

## Fiction as missiology: a Creative “hapkas” Christology in “The Mountain”

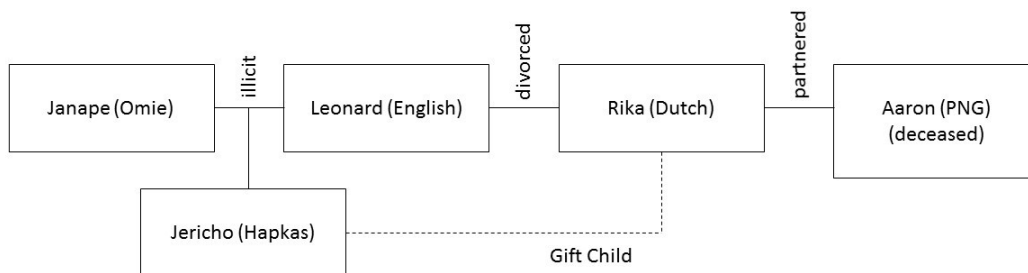
Dr Steve Taylor, Flinders University: Knox Centre Ministry and Leadership

Email: [principal@knoxcentre.ac.nz](mailto:principal@knoxcentre.ac.nz)

Website: [www.emergenzi.org.nz](http://www.emergenzi.org.nz)

In this paper I examine conversion in a fictive novel, *The Mountain* (following Skreslet, who encourages mission studies to reading fiction from outside the West). I argue that conversion of culture (“*Of all the applause, of all the cheers, the greatest is for the Christian missions*”) is due to an indigenous Christology (“*good’ man true*” ... *die for PNG*).

### The Mountain: “The ancestors give us Leonard”



For the Omie, the key actor is the ancestors:

The ancestors give us Leonard. We give you [Jericho] to Leonard. And you [Jericho] return. Ancestor gift. The child who left us, who we call Jericho, has returned, the man who make a great noise, blow down the walls. Jericho, the name from the ancestor story of Leonard. (Modjeska 212: 351)

### The Mountain: “Gift child”

Hybrid notions of kinship offer a different way of being in community.

“Could it be that redemption was possible? That she could return from the closed, dark place where she’d been these last few weeks? That fear and shame need not rule all of her life?” (256)

This Christology of gift has departure (*We give you*) and return (*your return*). The return is in hope of communal redemption. This is clarified the next morning.

“Standing in the morning sun with these bark-cloth woman, Jericho is startled into a thought ... Here is the mountain’s wealth. Here is how he can help. Their cloth is art in any terms. It’s contemporary, it’s bold and it’s beautiful.” (Modjeska 212: 353)

### The Mountain: “Hapkas”

“*Hapkas*. It’s a great word. My kids use it all the time. They call themselves *hapkas*. I’m from the Sepik, their mother’s from Milne Bay. It’s a point of pride. Makes them interesting ... Haven’t you heard of hybridity.” (Modjeska 2012: 278)

Jericho is “hapkas” biologically, from an Omie birth mother and an English father.

There is a further dimension of “hapkas” in the name Jericho. This is present as the Omie village chief pronounces Jericho, “the man who make a great noise, blow down the walls” (Modjeska 2012: 351). In the Old Testament, Joshua is an agent of salvation, who leads his people to “make a great noise” when attacking a Canaanite city, Jericho. Perhaps the Omie village chief has got the name mixed up, and Jericho is meant to be named Joshua. However, referencing Jericho, suggests a more intriguing understanding of “hapkas.”

Inside the Canaanite city of Jericho is Rahab, who shelters the spies (Josh 2). Is the Omie chief,

shaped by an ancestor theology, in fact referencing Jericho's Omie mother as a Rahab, who has sheltered an English "spy"? This reading offers a subtle, yet transformative application of the Christian narrative, given that in Matthew 1, Rahab is named in the genealogy of Jesus, as an ancestor of Jesus. This makes Jesus "hapkas," enriched by the blood of Canaanite woman. In this reading, the agency of Rahab/Omie as indigenous woman results in children, who are "hapkas," woven as ancestors into narratives of redemption. In this reading, the narratives ("the ancestor story of Leonard" (Modjeska 212: 351)) of the missionary are co-opted by the Omie to explain their actions, of how indigenous people act when "spies," whether in the Joshua narrative or Western researchers, conduct research among indigenous people.

### "Hapkas" Christology

Firstly, "hapkas" is a way of understanding fully human, fully divine. Second, in *The Mountain*, when Jericho is brought to Rika, a hybrid notions of kinship is described. Third, indigenous cultures as "Old Testaments: This is a posture of respectful transformation, rather than hagiography or colonisation.

In sum, I have examined fiction from outside the West and argued for a distinct and creative Christology as one result of religious change in PNG. "Hapkas" provides a way to understand ancestor gift, fully human, fully divine and the new Adam. It is a reading that attributes primary agency to an indigenous culture and offers a transformational way to understand religious change as communal participation in the art markets of twenty-first century global capitalism. It is consistent with recent Biblical scholarship regarding the Genesis narratives in the Old Testament. This suggests that to understand conversion missiologically, requires following Jesus who is "good' man true" for the particularity of all indigenous cultures.

### Key References

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