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Olyomakaya: A ‘Smoking’ Memory of the Early Finnish Mission in Northern Namibia

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Abstract

This chapter studies the Oshiwambo name for Saturday, *Olyomakaya*, which translates as tobacco day. The name *Olyomakaya* derives from late nineteenth-century Finnish missionary activity among the Aawambo. Missionaries distributed tobacco on Saturdays and encouraged the recipients to come to church the following day, and soon people started calling it *Olyomakaya*. This chapter explores the history of Aawambo and the missionary use of tobacco, but also how tobacco use and *Olyomakaya* are remembered in contemporary Aawambo culture. The missionaries did not introduce a new custom when they donated or traded tobacco, but they made use of a local tradition of smoking and chewing tobacco, as well as using tobacco as a means of payment, and sharing it as a sign of friendship. While some missionaries opposed the use of tobacco, the Owambo kings and chiefs were adamant that they should be supplied with the product. Indeed, a failure or refusal to provide them with the commodity often angered them and had the potential to jeopardise the entire mission endeavour. In Aawambo cultural memory, *Olyomakaya* is also remembered in terms of local culture; as the missionaries’ pragmatic extension of indigenous tobacco practice and as a means of fostering companionship and unity.

The aim of this chapter is to scrutinise a weekly occurrence in northern Namibian cultural tradition, namely *Olyomakaya*, which is the Owambo name for Saturday.¹ *Olyomakaya* means tobacco day – a name derived from the late nineteenth century and, more specifically, from the distribution of tobacco at Finnish Lutheran mission stations. This chapter has both historical and contemporary dimensions. On the one hand, we will study the role that tobacco played in the opening decades of the missionary presence in what was then called Ovamboland, in modern-day northern Namibia. On the other hand, we will attempt to grasp how the concept of *Olyomakaya* is understood in contemporary Aawambo culture. Our aim in the present study is not only to bring about new insights about the use of tobacco in the context of the intersection between early Finnish missionaries and Aawambo, but also to shed light on the contemporary understanding of a little scrutinised part of Aawambo history and cultural memory. Our intention, therefore, is not to investigate tobacco use in Aawambo culture in a broad sense. With this in mind we allow ourselves to make a time leap from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century to our own era.

From the perspective of cultural memory research, *Olyomakaya* can be placed somewhere between a cultural memory and what Jan Assmann calls a communicated memory. Although more than 100 years old, *Olyomakaya* is of sufficiently late origin for some people in the community to remember it, or at least to have grown up at a time when many contemporaries had experienced tobacco distribution. In other words, to some extent its memory is still communicable. One of our interviewees was 99 years old at the time of the interview. On the other hand, *Olyomakaya* can no longer be vividly remembered. Its age has inevitably led to a gradual deterioration in its cultural memory. Hence, without institutionalisation in the form of a day of the week, it will soon disappear.²

The written sources examined in this study consist of missionary periodicals, with a particular emphasis on the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS) magazine *Missionstidning för Finland* between 1870 and 1904.³ Furthermore, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with men and women from the Oshikoto and Ohangwena regions in northern Namibia.⁴ We asked the interviewees to explain what *Olyomakaya* is, what they knew about the Finnish and Aawambo use of tobacco in the early mission (in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), and encouraged them to talk freely about tobacco and the concept of *Olyomakaya*. The intention with these rather simple and open interviews and the discussions that they gave rise to was to assess what is still remembered about the origin of the concept of *Olyomakaya*.

1. Monday to Sunday in Oshindonga reads: *Omaandaha, Etiyali, Etitatu, Etine, Etitano, Olyomakaya, Osoondaha*.
2. For theories of cultural and communicated memory, we refer to the works of Jan and Aleida Assmann. See Assmann 2017 and Assmann 2018.
3. The Finnish Missionary Society periodical was published both in Finnish and Swedish with mostly identical content. The Finnish version of the periodical was named *Suomen Lähetysseuran Aikakauslehti*.
4. The research aims, consent form and ethical considerations were explained to each participant before they agreed to be part of the study. The participants in the study ranged in age from 19 to 99 years. The participants included five men and three women. While all eight interviews have been of value for this research, six have been directly quoted.

Finally, literature written about the Finnish missionary work in northern Namibia has also been consulted.

Aawambo, Missionaries and Tobacco

In the reports published in the FMS periodicals from the early so-called Ovamboland mission (established in 1870), the missionaries frequently wrote about tobacco. The missionaries reported about the smoking and chewing of tobacco, the use of tobacco as a trade commodity and attempts to grow tobacco. Several of the missionaries smoked. Indeed, the most famous Finnish missionary of all time, Martti Rautanen⁵, was often portrayed with a pipe in his hand. Among the Aawambo, both men and women smoked, typically pipes, but some preferred to chew or sniff their tobacco.⁶ Tobias Reijonen observed that tobacco played a large role for the Aawambo – too large in his opinion. They explained to him that tobacco bestows intellect upon them and cures coughs as well as chest and stomach sicknesses.⁷ The notion of intellect or wisdom finds support in Aawambo cultural memory, and one interviewee recalled a proverb stating that an elder smoking a pipe is speaking wisdom to the rest.⁸ In 1870, Reijonen had already recognised that the Aawambo grew tobacco. When tobacco plants had matured, the leaves and stalks were collected and pounded. According to Reijonen, the tobacco was 'of lower quality' than the imported tobacco that some of the missionaries smoked.⁹ The missionary did not elaborate on how the tobacco was handled after it had been pounded, but it is likely that it was rolled into balls before being bartered. Such a process was reported by David Livingstone among the Toga peoples of present-day northern Zimbabwe.¹⁰

That the Aawambo also preferred the missionaries' tobacco quickly became apparent, and it was turned into a desired trade commodity and gift. The Finns brought tobacco with them wherever they went. Upon request, they would give a piece of tobacco as a token of friendship, while at the same time regarding the encounter as 'an opportunity to teach' the person receiving the gift.¹¹ In 1872, Gustaf Skoglund wrote about how he had met a group of people who were afraid of him. After a while, one of them approached Skoglund and asked for tobacco and he gave him some. The missionary described how this small gift completely changed the situation. People gathered around his ox wagon and he heard them tell each other that it was not true

5. In this volume, the Finnish form of his name Martti is used, even though his name has also been spelled as Martin especially in Swedish sources.

6. Rautanen 1893, 182; Wehanen 1899, 137; Reijonen 1875, 51.

7. Reijonen 1874, 140 (translation by Groop). The original word for 'intellect' used in the article in Swedish is *förstånd* and *ymmärrys* in Finnish.

8. Mb 2019. In Mb's recollection the proverb reads 'Omukuluntu ngele owu wete ombiga ye yi li pokati komayego osha hala kutya ota popi oshinima shoondunge.'

9. 'Owambo-Landet' 1870, 23; Saari 1904, 6–7.

10. Livingstone 2011, 317.

11. Reijonen 1872 (translation by Groop), 88.

what they had heard about how he would kill people.¹² If a missionary did not give tobacco to those asking for it, as for instance Tobias Reijonen reported, those left without tobacco complained that ‘you do not love the people!’¹³ This perception of the act of sharing tobacco as a sign of friendship was not restricted to the Aawambo. As reported by Karl Leonhard Tolonen, the Damara and Herero also regarded a piece of tobacco as a sign of friendship and could accuse a missionary of hating them if he refused to hand over the product.¹⁴

Due in part to low salary levels, the early Finnish missionaries were dependent on trade for their own survival. While this trade is not elaborated on in detail in the periodicals, we can learn more about it from the missionaries’ letters and diaries. Here, they frequently describe the form of payment they used for goods and services, such as (glass) pearls, steel wire, lead, gunpowder and percussion caps for firearms. While weapons and ammunition were held in particularly high esteem, tobacco appears to have been among the most frequent means of payment.¹⁵ Sometimes missionaries even had to buy tobacco from across the Kunene River in present-day Angola to acquire the currency needed to buy *mahangu* (millet) from their neighbours.¹⁶ Tobacco also appears in the missionaries’ writing as something of an additional payment. This was the case when Karl August Veikkolin paid his neighbours for tending to his cattle and bringing him milk every morning and evening. For this service he paid them one head of cattle every four months, according to what he described as ‘the law of the kingdom.’ On top of this, he also gave them a piece of tobacco every week. For this extra payment, the neighbours kept his cattle near their homes, as the missionary requested, instead of grazing them further away.¹⁷

Tobacco played a crucial role in the relationship with political leaders. In 1870, the Finnish missionaries had already learned through their encounters with the Herero paramount chief Maharero kaTjamuaha that they had to provide him with tobacco and that it had to be what he referred to as ‘the expensive tobacco from the Cape [Colony].’¹⁸ As a rule, the missionaries always brought tobacco when they met rulers. Moreover, should a king run out of quality tobacco he sent someone to the mission to request more. Naturally, the missionaries also provided the royals with other commodities, but tobacco was generally one of the gifts that were exchanged. When Tolonen visited Oukwanyama in 1871, he twice brought gifts to King Mweshipandeka yaShaningika: first he presented pearls, a blanket and two pieces of tobacco, and later gunpowder, lead and two more pieces of tobacco.¹⁹ King Nehale IyaMpingana, who reigned over eastern Ondonga, continued to ask for tobacco even after he had chased away missionaries from his territory. This should be viewed as a sign of at least

12. Skoglund 1872, 80. See also Tönjes 1996, 237. Hermann Tönjes writes about a similar occasion and the joy that it brought when, during a visit to a Kwanyama homestead, he offered his cigar to the head of the homestead.

13. Reijonen 1874, 140.

14. Tolonen 1871, 160–162.

15. Skoglund 1878, 13; Reijonen 1874, 109; Pettinen 1889, 118. See also Siiskonen 1990, 129–130.

16. Veikkolin 1881, 8. Compare Peltola 1994, who writes that tobacco was still used to buy milk in 1909 during a famine.

17. Veikkolin 1874, 80.

18. Kurvinen 1870, 142.

19. Tolonen 1871, 136.

some kind of friendship from the king, who has otherwise been remembered for his aversion to European influence.²⁰

According to Alpo Hukka, the Finnish missionaries systematically started to distribute tobacco at the mission station on Saturdays in the 1870s. This was an efficient way of gathering people to welcome them to Sunday service the following day.²¹ Similarly, in his biography about Martti Rautanen, Matti Peltola describes this custom as 'an attempt of the early years [of the missionary] when the number of visitors coming to hear the Word was still small.' Soon, writes Peltola, 'the people started to call this day "tobacco day" (*Olyomakaya*) and its name remained the same from this day forth.'²² Tolonen clearly indicated that the distribution of tobacco on a Sunday was not an option. For the missionaries it was important to show to the people that Sunday was a holy day when it was not appropriate to pursue trade or exchange tobacco.²³ Eino Pennanen provides another clue as to the origins of the Finnish custom of distributing tobacco on Saturdays, asserting that it was inherited from the German missionaries of the Rhenish Missionary Society when they worked among the Herero. In an article in a FMS periodical for young people he writes as follows: 'Among these tribes, Saturday bears the name "tobacco day." It is a memory of a time when German missionaries working in Hereroland handed out tobacco to people on Saturdays so that at least some listeners could be brought to church on Sunday.'²⁴ It is likely, as Pennanen suggests, that the idea to distribute tobacco as a means of promoting the mission was taken from the German mission further south. Yet, the actual name 'tobacco day' is more likely an Aawambo invention. The naming of Saturday after tobacco distribution is not found in the Herero language, nor did the long-serving Rhenish missionary, Hugo Hahn, write anything about systematic tobacco distribution in his diaries.

The missionaries also occasionally withheld tobacco from the local population as a punishment for misconduct or for failing to attend church. Botolf Björklund refused to give tobacco to a man who had approached him for some. The reason for the denial was that the man told Björklund that he had no interest in hearing the Word that the missionaries had been sent to preach.²⁵ In 1882, Martti Rautanen wrote about his own similar experience:

I have tried to test many neighbours by not giving them tobacco when they have come and asked for it, and I have explained to them that it is because they do not come to hear the Word, but they would rather be without tobacco than come [and listen to] the preaching of the Word, and thus they become almost completely alien to the Word.²⁶

20. Pettinen 1892, 68.

21. Hukka 1954, 26–27.

22. Peltola 1994, 220. See also Hukka 1954, 27. Neither Peltola nor Hukka provide any sources for their notions on the background to *Olyomakaya*, nor is the name *Olyomakaya* mentioned in any of the periodical articles, although a great deal was written about tobacco.

23. Tolonen 1873, 140.

24. Pennanen 1937, 6.

25. Björklund 1878, 164.

26. Rautanen 1882, 154 (translation by Groop); Reijonen 1877, 151.

Until 1900, the missionaries rather uncritically used tobacco as a gift and a means of payment. Tobacco was regarded as an adiaphoron, that is, an entity that was neither forbidden nor enjoined by Scripture. This would change in 1900 with the arrival of the missionary Emil Liljeblad. He was against the habit of smoking and refused to give tobacco to those asking for it. Furthermore, he angered his colleagues by teaching his pupils that smoking was wrong and smokers would not go to heaven. When Liljeblad refused to give tobacco to King Nehale in 1902, despite undertaking an ambitious project to build a new mission station in the monarch's domains, the other missionaries decided that it was time to ask the board of the missionary society to intercede. Hence, in 1903, the board concluded that trade with tobacco, though undesirable, was still permissible since there were no good alternatives. This did not convince Liljeblad, who was determined to continue his fight against the custom. He subsequently endangered the future of his own mission station by refusing to bring tobacco to King Shanika of Ongandjera in the latter part of 1903. The other missionaries' good relations with the king (and the fact that they brought him a few packets of tobacco) saved the day.²⁷ Liljeblad was irritated with both the custom and King Shanika's attitude. The king had made it clear that he had not requested missionaries to convert his people, but because he wanted them to bring him tobacco, wine, clothes and guns. Liljeblad would rather be banished than to give the king and his subjects what they demanded:

For my part, I cannot at all accept the use of the first two commodities [tobacco and wine] in the mission field neither as gifts nor in barter, and therefore I have often heard both the regent and his subjects wonder what kind of a teacher I am who does not give tobacco. Nehale also said the same thing to brother Glad and me. My conscience, however, does not allow me to use these pleasures, which do so much evil, also here in Ovamboland, nor to give it to others. I believe that the Lord will move his cause forward even without these means. If it were also the case that I was expelled from the land because I do not provide them, I would understand it in the way that the Lord has not yet given open doors to this kingdom.²⁸

Recalling the Use of Tobacco

In the interviews carried out for the present study, the informants shared information about the various uses of tobacco according to Aawambo tradition. They were in agreement with the missionaries' observations that tobacco was used for smoking, but also that it was often chewed or sniffed. Moreover, they also agreed that Aawambo used tobacco to establish friendships, and as a means of payment.

27. Saari 1904, 6–7; Peltola 1994, 220–221. It is unlikely that Liljeblad's aversion to tobacco was linked with any medical knowledge about the dangers of smoking (of which relatively little was known at the time). Rather, Liljeblad's reaction was likely to have been linked with contemporary opinions in Europe and the US about tobacco (and in particular cigarette smoking) and sexual promiscuity. See, for instance, Tinkler 2006, 140.

28. Liljeblad 1904, 56 (translation by Groop).

While it was apparent from the interviews that these various uses of tobacco had a long tradition, it is difficult to ascertain how long this had been going on for. In the interviews, the expression *ombandu yekaya* (tobacco roll) is frequently used instead of *omakaya*. It is apparent that the interviewees are referring to a local tobacco tradition, which is still in use today, rather than to a custom introduced by missionaries. One of the interviewees (Ks) described the procedure of making *ombandu yekaya*. When tobacco leaves have grown sufficiently, he explained, they are stored in *okayuma*, a traditional clay pot. After a few days of fermentation, the leaves are removed and pounded. The pounded tobacco is moulded into a shape called *ombandu yekaya* using a traditional mat made from palm leaves.²⁹ According to Ks, the users of *ombandu yekaya* break a piece of tobacco from the *ombandu* and smoke it in their pipes. This explanation of the production and use of local tobacco corresponds with the reports of the missionaries about tobacco use in the early 1870s. It also accords with contemporary reports by David Livingstone about the process of growing tobacco and subsequently forming it into balls in other areas of southern Africa. It seems apparent that the Aawambo memory of tobacco does not only relate to the distribution of tobacco (*omakaya*) by missionaries, but also to local production and use (*ombandu yekaya*).

The use of tobacco as a symbol of friendship was recalled by several interviewees. One individual brought up the expression *okutulilathana kombiga* (union or accord) to explain the sharing of a piece of tobacco in Aawambo tradition.

They [the Aawambo] are noted for having a strong need for tobacco, which they utilise not just for smoking, but also as a symbol of friendship [*pendje mo omakaya, tulila ndje kombiga*]. *Mbono ohaya tulilathana kombiga* is a phrase that means 'they are friends and there is harmony between them.' This is known as *okutulilathana kombiga*.³⁰

Tobacco was used to symbolise how peace had returned when people had been at war. It exemplifies harmony. The notion of *okutulilathana kombiga* validated what the missionaries called a symbol of friendship. In general, the interviewees confirm the missionaries' observation that Aawambo utilised tobacco to foster companionship and unity, and the missionaries' distribution of tobacco as being consistent with local customs.³¹ As Skoglund's encounter with the group of people who were afraid of him demonstrated, tobacco allowed missionaries to form friendships with the Aawambo. Similarly, King Nehale IyaMpingana continued to ask the missionaries for tobacco after chasing them out of his realm. A shared piece of tobacco allowed missionaries to befriend the Aawambo. What appears clear is that the missionaries made use of a local tradition of gift-bearing that existed well before their arrival.

29. Ks 2019.

30. Mb 2019.

31. One of the interviewees goes as far as connecting the sharing of tobacco by Aawambo with the missionaries' more systematic distribution of tobacco. 'Every Saturday,' stated Ng, 'the missionaries began distributing tobacco [*taye ya tulile koombiga*], and this is where '*okutulilathana koombiga*' was born.' This reflection does not seem to harmonise with Mb's understanding of *okutulilathana koombiga* as a pre-missionary custom, yet, at the same time, it demonstrates how effective the systematic use of an existing custom was in missionary work. Ng 2019.

As for the use of tobacco as a currency, the interviewees confirm, and even expand our understanding, of the early Finnish missionaries' reporting vis-à-vis the use of tobacco as a means of payment.

Tobacco was also utilised for payment, particularly by traditional authorities. When buying or paying for a field [*epya*], people used to give *ombandu yekaya* to the village headman – in particular tobacco [...] Again, *ombandu yekaya* was utilised for *lobola* [*iigonda*] engagement, particularly in Uukwambi, where they do not provide cattle or hoes as in Ondonga. Because they do not donate cattle or hoes, *ombandu yekaya* is viewed as a significant factor. People believed that once someone is given *ombandu yekaya*, they are respected.³²

Mb recollected that the Aawambo not only used tobacco as payment and compensation, but that it also entailed aspects of dignity and respect. While the payment of tobacco would in some situations merely be a matter of paying for a commodity, at other times it was more than a mere payment. For instance, when a man approached the parents of a girl and presented them with tobacco it was not regarded as pure payment, but rather a sign of respect.

Some of the interviewees also recalled the traditional use of tobacco as a medicine. The missionaries wrote very little about Aawambo use of tobacco for medical treatments, and when they did, it was largely with disdain. When the Finns gave the kings homeopathic treatments, the former believed that smoking destroyed the effects of these remedies.³³ One interviewee described how tobacco smoke was utilised to treat newborns, helping to ease the symptoms of babies with breathing problems.³⁴ Another interviewee recalled that people used to smoke tobacco to alleviate nausea after eating food that smelled foul or had gone bad.³⁵

Remembering Olyomakaya

How then are contemporary Aawambo remembering *Olyomakaya*? It is not only 'tobacco day' that has a formalised relation with early Finnish missionary activity in Namibia, but there are several examples of local terms and names in Aawambo language that refer to the early Finnish mission. For instance, Martti Rautanen was referred to as *Nakambale* (the person with the hat). August Pettinen was called *Nandago* (*ondago*, according to Saarelma-Maunumaa, being 'a bulbous plant with small edible bulbs').³⁶ The name *Olyomakaya* is interesting due to its centrality in everyday language, while its origins are remote and its linguistic or cultural relevance today can be regarded as insignificant.

32. Mb 2019.

33. Rautanen 1871, 177.

34. Mb 2019.

35. Ks 2019.

36. Pettinen 1892, 7; Pettinen 1889, 120. *Nakambale* literally means the person with the hat. Saarelma-Maunumaa translates *ondago* as 'a bulbous plant with small edible bulbs'. See Saarelma-Maunumaa 2003, 125.

All but one of the interviewees knew the provenance of the word *Olyomakaya*. Their answers to the question about the origins of 'tobacco day' clearly illustrate this, as they were able to explain it by tying it to the free distribution of tobacco. The following reply demonstrates a good awareness of the term:

According to what I have heard, the term *Olyomakaya* comes from the missionaries' tobacco distribution. When the missionaries came to Ovamboland, they saw that the Aawambo people like tobacco, so they utilised tobacco to entice them to church services. The church service was held on Sunday, so they used to invite people to come to get tobacco the day before Sunday in order to entice them to attend the next day's service.³⁷

According to Mb, missionaries simply made use of a commodity that they saw was enjoyed by the Aawambo. He recalled that the missionaries invited people to come to the mission to obtain tobacco. He thereby suggested that the active and conscious employment of tobacco as an enticement was deliberately undertaken, rather than simply choosing to distribute tobacco on Saturdays without any particular invitation being extended. Ks, who concurred with Mb, underlined that 'people were called on Saturday afternoons to come to get tobacco and then return the next morning to attend the church service.' In fact, Ks, who was born in 1920 and baptised by Martti Rautanen, asserts that it was Rautanen at Olukonda Mission who distributed tobacco – a statement that finds support in a separate interview with Ii.³⁸ The memory of the interviewees tallies with the missionary sources that describe how missionaries supplied tobacco on Saturdays to invite people to church the next day. Yet, in the memory of the Aawambo that were interviewed in the present study, the missionaries not only distributed tobacco but also turned it into a distribution event in which they invited or called on people.

One of the interviewees returned to the missionaries' utilisation of tobacco to entice people: 'They tried to think of ways to get people to come to the service. *Ohaka yulwa nashi haka li* is an Oshiwambo proverb that basically means "one can entice you with what you eat or like." Tobacco was the most significant crop for the Aawambo people at the time.³⁹ According to Ng, the missionaries were aware of the Aawambo fondness for tobacco and used it as a kind of bait. What is interesting is that two of the interviewees employed a fishing analogy when speaking of bait, although the typical way of fishing in the region used baskets and not a rod with bait attached at the end. According to the interviewees, the distribution of tobacco was a successful method and appreciated by the locals. This was affirmed by Kk: 'Eee [*Olyomakaya*] is the day when people are given free tobacco and they say things like today is tobacco day, let's go to our tobacco day.'⁴⁰ Not only did he portray the tobacco distribution in positive terms, but also described it as a recurring event that served the purpose that the missionaries had anticipated.

This rather pragmatic attitude was also supported by Alpo Enkono, the former General Secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia. Enkono highlighted how the distribution of tobacco on Saturdays fulfilled a practical function.

37. Mb 2019.

38. Ks 2019, Ii 2021.

39. Ng 2019. All translations of interviews by Haufiku.

40. Kk 2018.

First, he too maintained that it was a decoy. The missionaries were ‘fishers of men,’ who had to find a way to make people come to Sunday services. Second, he provided a stronger frame for what Kk indicated above, by calling the distribution of tobacco ‘the first Owambo calendar.’ The Aawambo did not have a calendar system that would help them to distinguish days (which systemised the work of the missionaries). Thus, the distribution of tobacco on Saturdays was a simple way of pinpointing at least one day of the week.⁴¹ It is probable, but difficult to prove with absolute certainty, that the name *Olyomakaya* was the first day that was given a local name, and that the subsequent weekdays were named at a later stage.

Some of the interviewees also remembered the fact that the missionaries did not give tobacco to everyone that showed up at the mission: ‘You will not receive tobacco if you do not attend a religious service,’ said Ng, who added that ‘tobacco distribution was primarily intended to entice individuals to attend church services.’⁴² Although Ng explained that tobacco was distributed free of charge, he also remembered the conditional nature of these transactions: it was denied those who showed up to get tobacco but who had no intention of attending the Sunday service.

Ng also remembered that missionaries ‘showed them how to grow tobacco plants in the pond [*pomithima*].’⁴³ This seems to contradict early missionaries’ claims that Aawambo were already cultivating tobacco when they arrived. However, Ng’s claim may also be viewed through the early missionary sources that suggest that some missionaries who had learned how to grow tobacco in the arid local climate instructed less experienced farmers, and encouraged others who did not grow tobacco to start doing so.⁴⁴

While the interviewees remembered *Olyomakaya* as a missionary invention, they remembered the name *Olyomakaya* as a local invention:

In most circumstances, an outsider is involved in naming a place or giving a person a nickname, depending on the situation. The day was not named *Olyomakaya* by the missionaries in this circumstance. This was the Aawambo people themselves, following the start of tobacco distribution on that particular day before Sunday church.⁴⁵

According to Mb, ‘the missionaries couldn’t name a day after tobacco.’⁴⁶ It remains unclear in what way he found it far-fetched for the missionaries to come up with the name *Olyomakaya*. However, he is clearer in his opinion of the Aawambo role in the naming of Saturday, meaning that ‘most place names are provided by locals based on a specific scenario and then used.’⁴⁷ In Mb’s view, the Aawambo created names based on what they saw and experienced. This tallies with the historic re-naming of missionaries instead of learning to use their ‘real’ names. Ks agreed that it was the Aawambo who came up with the name, simply because ‘they were the ones who

41. Enkono 2018. This view of ‘tobacco day’ as the dawn of the western calendar among the Owambo is also suggested by Hukka. See Hukka 1954, 26–27.

42. Ng 2019.

43. Ng 2019.

44. Reijonen 1874, 121.

45. Mb 2019.

46. Mb 2019.

47. Mb 2019.

got *omakaya* on that day of tobacco.⁴⁸ While the interviewees did not seem to recall this event as particularly strange, to the Aawambo in the late nineteenth century it must have been an odd experience. The Saturday visitors at the mission where, as Mb insinuates, outsiders who had a peculiar experience in a new and strange environment, where those who promised to come to church the next day received free tobacco. Others who did not intend to attend Sunday service were denied tobacco, which was likely to be regarded as a rather unfriendly gesture. Lastly, Mb was of the opinion that the usage of the name *Olyomakaya* today is proof that the name itself was a local invention. Had it not been so, the Aawambo would hardly have accepted it to the extent that they would continue to use it in the same way for 150 years.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Tobacco was frequently used among the Aawambo before the arrival of the first missionaries in 1870, and the Finns – probably based on experience from the German mission further south – were quick to make good use of this tradition. The missionaries reported that both they and the Aawambo used tobacco as a means of payment but also as a way to cultivate friendships. However, the sources suggest that the growth, preparation and consumption of tobacco was established well before the missionaries arrived in Ondonga. Likewise, it is apparent that the missionaries made use of the well-established local custom of sharing tobacco as a sign of friendship. However, the missionaries did bring imported tobacco with them, which many considered to be of higher quality than the *ombandu yekaya* produced by the Aawambo.

While Martti Rautanen admitted that he made use of tobacco as a carrot and a stick strategy in relation to religious services, none of the missionaries discussed the name *Olyomakaya* itself in the missionary periodicals. The origin of the name for Saturday would probably have been considered controversial. However, the origin of *Olyomakaya* is mentioned indirectly in a few FMS texts, first time in 1937.

In Aawambo cultural memory, the origin of *Olyomakaya* appears to be well established. All but one interviewee could describe how Saturday became *Olyomakaya*. Their narration is largely in line with the account of the FMS and its missionaries. While the interviewed women and men were aware that the missionaries had used tobacco as a decoy, they did not judge it as inappropriate, but discussed it in rather neutral terms. There may be several reasons for this rather indifferent attitude, including the temporal distance to the early missionary activity, the integral role of tobacco in Aawambo culture and a widespread rather affirmative view of missionary history in northern Namibia. The same interviewees also agreed with the early missionaries' reports about the use of tobacco as a means of payment and as a symbol of friendship and harmony. Finally, it seems to be a generally held view that the name *Olyomakaya* did not originate with the missionaries but was adopted by the Aawambo.

48. Ks 2019.

49. Mb 2019.

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