This seemed to fit with what others said throughout the meetings of Bongo feeling the need to hide themselves within other groups. Some mentioned fear going with this one too. People fearing what others will do to them if they find out they are Bongo.*)
14. Alcoholism
15. Lack of roads
16. Witchcraft

*What are possible solutions and who can be involved? (Each answer goes with the corresponding number above.)*

1. Teach young children; white people could take the children to school to teach them the word of God.
2. Poverty is the cause, so NGOs should teach people both in vocational training and the word of God.
3. The government should make a peace initiative between the tribes; word of God should be preached.
4. NGOs take message to funders so they can lead vocational training; praying to God to remove challenges.
5. The law (of girls not marrying till age 18) should be more powerful to rule over people and be enforced more.

6 & 7. People should be taught the word of God to then teach others with help from SIL and others from outside. (Egyptian missionaries and a Pentecostal pastor have approached the Youth Association chairperson about work. The missionaries asked for the names of two people from Aguka for them to take to study the Bible. The names weren't found right away and the missionaries left for now. When they come back, the names will be given and hope they will move forward. A Bongo Pentecostal pastor from Wau has asked the community to find him accommodation in either Tonj or Aguka for him to

come and stay to lead Bible studies. The place and time hasn't yet been decided. *Members of the Catholic church were asking more questions about these things and seemed a bit concerned that they weren't from among the Catholic church. They were not aware of these engagements and mentioned that those aren't the denominations of the people in Aguka.*)

8. Bongo community needs to pray for jealousy to go away.

9-11. Satan is working in the minds of people, so it needs people to know the word of God very well through the Bible.

12&13. Need schools to teach people their rights.

15. The government should repair the roads.

16. People bring word of God to teach those doing witchcraft.

After creating and discussing these lists, I asked the group to think about these issues and any solutions that have been started among them. If work has begun, recognizing that it isn't complete since they are still issues, they were to put a check mark next to those things. If a specific plan was in place to begin to address these things, they should mark those areas with a plus sign. They marked that some children have begun to be taught in schools (*just in general, not Bongo language)* and that they do have some schools designated for Bongo children in Tonj to help children know their rights (#1 and #12&13). They also checked the statement that poverty is the cause of dropping out of school, but not that any work has actually been started to work on this (#2). For #3, they marked that the word of God has begun to be preached in churches that include multiple communities. They also checked #9-11 because some people are beginning to learn more about the word of God. The only places they put +'s were in connection with the missionary and church work mentioned above. There don't seem to be any specified plans yet for solutions, but hopes that some will begin.

**Time in Aguka:**

Aguka is a village 26 miles south of Tonj. It and Busure are considered original centers of the Bongo community. Aguka is seen as the only place that has remained purely Bongo without outside pressure. The committee felt it would be important for me to travel to both of these locations in addition to the larger towns to meet community members and also to attend church in Aguka. Sister Mary had been in Juba previously for a workshop and had travelled back to Tonj through Wau the day after I arrived. She then planned to travel back to Aguka at the same time as my going. Bona, Mario and two children who were returning from time away also planned to travel. Because of this, we hired four motorbikes to take us to Aguka after our meeting with the youth in Tonj on Saturday morning. Two of the hired drivers were Bongo community members. They stayed the night, through the church service and till after our meeting and lunch in order to take Bona, Mario and me back to Tonj the next day.

There is one church in Aguka, which is the Catholic church led by Sister Mary with the help of Charles (the head teacher at the primary school in Aguka where the church is also held). Sister Mary told me a bit of her testimony on the first day we met in Tonj. She said that she was living in Nairobi and had begun some translation work there. She had translated the gospel of Matthew, which was being sold in some bookstores. Someone from the community saw that for sale and bought a copy to bring back to Daniel in SIL. That is when she and Mario were chosen to take part in the Luke Partnership to do the translation of Luke and the Jesus Film. She felt led to go work in Aguka to bring the Church to the Bongo community. She asked the bishop over her diocese at the time if she could go and minister there. Many people asked her why she wanted to go there since it was very dangerous. They told her she wouldn't last two days there before dying. (*Others in Tonj and Wau mentioned similar stories. It seems from what they shared that outside communities as well as Bongo communities themselves, saw the Bongo home areas, Aguka and Busure, as so steeped in witchcraft that they were dangerous to visit or live in. Bongo parents that lived in other locations, especially but not limited to the diaspora, would tell their children not to go to these places because they would be killed.*) She told these people that if God wanted her to go here, He would keep her safe. She has now been ministering in Aguka for 20 years.

(*Before I travelled to Aguka, people often would tell me with pride that it is a purely Bongo area. This was in two senses, language and place. The community seems to feel their language and place/land is very threatened as this was mentioned in Tonj, Wau and Busure. People feel like they are being forced out of areas without any space to call their own and that other language groups are more assertive in forcing their languages to go forward within the towns, so then Bongo gets marginalized. It seems to be quite a tension since they want to be hospitable and accommodating to others but also feel oppressed and abused at the same time. I even sensed this tension at times when meeting with some groups that there was an uncertainty in what they should say or what they thought I might want to hear. That is one benefit of meeting with multiple groups in more than one location. Even if some are trying to say what they think you want to hear, others say things as they are, so this helps to give a clearer picture.)*

The church service in Aguka was very full. I would say there were probably around 150 children, 70 women and 40 men. Sister Mary has worked hard to translate the non-Scripture portions of the lectionary into Bongo. She has also translated songs for the service into Bongo and taught those orally to the choir leader who then has taught others. For the portions of Scripture that are read, Sister Mary uses an English Bible but says the verses out loud in an on-the-spot Bongo translation. Mario read one of the three readings the day we were there, and he did it this way too. Charles read the third reading, which he just read in English. (*That may have been to accommodate me since he was also translating Sister Mary's sermon in English since I was there.)* Bona, Simon and Mario mentioned that Sister Mary also helps them with the Bongo gospel readings on the Don Bosco radio in Tonj. It is aired in English, Arabic, Dinka and Bongo each day, and Sister Mary does the Bongo.

The church service was a special one because it was the day set aside by the Catholic church to celebrate Daniel Comboni, marking the day he died. He is the patron saint of the church in Aguka, so Sister Mary had his picture displayed and shared about his work and ministry a bit in the message as well. She said the full special service was postponed until the following Sunday because that worked best for the priest coming from Tonj to mark it, but that she still wanted to mark the actual day in some way. The call and response parts of the mass were all done in Bongo with no translation. Some of these were statements, some prayers and some songs as in traditional masses anywhere. These parts of the service seemed to have the most engagement. Otherwise, possibly because there were so many children, it felt like people were not paying as much attention. This church is the only Bongo church in all of the Bongo area. All the other Bongo Christians attend multilingual churches in towns, so their services are done in other languages. A few people in the meeting after church mentioned that they belonged to other church denominations outside of Aguka, but since they moved there and the Catholic church was the only one, they prayed there. They said they would like to see other denominations coming in as well.

**Meeting after church:**

When we started there were about 75 people that stayed after the service to see what the meeting was about. By the time we were further into it, however, we were probably down to 35 or 40 people. This group had men, women, youth and elders represented. (*The Aguka Youth Association chairperson was also involved. It seemed here as well as in Tonj that this position is almost equal in importance to a chief.*) Because the group was so large, I decided to do the River of Life activity to hear from the community what they thought was good in moving their community and culture forward well, what challenges were trying to stop them moving forward and what future good things they hoped God would bless them with.

*What good things has God blessed the Bongo community with to build the language and culture since the church began in the Bongo community?*

- The church in Tonj came to Aguka to hold baptisms in 1959. There wasn't a church in Aguka at this time, but the priests made special trips in.
- God has given them life until now.
- God gave the process of Bible translation, which is still going on. God has brought others to translate the Bible (outsiders and those from within the community doing the work).
- Hospitals and schools
- Bongo alphabet
- The (Catholic) church came to stay in Aguka and other churches have come to the Bongo community.
- Jesus Film
- Praying and singing within their own language

- Children are still able to be baptized in Aguka.
- God has given peace with others.
- God has stopped those killing the Bongo.
- School books

*If we think of a river and things that can block it going forward such as fallen trees or rocks, how has the Bongo river had these things? Has there been anything trying to block these good things from going ahead? (A lot of the answers seemed to be focused on what it would look like if the good things happening stopped or went away/changed, rather than specific incidents of things that threatened this. It gave good insight into what their concerns are, however.*)

- If children continue to drop out of school, it may make the school go away one day.
- There is still the possibility of outside groups coming after the Bongo community to kill them.
- If the Bible translation project ends, they will not have a full Bible.
- If people do not teach Bongo literacy, it may completely stop one day.
- If people stop coming to the church, it will be an empty building.
- Sister Mary and Charles are a huge blessing to the work of the church, but if they are not there, the work won't continue. There aren't any others yet who will continue the work.

*What future good things do you hope God will bless you with? (Talked about how a river brings life, so if the good river continued, how would their community look in the future.)*

- Old and young commit to going to school and learning so that it brings change.
- Hope that the whole Bongo Bible will be complete so they can pray in church with everything in Bongo.
- Anything that is in Juba concerning the word of God in new technology will come to Aguka. (*Here they also mentioned wanting the Jesus Film projector to come so they can see it. Bona promised that he would bring it from Tonj the next weekend.*)
- Songbook for church in Bongo. Sister Mary has translated and taught them, but they aren't in book form to preserve and have together.
- A new church building
- Other church denominations to come to Aguka with pastors that will stay and not just visit.

**Meeting with Language Committee in Wau:**

When I arrived in Wau, I had a bit of an issue with the authorities. The driver of the public vehicle I was in was in a hurry to get to Wau and back to Tonj all in one day. He therefore didn't want to stop and wait for me to go in and register at every checkpoint in between. There are six checkpoints in total. He seemed to have a good relationship with those covering four of the six

checkpoints and they just let him through. The fifth checkpoint gave a bit more discussion, but still let us go without him pulling over and having me get out. The sixth checkpoint just outside of Wau, was adamant that I get out and register with my passport. I was sitting in the middle of people and the driver did not pull over. He was also shouting at the officials. The official took my passport, looked at it and gave it back to me. He told the driver to pull over so I could register, but the driver refused and drove around the blockade. He also refused to stop for every group of traffic police that was trying to pull him over once we entered Wau town. Once we got to the bus park, and all got out, a police officer that had followed us from some point came up to me and told me I needed to go to the security office at the bus park since I had ignored all of the checkpoints. Thankfully, Marko and Raphael were there waiting for me. We all went to the office and calmly explained things to the officials there. A few of the other passengers in the vehicle also came to explain that it was the driver refusing to stop, not me. The officials took my information, welcomed me to Wau and let me go. From there, Marko arranged a tuktuk to take us to Dahlak Hotel where I would be staying during my time in Wau.

That evening I was able to meet with the Language Committee on the compound where they hold their LC meetings. Marko picked me up and took me. Most of the members of the committee were present: Marko Rabbi Moi (chairperson), Anyeza Gabriel Dudu (deputy chairperson), Raphael Zakeria Paul (secretary), Michael Augustino (member), John Kamilo (information), Tereza Ali Madinge (member and recent Bible translator), Simon Abakar Daniel (advisor), Flora John Karmilo (member) and Aida Sigen (service). Some of the family members from that compound also joined our meeting since they are Bongo as well.

I did the River of Life activity with the Language Committee as well, wanting to see what stood out as good and valuable or concerning to them as the group that is organizing many of the things within the community.

*Good things that add to our river as the Bongo community to make it flourish and grow:*

- Love for one another
- Helping one another (ie: giving to the poor)
- Educating people with good things (*when I asked what these good things were, they said evangelism and literacy*)
- Staying peacefully with each other
- Translation of Luke, Genesis and Exodus, even though few can read
- Creation of the Jesus Film
- Coming together for marriage (*gathering for the celebration*)
- Farming and weeding together as one group, doing one person's garden and then moving onto the next.
- Gathering for baby naming ceremonies.

- Gathering of women in groups (*When I asked for details for this, they said women often gather together when there are problems in the community to solve them.*)
- Cultural happiness (*celebrating events with Bongo culture: dancing, singing, etc.*)
- Praying to God
- Audio Scriptures shared through phones (*I asked about these. They said they are Bongo audio Scriptures, but didn't have more details to give. I wondered if it was the ones Sister Mary does for the radio.*)

*Challenges that are blocking the Bongo community from flourishing:*

- Divisions among people (T*hey said most of these are caused by jealousy.*)
- Teaching the younger generations about bad things that were done long ago, encouraging revenge.
- Greed/selfishness/refusing to share
- Poverty
- Adopting outside cultures
- Sharing wrong information/rumors to divide people

*What would you like the Bongo community to look like in 5-10 years? What good things should continue? What new good things will be there? What challenges will disappear?*

- Bongo people will know how to read and write
- To marry among themselves, not from outside language groups
- Have a center for developing Bongo culture and books and to learn their language
- Have good space for farming
- Having space for Bongo neighborhoods to live together

**Meeting of elders, women and youth leaders in Wau:**

Some of the Language Committee was present for this meeting too. Some to discuss as part of the group they belonged to and others to help the meeting run smoothly. Marko opened this meeting up with a devotional. He had Madinge read aloud from Genesis chapter 11 in Bongo and then shared a short message on this. There were seven youth, eight women and eight elders. I divided the people into each of these three groups and had them discuss and write their answers on a piece of paper. I asked them all to list things that are important to their group in the community. I was thinking of this as things they do within their culture that are important for them to do, but for most of them it seemed to be more things they long for within their community. I also asked them to list challenges that are specific to their group within the community. After they discussed, we all came back together, heard from each group and asked any clarifying questions. I put the clarifying information with each one in brackets. One thing that they noted when we came back together was that all of them wrote in English because most of them don't know their language well enough to use it in writing.

*Important parts of the Bongo community for each group:*

*Elders:*

- Unity
- Means of learning the Bongo alphabet
- Training of trainers for Bongo literacy
- Cultural centers
- Talking to children in Bongo at home

*Women:*

- Unity
- Problem solving
- Reconciliation
- Working together
- Contribution (*sharing their means with others*)
- Livelihood (*co-existing peacefully, making their own money and not just relying on their husbands*)
- Providing education for those within their homes
- Praying together

*Youth:*

- Education
- Employment and maintaining cultural work (*cultivation, honey, wood gathering*)
- Building capacity (*I asked about what capacity specifically. The said adding skills and knowledge to fill gaps generally because they feel they need capacity in many areas.*)
- Unity
- Cultural practices
- Learning to read and write Bongo

*Challenges facing your group within the Bongo community:*

*Youth:*

- Lack of education
- Lack of job opportunities
- Family problems (*revenge killings; responsibilities at home that hold the youth back, such as if a parent dies, having to take over the work and care for family members instead of finishing their education*)
- Practicing of witchcraft
- Substance abuse

- Early marriage
- Poverty
- Hatred and jealousy

*Women:*

- Ignorance (*not that they are ignorant, but that others view them as if they can't do anything because they see them as completely ignorant*)
- Disunity
- Hatred
- Selfishness
- Poverty
- Illiteracy

*Elders:*

- Lack of communication (*there is not good communication across the Bongo community or between them and other tribes*)
- Illiteracy
- Lack of teaching materials: books, pens, etc.
- Lack of location for Bongo community to come together

**Meetings with Church Leaders in Wau:**

Other than Sister Mary in Aguka, the main Bongo church leaders live in Wau and Busure. I first met with a group of Bongo church leaders by myself. The next day, Jackie joined me to meet with a smaller group of church leaders. The Bongo church leaders are as follows: 3 Catholic priests: Father Jermano (Vicar General for Wau diocese), Father Matthew (from Busure), and Father Gabriel (soon to be vice chancellor for the Catholic University in Kauda); 1 Seventh Day Adventist pastor: Pastor Jacob; 1 Africa Inland Church pastor: Pastor Marko (also Bongo LC chairperson); 2 Pentecostal pastors: neither could attend our meeting as one was sick and one had a child who was sick (*I assume it was one of these pastors that spoke to the Youth Association chairperson in Tonj, but no one else seemed to know about that when I asked.*).

*What is important as you see it for the Bongo community and the church?*

- There is a spirit of unity, when there is a funeral, it doesn't matter which church the person was connected to, all come together.
- Bongo are very social with others and are happy to worship together but the Bible would still be useful in Bongo for people to use to counter bad cultures. People are not educated, but the Bible could provide another type of education.
- Bongo (literacy) is not being taught, so even if we have a Bible, people would not be able to read it.

- Other language communities insist that their languages should be used for liturgy, but Bongo isn't like this. They adjust to use languages that others can understand. In towns, the language is going away because people use the languages of those around them. Fr. Matthew and Fr. Gabriel are Bongo, but they don't speak much Bongo. They can understand more than they can speak. Pastor Jacob also mentioned being more connected to the Luwo language as his mother is Luwo, but he feels a strong responsibility to help develop and learn Bongo.
- The hope would be to have a Bongo church one day once people can read and understand it.
- Many more Bongo people in Wau can read and write in Arabic and English.
- There is a desire among the church leaders for their congregations to know the Bible well.
- It was significantly mentioned in this group as well about the problem of the community scattering and feeling like their identity is being lost. "If we have the Bible, it will change this and make us more serious about fearing God and using the language."
- "The Bible (portions) coming is also what is encouraging us to create schools and learn the history of our culture."
- Belief that Bongo are the majority and mix to hide among other tribes, so they seem to be the minority. There is a big fear of being oppressed and killed when it is known that they are Bongo.
- The Bongo community is known to be a people of witchcraft, so people fear them, which causes them fear as well.
- Fr. Gabriel grew up in Sudan and serves there still, so he said he feels somewhat disconnected from the community. There is a strong reputation of witchcraft in the home areas (Aguka and Busure) even among the Bongo community in Sudan, so that community also fears people dying if they go to those places.
- Much of this fear and revenge culture comes through stories that are told to children from the time they are born. Some of this seems to be strongly motivated by the Bongo community wanting their children to stay away from witchcraft, so it further promotes the loss of language and culture.
- Children who do not speak, read or write Bongo can still understand it, so stories are useful.

After Jackie arrived in Wau, we met with the Vicar General (Fr. Jermano), Fr. Matthew and Fr. Gabriel along with Marko. Jackie asked the group some further questions. I then made some notes on what they mentioned and include my thoughts of what might be helpful based on those.

*What are your ideas for how the church can support Literacy and SE?*

- PALACA (the Catholic center) is open to all the language groups that have ideas and requests to help them.
- Opening community schools for Bongo literacy is most important (the Bongo church leaders are committing to help with this).
- There are Bongo teachers in the formal schools as well as in the Ministry of Education.
- Bongo youth have a social network where they discuss things. (*Maybe the diaspora can be served by the website www.bongobible.com*. *This group and others didn't seem aware of their website. Daniel and I worked on it years ago, but it has also been quite some time since it's been updated. The Wau LC did know about the website.*) Fr. Gabriel mentioned a Dinka website that he's seen and used that was created in Australia that has a helpful interactive alphabet feature. Marko showed Fr. Gabriel a Bongo alphabet app that Daniel and the SIL Literacy department made. Fr. Gabriel said it was good, but should also include English or Arabic so those who can't read Bongo have a starting point. (*Might be good to create a Scripture app with existing Bongo Scripture that is multi-lingual, either one with Bongo and English and one with Bongo and Arabic or if possible, one with all three languages. I did mention this idea to the group and it was welcomed.*)
- Fr. Gabriel mentioned that Catholic mass is becoming boring for many youth (*This seems to fit what I was seeing for the youth and children in Aguka too.*) "If we do something that is more attractive to youth, it will be good." (*Maybe storying and/or listening groups would be more attractive and hold people's attention to engage with them?*)
- Bongo love stories. Often when they are working together or sitting together at night, they share stories, mostly histories and advice stories. Fr. Matthew mentioned this is truer of Aguka and Busure and less of the towns where people are busy. (*Bible storying seems like it could fit into this structure too.*)
- Marko mentioned that this is only the second year the Bongo community is coming together to discuss and learn their language.

**Meeting in Busure with elders, women and youth:**

This meeting wasn't announced as the Language Committee had hoped, so no one knew we were coming. We walked around Busure for a little bit to see the area while the deputy chief gathered people. The Language Committee traveled together with Jackie, me, Fr. Gabriel and Fr. Matthew from Wau. About 25 people were able to come from Busure, men and women, youth and elders. Marko introduced the Language Committee to those that gathered, since the LC had not all gone together to Busure before then. He then introduced us and I asked some questions to see how the community accepts, incorporates and celebrates new things. This can be helpful information when introducing Scripture programs and materials within a community to make sure they are fitting the known structure of acceptance and use.

*Think about new programs, products, etc. How are they welcomed into the Bongo community? Who needs to approve of them?*

- The educated people from among the community are selected and sent out to look for these things.
- The Bongo Association has a responsibility to look for good things and introduce them to the community.

*When these selected people find these good things, how do they present them to the community?*

- They can send a message with someone or call through the phone. Then the community gathers to discuss and decide if they will accept it or not.
- The chief also plays a significant role.
- There are two committees: 1 in Busure and 1 in Wau. They come together to look at good and bad things and how to solve problems.

*How do you shift things that come from outside from being foreign to becoming part of the culture?*

- We take good care of the things.
- We accept the message that has been given.

*Are there any celebrations, ceremonies or actions that need to be done for it to be accepted?*

- The community will come together in one place, discuss in Bongo and hold cultural dances.

*When there are programs (ie: hospitals, schools, churches, etc.) how do you test whether they are good or causing problems?*

- We see the results and judge from that whether they are good. Hospitals: we see our children getting healed, schools: children are learning, churches: people know God.

This was the last meeting connected with the Scripture Engagement assessment. After this, Jackie and I met with the Language Committee over three days to give them a summary from my trip, train them in big-picture planning and think through programs and materials that would be helpful to address many of these issues. That training is covered in another report.